**STEREO/TYPES: CANADIAN WOMEN DJS SOUND OFF**

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# ABSTRACT

There has been a significant increase in the number of women DJs since the turn of the twenty-first century due to advances in technology resulting in increased access to cheap or free digital music and software, inexpensive and user-friendly hardware (such as controllers), and the networking and promotional opportunities afforded by the Internet. Moreover, emergent local, regional, national, and international initiatives to advance women in DJ culture are converging with established underground networks and actions, resulting in the increased visibility and influence of BIPOC and womxn DJs and producers, who continue to organize collective resistance to misogyny, sexism, racism, and heteronormativity within DJ culture–both generally, and specific to Canada. This multi-dimensional study–conducted from the insider perspective of a professional DJ–explores the ways in which Canadian women DJs' positionality in DJ culture is impacted by the social construction of gender, race, and sexuality. Particular attention is paid to the effects of homosociality and heteronormativity on women's engagement with DJ technologies, and how we resist these forces by forming networks to establish our own physical and digital spaces in Canadian DJ culture. Although women's access to DJ culture and our representation within the culture in terms of media portrayal, diversity, and sheer numbers has improved, the underground and activist scenes propelling these institutional changes are increasingly vulnerable to commercial cooptation that threatens to dilute any revolutionary potential. This study analyzes how women have been excluded from the majority of academic and popular culture discourse on the history of DJ culture, and the importance of documenting our contributions in order to push for a reconfiguration of this history. The research design for this project consists of a mixed-methods approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative data generated from an online survey of 113 womxn DJs, personal interviews with thirty-five womxn DJs, and participant observation. This rich ethnographic data is explored in detail throughout this study.

## DEDICATION

To all of the amazing humans that took part in this study: THANK YOU.

To my mother Susan Olivia Hancock, and my other mother, Lee Bolton-Robinson. My debt to you both will take a lifetime to pay off.

To Rhiannon. For everything.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION**

**1.1.      Stereo/Types: Re-defining the DJ**

Canada is home to a diverse and expanding group of womxn[1] DJs whose experiences have

not been explored academically. Although there has been a small amount of research on gender

and DJ culture from Canadian scholars (Bredin 1991; Elafros 2013; Kale 2006; Marsh 2002;

Straw 1997; Walker and Pelle 2001; Zeleke 2004), there have not yet been any studies

examining womxn DJs in-depth and in a specifically Canadian context. Furthermore, the

scholarly work on gender and DJ culture published to date focuses primarily on a male/female

binary, and other identity factors such as race and sexuality remain under-studied, save for a few

exceptions (Craig and Kynard 2017; Gadir 2016, 2017; Rodgers 2010). Yet such research is

greatly needed to expand the body of knowledge on womxn DJs and document how our presence

and activism is making the DJ industry more equitable in Canada, and globally.

A primary goal of this project is to qualitatively and quantitatively explore the ways in

which Canadian womxn DJs' experiences of work and identity are impacted by the social

construction of gender, race, and sexuality. In pursuing this goal, I am responding to the

suggestion that further research in the field of gender and DJ culture needs to focus specifically

on the interplay of structural oppressions such as race and sexuality (Elafros 2013) and how they

may impact womxn's access to, and experiences of, DJ culture (Craig and Kynard 2017;

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[1] Throughout this work I use "womxn" as opposed to "women/woman" to refer to people who are not socially gendered as cis-female. While I recognize that this is a flawed term, I still use it here because I have to use *something* as a referent. I do not think it is misleading to address the participant group as a whole by a variation on the term "women", in order to trouble that term, because the vast majority of my interview and survey participants did identify as cis-female; only a few identified as trans or non-binary. I do not want to collapse nor flatten the experiences of my subjects with regards to gender, race, or sexuality. Therefore the "x" in "womxn" signifies the diversity of my respondent group beyond gender identity. In saying that I am interested in looking at "gender and DJ culture", I follow Butler by recognizing gender as a performance: "Because there is neither an 'essence' that gender expresses or externalizes nor an objective ideal to which gender aspires, and because gender is not a fact, the various acts of gender create the idea of gender, and without those acts, there would be no gender at all" (Butler 2003, 127). See also Lorber (1996).

Farrugia 2012; Rodgers 2010). In addition to the main research question, the following sub-questions also guide this project: what ways have womxn been omitted or obscured from the history of DJ culture? How has womxn's increased access to digital media enabled femme, queer, non-binary and BIPOC[2] DJs to organize a collective resistance to misogyny, sexism, racism and heteronormativity within DJ culture–both generally, and specific to Canada? For example, how have womxn DJs used social media to advocate for gender parity in bookings? How is DJ culture changing as a result of the increased presence and activism of those previously barred from the boys' club of DJing, and are we witnessing a backlash as our visibility increases? Particular attention will be paid to the effects of homosociality and heteronormativity on womxn's engagement with DJ technologies, and how we resist these social forces by forming queer and/or womxn-centric and/or music genre-specific networks in order to carve out our own local and digital spaces in Canadian DJ culture.

This study analyzes qualitative and quantitative data drawn from a survey of 113 womxn DJs, in addition to interviews with thirty-five womxn DJs and two womxn party promoters (non-DJs). My mixed-methods approach also incorporates over twenty-five years of experience attending and/or DJing at nightclubs, music festivals, retail environments, community and commercial radio, corporate events, and weddings–basically any and everywhere you might find DJs performing or engaging in DJ-related activities. The resulting ethnographic data is in-depth, immersive, and rich in detail, revealing participants' emotions, desires, viewpoints, and actions, as well as the structures and contexts of their lives as DJs.

My dissertation departs from other major studies of gender and DJ culture in that I do not solely focus on DJs who play EDM (Electronic Dance Music), which–although encompassing a

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[2] Black and Indigenous People/Person(s) of Color.

wide range of sub-genres and having attained popular (and thus ubiquitous) status–is still but one genre of music that people dance to. In attempting to focus beyond EDM DJs, I sought out participants who played any and all genres including hip hop, top 40, pop in general, multiple genres of underground[3] music, retro pop music from the 1950s and onward, jazz, and more.[4] By example, one survey respondent stated that she played "pan-global butt music".

In this introduction, I define what constitutes a professional DJ and summarize DJing's origins. I discuss how DJing's ever-increasing accessibility with regards to equipment and affordability has resulted in a growth in the number of womxn DJs globally and a subsequent surge in exposure, and how digital technologies enable us to form supportive networks and push back against sexism, racism, and heterosexism in DJ culture. I explain the motivation for this study, and describe how I came to think critically about gender and DJ culture. I specifically discuss the ways in which my "social geography" (Frankenberg 1993) as a white, cis-gendered, straight-presenting, formally middle-class, (now) dis/abled, (now) middle-aged womxn impacts my work as a DJ and my societal and cultural interactions with other DJs, stakeholders associated DJ culture, and audiences. I conclude this introduction by briefly outlining each chapter.

### 1.2.    "DJ" Defined

By definition, a DJ is someone who plays recorded music for an audience, whether over the radio, at nightclubs and music festivals, or at weddings and corporate events. This study

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[3] There is not necessarily a strict definition for 'underground', however in terms of scenes or subcultures, 'underground' denotes an opposition to mainstream, commercialized ventures, and is usually used to describe genres of music or clubs. I agree with the 'top' definition on *Urban Dictionary*, as follows: "1) A genre in music and other forms of media intended for an elite audience, that is often characterized by its high levels of originality and experimentation, and does not conform to typical standards, trends, or hypes as set by the popular mainstream media."

[4] For a breakdown of the varied musical genres played by survey respondents, see Appendix D.

focuses on professional womxn DJs that play nightclubs and music festivals, although in reality most DJs work in multiple environments, including retail stores and online spaces. By "professional", I am referring to DJs who make any or all of their income through DJing. For the purpose of establishing a framework to conceptualize what is materially and practically involved in DJing, it is useful to briefly outline the basic practices that comprise DJing, and therefore construct DJ culture.

Farrugia (2012) outlines the practices and discourses of cultural production that constitute the act of DJing, which can be lumped into four categories: amassing a music collection, the physical act of DJing itself (for example, practicing without an audience, or playing for one), promoting, networking, and other business aspects of maintaining a DJ career or hobby, and (increasingly more nowadays), the act of producing original music, remixes and/or edits. As is evident from the practices described above, there is a lot more involved in DJing than simply playing recorded music for an audience of oneself or one thousand.

Throughout my dissertation, I will be referring to these main practices and the ways in which they have evolved over time. It is tempting to construct these practices according to a loose divide between twentieth century (or 'old school') practices, and twenty-first century (aka 'new school') practices, because, as demonstrated throughout this study, there is a continuous debate about 'authentic' DJ practices in DJ culture, along with a valorization of vinyl and analog technologies, as opposed to digital music and equipment. The reality is that most experienced professional DJs can play on multiple formats, including Digital Vinyl System(s) (DVS), and software systems with or without controllers or other hardware interfaces. By example, approximately 80 percent of my survey respondents utilized a DVS such as Serato or Traktor when DJing, and most respondents also played on additional platforms such as turntables, CDJs,

and/or laptops.[5]

Technically, the first DJ was a Canadian. On December 24, 1906, Reginald Al Fessenden, a Canadian engineer, sent "un-coded radio signals – music and speech" (Brewster and Broughton 2014, 21) from a location near Boston and surprised a number of ship telegraph operators out on the Atlantic Ocean, thus enacting the first instance of 'DJing'. In addition to reading aloud from the bible, playing violin, and singing, Fessenden also played a recording of Handel's "Largo" performed by a woman ("probably Clara Butt") (ibid). Thereby, Fessenden is the first documented person to play recorded music for an audience. Notably, he had worked with Thomas Edison, who invented the cylinder phonograph in 1877. By 1906, both radio waves, and the flat-disc gramophone - which was introduced in 1887 and quickly out-performed its cylinder cousin - had developed enough so that radio could transmit recorded music (Brewster and Broughton 2014). Another early DJ innovator was California resident Ray Newby, who played records and broadcasted via transistor radio in 1909, under the guidance of Charles "Doc" Herrold. From the very beginning, the evolution of DJing has been shaped by advances in technology.

Radio's development during the first few decades of the twentieth century produced the first wave of DJs, referred to at the time as announcers or programmers. The term DJ is short for "disc jockey", and most sources state that the term was coined by Walter Winchell around the late 1930s or early 1940s, to refer to radio announcer Martin Block, who played all the new and popular dance songs on his radio show "Imaginary Ballroom", wherein he pretended to be broadcasting from a ballroom. However, Brewster and Broughton also cite radio historian Ben

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[5] The DJ-related activities described above – and infinitely more – comprise the act of 'musicking', a term conceived by musicologist Christopher Small, and defined by Nick Prior as "the activity of doing music – part of the human condition, dependent on social relations designed to get at the essential humanity of engaging in musical activities" (2018, 15).

Fong-Torres, who asserts that in 1941, a record executive named Jack Knapp coined the term "disc jockey" based upon how he thought that the way that the DJ riding the volume, or gain, on the record player(s), looked like a jockey handling the reigns of a horse (Brewster and Broughton 2014).

This dissertation focuses specifically on DJs that play for live audiences. This type of nightclub DJing began to slowly evolve during the 1930s and 1940s, when people began attending public events to dance to someone playing records, as opposed to a live band or a jukebox. Therefore, people's continued desire to dance in public to curated music selections created the demand for the club DJ as we now know them. Club DJing as an art form and profession progressed gradually until the late 1970s, when it quickly morphed into what we presently consider the practice of club DJing, driven in no small part by the creation and subsequent popularity of disco and hip hop, in tandem with technical developments in commercial recording such as the 12" record and more sophisticated turntables and mixers. Although a great deal is known about DJ history, there is still much more to be uncovered. In Chapter 2, I trouble the androcentric history of DJing by outlining key womxn in DJ culture whose contributions have been omitted or obscured by sexist and influential journalists in the field.

### 1.3.    Gender and DJ Culture in the Twenty-First Century

Feminist scholars have noted a significant increase in the number of womxn DJs in North America and Europe since the turn of the twenty-first century (Bluestein 2016; Farrugia 2012; Gadir 2016; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013). This increase is credited to advances in technology that have resulted in unprecedented access to digital music, cheap or free software, and inexpensive, user-friendly DJ equipment, such as DJ controllers and laptop computers. The

Internet, particularly social media, provides accessible spaces for womxn DJs to network and promote. With advances in technology working to eliminate key sexist and homosocial barriers, more and more womxn are taking up DJing (Katz 2006; Marsh 2002). As a result, womxn DJs have formed enough of a critical mass in Europe and North America that we are starting to successfully advocate for more inclusivity in DJ culture.[6] Chapter 7 outlines the effects of specific events in Toronto's underground DJ scene that I believe was enabled by a critical mass of vocal, local womxn DJs and their allies, led by Cindy Li (whose artist name is Ciel) and Chhavi Nanda (whose artist name is Chippy Nonstop).

Over the past ten years, our voices have become increasingly louder in online and print publications focused on electronic dance music culture, such as *MixMag, Resident Advisor*, *DJ Mag*, and the now-defunct *Vice* offshoot *Thump.* The past five years in particular have seen an explosion of online discussion around womxn DJs and gendered discrimination. One 2016 article on *Thump* asked perhaps the most prevalent, basic question on this topic from the point of view of many womxn DJs: "do we actually need to talk about 'female DJs' in 2016?" (Rymajdo 2016).[7] The author's answer boils down to "yes", and I think this is still the case in 2020. A more nuanced version of this question appears in the body of the article, which describes how one of the main tensions embedded in this line of thinking is that this discussion could be considered an archaic way to redress gender equality, given that we are living in a day and age where "the idea of gender neutrality is becoming increasingly visible in popular culture and beyond", therefore "are discussions about gender in club culture also becoming passé?" (ibid). In other words, are

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[6] The concept of critical mass originated in discussions of womxn's political representation, and is concerned with the concepts of descriptive representation and substantive representation (Krook 2015; Krook and Childs 2009; Newton-Small 2017).

[7] Rymajdo (2016) interviews two UK womxn DJs–a newcomer, and another DJ who has played since the 1990s–to explore if and how things have changed over time for womxn DJs, and if we need to cease gendering DJs by designating womxn DJs as such.

we merely reifying difference by focusing on it? Examining the percentage of womxn versus

male DJs in club and festival line-ups, and representation on electronic music labels and

platforms, there is "pervasive gender inequality across the board. However, some women in the

industry are increasingly getting frustrated when the conversation is always about *that*" (ibid).

After all, as the article points out, the media never refers to a male DJ as a 'male DJ.' These

sentiments were echoed by a significant number of my survey respondents, and I discuss these

findings in detail in Chapters 4 and 5. I also take a closer look at gender parity in festival line-ups

in Chapter 2.

As a result of our rapidly growing numbers, womxn DJs have never been as prolific or

newsworthy as presently in 2020, having enjoyed a massive increase in media exposure since I

began my research formally in 2010. Our representation in popular culture reflects this increased

presence. Some examples include the recent Netflix series *Turn Up Charlie* (2019), featuring a

white womxn lead character named Sarah Raine, an internationally successful DJ who employs a

Black womxn studio engineer (who presents as queer) and a Black womxn manager.

Refreshingly, Raine's gender is never specifically mentioned nor highlighted in relation to her

occupation. Still, the fact that Raine has a child does play into her decision to tour less, however

her male partner also alters his career to be at home with his family. Co-produced by series' star

Idris Elba, the production sought the expertise of a white queer Canadian womxn DJ, DW

Waterson, who instructed the female actor playing Raine on how to DJ, as well as acting as a

consultant and unit director for the series. The HBO series *Insecure* frequently depicts womxn of

colour DJing in nightclub scenes, and the Netflix series *Sense8* accurately portrayed a white

womxn DJ in a lead role. Most recently, the iconic character of record-store owner Rob, played

by John Cusack in the 2000 film adaptation of Nick Hornby's *High Fidelity*, was reprised by Zoe

Kravitz in the film's 2020 reincarnation as a Hulu streaming series, thereby transposing the main character of Rob into a Black womxn (also named Rob–short for Robyn). Happily, each of these portrayals represents DJing authentically in regard to how the actual practices and routines of the profession are depicted, and, in the case of *Turn Up Charlie*, *High Fidelity*, and *Sense8*, its (often) accompanying hedonistic lifestyle.

In regard to other types of Canadian media, there have been two documentaries profiling Canadian womxn DJs. *Spinsters* (2001) is a feature-length documentary by Canadian filmmakers Walker and Pelle that explores the lives and work of several womxn DJs, including two Canadians: Toronto-based DJ, nightlife historian, and queer party promoter Denise Benson, and groundbreaking Montreal-based DJ Misstress Barbara. The film also interviews celebrated California-based hip hop turntablist Shortee, and legendary Detroit house and techno DJ Heather, in addition to a handful of less recognized DJs. Notably, womxn of colour are well represented throughout the film. More recently, the National Film Board of Canada produced a documentary short titled *Rock the Box* (Monk 2015), profiling DJ Rhiannon (who now goes by the name Rhiannon Roze), a white Canadian womxn DJ and recently anointed music producer (and for the sake of full disclosure, a close friend of mine), whom I interviewed for this study.

Leaving aside film, the CBC has run numerous news and opinion pieces on topics related to gender and DJ culture in approximately the last five years, focusing not only on the "lack of female DJs" (Hoffman 2014; see also Zavarise 2018), but also gender parity in music festival line-ups (Beaudette 2017; Mackay and Kelly 2018; Sampson 2015), and womxn producers (Chandler and Gordon 2019). Recently, a photography book titled *The Ten Percent* and featuring

portraits of sixty-three female-identified DJs from Calgary served as a visual rebuttal to the
discourse of rarity (Hazard 2018).[8]

In addition to the upsurge in industry-specific and mainstream media coverage celebrating
the achievements of womxn-identified DJs and highlighting the gendered barriers we experience,
corporations have taken notice of our increasing numbers, seeking to exploit the discourse
around our exploitation. Major businesses associated with club and festival culture have
launched campaigns aimed at increasing womxn's participation in DJ culture and its attendant
industries, reflecting the wider trend of corporations sponsoring initiatives to increase womxn's
participation across all subsets of the music industry. These campaigns include Smirnoff
Vodka's "Equalizing Sound," launched in 2016 "to promote greater visibility in dance music
across gender, race, genres and beyond" (Smirnoff 2016). One facet of Smirnoff's campaign has
them partnered with Spotify to create a 'sound equalizer,' which is a function that tells you how
many female-identified artists are in your current Spotify library.[9]

Absolut Vodka launched the "Create a Better Tomorrow Tonight" campaign consisting of
several initiatives, including performances and panel discussions, designed to promote safe and
inclusive nightlife cultures. In 2017, I attended the Toronto evening performance, and the
afternoon panel discussion wherein participants debated the positive and negative aspects of
being an underground musician who collaborates with corporations; I discuss this panel in more
detail in my conclusion. In 2018, "female-friendly" dating application Bumble launched the

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[8] I tried to order a copy of *The Ten* Percent but it quickly sold out of its limited print run. Fortunately, you can view
the photographs online at https://phmuseum.com/misshazard/story/the-ten-percent-15f89ac9ce.

[9] Interestingly, I applied the 'sound equalizer' to my Spotify library and was surprised to discover that only 40
percent of the music on my playlists was from womxn artists; I thought it would be 50 percent or more. Spotify
allows you 'equalize' your library by increasing the percentage of female artists to any desired amount, subsequently
presenting you with a customized playlist reflecting your preferred percentage music made by female-identified
artists.

campaign "Making Moves in Music", dedicated to "combating gender inequality in the electronic dance space".[10] Through their involvement in social and cultural movements, corporations are responding to consumer trends, signifying both progress for DJ culture, and a regressive co-optation of said culture. Again, I take up these themes in more detail in my conclusion.

Advertisements designed to recruit students for post-secondary audio arts institutions have also started targeting womxn. Since approximately 2015 I have noted the prevalence of a subway-car advertisement for the Toronto-based audio arts school Trebas Institute, depicting a white womxn DJ wearing headphones and a big smile, with her arms extended and her hands in the air, presumably playing in front of a large crowd. Centennial College also promotes itself as inclusive via print advertisements placed at various public locations throughout the city of Toronto, depicting womxn in DJ, production and sound engineering roles.

The increased visibility of womxn DJs creates a backlash within DJ culture, as evidenced by online discourse and media constructions that paint us as either gimmicks or tokens (Hancock 2019), or that otherwise essentialize us, further reinforcing gender binaries. Given the prevalence of womxn DJs' experiences with gatekeeping tactics enacted by male colleagues, such as 'othering', essentializing, and/or sexualizing, it seems as though our mere presence is a threat. The backlash works to undermine the gains we have made this millennium, and buttresses the glass ceiling that we bump up against. Currently in 2020, a significant part of this glass ceiling is financial. Although the numbers and visibility of womxn DJs is rapidly rising, our pay is still far lower than our male counterparts. It is telling that Paris Hilton was the world's highest paid female-identifying DJ in 2017 (Bruner 2017), given her relatively late entry into the profession, and the fact that she does not produce her own remixes, edits, or original music.

10 Bumble, "Making Moves in Music," *The Beehive*, November 27, 2018, https://thebeehive.bumble.com/uk-blog/bumble-presents-making-moves-in-music-for-electronic-dance-space#:~:text=Bumble%20wants%20to%20help%20change,European%20cities%20and%20Los%20Angeles.

Gavanas and Reitsamer (2016) discuss the neoliberal economy's vast impact on the changing relationships between culture and society, changes that increasingly force cultural producers to also act as entrepreneurs.[11] The authors point out that the substantial research on musicians' working conditions in many diverse scenes focuses on the following common characteristics: "precarious employment, low and sometimes non-existent wages, dense social networking, the holding of multiple jobs to sustain livelihoods and music-making and the blurring of work and leisure that often leads to self-exploitation" (para 2). On the other hand, Honeybook, an American software company geared toward free-lancers in the creative industries, defines the emergent creative economy more optimistically, as "the result of a revolutionary period in human history when creativity is celebrated and entrepreneurship is powered by advancements in technology. It is richly diverse, comprised of small business owners, freelancers and entrepreneurs in fields like photography, graphic design, event planning, writing, arts, music and more" (Honeybook 2017). In addition to its core practice in music, having a present-day DJ career often involves several of those aforementioned practices.

Honeybook compiled a report titled *2017 Gender Pay Gap: Creative Economy Report* that detailed their findings from a study analyzing data solicited from their own clients.[12] Honeybook's study revealed that, on average, women in the creative economy made 32 percent less than men doing the same job. Moreover, womxn DJs *specifically* experienced the *biggest pay gap* out of all of the occupations analyzed, earning only 46 cents to every dollar earned by men. The report offers a simple and realistic solution: "female creative entrepreneurs need to charge more to begin closing the gender pay gap" (Honeybook 2017). Now that our numbers are

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[11] Gavanas and Reitsamer interviewed seventy-five DJs based in Berlin, London, Vienna and Stockholm. The interviews took place between 2005 and 2011 (approximately).

[12] Researchers analyzed 2000 internal invoices over a twelve-month period, following-up with a survey of 3,102 respondents during September 2017.

increasing, the possibility emerges for womxn DJs to advocate for pay equity, thereby generating

questions for future research regarding effective methods for achieving this goal. Do we follow

the same modes of activism that we used to increase our visibility and presence in DJ culture?

And/or what new or more radical models might we develop to address the lack of pay equity in

DJ culture?[13]

## 1.4.    An Insider Perspective

To date, there is no wide-scale statistical data pertaining to Canadian national or regional

DJ populations. Therefore, I can only offer my discursive observations, and those of my

interview and survey participants, regarding the increase in womxn DJs in Canada that has

occurred over the past twenty years. My observations are based upon three decades of experience

attending nightclubs and DJ-focused events from 1990 until 2019, and roughly a decade of

touring and playing Canadian cities from 2002 until 2012. During this time, whenever I was in a

nightclub or event space where there were DJs, and whether I was playing or attending for

another reason, I tried to observe how DJing was gendered.

Currently in 2019, I (very roughly) estimate that womxn comprise anywhere from 20 to 30

percent of DJs working in Canadian urban centers, and this figure is in accordance with that

expressed by many of my interview subjects when I asked them how often they noticed womxn

DJs in their hometowns, and when travelling. In contrast, I would estimate the percentage of

womxn DJs in large Canadian cities to have been only 2 to 10 percent roughly two decades ago,

depending upon the city's specific size and attributes. By example, I am sure that Toronto was

home to more womxn DJs in the late 1990s (Benson 2015) than Vancouver or Calgary, one

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13 These questions came late in my study, and therefore I am not able to speak to them in the space and time that I
have as my dissertation draws to a close, therefore I discuss them in my conclusion as areas for further research.

obvious reason being that Toronto had (and still has) a larger population.[14] Given that mentors

and femme-friendly networks are vital for fostering supportive environments, it is safe to say that

the more womxn DJs residing and playing in a city, the more that city nurtures and begets

womxn DJs, as we are able to form our own networks and mentorships, as discussed in detail in

Chapter 4 of this study.

When I began to DJ professionally in 1999, there were few womxn working as DJs in

Vancouver, BC, where I lived at the time. As a Women's and Gender Studies Master's student at

the University of British Columbia (UBC), it did not take long for me to become interested in

how womxn DJs experience our work and culture, given our outsider status. My interest in how a

DJ's experience of work is mediated by their gender, race and sexuality was ignited by having to

endure the intense frequency and monotony of people's responses to my presence in the DJ

booth.[15] During every shift of my first paid DJ job at a cheesy top 40 dance club called Kits On

Broadway that has thankfully long since burned down, someone–usually several people–would

come to the booth and ask me if I was the DJ, if I had been DJing all night, if anyone was

helping me DJ, who taught me how to DJ, and other variations on the theme of me not being

perceived as a 'normal' DJ. As mentioned, these questions and comments occurred more than

once during each of the three nights that I DJ'd at Kits for approximately eighteen months. Less

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[14] Denise Benson does not offer any hard statistics in regard to the number of womxn DJs in Toronto during any given time period, nor does she make comparisons with the number of womxn DJs in other Canadian cities. Instead, my estimation is informed by Benson's book *Then & Now: Toronto Nightlife History* (2015), wherein she documents a significant number of womxn DJs playing in Toronto during the time period of 1975-2015. Therefore, I am comparing Benson's qualitative data with my observations that are based upon being an avid clubber in Calgary from 1991 until 1996, and in Victoria and Vancouver from 1996 until 2010. Although I have DJ'd in White Horse and performed as an MC and singer in Yellowknife, I have never played Quebec City, or the Maritimes, or any cities in Saskatchewan or Manitoba aside from Saskatoon and Winnipeg. Therefore, my observations are by no means geographically comprehensive in regard to Canada.

[15] At that time in 1999, I was in an actual DJ booth, which is very rare in nightclubs nowadays. The ways in which DJs have evolved from being hidden away in event spaces and thus relatively inaccessible, to being placed visibly in front of an audience, with or without barriers to separate them from the crowd, speaks to the ways in which the role of the DJ has evolved over time to become much more visible, and performative.

frequent, but frequent nonetheless, were statements such as "Cool! A girl DJ!", "I've never seen a girl DJ before!", "Are you DJ Leanne?", "Do you know DJ T?", and so on. DJs T and Leanne were two other womxn DJs out of perhaps five in total that I knew, or knew of, during the late 1990s in Vancouver.[16]

Although I did not DJ in public for money until the age of twenty-four, in hindsight I see that I was always primed to become a DJ. During my 'tweens, teens and early twenties I was obsessed with collecting music and making mix tapes, and dancing. I took dance classes throughout elementary school, until dropping out in junior high due to the idea that I was 'fat'. I was too afraid of ridicule, and my self-consciousness was caused by internalizing the western beauty norms promoted by 1980s societal Calgary, beauty norms that deemed me overweight, and therefore, undesirable. Still, I loved to dance, and in grade seven I lived for after-school dances called 'shags', where I joyfully danced to the Violent Femmes, the Red Hot Chili Peppers, and New Order. I could not wait to be old enough to get into nightclubs and consummate my dance floor desires. Due to the gracious gift of my (six years') older sister Angela's ID, around age fifteen I started being a 'club kid', spending at least three nights a week dancing in the few alternative nightclubs in Calgary. I shunned the mainstream top 40 clubs with their terrible music and packs of rape-y white men.

A few months after my eighteenth birthday I moved out of my parents' suburban home, where I had been fairly miserable throughout secondary school and my first year of university,[17]

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[16] Another way that I became aware of the scant amount of womxn musicians and DJs in Vancouver was by selling advertising and writing for a local music magazine called *DiSCORDER Magazine*. *DiSCORDER* published monthly event and nightclub listings that I had to proofread, and I made it a habit to read the local event listings published in Vancouver's lifestyle and entertainment print magazines, and newspaper sections dedicated to local entertainment, in part to keep tabs on the competition by noting who was advertising in which publication. I also had a radio show on *DiSCORDER's* sister radio station CiTR 101.9FM, and I had to recite the event listings frequently on-air as well.

[17] Apart from spending grade eight at a high-end boarding school where I was miserable on a different level, although I recognize how incredibly privileged I was to be there.

into my own apartment downtown. My roommate was another goth-y young womxn into alternative music and clubbing, and I mostly bonded with my friends over our shared love of music. When at the clubs, usually either The Warehouse or The Republik (both now-defunct), I hung around the DJ booth watching the (always male) DJ mix tracks using records and cassette tapes. I would bug him incessantly about the tracks he was playing, as well as make at least one request per evening (I now understand what terrible karma I created for myself in that regard, but I digress). When I was on the dance floor, or even just standing or sitting around, I would anticipate what the next track would be and when he would mix it in, often guessing correctly on both counts. Yet, despite music being one of the most important and beloved things to me, it somehow did not occur to me to pursue DJing until I was basically forced to DJ an event  - as I discuss shortly.

I was born in 1975, and my experience may speak to womxn of my generation who consider themselves audiophiles. It never occurred to me to pursue DJing given that I rarely, if ever, saw womxn DJs either in popular media, or real life, during the 1980s. With the exception of Spinderella from Salt n' Pepa, womxn DJs did not start appearing in the media in any significant way until the late 1990s. Bayton, speaking in Farrugia (2012), affirms that I might have been drawn to DJing earlier in my life, had I seen more examples of womxn DJs in media or the flesh while growing up: "the lack of women role models makes it difficult for girls to identify with performers and picture themselves in such active roles" (11). Despite working as a go-go dancer, clubbing all the time, and being obsessed with music, as mentioned previously, I discovered DJing by sheer necessity at age twenty-two while an undergraduate at the University of Victoria (UVic).

In 1997, I co-created and produced a fundraiser called The Groovefest at Vertigo, UVic's

(then) brand new, state of the art nightclub. I could not find a DJ for the event that would play funk, disco, electronic, post-punk, rock, and underground hip hop, a mix of genres that I felt was crucial to a successful dance party. The main reason I could not find the DJ of my dreams was because in the late 1990s in Greater Victoria, DJs tended to segregate themselves by playing just one genre, such as drum n' bass, techno, house, hip hop, or ambient, all popular genres with British Columbia DJs during the late 1990s. Instead, I wanted a DJ who would play James Brown, New Order, The Pixies, Dee-lite, Abba, and A Tribe Called Quest in one set and make it work. As I could not find the right DJ, and because I already owned all the music that I desired to hear on the dance floor, I decided to DJ the event myself, thereby awarding myself my first DJ gig. It was all very DIY, except that my first gig was in a brand new club with fantastic sound and DJ equipment, including industry standard turntables, CDJs, monitors, and mixer. I would soon learn how precious and relatively rare it was to have such quality gear to play on – most small clubs did not have equipment that fancy back then. When I DJ'd for my first dance floor at the Groovefest I was terrible technically (in terms of smooth transitions between songs), but quite successful with music programming, meaning that I knew what track to play and when to play it, in order to keep the dance floor full. People danced and smiled at me until the lights came on and the bouncers kicked them out. I made people dance all night long to music that I loved, thereby facilitating the circumstances wherein they too felt the joy that specific songs gave me, and it made me feel amazing in turn. I was hooked (and I still am).

Inspired to DJ more, I started spinning at Victoria's only lesbian bar, a tiny hole-in-the-wall called The G-Spot (their motto was: "if you can find it, you can come"). My desire to continue DJing was partly in order to improve the musical culture of my social, academic, and activist circles. In the later 1990s the 'white feminist cultural scene' (if you will) in Victoria was very

much informed by 'womyn's music', typified by white, folk-based artists like the Indigo Girls, Sarah McLachlan, and Annie DiFranco. I was not into that kind of music. Rather, I wanted to hear funk, jazz, hip hop, electronic, pop, rock and punk, all together in one evening. I collected these genres and my passion pushed me to share "my" music with others. I actually felt that it was my duty to expose people to amazing music that could potentially bring them unmitigated joy.

I graduated with my BA (Hon.) in Women's Studies from UVic in 1997 and moved to Vancouver, BC, where I started volunteering at CiTR 101.9FM, UBC's campus and community radio station. I hung around the station a lot, and soon I had my own radio show. One day there was a printed fax posted on the station's bulletin board advertising for a DJ to play at a cheesy mainstream nightclub on Broadway and Granville called Kits on Broadway. All of us college radio hipsters gathered around the bulletin board and howled at the prospect, then I waited for everyone to disperse before writing down the contact number, undetected. The advert promised a starting wage of $20 an hour, and at the time I was making under $10 an hour as a barista, in addition to a very small amount of money teaching a very small number of students thirty minute lessons at a Vancouver Speech Arts academy. Vancouver was expensive, and I was paying rent on a one-bedroom apartment in the city on my own. I had few qualms about 'selling out' as a DJ. I recall trying to reassure myself that selling out was not actually possible because I was not even a real DJ yet.

I called the promoter at Kits On Broadway, Dave, who turned out to be kind and supportive. I went to the interview and landed my first paying DJ job by grossly over-exaggerating my experience in Victoria. Back in 1999, speaking on the microphone was also a part of the DJ's job at a cheesy mainstream club, and so my speech and drama training came in

handy also in landing me the gig. As discussed at the beginning of this chapter, the crowd that patronized Kits was heteronormative, predominantly white, and demanded to hear mainly top 40 music. After a short time I impressed management with my ability to fill the dance floor, and soon I was DJing at the club three nights a week. Dave was very encouraging; although he appreciated the novelty value of hiring a young, conventionally attractive 'girl DJ', he also recognized and praised my familiarity with multiple genres and decades of music, and my ability to select tracks in a way that moved people onto the floor and kept them there.

At that time I was DJing with two domestic CD players, the kind that you would have at home as a part of your overall audio system in the 1990s, and therefore a far cry from industry standard CDJs, which only became widely available around the 2000s and yet were still as expensive as quality turntables. Mixing tracks on the equipment at Kits was impossible due to the home-style CD players, as well as the basic two-channel Radio Shack mixer that lacked EQs or settings for listening to either channel separately (a practice that is essential for mixing by ear). For music, I relied on the club's library of compilation CDs comprised of dance, top 40, and (most heinously) country songs, provided by a subscription service on a monthly basis. Soon into my tenure at Kits, I started supplementing the clubs' music with my own, ever-growing CD collection that contained more underground and alternative tracks.

Even though the club and crowd were definitely not to my liking, and despite how strongly I disliked most mainstream pop music at that time (I have since softened), I realized that I loved DJing, and that I had a knack for pleasing cheesy people with music that I also liked. I would drop Led Zeppelin, Public Enemy, and Groove Armada in between Britney Spears, Smash Mouth, and Jennifer Lopez, and make it work. I was developing my own style as a DJ that incorporated all of my musical influences genre-wise and was also heavily informed by my

experience as a professional go-go dancer and avid clubber. I knew what made bodies move, and just as importantly, what confused people and caused the dance floor to dissipate.

Quickly, I increased attendance significantly at Kits, and therefore revenue. Granted, it was fairly easy to appeal to a wider audience simply by not being terrible. Prior to hiring me, Kits had employed the same white male DJs for over a decade that mainly played classic rock n' roll, and would actually play tracks like "Free Bird" at midnight, thereby completely emptying the dance floor of anyone who happened to be there in the first place. My track selection and programming attracted a younger crowd comprised mainly of students from nearby UBC; therefore Kits got exactly what they wanted by hiring me. The club gave me a pay raise, and soon other wannabe DJs started trainspotting me,[18] which was annoying because it was all white men doing it. It was apparent that these wannabes were more interested in being the focus of (female) attention, than in trying to make people dance without resorting to a formulaic style based on top 40 tracks. Moreover, none of these men seemed like feminist or queer allies, therefore I had zero interest in helping them become DJs.

I find it ironic that although I started DJing due to my involvement in feminist activism, my first real DJ residency took place in a nightclub setting that seemed to offer fertile grounds for date rape.[19] My experiences as a professional DJ have also led me to consider the ways in which my race, class and sexuality affected my employment as a DJ, as well as the public's perception of myself in that role. Julz, my partner at that time, was also a Master's student at UBC, and an audiophile with a radio show on CiTR, and I procured him a job DJing at Kits

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[18] Trainspotting is the act of watching a DJ closely in order to identify which tracks they are playing, for example, by trying to read the labels on the records, or the screen of the computer.

[19] The club had posters up everywhere announcing DJ lineups, theme nights, and contests, featuring this charming slogan: "Kits! Where it's never too late to find a date."

shortly after I was hired. Yet, Julz was fired after only a month or so, even though I perceived him to be doing almost as good a job as I.[20] There was no question that, like me, he was a vast improvement over the previous dinosaur DJs, but Julz happened to be Black and have dreadlocks.

Apart from Dave, who was cool, the management at Kits did a terrible job of hiding their blatant racism. I recall at times receiving phone calls in the DJ booth and someone ordering me not to play any hip hop because gang members had entered the bar. Of course, all I saw from my big booth window were two or three Black men that did not appear to be wearing 'colours' or gang-related attire nor behaving threateningly or suspiciously. But there were the occasional white Hell's Angels members wearing their full colours in the bar, and more frequently, an entire football team or fraternity from UBC would roll in. If I was lucky, a pack of them would approach my booth and demand that I play "Girls" from the Beastie Boys, or some other song that would make myself and most womxn feel completely unsafe in a night club full of drunk rowdy white men. At least I was in a booth with a door that locked. I resisted these requests as much as I could, sometimes by simply saying, "no, I won't play [insert crap song title here], it's misogynist", in which case the requester would not know how to reply, as they clearly had no idea what "misogyny" meant (again, it was 1999-ish).

These observations and experiences made me hyper-aware of my status DJing for a public consisting of mostly straight (seeming) white university students and some die-hard older regulars, also mostly white people. I would play Bob Marley, Montell Jordan, Aretha Franklin,

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[20] I realize my statement sounds arrogant but again my experience as a go-go dancer had a major impact on my style and thus perhaps made me stand out as a DJ, because I spent years perched above a dance floor watching exactly what got people going, and what cleared the floor. Julz did not have that kind of experience as a dancer nor as a clubber, the fact that he was as good as he was as a DJ spoke to his excellent taste and musicality. He was also a guitarist and hence already a musician. After being fired from Kits, he was hired by a club in Vancouver's Gastown neighbourhood with a more ethnically mixed clientele where he played more hip hop and r&b to cater to the crowd, as a proper DJ does, and he was very popular and played there for some time, indicating that it was likely racism that got him fired from Kits, and not his job performance.

Destiny's Child, Michael Jackson, and many more Black artists, yet it seemed that the management did not want Black men working at or patronizing the club. There was one server who was a womxn of colour, and I seem to recall one Black doorman, but otherwise the staff were overwhelmingly white. I was struck by the stark juxtaposition between the club's appropriation of Black culture via music, and the ways the club's management demonized Black people. My academic feminist education enabled me to look somewhat critically at my race and class privilege, and I began to consider how those factors, as well as my perceived sexuality, and youth, played into my opportunities for DJ work.

After about a year and a half of DJing in the straight, white hell that was Kits, I had saved enough money to purchase two Technic Mark II turntables, a clunky old mixer-cum-soundboard with multiple channels, inputs and outputs, and a front-loading Denon dual CD player, with Dinosaur road cases for the decks, mixer and CD players, plus headphones, needles, and various necessary cables and electrical adapters, as the turntables were manufactured in the UK, which somehow made them even cooler (to me). I was beyond excited. I bought all of the equipment together at once for only $1000 USD plus shipping–really a fantastic deal–from my sister Angela's then-husband who resided in Bermuda at the time, and was one of only a few local DJs that played there during the early 1990s. I picked up all my brand-new second hand gear from the airport cargo service in Richmond, BC, and started learning how to DJ at home with my records and turntables.

Soon I was able to quit Kits, which I was eager to do as the club had become so busy that I could no longer mentally handle the barrage of people bugging me throughout my entire shift. I landed a weekend residency at The Backstage Lounge, a much more hip venue on Granville Island. I lugged my turntables and mixer in their road cases, plus a milk crate and two record

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bags stuffed with vinyl, to the Backstage Lounge every Friday and Saturday night. There at the club I played the music that I loved, mainly funk, disco, and hip hop, for an older, cooler, more mature, and slightly less white audience. Playing with records on turntables was far more fun and creative than playing on the basic CD players and mixer at Kits. It was also far more stressful to have to set up, and then often troubleshoot, my equipment. Gear problems were frequent and I remember at times it felt like a sharp learning curve. However, had I not had unrestricted access to equipment, and the time and space to practice both alone at home, and in front of an audience during gigs, I do not think my DJ hobby would have developed into my profession. Also, as discussed, prior to buying my own equipment and throwing my own club nights, I was able to access professional turntables and CD players as a volunteer at CiTR radio.

I also had a mentor at CiTR, then-program manager Anna Friz, who patiently explained and demonstrated the station's equipment, and was always encouraging. Additionally, CiTR's station manager and music director, along with *DiSCORDER*'s editor and key volunteers, were ideologically feminist womxn. An entire staff of womxn thus worked to mitigate the presence of the predominantly white, straight-presenting, cis-gendered male population of programmers and other station volunteers at CiTR. Therefore, as a white, able-bodied, straight-presenting young women, the station was a welcoming enough environment to me that I felt suitably comfortable learning the technical ropes in order to produce my own weekly radio show, titled "Stand and Be Cunted" to compliment my adoption of the on-air handle DJ Hancunt.

Shortly after I began DJing at the Backstage Lounge, I started my own weekly club night called The Funktion at The Chameleon, a small underground club known for acid jazz, house and r&b music. The club's management were not thrilled with the DJ name "Hancunt", so I went by DJ Lush, which I regarded as a bit of a cop-out on my behalf. Still, I was excited to be

working at The Chameleon where the staff and management were more feminist, queer-positive, and anti-racist than at most clubs in Vancouver. By no means was it a utopian space, but like the Backstage Lounge, The Chameleon felt much more safe and thus comfortable to me than Kits. I leveraged my connection with CiTR and to get both the station and paper to officially sponsor The Funktion, and used my radio show on CiTR to promote the night as well. I invited different CiTR DJs that could play according to the genre format (funk and its variations) to guest every week, knowing that they would promote their appearance at The Funktion to their radio listeners. My DJ and promoter hustle was clearly enabled by the networking and community building skills that I acquired by throwing fundraising parties.

After two years of DJing around Vancouver I started to make a name for myself by promoting and playing The Funktion, which was becoming popular, as well as other club nights, eventually earning a significant portion of my income DJing, until I graduated with my Master's degree in Women's and Gender Studies in 2004. After graduation, DJing became my main income until I moved to Toronto in 2009, supplemented by working as a 'phone girl' at a higher-end Vancouver brothel on-and-off for a few years, and occasionally minding my friend's tiny clothing shop in Gastown. By 2003, I was also a rapper and singer in a semi-successful, somewhat-notorious indie hip hop band called StinkMitt. Although StinkMitt started completely by accident, we were successful to the degree that I spent approximately one third of my life from 2003 until 2007 touring North America and Western Europe, which was actually not very glamorous but rather ran the gamut between grueling and soul-destroying. During these tours I often DJ'd for extra money or as a part of the gig package, either on a separate night, or at an after-party following our concert. DJing as 'work' took on great significance for me thus, as

there were very few permanent jobs that I could hold,[21] given that I would leave Vancouver to tour for days or weeks on a constant basis. I was more or less relegated to DJing and the brothel to pay rent and bills, and at that time such jobs were viewed as remarkably different from 'traditional' nine to five, Monday to Friday employment. StinkMitt barely broke even financially so suffice to say it was not a significant source of income. I had to hustle, and DJing was my main hustle.

As a result of the exposure from performing and touring, during the 2000s I was a popular DJ in Vancouver and one of the more well-known womxn DJs in and from Canada. In reflection, I recognize that I was proud to have succeeded in a male-dominated profession and represent as a successful womxn DJ. I coveted every expression of my status as a professional DJ, knowing that because I was a womxn, my legitimacy was constantly questioned. I relished in excelling in a traditionally male profession, and used my status as a big fish in the little pond of Vancouver to push my queer anti-racist feminist cultural agenda. I felt like I was being so subversive. By example, I was inordinately proud of being voted one of the top five best DJs in Vancouver in the categories of top 40 and electronic in the Clubvibes.com Nightlife Awards every year from 2005 until I left the city in 2009, because the majority of the clubs, club nights, DJs, and promoters that were also nominated were cheesy, mainstream, cis-male, and heteronormative.

I experienced a range of sexist-to-misogynist behavior while DJing in the mainstream club scene in Canada, perhaps more so while living and playing in Vancouver between 2000 and 2009, than in the bigger city of Toronto where I have resided since. I cannot determine whether this perceived difference is due to changes in attitudes over time, and/or cultural differences at

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[21] Assistant managers, otherwise known as 'phone girls', were heavily trained. Due to the financial investment that went into training, the owner tried to retain assistant managers, so she put up with my coming and going due to touring.

the local level, and/or aging and thus being regarded differently (read, less vulnerable).[22]

Sometimes in both cities, certain male DJs' reactions to me ranged from forced indifference to downright hostility. Regardless, I also encountered many supportive male DJs, including those who went out of their way to mentor me, and were key players in my success as a DJ. I also experienced a few womxn DJs who viewed me competitively and negatively, and I found ways of working with and against negative attitudes, in order to survive economically as a DJ, while doing my best not to compromise my core values. This desire not to compromise my morals got me into trouble with my employers at Celebrities, the Vancouver club where I had a residency[23] called Stacked Tuesdays for four years. I outline this conflict in Chapter 6 of this dissertation.

In addition to Stacked, I held many other residencies in Vancouver while also playing several one-off local and international gigs until I moved to Toronto in 2009, where I was offered gigs that led to residencies, and I continued to play clubs and tour occasionally in North America until 2011. I have been very fortunate to have played in several amazing venues and locations, including a high-paid weekend residency at an upscale strip club, a two-week residency at a five star boutique hotel in Tulum, Mexico, and a locally-owned restaurant in a small town in Italy while on tour with StinkMitt, where the proprietor just plopped down a liter of red wine and a glass in front of me and shouted "Now DJ!"

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[22] During our interview in 2015, Mama Cutsworth expressed a similar sentiment in regard to being a high profile DJ for over a decade in Winnipeg: "Because now I have a relationship with these venues, these technicians, the people in the music business, I'm not treated like that so much anymore, but I don't know if that's just because of my personal reputation. So like how are the other female DJs being treated? That's the part I can't gauge, because it's like - has the climate improved over the past ten years, or has my reputation gotten around so now people know I'm good, but they'll still treat other women with disrespect."

[23] Having a DJ residency means that the DJ plays at a venue on a regular basis, usually the same night of the week, every week, every second week, or once a month. Typically a residency would showcase a DJ's particular style of music, programming, and mixing skills, and the resident DJ would invite other DJs to play guest spots. The DJ is expected to program and promote their residency to some degree, according to the expectations of the venue and/or promoters they are working with. Regarding my aforementioned residency at Stacked, when I went away we had guests play in my place along with the other resident DJ, Trevor Risk.

On the other hand, one of the worst gigs of my life occurred when I DJ'd right after Cyndi Lauper's performance at Toronto Pride 2010, in front of 35,000 people on a massive stage in Queen's Park. I was given faulty equipment to play on, no onstage monitors to hear myself with, no lighting to see the track listings on my CDs, and therefore no ability to play properly. I had a similar experience playing the Phoenix in Toronto for the opening show for North by Northeast in June 2017. I was also a part of two fun but very trying 'all-girl' DJ tours in 2008 and 2010 respectively, the first of their kind in Canada apparently. Currently I run a mobile DJ company called Dialed-In DJs (DID) that specializes in non-cheesy music for weddings. I started DID in 2013 when I (erroneously) thought that I would be finishing my PhD in two years and thus have to start paying back my student loans, and as my 40s approached I did not want to continue relying on nightclub gigs for DJ work, which pay far less, and have far less desirable working conditions, than weddings.

You have to pay to play as they say, and around 2013 I developed osteoarthritis that went undiagnosed until 2016, which is now severe in my left hip and moderate in my right, and significantly affects my ability to walk and stand at times, as well as rest comfortably while seated or lying down. According to the specialist sports doctor who diagnosed me, the discrepancy in severity between my left and right hip is due to my constantly tapping my left foot while standing, in order to keep time while DJing, over the course of twenty years. I believe my osteoarthritis was also triggered and/or aggravated by my transition into mobile DJing, wherein I lug hundreds of pounds of gear, about 40-50 pounds at a time, several times per gig, not only in and out of venues, but also up and down the five flights of stairs of my apartment building, approximately 200 gigs between Spring 2013 and Spring 2020. Sadly, my building does not have an elevator. I can literally say that I have suffered for my art.

In sum, I fell into DJing because of my involvement with feminist activism, having no idea that I would have successful at it. I am tempted to say that it was an accident, yet I realize that I was drawn to playing recorded music and dancing to it since I was a child exploring my sisters' and parents' record collections, and making mix-tapes on my dad's stereo equipment. Still, my own early experiences as a professional DJ were characterized by my lack of confidence with regards to DJ technology, despite the fact that I had familiarity with analog and digital music technologies through my participation in CiTR, and I received positive feedback on my playing early on.

## 1.5.    Chapter Outlines

Chapter 2 surveys academic and popular culture texts discussing womxn's involvement in DJ culture throughout its development over the past century (Rodgers 2010; Farrugia 2012). After briefly discussing a few key American womxn DJs from radio's early years in the 1920s and 1930s, I discuss DJ culture during the 1940s and 1950s in order to challenge the common perception that the first club DJ was UK serial sexual predator Jimmy Savile.[24] My analysis posits that substantial evidence exists that suggests that French cabaret singer and nightclub impresario Régine Zylberberg was also an early DJ innovator, and furthermore, that she is more influential and important in DJ culture than Savile. Known by her first name only, Régine is already duly credited with creating the modern nightclub (Echols 2010, Shapiro 2005), yet she also claims to be the first club DJ (Schofield 2005); however, she is not currently regarded as such in academic literature, therefore Régine's significant position in DJ culture has yet to be

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[24] Jimmy Savile was a BBC Radio 1 DJ, and a BBC One TV host for *Top of the Pops* and other BBC shows for decades, and is widely credited as being the first nightclub DJ (Brewster and Broughton 2014; Poschardt 1995). Shortly after Savile's death in 2011 at age 84, it quickly emerged that "589 alleged victims [of sexual abuse at the hands of Savile had] come forward during [police] investigation of offences committed by Savile and others . . . Of the alleged victims, 82% were female and 80% were children or young people" (BBC News 2012). See also Boyle (2018), and Greer and McLachlin (2013).

acknowledged. Régine's exclusion from the history of DJing is a prominent example of how this history has been canonized as male. The literature review concludes by examining the dominant themes in recent texts on gender, race, sexuality and DJ culture from the last decade (approximately 2010 until 2020). I focus specifically on the concept of gender parity in regard to booking DJs for festivals and events, and how the concept of a lack of womxn DJs–or rather, a lack of 'good' womxn DJs–results in a discourse of rarity that works to justify womxn's exclusion from DJ lineups.

Chapter 3 describes my mixed methods research design (Hesse-Biber 2010) and how I collected and analyzed qualitative and quantitative data drawn from an online survey completed by 113 participants, and personal interviews with thirty-five womxn and non-binary DJs hailing from across Canada, as well as two queer womxn promoters. I discuss how my theoretical framework is based upon an interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist standpoint that centers the differing voices and experiences of womxn DJs (Harding 2012), including myself, and is further shaped by my insider status as a long-term member of Canada's national DJ network. I outline how I use grounded theory as a methodological framework to make space for my participants' voices to emerge. I conclude Chapter 3 by discussing further methodological and ethical concerns related to my data collection and analysis.

Both Chapters 4 and 5 present in-depth analyses of my survey and interview data, based upon the discourses of differently situated Canadian womxn DJs as they respond to questions about DJ culture and practices, and gender, race, and sexuality. In these two chapters I pay attention to how the quantitative and qualitative data from my survey speaks to the qualitative interview data, and vice versa. I also sought to determine some of the ways in which womxn's access to DJ culture has changed over time.

Chapter 4 begins by illustrating the career pathways of my interview subjects who began DJing in Western Canada in the 1980s, in order to situate their regional, national, and/or international influence. I compare the entryways into DJing available to these early DJ progenitors, contrasting them with the routes taken by Canadian womxn DJs in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. I outline the importance of regional and digital networks for Canadian womxn DJs relative to Canada's geography, namely the country's vastness and the expense and duration of travel within it. I continue to examine how the various practices associated with DJ culture have changed alongside technology by illustrating social media's impact on DJ work, and how digital labour is now regarded as a necessary part of a DJ's hustle. Chapter 4 concludes by focusing on my youngest interview subject, their engagement with digital DJ culture, and how their DJ practice relates to their career in STEM.

Chapter 5 continues to explore key themes regarding gender, race, sexuality and DJ culture. I look specifically at respondent discourse that speaks to the ways in which racialization and whiteness impacts womxn DJs' experiences of DJ culture. I analyze my participant data to determine how mitigating factors such as race and sexuality work alongside gender to influence perceptions of womxn's credibility as DJs. A key sentiment expressed by a large majority of my interview and survey subjects was that their credibility as DJs was often questioned due to their gender. I look specifically at the ways in which womxn DJs are frequently portrayed as gimmicks or tokens, and how we work both with and against these binary representations.

Building upon my analysis of the survey and interview data in Chapters 4 and 5, Chapter 6 discusses different queer and underground club scenes in Vancouver, Toronto, and Montreal, over the past fifteen years. These case studies reveal the wider social dynamics at play with regards to gender, race and sexuality in DJ culture in those regions. First, I discuss the Lick Club,

a queer/lesbian bar that operated in Vancouver, BC, for nine years (2003 until 2011), staffed predominantly by queer womxn and non-binary people. I look at the ways that Lick's physical space impacted the careers of the womxn and non-binary DJs that played there, and the promoter and DJ networks that emerged from the club. A physical space such as Lick that caters to womxn, trans and non-binary DJs (thereby side-stepping male-dominated DJ networks) can be a significant factor in uniting beginner DJs with more experienced mentors. Moreover, the permanence of the club's physical space, and its special financial circumstances, contributed to its success as a community and creative hub for queer womxn, femme and non-binary clubbers, performers, and staff. I contrast my experience at Lick with my experience at Celebrities, a much larger and more corporate gay bar where I had a weekly residency, concurrent with my time at Lick. I experienced sexism and harassment at Celebrities, and these experiences stand in sharp contrast to working at Lick. I conclude Chapter 6 by briefly discussing a third case study further illustrating the importance of cultural spaces for queer and marginalized communities, drawing on Desmond Cole's (2020) discussion of the queer activists of colour that fought for space and impactful participation in Toronto Pride celebrations.

Chapter 7 explores the discursive activism deployed by womxn DJs and their allies to advocate for increased representation and safer spaces in DJ culture. Using data collected from public Facebook and Reddit posts, an interview, participant observation, and recent academic and pop culture media, I study the online discourse that occurred subsequent to a female DJs' call out of an all-male DJ crew in Toronto, for failing to book female and non-binary DJs for their long-standing events. These events took place over the summer and fall of 2017, and I connect them with events that occurred in response the calling-out of men accused of sexual assault in Montreal and Vancouver that same year. I make connections across the different

events in the three cities to demonstrate how a lack of womxn's representation in DJ line-ups props up sexism and sexual assault in DJ culture. I also examine the responses of my interview and survey participants in regard to their experiences of sexism and sexual assault while participating in DJ and nightlife cultures, linking this data to the case studies explored in Chapter 7.

This dissertation concludes by highlighting some prominent BIPOC womxn DJs currently active in Toronto and Vancouver, to demonstrate how womxn's access to DJ culture, and our representation within the culture in terms of media portrayal, diversity, and sheer numbers, has improved significantly. Lastly, I outline possible areas for future research that surfaced while working on this project, as well as possible avenues for disseminating my findings. One of the primary themes to emerge from this study is the discovery of key womxn figures in DJ history that have been overlooked or ignored to an extent, and the conclusion touches on a current project springing from my dissertation - a media documentary on Régine. I mentioned Régine's importance briefly earlier in this introduction when outlining the following chapter, wherein I discuss her in detail. The following chapter also touches on other key womxn and their foundational contributions to DJ culture, in addition to providing a survey of the extant academic literature on gender, race, and sexuality in regard to DJ culture.

**CHAPTER 2: LAST NIGHT A LITERATURE REVIEW CHALLENGED AN**

**ANDROCENTRIC VIEW OF DJ CULTURE**

## 2.1.    Introduction

This chapter surveys the primary academic research and relevant popular culture texts in

English that address the topic of womxn DJs in western culture. In the first section, I describe

how womxn have worked as DJs since the profession's origins in the early twentieth century, in

order to contest our lack of historical presence in both popular and academic works on DJ

culture. In this way, I follow both Farrugia and Olszanowski (2017) and Rodgers (2010) in

challenging those prominent historians of DJ culture who claim that womxn DJs are historically

absent. Specifically, I challenge historians of DJ culture who assert that deceased serial sexual

predator Jimmy Savile (or Sa-VILE if you will) was "the world's first superstar DJ" (Brewster

and Broughton 2014, 56). My analysis posits that there is evidence that suggests that French

cabaret singer and nightclub impresario Régine Zylberberg (who is known simply as 'Régine')

was also an early club DJ who achieved fame in France in the 1950s, and it is possible that other

DJs came before both Régine and Savile. I think it is pertinent to question if there are any other

DJ forerunners that remain unknown, having been overlooked in historical studies of DJing due

to a myopic focus on Savile, and the UK in general. Lastly, I question whether it is even

quantifiably possible – and moreover, *desirable* – to try to determine such a thing as who was the

'world's first nightclub DJ'.

As stated in my introductory chapter, previous researchers have reviewed the relevant

academic material on gender and DJ culture published in English prior to (approximately) 2010

(Farrugia 2004, 2012; Gadir 2016, 2017; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016; Rodgers 2010),

demonstrating how women are frequently written out of cultural history. Therefore, a second

goal of this chapter is to build upon these scholars' work by providing an overview of the key

academic texts on gender and DJ culture published between approximately 2010 and early 2020,

while further unpacking the predominant themes previously addressed by the researchers cited

above. This next section examines how womxn's contributions to DJ history are erased by key

historians–specifically Brewster and Broughton, authors of the influential monograph *Last Night*

*a DJ Saved My Life* (1999, 2006, 2014) who claim that womxn had virtually nothing to do with

the development of DJing over the past approximately 100 years. As Farrugia and Olszanowski

(2017) have pointed out, this omission is a problem because "constantly focusing on a lack is an

affront to womxn who form the scene and have developed it throughout its history" (2).

Moreover, the conception that womxn did not participate in DJ culture historically impacts

perceptions of womxn's present and future participation in said culture.

### 2.2.    Hxrstory/History

As stated, there is a growing body of research that suggests womxn were key to the

development of DJ culture. In fact, I argue that there is enough evidence to suggest that womxn

played crucial - if not foundational – roles in the development of DJing and its attendant culture

as both are presently known, in the USA, France (as in the case of Régine) and Canada. By

example, I discuss womxn who innovated DJing in Calgary and Vancouver in Chapters 4 and 5

of this dissertation. While my study opposes a sexist construction of DJ history by demonstrating

that womxn DJs made foundational contributions to DJ culture both internationally and in

Canada, I follow Rodgers, who is careful to articulate how her concern is not centrally focused

on uncovering a lost history of womxn DJs. Rather, Rodgers also seeks to explore the

relationship between history and the present: "[Pink Noises'] relationship to electronic music

historiography is not to advocate an unattainable completeness in historical accounts but to be

concerned with how histories are contained and contested in movements of sound in the present"
(2010, 2). Indeed, the value is not so much in uncovering a lost history in order to claim said
history as valuable in and of itself, but rather to reshape the ways in which history has been
canonized as white and male. Moreover, it is vital that we question the validity of canons,
whether chronologically based or not.

Having our history erased means that prior to the last two decades little existed
representationally of womxn working as DJs and electronic music producers (or instrumentalists
for that matter). This lack of representation means that it was hard to envision ourselves as DJs
or producers, simply because we never saw ourselves represented in these roles in the media. For
example, Rodgers documents her own predilection to "[default] to stereotypical assumptions
about gender, audio and technology in my personal history" (1) despite discovering that "there
were clear precedents for music and computing experience in generations of womxn before me
in my family". As a successful electronic music artist and creator of *Pink Noises*, a critically
acclaimed feminist website dedicated to womxn in electronic music and art, even Rodgers
wrestled with internalized assumptions about "gender, audio and technology" (2). Because of our
assumed historical absence, Rodgers posits her work as a kind of 'antidote' by presenting the
voices of womxn DJs and electronic music artists in order to "contribute the sounds and stories
of some women to historical accounts which have thus far left them out" (5).

Until recently, womxn have been written out of the history of DJing by simply being
omitted from key texts. A prominent example is *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (Brewster and
Broughton 2014) as arguably this monograph has had the most influence on public perception of
the history of DJ culture. Acclaimed by *The Observer* (2006) as one of the fifty best music books
ever written, *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* is widely considered the definitive history of DJ

culture. Yet there are several key examples where womxn's contributions are omitted or downplayed by authors Brewster and Broughton. In all three editions of *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (1999, 2006, 2014), Brewster and Broughton claim that womxn had virtually nothing to do with the development of DJing over the past century. The authors limited their discussion of womxn DJs to two pages out of 400 in the first two editions (1999, 2006). The third edition (2014) reveals how the authors' perceptions of womxn DJs had barely evolved since the first edition was published fifteen years prior. Despite increasing their coverage of "Women DJs" to a disappointing four pages in the third edition (contrasted with six pages devoted solely to Savile, an increase from the three pages devoted to him in the second edition), Brewster and Broughton make a point of stating in no uncertain terms that womxn were categorically absent from DJ culture from its origins until approximately the turn of the twenty-first century: "Throughout this book the DJ is a 'he' and this is not just a matter of grammatical simplicity. In DJing's 94 years, women have been largely frozen out of the picture, with precious few exceptions" (Brewster and Broughton 2014, 463).

Such a statement may seem sympathetic at first but insisting that womxn are absent from DJ history works to re-inscribe this absence, in that it negates the possibility that some parts of DJ history are yet to be uncovered. By refusing even to use gender-neutral language (in 2014 no less) the authors reinforce a discursive construction of the DJ as resolutely male. Brewster and Broughton hold their position in *The Record Players: DJ Revolutionaries* (2010), a collection of interviews with forty-six men whom the authors deem to be the most important DJs in history. In the introduction, Brewster and Broughton declare: "There are no women here. That's not our fault, that's how history has dealt it so far" (5), once again discursively erasing even the possibility that there have been womxn innovators in DJ history. Forty-six men. Zero womxn.

Tellingly, the authors contradict themselves in *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (2014) by referencing several trailblazing womxn from DJing's early history, specifically Sybil True, one of the first radio DJs to influence record sales as early as 1914, and Halloween Martin, who played records on her Chicago-based radio show "The Musical Clock" beginning in 1930, subsequently enjoying a long career (Farrugia 2012; Keith 2008). According to Fikentscher (2013), the format of Martin's program made her one of the first modern DJs ever, because it was based on presenting music from records, instead of a live band: "I argue that the first concept of the DJ and music programming were formed during the early days of independently DJ-led radio shows" (134). Despite Martin's popularity, and the success of other womxn announcers in the early days of radio, womxn were squeezed out of these positions as the salaries and stature associated with radio DJs increased as the century progressed (Farrugia 2012, Halper 2001).

Fast-forward to the mid-1980s when the DJ emerged as a western media figure, due largely to the advent of MTV and Much Music coinciding with hip hop, an emerging musical genre in the 1980s that featured DJs as a key part of hip hop groups. Arguably, Spinderella from the rap group Salt-N-Pepa was the first world famous DJ of any musical genre. Salt-N-Pepa became household names in 1986 due to their smash hit "Push It", and as the video was in heavy rotation on music television, the group members became physically recognizable. In the video for "Push It", Spinderella is positioned onstage behind her turntables and the two MCs, cueing up, and then scratching a record. In fact, the video opens with a shot of Spinderella's Technic II turntables resting in red road cases, and her hand cuing the record, and then letting it go. In addition to her significance as a Black womxn role model, it is worth noting that she is a hip hop DJ, and not an

EDM DJ, as the latter embody the superstar DJs of today.[25]  Just as in every other genre of

music, womxn artists, specifically DJs, were much more prominent in hip hop than they are

historically acknowledged to be.

Craig and Kynard interviewed Spinderella in 2017, and although she was one of the first

DJs, and the first womxn DJ, to attain visibility via mass media, "she stresses that she was not

the first woman hip-hop deejay, only that they were not made visible in her early years . . . Salt-

N-Pepa's mainstream success offered a spotlight for women deejays (Craig and Kynard 2017,

146). The authors offer several reasons as to why Spinderella's primary importance as a

forerunner in hip hop and popular music generally is obscured: "The convergence of whitestream

feminism, a patriarchal music/hip-hop industry, a western preoccupation with lyrics/MCing over

deejays/sonic-technicians, white racist disbelief in the genius of Black vernacular culture, and the

(early) marginalization and (later) hyper consumption of hip-hop all seem to unite in a distinct

and concerted front that masks the creative, political and intellectual work that women like DJ

Spinderella do" (146).

Indeed, the history of hip hop is a history of firsts for women. One need not look any

further than Sylvia Robinson, the Black record label mogul who created the rap group the Sugar

Hill Gang and delivered hip hop's first radio hit, "Rapper's Delight", to the public (Daly 2005).

Although Brewster and Broughton (2014) briefly give props to Robinson for assembling the

Sugar Hill Gang from members that she scouted, the authors fail to mention that Robinson also

engineered and produced "Rapper's Delight". Robinson was a seasoned musician and

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[25] Interestingly, nowadays hip hop DJs are comparatively underground, and no longer prominent in rap acts. Does the average pop music consumer know off-hand who DJs for Drake, or Nicki Minaj? Likely not.

producer,[26] and the fact that she played such a crucial role in exposing hip hop to the masses by fusing rap with disco in "Rapper's Delight" asserts her massive impact on DJ culture.

I will provide further examples of Brewster and Broughton muting women's contributions to DJ culture. They make no mention of Daphne Oram in the 2014 edition of *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, despite her central position as the Godmother of electronic music, having founded the BBC Radiophonic Workshop in 1958 (Hutton 2004, Williams 2017). Scant attention is paid to Judy Weinstein, who shaped "the scene in the early days" (Tantum 2016, para 1) of disco and DJ culture during New York City in the 1970s. Weinstein was the close friend, mentor, and manager of several major DJs including Larry Levan, Frankie Knuckles, and David Morales. Weinstein created and ran one of the original DJ management companies, as well as the highly influential record pool that lasted for thirty years, from 1978 until 2008 (ibid). For the Record afforded Weinstein the connections to start her own record label, Def Mix, and she produced genre-defining sounds and tracks that shaped house music and brought it into the mainstream via remixes from major artists like Madonna, Janet Jackson, and Whitney Houston.

Historically key Black womxn DJs from North America, Europe and the UK are also left out of *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*. The book contains zero mention of Chicago techno progenitors Kelli Hand and DJ Heather, nor trailblazing American DJ Honey Dijon, a trans womxn and an early proponent of trans visibility, and one of the world's greatest living house DJs. An example of a UK trailblazer is DJ Paulette, the first womxn to spin at Manchester's

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[26] Sylvia Robinson began her career in the 1950s as a guitar player and singer in the group Mickey and Sylvia, who had a hit cover of a Bo Diddley track titled "Love Is Strange" in 1957. "Love Is Strange" would have a second coming thirty years later after appearing on the soundtrack to the film *Dirty Dancing* (1987). Robinson had another hit in 1973 with "Pillow Talk", widely considered a prototype disco track. "Pillow Talk" featured Robinson's breathy vox, which influenced Donna Summer's vocal delivery on the seminal disco track "Love to Love You Baby", produced by Gorgio Moroder in 1975. Always ahead of the curve, in the late 1970s Robinson heard someone rapping at a house party, and knew immediately that rap would be the next big thing in music. She assembled the Sugar Hill Gang from members she personally scouted, some of whom stole lyrics from other more established (read, authentic) rappers. For the backing track, Robison copied Chic's disco hit "Good Times" by recording studio musicians replicating it (Daly 2005).

legendary Hacienda (a vastly influential nightclub with great historical significance for rave culture and electronic music): "although the first womxn DJ at the Hacienda and a leading figure in the Nineties dance scene, she has almost been 'airbrushed' out of history. 'For years I never said anything about it,' she said. 'But now I'm old enough not to care if anyone feels uncomfortable if I say 'this is wrong'''" (Howell 2018).

Brewster and Broughton do not acknowledge any noteworthy female practitioners of DJ culture until the advent of acid house in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It was only then that womxn were more or less *permitted* to DJ, because–according to Brewster and Broughton at least–prior to the 1990s the mere concept of women DJing was absurd (meaning subject to ridicule):

> One cultural side effect of acid house was the freedom it gave to women to be DJs. In the rushing years at the end of the eighties, *anything seemed possible, even the idea that a woman could enter this most male of professions and not be laughed out from behind the decks*. DJing's maleness is largely a historical thing and in recent years women DJs have progressed to being, if not a sizable number, at least a number worth counting. And while some are content to exploit club cultures' essential sexism to get ahead, thankfully there are some that are judged on their talent rather than their cleavage. (Brewster and Broughton 2014, 463, my emphasis)

Clearly, womxn have historically experienced significant barriers to accessing DJ culture, but such barriers, as manifested in the behaviors of sexist and misogynist stakeholders, have been far more insidious, harmful, and violent than simply being mocked. Brewster and Broughton's approach to womxn in DJ history works not only to discursively erase us, it diminishes the degree to which male gatekeepers fought to restrict our access to DJ culture and the damages this

has caused above and beyond our omission from the male narrative. Note that the authors do not cite any historical examples of womxn DJs actually being laughed at to the degree where they stopped DJing and left the booth/stage/venue (or wherever), so it is unclear as to how the concept of womxn being "laughed out from behind the decks" originated and was perpetuated.

Brewster and Broughton's approach to womxn in DJ history works to discursively erase us. The above quotation from *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* also demonstrates how the authors consistently treat our professional legitimacy as contingent on the condition that we downplay any 'sexiness' we might exhibit: "And while some are content to exploit club cultures' essential sexism to get ahead, thankfully there are some judged on their talent rather than their cleavage."[27] Throughout the monograph's four pages on womxn DJs, Brewster and Broughton repeatedly assert that if we appear 'sexy' in any way while DJing or pursuing DJ-related activities then we are not credible or 'real' DJs. Moreover, we will ruin it for 'real' womxn DJs everywhere, so we best heed Brewster and Broughton's sexist opinions: "DJ Rap […] quit her day job as a topless model and became the first womxn drum and bass producer signed to a major label. *Admirably* (apart from a pneumatic album cover photo) she blocked any attempts to use her past career as a promotional gimmick" (2014, 464, my emphasis).

Tediously, the majority of quotations from womxn DJs in *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* support the authors' adamant claim that only those of us who, again, consciously downplay any 'sexiness' can be allowed access to male-dominated DJ culture. This attitude situates womxn DJs as 'other', opposite the 'real' DJs who are positioned as resolutely male, thereby casting any womxn DJ as a token and an exception to the rule. We are only granted credibility if we mute our 'sexuality', and I explore this specific barrier towards our participation in DJ culture further

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27 It is notable that this sentence comprises the sole discussion of "club culture's essential sexism" in *Last Night a DJ Save My Life.*

in Chapters 4 and 5. Presently, I would like to present a detailed and final example of Brewster and Broughton's limited view of womxn's historical contributions to DJ culture by examining the authors' claims that serial sexual abuser Jimmy Savile was the *very first* nightclub DJ.

### 2.3.    Régine vs. Jimmy Sa-Vile

As discussed in a preliminary analysis, the first club DJ is considered to be the first person to play records on two turntables, providing continuous music for a paid audience to dance to. Until recently, based upon those criteria, most journalistic and academic sources claim that Jimmy Savile was the first club DJ. By way of example, in *The Sage International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture*, Noel Lobley defines "DJ culture" as follows: "Jukeboxes, popular in Depression and Prohibition-era United States, existed since 1889, but the idea of dancing to records selected live, as opposed to live musicians, is credited to Leeds-born DJ Jimmy Savile in 1943 . . . said to be the first person to have used twin turntables to keep the music flowing at dances" (2019, 744). Notably, Lobley cites Brewster and Broughton (2014) as his only source to support this specific claim (Lobley 2019, 746).

In a blog post titled: "Jimmy Savile–DJ Originator or More Smoke and Mirrors?" DJ and blogger Greg Wilson (2012) investigates the roots of Savile's assumed primacy in DJ history, and outlines how the vast influence of *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life* shaped the public's perception that Savile was the first club DJ. By deconstructing the key narratives and modes of media that combine to construct Savile's primary status in DJ culture, Wilson provides a robust and well-researched examination of the extreme problematics of bestowing 'first club DJ' status upon Savile, from the point of view of a professional UK DJ. Wilson outlines how, even setting aside Savile's monstrous criminality, his primacy in DJ culture should be questioned due to a lack of proof. Wilson asserts that Brewster and Broughton's claim of Savile's primacy is based

on insufficient evidence gathered from the first academic monograph on DJ culture published in 1995 and aptly titled *DJ Culture*, by Ulf Poschardt (1995): "'DJ Culture' . . . became the first book to attempt to chart the history of the DJ . . . In a short section outlining the development of DJs in Europe, Poschardt repeated [UK popular music journalist] Nik Cohn's pronouncement that Jimmy Savile was a trailblazer . . . However, [Poschardt] never mentioned anything about [Savile's] claim to be the first DJ to use 2 turntables" (Wilson 2012, para 29). Several popular music scholars cite Brewster and Broughton and/or Poschardt when claiming Savile was the first DJ–and no other sources. For example, in *The Sage Handbook of Popular Music*, Matt Brennan states that Savile was "one of the first to organize record-only disc hops in the UK" and cites Brewster and Broughton as his only source (2015, 215). In *Unlocking the Groove: Rhythm, Meter, and Musical Design in Electronic Dance Music*, Mark Butler makes a similar claim and also cites Brewster and Broughton as his only source (2006, 35-36).

Interestingly, although Lobley omits Régine from his discussion of "DJ culture" in *The Sage International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture*, she is hailed as a DJ innovator in the "Disco" entry in the same encyclopedia. According to Maristella Feustle, "the discotheque formally emerged at Paris's Whisky à Gogo where Régine Zylberberg replaced the jukebox with a disc jockey controlling linked turntables to eliminate pauses between songs" (2019, 738). While Feustle does not claim that Régine was the first DJ or was responsible for begetting the first DJ, according to Régine herself, she was the 'disc jockey' controlling the turntables and selecting the music at the Whisky à Gogo, as discussed in a later section of this chapter. Given this fact, astonishingly, the narratives of Régine and Savile compete for the title of the 'first club DJ' within the same encyclopedia. Finally, Feustle does not mention Savile in her entry for "Disco", nor does she cite Brewster and Broughton; rather, she cites Alice Echols (2010), Kai

Fikentscher (2000), and Peter Shapiro (2005). The following two sections focus on the cultural

contributions of Régine and Savile in order to demonstrate how the former's historical

importance has been downplayed or omitted, and how the latter's importance has been inflated

and unduly celebrated in DJ culture.

**Who Was Jimmy Savile?**

Jimmy Savile was a British Broadcasting Company (BBC) Radio 1 DJ and the host of *Top

of the Pops* and other BBC TV shows for decades. Savile was also a heinous serial sexual abuser

whose predatory crimes spanned more than six decades. The extent and duration of Savile's

criminal activity was greatly enabled by his access to UK national institutions including his

employer the BBC and the focus of his 'charity' work, the National Health Service (NHS).

Shortly after Savile's death in 2011 at age 84, it quickly emerged that "589 alleged victims [had]

come forward during [police] investigation of offences committed by Savile and others . . . Of

the alleged victims, 82% were female and 80% were children or young people" (BBC News

2012; see also Greer and McLachlin 2013). The public discovery of Savile's crimes and how

they were facilitated and concealed by two major institutions primary to the fabric of public life

in the UK rocked the country and resulted in the creation of several new laws, as well as old laws

being changed (Boyle 2018). And herein lies the problem, namely that of assigning accolades to

the worst serial sexual abuser in modern UK history who preyed upon the most vulnerable

population, as Brewster and Broughton do in the following passage from *Last Night a DJ Saved

My Life*: "Jimmy Savile was the first superstar DJ… So, despite the revelations about his life-

long exploitation of vulnerable youngsters, *we must accept* that Sir James Savile OBE (his list of

honors shows how well he used his establishment connections as a smokescreen) was the wily

showman who took us from dance bands to DJs, the innovator who conjured the notion of

inviting people to pay to dance to records in a club" (2014, 55-6, my emphasis).

In a 2016 interview with Red Bull Music Academy, Brewster states that when he and co-author Broughton were interviewing "hundreds of people" for *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life*, they "asked everyone the question 'Who influenced you?' – in order to get to the very root of the culture – nearly everyone said, 'You've got to go talk to Jimmy Savile, because he was the pioneer.' I mean, it's a sad fact now, but obviously his contribution to DJing is contentious to talk about now" (Martin 2016, para 9). Brewster's statement raises two questions. Indeed, how is it possible that neither he nor Broughton heard anything about the allegations against Savile after interviewing "hundreds" of people connected to DJ culture? Or, if Brewster and Broughton did hear talk of Savile's crimes, why did they choose to ignore the rumors about Savile that apparently had been percolating for decades? (Burrell 2016). Of course making unproven allegations carries serious legal consequences, but one might expect that after such allegations came to light in 2012, Brewster and Broughton's hero worship would have diminished prior to publishing the third edition of *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* in 2014.

The second question elicited by the above quotation from Brewster and Broughton is as follows: if Jimmy Savile represents the "very root of the culture", what does that say about sexism, misogyny, and sexual harassment, assault and abuse in DJ culture? I speak to this concern in more detail in Chapter 7 wherein I look at two case studies concerning sexual assault in Canadian DJ culture, and my survey and interview respondents' own experiences with sexual harassment. For now, I will comment on how it strikes me that Savile's atrocious crimes seem like both a nucleus, and an outgrowth of the aforementioned problems. As demonstrated throughout this study, DJ culture's sexism and misogyny poses barriers to womxn, therefore, is it any wonder that its alleged originator was a serial sexual abuser of young, often disabled or

hospitalized children and teens, many of them lacking parents or protective caregivers–in short, extremely vulnerable people, mostly girls, with victims as young as two years old (Boyle 2018).

Wilson points to how the various amendments made by Brewster and Broughton between the three editions of *Last Night A DJ Saved My Life* reveal the discrepancies in Savile's self-narrative. Here, Wilson discusses how Savile's stature again prevented him from being questioned with regards to his primacy in DJ culture, and cites two other UK contenders who may have used twin-turntables to play records for a paid audience to dance to. Wilson also points out how, unlike other UK DJs active in the 1940s, no photographic evidence exists to support Savile's claims to be the 'first club DJ' by way of being the first DJ to play on twin-turntables:

> You didn't question Jimmy Savile, if he told you that he was the inventor of twin-turntables, given the lack of evidence to the contrary who were we to dispute this? After all, this was a man who'd been honored by Queen and country (and Pope for good measure)–an upstanding citizen, let alone a living legend. Perhaps, as with his catalogue of abuse of underage girls, he pulled the wool over our eyes in positioning himself at the genesis of DJ culture, when really we should have been looking towards more marginal figures like Bertrand Thorpe and Ron Diggins, or *similar pioneers in other countries*. It's not unreasonable to imagine that, as with the invention of the steam engine, a number of people in different places came up with roughly the same idea around the same time. Even if we do believe that Savile was using 2 turntables before Diggins, or vice versa, can we be sure that either was aware of what the other was doing? (Wilson 2012, para 34, my emphasis)

In response to Wilson's blog post, long-time *DJ Mag* editor-in-chief Carl Loben wrote that he was

now of the opinion that Savile wasn't 'the godfather of DJ culture', as we have been led

to believe over the past decade or so . . . For starters, the dates don't add up as to when he

supposedly first put two turntables together. When I interviewed him about it for DJ

Magazine in 2002, he said that it was in 1941. But he would only have been 14 or 15 at

this time, and other accounts online vary as to the dates too–as do how many people were

at his first gig, which could be anywhere between 250 and 12 . . . I think we should strip

him of any reverence when it comes to being a DJ pioneer . . . he wasn't a music fan, he

didn't collect records, he was an egotistical megalomaniac & predatory pedophile.

(Loben 2012, in Wilson 2012, comments section)

Here, Loben also refers to the well-documented fact that Savile did not collect records, nor show

much interest in music fandom (Mardles 2007). Wilson speaks of the culture of denial around

sexual predators who are a part of the fabric of everyday life, as was Savile in the UK for

decades, stating: "In this environment of denial it's likely that Jimmy Savile's whole career was

based on his intention to place himself in the proximity of young girls, not on a desire to be a DJ

revolutionary" (2012).

Given that scant data backs the claim that Savile was the first club DJ, how and why did

media narratives of DJ history grant Savile primacy? Savile was often described as a

"professional exaggerator" (Boyle 2018, 1567) so why did Poschardt, Brewster, and Broughton

take Savile's word? For this reason alone it is pertinent to question whether other forerunners

remain unknown, having been overlooked in historical studies of DJing due to a myopic focus on

Savile, and on the UK in general; to this end, the following section examines Régine's

foundational contributions to DJ culture. Unlike Savile, Régine was–and still is–a dedicated

audiophile who collected records from a young age, and was passionate about music and

dancing. Like Savile, Régine also claims to be the 'first club DJ' (Ortiz 2011; Weil 2009),

although unlike Savile, she is not currently regarded as such in the majority of academic work on

DJ culture's history, as demonstrated in the preceding section.

**Who is Régine?**

Long before Beyoncé, Madonna, or even Cher, Régine was hailed by her first name only.

Although practically unknown in North America in the twenty-first century, Régine is famous in

Europe as a singer, actor, and nightclub franchise owner, earning the nickname "Queen of the

Night". Part of her popularity stems from being a working-class heroine and a 'woman of the

people'. Indeed, her autobiography *Régine: Call Me By My First Name* details her exceptional

life. Born in Belgium in 1929 to Polish-Jewish parents, Régine had an unstable childhood; her

mother abandoned Régine and her younger brother by moving to Argentina shortly after his birth

(Zylberberg 1988). Régine grew up going back and forth from her father's dwellings in working

class Paris to boarding school, as well as spending her early teen years during the WWII

occupation of France hiding from the Nazis (initially in a convent, and later in a senior citizens'

home in Lyon). Régine was married and divorced with a young son by the age of nineteen and as

she declares in her autobiography, all she was interested in was going out dancing.

Régine's autobiography contains dozens of references to her passion for cutting edge

music, dancing, and night time culture: "night people are a special breed, all a little lost, a little in

need of human warmth, of intimacy, of the illusion of security" (1988, 174). Throughout *Régine:*

*Call Me By My First Name* she discloses how she "loved music and dancing", since she was a

girl, and how "people were always surprised to see a kid of eleven dancing so well. I used to sing

all the popular tunes too" (22). She divulges a passion for dancing in the nightclubs of Paris as a

young teenager, revealing her love of dance music by describing her heightened exposure to jazz

when moving back to Paris: "We used to go dancing at the Shubert in Montparnasse… I was better acquainted with jazz and bebop than I was in Lyon" (70). Régine repeatedly asserts her passion for dancing, stating "Out dancing, I could dream, and forget . . . The only thing that interested me, like it did when I was a kid . . . was dancing" (104) and that she "danced to everything" (124). Régine also describes her penchant for playing her "favourite records over and over again" (109-10).

By the age of 20 in 1949, Régine was a barmaid at the Whisky à Gogo in Paris, and by 1953 she was managing the bar (Zylberberg 1988). It is due to Régine's tenure at the Whisky that she is credited with creating the modern day discotheque, or nightclub (Feustle 2019, Graves-Brown 2012). In a 2005 interview with the BBC, Régine describes how she introduced many fundamental concepts at the Whisky that are now standard in nightclubs, such as the use of two turntables to enable continuous music, specific flooring for a dancing area, and specific types of lighting: "I laid down a linoleum dance-floor–like in a kitchen–put in coloured lights, and removed the juke-box. The trouble with the juke-box was that when the music stopped you could hear snogging in the corners. It killed the atmosphere . . . Instead I installed two turntables so there was no gap in the music. I was barmaid, doorman, bathroom attendant, hostess–and I also put on the records. *It was the first ever discotheque and I was the first ever club disc-jockey*" (Schofield 2005, my emphasis).

In a televised interview with *Ados France* posted to YouTube in 2010, Régine gives a similar account of transforming the Whisky into the first discotheque, and again asserts her primacy as a DJ, while going into more detail about controlling the lights as well as the music, and giving dance lessons [translated from French]:

I built a linoleum dance floor, I painted the lights and asked for the jukebox to be

removed and I set up two machines with 12 rotating discs, but the rotation was too slow for me so I undid the mechanical system in order to have the discs dropping on the player right away and I would DJ, so I invented tunes mixing (00:39) . . . As I [controlled] the lights . . . I would enhance the music with the lights according to the beat I was playing. I would also give cha cha and hula hoop classes since I am a dancer (01:05) . . . Although DJing is seen as a man's job, I succeeded at it because I was simple and cool; I had an ease of amusing people that only a few people know how to do (03:35).

Régine affirms her credibility once again in an interview with *Women's Wear Daily*, wherein the interviewer states "DJs have a lot to thank you for. You banished jukeboxes and replaced them with paired turntables for seamless music"; Régine replies, "Most DJs know that I invented mixing. I was the first to destroy the automatic system with the manual system" (Weil 2009).

Régine opened her own club in 1957, Chez Régine, and she describes how she broke new types of music and dances at her clubs (a definitive hallmark of groundbreaking DJs): "To launch the cha-cha, I opened a dance school at the club on Sunday afternoons. . . . It was the first time couples had to separate, and this new departure proved most disorienting" (Zylberberg 1988, 130-31). Numerous media sources corroborate how Régine brought the "Twist" to France by obtaining the record and teaching her patrons the dance (Foreman 2009, West 2011). Indeed, the twist gets its own short chapter in Régine's autobiography (Zylberberg 1988, 167-72) wherein she describes learning of the dance from American cast members of *West Side Story*, in France to perform the musical in the early 1960s. Upon seeing the cast members dance the twist while warming up, Régine inquired about the dance and, learning of its nature, said, "so there must be some records, mustn't there?"(168) and ordered Chubby Checker's "Let's Twist Again" which she played for the patrons of Chez Régine to dance to.

Régine was aware of her trendsetter status, and like any professional DJ, kept her ear to the ground to break new sounds: "I was one step ahead of the music, one step ahead of the twist" (173). Régine describes how she "put the records on. . . . We danced the cha-cha, the meringue and of course rock 'n' roll. I'd bought some rock records before it became fashionable, and when people started talking about it I got them out and everyone went wild" (Zylberberg 1988, 130-31). By introducing the twist–a type of dance that one does solo, as opposed to a foxtrot or another dance requiring two bodies–Régine revolutionized popular dance in France and elsewhere in Europe, which in the early 1950s had not yet been as impacted by Black musical culture as in America (Ortiz 2011).

Régine originated other nightclub concepts such as "hype," which Brewster and Broughton ultimately credit her for. When she was sent to rescue a new version of the Whisky à Gogo in Cannes that was faring poorly, Régine kept the club empty but cranked the music inside and hung a "disco full" sign on the door for two weeks. When Régine finally did open the door, there was a line up down the block (Zylberberg 1988). It was at the Whisky à Gogo where the practice of patrons purchasing a bottle of whisky–not a glass–and writing their name on the bottle began. By the time Régine opened Chez Régine, she had created the forerunner to what is presently known as "bottle service" in nightclubs. Régine also introduced theme nights, such as a "Jean Harlow" night wherein guests adorned themselves all in white, and with these "happenings" the "patrons were the performers" (Ortiz 2011, 3). All of these innovations position Régine as the prototype modern nightclub DJ who often acts as a promoter as well, for example, by curating the theme for a club night (a convention that endures to this day).

Owing to the extensive evidence demonstrating that Régine was a DJ who played dance records at her club, how did Brewster and Broughton overlook her so-called DJ claims? In *Last*

*Night a DJ Saved My Life*, the authors allude to an awareness of her autobiography, *Régine: Call Me By My First Name*, but they do not refer to it by its title, nor do they cite it or any sources on Régine in their bibliography (thus, it does not seem that they interviewed her). Given that Brewster and Broughton conducted over 200 personal interviews for their project, and Régine is a celebrity active in the public realm while residing in France, it strikes me as odd that they did not speak with her. Incredibly, Régine's significant position as a cultural progenitor has yet to be widely acknowledged, despite being "considered the very first disc jockey, or DJ . . . [who] created an atmosphere of boundlessness" (Ortiz 2011, 3). Régine's relative absence from DJ history is in keeping with the perception that women did not make foundational contributions to DJ culture (Brewster and Broughton 2014) and is a prominent example of how this history has been canonized as male (Farrugia and Olszanowski 2017; Rodgers 2010).

**Mixing Narratives**

As asserted in preceding material, Brewster and Broughton's claim that Savile was the first club DJ is significant, since the widespread popularity–and thereby influence–of *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* grants it a definitive role in shaping public perception. Referencing Sarah Thornton (1990), I argue that Brewster and Broughton "personalize" the history of DJ culture by focusing on Savile, and "canonize" the same history by fixing it in the UK according to their own set of criteria, thus narrativizing the story of Savile as the 'first club DJ' by presenting it as "straightforwardly 'true' " (Thornton 1990, 94) despite significant evidence to the contrary.

Since the present chapter pays close attention to both journalism and academic work on this topic, I have noted how the narrative of 'the first club DJ' currently shifts away from Jimmy Savile, a factor acknowledged by Brewster and Broughton; nonetheless, the authors blame this phenomenon not upon a lack of evidence, but rather state that "In posthumous disgrace he is

being rapidly whitewashed from history. Despite his unspeakable crimes, he remains a revolutionary DJ and an important figure in our story" (2014: 53). Indeed, Savile is already beginning to be excised from DJ history and substituted with Régine in mainstream journalistic accounts. For example, a March 30, 2019 article in the *Daily Telegraph*, an Australian newspaper, omits Savile from the narrative of the first club DJ and grants Régine the title instead: "In 1953 at a nightclub named Whiskey [sic] A-Go-Go in Paris . . . Belgian-born singer and DJ Régine Zylberberg, came up with an influential innovation. She linked two record players together and created mixes of two tunes, or seamlessly slid one song into the next to keep the music going and the dancers dancing. Régine opened her own club . . . pioneering the record playing format" (Lennon 2019).

Interestingly, the narrative granting Régine primacy in DJ culture is quietly being promoted on Twitter. A search for "Régine Zylberberg'" on May 28, 2020, found fifteen tweets posted between 2011and 2020 that make specific reference to Régine as the 'first club DJ' using identical or similar keywords. For example, on September 15, 2011 a user tweeted part of the following paragraph with a link to their Facebook page with the full paragraph: "Just saw this in Mental Floss: The birth of the DJ occurred in 1953, when 24-year-old Régine Zylberberg, manager of Paris' famous Whisky a Go-Go, undertook an experiment to replace the club's jukebox with two turntables and a microphone. In no time, DJs were pumping up the jam at parties the world over. By the 1970s, Zylberberg was running 25 clubs across Europe and the Americas."[28] Mentalfloss.com has an "Amazing Facts" generator, so perhaps it was through that generator that the key phrase regarding Régine's prominence was published. Aside from the

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[28] Rob Alahn (@robalahn), "Just saw this in Mental Floss: The birth of the DJ occurred in 1953, when 24-year-old Régine Zylberberg, manager of Paris' famous Whisky a Go-Go, undertook an experiment," Twitter post. September 15, 2011, https://twitter.com/robalahn/status/114433950075715584.

preceding tweet, however, most of the tweets occur in 2012 or later, and I find this to be

significant as 2012 is the year the Savile scandal broke.

For example, a user tweeted in Italian to suggest that "International DJ day should be

changed from March 9 to December 26, or failing that, the day Régine Zylberberg dies."[29] A

tweet from a Rotterdam-based nightclub and radio DJ included Régine's name along with three

of the most prominent, well-known and respected trailblazing DJs: Francis Grasso, Kool Herc

and Grand Wizard Theodore.[30] Another user tweeted, "#fact The first DJ was in 1953, when 24-

year-old Régine Zylberberg, manager of Paris Whisky a Go-Go, did it to replace the club's

jukebox."[31] Yet another user tweeted that "Régine Zylberberg was probably the first female #DJ

to spin on twin turntables"[32] and included a link to Régine's Wikipedia page. Of all of the extant

tweets naming Régine as the first DJ, this "female #DJ" Hashtag user was the only one who

made the gendered distinction of "female DJ". Aside from one Twitter user who linked to their

own Facebook post, none of the other Tweets affirming Régine as the 'first club DJ' link to

sources, so it is unclear as to where these users obtained their information. One possibility is the

Twitter account for Ripley's Believe It or Not! which published the following tweet in 2012:

"Believe It or Not! (#BION) The birth of the DJ occurred in 1953, when 24-year-old Régine

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[29] Tomas Bettolli (@tomasbettolli), "International DJ day should be changed from March 9 to December 26, or failing that, the day Régine Zylberberg dies," Twitter post, October 3, 2019. https://twitter.com/TomasBettolli/status/1179621196108894208.

[30] Okkie Vijfvinkel (@OkkieVijfvinkel), "17 Group 7 children talk about @DJ history and late #beatmatchen at 9 am," Twitter post (translated from Dutch), February 20, 2019. http://twitter.com/OkkieVijfvinkel/status/1098157931722350592.

[31] Robin (@Maitreya12358), "#fact The first DJ was in 1953, when 24-year-old Régine Zylberberg, manager of Paris Whisky a Go-Go," Twitter post, July 26, 2013. https://twitter.com/Maitreya12358/status/360847308046348288

[32] Peter Becks (@Peter_S_Becks1), "Régine Zylberberg was probably the first female #DJ to spin on twin turntables," Twitter post, December 3, 2015. https://twitter.com/Peter_S_Becks1/status/672554225315020800.

Zylberberg, manager of… [link to Facebook post]."[33] The tweet is incomplete, and the link to the Facebook post is dead. Again, I find the date in 2012 to be significant.

Overall, this section demonstrates that Savile should not be given primacy in DJ culture for three reasons: he was a despicable person, very little evidence exists to support the claim that he was the *very first* person to play dance music on twin turntables for a paid audience, and the criteria for defining the 'first club DJ' is narrowly constructed with a focus on the UK. Ultimately, re-defining the criteria for primacy in the history of DJ culture would elevate Régine from obscurity to the centre of the narrative. As a respondent to Wilson's blog post concludes: "Maybe the two-table claim will be slowly forgotten given the much wider positive impact club culture has had on society" (Hobbins, in Wilson 2012, comments section). Given that Régine's crucial contributions to club culture *have* been widely acknowledged, if we follow Hobbins' suggestion and focus on the impact of club culture (a more vast and diverse terrain than that constituting a personification of Savile), then Régine's centrality becomes undisputed. Still, I want to caution against replacing one figure with another and simply continuing with a narrativization of DJ history; indeed, we should look instead at several narratives, and how they speak to and/or against each other. Clearly, the value lies more in reshaping the ways in which history has been canonized as white and male, rather than uncovering a lost history in order to claim said history as valuable in and of itself. It is even more urgent that we fiercely question the validity of canons, whether chronologically based or not. Such hierarchical frameworks reinforce a linear view of DJ history, flattening or omitting the contributions of many historical subjects, thus reinforcing a DJ canon that distorts history.

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[33] Ripley's Believe It or Not Niagara (@RipleysNiagara), "Believe It or Not! (#BION) The birth of the DJ occurred in 1953, when 24-year-old Régine Zylberberg,", Twitter post, February 3, 2012. https://twitter.com/RipleysNiagara/status/165611814023991297.

To conclude this section, I must state that despite my contention with Brewster and Broughton's dismissal of womxn DJs' foundational contributions to the culture, I do agree that womxn did not participate in DJ culture to the degree that would put us on par historically with men in terms of numbers and industry success–however, that is a far cry from being virtually non-existent and allegedly prone to being "laughed off of the decks" (Brewster and Broughton 2014, 464). Rather, this historic lack of numbers mimics the general popular music scene, which predominantly lacks womxn instrumentalists. But still, the fact that there were historically fewer womxn DJs than male is not reason enough to make the sweeping generalization that womxn are mainly absent from DJ culture historically save for a "precious few exceptions". I emphasize Brewster and Broughton's words in order to point to how the authors insist on male DJs being the rule. This sexist attitude is of course not just limited to assumptions about womxn DJs, but is present throughout the history of popular music and art.

### 2.4. Recent Literature on Gender and DJ Culture: Dominant Themes

Prior to the turn of the twenty-first century there were scant texts exploring the gendering of DJ culture, and the feminist scholars that I cite throughout have already covered most of the extant work. Therefore, this section outlines the dominant themes in regard to womxn and DJ culture that are present in the academic literature published after (approximately) 2010. The past twenty years have generated a small but growing body of academic research on the topic (Bloustien 2016; Craig and Kynard 2017; Duignan-Pearson 2017; Elafros 2012; Gadir 2016, 2017; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016; Rodgers 2010) including a full-length academic monograph on womxn DJs (Farrugia 2012) as well as a journal edition dedicated to womxn in electronic dance music (Farrugia and Olszanowski 2017). Collectively, the aforementioned scholars have identified the prevalent themes with regards to womxn and DJ culture, as follows:

womxn DJs' supposed or assumed absence from DJ culture, gendered relationships to technology and how they underpin womxn's difficulty in accessing the necessary supports to pursue DJing, gendered discursive and material barriers to DJ culture, and the ways that womxn DJs are specifically enabled by both material and online networks, as well as digital technologies.

With the exception of Craig and Kynard (2017), Duignan-Pearson (2017), Elafros (2012), and Rodgers (2010), the subjects in these studies are mainly white womxn, and neither race nor sexuality are predominantly explored in the majority of material on the topic. Furthermore, with respect to genre, most research centers on DJs that play EDM (Electronic Dance Music), with hip hop a distant second. Therefore, further research should focus on de-centering whiteness, heterocentricity and cis-genderism, as well as EDM, from studies of DJs and DJ culture, as I have attempted to do in this dissertation.

**Myths of Womxn vs. Technology**

The cultural belief that men are more suited to working with technology than womxn permeates the professional cultures of science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). As a result, fewer womxn than men pursue careers in these fields (Manuel 2018). Feminist scholars have demonstrated the ways in which technology is represented as masculine, and how girls are socialized to find it intimidating and inaccessible (Turkle 1998; Wacjman 2004). That factor has a negative impact on the perception of womxn as DJs (Rodgers 2010), because DJing is positioned as a technical skill which ever-increasingly relies on familiarity and access to technology, and it has been well documented that this is a key reason that womxn and girls are discouraged from DJing (Farrugia 2012). Even trailblazing Canadian DJ Misstress Barbara stated that she thought womxn were "less comfortable" with technology than men ("Lack of Women

DJs”).

Despite the widespread belief that womxn are "less technical" than men, researchers have demonstrated that womxn have been users and innovators of music technology throughout history (Rodgers 2012), and have proven that womxn do not have an inherent aversion to technology (Abbiss 2008). In fact, studies of girls playing video games found that when they are afforded the time and space to play them, they do so eagerly, and move quickly from novice to expert in terms of ability and confidence (Jenson and de Castell 2008). As stated throughout this study, with several advances in technology working to minimize key sexist and homosocial barriers, more and more womxn are taking up DJing.

DJs have always been early adopters of technology, as ours is a practice entirely reliant on it (Farrugia 2012). Both technology and music are often designated as masculine fields, and the forces of related gendered stereotypes seem to gain even more prominence when these realms join together in electronic music (Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013; Rodgers 2010). Furthermore, given that most current popular music is digitally produced, popular music itself is becoming increasingly associated with technology and digital production.[34] The misconception that womxn are inherently lacking in technical ability results in our being forced into a binary, whereby a skilled womxn DJ is considered a token, and an unskilled womxn DJ is branded a gimmick; a

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[34] In *Popular Music, Digital Technology And Society* Nick Prior (2018) outlines the "technical" definition of "digital" as the "process where data is stored in binary forms as zeros and ones". However, Prior explains how "'really' the digital is a formation of discourses, artefacts and practices that revolve around an increasing reliance on complex computerized systems" (14). Prior defines "formations" as "more a set of meaning, objects and practices than a technical ordering of information per se, the digital represents characteristic forms of organizing an increasingly interconnected and computerized world expressed in everyday behaviours, discourses and relations". His approach is predominantly based in sociology, as he studies the intricate ways technology inhabits the production and consumption of music, and "how the sonic and the digital constitute each other, and the issues sparked by their mutual entanglement" (4). Prior points out how the terrain of popular music has been "radically reshaped by digital technology, warranting close attention to the depth and richness of technology's connection with musical forms, habits and techniques" (5). According to Prior, "technology encompasses three main compounds: the material objects themselves; the activities that revolve around them; the know how that facilitates their use", and "all music is technological in the sense that it is mediated by technological materials, forces and processes" (4).

concept that I explore in detail in Chapter 5. In turn, this binary reinforces stereotypes of us as technically inept and/or technophobic, with those of us who master DJ technology being regarded as exceptional. Interestingly, visibly queer womxn seem to be able to bypass these specific barriers, a concept discussed briefly by Farrugia (2012), and one that I analyze according to my participant data in chapters 4 and 5 of this study.

**The Credibility Question**

In a patriarchal society, men are considered the gatekeepers of culture and thus more "suited" to DJing. The extant studies that have been conducted on DJ cultures' attendant gender politics demonstrate that men are promoted and endorsed far more quickly than womxn (Farrugia 2012; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2016; Katz 2006). Specific to DJ culture, my own research demonstrates that womxn DJs routinely have their credibility questioned. Out of the approximately 150 womxn that I interviewed and/or surveyed, the vast majority stated that one of the most negative aspects of DJing was being required to continually demonstrate your credibility. As demonstrated throughout this study, this constant battle for credibility is a key barrier for womxn DJs. Will Straw (1997) explains the connection between homosociality and gatekeeping, referring to how gatekeeping practices work to uphold sex segregation: "If the worlds of club disc jockeys . . . seem characterized by shared knowledges which exclude the would-be entrant, this functions not only to preserve the homosocial character of such worlds, but to block women from the social and economic advancement which they may offer" (10). In sum, DJ culture and its attendant industries are based around male networks, aka "boys' clubs" (Bredin 1991; Zeleke 2004), resulting in "a cultural environment shaped by male technophilia" (Bloustien 2016, 232).

**Material Barriers to DJing**

In addition to discursive barriers, womxn also experience material barriers to DJing, including late nights at nightclubs and afterhours venues, and potential dangers posed by alcohol and illegal drugs. In these ways, aspects of the "night time economy" (Hutton 2006) present further obstacles for women working as DJs. Prior to the 2000s, a main way to acquire music was to go to record stores and 'dig' (look) for records in a mostly male environment. DJs would also go out to trainspot other DJs at nightclubs in order to hear what they are playing and see how the dance floor is reacting to it. This practice had the dual advantage of letting DJs support other DJs' and promoters' events, which could lead to those DJs and/or promoters booking said DJ for showing their support. However, nowadays you can do a great deal of your 'musicking' and networking online, making it more accessible to womxn who might find it intimidating, unsafe and/or expensive to be running from club to club in the city. Still, DJs are often expected to physically attend an event in order to show their support, if they seek to play that event. Moreover, although one no longer needs expensive records and turntables to DJ, equipment, specifically laptops, are still required to play, and such equipment is still less affordable for womxn, who are often poorer than men due to the wage gap and other systemic factors.[35]

Nevertheless, as discussed, the aforementioned barriers have decreased since the advent of digital music and compatible DJ software and hardware, thereby circumventing the need to be socially connected to people or places that have more expensive turntables, CDJs, and mixers. Since the advent of the Internet, wannabe DJs can view YouTube tutorials instead of trainspotting other DJs in the flesh, thereby removing the need to physically attend DJ performances in order to observe technique. As one anonymous respondent to my survey said

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[35] Mellissa Moyser, "Women and Paid Work", *Women in Canada: A Gender-Based Statistical Report,* Statistics Canada, March 8, 2018, accessed April 8, 2018. http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm.

about learning to DJ: "It started with a romantic partner. I asked friends for advice from then on. Now I ask YouTube".

As DJing has become more popular and accessible, people can also attend DJ schools to learn the craft, again bypassing the need to hangout in nightclubs and other venues featuring DJs in order to gain skills and find mentors. Toronto, Montreal, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, and Halifax all have one or more DJ academies or schools, as well as post-secondary audio arts schools that offer DJ modules or courses (I discuss the impact of DJ schools on DJ culture in more detail in Chapter 4). Interestingly, a cursory Internet search conducted in April 2020 revealed that at least three post-secondary audio schools–Recording Arts Canada[36] in Toronto and Montreal, Halifax's Recording Connection,[37] and Calgary's Beat Drop[38]–had websites prominently displaying pictures of womxn engaging in DJing and audio production. Again, we have recently become a target market.

Unfortunately, although DJing has become increasingly accessible since the turn of the century, sexist and homosocial attitudes still persist in DJ culture. As technological developments allow increased access to DJ technology, male DJs continue to act as gatekeepers via emergent discursive themes that amount to 'moving the goalposts', so to speak. Some DJs stress that the most 'authentic' style of DJing is to play *only* records, which again, are far more expensive and difficult to acquire than digital music formats such as mp3s. Furthermore, turntables are more expensive to purchase than digital DJ software, and many nightclubs and spaces where DJs perform no longer have turntables, therefore if you are playing on turntables it is highly likely that you, or another DJ, or a promoter, are bringing the turntables to the space.

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[36] See https://recordingarts.com/school/programs/sound-music-production.

[37] See https://www.recordingconnection.com/.

[38] See https://www.beatdrop.ca/electronic-music-production.

Playing on turntables also means having needles, cartridges and slip mats, whereas DJing on a laptop only requires headphones. As depicted in Chapter 4, many Canadian womxn who started DJing in the 1980s and 1990s initially accessed turntables though nightclubs or campus and community radio (referred to as CCR) stations, and then slowly acquired their own equipment by inheriting or being gifted with DJ gear, and/or finding it at bargain prices.

CDJs, while expensive, only require MP3s stored on CDs or USB keys to play tracks, while DVS software only requires MP3s, therefore, both CDJs and DVS software systems eliminate the need for expensive records, turntables, and turntable accessories. DVS software can be sourced for free, or if paid for, is still far less expensive than industry standard CDJs, with the latter's cost starting at around six hundred dollars each for a decent make and model. Still, most clubs do have CDJs in working order that can play mp3s from both CDs and USB keys, thereby making CDJs accessible to DJs so that womxn DJs without access to gear otherwise can learn DJ skills while on the job.[39] For all of these reasons, turntables and vinyl can be the most prohibitive in terms of accessible formats for DJing, and as a result, gatekeepers valourize DJing with vinyl on turntables discursively as a way to discredit DJs that do not play vinyl, an issue I explore further in Chapters 5 and 7.

**Womxn's Networks**

Feminist scholars of DJ culture have demonstrated that womxn DJs benefit from forming their own collectives and other formal or informal networks (Farrugia 2004, 2012; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016). Being a part of a localized network gives womxn DJs the opportunity to receive invaluable support from colleagues by being advised on skills and technology, and provided with opportunities to play for an audience (Mitchell 2016; Weiss 2016). Aside from the

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[39] Some of my respondents discussed learning to DJ in front of an audience as opposed to practicing alone. When I first started playing on Celebrities' fancy CDJs in 2004, I would get to the club before it opened to the public and practice. Because I only lived a few blocks away, it was easy to practice there during the day as well.

time, effort, and expense that it used to take to acquire DJ equipment, it is also difficult to get gigs, and DJs have to rely on their own networks and connections for opportunities to play. Thus, both real-world and online social networks play a crucial role in a DJ's ability to get booked (Farrugia 2012; Rodgers 2010; Weiss 2016). Prior to the ubiquity of the Internet, face-to-face networking was required in order to make the necessary connections with promoters, bookers, and other DJs necessary to obtain work. Most of these industry players were (and still are) cisgendered men.

An absence of networks entails a lack of access to mentors and the material objects and spaces that facilitate practicing and performing. The advent of the Internet provided a means for womxn to form supportive and professional networks. Farrugia (2004, 2012) studied American womxn DJs' on and offline networks over the course of a decade, demonstrating the importance of networks for gaining recognition and work. From the early stages of the Internet and social media, networks such as female:pressure[40] (established in 1998 and still going strong), and Shejay (established in 2000 and closed in 2017), maintained a strong online presence that encouraged the formation of local and virtual communities of womxn DJs. Farrugia argues that "such spaces are distinctive and vital" (2012, 67), as DJs build social capital through their networks.

Farrugia studied the success of San Francisco-based DJ collective Sister SF in providing supportive spaces for womxn DJs: "to a large extent the strong presence of women in [electronic/dance music] stemmed from the efforts of SisterSF, a women-centered DJ collective . . . Sister SF maintained a space for women electronic and dance music DJs both online and offline, by offering a space where they can write themselves into DJ culture" (2012, 112).

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[40] See https://femalepressure.wordpress.com/.

Farrugia stresses how important it is that womxn DJs fight for space in DJ culture, stating that womxn are engaged in a "constant battle to claim space for themselves" (2004, 237). Farrugia identifies how "getting access to bookings at local clubs–which is where most DJs begin their careers–depends heavily on who you know" (246). Her findings corroborate those of Gavanas and Reitsamer (2013), who demonstrate the ways that DJing is gendered in several different European cities, and more specifically, the homosociality of DJ networks. In Chapters 4 through 7, I discuss different virtual and regional networking sites for womxn DJs in Canada in more detail as I examine participant, and site-specific, case studies. Chapter 6 looks closely at the positive impact that a queer nightclub, staffed mainly by womxn, trans, and non-binary people, had on Vancouver's DJ networks during its eight-year run.

### 2.5.     Gender Parity and the Discourse of "Rarity"

Despite our growing numbers and visibility, womxn DJs are still booked far less than men. By example, in "Forty-Seven DJs, Four Women", Gadir (2017) discusses Musikkfest, an Oslo music festival with a DJ line up of– you guessed it–forty-seven men and four women. The festival's booking agents were called-out in an editorial in a local magazine that criticized the gender disparity in the festival's DJ line-up. The editorial inspired a backlash, with the booking agents taking to social media to blame the call-out on "political correctness" and insisting that "they prioritize skill and talent when booking DJs, and by implication, that they do not prioritize equality" (50). Gadir conducted a group interview with several stakeholders in the Oslo dance music scene, including two booking agents for the festival in question. The group interview "revealed strong beliefs in 'hard work', 'skill' and 'talent' as the combined means to a successful DJ career" (51), with the dominant view being that bookings should be based on those three attributes, as though it were impossible to do so while also striving for gender parity, or at least a

certain quota: "[a] certain discourse of 'rarity' is used to code this illegitimacy. Male DJs act like there aren't enough womxn DJs and therefore not a wide enough pool to book from. When presented options or where alternatives exist they then resort to the claim that they book on skills not gender". This discourse of "rarity" is not limited to Oslo, but rather permeates DJ culture worldwide, and works to re-inscribe the marginalization of womxn DJs ("Lack of Female DJs" 2014).

If womxn DJs seem like a rarity, it is not because we are actually rare, but rather because we are rarely booked outside of those festivals that adopt an explicit mandate of gender equality and/or equity in regard to their lineups. At present the small pool of academic work examining gender disparity in DJ culture is mainly qualitative in nature (Bloustien 2016; Craig and Kynard 2017; Duignan-Pearson 2017; Farrugia 2004, 2012; Gadir 2016, 2017; Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016; Hutton 2006; Katz 2006; Rodgers 2010; Straw 1997). However, various pop culture media sites have conducted quantitative studies demonstrating how electronic music festival lineups around the world lack womxn's representation in proportion to the actual population of qualified womxn DJs available.

The most extensive research has come from female:pressure, "an international network of womxn, transgender and non-binary artists in the fields of electronic music and digital arts" (femalepressure.net) founded by DJ and producer Electric Indigo. Since 1998, female:pressure has fulfilled its mission of being a "technological answer to the recurring complaints about the alleged lack of women artists in the field" (femalepressure.net) and a major online resource and hub for networking. Since 2013, members of female:pressure–dubbed "the Troublemakers"– have researched the percentage of womxn artists booked for festivals, compiling their data into a biennial FACTS report available on femalepressure.net. The majority of festivals surveyed were

located in Europe and North America. Due to their wide media reach, female:pressure's findings

turned up the heat on an international conversation about womxn's representation in electronic

music that had been simmering for years.

The first survey in 2013 indicated that womxn comprised 10 percent of the artists listed in

festival lineups. The Troublemakers conducted the survey again in 2015 and found that although

gender disparity had recently become a popular topic of discussion in dance music culture and its

attendant media, the gender ratio of festival lineups did not reflect this increased awareness,

remaining at around 10 percent ("Facts 2015–Statement"). In 2017 The Troublemakers surveyed

the lineups of festivals taking place between 2015 and mid-2017, and found that women

comprised 15 percent of the artists booked ("Facts 2017–Results"). The Troublemakers' results

are corroborated by similar studies conducted around the same time period by *Thump*

(Friedlander 2016), *The Huffington Post* (Vagianos 2016), and *Pitchfork* (Garcia-Olano and

Mitchum 2017), that reported that womxn comprised 12 to 14 percent of artists booked for

festivals. According to these statistics, the number of womxn artists booked for festivals had only

risen by 2 to 5 percent from 2010 until mid-2017.

This slow progress from 2010 to 2017 seems strange in light of how the media focus on

gender parity in DJ culture has rapidly increased since I formally began this research in 2010.

*Thump* published more than a dozen articles over a two-year period on the topic of gender

disparity in dance music culture. In 2016 *Mixmag* chose outspoken feminist DJ The Blessed

Madonna as their "DJ of the Year" (Brailey 2016).[41] *DJ Mag* made their October 2016 edition a

"Women In Dance Music Special Issue", and they were careful to explain why: "Women are

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[41] Until recently, the Blessed Madonna called herself The Black Madonna. She changed her DJ name to the Blessed Madonna in 2020 due to public accusations of appropriating BIPOC cultures, but she only did so after a significantly long duration of mounting public pressure (see Beaumont-Thomas 2020). See Ekanayake (2017) for a discussion of cultural appropriation in regard to a white DJ adopting the name "The Black Madonna".

under-represented in a lot of professions, but you'd think our scene –founded on inclusive, utopian ideals–would be one of the more enlightened industries. And when you look at the role of women in proginating electronic music, or realize that there are literally thousands of women doing crucial work in the industry, the idea that women are inferior DJs or producers goes completely out the window" (Cijffers and Loben 2016). Here, the authors speak to the discursive ways that DJ culture upholds the utopian idea that it is an inclusive subculture built upon what is widely known in rave and dance music culture as PLUR - "peace, love, unity, and respect".

There is a widespread belief that electronic dance music culture cannot possibly be discriminatory because it supposedly embodies the ethos of PLUR. Gadir (2017) has demonstrated the predominance of these beliefs by discussing how, according to this logic, sexist gatekeepers of DJ culture expound that if festival lineups lack womxn artists, it is due to a scarcity of womxn artists, and that scarcity is due to the fact that womxn are just not as interested in DJing as men are, and *not* because of sexism. I examine this theme in detail in Chapter 7, providing a case study of a controversy that played out both online, and in real time, when a Toronto-based male DJ collective was called out for never booking womxn DJs for their long-running events at key venues in the city.

In addition to the quotation from *DJ Mag* discussed above, another example of media intervention impacting DJ culture is online dance music magazine *Resident Advisor*'s announcement that they were ceasing their annual polls in 2017, wherein readers voted for their favourite artists in different categories. In addition to acknowledging the sexism reflected in past poll results, *Resident Advisor* noted how the results also revealed racism and heterosexism: "Dance music is an art form born in queer communities, shaped by people of colour and populated by artists of all genders. But, simply put, this isn't something you'd know by looking

at the recent results of our polls. At best, the lists misrepresented the reality of the scene; at worst, they helped to reinforce some of its harmful power dynamics, which still favour white men above everyone else" ("Opinion: Why We're Stopping the RA Polls"). *DJ Mag* and *Resident Advisor* are but two examples of media specific to DJ culture that have acknowledged the impact of their roles in relation to representation in DJ culture.

Media focus on the gender disparity in festival DJ line-ups has not only resulted in mainstream initiatives to push for parity (such as those described in the introduction), but grassroots and government-sponsored initiatives as well. Keychange (keychange.eu) is a multi-pronged, global campaign that aims to double the number of female-identifying artists headlining festivals by 2022. These initiatives are working. Due to recent campaigns, gender equity is increasing presently in 2020, and the success of these campaigns is exciting, because if the number of female-identifying artists headlining festivals reaches or exceeds 30 percent, then we will have achieved critical mass in terms of representation, as discussed in Chapter. I elaborate on these campaigns, and other recent initiatives to increase womxn's representation in DJing and music production, further in the conclusion. With such intense media attention focused on the subject of womxn DJs and electronic music producers, and the growing number of mainstream and underground initiatives to increase gender equity in DJ culture, I anticipate the percentage of womxn DJs playing in festivals to increase significantly over the next few years. Of course, whether or not we achieve equity with men in terms of billing–mainly, filling headlining slots– and pay, is less predictable, and less anticipated.

Leaving aside the literature review, this next chapter examines my methods and methodologies, including frameworks, data collection details, and methodological and ethical challenges and concerns.

# CHAPTER 3: INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST METHODS AND METHODOLOGIES

## 3.1.     Designing a Mixed-Methods Study of Womxn DJs in Canada

This chapter outlines my methods and methodologies. I start by briefly sketching my research design, including my data sources and collection methods, and describe how I sought to triangulate my methods. I discuss how my theoretical framework is grounded in an interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist standpoint that centers the voices and experiences of womxn DJs, as I examine DJ culture from the point of view of womxn practitioners, including myself, thereby adopting an insider perspective. I consider how basing a theoretical framework on an insider perspective has unique challenges and limitations, as well as the importance of self-reflexivity, defined here as a continuous methodological interrogation of my positionality as a researcher and an insider (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007). I relate how my interdisciplinary theoretical framework is also informed by feminist popular music studies, feminist technology studies, and most crucially, intersectional feminist theory (Crenshaw 2018 [1989]; Hill-Collins 1991). I then outline several key issues in regard to de-centering gender while working towards an intersectional analysis.

After sketching my theoretical framework, I discuss how my methodological framework is based in grounded theory, an explicitly feminist method of qualitative data analysis (Clarke 2012). I then discuss the construction and administration of my survey and interviews, including participant recruitment, interviewing, coding, analysis, and methodological and ethical concerns. I describe the caution that white scholars (such as myself) must exercise when laying claim to an intersectional analysis, and how developing an intersectional analytical framework demands that we work to expand the discussion of DJ identity beyond hegemonic norms.

This multi-dimensional study explores the ways in which womxn DJs in Canada are impacted by the social construction of gender, race, and sexuality with regards to their positions in DJ culture. The research design for this project consists of a mixed methods approach incorporating qualitative and quantitative data comprising an online survey, personal interviews, and participant observation. One benefit of mixed methods research is the potential for complementarity, wherein the different methods used produce comparable data (Hesse-Biber 2010). My research design employs triangulation, as I make use of more than one method while examining the same research question or questions. Methods triangulation helps verify that the findings are not the result of the specific method, and therefore the researcher(s) can be more assured of their discoveries and conclusions. Employing multiple methods enables researchers to equalize the advantages and disadvantages of different tactics (Miner et al. 2012).

York University's Office of Research Ethics approved both the survey and interview component of this study in 2013. To collect data on the experiences of differently located womxn DJs, I administered an anonymous online survey to 120 womxn DJs that was completed by 113 respondents, including three self-identified trans or non-binary DJs, resulting in a completion rate (number of survey takers that completed the entire survey) of 77 percent (Surveymonkey.com). I also conducted personal interviews with thirty-five DJs and two promoters, predominantly over Skype. Amongst the DJs interviewed in person, again three identified as trans or non-binary, and I am fairly certain they were the same three people that identified as trans or non-binary in the survey, because many people that were interviewed completed the survey as well. The interview and survey participants hailed from across Canada. My introduction explored in-depth how my research is also heavily informed by thirty years of observing DJ culture in various environments – first as an underage clubber, then as an

occasional night club go-go dancer from 1997-2004, a promoter from approximately 1995-2017, a touring hip hop artist from 2003-2007, and a DJ for the past twenty years and counting. Therefore, I have experienced multiple clubs, parties, raves, festivals, concerts, and other musical gatherings involving DJs.

### 3.2.    Theoretical Framework(s)

My theoretical framework is grounded in an interdisciplinary and intersectional feminist standpoint (2012) and adopts an insider perspective (Acker 2000) as it seeks to explore DJ culture from the point of view of womxn practitioners, including myself. A feminist standpoint centers the voices and experiences of womxn DJs: "feminist standpoint theory… places women's concerns, knowledge, and experiences at the forefront of academic concern and inquiry and is committed to issues of social justice and societal change for women" (Hesse-Biber 2010, 2). A feminist standpoint lays the theoretical groundwork for a feminist qualitative framework, which allows for a polyphonic analysis that illuminates how different subjects negotiate the hegemony of DJ culture as it is enacted upon various sites.[42] Feminist research methods stand apart from other methods in their attempts to revise the social science canon so that it includes the multiplicity of womxn's experiences (Acker 2000). Additionally, feminist research methods are distinctive in the way that they engage anti-essentialist feminist theories, such as queer, anti-racist feminism, to produce research that will in turn encourage or support social change, particularly political action or policy decisions (DeVault 1999). A key component of feminist methodology is to practice reflexivity, and because it can be difficult to enact, I expand upon the vitality of researcher reflexivity in a later section of this chapter that focuses on methodological

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[42] I define feminism as "the desire to eradicate oppression – both my own, and everyone else's" (Hancock 2001). This definition deliberately does not mention specific standpoints like "woman, race, gender, class, nationality, age, ability, sexuality, and sex" but instead references what they represent in this sense: multiple sites of oppression and/or privilege in the matrix of western political, cultural and social hegemony.

and ethical concerns relative to this study.

Basing a theoretical framework on an insider perspective has unique challenges and limitations (Pillow and Mayo 2012; Visweswaran 1994). My role as a researcher intersects with my profession as a DJ and places me within an indigenous-insider framework, as I both work in, and study, my own field (Acker 2000; Hill-Collins 1991). As a researcher and DJ therefore, I am an insider in DJ culture when positioned as a researcher, but an outsider in DJ culture when positioned as a DJ, because DJing is still a male-dominated profession. Yet, I do belong to a loose network of womxn DJs in Canada, and as a legitimate member of that community, my intention is to promote our well being through my research (Acker 2000). Again, I elucidate on this issue as a methodological and ethical consideration subsequently in this chapter.

To reflect the interdisciplinary nature of my dissertation, my theoretical framework borrows from the field of feminist cultural studies, specifically, feminist popular music studies (Keenan 2010; Rose 1994). Researchers in this area have demonstrated how womxn are continually left out of grand historical narratives of popular music (Bayton 1992), even in genres that we had a major role in creating, such as grunge (Strong 2011) and hip hop (DuVernay 2010). Brooks (2008) has demonstrated that black womxn in particular have been shut out of popular music history, a gross omission, given the legacy of the womxn blues singers of the 1920s and 1930s, most notably Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, who toured and recorded extensively, and were demonstrably the first pop music stars in North America (Davis 1998). The relative obscurity of queer Black guitar trailblazer Sister Rosetta Tharpe is another glaring example of womxn's erasure from popular music history in general, and Black womxn's erasure from their foundational contributions to rock 'n' roll specifically. Tharpe, despite being widely lauded as the founder of rock n' roll (Wald 2009), was only inducted into the Rock 'n' Roll Hall

of Fame in 2018 ("Sister Rosetta Tharpe"). Here, Daphne Brooks' words resonate, as she speaks of "black women artists' surprisingly precarious and paradoxical position as highly influential yet critically undervalued figures in popular music culture" (2019, 20-21).

Like the scholars upon whose research I rely heavily (Farrugia 2012; Rodgers 2010), my theoretical framework is further informed by feminist technology studies, which has unveiled the ways in which different technologies are gendered (Turkle 1998; Wacjman 2004), and in particular how masculine and feminine stereotypes are reinforced through those technologies (Abbiss 2008). Moreover, feminist technology studies has sought to illuminate the possibilities of womxn's agency (Haraway 2018; Landström 2007), a concept which is particularly important when considering how womxn take up DJing and music production in a culture that does not actively encourage them to do so (Gavanas and Reitsamer 2016). Therefore, a critical understanding of DJ culture and how it is gendered is vital for this project: "Gendered identity is … crucial to understanding DJ trajectories. As womxn are routinely ex scripted as professional DJs, it is important to establish what it means to be a 'women DJ' in a politically unequal network of male-oriented relationships" (Rietveld 2013, 8). Furthermore, an understanding of how the gendering of DJ culture is concurrently mediated by race and sexuality is also vital to understanding DJ trajectories, thus more research is needed in this area.

As a white feminist scholar it is challenging for me to decenter gender from a study of womxn DJs, as I have been conditioned to focus on gender as a key barrier to my participation in DJ culture, while overlooking how my gendered experience is impacted by my white privilege and my perceived sexuality. Moreover, it is difficult to conduct an intersectional analysis without focusing on a single aspect of identity as it interplays with another (Keenan 2015). Yet it is absolutely necessary to de-center gender from an intersectional analysis of the experiences of

womxn DJs because, while gender is pivotal, the idea that identity pivots around gender, as opposed to other aspects of identity such as race, sexuality, and disability, must be disrupted. As discussed in my introduction, many womxn DJs are weary of the way gender always frames the discourse around our careers, thus framing the discourse around other factors of identity or points of friction such as race and sexuality can move the discussion in different and necessary directions. Consequently, white feminist popular music scholar Elizabeth Keenan calls for feminist researchers of popular music to take more than just gender into account.

## 3.3.      Intersectionality

Black feminist legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term "intersectionality" (2018)[1989] to describe the theory she developed specifically in relation to Black women's experiences in the American legal system, constructed from the theoretical contributions of preceding 20th century Black and Latinx feminists, most prominently Audre Lorde (1984), the Combahee River Collective (1981), and Gloria Anzaldua and Cherrie Moraga (1981). In turn, these theorists built upon the work of earlier Black scholars such as Sojourner Truth and W.E.B. Dubois, "intellectuals who first articulated the unique challenges of Black women facing the multiple and simultaneous effects of race, gender and class" (Thornton Dill and Kohlman 2012, 155). Intersectionality has been used as a theoretical paradigm for approximately thirty years hence, during which time it has morphed: "categories of race/ethnicity, class, and gender were defined as major markers and controllers of oppression in the earliest discussions of intersectionality, with limited attention given to other categories such as sexuality, nation, age, disability, and religion, which have been discussed in more recent years. One result of this historical trajectory is a perspective asserting that individuals and groups can simultaneously experience oppression and privilege" (ibid). Today, intersectionality has come to describe a

theoretical lens that takes into account aspects of identity beyond gender, race and class - such as sexuality, ability, age, nationality and Indigeneity, and how these social constructs combine to impact people's experiences of oppression in specific ways that differ according to identity and other societal factors.

Keenan (2015) notes how quickly Crenshaw's term spread from academia to popular culture, greatly impacting the growth of third wave feminism during the 1990s - yet, the third wave's emphasis on intersectionality has not always translated into holistically intersectional practices, and in this way intersectionality has been co-opted to various degrees by white feminists and white feminism.[43] Despite third wave feminism adopting intersectionality as a mantra and supposed guiding principal, white feminist popular music scholars tend to focus on gender first and foremost and then sexuality somewhat, often failing to provide a critical examination of the role of whiteness in cultural production and musical communities: "The disconnect between discourse and practice of intersectionality becomes especially apparent in the ways that third-wave feminists have approached popular music in particular: despite the commitment to understanding that aspects of identity offer greater or lesser positions of power and influence, third-wave feminists have most often foregrounded the activities of white, middle-class musicians and at times ignored the contributions of women of color, from hip-hop feminists to pop musicians" (Keenan 2010, 68).

Keenan demonstrates how white third wave feminist blogs like Jezebel.com and Feministing.com place an inordinate focus on Riot Girl and the subsequent 'women in rock' movement in the 1990s, a movement largely comprised of, and represented by, white womxn musicians such as Kathleen Hannah, Liz Phair, and Tori Amos (2010, 45-46). Such myopic

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[43] By example, while white feminists pay lip service to intersectionality by affirming its centrality to feminist theory and praxis, third wave feminisms' focus on individuality and choice further reflects its white, middle-class base, who are likely to have greater 'choice', or autonomy, by means of access to societal supports.

focus limits an understanding of young womxn's feminist expression and activism during the 1990s by overlooking the vast impact of hip hop and R&B. Popular Black womxn artists like Queen Latifah, Salt 'n' Pepa, and TLC expressed Black and Latinx feminist values in their lyrics and videos, achieving widespread fame in the 1990s that continues to this day.

Specific to studies of DJ culture, it is crucial to move past research centered on whitewashed EDM DJ culture, and instead foreground Black musical, cultural, and social histories. By example, Craig and Kynard illustrate how paying attention to hip hop DJ culture greatly expands the field of inquiry: "looking at the work of the deejay allows us to focus on the way the beat is an integral part of African American political resistance and survival . . . Because we treat hip-hop beats as a culture and thought system . . . we see hip-hop deejays as cultural producers who work from and transform a very distinct ethos of rhythm and sound" (Craig and Kynard 2017, 146). This analysis does not just pertain to hip hop, and feminist researchers of popular music need to do more to address the appropriation and commercialization of Black-founded genres like house and techno by a white, heterocentric, capitalist, transphobic, patriarchal, and hence mainstream, culture.[44] House and techno are both DJ-driven, underground dance music genres that have been evolving since the 1980s, originating in queer Black and Latinx clubs and cultural scenes in Chicago, New York and Detroit. The popularity of house and techno has led to the dilution, de-contextualization, and commercialization of these two distinct

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[44] In an interview with *Dazed*, legendary house DJ Honey Dijon (a Black trans woman) describes how when she "was growing up, most dance music culture was specifically for queer people of colour and they were creating their own spaces because of not being invited to white queer spaces. Disco came from that also. But for me, it wasn't a statement like it is today. It was just the way it was, it was just where you went, it was much more natural. You're talking about a different time, pre Internet and pre social media… it was underground. You had people of colour creating these things through word of mouth. But politics of cultural identity is a more mainstream conversation now, rather than an underground conversation" (Abraham 2019).

genres, resulting in the (in my opinion, generally banal) genre called EDM.[45] EDM is literally the

sound of the co-optation of house and techno, as well as other revolutionary underground dance

music genres such as dub, hip hop, and drum n' bass.

### 3.4.    Methodological Framework

I use grounded theory as a methodological framework for data analysis because it suits my

study's interdisciplinary and intersectional theoretical framework(s). Initially developed by

Glaser and Strauss, grounded theory is generally regarded as one of the first methodologically

systemic approaches to qualitative inquiry (Glaser and Strauss 1967, in Clarke 2012). It is a

flexible, systemic, comparative method of constructing theory from data that supports studying

social and social psychological processes, and is usually used to analyze in-depth interviews or

field data  (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane 2017). Clarke (2012) describes how "a 'grounded

theory' of a particular phenomenon is composed of the analytic codes and categories generated

inductively in the analysis and *explicitly integrated* to form a theory of the substantive area. In

fact, it can be argued that precisely what is to be studied *emerges* from the analytic process over

time" (2012, 390). Therefore, the study's research questions, and the theory those questions

generate to explore possible answers, are inductively developed during the study in constant

interaction with emerging data, making it a solid conceptual framework within which to explore

tentative theories about phenomena (Maxwell 2005) - in this case, how differing identificatory

factors intersect to mediate womxn DJs' experiences of work and DJ culture. Analyzing the

varying experiences of womxn DJs in Canada demands an explorative emergent methodology

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[45] EDM is an acronym for Electronic Dance Music, and it should be noted that EDM does *not* refer to electronic dance music *in general* - as in music made electronically that is generally danceable. For example, electronic bands coming to prominence in the 1980s such as New Order, Yaz, and Depeche Mode all made highly danceable electronic music, but those bands are considered to belong to the new wave genre, not EDM. EDM is made by artists like Calvin Harris, David Guetta, and Nervo, and emerged as its own distinct genre around the turn of the twenty-first century, coinciding with the rise of digital technologies.

because there has been very little academic research in this area, resulting in many possible routes of inquiry.

Furthermore, and most salient for the purposes of this study, Clarke regards grounded theory's use of an emergent method as implicitly feminist,[46] because it "tries to build an adequate 'database' for a project through expanding the data to be collected 'as needed' analytically and also through researchers' mining their own reflexivity . . . Thus it takes 'experience' into account in all its densities and complexities (Scott, 1992) - especially the experiences of the researchers with their project and their reflexivity about it" (2012, 390). As described by Clarke and outlined in the previous section discussing my theoretical framework(s), my study demands my reflexivity as a researcher, therefore grounded theory is particularly useful for social justice inquiry (Charmaz, Thornberg, and Keane 2017) wherein the researcher seeks to enact change and contribute to the betterment of their community.

### 3.5.    Data Collection

**Participant Recruitment**

I used nonprobability sampling to recruit participants, wherein "respondents are selected using some nonrandom procedure, such as surveying particular groups of individuals of interest" (Miner et al. 2012, 15), in this case, Canadian womxn DJs. Nonprobability sampling is inexpensive and often generates a large sample more quickly than probability sampling, however one disadvantage is that it does not allow for broad generalizations about findings (ibid). I recruited participants from places I had easy access to, primarily my own real life and online

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[46] Clarke outlines the ways that they and other scholars have long conceived of grounded theory having always been "already implicitly feminist: (1) its roots in American symbolic interactionist sociology and pragmatist philosophy emphasizing actual experiences and practices - the lived doingness of social life; (2) its use of George Herbert Mead's concept of perspective that emphasizes partiality, situatedness, and multiplicity; (3) its assumption of a materialist social constructionism; (4) its foregrounding deconstructive analysis and multiple simultaneous readings; and (5) its attention to range of variation as featuring of difference(s)" (Clarke 2005, Star 2007, in Clarke 2012, 391).

human networks, a technique referred to as convenience sampling, which is a type of nonprobability sampling (ibid). I relied particularly on snowball sampling to recruit survey participants, which is a variation of convenience sampling, wherein participants recruit others in their social network to be a part of the sample (ibid). Web surveys are particularly amenable to snowball sampling (ibid), and I found Facebook effective when it came to finding research participants by having existing research participants, potential research participants, and other stakeholders in DJ culture sharing and posting the survey and interview call-out to their own individual networks.

Facebook was also fairly instrumental in allowing me to look for DJs to interview based upon their location, as it contains information as to where different DJs reside or are based geographically, which helped me to find DJs residing in those parts of Canada where I had weaker networks. I ended up with a database of 106 potential interview participants, some of whom I reached out to, and some that reached out to me upon hearing about the interview (and/or survey) either through social media or word of mouth. At the end of the survey I asked respondents if they wanted to be interviewed, and at the end of the interview, if the participant had not completed the survey, I asked if they would like to do so, and that was another way I recruited participants. One significant drawback to snowball sampling is that "it can create systemic sources of sampling error because participants are likely to recruit others who share similar characteristics in addition to the character of interest" (ibid, 16), and this was apparent in regard to my survey and interview recruitment methods. By example, very few of my survey participants indicated that they played primarily reggae or dancehall. Rather, many survey respondents stated that they played primarily house, techno, or drum n' bass, demonstrating

"similar characteristics" in regard to musical genres "in addition to the character of interest", i.e., being a womxn DJ in Canada.

I prioritized trying to find BIPOC, queer and non-binary DJs for both the survey and the interviews in order to compensate for the fewer numbers of BIPOC womxn DJs in my networks. Therefore, a main goal of both the survey and interviews was to achieve as much participation from BIPOC womxn-identified DJs as possible, ideally 50 percent or more, in an attempt to redress some of the imbalance in previous research. I did not achieve that goal however, and only 25 percent of my survey respondents identified along the BIPOC spectrum, with the other approximately 65 percent identifying as white in some way, and the remaining 10 percent refusing to identify themselves racially or ethnically in any way. Again, I discuss how various white participants conceived of themselves racially in Chapter 5. While I did work hard to get the 25 percent of BIPOC DJs that took my survey during the limited time, the domination of white subjects is reflective of my hegemonic identity, personal networks, and geographical trajectory across Canada, as well as the relative lack of visibility (to me) of BIPOC womxn DJs during the recruitment period of 2014-15. BIPOC womxn DJs have become significantly more visible to the (white) public since 2015, and I discuss this phenomenon in more detail in my conclusion. If I had taken more time recruiting participants, I know I could have achieved 50 percent or more participation from BIPOC DJs within the same sample size. I fared slightly better with my interview respondents, and 13 out of 37, or 35 percent, were BIPOC.

Unfortunately, I did not have any participants from the Territories or any cities in Quebec apart from Montreal, reflecting the influence of geography in regard to the distance of the Territories from Canada's major cities, and my own English networks. Moreover, the survey was conducted in only in English, as I am not fluent in French, therefore language was a barrier. I

also lacked contacts in the Maritimes as I have never toured nor played there, but I still had some success recruiting a few interview participants from the region by following the snowball method. I also researched certain regional DJs online and then tracked them down via social media channels. 24 percent of my participants were from Toronto, 22 percent were from Vancouver, 14 percent were from Calgary, and 11 percent were from parts of British Columbia (excluding Vancouver). Only 10 percent of respondents were from Montreal, while 7 percent resided in other parts of Alberta aside from Calgary, 6 percent in Winnipeg, 3 percent in Ottawa, 3 percent in the Maritimes, and 2 percent in Saskatchewan (all percentages are approximate).

A great deal of my survey and interview methods relied on attendant technological agents. To begin with, in order to keep my research efforts organized and separate from my personal, professional, academic, and artistic online accounts, I created a separate Gmail account solely for communicating with participants and potential participants for both the survey and the interview. I also created Google spreadsheets specifically detailing potential and subsequent interview participants (who were not participating anonymously) to try and loosely map demographics like location, as well as identificatory factors (age, gender, race, and sexuality). This mapping was in order to try and obtain participants from as many locations as possible, both geographically, and in terms of identities, and served to track those geographical and personal locations wherein I lacked participants.

As the survey was meant to be anonymous, I only kept track of survey participants' emails in order to send them an ITunes Gift Card for partaking in the survey, and they did not need to input their email address anywhere in the survey in order to access and complete it. As mentioned, participants were sent a link to the survey from Survey Monkey, or I emailed them the link. Upon completion of the survey, respondents saw the following text: "Thank you for

completing the survey. If you would like to receive a $10 Gift Card to ITunes for completing the survey, please click here and a new survey will open that contains only one question asking you to input your email so that a Gift Card can be emailed to you. Please note that as you're entering your email into a new survey, your email will not be connected to your survey responses and therefore your responses to the survey will remain anonymous." Still, participants were aware that I had their email addresses, which may have reduced their anonymity somewhat, as discussed later in this chapter. Because there was no demand to verify their emails however, I figured that respondents could take a few minutes and create new and anonymous email accounts if they were concerned about being identified as survey participants.

I wanted to try and guarantee survey participants anonymity in hopes that doing so would encourage them to be more candid and honest in their replies. Given that I might have been known to many of my survey respondents, I considered that respondents who felt that I could identify them might thus be concerned that I would possibly share details of their responses with others. Would they feel comfortable describing an incident with a venue or promoter, knowing that I also knew that venue or promoter? How much could I expect my respondents to trust me, despite the clear description of my obligation to protect their data, as outlined in the informed consent document that they were required to sign (online) before being directed to the survey. I also asked survey respondents some personal questions regarding how they identify racially, sexually, and in terms of gender. As stated, I conducted the survey during 2014-2015 when it was no longer illegal to be queer, and our rights are enshrined in the Charter, thereby legislating protection from hate crimes. Yet, despite the relative safety of being out as a queer in 21st century Canada, I had to consider that some people still might not be out. By example, one survey respondent disclosed that they identified as a "closet T" (trans person, and closeted).

Given that I designed the survey to take approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete (the average time spent was 17 minutes and 38 seconds), and the duration of the semi-structured interviews to take approximately 30 minutes to an hour, I felt it necessary to add incentives attractive enough to entice participants. I also recognized that it was beneficial to offer incentives so that participants would be motivated to complete the survey and/or give their time to be interviewed (Miner et al. 2012). Moreover, I genuinely wanted to demonstrate my appreciation and gratitude for the knowledge, feelings, and experiences participants shared with me, so I offered a $10 ITunes gift card for completing the survey, and a $20 value for completing the interview. Initially I wanted to offer participants a choice of gift card by including Beatport.com (an electronic dance music download site popular with house and techno DJs) in addition to ITunes, however as a UK-based business, Beatport.com did not sell gift cards in a way that made them easy to purchase and send to participants electronically, so for ease of process I ended up only giving ITunes gift cards.[47] In retrospect, I can see how my impulse to also offer Beatport gift certificates, instead of a gift certificate for a music download site that specializes in genres other than house and techno, did not support my goal of recruiting DJs that played genres beyond house and techno.

The following two sections discuss the survey and interview methodology separately, including any methodological or ethical issues specific to either mode of data collection.

### 3.6.    Survey

The survey ran from July 2014 until April 2015, and the majority of replies occurred in two waves, the first in October 2014, and the second spanning February and March 2015, reflecting

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[47] This process did not turn out to be any easier however. I hit a time-consuming snag when I was blocked from purchasing ITunes GCs because I bought so many that ITunes decided I was up to something fishy. I had to get in touch with them to work it out, which was a massive hassle that took place over a span of several days and involved at least an hour and a half on the phone with ITunes customer service representatives.

the timing of my recruitment efforts. I tried to adhere to best practices as outlined by Miner et al. (2012), who define survey research as "research that is conducted using questionnaires to collect data about a phenomenon of interest" (237). I employed the survey with the goal of soliciting enough data from a broad enough sample of respondents as to allow for comparisons amongst them according to identity factors, as well as genres played, education, employment aside from DJing, and other themes. I designed the survey to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data, and I described the benefits of qualitative data analysis techniques earlier in this chapter. A key benefit of quantitative methods is that they are "helpful for understanding how particular attitudes, behaviours or experiences are distributed or associated in a population, which can then determine the best course of action in implementing social change for women" (ibid, 246).

There are several advantages to conducting web surveys: they are inexpensive, and easy for respondents to take part in, as they can choose when and where they complete the survey (ibid). Furthermore, because participants take the survey at a distance from the researcher, some of the difficulties associated with honesty and social desirability bias (the tendency of participants to provide answers that will be viewed positively by others) are eliminated (Dillman et al. 2008, in Miner et al. 2012). A disadvantage of web surveys is that they can result in lower response rates, as it is easier for participants to decline to do the survey or to terminate it before completion (Miner et al. 2012). For this latter reason, amongst others, it is important that web surveys be kept brief. I feel that my survey could have been designed to be more brief, in which case I may not have had the survey respondent drop out rate that I did (23 percent), an phenomenon that I expound upon when I analyze my survey data in the following two chapters.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 7 of this dissertation, online research garners particular ethical implications (ibid) and steps must be taken to ensure participant anonymity. I had mixed

results in this regard. I did administer the survey via hyper-link to SurveyMonkey, which utilizes

a secure server, and it remained hosted there in order to guarantee respondents' anonymity, but

there were factors that worked against that anonymity. By example, a noticeable number of

respondents skipped one or two questions around the topic of paid DJ work, indicating that

perhaps some respondents had "the desire to edit or censor one's responses, an effect that can be

diminished through increased anonymity" (ibid, 19). As mentioned, given how my recruitment

efforts relied on my networks in the Canadian DJ scene, it is likely that some of my participants

knew who I was personally or socially via the industry, and therefore those participants may

have felt that I could identify them through their survey answers and thus were not comfortable

discussing their DJ income.

Another reason I built the survey in SurveyMonkey is because its analytic features can

facilitate an initial analysis of the respondent data. By example, you can search for specific

words or word sequences in order to analyze open-ended questions; thereby responses can be

categorized for easier coding. To formulate both the initial survey and interview questions, I took

direction from a trial study I conducted previously on gender and DJ culture in 2010 for a

graduate course on feminist research methods at York University (See Appendix A). In addition

to that trial study, I pre-tested the survey I administered for my dissertation by having three

friends–two that identified as cis-female and another that identified as trans masculine–complete

the survey, and then provide me with structured input.

I attempted to follow best practices as outlined by Miner et al. while designing survey

questions. With regards to comprehension, or designing the survey so it would be as easy a

process as possible for people to complete, I divided the questions into sections grouped together

by topic and tried for a smooth flow from section to section. The survey consisted of 23

questions in total, and was divided into 7 sections,[48] with each section relating to a theme or topic as follows: "begin survey", "DJ herstory", "musical genres", "DJ work, day jobs and school", "music formats and DJ gear", "DJing and producing", and "how do you identify?" I structured the order of the questions so that "the *dependent* measures (i.e., the outcome of interest) [came] before independent measures (i.e., the cause of interest)" (Miner et al. 2012, 250).[49] The survey begins with general questions (asking for the respondent's age and hometown), and the final section "How do you identify?" consisted of three questions asking them to describe how they identify in terms of gender, race, and sexuality. I asked questions about identity last because "the survey should conclude with the most sensitive and intrusive questions, when rapport and trust are likely greatest" (ibid).

It is valuable to use a mix of open- and closed-ended questions. One benefit of close-ended questions is that they are quicker and easier to answer. When designing close-ended questions, it is important to provide a broad range of response options so as to not exclude any response a participant might want to offer. Given my use of predominantly open-ended questions, the majority of my survey questions elicited responses that could be analyzed qualitatively as well as quantitatively.

With regards to qualitative methodology, I coded the survey inductively and in accordance with grounded theory to harmonize with my methodological framework. Miner et al. (2012) describe inductive coding as a method that researchers sometimes use in order to "collect data

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[48] See Appendix C for a complete list of survey questions.

[49] According to Miner et al., "The survey should begin with the most general questions, and questions should flow smoothly and easily from section to section. However, because the order of questions can profoundly affect responses the *dependent* measures (i.e., the outcome of interest) should come before the independent measures (i.e., the cause of interest). For example, questions about respondents' satisfaction with their job should come before questions assessing their experiences of sexual harassment because questions about sexual harassment can 'prime' negative workplace experiences, which can affect their response to all later questions on the survey." (2012, 250)

without confining them to predetermined categories (e.g. asking [about] race as a free-response, fill-in-the-blank question), and they later transform these responses into quantitative data (e.g., collapsing responses of 'white and 'Caucasian' into the same category)" (240). In addition to being an advantageous method for reasons previously outlined, when coding inductively, "the themes or categories are not narrowly defined a priori by the researcher, participants often have the freedom to respond to research questions in ways that make sense to them personally. Proponents of qualitative research methods argue that this aspect of qualitative research is extremely important because participants should be able to describe their experiences as they perceive them, not through the researcher's preconceived notions about what their world is like" (ibid). In short, inductive coding can work against researcher bias and in fact, facilitate self-reflexivity.

In terms of wording the questions, I used non-technical and unambiguous language to aid in participant comprehension, and I also included 'cues' in the questions to help participants recall information.[50] I found wording the questions to be one of the most complicated and difficult aspects of designing the survey, as I was acutely conscious that how the questions were worded would impact how participants formulated answers, especially as the survey asked questions about personal histories and preferences: "questions about attitudes, which unlike behavioural questions are more likely to be influenced by personal bias, are highly susceptible to response errors resulting from question wording and the order in which questions are presented" (Miner et al. 2012, 252). Despite taking time and consideration designing the questions in order to evoke the best quality data possible, I feel that I achieved mixed results with my survey, and I believe that both the construction of the questions, and the overall design, could have been

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[50] See Appendix B: Interview Schedule and Questions for the list of interview questions.

improved.

When I began coding the survey data I soon recognized that there was a great deal of repetition amongst the survey questions themselves. Furthermore, because many of the survey questions were open-ended, they generated qualitative data that repeated the data obtained from the interviews with the subjects that participated in both the survey and an interview. I also regret not making more of the survey questions close-ended, as having so many open-ended questions made the survey much more complicated, and thus time-consuming, to code. The open-ended questions were difficult to create categories for, as nuances in answers meant deciding if a new category should be created, or if that answer could 'fit' into an existing category. I had to make choices about how to code responses, and I was concerned that this process resulted in too much guessing about a respondent's meaning in order to put their answer into a category. This was a key concern of mine, because "there is a fine line between highlighting a feminist standpoint within a narrative and mistakenly representing a participant's narrative" (Miner et al. 2012, 255). In sum, I feel that I would have had a more streamlined research design if I had done more preliminary testing of the survey in order to refine its design prior to administering it to respondents.

### 3.7.    Personal Interviews

I conducted semi-structured, personal interviews with thirty-five DJs and two promoters, predominantly over Skype.[51] My interview subjects were of varying ages, backgrounds, musical

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[51] Exceptions are DJ Jas Nasty, who submitted her responses to my questions via email, and DJ Hotboxx and Cindy Li, both of whom I interviewed separately, in person, over drinks and food in downtown Toronto. Another DJ subject, Mary Flavours, was not able to Skype so I tried recording our phone interview by putting my smartphone on speaker and recording our conversation into GarageBand on my MacBook. However, something went wrong and the conversation did not record. I did not catch this error although I did check to see if the software was recording a few times during our interview, and each time, it looked as though it were. I am not sure what happened, as I also recorded my interview in person with DJ Hotboxx on GarageBand, and that worked normally. Therefore, I wrote up my interview with Mary Flavours from the notes I took throughout, and sent them to her for clarification and approval; she was graciously forgiving.

preferences/styles, and geographic locations; again, three identified as trans or non-binary.

To elicit data from my survey participants, I asked direct, similarly structured questions about three identificatory factors–gender, race, and sexuality–in turn. In contrast, during the personal interviews I simply asked my participants, "how do you identify", and then directed the discussion according to their responses. Often interview participants asked for clarification to that question ("identify as what?"). Other participants assumed I was asking about their DJ identities in relation to the genres of music they spun and their technical style as DJs. Still other interview subjects either assumed I was discussing personal/societal identities, or they discussed those topics after I briefly clarified the question by saying that they could talk about DJ identities, personal identities, or both. Therefore, while each anonymous survey respondent was asked directly how they identify in terms of race, gender, and sexuality (and 103 out of 113 answered), not all of my interview subjects spoke directly about all, or even any, aspects of their identity in terms of race, sexuality, or gender. Still, comparing and contrasting the responses from the interview data with the survey data reveals some interesting themes, as discussed throughout the remainder of this dissertation.

**Transcribing and Coding the Interviews**

I had most of the personal interviews transcribed by Transcript Heroes, a transcription service based in Toronto and recommended by a colleague. Additionally, a friend with transcription experience transcribed two interviews, and I transcribed two as well. The shortest interview ran for 20 minutes (DJ Hernia), and the longest lasted for an hour and 10 minutes (Mama Cutsworth). I coded the interview data utilizing the coding software HyperResearch, a code-and-retrieve data analysis program compatible with Macintosh computers that was first developed by feminist researcher Sharlene Hesse-Biber. I had prior experience coding interview

data in HyperResearch as I used the software during my aforementioned pilot study on DJ culture.

I utilized an open coding method (Clarke 2012, 346), and although the codes were developed as the analysis progressed, I was got started by referencing the codes I developed from my data analysis of my pilot study (again, Appendix A lists the codes from the trial study). I first coded the hard copies of the transcripts by hand, making copious notes about the different themes emerging. I then began coding the interviews in Hypertext using what I referenced as meta-codes, which denoted approximately a dozen broad themes, in addition to more specific sub-codes that I grouped under each meta-code. However, as I progressed with my coding in Hypertext, I started getting lost (so to speak) amongst all the different sub-codes, meaning that I created an over-abundance of highly specific sub-codes. As a result, after only coding five interviews, or 20 percent of the interview data, I had far too many sub-codes to be manageable. Therefore, I stopped working with the transcripts digitally in Hypertext, and instead, went through the hard copies of the transcripts again. During this subsequent round working with the hard copy transcripts, I decided which themes would be sub-codes, and which would be meta-codes, using a different coloured highlighter differentiate them. I then assigned sub-codes to their most relevant meta-codes, deleting some sub-codes, and amalgamating others in the process. After cutting the number of meta-codes down to fifteen, the coding process in Hypertext became much faster and easier because the codes worked well with the transcripts. Throughout the process of coding each interview, I did end up creating more sub-codes, and/or refining them, but this time I was far more careful, and at the conclusion of the coding process in Hypertext, I had developed and retained forty-one codes that I found manageable and productive. I also kept

extensive memos and field notes throughout the coding process, in order to make my reasoning

for creating and using specific codes as transparent as possible.

### 3.8. Further Ethical and Methodological Concerns

Given the multiple subjectivities explored in this dissertation, there are several relative

ethical and methodological concerns relating to the core concept of reflexivity that have not yet

been addressed. Many of the people I interviewed were friends of mine (to varying degrees), and

this intimacy could perhaps hinder my study if it caused a participant to withhold critical

comments out of the desire not to trouble my research. On the other hand, my friendships with

my interview participants might enhance the data obtained if our relationship caused them to feel

at ease enough to reveal more information than they might have if interviewed by a stranger.

Given the complexity of the relationships between my participants and myself, self-reflexivity is

key (Oakley 1988, as outlined in Olszanowski 2012; Rodgers 2010). Feminist research is defined

by a refutation of claims to objectivity, a reciprocal relationship with the research subject, and

the concept of reflexivity. In looking at concepts of reflexivity, I am attracted to Brooks' and

Hesse-Biber's discussion of Harding's concept of "strong reflexivity," which "requires the

researcher to be cognizant and critically reflective about the different ways her positionality can

serve as both a hindrance and a resource toward achieving knowledge throughout the research

process" (2007, 15). It is vital to interrogate how my social location affects my research process

and data analysis, and also plays upon my status as an insider (Acker 2000), as discussed

previously in the section outlining my theoretical framework. Although I may share a similar

worldview as other group insiders, gained by experiencing the problems that characterize our

community, multiple aspects of identity also shape research experience, and not just that of being

an in-or-outsider (Hesse-Biber and Piatelli 2007).

I must critically examine my social location in relation to the main societal institutions I am embedded in, and recognize how my subjectivity (including my membership status in relation to those who participated in the research) is a crucial and ubiquitous aspect of the investigation. I have to acknowledge that I possess many of the trademarks of hegemonic female identity, and that womxn such as myself are already reflected in the existing literature on gender and DJ culture. Therefore, what does it mean to acknowledge the epistemological impact of being an insider of the community I am researching (Acker 2000), and what measures can I take to ensure that I do not construct and or collapse my subjects' experiences with my own? This is a question of both ethics and biases; specifically, my own biases developed from my experience as a DJ for approximately two decades, recognizing and articulating the sexism and white privilege I experienced. By example, it is important to question if and how participants' ethnicities reflect who had access to DJing during the time of the survey. Moreover, in considering how intersecting oppressions impact a person's access to DJ culture, it is also useful to question who has the ability to be themselves in DJ culture once gaining access, and who might have to hide (or accentuate) certain aspects of their identity (and why).

In this chapter I outlined how my theoretical framework is based upon feminist standpoint theory, which centers the voices and experiences of womxn and engages with anti-essentialist feminist theories. Accordingly, this study takes a specifically queer, anti-racist focus. The following two chapters present an in-depth analysis of my survey and interview data. I seek to amplify the voices of differently situated Canadian womxn DJs as they discuss several key themes relating to gender, race, sexuality and DJ culture. As discussed, I pay special attention to how the quantitative and qualitative data from my survey speaks to the qualitative interview data, and vice versa.

## CHAPTER 4: STEREO/TYPES (SIDE A)

### 4.1.     Introduction

*Despite having classical music training including harmony and theory, I have never produced my own music. I attribute this to the time I spent promoting and being busy with my day job. It also requires a culture of producers to provide tips and feedback. I could have tapped into my guy friends who were doing this but didn't for whatever reason.*

(Anonymous survey participant)

This quotation highlights several themes in this chapter, which focus on Canadian womxn's pathways into DJ culture prior to the 21st century. By analyzing my survey and interview data, I demonstrate how these pathways were shaped by regional and digital networks emerging from cultural and institutional spaces such as nightclubs, campus and community radio, and online platforms offering access to DJ technologies and resources. My survey and interview participants discussed musical backgrounds and instruments they played; whether or not they produced music or dabbled in music production ("Despite having classical music training including harmony and theory, I have never produced my own music"); the hassles of promoting and having to work a day job ("I attribute this to the time I spent promoting and being busy with my day job"); their educational pursuits; the importance of mentors ("It also requires a culture of producers to provide tips and feedback"), and the homosocial barriers to DJ culture that womxn experience ("I could have tapped into my guy friends who were doing this but didn't for whatever reason"). These "whatever reason"(s) have already been discussed at length in prior chapters of this dissertation.

The following section highlights some key womxn in Canadian DJ hxrstory, and their impact on the culture. I then illustrate the career pathways of my interview subjects that began

DJing in Western Canada in the mid to late 1980s, in order to situate their regional, national, and/or international influence on other womxn DJs, and DJ culture generally. I compare the entryways into DJing available to these early DJ progenitors, and contrast these entry points with the routes taken later by womxn DJs in the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s. Using some of my interview subjects as case studies, I sketch the impact of Canada's geography on womxn DJs' regional and digital networks, and the importance of these networks in regard to organizing for visibility and space. I discuss my interview with Jaala, who intervened in Calgary's sexist DJ culture in the mid-1990s by producing a showcase of women DJs, as well as two Saskatoon DJs who shared their feelings of being isolated from networks of queer and womxn DJs. I continue to examine how the various practices associated with DJ culture have changed with technology over time, by illustrating the impact of social media, and how digital labour has come to be a necessary part of a DJ's 'hustle'. I conclude this chapter by focusing on the ways in which the youngest of my interview subjects engaged with digital DJing, and how their DJ practice relates to their career in STEM.

## 4.2. Hidden Hxrstories of Canadian DJ culture

*I was the first female DJ in Canada to play hard-core techno. So I did not have any female icons to look up to. It was me and the boys, and I was one of them.* (Double D)

The hxrstory of womxn in Canadian DJ culture is a history of 'firsts', but these womxn initiators are have not yet been documented. As recently as November 2017, Redbull.com published an article titled "The History of DJ Culture in Canada" (Parkin 2017)[52] that cited fifteen prominent Canadian DJs, and not one was a womxn. This section attempts to recover some of our lost hxrstory by discussing several key womxn originators in Canadian DJ culture

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[52] Note that a brief Internet search suggests that Parkin grew up in Ireland, resides in the UK, and is presumably not Canadian. Therefore it is unclear if they have lived (or even spent much time) in Canada.

whom I interviewed for this study. These participants recounted their inspirations, role models, networks, and mentors, and their words weave together a hxrstory of Canadian DJ culture, the telling of which is long overdue.

Rewinding back to the 1980s, radio DJ turned television VJ Samantha Taylor[53] was hugely influential as the host of the CBC TV show *Video Hits* from its 1984 debut until she left the show in 1989 (*Video Hits* continued to run until 1993 with two subsequent different hosts). It is worth noting the amount of power Taylor had in the Canadian music industry in the latter half of the 1980s. *Video Hits* was the top-rated show on CBC during its time, garnering one million viewers on a weekly basis. At the height of its popularity, Taylor held such great influence that she could dictate which videos would not be aired on the show. By example, when Taylor found a Honeymoon Suite video to be too sexist, she refused to let it air, forcing the band to re-shoot the video without the sexist content in order to get it aired on *Video Hits* (Bociurkiw 1985), one of the only media formats that presented music videos at that time in Canada. Unfortunately, "the Samantha Taylor era of VIDEO HITS no longer exists in the CBC Archives" ("Celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Video Hits"). Once again, our history has been rendered invisible.

Patty Schmidt, host of the CBC's iconic alternative music radio show *Brave New Waves* from 1995 until 2006, is another key influence on Canada's musical landscape. Active since the late 1980s, Schmidt began her career on the airwaves at McGill University's radio station CKUT in 1987, starting at *Brave New Waves* as a fill-in host and researcher in 1991. The CBC launched *Brave New Waves* in 1984 to showcase underground and forward-thinking music. As Schmidt explains, "The program was founded by a gay man and a gay woman. And every subsequent

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[53] For information about pioneering women in commercial broadcast radio in Canada, see Peggy Stewart, *Radio Ladies: Canada's Women on the Air, 1922-1975* (Burnaby, British Columbia: Magnetawan Pub., 2012). The book consists primarily of anecdotal recollections from Stewart's interviews with former womxn radio broadcasters of news and other spoken word formats, as opposed to broadcasting music.

host, including me, was able, subtlety, to bring a perspective of queerness and progressive politics to the airwaves, even if it went unnoticed by the audience" ("Interview With Patti Schmidt").

In an interview with Yvesrocher.ca, Schmidt described the impact that Brave New Waves had on people: "It was a source of revelation, new perspectives, new sounds, and inspiration, and caused people to become artists and creators, culture makers and participants in worlds of art and music that have few supports in mainstream society. It emboldened the weirdos and loners, and connected them with each other through the magic of radio and the power of music. That this was a national program, publically funded, made it a powerful vehicle" (ibid). *Brave New Waves* had a broad reach also because of its frequency; it aired for thirty hours a week, from midnight until 4am, summoning the night owls. *Brave New Waves* showcased many different genres of dance music, and any Canadian lover of underground music would have been tuning in to hear new sounds, prior to the advent of the Internet. It is easy to see how *Brave New Waves* would have a big impact on a generation of clubbers and would-be DJs, groomed to stay up all night and listen to weird electronic music.

In the aforementioned interview, Schmidt was asked about her long career and respected position in the fields of electronic music and digital arts, and what changes she had noted since starting in the industry:

> More women are taking up more prominent roles in the culture and creation of electronic music and digital arts. And that is amazing to witness. There are still ingrained sexist attitudes and biases that dominant the culture at large, but I have never seen such an explosion of creation by women, as in the last 10 years or so.

Being taken seriously has often been a challenge. It is for women in all fields. Being heard is another challenge. Björk said: "Everything that a guy says once, you have to say five times." Women have to be more likeable and friendlier than their male counterparts, and if you want to gain entry into the circles of men who make most of the decisions in my milieu and industry, you have to check your emotions and your opinions in ways I've often been bothered by. I also think it's more difficult for older women to navigate music worlds, just as it is for older actresses. Roles and role models are scant, and I have often felt without a roadmap for how to be. (Ibid)

Schmidt continues to wield a positive influence on electronic music and its attendant culture in Canada through her engagement in prominent music, visual and digital culture initiatives, including the Mutek Festival, which she has been involved in since 2008.

Mutek originated in Montreal in 2000, and has since grown to take place in several cities annually worldwide. The "Mu" in "mutek" signifies "mutation", and thereby all of the different festivals bearing the Mutek name aim to "create a sonic space that can support innovation in new electronic music and digital art" (Mutek.org). Recently, Mutek became a part of the Keychange initiative created by Europe's PRS Foundation to address the low numbers of women participating in music activities throughout Europe, including our representation onstage at festivals and in conference programs. Mutek is one of the seven festivals that founded the Keychange initiative, and a key action is getting festivals to pledge to achieve gender parity by 2020; indeed, Mutek itself achieved gender parity in 2019.

### 4.3.    DJ Pathways of the 1980s

**Debbie Jones**

During my research I discovered womxn DJs who exerted strong influences on western

Canadian techno and house music scenes. As one of the first DJs to play techno in Vancouver,

Debbie Jones was a major contributor to the city's dance music scene as a resident weekend DJ

at legendary underground dance club Graceland from 1988-1990. Jones and the other DJs at

Graceland brought the new sounds in dance music to their Vancouver audience during that time:

"The Graceland DJs were aware of the roots of development in Chicago House and introduced

those beats to Vancouver. They also ushered in acid house, early industrial dance, and the most

experimental in hip-hop, rap, and ethnic house" (Shea 2014, ii-iii). Jones passed away in 2005,

but fortunately her legacy as a DJ and Vancouver tastemaker is well-documented in *Discotext*

*Magazine: Vancouver Club Culture and the History of EDM 1988-1990* (Shea 2014), a collected

volume of all thirty-one editions of *Discotext Magazine*. *Discotext* was a monthly publication

that originated in 1988 as a result of repeated requests by Graceland's patrons for the clubs' DJs

to publish their dance floor playlists. The published playlists quickly grew into an entire

magazine, with Jones as editor. Reading through the editions collected in *Discotext*, it becomes

evident that Jones' popularity grew at Graceland, as by 1989 she had moved from DJing on

Friday nights to Saturday nights (the latter evening is generally the most coveted by DJs, as the

audiences are typically bigger and more lively). *Discotext* also documented how Jones DJ'd

while pregnant, right up until her "seventh or eighth month" (ibid, IX), and gave birth in between

editing issues 14 and 15 of *Discotext*.

**Double D**

Calgary also had its own dance music revolutionary, Double D, who introduced the city to

the sounds of techno. Double D moved to Calgary from Latvia in 1981 at the age of fifteen and

started DJing in 1989, describing how she "basically started when techno started". Not only was

Double D one of the first DJs to play techno in Alberta, as a founder of House of Unity, she also threw the first raves in Calgary. Although Double D played piano and had always been musically inclined, her pathways into DJing were still random, and yet also typical for western Canadian womxn DJs in the 1980s and 1990s, as her story echoes those of other DJs over forty interviewed for this study. I elaborate upon Double D's, and other research participants', entry points into DJing throughout this chapter and next.

When I interviewed Double D we began by discussing her pathway into DJing, which was heavily influenced by gay club culture(s).[54] Double D described how she first started DJing in Calgary in the late 1980s, recounting that she worked at a gay bar in Calgary doing the lights for the resident DJ, who recruited and trained her to DJ for him while he took breaks during his DJ sets:

Double D: " [the] place [was] called Tracks . . . it was a gay bar but it was like a country gay bar, does that make sense?"

Me: "Only in Calgary would that make sense."

Double D: "Yeah, only in Calgary. So the guy who DJ'd there said I'm going to show you how it's done and when I need a coffee break, you can take over from me. You can't really mix country music, right? So I managed to get fired from the gay country bar and they moved me to the gay disco bar. They were saying you know honey, you really need to go somewhere else because you play the same country track over and over. You don't even notice you repeat it three times. I'm like yeah dude, it's all the same to me. So they moved me to a club called 318 and it was on 17th avenue, it was actually the place where I started and got my own night . . . It was a weird thing because of the music I played, it attracted all

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[54] Gay in this context meaning specifically male oriented, in and of its time in the late 1980s, before widespread acceptance of the concept of queer culture in general.

of the straight people. I had straight kids in the gay bar in 1990, 1991, all of these people would hear techno music and creep in, what is this weird music? So I have to credit the gay scene for giving me a chance to bring techno to Calgary."

As described above, Double D was working in a gay bar when she was pressed upon to start playing records, and then she moved to another bar called 318, a "... gay, disco-ish bar" that played dance music and was a more fertile environment for her to pursue her passion: techno.

Initially Double D did not have her own gear at home, rather, she learned on the equipment at Tracks, and then on the equipment at 318. She recounts going to 318 during her lunch break from work to practice on the club's equipment: "So I started using the gear in the gay bar on lunch breaks with the janitor [there]. I'm sure I drove him crazy 'cause I would play two tracks over and over for an hour and he's like oh my god, please go away".[55] The resident DJ at 318 continued Double D's DJ education by teaching her fundamental DJ techniques, such as beat matching. Double D also explained how she made use of the promotional copies of industrial and electronic records that labels would "dump" at Tracks, accidently playing them at 45 RPM (rotations per minute) without realizing it was the wrong speed, mainly because playing those particular records at 45 RPM as opposed to 33 1/3 RPM made it possible to mix them into her (much faster) techno records. Because Double D did not have enough techno records to fill an

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[55] I was fascinated by Double D's detailed description of learning to beat match by mentally practicing with visual clues from car lights, and audible clues from clocks:

> You play one record, you play the other and you get your ears used to listening to two songs at the same time and you go to play up the speed of one or the other. You have to try to speed up one and slow down the other, get the beats in line and you got to listen for a proper in and a proper out, you can't rush it, you can't be too slow . . . It's sort of like listening to two phone calls with two headsets and two people talking to you at the same time, right? Once your ears can separate, you will start to see it. When I started doing this, when I'm sitting at the lights and I'm watching cars ahead of me and their blinkers are off key, you can catch the left signal and another left signal and another car and eventually they meet and they start to go off beat, and they meet again and then they go off beat, so I started watching blinkers on people's cars and I started listening to the clocks. If you had two clocks in the room and they'll tick at the same time and all of a sudden one will slow down, the other will tick faster, then they'll meet, and tick again . . . So I started noticing patterns.

entire evening when she first started, she relied on industrial and electronic records to fill in gaps, even though she was not particularly excited about those genres.[56]

Around the same time she started DJing at 318, Double D was heavily influenced by a trip she took to San Francisco in 1989 with a friend who was on a mission to visit every gay bar in the city in the span of four days. Double D recounted how she started buying techno records during that trip, after attending a warehouse party and hearing techno for the first time and becoming enraptured. She wanted to be able to hear techno back home, but there were neither venues nor radio stations playing it yet, so she realized that she would have to bring techno to Calgary. During that same trip she met Larry LaRue, a DJ at legendary San Francisco gay bar The Stud, who took her to a small record store in the Tenderloin district called BPM, and introduced her to the store's owner. LaRue explained to Double D that BPM was the place where she would find all that she needed techno-wise, and he even selected the first record for her to buy: "And that's how I got hooked, you get the first record and then you just can't stop". Double D kept returning to San Francisco, visiting LaRue until he tragically passed in the mid-1990s from complications due to HIV/AIDS (Freeman n.d.). During our interview, she spoke poignantly of their closeness and his decline in health; she still has the mix tapes he made for her. Double D is still friends with BPM's owner to this day, and she described how (prior to the advent of the internet) he used to play her tracks over the phone so that she could determine which records she wanted to purchase through the mail.

Double D's DJ origin story illustrates key pathways available to Canadian womxn DJs during the 1980s and 1990s. As I demonstrate throughout this study, these entry points–gay bars and gay men's dance culture, access to gear, CCR radio, mentors, and to a lesser degree,

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56 Other DJs that I interviewed (by example, Blondtron) would describe similar situations of buying records and playing them at the wrong RPM without realizing it.

networks–played key roles in nurturing Canadian womxn DJs in the 1980s and 1990s, prior to the onset of digital technology. As mentioned, Double D played piano and had always been musically inclined, but she was encouraged to DJ due to circumstance; she did not initially seek out the position. Therefore, she was able to access gear to practice on both by learning on the spot while playing for audiences at Tracks, followed by playing at 318 and practicing there on her own during the day as well. Furthermore, she was a part of CCR radio via her participation at University of Calgary radio station CJSW 90.9 FM, where she has hosted a Friday night show called DNA for thirty-three years and counting at the time of this study's completion in 2020.

Double D's impact upon the Canadian DJ landscape cannot be ignored. By throwing the first raves in Calgary–events that would have attracted people from other regions in Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia, as well as places south of the border such as Seattle– Double D influenced a generation of music lovers, including womxn who would most likely be hearing a womxn DJ for the first time. Recently, it was refreshing to see Double D get international recognition in a Mixmag.com article about womxn progenitors of hardcore techno (Dicker 2019).

In thinking about the potential impact of Double D's under-acknowledged historical influence in light of my survey data, it is notable that approximately 24 percent of my survey respondents named one or more DJs that inspired them, with seven respondents, or approximately 6 percent, stating they were inspired by witnessing another womxn DJ either spinning live, or represented in the media. I am certain that this low figure of 6 percent reflects womxn DJs' lack of representation prior to the twenty-first century, when there were scant opportunities to see us either live or in media. Once again, the power of representation for effecting change cannot be understated. Said one survey respondent, "for the first time in 1999 I

saw a female DJ playing up close and personal on turntables. This is when I decided to learn to mix". Another respondent mentioned Winnipeg's Mama Cutsworth as an inspiration to pursue DJing, demonstrating the importance of regional role models (I discuss Cutsworth in more detail later in this chapter). Yet another respondent cited Lauren Burrows as an inspiration. Burrows also DJ'd on CiTR 101.9FM in Vancouver around the same time as I, and later she on worked in commercial broadcast radio. Two respondents mentioned being inspired by Montreal-based DJ Misstress Barbara, who has been active since 1996; one commented that after "seeing Misstress Barbara strong [and] fierce on the decks, I wanted to own the dance floor like her".[57] Cumulatively, these responses speak to the importance of representation in regard to encouraging womxn to pursue DJing, echoing the findings of the scholars that I cite throughout this work.

Relatedly, approximately 26 percent of my survey respondents conferred how their desire to DJ was sparked by their love of partying and parties, and/or a certain local music scene or event. By example, twelve respondents cited either their first rave, or a specific local scene, as their inspiration for DJing. Not surprisingly, all but two of those twelve respondents were between the ages of thirty-one and forty, reflecting the popularity of the rave scene in Canada in the late 1990s. One respondent described how "it wasn't until I went to my first rave when I saw a DJ playing dance music that I knew that is what I wanted to do. In that moment I then realized, this is how I want to express myself musically".

**Mary Flavors**

Mary Flavours is another prolific Calgary DJ; she started spinning five years before Double D. When I interviewed Mary, she had just moved to Victoria after approximately thirty years of living and DJing in Calgary. As I grew up in Calgary, I am fairly certain that Mary

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[57] Leaving aside Canada, two respondents mentioned seeing Spinderella from Salt n' Pepa in music videos during the 1980s and 1990s. Spinderella was also the first womxn DJ I ever saw in the media, perhaps seven or eight years before I saw a womxn DJing in real life.

Flavours was the first womxn DJ that I saw in the flesh, on New Year's Eve in 1993, in a bar called Crazy Horse that was located in the basement of a trendy downtown restaurant called Mescaleros. Born in Paris, France, Mary moved to Calgary with her mother, who had hosted a radio show in Serbia during the 1940s where she played music on 78s (records) during the broadcast, and sang live to conclude each show. Mary's mom brought her records with her when they moved to Calgary, and knowing that Mary also loved music, she gave Mary a record player for her tenth birthday. Needless to say, her mom approved of Mary's DJing, and sometimes came out to her gigs.

Mary got her start DJing in 1984 around the age of "eighteen or nineteen", through a male friend that DJ'd at the Banke, an upscale, mainstream nightclub located on Stephen Avenue Mall in downtown Calgary that catered to a straight clientele. Mary's friend invited her to DJ and work the lights for the weekly Wednesday "Ladies Night", and showed her the technical ropes, including how to mix records. Encouraged by her older stepbrother, who was in a punk rock band, Mary's preference was/is for alternative/underground music, but at the Banke she was not encouraged to play the music that she liked ("the weird stuff," as she put it), similar to how Double D started off playing music that she disliked at the "gay country" bar. Like Double D, Mary also took trips to shop for music, travelling to London, UK and Paris to buy records. When she was nineteen, Mary was invited to join a record pool in Calgary, and became the only womxn member. She used to own approximately 4000 records, but at the time of our interview, she had pared her collection down to 2000.

Mary's former partner was a sound technician who worked for Double D as a sound tech at her raves, and with his help Mary learned to assemble and EQ a sound system properly. Because her networks afforded her access to equipment to play on, Mary did not own her own gear until

some time into her DJ career, when she was gifted with Technics Mark II turntables. After a few years of DJing professionally, Mary became heavily involved in radio as well. She also purchased more equipment (mixer, subwoofer, speakers and cables), in addition to inheriting equipment from RadioRadio (104.5 cable FM), a CCR station that she was (and continues to be) heavily involved in. Prior to her involvement with RadioRadio, Mary and her then-boyfriend (a nightclub owner) hosted a radio show called "Up For Clubbing" on CJSW from 1988 to 1989. CJSW is the same CCR station that has run Double D's show for thirty-three years and counting. Mary started doing a show on RadioRadio in 1989, eventually inheriting the station when its founder passed away after a long struggle with cancer. At the time I interviewed Mary she was making an auditory museum of the station's history and show archives (radioradio.ca). The station is a not-for-profit and funded entirely by Mary; she expressed how she would run it until she could no longer manage to, at which point she is hoping to pass it on to someone else.

Mary Flavours and Double D began DJing in Calgary in 1984 and 1989 respectively, and as demonstrated, there are many similarities in their DJ trajectories. Both are white womxn who were born in Europe and moved to Calgary in their youth. Both had musical backgrounds, and were encouraged by male DJs who showed them how to use the equipment, including turntables and mixers, teaching them basic DJ techniques. Both began DJing mainly in public, which meant learning and practicing in front of an audience. Both DJs travelled outside of the country to buy records, as well as receiving promotional records, and both could access gear to practice on at the nightclub where they worked at or radio station where they volunteered, as did some of my survey participants, and myself.[58] In the 1980s thus, womxn were more reliant on male mentors

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[58] By example, a survey participant who was between the ages of thirty-one and thirty-five at the time of the survey described how they went into an empty nightclub on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights with a pile of records and practiced on the turntables for two hours before clubbers arrived.

due to a scarcity of womxn DJs, especially in a smaller city like Calgary, which in the 1980s had only half of its present day population of approximately 1.3 million. These findings correspond with research demonstrating that prior to the advent of digital technology and the internet, learning to DJ was largely socially dependent, as aspects of knowledge and cultural capital were circulated informally amongst friends, as opposed to taught institutionally (Straw 1997).

### 4.4.    DJ Pathways of the 1990s

In contrast, many of my interview and survey respondents who began DJing during the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s recounted learning along with a group of friends, and/or accessing gear through a friend or romantic partner. Approximately four out of five DJs that I surveyed affirmed that their DJ careers had benefited from some kind of mentorship and/or supportive relationship(s), and approximately 43 percent indicated that another DJ (or DJs) mentored them.[59] One survey respondent described how another DJ provided support by demonstrating some "tips and tricks", and then the respondent taught themselves after that, because "at the end of the day it's a lot of trial and error on your own", alluding to how DJing is often a solitary activity, once you gain access to gear and music. Reliance on male mentors began steadily eroding in the 2000s. This trend continues, as currently the knowledge, cultural capital, equipment, and music needed to participate in DJ culture is far more accessible for womxn, whether pursuing DJing solo, with friends, with a collective, though formal instruction at one of Canada's DJ academies, and/or informal instruction via free online tutorials.

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[59] In a 2015 study titled *A Profile of Women Working in Ontario's Music Industry* that was commissioned by Women in Music Canada (WIM-C) and conducted by Nordicity, survey respondents said that access to networking, mentors, and a positive workplace culture had had the most positive impact on their careers. These findings correspond with those of a study conducted by the Berklee School of Music on the socio economic realities of womxn working in the U.S. music industry (Barra, Prior, and Kramer 2019). The Berklee study revealed that 92 percent of respondents reported that having a mentor had had a positive impact on their careers (ibid). Furthermore, mentored women reported greater job satisfaction, and earned on average of 8 percentage points more than those without mentors. Notably, the Berklee study based their research design on the 2015 study commissioned by the WIM-C cited above.

On the flipside, a few survey respondents spoke about the different ways that male-dominated DJ environments affected them. One survey respondent recounted working at "a roller rink and the manager said he wasn't really interested in having me DJ because I was a girl. I had wanted to choose the music to roller skate to. I got very interested in learning after that." Another respondent recalled how "boyfriends w[ere] always competitive and didn't really want me to do it either". Interestingly, one respondent viewed unsupportive men in a positive light: "the guys I played with were particularly hard on me… at the time I didn't understand why. Later I realized that they wanted me to be able to hold my own with anyone on the decks in any situation." This same respondent (who was between the ages of twenty-six and thirty when they completed the survey) stated that Girls On Decks–a Calgary-based virtual and physical community of womxn DJs established in 2003–inspired her to DJ.

Molly Fi co-founded Girls on Decks in 2003 in response to Calgary's mostly male dominated and hyper-competitive dance music scene, which she felt offered scant support to emerging womxn DJs in Alberta. Girls On Decks was formed with two other womxn, Isis Graham and DJ Adrenacrone, leading to the group's directive of supporting and generating performance opportunities for womxn in the arts (https://www.facebook.com/Girls.On.Decks/). Thus, it could be that while the aforementioned survey respondent felt that male colleagues treated her toughly, she also knew about Girls On Decks, and this accessible and supportive womxn DJ collective may have bolstered her confidence through representation.

DJ Hotboxx is a white, queer woman, who was in her mid-40s at the time of our interview. Like both Double D and Mary Flavors, Hotboxx was already working at a gay club in Saskatoon as a bartender before she started DJing at the same club in the early 2000s. The male DJ at the club recruited and trained her to replace him as he was moving to London, Ontario. Like Double

D, Mary Flavours, myself, and others such as Michelle D (whom I discuss later in this chapter), Hotboxx learned on the job after being shown the ropes by said male DJ; she practiced on the club's gear and accessed music through the club's library. DJing was made accessible to Hotboxx in that she had free training (read: mentorship) as well as easy access to gear and music. Although she loved vinyl, she ended up using digital DJ technologies because they are easier to use. Hotboxx did not own her own gear until six years after she started spinning, at which point she bought Technic turntables and installed them in her home.

My survey data demonstrates the importance of having access to gear and music in regard to encouraging womxn to DJ, and how more and more womxn took up DJing as these things became increasingly accessible as the 1990s progressed into the 2000s. One survey participant between the ages of twenty-six and thirty declared that they never played records, but rather went from making mix tapes (after their father showed them how to do it "on actual tapes"), to learning how to DJ on Traktor and DJAY, two different Digital Vinyl Systems (DVS). Another respondent in the same age range described the process of learning on CDJs as "awesome/awful." Some younger respondents mentioned learning on their own by following YouTube tutorials. These responses corroborate research (already cited several times in this study) that demonstrates how the availability and affordability of digital technologies has greatly increased womxn's access to DJing.

### 4.5.    DJ Pathways: Campus and Community Radio (CCR)

Both Mary Flavours and Double D were heavily involved in Canadian Campus and Community Radio (CCR), and remain so, with both of them broadcasting for over thirty years and counting. Charity Marsh (2002) cites the CCR sector as a common entry point into DJing for women before digital technologies made DJing increasingly accessible, as it was one of the few

places people could access DJ equipment and music libraries. The CCR sector holds particular significance in Canada as all urban centers and many rural communities have CCR stations that are required to support programming for women and minorities by providing access to space, equipment, and free training for all community members (Zeleke 2004). The CCR sector provides womxn programmers and DJs more access to the airwaves than that afforded by commercial radio in Canada, thereby potentially having a positive impact on the landscape of Canadian radio, and the wider realm of womxn's relationship(s) to technology (Bredin 1991). Early feminist research on the social climates of Canadian CCR radio stations conducted by Bredin demonstrates how womxn's, including queer womxn's, radio shows on CCR provided favourable conditions for womxn to learn skills from one another and support each other in the process of producing a radio show. Many Canadian womxn DJs got their start on CCR due to its accessibility, as many stations provided opportunities to learn with, and be supported by, other womxn. Several of my interview and survey respondents described CCR's provision of a supportive environment wherein to learn technical broadcasting and DJ skills.

**Venus**

Venus seems to exemplify the positive impact of CCR on fostering the careers of womxn DJs in Canada. Venus got in touch and offered to be interviewed after seeing my call for interview participants posted on her friend Jas Nasty's Facebook page (Jas Nasty is based in Ottawa, and also participated in this study via an email interview). Venus started DJing in 1992, hosting a radio show with two other womxn that ran for twelve years on CHRY 105.5 FM, York University's station. During our interview, Venus recounted how she started volunteering at CHRY at age 15:

I was a big radio and music nerd and always listening to music . . . I think I was about

12 or 13, I discovered college radio. So I was able to listen to music that you couldn't hear anywhere else and this is pre-internet days . . . I'd started volunteering and got really interested in wanting to be on the radio myself . . . So CHRY's set up at the time, they had CD players and reel-to-reel machines and . . . turntables. And that's what I gravitated towards. I wanted to learn how to DJ . . . I had already started collecting records a little bit but didn't have two turntables set up at home, I just had one to listen to some stuff. But I got serious about collecting things as I started doing the radio show, which I started when I was 16 years old. I was a real fan of hip-hop music and reggae and soul. So the thing CHRY had that the other stations didn't have was you could hear hip-hop and R&B basically every day like every morning show and every evening show . . . And I specifically remember actually how I learned DJing. Somebody showed me how to beat match . . . he was a neighbor of [CHRY's] Music Director at the time and they knew that I was really keen on trying to learn.

Venus described how the station manager, Fiona York (whom I had the pleasure of working with on a feminist project for the National Campus Radio Association (NCRA) in 2005) was highly influential in motivating Venus to host her first radio show. Venus recalls how York was

very, very encouraging . . . I had been volunteering on another show and kind of helping with music . . . but it was like a dude show and it was his deal. And I told her . . . "Look, I'd be interested if something came up." So she got me [a time slot for a show] and she was really encouraging me and I was like, "I don't know if I can do these two hours alone." She's like, "Just do it. It's important you do this. You're great, just do it. Who cares?" So I really have to credit her. She was really, really instrumental. I got a timeslot and she was the one who suggested Dahlia should probably come in.

A third womxn host was added, DJ Trouble, and the show was named after a favourite song of Venus' by Diamond Dee, "Best Kept Secret". Venus explains how "it was kind of this play of you don't know it's all girls doing this show, do you? That's the secret, haha. We're playing. Even though you can clearly hear us on the air and knew it was women . . . We played hip-hop, we played R&B, we played house, we played dance floor jazz, soul . . . all kinds of stuff . . . everything that we liked . . . in fact, I can . . . safely say we were probably the first all-female hip hop show or [all-female] show [that played] that music." Venus' story illustrates the dedication that it takes to host a CCR radio show. Personally, I found it fairly time-consuming to program my hour-long, once weekly radio show on CiTR in Vancouver, so I was struck by her diligence in doing a three-hour morning show for twelve years: "We were on Tuesday mornings from 7 to 10 AM weekly . . . getting up at 5-5:30 in the morning all cracked out, every week, could never get that right . . . for years, Dahlia would pick me up, we'd get Timbits. We'd go to the station and my friend would be sleeping on the couch when we got there because he did the graveyard shift 2 to 7."

Eventually Venus started guesting at various club nights in Toronto, including Chicks Dig It, where she first DJ'd in front of an audience. Chicks Dig It was a weekly Monday evening showcase of local womxn DJs that ran at Toronto club We'ave (located across from the Ontario Art Gallery) from 1997 until 2000. The club night would prove to be influential in fostering the careers of several womxn DJs in Toronto during its run (Benson 2015). Venus moved to Montreal in 2003, and for several years she worked in the administrative side of the music industry, most notably for esteemed indie record label Ninja Tune. At the time of our interview, Venus still DJ'd occasionally in Montreal.

**Mel Boogie**

I asked Venus about the long-running CHRY show "Droppin' Dimes", hosted by legendary Toronto hip hop DJ Mel Boogie, as I had been under the impression that "Droppin' Dimes" was the first all-womxn DJ show on CHRY. Now into her 26th year as a professional DJ with no signs of slowing down, Mel Boogie is quoted on her website as saying that she "literally learned to DJ on the air" while hosting her first radio show on CHRY (www.melboogie.com). The award-winning DJ has always sought to increase exposure for womxn artists. Recently Mel Boogie toured with Toronto hip hop group The Sorority, and she has been the core DJ for Honey Jam since its inception in 1995. Venus explained how "Droppin Dimes" started after "Best Kept Secret": "Melissa [Mel Boogie], who I've known for years . . . actually started coming by our radio show [and]... sitting in just because she wanted to learn and just hang out. She started volunteering and she ended up getting her own show Friday morning at that time, 'Break of Dawn' ". Mel Boogie hosted "Break of Dawn" on CHRY 105.5 FM from 1993 until 1999, and then she hosted "Droppin' Dimes" from 2001-2014.[60]

Mel Boogie (a Black womxn) and Venus (a white womxn) seemed to have achieved success with DJing during the 1990s by accessing the support and resources offered by CHRY. Although Mel Boogie had two CCR radio shows that ran for six and thirteen years respectively, because I did not get the opportunity to interview her, I cannot confirm that CCR radio was a totally positive experience for her. Data from both Bredin's (1991) and Zeleke's (2004) studies of the social climates of Canada's CCR stations suggests that womxn's access to support was skewed by ageism, racism, heterosexism, ableism, and classism. Both Bredin and Zeleke's respondents felt that many CCR stations were inaccessible to womxn of lower socio-economic status, and/or women with disabilities. Bredin's subjects describe how: "The situation of the

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[60] I tried diligently to interview Mel Boogie, even turning up at one of her gigs to introduce myself in person. She was very welcoming and even replied to a couple of my emails, however I could not pin her down for an interview.

station in a predominantly white, young, Anglo, middle-class milieu at McGill made the programs more accessible to women who were already located within that context. The programmers were aware of the barriers that existed around age, race and class but weren't really certain how to overcome them" (Bredin 1991, 40).[61] Writing thirteen years later, Zeleke cites "harassment, technophobia, a 'hipster' type environment, and a boys' club environment" (2004, 5) as the main barriers experienced by womxn in CCR radio. Womxn respondents who experienced the "hipster" type environment identified a kind of ageism at work against their participation at stations (Zeleke 2004, 8). This "hipster" environment demands that people embody a type of 'coolness' that is defined by their cultural capital. In turn, this focus on cultural capital is one of the factors that creates a 'boy's club' mentality at CCR stations. This attitude amongst male participants in CCR stations mirrors DJ culture at large (Keightley 1996).

Although Zeleke's findings do not necessarily negate my assertion that CCR stations provide resources and support to (some) womxn DJs, her findings underscore how hetero-presenting, cis, white, able-bodied, and (at one time) young womxn like myself were more likely to have had the "sheer determination" to "hang in there" (Zeleke 2004, 10) and use CCR to our advantage, due to our privileges in relation to womxn whose race, class, gender presentation, age and abilities were not considered normative. When I participated in CITR on and off from 1998 until 2008, I was younger and more able-bodied. Therefore, any gendered barriers I faced were mitigated by my whiteness, youth, ability, and perceived cultural capital. Moreover, for some of my tenure at CiTR I was a Master's student at UBC and therefore I felt a certain amount of belonging on campus, and in the station.

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[61] Bredin's 1991 study included a small-scale survey of the broadcast time allotted to programs produced by lesbians, racialized womxn and/or Aboriginal womxn. Bredin found that when averaged across ten urban Canadian CCR stations these groups programmed less than forty-five minutes of 162.4 total weekly broadcast hours. Bredin conducted a more in-depth analysis of lesbian programming at one Anglophone station in Montreal, interviewing four womxn-identifying and feminist programmers/hosts.

Winnipeg's Mama Cutsworth has been heavily involved in CCR radio in Winnipeg since 2001. Commenting in 2011, seven years after Zeleke's findings were published, Cutsworth spoke about the problematics of having a CCR station–mandated to be accessible to all members of the community–located on a downtown university campus. She explained how people who have never attended university might be intimidated, or that the station might be inaccessible to people who do not live downtown: "being a downtown campus . . . has its cons, because [if] someone's family doesn't have a history of going to university, they may never feel comfortable enough to walk in and say they want to be a part of the station. Which, although it is *that* easy, I could see that being intimidating. We're always looking for more women and more Aboriginal folks. It's still my understanding of campus and community radio that it's still pretty white and that is a thing that I would like to change. And that's slowly shifting" (Michaelson 2011, in Fauteux 2015, 98).

Cutsworth started volunteering at the University of Winnipeg radio station at age 19, and when I interviewed her, she had hosted a radio show on CKUW for fourteen years, since 2001. She described how she was fairly involved with the station, and while the station's staff was 50 percent womxn, the volunteer base that makes up the majority of programmers and on-air hosts was closer to 35 percent womxn. Said Cutsworth, "we're always trying to increase female involvement in the station, always". Zeleke (2004) found that participants in CCR stations during the first few years of the twenty-first century were comprised of approximately 33 percent womxn and 67 percent men, similar to Cutsworth's estimation a decade later. Moreover, Zeleke found that only 20 percent of the stations surveyed provided "specific training for women and marginalized groups" (43).

It is worth noting that only 4.5 percent of my survey respondents cited campus and

community radio (CCR) as an inspiration. However, that low number does not necessarily mean that only five respondents were inspired by, and/or participated in CCR, as I did not ask about CCR directly in the survey; I merely tallied the percentage of those that brought it up on their own in their survey responses. I regret not asking a direct question about CCR as the extant literature, and the qualitative data garnered from my interviews, supports the theory that CCR was a significant incubator for Canadian womxn DJs in the 1980s, 1990s, and 2000s. Regardless, CCR was not the only significant pathway to DJing for Canadian women prior to and during the turn of the twenty-first century. Womxn were forming their own regional and digital DJ networks outside of institutions like CCR stations or nightclub spaces, finding each other online, and/or and creating alliances in real life.

### 4.6. Canadian Regional and Digital Networks

Canada's relatively small population and expansive geography has had a significant impact on the number of women-identified DJs in Canada's urban areas. One of the major challenges to earning a living as a nightclub DJ in Canada is simple geography. Playing locally, you cannot get enough paid DJ work to survive financially if you do not live in a city large enough to provide enough opportunities. Touring the country is prohibitive due to the high cost of flying within the country, and the vast driving distance between major Canadian cities (and even seasonal resort towns). In fact, only a few of the DJs I surveyed mentioned frequently travelling within Canada to DJ. Prior to the onset of digital DJ technologies in the late 1990s, there were fewer womxn DJs in Canada, however we still formed regional, national, and even international networks.

**Jaala**

Jaala Wanlass grew up in Calgary where she started DJing professionally around 1994. She was residing in Vancouver when I interviewed her over Skype, having moved there from

Edmonton in 2000, thus by the time of our interview she had resided and played in three different Western Canadian cities over the past twenty years.[62] In the early 1990s in Calgary Jaala would sneak out to raves to indulge her love of electronic music: "it was like finally I found a place where they play the music I like . . . I was always surrounded by DJs . . . [and] by that type of music. I was always [sourcing] it out and looking for it even before I was DJing". Jaala started off playing mainly house music after being encouraged to do so by a couple of DJ friends that she had at the time who basically said to her "you should really think about picking up DJing because we watch you dance and you never miss a beat. And I was like, okay. And so, I thought about it for a while but it just seemed like it was this unattainable goal. Because at that point in time it was kind of like . . . a secret handshake sort of . . . it was very heavily guarded. You know, like a close knit secret".

Despite DJing's male mystique, when Jaala found herself in England helping a friend with their record label business, she decided to spend "about two thousand pounds buying vinyl", using her inheritance from her grandfather. Jaala explained, "I was like, you know what? I'm just going to buy a bunch of stuff and ship it over and away we go". Jaala taught herself how to spin on "a pair of crappy turntables. I didn't even have [Tech 12's] when I first learned . . . And just went from there and learned how to do it myself". Several of my other interview and survey participants who began DJing in the 1990s described a similar story to Jaala's, wherein they approached purchasing equipment and teaching themselves to DJ with an attitude of 'I have no idea what I'm doing but I'm going to do it anyways'. Even though DJ equipment and music were expensive to purchase in the 1990s and even up until the early-mid 2000s, things could also be

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[62] I became completely embarrassed during our interview when I found out that I already knew Jaala - or knew of her at least - but had not recalled the fact. Indeed, I DJ'd a few shifts in her beauty salon in exchange for esthetic services shortly before moving to Toronto in 2009. Jaala had custom built the DJ booth in her salon on a raised platform that was accessible by a short ladder, and I distinctly recall hoisting my record bags over my head and onto the platform before climbing up the ladder to set up and play.

sourced cheaply if you were motivated enough to put in some sweat.

When she started out, Jaala's DJ friends were supportive of her efforts and she was frequently offered opening slots. Jaala elaborates: "I think I spent a lot of time paying my dues, lugging equipment and playing crappy slots, that's for sure . . . I think you have to put your time in, just even learning equipment in clubs . . . the DJs wanted to know that I could actually play first and foremost". After gradually moving to better time slots and gigs and establishing herself as a professional house and electronic DJ in Calgary, Jaala "felt a lot of push back from the guys. And because I was playing with a lot of guys most of the time anyway, I really kind of got a lot of push back. Like they were happy that I was doing it but not happy I was doing it. And so I kind of felt like I was just going to hit a ceiling no matter how hard I try, no matter what I did there things weren't going to move forward". Jaala did do something to move things forward however; she threw a three-day party and intervened in Calgary's sexist DJ scene.

During the course of our interview I was delighted to learn that Jaala, along with another white womxn from Calgary, DJ Magpie, threw the first "three day all-girl rave" in Calgary in 1996, bringing in womxn DJs from all over North America, including Double D and Saskatoon's Carrie Gates, whom I interviewed for this project and discuss later in this chapter. The festival was called the GAIA project, and Jaala explained her impetus for organizing it: "It was a three day . . . party with all female DJs. I think at that point in time I just felt there was so much pushback on girls and I was just kind of being let's throw this three day all female festival kind of thing and it started in Calgary and let's let it rip. Let's have the girls have a chance and let's bring these girls from obscurity and let them come out and play. So, it was a lot of fun".

In perusing a digital copy flyer for the GAIA Project (which Jaala graciously sent me), I noted that the festival featured Portland's DJ Dazy, who established the influential womxn's DJ

collective SisterSF in 1996 (as discussed earlier in this study in the context of Farrugia's (2004, 2012) research). Other womxn DJs listed on the flyer hailed from Vancouver, Victoria, Austin, Seattle and Los Angeles, in addition to Carrie Gates from Saskatoon, and four Calgary DJs: Double D, Jaala, Magpie, and Honeey-Mustard.[63] I asked Jaala how they found the other womxn DJs pre-internet: "That's a really good question. We searched high and low. We found obscure people, we did word of mouth, we found people from Texas. I don't remember–how did we do that? From friends and hearing mix tapes and . . . just trying to track people down and finally finding agents . . . And then we just managed to grab all these people."

**The Impact Of A *Lack* Of Local Networks**

As mentioned, Saskatoon's Carrie Gates played the GAIA project, and I also interviewed her for this study. Both Gates and DJ Hotboxx (my other interview participant from Saskatchewan) spoke passionately during our respective interviews about the impact that a *lack* of womxn's networks had had on their DJ careers and social positioning within the culture, discussing the isolation they experienced as one of very few womxn DJs in Saskatoon. Gates and Hotboxx, both queer white womxn, acknowledged the value of womxn's networks, of playing with, and being in proximity to, other womxn DJs. There were very few womxn DJs in Saskatchewan at the time I interviewed Gates and Hotboxx; the latter had moved to Regina by the time of our interview, wherein she expressed that she only knew of one or two other womxn DJs in Regina. Thus, the situation was different from that of Vancouver, Toronto, and Calgary. These three cities had significantly more population growth than Saskatoon over the past two decades.

Speaking to the desire for homosocial, womxn, non-binary, and/or queer-based DJ

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[63] Honeey Mustard apparently started around the same time as Double D, however I was not able to secure an interview with her, even though I tried to track her down.

networks, Hotboxx discussed how she did not have any friends who DJ'd, nor was there anyone in her social circle that DJ'd, and that "gay dudes can still act like 'bros'" (meaning, gay men can still behave like sexist gatekeepers and establish homosocial networks that exclude womxn). Hotboxx also expressed her frustration with approaching other networks of womxn and/or queer DJs in cities such as Vancouver, explaining that while some people were responsive and warm, others were not, and therefore finding support from other homosocial or queer-based networks in different regions did not seem to be guaranteed. As Hotboxx put it, "it can either be a huge camaraderie or a huge disconnect".

**Carrie Gates**

Canada, although vast, is relatively small in population, and although I had not met Carrie Gates prior to interviewing her over Skype, we are around the same age with several friends in common, and so it was easy to develop a rapport. Gates started going to raves in Saskatoon in 1994, and was friends with a DJ named De-koze, who became one of Toronto's best known DJs after moving there, and still plays out in Toronto on a weekly basis. De-koze encouraged Gates to take up DJing, and she spoke fondly about how "he was really community minded and [into] giving people a chance. He'd try things, he's so positive". Gates had another friend with a radio show on a CCR station who took Gates to the station with her a few times, but would not let Gates touch the equipment, despite the fact that she very much wanted to. Gates recalled how she ended up getting her own radio show:

At that point nobody did an all night show, our station shut off at midnight. But I thought, you know, if I decide to do from one until six in the morning, they're not going to stop me and they have . . . one night of whole night programming. So I did the radio show all night for about eight years. I had to lug my records down there all the time and

sometimes I'd be like going over there at one in the morning in the winter with this box and be like "What the fuck am I doing?" . . . That was really fun because it gave me the freedom to try new things and explore. And it was in the middle of the night and so I had no idea if anyone was listening and it was the only all night show so not many people knew about it except the taxi drivers . . . [and] my friends who were smoking pot and having sex and stuff, I'd always go on the mic and say, "Okay you guys, what are you doing out there?" And then they'd be like, "We're having sex, we're doing drugs, we're driving a taxi".

Around the time that Gates began her radio show in the mid-1990s, she started getting booked to DJ local parties, however she was more experimental than other DJs and would use three turntables, multiple microphones, and other amplified objects in her sets.[64] At that point Gates felt isolated as she did not know any other womxn DJs personally, but she recounted hearing Calgary DJ Double D spin for the first time: "I remember . . . we'd never heard anything like [it] . . . we're all sitting on the dance floor and . . . the fog goes on and the lights go down. Boom. And we all look at each other, 'Oh my God, we're going to get it now, aren't we.' And she just slammed us, it was great. I'll just never forget that moment we're like, it was like time stopped and all our jaws dropped and we're like 'What the fuck is this?'" Gates spoke at length about the impression Double D left on her: "She didn't subscribe to a lot of the . . . visual culture of the rave scene either . . . she owned her space and she had a real presence to her . . . and then her music was so big and dark and it wasn't what people were expecting from a female DJ".

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[64] Gates' description of learning to DJ and practicing on her own reminded me of Double D's description of understanding beat-matching by watching the blinking tail lights of cars, albeit with its own fascinating dimensions: "I lived in this little house by myself and I'd have . . . a couple of CD players, non-direct drive turntable, a radio and a couple of cassette players. And then I would . . . turn everything on all over the house and . . . move some of them closer together and further apart. And so I had this mix going throughout my house. I remember that first year I started DJing too it was like everywhere I went I could just hear every sound . . . mixing in with some record".

Even though De-koze and other male DJs had been supportive of Gates, there was the

suggestion that if she dressed sexy and played more house music (as opposed to "the weirdest

music [she] could find, like world music and children's music combined"), she could obtain

national and international gigs, and further her DJ career. She poignantly expressed feeling

conflicted by these suggestions:

It was really frustrating because I could see this door swinging open to me but I would

have had to give up a part of myself to walk through. And the more I thought about that

and saw what was going [on] around me and seeing no other female DJs really coming

up after a while . . . it just got discouraging. And you get to the gigs and . . . guys

wouldn't believe that you knew what you were doing . . . until you get on the decks with

a couple songs. And then they were really nice to you . . . it was really hard to deal

with. At the beginning of your set also cause you're trying to keep your vibe up . . .

And then like somebody says something to you that just makes you feel kind of like they

want you to be small . . . but then after you play a couple tracks they actually [show]

respect but  . . . it sucked doing that over and over again.

Indeed, when I spoke with Gates she teared up a bit while describing her feelings of isolation as

one of the only established womxn DJs in Saskatoon. Both Gates and Hotboxx specifically

conveyed how they envied the support I had from the local queer and womxns' networks that I

had been a part of in Vancouver, and that I had become a (more peripheral) part of after moving

to Toronto.

After DJing for ten years, Gates morphed into a VJ, or video jockey, which is someone

who mixes visuals in tandem with music. VJing can be a far more technically and materially

demanding art form when compared to DJing. Gates explained how she taught herself to VJ in

much the same way as she taught herself to DJ:

> I thought to myself, I taught myself how to deejay, like nobody ever taught me anything about how to deejay, right. And so I thought well I can do this with video too . . . you've done this DJing stuff for 10 years, it's time to . . . grow as a person and try something new. So I got into video art and I realized . . . oh my God this is crazy. I'd look down at what I was doing and just be like whoa I can't believe this is possible. Like this is so exciting . . . And the technology has been . . . just rushing the last 10 years. I'm really glad I started out when I did so I could see that arc.

>      But now with VJing . . . and now the internet too cause we didn't have the Internet back then, [I'm] exposed to way more people so it's been . . . really positive for me. And it's helped me not feel so isolated here because when people recognize me elsewhere I feel like . . . it sort of validates what I do [whereas] the context I'm in [in Saskatoon] it's like, nobody really understands it or sees [that] I'm part of a bigger community . . . They like the effect of what [I do] but I can't really talk to anybody about it. So it's been good for me to create a better group through the Internet for that sort of thing. And then with the VJing I can do screenings and stuff as well.

As Carrie's story demonstrates, isolation can sometimes lead to innovation, as is the case with Winnipeg's Mama Cutsworth, whom I discussed earlier. This next section explores Cutsworth's impetus for starting her DJ academy, and its impact on the DJ scene in Winnipeg.

**Mama Cutsworth**

A brief and cursory online search for "DJ schools in Canada" brings up DJ instruction schools in Vancouver, Ottawa, Calgary, and several in Montreal and Toronto, most of them founded in the early 2000s or after. Mama Cutsworth (a white womxn) founded her DJ Academy

for All Women and Non-Binary Folks in Winnipeg in 2012. Cutsworth's DJ academy and others like it support beginning DJs by providing space and access to equipment. Cutsworth started DJing in 2004, but had been collecting records since age thirteen; she was thirty-two at the time of our interview. As discussed previously, Cutsworth volunteered at the University of Winnipeg radio station, where she gleaned the technical and cultural capital needed to start DJing. She bought inexpensive belt-drive turntables and a second-hand mixer for fifty dollars, and played on that set up until she had saved up to buy Tech II turntables.

Cutsworth was self-taught, and she expressed how she did not have any womxn role models to look to when she started DJing: "there were a couple other women that were sort of around, but they were in a totally different scene". Friends and romantic partners were encouraging however, and at the time of our interview she was supporting herself entirely by DJing, no small feat in a mid-size city like Winnipeg, which, like many Canadian cities, is a fair distance from other metropolises. Moreover, Cutsworth is able to support herself by DJing while avoiding nightclubs and club-type gigs by throwing her own events, and playing festivals and "a lot of unusual events". She pointed out that living in Winnipeg is affordable, which is one reason why she does not have to work a DJ job, "it's a great city for musicians, for a lot of reasons".

Cutsworth also has the freedom to ensure that her events "have some sort of political, social positive impact", and her mandate for throwing dance parties is that they must be explicitly inclusive and welcoming of queer and trans people. Her commitment extends to her Academy for All Women and Non-Binary Folks. She was nominated for the Making a Mark Award on behalf of the Winnipeg Arts Council in 2017 for her work with the Academy. Cutsworth stated in our 2015 interview that after four seasons of the Academy she had noticed its impact on Winnipeg: "I finally have . . . a critical mass of a group that is buying their own

professional grade equipment, doing gigs, getting paid for them". She helped set up a monthly DJ night for four of her alumni, and although she mentors them "as much as they want, I also want to be as hands off as possible, because I don't want to micromanage them . . . So I want to mentor them, because I didn't have a mentor and I want them to feel included and have fun and learn, and I want to share my philosophy on DJing and how we all need to express ourselves individually through music". She also spoke of the pleasure of watching her students "go from nervous to empowered . . . there's this really amazing sort of story line that happens when you're watching someone - you're rooting for them essentially".

Cutsworth expanded upon her motivations for establishing her DJ academy: "I've been quoted this in interviews, so I feel like now it's a script to say this to you, but I do complain a lot about the lack of women in the town DJing and I felt really isolated. And so even though my partner is a straight male DJ and we have other male DJ friends . . . there are certain things that only I experienced, and when I would talk about them with them, they didn't quite understand what I meant; simply because of gender. Like it wasn't because they weren't trying". At her partner's urging, Cutsworth decided that she needed

> to be proactive rather than lament . . . So it's a very specific reason why I started [the] school. I was like, I want there to be a community of women who won't also feel isolated the way I have felt isolated for so long. And for me it was also really important for it to be any kind of person who identifies as a woman, so like trans, two-spirited, because that's an extra layer of isolation, because sometimes spaces are really horribly transphobic . . . So . . . technically, my academy is called Mama Cutsworth's DJ Academy for All Women and Non-Binary Folks . . . and that has actually been great,

because I've had trans students now - which is important to me.

As our interview was wrapping up, Cutsworth articulated an intriguing idea:

It specifically relates to teaching, in that my guess is, most people who are teaching others how to DJ at this point in time, were self-taught at that first generation, so to speak. And so because of that, I've been thinking a lot about how it takes a lot of self-confidence to decide that your skills you taught yourself are good enough to teach others. And there's no certification, there's no DJ degree, I don't have a B.Ed. in DJing, I just decided that I was good enough to teach. And so I've thought a lot about how women are not typically socialized to have that level of confidence, because it's ballsy, if you will, to determine that about yourself. Or anyone, like male or female. I think it actually takes a lot of guts to decide you're good enough to teach when there wasn't formalized training in your area. And that . . . type of confidence, is still pretty uncommon, I think, with women sometimes. I'm very curious to see what will happen down the road with the fact that now DJ schools are popping up. I don't know anyone who took DJ courses and is now teaching, like that sort of next generation. We're not quite there yet, right. So I'm curious about that, and just sort of thinking about who is running stuff, and that can mean being . . . a program director with [a] festival – women are still not running a lot of those things, and that's what we need next, I think.

I was grateful to Cutsworth for bringing up such interesting points about the impact of formalized DJ training on generations of DJs; her thoughts beget questions for further research. Most of the DJs I interviewed mentioned being informally and/or self-taught; certainly none of them had undergone formal DJ training in a paid/professional environment.

DJ Chiclet was in her mid-30s when I interviewed her, and she described how she taught

herself to DJ in 1997; before that, she had been going to raves since high school. Chiclet "was really inspired by the atmosphere of the rave scene in Toronto in the mid-1990s, and just the sense of acceptance and unity. I know it sounds really cliché, but it really did feel like that. And I just saw the DJ was having so much fun . . . I just grew to love the music and wanted to approach it in a more hands-on way". As mentioned, Chiclet was entirely self-taught, and her description of the time and process it took her to learn to DJ illustrates how different things were twenty-five years ago, particularly for someone who did not have access to equipment, mentors, or networks. Said Chiclet, "I didn't know any DJs at the time so I would just watch . . . what they were doing and try to figure it out. And the Internet at the time was not very well resourced like it is today in terms of DJ tutorials, but I did manage to find some, [but] not with videos or anything. So I got one turntable and a really crappy Discman and a really crappy mixer and . . . basically with the limited internet resources and just going to raves and having an awesome time and just watching DJs I taught myself how to beat-match".

### 4.7.    DJing, Education, Employment and STEM

I wanted to investigate the types of employment that womxn DJs gravitated to, so my survey included the questions "Do you earn part or all of your income from DJing?" and "Do you have a 'day job'? If so, please list your occupation (s)". With regards to my survey respondents, approximately 16 percent said that they did not have a 'day job', which corresponds with the percentage of DJs that stated they make most or all of their income through DJing (approximately 16 percent of all respondents). The approximate 84 percent that reported also having a "day job" were employed predominantly in the fields of creative arts and design, (approximately 18 percent of all respondents), and media and Internet (also approximately 18 percent of respondents). Careers in hospitality and events management, and business, consulting

and management, followed in popularity at 14 and 11 percent respectively.

I was also curious as to how many of my survey and interview subjects were employed in STEM fields in comparison to national averages, in order to look for correlations between DJing as a pursuit, and education and/or employment in STEM fields (or vice versa). To determine the approximate percentage of my survey respondents who were employed in STEM fields, I tallied the percentages for the following distinct employment categories (as determined during the coding process): media/internet, information technology, "other tech job", and science and pharmaceuticals, arriving at the figure of 29.2 percent. Comparatively, womxn comprise 23 percent of science and technology workers among Canadians aged 25-64 (Wall 2019).[65] Interestingly, only approximately 16 percent of my survey respondents mentioned undergoing formal education in one or more of the following STEM fields: electrical engineering, chemistry, biological sciences, energy planning, physics, food science, human kinetics, computer science, aviation, and kinesiology. This figure is considerably lower than the nation at large, wherein women made up 34 percent of the population holding bachelor's degrees in STEM (ibid).

**Michelle D**

Michelle D, a white womxn, was twenty-three at the time of our interview. She started DJing around the age of eighteen, and she remarked that there were virtually no womxn DJs in Edmonton when she started playing in 2010. When I interviewed Michelle D in 2015, she estimated that womxn comprised approximately 10 percent of the DJ population in Edmonton at that time. Michelle D grew up playing several instruments and taking dance classes; she started DJing because she "had always wanted to". While trying hip hop dance lessons Michelle D heard

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[65] "Natural and applied sciences and related occupations: This category contains professional and technical occupations in the sciences, including physical and life sciences, engineering, architecture and information technology". See "Introduction to the National Occupational Classification (NOC) 2016 Version 1.0" (statcan.gc.ca).

a track mixed by a DJ friend of the instructor's that consisted of several songs within three minutes, and she was fascinated with the way that the DJ constructed the "overlapping transitions". Michelle D realized that she was more interested in learning to DJ than dance lessons, so she sought out someone to teach her, and a male friend took her under his wing.

As Michelle D did not yet have access to equipment, she learned how to play at the club with her mentor standing by her and helping her beat-match. She conveyed how "It was really challenging . . . It was not an ideal learning situation". Because she was learning on the job by using the club's CDJs, she developed 'bad habits', such as using the cue and play buttons instead of the jog wheel to adjust the beats in either track in order to match them (I had a similar experience when first learning to DJ, only the 'bad habits' involved turntables and records). Said Michelle B, "Later on, when I got some time alone with the jog wheel, I realized that okay, this is sweet. I'm not so afraid of this now, I can use it".

Michelle D's recollection speaks to how learning in a high pressure situation does not allow you to relax and experiment with confidence, rather (in my experience anyways) you approach every mix just praying you will pull it off. When Michelle B did acquire her own equipment, she purchased production gear as opposed to DJ gear because the former was less expensive, and she wanted to produce her own music. She did purchase a controller however, and Pioneer CDJs and mixer the following year. Michelle D's choice demonstrates a material shift in DJ culture, whereas production gear would have been more expensive than turntables and records 25 years ago, the former's present affordability is having a positive impact on the number of womxn utilizing DAWs (Digital Audio Workstation) to produce music.

At the time of our interview, Michelle D had been touring a bit, playing some smaller cities in Alberta and BC, however she was not playing out as much as she used to, explaining that her

full time job does not allow her as much time to gig. Despite having 'only' a BA in psychology, she is a computer science professor at the French campus of the University of Alberta. Michelle D was hired because the institution badly needed a professor for a computer science information technology course to be taught in French, and they could not find anyone. Michelle D had worked on campus as a computer technician "for years", so she was hired at the last minute. She described how teaching has been a challenge given that she is younger than most of her students.

I asked her if having an aptitude for computer technologies made it easy for her to jump from DJing into music production, and she responded that it was more so the other way around: "I think a lot of the reason I became more proficient with computers is because of production stuff. When I first started, I didn't know how to crack a program. That didn't make any sense to me but then I kind of over time built a mental framework of solving problems in IT. I'm not going to know the answer to every single computer problem that I encounter. But just the fact that I sat there and tackled software for so long trying to get better . . . I kind of now just became–how do I say this–more inclined with technology". Michelle D's transition from novice to expert with digital technologies was impacted by her digital DJ and production skills. It is interesting to consider whether or not learning to DJ on turntables or CDJs would have been similarly influential on Michelle D's learned proficiency with computer technology.

Digital technologies enable several avenues of online promotion, and this is both a blessing and a curse as they generated expectations that DJs should also spend time and effort promoting the gigs that they are DJing, and thus *already* labouring at. During our interview, Michelle D (understandably) complained that promotion was taking up 40 percent of her time spent on her DJ career–time not spent playing, practicing, learning new skills, or producing. Yet these are the things that drew her (and most of my participants) to DJing in the first place.

### 4.8.    Social Media and the DJ Hustle

Unsurprisingly, my survey respondents unanimously engaged in some form(s) of networking and promotion. Said one DJ, "I've hosted and produced my own radio shows since 1994. I've used flyering, word of mouth, postering, CD giveaways, partnering with record shops and festivals. However, now the market has switched almost entirely to internet promotion". Another DJ affirms: "Social networking is the key foundation in today's DJ marketing . . . You simply cannot get by in this field without marketing yourself and being present in the industry . . . I . . . actively seek out media opportunities as well. I no longer make CD[s]". Two respondents mentioned that they used to promote, but now are focused on producing, underscoring again the time-consuming nature of promotion. Said one DJ, "for local gigs–DJ promoting expectations from promoters have gone up substantially over the years. It's like promoters are doing less of the work". This response reflects that of the majority of DJs I surveyed, who also resented the amount of time and energy required to promote. My personal experience working with a mainstream, commercial Vancouver nightclub in the late 2000s was that they expected me–but not my male co-DJ–to be responsible, through promotion, for filling the club with patrons for our weekly residency. Although it was a heterosexist, sexist, classist and corporate club, I question whether, like reproductive and emotional labour, unpaid/uncounted labour in the form of promoting is expected more from womxn DJs than male. Therefore, further research could investigate whether–and if so, in what ways–this phenomenon occurs.

One survey respondent outlined the basic tasks that constitute promoting yourself as a DJ, describing it as their "(least favourite) part of the job. Unavoidable. Totally dependent on Facebook. Have tons of scenester 'friends'. A bit of Twitter and Soundcloud. Post mixes or play on radio a few times a year. Promote other people's music and events. Above all SHOW UP at

other people's events as much as possible: kiss, hug, dance, talk, schmooze with partiers and industry (artists and venue management and staff). Support the scene and stay visible. Approach regulars and make friends." One respondent summed up their attitude towards promoting by saying they do "whatever it takes". (I personally agree with the respondent who simply said, "I hate promoting").

Prior to the onset of social media platforms in the mid-to-late 2000s, promoting consisted mainly of flyering, postering, faxing information to print and radio media, and making mix tapes (and later on, mix CDs). One survey respondent said that they "used to host a radio show and give out CDs in my earlier days of DJing (2003-2009ish)". This particular DJ's timeline is interesting as it indicates how ubiquitous Facebook and other online platforms were by 2014, having replaced types of promotion less mediated by digital technology, such as radio, or distributing print fliers or mix tapes or CDs to fans. The advent of MySpace in the early 2000s, followed by Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, Soundcloud, Mixcloud, Bandcamp, and a host of music-based social media platforms emerging during the 2000s and 2010s added another dimension to promoting, and replaced postering and flyering as the standard ways to promote DJ-based events.

Out of all of the social media platforms listed above, my survey data indicated that Facebook was by far the most popular for promoting, and was used by approximately 84 percent of respondents. Though widely employed, Facebook was not actually 'popular' with my survey respondents, meaning that the platform itself was not well liked overall. By example, in response to the survey question asking if–and if so, in what ways–respondents engaged in promoting as part of their DJ work, one person answered, "Facebook presence, even though I hate FB". Another respondent said, "I use Facebook to promote as it seems to be the best way to connect

with all types of people". The second most popular platform for promoting was Twitter, used by approximately 52 percent of survey respondents. It is notable that both Facebook and Twitter are also key sites of twenty-first century feminist organizing. It is apparent that both platforms, despite their predominantly hegemonic ethos, enable womxn DJs to enact a combination of promoting, networking and activism, and discuss this topic in more detail in Chapter 7 of this study.

DJ Chiclet described how, despite not being adept at self-promotion, she got gigs by making and distributing mix tapes in the 2000s: "back then it was easier to get a gig through a mix tape. So if you did a good mix, if the promoter could hear your mixing ability, and track selection, like they make sure you can beat-match . . . then you could get booked based on that, without them even really seeing you or talking to you. They would book you based on your mix tape alone". With regards to the present, Chiclet said, "I feel like it's changed a lot. It's more about how many people you can bring in rather than like track selection or mixing ability and what not". Indeed, this pressure on DJs to promote their gigs in order to draw large enough crowds has resulted in the current perception amongst DJs that promoters and clubs only care about how many people the DJ draws to the event, therefore it does not matter how good the DJ is (or is not). This attitude is also fed by paranoia about the increased access to DJ culture enabled by digital technologies, as gatekeepers of DJ culture view this phenomenon as diluting or cheapening the integrity of the profession.

The next chapter, titled "Stereotypes Side B",[66] continues to present Chiclet's views

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[66] I titled Chapter 4 and 5 "Stereotypes Side A" and "Stereotypes Side B" respectively to signal the way in which the two sides of a record (side A and side B) often differ thematically. Traditionally with records, side A would contain the song or songs that the producer/label/artist/other stakeholders deemed to be a 'hit', and to encourage radio play. The songs on side A thus may be more polished and thus palatable for mainstream, commercial public consumption. On the other hand, side B often contains the more experimental, perhaps longer, perhaps more moody or introspective songs–the 'weirder' tracks. Moreover, given the binary ways in which gender, race, and sexuality

(specifically, the ways in which she navigates DJ culture as a queer, racialized womxn) alongside the views of other interview and survey participants. While this chapter focused on how Canadian womxn's pathways into DJ culture prior to the 21st century were shaped by specific technologies, resources, and regional and digital networks, the following chapter presents an in-depth look at how my subjects' engagement in DJ culture is mediated by their own modes of identifying, and their societal construction as gendered, racialized, and sexualized subjects.

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are constructed in western society, the idea of two opposite "sides" resonates as these two chapters examine the macro and micro processes shaping binary stereotypes.

# CHAPTER 5: STEREO/TYPES SIDE B

## 5.1. Introduction

*Sometimes . . . I would identify . . . [as] a DJ, I wake up in the morning, I say, I'm a DJ. But around tons and tons of DJs, I would say, I'm a womxn DJ. And around tons of womxn DJs, I'd be like; I'm a queer woman DJ. Or tons of white DJs, I'd be like, well, I'm a black queer woman DJ . . . just to be, like, how do I identify within this group?* (Cozmic Cat)

Above, Cozmic Cat speaks to the ways in which her perception of her identity fluctuates in accordance with her social surroundings, and how she is defined in relation. This chapter examines how my participants mediate their representations in light of societal constructs of gender, race, and sexuality. In addition to the theoretical tools and frameworks utilized in my study thus far, I employ two conceptual frameworks developed by Robin James in her monograph *Resilience and Melancholy* (2015) to analyze my participant data. The first is MRWaSP, or "multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy", which is based upon bell hooks' concept of "white supremacist patriarchy" (hooks 1984). James conceptualized MRWaSP to denote how multi-racial white supremacist patriarchy has adapted in order to function uncontested, replacing classic white supremacist patriarchy by allowing BIPOC, and distinctive, traditionally marginalized peoples considered 'other', membership in Western, neo-liberal societies, depending upon and according to these subjects' conformity with hegemonic identities in terms of class, ability, sexuality, and so forth.

James describes the concept of "Look, I overcame!" (LIO for short)[67] as a "specific iteration of resilience discourse" (79) that demands patriarchal damage be demonstrably,

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[67] James explains further: "The LIO is a specific iteration of resilience discourse, one that involves both *overcoming* (resilience) and *looking*. The looking in LIO discourse is different than the looking involved in the classic feminist concept of the male gaze. Instead of gazing, LIO resilience is a type of post-cinematic (to use Steven Shaviro's term) controlling image" (2015, 79).

spectacularly "overcome". The illusion of this individual "overcoming" works to maintain MRWaSP by reinforcing the neoliberal notion that a person can overcome anything 'if they just try hard enough', masking the reality that patriarchy exerts institutional oppressions that can only be overcome collectively. LIO also masks the reality that any/all institutional oppressions are interlocking, whereby patriarchy cannot be eradicated unless racism, homophobia, and other relative institutional oppressions are eradicated. On this note, the patriarchal male enemy in LIO is stereotypically constructed as Black or brown. James' analysis of popular music provides a sonic blueprint to illustrate how both LIO and MRWaSP operate, further rendering both concepts particularly useful for studying how different identity factors intersect to mediate the experiences of womxn DJs in Canada.

In the next section I draw on the work of Canadian anti-racist scholars, specifically Das Gupta (1999) and Cole (2020), to discuss the shadows of Canada's multicultural policy in light of my respondents' comments. DJ Chiclet, who is of Asian background, describes how her experiences of not just performing, but doing mundane things like parking a car, are mediated by the 'polite racism' that infuses our national brand of multiculturalism, as well as tropes of Asian femmes' assumed (non) aggressiveness (and by extension, competency). Following, I examine how some white survey respondents interpret and respond to questions about racialization, whiteness, gender, and/or sexuality in relation to their lives and DJ careers, focusing on how they employ the concept of LIO to negate or dismiss sexism's impact. I consider how refusing to discuss oneself in terms of racialization and whiteness, and/or refusing to acknowledge white privilege with regards to access to DJ culture, works to uphold MRWaSP through the narrative of LIO.

The second half of this chapter continues to explore my participants' perceptions of how

their gender, race/ethnicity, and sexuality have impacted their DJ careers. I look specifically at how sexist, racist, and classist constructs of gender, racialization, whiteness, sexuality, and material practices combine to produce the binary trope of the female DJ as either a gimmick or a token, and the ways in which womxn DJs work within and/or outside of this binary. I conclude this chapter by circling back to my discussion of how technology is used to both restrict and enable womxn's access to DJ culture, illustrating how the gimmick or inauthentic womxn DJ who lacks credibility is directly equated with DJing on digital equipment, as opposed to turntables and records.

I complete this preface by noting that I approached the subject of identity differently in the interviews than in the survey. In the survey, I asked direct, similarly structured questions about each identificatory factor (gender, race, and sexuality; see Appendix C for a list of survey questions), whereas I simply asked my interview participants, "how do you identify?" and then let their responses guide the discussions. If interview participants were unsure, or seemed hesitant while answering, I provided clarification by specifying that they could talk about DJ identities, personal identities, or both, in order to give them some talking prompts. Therefore, I sought to take this difference in question design into consideration when comparing and contrasting my interview and survey data.

### 5.2    Multiculturalism, MRWaSP, Whiteness, and "Look, I Overcame!"

Das Gupta (1999) outlines the positive and negative aspects of Canada's official multicultural policy: "On the positive side, multiculturalism has provided a context in which disempowered and marginalized groupings have been able to make progressive demands from the state. It has provided a political climate in which overt racism and discrimination has been made illegal. However, it has also produced a peculiar brand of 'Canadian' racism described by

many as 'polite', 'subtle', 'systemic,' and even 'democratic'" (187).[68] Chiclet shared her insights

on the nuances of multiculturalism's influence on colonial Canadian culture, describing an

example of how discourse around race can be deemed offensive in a country built on institutional

racism. After I asked Chiclet how she identified in addition to the factors already touched upon in

our interview (during which she said directly, "I'm a woman and Asian. I'm gay"), she said,

> It's not PC to say, but I'm white-washed . . . the Chinese community . . . call . . . people
>
> like me a [term] which is a little bit derogatory and it means . . . a section of a bamboo
>
> closed off at both ends so you can never be one or the other, you're somewhere in between
>
> . . . I think we're more sensitive to it in Toronto. Like in Canada in general, especially in
>
> the more populated cities . . . if somebody calls somebody a banana in Toronto it's . . .
>
> taken as more offensive than . . . anywhere in Europe . . . because we're more sensitive to .
>
> . . multiculturalism [in Canada]. It's part of our policy.

Chiclet is frequently reminded of her racialization relative to the normative (read: white)

'Canadian'. She described how a bouncer outside of a Toronto strip club called out "Chinatown"

when she walked by, and she stopped and challenged him by asking him to repeat what he said,

unsurprisingly, he was embarrassed and did not speak further. Said Chiclet, "people just . . .

make these assumptions about you because . . . you're a woman . . . and you're Asian and that

you won't react. You know, the submissive Asian woman basically". Despite being highly

visible as an Asian femme, Chiclet also spoke about how her queerness was rendered invisible:

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[68] Multiculturalism became official state policy under the Trudeau government in 1971, and entrenched in law in 1988 (Ansari 2017). According to Thobani (2007), in re-defining Canada's national identity from a basis of exclusion to inclusion–as immigration policy was re-drafted in the 1960s purportedly to evaluate potential immigrants on the basis of skills as opposed to ethnicity/nationality–the nation-state intended to signify its "commitment to valuing cultural diversity . . . The adoption of multiculturalism enabled the nation's self-presentation on the global stage as urbane, cosmopolitan, and at the cutting edge of promoting racial and ethnic tolerance among western nations . . . Multiculturalism as official policy furthered popular perceptions of the nation having made a successful transition from a white settler colony to a multiracial, multi-ethnic, liberal-democratic society" (144-5).

"I'm not very . . . butch . . . in any way. People also think that I'm [heterosexual]. So I've experienced a lot of heterosexism as well".

Chiclet was very straightforward about how her gender, race and sexuality impacted her experiences working as a DJ: "Like I don't know if it's a gender thing because . . . I'm . . . overly humble sometimes. People just don't expect much from me and then when I can do something they're super surprised". She described how "if you're good, like if you actually know what you're talking about they're surprised. And there have been a couple of times where even with my [male] friends they couldn't figure out . . . what was wrong with the [DJ] mixer and I went up and I looked at it [and] I said, 'Oh, here' [is the problem]. And [still] all of them were talking together, 'Oh, what's going on? And I look at it and I fix it and they don't say anything. They just pretend I'm not there". Chiclet is seemingly invisible to her male peers when she actively demonstrates her expertise.

Chiclet's experiences as a queer Asian femme confronting stereotypes of passivity extend past her experiences working with male DJs, as illustrated by the strip club bouncer's harassment. Chiclet related another mundane example, wherein her demonstration of a certain technical mastery made her hyper-visible in its instance, as opposed to rendered invisible as in the aforementioned experience with her male DJ friends: "I drive a stick shift and one time I was parallel parking and I did a good job, let's just say that. And then these men were standing there and they applauded. Okay, is that because I'm Asian or because I'm a woman or both? It's annoying. But if you don't laugh you'll kill someone". Chiclet's description of the men's micro aggressions strikes me as somewhat emblematic of multiculturalism. The men's applause –while seemingly friendly and celebratory–also signifies an expression of surveillance, judgment, and the confounding of low expectations based upon racist and sexist stereotypes. Chiclet's narrative

illuminates how she has to navigate racism and/or heterocentricity as a queer and racialized womxn, and her experiences illustrate the Eurocentric attitudes hiding behind the veneer of multiculturalism, "the rhetoric of tolerance and successful pluralism, with which mainstream White Canadians identify so lovingly" (Burman 2016, para 1). Chiclet's experiences demonstrate how MRWaSP harmonizes with multiculturalism.

Chiclet was one of the five (out of a total of six) interview respondents who identified as BIPOC; she first mentioned her racialization when I asked her the question, "What do you think are some of the different challenges female DJs face?" Immediately, Chiclet brought up her intersectional identity in regard to race, sexuality, and gender. The other four respondents that identified as BIPOC discussed their racialization after I gave a verbal prompt. For example, Anuxa, Paula, and Tracey D did not mention their ethnicities until I asked the question "how do you identify?" at which point they each articulated their ethnicity, and in the case of Paula and Tracey D, their sexual orientations as queer. DJ Ariel responded to the 'identity question' by referring to her taste in music, and how her preference for west coast hip hop identified her as more laid back. Ariel mentioned her mixed ethnicity further on in our interview however, when discussing how and why she was an outcast in high school, and how she turned to music, which she (like many of my participants) said saved her life. Lastly, Fawn BC was the sole BIPOC interview participant who did not mention her ethnicity; specifically, her Indigeneity, which I am aware of as we are friends 'in real life', and she frequently plays Indigenous cultural events. Fawn did mention being queer during our interview however, as discussed later in this chapter.

**Whiteness and "Look, I Overcame!"**

In contrast, in response to the question "how do you identify?" 75 percent of my white interview respondents (fifteen out of twenty) did not bring up their whiteness, nationality, or

ethnicity during our interview. Regarding the five white respondents who did mention whiteness, two spoke indirectly about whiteness to different degrees, with one describing how it was hard for her not to see injustices happening, specifically racial injustice, and the second describing how, although she is aware that she is 'Canadian', she does not consider it to be a part of her identity on a daily basis. The remaining three white respondents directly acknowledged their whiteness; two of them spoke briefly of having an "advantage" or a "privilege" after I gave a direct prompt about whiteness in regard to identity. This is not to say that any or all of my white interview respondents are unaware of their white privilege, nor that they were reluctant or avoidant to talk about it, as again, I did not ask them a direct question regarding racialization and/or whiteness. Rather, I am reporting that the majority of my white interview participants did not bring up their whiteness or topics around racialization during our interview. This data is not particularly surprising, given the vast amount of scholarly research demonstrating how the majority of white people residing in the western world regard whiteness as an invisible norm. This ability to unwaveringly see oneself as central in society is a key aspect of white privilege, bestowed upon white people by white colonial supremacy.[69]

In saying that white people regard whiteness as an invisible norm, it is important to note that whiteness is only invisible to white people. Sarah Ahmed explains:

It has become commonplace for whiteness to be represented as invisible, as the unseen or the unmarked, as a non-colour, the absent presence or hidden referent, against which all other colours are measured as forms of deviance (Dyer 1997; Frankenberg 1993). But of course whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it. For those who don't, it is hard

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[69] "White power works in concert with other forms of power - including capitalism (the dominance of private profit over public benefit); ableism (the dominance of people deemed able-bodied); cisnormativity (the dominance of people who fit a strict male-female gender binary); patriarchy (the dominance of men); and heteronormativity (the dominance of people who, based on the gender binary, only accept heterosexuality as normal) - they create what feminist scholar and author bell hooks described as 'dominator culture'" (Cole 2020, 29).

not to see whiteness; it even seems everywhere. Seeing whiteness is about living its

effects, as effects that allow white bodies to extend into spaces that have already taken

their shape, spaces in which black bodies stand out, stand apart, unless they pass, which

means passing through space by passing as white . . . The project of making whiteness

visible only makes sense from the point of view of those for whom it is invisible. (Ahmed

2004, para 1)

Ahmed stresses that it was not white theorists such as Ruth Frankenberg and Richard Dyer who

first named and critiqued whiteness, pointing out the earlier, groundbreaking work of Audre

Lorde as a prominent example: "As Lorde shows us, the production of whiteness works precisely

by assigning race to others: to study whiteness, as a racialized position, is hence already to

contest its dominance, how it functions as a 'mythical norm' (1984: 116)" (Ahmed 2004, para 2).

I will now shift my focus from my interview data to my survey data as I continue to

examine racialization and whiteness. In the survey, I phrased my question regarding participants'

conception of themselves in terms of race as follows: "Do you identify as a person of colour or a

racialized person? Do you identify as an Indigenous person? If neither, do you identify as

white?" It is worth noting that the question did not ask people to elaborate further by naming or

discussing their ethnicity, however there was a field for comments in case people desired to

comment. The majority of survey participants who identified as white did not articulate if, or

how, their whiteness impacts their experiences as DJs and/or humans, save for one respondent

who wrote, "I was born in England. I am as white as it gets. I am from the country that colonized

the world". Eleven people skipped the question entirely.

In addition to those eleven people that skipped the question, another ten people responded

to the question regarding racialization by declaring *why* they chose *not* to identify themselves

racially or ethnically at all. Some examples of these types of responses are as follows: "I am not racist", "I try to identify with everyone as a soul in skin and bones", "I am mostly human, pretty pasty; party dragonkitty", "I have bloodlines but I don't identify with anything other than human", and "I'm a person". Two people just typed in "na" and "nah" respectively. Out of the aforementioned ten respondents that did not name an ethnicity, two indicated that they might possibly consider themselves racialized to a degree. Said one respondent, "My friends call me 'persuasion' haha. Most of my friends are white however my parents are immigrants and I've been fetishized as 'exotic' my whole life". The second respondent simply commented, "olive skin".

A few white respondents seemed to minimize their whiteness in various ways. For example, one person said, "I am white. But again, it's not really how I introduce myself". This response speaks to how white people–unlike BIPOC people–are not routinely asked about where they are from, and/or their ethnicity. Said another white respondent, "I prefer not to identify myself in terms of race which is a harmful fallacy that tricks people into thinking they are different from their fellow human beings. On governmental forms, however, when asked, the closest 'racial group' title seems to be 'Caucasian' or 'white'". This response reminds me of the oft-said phrase, "I don't see colour". Saying "I prefer not to," suggests a choice as to whether or not one sees their ethnicity as a part of their identity that impacts how others see them, thereby demonstrating the awareness that they can avoid racialization. In stating that race is a fallacy that "tricks" people into "thinking they are different from their fellow human beings", the potential to acknowledge systemic racism is reduced to acknowledging personal prejudice, as opposed to acknowledging institutional racism. Again, multiculturalism works to minimize the impact and acknowledgement of white supremacy by providing white people with a framework within which

we can consider ourselves to be benevolent and accepting of marginalized groups.

Desmond Cole discusses how "the modern incarnation of whiteness resists exposure and definition - white supremacy thrives in large part by avoiding being named or identified. When confronted with its own violence, whiteness simply flips the script . . . today whiteness is often about endless disavowal. Whiteness pretends to forget its own name when called, and refuses to acknowledge its desire for dominance" (Cole 2020, 30). Another white respondent demonstrates Cole's point regarding white people's ability to "flip the script", suggesting that they themselves could be considered an ethnic minority, due to their appropriative hair style. In response to the question regarding racialization/whiteness, this respondent replied: "White with dreadlocks. One time in Vietnam someone asked if I was an ethnic minority. Strictly speaking I'm not but I could see that for cultures that denote ethnicity through headdress that my dreads were confusing!" As Yancy states, "As the transcendental norm, whiteness actively militates against the recognition of itself as a problem" (2014, 2).

Avoiding a discussion of one's identity in terms of racialization and whiteness, and by extension, not acknowledging the experience and impact of one's white privilege, is necessary in order to maintain LIO in service of MRWaSP. Interestingly, survey respondents who identified as white, or did not identify their ethnicity, invoked discourses of resilience (and by extension, the "overcoming" embodied by LIO) in response to the 'gender question'. However, these same respondents did not invoke ideas of resilience in response to the question concerning racialization and whiteness. The difference in responses to the two questions could be attributed to the ways in which respondents' white privilege does not (noticeably) present them with any damages or situations to "overcome". However, these respondents may perceive that their gendered identity as 'female' *does* present damage to overcome. This idea is described by James as a second

"layer" interwoven into the "new sexism" that treats "the negative effects of sexism as individual women's failure, not society's failure, it hides the fact of ongoing social injustice behind the veneer of feminist victory" (2015, 78).

In discussing the conceptual foundations of LIO, James details how cultural ideals of white femininity shifted during the twentieth and (early) twenty-first centuries, from an emphasis on fragility to an emphasis on resilience as symbolized by LIO:

> Traditionally, ideal (by which I mean: white, bourgeois, able-bodied, cisgendered) femininity required the performance of fragility . . . As an ideal and a disciplinary technique, fragility marks race and class-based distinctions among women, separating out the 'good' women from the 'bad' . . . Fragility traditionally separated privileged femininities from rougher, less dainty, less privileged ones. Now, however, fragility is increasingly attributed to minority women, especially third-world women of color, who are represented as precarious victims in need of rescue. This shift . . . is the effect of neoliberalism's restructuring of ideal femininity. MRWaSP rewards privileged women for being resilient. (2015, 80-81)

James' describes how the resilience discourse of LIO reconfigures strength "as *flexibility* rather than rigidity; instead of preventing bad things from happening, you are optimally prepared to meet any and all challenges. Resilience is the ability to recover from disaster" (2015, 78). James explains further:

> Traditionally, (white) women were supposed to be passive, silent, and fragile . . . We now expect individual women to overcome the damage wrought by traditional femininity (negative body image, objectification, sexual assault and/or domestic violence, silencing, etc.): they need to "lean in" and be tough, be "all about that bass," and so on. *Resilience*

*still requires women to be hurt by the same old sexism while also creating a new kind of*

*sexism on top of it.* This new sexism has a few interwoven layers: (1) it makes women

responsible for fixing sexism, thus maintaining the gendered division of labor that has

women cleaning up after everyone else's mess; (2) treating the negative effects of sexism

as individual women's failure, not society's failure, it hides the fact of ongoing social

injustice behind the veneer of feminist victory; (3) it replaces what gender studies

scholars call the virgin/whore dichotomy with the opposition between resilience and lazy

backwardness so that women who don't appear to be resilient are seen as both

abnormally gendered and sexually deviant; (4) it instrumentalizes women, using them as

tools to cut the post-racial color line and hide white supremacy behind the veneer of

racial diversity. (2016, para 4)

LIO is expressed sonically in EDM through a "noisy" demonstration of overcoming patriarchal

oppression. James explains how EDM's signature sounds, namely the prevalent 'soars' and

'drops' that are the genre's trademark audio flourishes, function as auditory manifestations of

neoliberal feminine ideals of "resilience". This resilience discourse "reproduces the relations of

domination and inequality that it claims to solve . . . We expect women to perform a specific kind

of resilience: they must loudly and spectacularly demonstrate that they have overcome

patriarchal oppression. Noisy feminism is both a new gender norm for women to embody and a

tool white supremacy uses to scapegoat non-white men for lingering sexism" (James 2016, para

3). By analyzing the vocals of Florence Welch and music from other white EDM singers, and

producers, James demonstrates how EDM has co-opted (formally) underground electronic music

genres and recouped them to maintain normative hegemony.

### 5.3.    Gender and Sexuality

I now turn my focus to the survey's 'gender question', which I phrased as follows: "Do you identify as female, transgendered, gender-queer, cisgendered, and/or otherwise?" I deeply regret not including the term 'non-binary' in the list of suggested words and phrases listed; sadly, it was not in my lexicon in 2014 when I designed and administered the survey. Therefore, I wonder if (and if so, how many) respondents would have described themselves as 'non-binary' if I had made the phrase a prompt in the question also. Although the question being discussed was open-ended, most responses were straightforward and consisted of just one word, thus the data only required four codes, as follows: female (approximately 92 percent), gender queer (approximately 5 percent), trans masculine and/or transgender (approximately 2 percent, or three respondents), and four respondents (approximately 5 percent) declined to claim any gender identity. Within this latter group, two stated "no", one stated "nope", and the fourth declared, "I'm an artist". One respondent phrased their answer in the same way that they did with their answers to the other two questions regarding identity, by stating, "I am female, but it's not really how I introduce myself". Out of the 113 respondents that completed the survey, seven skipped the 'gender question'.

Further to the theme of "I'm human" (which implies that one is not defined by gender, race, or sexuality), some respondents used the 'gender question' as a platform to rail against being known as a "female DJ", or to discuss their feelings about the concept. Notably, the survey question as worded does not reference DJing at all. I did not ask if respondents identified as a "female DJ", rather I only asked if they identified *as female or otherwise*. Here again, I wonder if respondents' awareness of my feminist ideologies influenced their answers. One participant declared, "I do not identify myself as a female DJ. I just DJ." Another respondent replied, "not really but am proud to be one of the first professional turntable/electronic female DJs in Canada". This latter respondent seems to both reject and embrace the ways in which their gender impacts

their experiences as a DJ, demonstrating the strategic ambivalence deployed by some womxn DJs when negotiating their socially gendered identities. This attitude reminds me of LIO, in that gender–specifically, female-ness–is viewed as something to be overcome on the road to success, as opposed to recognizing the structural oppressions that work to keep womxn from DJing and engaging in other occupations socially constructed as male pursuits. Another respondent said, "I'd prefer to not be identified as a gendered anything. [I] absolutely hate being called a 'female' dj, musician, producer etc. take it out of the dialogue!" And another DJ responded that they would "rather be seen as a musician and DJ, before gender. However, being a female DJ has allowed me to stand out, and I've never felt it as a block towards moving forward. I tend not to surround myself with people that make it an issue". This last response implies that sexism can be avoided by avoiding certain people, again positioning sexism as something solely personal problem, as opposed to institutional. Again, these responses are indicative of an attitude that female-ness is something to be overcome, as opposed to patriarchy itself. Perhaps putting a 'nice Canadian' spin on LIO, two respondents sought to make it clear that although they identified as "female", that did not mean that they did not like other humans. For example, one survey participant identified as an "Open minded female who loves everyone. Labels are for soup cans". Another participant said, "female, and everybody is awesome", as though to lay claim to a feminine gender identity might indicate that you do not like other gendered identities.

One problem with rejecting the idea that gender factors into how womxn DJs perceive ourselves or are perceived publically is that we face being gendered regardless–by audiences, other DJs, and whomever else we cross paths with in our industry. We are gendered (and by extension, often sexualized) whether we invite it and/or like it or not.  Ottawa-based DJ Jas Nasty spoke succinctly to this theme in her email response to the interview question, "Do you think

female DJs face different challenges than male DJs?" Jas Nasty wrote, "I think female DJs often face being sexualized or gendered in a way that male DJs are not. Or, set up in a specifically female gendered role when often we are not looking to be assessed for our gender or appearance or anything other than ability, talent, and music selection–skills as a DJ in general–no matter how we choose to dress or identify for any given gig".

Despite the inevitability of the male gaze, womxn DJs still make choices about their appearances according to strategies that attempt to control or contain their gendered representations. Several of my interview and survey subjects spoke about the subtle and diverse ways in which they altered their clothing or overall appearance to suit the type of gig they were playing, and this was true to my experience as a DJ also. I imagine womxn take a different approach to dressing for work than that taken by a straight, cisgendered male DJ who might just view clothing and appearance as either casual or formal, as opposed to signaling his sexual preferences (queer or straight) and/or availability ('sexy'/not 'sexy').

Participants' practice of altering appearances to suit the work environment extended to expressions of gender identity also, and some survey respondents used more than one label to denote their gender. By example, a survey respondent that identified as both "female" and "gender-queer" commented on the potential for fluidity when it came to their gendered presentation as a DJ, and how they play with their image, and hence identity, in order to suit the gig. When asked how they identified in terms of gender, they stated: "Female. Sometimes present as trans and/or butch. Sometimes femme it up for a straight crowd and because women are more 'interesting' and memorable behind the decks. Seems wise for the brand". Their response suggests that they are aware of how the concept of 'women' is constructed according to what is perceived to be 'feminine', and of the fetishization of womxn DJs in particular, in that their

female-ness is what makes them more " 'interesting' and memorable behind the decks".

Therefore, this DJ uses different gender performances (butch, femme) as tools to advance their

career ("seems wise for the brand").

This same DJ also expressed fluidity in their answers to the survey questions about

sexuality and racialization, identifying as "POC. Sometimes pass as white (light skinned) but I

become clearly immigrant pretty fast. I'm Lebanese." In response to the 'sexuality' question,

they commented: "out L, G, B and closet T. Often seen at the club with one or two visible

girlfriends (I'm poly). Often get asked about that." A different respondent that also identified as a

person of colour seemed fairly comfortable as well in adopting different labels, gendered and

otherwise. In response to the question regarding how they identified in terms of gender, they

stated: "Mostly genderqueer but still use female pronouns if they are needed". In response to the

survey question "Do you identify as LGBTTIQQ2SA? If not, would you identify as "straight" or

heterosexual?" they commented, "Yes I am one or two or a few of those letters in there!"

As discussed, only my survey respondents were asked a specific question about their

sexuality. Twelve people skipped this question, four more than the number of respondents that

skipped the question regarding gender identity. For reference, respondents were perhaps most

avoidant of the 'race question', as again eleven people skipped it, and an additional ten people

responded by explaining that they chose *not* to identify themselves racially or ethnically at all.

Again, the 'sexuality question' was open-ended, and again, most responses were short and

straightforward. In fact, there was even less discussion from participants than that which

occurred in response to the 'gender question'. In contrast, because I did not ask my interviewees

directly about sexuality, some interview participants did not address their sexual preferences (or

lack thereof), just as some did not address racialization or whiteness. Again, all of my interview

subjects addressed their gender, but again, this could be due in no small part to their recognition of gender as a main point of interest in my study.

Interestingly, some respondents may have been offended by the 'sexuality question' to some degree, as a few survey respondents asked how or why the way they identified sexually was relative to my study, as illustrated by the following comments from the survey: "I would prefer not to answer this question", "Is that important?" "N/A", and again, just plain "no". Once more, some survey respondents reiterated the theme that "labels suck", as similarly expressed in some of the responses to the questions about gender and race. For example: "Labels suck. Period", "I don't identify as any label really", "I'm neither here nor there. I don't believe in labels unless they are telling me what ingredients are in the food I eat", "Free love, all love. =)", and again, "I'm a person". Personally, my favourite answer to the 'sexuality question' was simply put: "Depends ;)". Lastly, one respondent stated, "Don't quite understand the question but will go with straight". These comments illustrate how sexuality, like race and gender, plays a key role in whether–and if so, to what degree–womxn are allowed to participate in an androcentric DJ culture. Womxn DJs, like all womxn, are generally evaluated based upon our appearances and subsequently assigned a value judgment ('a perfect 10!'), often in the form of a stereotype ('bombshell', 'tom girl', 'exotic', etc.). Therefore, we often seek to regulate our appearances in order to navigate and/or challenge sexism and objectification in the DJ workplace.

Farrugia's research on how womxn DJs construct our appearances, and how our appearances influence public perceptions of our sexuality, revealed three main categories: "sex kitten, t-shirt DJ and dyke" (2012). Farrugia describes how the term "sex kitten" refers "to women whose image conforms to heterosexist beauty standards (such as being thin and having long hair) and who are sexually provocative, wearing tight and/or revealing clothing" (44). The

term t-shirt DJ refers to womxn DJs who are careful not to call attention to their gender nor perceived sexual appeal, thus they adopt the dress of the average male DJ: "Male DJs tend to wear t-shirts and jeans onstage. Thus, in the minds of the women I interviewed, adopting this standard wardrobe helps ensure that they are onstage because of their DJ skills and not because of their sex–at least not exclusively" (50-51). The majority of the women Farrugia interviewed "felt a divide between themselves and the sex kitten persona" (47), and she explains how "The dichotomy that heterosexual female DJs in particular struggle with–to be t-shirt DJs or sex kittens–arises from the environment in which DJs pursue paid gigs" (44), and this dichotomy "is problematic because it assumes that a woman can be either a sex kitten or a good DJ, but never both" (51). To sexualize yourself in any way is viewed as an attempt to obtain professional performance opportunities *without* having merit (or, without "overcoming"). James (2015, 2016) expresses this attitude in her aforementioned discussion of how discourses of the "new feminism" have replaced the virgin/whore dichotomy with the lazy/resilient dichotomy.

There is a collective adamancy among womxn DJs that we are only credible if our gendered sexuality has no impact on why we are booked. Still, we might claim gender as a part of our identity when the time comes to stand out from the (often male) crowd. Recall the DJ discussed earlier who stated that she was "proud to be one of the first professional turntable/electronic female DJs in Canada". I posit that this respondent is comfortable invoking gender in this case *only because it cannot be used against them to refute their credibility*. If accolades have been publically granted, we can defend ourselves from accusations of being gimmicks, and thereby claim an authentic, albeit tokenized, DJ identity. As mentioned, Farrugia (2012) identified how many heterosexual and queer femme DJs struggle with being represented as either a t-shirt DJ with credibility, or a sex kitten lacking credibility. In the next section I focus

on the ways in which these binary stereotypes are duly manifested in the concepts of the gimmick and the token. Following, I discuss how anxieties around digital technology impact womxn's representations as either gimmicks or tokens. I conclude this chapter by briefly taking up Farrugia's third category, that of the "dyke" DJ.[70]

## 5.4.      The Gimmick and the Token

As stated throughout this study, womxn DJs are often constructed in a binary way as either gimmicks or tokens based upon our appearance and the degree to which we appear to be sexualized. Furthermore, the ways that we work both with and against these binary representations differ according to our differently situated identities. The gimmick and token binary is rooted in the homosocial construction of DJ culture, which results in the public perception that it is unproblematic for men to be DJs, and problematic for womxn to be DJs. This problematic is dealt with by labeling womxn DJs as either tokens or gimmicks according to our perceived skill level. However, the ideology underlying these stereotypes rest upon the virgin/whore dichotomy that has dominated womxn's representation in western culture for centuries (Berger 1972; Guerilla Girls 2003; hooks 2015).

James (2015) describes how "The classic virgin/whore dichotomy was often used to mark differences between white women, who were stereotypically good and virginal, and non-white women, who were stereotypically bad, unruly, and impure. The LIO narrative re-cuts the

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[70] It is important to note that of the DJs that participated in Farrugia's study, "almost all of the women were white, with the exception of two Asian Americans and two African Americans . . . thus, the racial composition of the participants in this study reflects the high proportion of white participants in EDM culture overall" (2012, 12). Therefore, I must be cognizant that the categories "sex kitten, t-shirt DJ and dyke" as derived by Farrugia are based on data from mainly white participants. Further research should engage with a sample composed solely or mainly of BIPOC DJs, as they quite likely face additional and/or different barriers in DJ culture as compared to white womxn. Keenan's reference to bell hooks helps to elaborate my point: "hooks brings up something that comes into play with many women musicians who have embraced empowered sexuality in their images and in performance: the standards of who can play *against* type and those who are playing *into* a type are moveable, depending on boundaries of race, class, and sexual orientation. These standards also affect the perception of which musicians can be considered feminists, something that has implications along lines of race and class" (Keenan 2015).

virgin/whore dichotomy to function in MRWaSP. 'Good girls' are resilient, whereas 'bad girls,' insufficiently feminine subjects, continue to be fragile and in need of rescue or protection. If women of colour are resilient enough, they are included within MRWaSP privilege; if they are insufficiently resilient, they are further marginalized as women of color" (85). James demonstrates how the virgin/whore dichotomy equates with the opposition "between resilience and lazy backwardness so that women who don't appear to be resilient are seen as both abnormally gendered and sexually deviant" (ibid). The dichotomies of virgin/whore and resilient/lazy interact to manifest DJ culture's own sexist dichotomy, that of the gimmick/token.

Unsurprisingly, the gimmick stereotype evokes a combination of the lazy and whore stereotypes, wherein womxn DJs use our sexuality, instead of hard work, to get ahead, thereby taking advantage of our objectification in a sexist society; an act which is viewed as lazy, rather than subversive. The gimmick is a whore who is too lazy to become a good DJ by (assumed) meritocracy, and this laziness demonstrates a lack of resilience, or ability to overcome her gendered sexuality, so she sleeps her way into her gigs. The opposite of being saddled with the lazy/gimmick stereotype is to individually overcome our exclusion from an androcentric DJ culture, meaning that womxn DJs who work hard and keep our legs closed (so to speak) are therefore resilient enough to earn token status as 'one of the boys'. The virgin is a good girl who works hard at DJing in order to overcome her female-ness (the gendered sexuality that inherently hampers her credibility) and achieve token t-shirt DJ status. In this way, the representation of the womxn DJ as a gimmick is inherently sexualized, as I discussed in detail in Chapter 2 in light of the sexist attitudes expressed by Brewster and Broughton in *Last Night a DJ Saved My Life* (2014). This phenomenon manifests itself in how the assignation of the categories of token or gimmick–again, purportedly based on skill-level–are heavily impacted by a womxn DJ's

appearance. If we fit the hegemonic ideals of attractiveness and sexiness, then we risk being viewed as a gimmick regardless of our skill level. The gimmick is inherently sexualized and carries with her the attendant (sexual) tensions; the focus on appearance via slut shaming is a way to characterize femme womxn DJs as gimmicks, as well as police our engagement with DJing. Therefore, womxn DJs must work to downplay our sexuality while continually proving our skills in order to claim credibility as a token. Failure to do so means running the risk of being regarded as a gimmick.

Chapter 2 of this study examined how the history of DJ culture has been predominantly written by men to be about men, with Brewster and Broughton playing an influential role in constructing DJ history as resolutely male. This rigid view results in a "false reality of that history–affecting and even interpellating the culture" (Mitchell 2020).[71] Womxn DJs were discouraged from DJing because we did not see ourselves represented as DJs. Then when we apparently started DJing alongside men in the 1990s, only those of use who "admirably" made sure we were not getting booked on the basis of our appearance could achieve credibility (according to Brewster and Broughton). By example, I have discussed how Brewster and Broughton applauded DJ Rap for "overcoming" her past as a topless model (read: lazy whore) and "admirably" (2014, 464) downplaying (read: overcoming) media representations of her hegemonic sexual appeal.

The womxn DJs I interviewed all recognized the token/gimmick binary and used various strategies to negotiate it. DJ L'Oqenze is a highly respected hip hop DJ residing in Toronto, a mother, and Black. When I interviewed her in 2010, she described her struggle to be recognized for her skill and style, and not her gender: "I guess the worst kind of compliment that someone

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[71] Here, I am grateful to Allyson Mitchell for her comments regarding the impact of the ossification of the history of DJ culture.

can give is that you're good for a girl". L'Oqenze stated that she realized she had become skilled enough to be worthy of her peers' respect when she was asked to be a resident DJ alongside two established and respected male DJs: "when I ended up doing that night, with those guys, that's when I realized, I can hang with the boys. Like I can really hold my own with the boys". As Craig and Kynard (2017) point out, it is crucial for womxn hip hop DJs to be highly skilled: "'Being skilled' here is about something much more than a kind of minimalistic equality equation where a woman strives to be as good as a man. 'Skilled' in this context means controlling . . . the language of hip-hop deejaying and therefore how an audience will consume a woman deejay's presence and body. Failure to do so would mean a loss in credibility not merely for her own professional self, but for women deejays in general" (146). For L'Oqenze, making it as a DJ implicitly meant making it in spite of her gender, and her access to DJ culture depended upon the public recognition that she is skilled enough to "hang with the boys".

At the time of our interview in 2014, DJ Rhiannon, a white womxn, had been taking a very different approach to L'Oqenze by simultaneously embracing *both* gimmick *and* token status in order to get noticed in a highly competitive industry. In an attempt to break out of the local Vancouver scene and land international gigs, Rhiannon posed for *Playboy* magazine. In the National Film Board short documentary film "Rock the Box" (2015), Rhiannon articulates her approach to dealing with the stereotypes forced upon her at that time: "we're women and we're living in a patriarchal society and we were born into this box. But I'm not going to let these boundaries prevent me from doing what I want to do or being who I want to be, I'm actually going to use them to my advantage" (Monk 2015). While Rhiannon plays into the gimmick construct, she's also vigilant about subverting it by putting her expert skills on full display, and consistently posting online video footage of her mixing live during performances. She also

regularly writes and produces her own tracks, often performing live vocals during her sets.

By taking advantage of the ways that MRWaSP rewards her whiteness and hegemonic sexualization, one could say that Rhiannon was "overcoming" or showing resilience as a DJ, in service of maintaining MRWaSP. However, the explicit lyrical content of Rhiannon's songs and the sexualized and campy videos that accompany her older material trouble the resilience narrative. One could speculate that it was Rhiannon's queering of the hegemonic representation of the *Playboy* model DJ that kept her from breaking through to the next level of success in the EDM industry. Since 2017, Rhiannon has toned down her hyper-sexualized image and learned to produce music. As a result of her newly acquired status as music producer (and not 'just' a songwriter, lyricist, and vocalist) Rhiannon acquired a management deal with an esteemed agency in 2019, changing her stage name to Rhiannon Roze (a close version of her legal name, Rhiannon Rozier).

Winnipeg's DJ Kilma seeks to collapse the token/gimmick binary by refusing to work in environments that try and restrict her to either stereotype. Below, Kilma implies that both her gendered self and her individuality as a DJ are inseparable:

I've been told dress really sexy and you'll get lots of gigs, which I refuse to do. And then . . . [you] shouldn't even show your face if you're talented . . . your music should stand [alone]. So it's either objectify me or oppress [me], and for years [I wore] a t-shirt, pants and high-tops because I wanted people to take me seriously. And it didn't matter, because people still judged me; they still said all the same remarks. So eventually I just decided ... to do what works for me, and if you don't like it that's cool, I don't want to work with you anyways.

In these ways, Kilma attempts to bypass the token/gimmick binary by resisting the pressure to assimilate to one or the other. It is apparent that L'Oqenze, Rhiannon, and Kilma each employed different strategies. L'Oqenze worked within the token stereotype, Rhiannon embraced and subverted the gimmick stereotype, and Kilma avoided working in environments where she would be pressured to represent herself in a specific way.

**Digital Anxieties**

The type of DJ equipment womxn play on heavily impacts the perception of us as either gimmicks or tokens. As demonstrated throughout this study, the advent of digital DJ technologies resulted in womxn's increased access to DJing, and a subsequent increase in visibility. This increase in access and numbers fuels anxieties in androcentric DJ culture, as exhibited by the policing of womxn DJs' appearances, alongside the persistent discourse asserting that DJing with turntables and records is a benchmark of authenticity (Farrugia and Swiss 2008). Androcentric and sexist attitudes in DJ culture promote the idea that womxn DJs who adopt a sexualized appearance and play on digital DJ equipment are gimmicks. Again, the implication is that we reached our place at the decks without having to put in the blood, sweat, and tears required to gain the skills *and* the 'deep crates' (which means to own and have a librarian-esque knowledge of milk crates full of music LPs that go beyond pop music radio hits). This sentiment was expressed by several of my survey respondents, and discussed by Craig and Kynard (2017) in reference to American hip hop DJ Shorty Wop: "Of particular note for Shorty Wop is that women deejays often substitute their sexuality for such deejay research skills. Women who are scantily clad are devoured as new digital deejays though they have not developed any real skills in the craft and do not really know (or spin) hip-hop history (Benard 2016)" (Craig and Kynard 2017, 149). As a Black womxn, Shorty Wop assumes different and

increased risks when deciding how to present herself publically, given Black womxn's over-sexualized media construction, as previously discussed.

**The "Dyke"**

In addition to the categories of sex kitten and t-shirt DJ, Farrugia's research revealed a third category, that of the "dyke" DJ, who primarily identifies as lesbian, and whose representation predominantly "manifests itself in physical appearance and applies to gay women who sport short haircuts and non-gender specific clothing. In fewer instances it represents identification with particular social and/or political stances in an effort to reclaim the once derogatory label" (2012, 56). Farrugia explains how this specific type of lesbian visibility means that male DJs do not perceive "dyke DJs" to have the ability to sleep their way into gigs (the assumption being that those in power in DJ culture are straight men) or market themselves based upon sexual appeal (the assumption being that straight men are the target market):

> Significantly, the embodiment of a visible dyke identity in EDM culture can enable women to be more easily accepted into EDM culture because men do not consider them to have an unfair advantage in securing paid DJ gigs the way they might t-shirt DJs or sex kittens. One of the women I spoke with . . . was DJ Sappho . . . a self-identified lesbian and techno connoisseur. Sappho had short brown hair and a medium build, and wore baggy green cargo pants and a loose t-shirt to the meeting. Her clothing was similar to that of the t-shirt DJs [I have] described but because she is gay and has a short haircut, male DJs view her differently from the t-shirt DJs. Men in the local scene, who typically were unsupportive of women DJs, gave her a lot of support. (2012, 56)

Fawn BC also exemplifies Farrugia's description of the "dyke DJ". When I interviewed Fawn, she discussed how she does not have to deal with being perceived as a gimmick, describing her

appearance as androgynous, and stating that she has been out as a lesbian for the majority of her DJ career. I asked her if being a queer womxn provided her with a different experience networking with men, and of the general homosociality of DJ culture. Fawn replied,

> Yeah, I get along with guys, like even starting as a DJ I hung out with more guys and they like the fact that I'm not just a big-titted pretty DJ, you know, that I get along with guys and I have a tomboy look. I'm not sexualized to them and maybe that makes it a little bit more comfortable to talk to me, so I think from a networking perspective that has helped me a bit. At the same time I wouldn't get the attention that a pretty girl DJ would. More often than not they might get the gig because they're cute. Like, they'll get an opening slot or something like that but they'll still get the gig.

The following chapter extends my discussion of the gendered and sexualized stereotypes associated with womxn DJs, and how these perceptions impact our work experiences. I provide two case studies based upon my experiences and observations working as a DJ for two different queer nightclubs in Vancouver, BC, during the 2000s. The first case study analyzes the impact of the Lick Club on fostering the careers of womxn and non-binary DJs in Vancouver. A shorter case study follows, examining my experience promoting and programming a weekly residency at a considerably larger and more corporate gay night club called Celebrities, where I DJ'd from 2004 until 2008, concurrent with my time at Lick. The two clubs (and hence experiences) were markedly different, revealing the complex influence of space, scenes, and networks in mediating the experiences and careers of womxn DJs in Vancouver in the 2000s.

# CHAPTER 6: LICK, STACKED & BLOCKORAMA: QUEER CULTURAL COMMUNITIES FIGHT FOR SPACE

*/If I had not had those experiences at Lick, had our group not been given the opportunity to go in there and create space and make something happen and create this really awesome vibe and culture that started to flow from the Lick Club . . . I mean I can't even count how many DJs started and moved through and actually became involved in the music scene in Vancouver. And I would even go so far as to say specifically because of Lick they had the opportunity in a safe environment that wasn't a super huge club, that they were really super supported in and could really own their space. If I didn't have that experience I wouldn't be in Winnipeg doing the same thing.* (Stacey Clark)

## 6.1.    Introduction

This chapter begins by taking an in-depth look at the Lick Club, a Vancouver, BC lesbian bar that operated from 2003 until 2011, employing predominantly womxn (as well as trans and non-binary) DJs. Specifically, this section examines the effects that the club's physical space had on the careers of said DJs in the region, focusing on the queer womxn, trans and non-binary DJ network that developed out of the club. A physical space such as Lick that caters to womxn, trans and non-binary DJs (thereby side-stepping male-dominated DJ networks) can be a significant factor in bringing beginner DJs and mentors together. My research corroborates other studies of womxn DJs in the USA (Farrugia 2004, 2012) and Europe (Gavanas and Reitsamer 2013, 2016) cited throughout this study, as well as my own findings herein that demonstrate the acute importance of mentors in fostering the careers of womxn and non-binary DJs.

My findings are based on qualitative data generated from interviews with key players in Lick's local DJ network. Interviewees describe how their participation in Lick provided them with access to mentors, DJ equipment and performance opportunities that proved to be integral to their development as professional DJs. I also draw on my own emic experience as a DJ and promoter at Lick. My methodology chapter identifies key ethical concerns regarding my hegemonic identity relative to Lick's other central agents, and my position as an insider studying a population of which I am a member. I argue that although womxn DJs are becoming more common in Canadian nightclubs and festivals, networks such as the one fostered by Lick are still significantly important to the careers of DJs whose identities do not afford them access to the 'boys' club'.

To begin, I invoke Halberstam's (2005) assertion that it is important for academics to document queer and underground cultural environments. I then turn to Woo et al.'s (2015) discussion of what constitutes a "scene" from a cultural studies perspective. I outline a brief history of Lick and the building that housed it in order to both temporally and contextually situate the club. I present findings from my interviews with key Lick participants, wherein interlocutors stress the importance of queer, womxn-centered spaces and communities to support the progress of womxn and non-binary DJs; mentorship is specifically discussed. I then explore the impact that Lick's closure had on the developing pool of womxn and non-binary DJs in Vancouver as well as on the city's underground queer club scene. Following, I turn my focus towards the different experiences that I had while DJing, programming and promoting my residency at Celebrities in Vancouver for four years. I conclude this chapter with a brief consideration of other Canadian womxn and queer-focused DJ collectives and networks that have had an impact on Canadian DJ culture in the last ten years, and examine historical and

present tensions around marginalized communities' access to urban cultural spaces. This chapter

concludes with a discussion of the importance for queer people of colour to take up, and take

*back*, space. To this end, I rely on Desmond Cole's discussion of the crucial queer Black

activism that generated the Toronto Pride celebrations, and Black Lives' Matter Toronto's

(BLM-TO) intervention into the 2016 Toronto Pride parade. Cole examines the ongoing struggle

to create and maintain spaces for queer POC, such as the Blockorama stage at Toronto Pride's

annual weekend celebration held in Toronto's gay village.

### 6.2.      Lick Club: a Queer Time, Space and Place

*I guess kind of feeling in touch with [a queer] community or wanting to feel more in touch*

*with that community because it wasn't something that I had access to growing up? And you*

*know I really support the idea of having spaces accessible for queer people. I just really*

*like the idea that it was just this little hole in the wall club and it was grimey and people*

*just came as they were and didn't give a fuck, you know what I mean?* (Jane Blaze)

In *In a Queer Time and Space* (2005), Halberstam emphasizes the importance of

documenting queer cultural spaces such as Lick: "queer lesbian subcultures have rarely been

discussed in the existing literature and they offer a new area of study for queer cultural

producers and queer academics" (160). As the title suggests, Halberstam argues that people

develop the use of "queer time and space" not only to oppose dominant societal institutions such

as family and heterosexuality, but also in accordance with other logics such as "location,

movement and identification" (1). Thereby, Halberstam takes up notions of queer subcultural

practices as alternative modes of living and relating to other people in society. Halberstam

illustrates the need for queer academics to engage in documenting queer culture in a way that

allows for interpretation and conveys a sense of its diversity and complexity. Radical cultural

work is all too often co-opted by the mainstream media and therefore it is important to generate as many records of queer culture as possible, in order to assert the existence of our cultural communities. As an academic still connected to Lick's DJ network, I am taking up Halberstam's call to action by exploring Lick as a site that encouraged queer subcultural practices outside of the general male-focused, homosocial DJ and nightclub networks in Vancouver (I discuss these homosocial networks in more detail at this chapter's end with regards to my residency at Celebrities). Informed by Halberstam's thesis, I posit that Lick's community of staff, performers, and clients comprised a queer nightclub subculture that developed in opposition to the dominant, heteronormative nightclub scene, and the (sometimes un-welcoming) gay male nightclub scene, as embodied by Celebrities. In essence, the Lick Club constituted its own underground, queer and womxn-focused scene. In using the concept of a 'scene', I am following Woo et al. (2015), who describe how

> Scenes are a basic part of the social imaginary of urban life. They are typically understood as loosely bounded social worlds oriented to forms of cultural expression. They provide systems of identification and connection, while simultaneously inviting acts of novelty, invention and innovation. Scenes are set within the fabric of everyday life but also function as an imagined alternative to the ordinary, work-a-day world. They can be utopian in moments, especially when scenes allow otherwise ignored or disappeared communities and subjects to find a home, but problems of institutionalization and coordination often push back against utopian aspirations" (para 12).

Adapting a "scene perspective" well suits a case study of the Lick Club, as each aspect outlined above by Woo et al. was realized in the scene that sprang from Lick, as I demonstrate in this chapter.

## 6.3. Specific Methodological and Ethical Concerns

The core data informing this study stems from semi-structured, informal interviews that took place over Skype between March and May of 2012, ranging in duration from 27 to 47 minutes. I interviewed seven DJs that played Lick regularly, and two promoters who have been heavily involved with the Vancouver lesbian party scene since the late 1990s. Six out of nine people interviewed for this article identify as womxn. The three exceptions are Revoked, who identifies as a trans man, Skylar Love, who identifies as masculine non-binary, and Stacy Clark, who identifies as gender queer. Four out of nine participants identify as people of colour: Jane Blaze, DJ T, Mandy Randhawa, and Revoked. Importantly, all of the interviewees for this study expressed a desire to have Lick documented and remembered. As discussed in Chapter 4 of this study, 23 percent of my survey respondents resided in Vancouver when they completed the survey in 2014/2015, therefore I also consider this segment of data in in relation to this chapter's themes. Lastly, I continue to draw on my own experience as a white, cisgendered, and queer womxn DJ living and working in Vancouver during the 2000s.

I had a long-running and intimate relationship with Lick as a DJ and promoter for the club. I worked there from its opening during Vancouver Pride in July 2003 until I moved to Toronto in 2009. I played a significant role in the club during the first two years of its existence by DJing there on a weekly basis, hiring and training other DJs to play at the club, and creating and promoting events at Lick. As a womxn DJ who had worked hard to establish a name for herself in Vancouver, I had a personal mission to make things easier for other womxn DJs and to do my best to destabilize the 'boys' club' of DJ networks that predominated Vancouver DJ culture.

My methods chapter discussed my hegemonic identity in comparison to many of my research participants; still it bears reiterating the necessity of critically interrogating my stake in

documenting Lick's history, so that I am not exploiting the knowledge that my participants have shared with me. For example, I am careful in exploring the idea that Lick was a "safe(r) space" that vastly enabled its participants to become professional DJs. Although I had busier residencies in bigger nightclubs during the time that I was 'coming up' as a DJ in Vancouver, when I played Lick I felt safer, and therefore more confident, artistically free, and inspired. This feeling of comfort and ease encouraged and enabled me to take more risks, leading to a steady increase in my skill level. In these ways Lick's low pressure, supportive, and intimate environment nurtured my growth as a DJ. The frequency with which I DJ'd at Lick during the first few years of its run greatly contributed to my growth as a DJ. Throughout my time at Lick I was committed to the club because I loved being in a womxn and trans positive, queer cultural space devoted to music, dancing and activism. I was more comfortable working in that environment, having been involved in feminist and queer activism since my late teens. Therefore, I experienced Lick as a welcome reprieve from the sexism that I often endured while working as a DJ in both straight and gay mainstream nightclubs.

The fact that I had such a positive experience at Lick calls into question my white privilege, and how my comfort may have been at the expense of more marginalized participants in Lick. Moreover, for a few years my partner (a straight, white, cisgendered man) was the general manager of the three venues located in the Lotus Hotel, which included Lick; thus contributing further to my sense of safety and security as an employee. Realizing that not everyone experienced the club the way that I did, I have to try not to paint Lick as a utopia without tensions, conflicts and problems, as those things were always present; recall Woo et al.'s description of 'scenes': "They can be utopian in moments, especially when scenes allow otherwise ignored or disappeared communities and subjects to find a home, but problems of

institutionalization and coordination often push back against utopian aspirations" (2015, 288). It must also be stated that Lick was likely not utopian for the residents of the Downtown East Side (commonly referred to by its acronym: DTES), who were impacted by the ways that Lick and the other Lotus venues contributed to the gentrification of the DTES and the subsequent displacement of its residents. Yet, it is hard not to treat Lick as utopic, as its very concept is just that: a nightclub run by and for queer women and other members of Vancouver's queer community. Moreover, Lick was not under any significant pressure to generate a profit, and therefore, as mentioned, the club was mostly left alone by upper management, which meant that we could choose who we let into the club, and kept heterosexist, sexist, and/or transphobic clubbers away from our space. As discussed in the next section, this autonomy enabled Lick to cater to the needs of its community of patrons (but not necessarily the needs of the DTES' residents).

### 6.4     The Lick Club: A Brief Hxrstory

*Lick was a depressed bar in an economically depressed area of town with lots of troubles all around it and it was by no means a destination location and so it didn't have a lot of the class issues that I think a lot of the other bars had, like along the Granville strip that had the taxis driving up . . . this was very different. There was a lot of work, community work, to create safe space for all gendered peoples.* (Stacey Clark)

A key aspect of Lick's success in developing a network of womxn, trans and non-binary DJs was that the club occupied a permanent space throughout its eight-year run, an impressive amount time for any type of nightclub. One fundamental reason that Lick existed for so long is that it was not required to make a profit, and so it is worth briefly outlining the special circumstances surrounding the creation and financing of the club. The building that housed Lick,

the Lotus Hotel, was built in the 1920s and is itself a part of a historically diverse (racially and sexually), working-class, downtown Vancouver community. The Lotus Hotel still occupies the corner of Abbott and Pender Streets, thereby bordering three (formally) low-income and working class neighbourhoods: Gastown, China Town, and the DTES. Notably, all three of the aforementioned neighbourhoods have rapidly gentrified since the early 2000s, and as mentioned, the Lotus Hotel has been a part of that gentrification. During the Lotus Hotel's existence in the 1990s and 2000s, the DTES was branded the poorest postal code in North America. Statistically speaking, the DTES was not the poorest area in North America during the time that Lick was open, but it was close (Skelton 2010).

During the 1980s the Lotus Hotel became a queer destination with political overtones. By example, AIDS Vancouver held their first monthly meetings there in 1983. Throughout the 1990s the hotel contained three different gay bars. The Lotus was a dance club in the basement that held a weekly womxn-only night on Fridays called Meow Mix. Charlie's Pub had a weekly lesbian night on Saturday (Claveau 2003). Chuck's Pub, which was the smallest venue and eventually became Lick, housed drag shows and gay men's dating game nights (this was in the pre-to-early Internet years and thereby hooking up online was not yet the norm). On top of these three queer venues there was a low-income hotel containing Single Occupant Residencies (SORs). Therefore, the physical space that Lick occupied was already constructed on an intersectional foundation layered with race, class, gender, and queer sexuality.

Multi-millionaire Mark James bought the Lotus Hotel in 2000 and the entire building was renovated over a period of two years, re-opening in 2002. The downstairs venue became the Lotus Sound Lounge and focused on house and techno music, two genres that had not yet become commercialized and therefore heteronormative. Charlie's became Honey Lounge, which

focused on more 'lounge-y' musical genres such as r&b, Motown and down tempo electronic music. James' mother was a prominent ally and activist in the struggle for gay rights and visibility in Vancouver, and in order to maintain his commitment to maintaining a queer space, James directed that the smallest club, previously Chuck's, remain branded as a gay bar, and initially it was called Milk. The popular weekend drag performances remained at Honey Lounge as well. Within a year of Milk being open, Stacy Clark and a man who was part of Vancouver's fetish community approached James with the idea of making Milk into a lesbian bar.

As discussed, James was committed to creating and maintaining a queer space. Under different circumstances, Lick would have faced economic pressure to compete in Vancouver's highly saturated nightclub market, whereby management might have had to charge a higher cover at the door, and/or sell liquor at a more expensive price point. Because Lick was able to keep prices down, it was more accessible to womxn, trans and young people (who earn less income overall due to systemic discrimination in the workforce) than the other gay nightclubs in Vancouver (which primarily catered to gay men).

When Milk was rebranded as Lick in 2003, I was hired to DJ there. I was already spinning next door in Honey Lounge and successfully branding myself as an up and coming DJ in Vancouver's queer and fetish scenes. Lick's management asked me to find other womxn DJs for the club. I brought in two DJs that I knew from Vancouver's (very small) womxn's hip-hop scene: DJ T and Skylar Love (who then went by the name DJ De Lux). Both of them were under nineteen years old at the time, and therefore not legally allowed in bars. I knew that Skylar Love was only eighteen when they started at Lick; however, I did not know that DJ T was also underage when she started DJing at Lick until I interviewed her for this article. With regards to the former DJ, perhaps it speaks to the lack of womxn DJs in Vancouver that I felt it justified to

recruit a DJ that was not legally allowed to work in a nightclub. The fact that it did not seem to

bother anyone involved with the venue, nor the public it served, perhaps also demonstrates how

Lick flew under the radar of the mainstream nightclub industry in Vancouver along with all of its

attendant institutions, including the police and the Liquor Control Board. In retrospect, I have

come to see our flouting of the liquor laws as another way by which we carved out our own

countercultural space.

### 6.5. Community Service

*How Lick became a safe space for transgendered DJs starts with the history of Lick*

*opening as a womxn's-only bar, period. There was a lot of dialogue around . . . well, what*

*does it mean to be a woman and what is the idea of safe space and what about trans people*

*and how does everyone fit in the community and we're looking for a space for this group*

*and this group and this group so we're having community based dialogues, and being able*

*to have those dialogues with people in a way that was really productive and community*

*building really led to . . . policy changing and saying, "ok, we're not a womxn's only bar,*

*we're a queer bar . . . realizing that the idea for Lick was not to create this space for*

*"womxn only" but to create this space where people who were not represented by the*

*dominant society could come and feel welcome and supported.* (Stacey Clark)

When Lick opened its doors to the public, its formal admittance policy was 'womxn-only',

however trans people were informally welcome. Above, Clark elaborates on the events that led

Lick to abandon its formal "womxn-only" policy after just a few months of being open. Lick's

management had no interest in policing gender; rather, they sought to create a space free from

unwanted, straight, cisgendered male attention. As more time passed, the management of Lick

decided to also admit heterosexual men who were considerate of being in a queer space. Clark

described how Lick was created to fulfill the desire to have a fun, nighttime destination for queers: "this was a nightclub. We were coming from a very sex positive, kink positive place. [Lick] changed as a result of embracing queer politics, relative to gender and race and class". For this reason, the club was a safe(r) space to socialize in a queer and sexually charged environment. As a result, things were quite wild during Lick's first few years. By example, bartenders worked topless (their own idea and choice of course), and the bathroom toilets were in need of repair after almost every weekend due to people having sex in the stalls.[72]

Like most club spaces in downtown Vancouver, Lick's demographic contained a large proportion of white clients and white staff. However, several people of colour, including resident DJs, bartenders and management, were key players in shaping Lick's environment through their programming and presence. Revoked, a Black, trans man, was involved with Lick almost from its inception—first as a DJ and drag king performer, and then as a bartender and a bouncer until eventually becoming General Manager of all three Lotus venues until their closure when the hotel was sold in 2011.[73] Revoked was one of the 'faces' of Lick therefore, as he was seen behind the bar, bouncing and/or taking cover at the door, DJing, and onstage hosting drag king performances and other theme nights. In addition to these roles, Revoked acted as Lick's resident handyman for almost its entire lifespan. Revoked's role in shaping Lick's vibe contributed a great deal to the club's ability to be welcoming to trans and gender fluid, as well as BIPOC, patrons, staff, and performers.

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[72] For a sense of how sexually charged the atmosphere at Lick was, see "Best Place to Meet Topless Women", *Georgia Straight*, September 23–30, 2004, 90, and Kasey Riot, "Scissorkissculture.com Presents Lick's Farewell Party," YouTube video, 4:28, May 5, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3kgcyZc4-Ug.

[73] Revoked was hired by my then-partner to replace him as the general manager of the Lotus Hotel and the three venues when my partner moved to Toronto in 2010. When the Lotus Hotel was sold in 2011, the new owners renovated all three of the clubs - Lick, Honey and the Lotus, rebranding them entirely and leaving behind the queer, underground ethos.

During our interview Revoked spoke about the sense of familiarity experienced by attendees and staff, another key factor that made Lick a potent breeding ground for performers and DJs, as again, it was a safer space than mainstream, heteronormative nightclubs: "I believed in the space. I really liked the grassroots fundraising aspect of it. It was really small so it was really intimate and you'd actually meet a lot of people there. And I knew everybody… it was like Cheers for gay people!" (2012). Revoked's comments articulate how Lick's small size and intimate nature fostered a close-knit community of people who worked, created, and partied together. The fact that Lick was the site of numerous fundraisers for local and grassroots causes also contributed to a sense of an inclusive, caring community.

Lick held almost weekly drag king nights and fundraisers; often, these events were a combination of the two. In keeping with its mandate of community service, Lick would frequently open and staff the venue free for fundraisers. By example, Lick hosted parties to raise funds for trans men to have top surgery, thereby playing a crucial role in the transition of specific community members. When I interviewed Revoked in 2012, a year after Lick closed, he expressed his grief over losing the club: "It was our goal to try to sponsor somebody's chest surgery every year and raise enough money [through Lick to pay] for that; that's like $15,000. I was really bummed out [as] that [money] could have gone to a lot of people who needed it". Despite being a nightclub known for debauchery, Lick was also a political space inhabited by a politicized community that tried to care for each other.

During the eight years that Lick was open, its DIY ethos encouraged amateur performers and DJs to take up space in the club through practicing and performing. Although Lick was small, dark and dirty, Clark stresses the importance of having a permanent, physical space to build a local queer cultural community: "The reason that I kept participating in [Lick] and [why]

it really morphed into what it became was that it provided an opportunity for womxn promoters, DJs, performers, [and] bartenders to actually have a space to come and work and feel like they were part of it. To the best of our ability we tried to create a really collaborative environment so that people had the opportunity to come and promote, DJ, dance, do drag [and burlesque] performances, and this whole community just kind of grew out of a really cool concept". In speaking about the cultural community that formed around Lick, Clark alludes to its significant impact on queer and lesbian culture in Vancouver.

Lick also impacted Vancouver nightclub culture in general. Despite the prevalence of sexism and heteronormativity, several of Lick's DJs, including myself, went on to achieve professional status beyond the Vancouver scene. For example, Kasey Riot, Skylar Love, Jane Blaze and DJ Rhiannon (all of whom have been interviewed for this project) have achieved both national and international success, frequently playing notable clubs, parties and festivals worldwide. Each of these DJs describe how Lick played an important part in their entry into Vancouver's DJ scene, and credit Lick's population of queers and womxn for creating a safe space for DJs to gain chops and cultivate a following in Vancouver.

### 6.6.     The Power of Queer Networks

*Lick was different in that it was predominantly run by queer management, they actually promoted womxn DJs learning and working there; that had happened in the past but never in that kind of capacity. I think every DJ that we know now probably came through Lick at one point or another. I think it was hugely important [to have] the space; you got to have space to perform, to practice and play, you have to.* (Cousins 2012)

Reflecting on Lick's impact on Vancouver nightclub culture, I argue that there were two crucial factors that enabled the club to foster womxn, trans and non-binary DJs. First, we had a

permanent, dedicated space and financial support. The second crucial factor was that Lick's management had a mandate of booking local, up and coming womxn, trans and non-binary DJs. Lick provided a space for the face to face networking that both Farrugia (2004, 2012) and Gavanas and Reitsamer (2016) identify as an essential function of male DJ culture. While Lick replicates other networks of womxn DJs in many ways, it was unique in that its network of DJs and other nightlife personnel was rooted in the physical space of the nightclub, and that most members of the network were out as lesbian, gay or queer.

In order to get a sense of how many womxn DJs worked in Vancouver in the decade before Lick opened, I interviewed Leigh Cousins and Mandy Randhawa of Flygirl Productions. Flygirl has produced lesbian parties at various Vancouver venues since the late 1990s; Cousins started producing lesbian parties in the mid-1990s. While they threw a few parties at Lick during its run, Flygirl events mainly happen in big venues on a monthly basis. Despite Lick technically being the competition, Cousins and Randhawa recognized its community standing and supported the club, and Randhawa often came out to party with the crowd.

Cousins stated that prior to Lick opening, there were no dedicated spaces for womxn DJs to play, nor did she see many womxn DJs in Vancouver, save for at the lesbian parties produced by Flygirl or one of the few other lesbian promoters in the city. Cousins and Randhawa both felt that there was a marked increase in local womxn DJs after Lick opened, resulting in a larger pool for Flygirl to select from. For example, as the 1990s progressed into the 2000s, Flygirl relied on one local DJ in particular, Tracey D (who I interviewed for this dissertation). Flygirl then brought in internationally famous DJs, such as Kimberly S from San Francisco, for their bigger parties, and Tracey D opened. When Tracey D stopped playing for Flygirl during the early 2000s, I was hired in her place, because at the time I was one of only a handful of well-known

womxn DJs, and I had ties to the queer club scene. Cousins and Randhawa stressed that the reason they booked DJs that played at Lick was because they felt that those DJs were highly skilled and "took their craft seriously" (Cousins). Jane Blaze also felt that Lick's existence increased the number of womxn DJs in Vancouver: "I feel like when Lick closed, that was the only place where most of us were playing, you know, aside from a few queer events here and there. And now that Lick is closed, I feel like a lot more womxn DJs from that pocket of people are getting a lot more play in the city at straight events and different events. Definitely there's a lot more women in the scene for sure".

In fact, each person that I interviewed specifically for this chapter shared the view that Lick had fostered an increase in skilled and experienced womxn DJs in Vancouver. Stacy Clark was residing in Winnipeg and DJing under the moniker Johnny Mexico when I interviewed him over Skype in 2012. It was interesting to discover that Clark had started DJing, as that was not the case when he lived in Vancouver. Rather, Clark filled almost every role at Lick except that of a DJ, working instead as a manager, bartender, bouncer, promoter and drag king. Clark also spoke about the importance of having a physical space such as Lick to foster local DJs, stating: "It was a proving . . . ground, a place where they worked through their skills, developed more skills, networked with other DJs, other performers, other promoters, built a resume as well, in a really positive environment" (2012). He describes how his time at Lick resulted in his surprise at the dearth of womxn, trans and non-binary DJs in Winnipeg's club scene. To address that lack, Clark started Queerview, a DJ collective explicitly welcoming to queer, trans and non-binary people. When I spoke with Clark, the collective had built a significant presence in Winnipeg over two years. In addition to throwing parties, Queerview collaborated with a queer youth group to throw all ages parties and teach DJing to youth group members.

Clark remarked that it had become more common to see entire bills of womxn DJs in queer clubs and parties in Winnipeg–womxn who were not just opening for male DJs, but also headlining. He stated that this increase was due not only to Queerview's initiatives, but also the efforts of other Winnipeg DJs to recruit and train more womxn, trans and non-binary DJs, such as Mama Cutsworth and her previously discussed DJ academy for all womxn. Clark points out that the success of parties featuring womxn DJs caused local nightclubs to take notice for financial and creative reasons: "I think if this [Queerview] collective wasn't together, that type of progress wouldn't be made with [the] clubs. And it could be a factor of . . . these guys are throwing parties and selling out every time, maybe we need to get in on that. [Maybe] a womxn DJ doesn't equate to lost revenue for the night, [rather] it equates to creating a different vibe and actually making some money for the club". Clark highlights how a nightclub's drive for profit influences DJ booking practices. If womxn DJs draw crowds, and those crowds spend money, nightclubs will book more womxn DJs–if they exist locally. By providing a relatively safe space to learn and practice, both Mama Cutsworth and the Queerview collective increased the number of womxn DJs in Winnipeg. The results achieved by Lick, Queerview and Mama Cutsworth demonstrates the importance of mentors in encouraging burgeoning womxn, queer and non-binary DJs.

### 6.7.    I Was Meant For Mentoring You (Baby)

*I know that when DJs would come in [to Lick] and play they were under a close eye. If they had an issue, we were there to help them with it. If they felt intimidated, we were there to support them. I think there was just a lot more support versus just kind of showing up at some open decks [night in a club], know what I mean? Like, we would actually book them in and make them a little event and make them a [flier]*. (Skyler Love 2012)

Most DJs interviewed for this article stated that Lick had been a crucial aspect of their journey from amateur to professional. Still, I was surprised to learn that several interviewees had either had their first ever gig, or their first regularly recurring gig (or residency) at Lick. During our interview, Skylar Love listed the names of six DJs that they felt had launched their careers at Lick, including themselves, Kasey Riot, Revoked, and DJ T. In addition to providing fledgling DJs with equipment and an audience, Lick also supported DJs by promoting their event and ensuring that they had on-site technical assistance. Love stated that they "wouldn't be half the DJ I am today if it wasn't for that place".

When I interviewed Love in 2012, they were managing a Vancouver DJ school in addition to gigging, thereby supporting themselves entirely through DJ-related activities. Yet, Love admitted that they were in a fairly unique situation for a non-binary DJ in Vancouver. They stated that there was only one womxn student out of ten attending the school at that time, and Love made a point of mentoring them: "nowadays I feel like I have to . . . break barriers for womxn to be able to kind of get in. It's like, I'm the old mama now and I got my foot in the door, and I'm scooping in my little kin" (2012). Kasey Riot has been DJing, producing music, and touring on an international level for approximately a decade at the time of this study's conclusion in 2020. She started coming to Lick in 2006 while still underage, and cited Love as someone who inspired her to pursue DJing: "Skylar was like a role model, because I started going to Lick and I was like, oh, that looks like fun, I want to do that. And womxn artists in general I think, motivated me to get out there and do my thing". Revoked cited Love as a role model as well.

Jane Blaze (who used to go by the moniker DJ She) also stressed the importance of seeing local womxn DJs and having role models that one could interact with. After moving to Vancouver, Blaze had her first local gig at Lick, quickly progressing to playing at clubs

throughout the city; Blaze was first womxn worldwide to compete in the famed Redbull 3style DJ competition. Blaze also managed Vancouver's premier record store for DJs, Beat Street Records, from 2007–9. Blaze elaborated on the importance of womxn DJs being represented in media: "I always kind of looked to womxn DJs, because, you know, again, just how ridiculous the industry is. At the time I was always hearing about male hip hop DJs, and when following the history of hip hop there was never any light on womxn, so, when I started getting into house music I was more on the tip of DJ Heather mixes, or Collette". Blaze revealed that although she did find a few examples of womxn DJs in popular culture, while growing up in Prince Edward Island, and then living in Calgary, she did not know of any local womxn DJs she could seek out as mentors. The importance of local DJs to act as role models and mentors was mentioned by almost all of the interviewees. As discussed, according to my survey approximately three out of four DJs affirmed that they had benefited from some kind of mentorship and/or supportive relationship, again demonstrating the importance of mentors and community with regards to supporting beginner DJs.

## 6.8.    Long Live Lick!

*Lick closing has definitely left a void in the scene, and particularly for people that are up and coming, I think it might be a deterrent to people, to not have a safe, comfortable place to kind of get in with people, but, at the same time it's kind of forced people to look beyond that and kind of open their minds a little bit.* (Jane Blaze 2012)

Mark James sold the Lotus Hotel in 2011, and the new owners were not interested in the building's existing businesses, and undertook extensive renovations. Upsettingly, as I write in 2020, a sports bar called The Pint takes up the space that used to house Lick, the Lotus, and Honey Lounge. Many interview participants expressed concern that the loss of Lick resulted in a

lack of spaces wherein underground queer youth culture could develop. Randhawa's comments are salient in this regard: "There were many younger kids that consistently knew that Lick was there, the first space that they would know to go would be Lick. So, that was my first [thought]: where are those kids now?" Both Love and Riot declared that with the loss of Lick came a loss of space wherein to play underground music—the music that most interests them. By example, Love, echoing Randhawa, stated: "I think with the loss of underground options all that's left is Top 40 and mainstream [music], and the mainstream is going to call on a certain demographic. I don't think a lot of the younger kids even know about queer culture, so that's even more sad". Love also pointed out that Lick not only fostered womxn, trans and non-binary DJs, but also an underground, queer musical sound that was cultivated by, and reflected in, the musical styles of the Lick DJs.

Jane Blaze also lamented the loss of Lick, as she felt it anchored a somewhat "stable" queer club scene centered around the space and the opportunities it provided for queer DJs specifically: "At the queer parties I've gone to I haven't seen any up and coming DJs, it's all people who have been around for at least five years. I kind of feel bad for people who are coming up because it's like how do you get into that scene or have access to it, you know what I mean?" Revoked also felt that Vancouver was lacking in queer spaces in general, and commented: "I'm not even worried about [Vancouver having] a queer women's space. I'm more looking for a queer space where people can chill and get their gay on and be whoever they want to be". However, it is interesting that both Jane Blaze and Riot were able to find a silver lining with regards to Lick's closure, as they felt that it forced Vancouver's queer womxn's scene to branch out into other clubs and spaces in the city.

Although Lick closed in 2011 when the Lotus Hotel was sold, its spirit lives on in monthly parties held in Vancouver that feature former staff, DJs and promoters from the club. Skylar Love, former manager Jessy Leak, and door person/MC/vocalist Brigee K produce two queer womxn's nights, Lick Club Reunited, and Babes on Babes. In addition, the monthly drag king night Man Up! that began at Lick in 2008 is still very popular after relocating to another Vancouver venue, The Cobalt, and relocating again to its current home in The Clubhouse.[74] In 2003, the agency casting extras for the television series *The L-Word* recruited people by posting signs in Lick's washrooms, and as a result, myself and several other Lick staff and patrons ended up as extras on the television series. Sometimes *The L-Word* used the other two Lotus Hotel venues, the Lotus Sound Lounge and Honey Lounge, as locations for shooting, with Lick utilized as the extras' holding area. In this way, part of Lick lives on in the cultural imaginary of the TV series. It is apparent that although Lick may be gone, it certainly has not been forgotten.

By using the trajectory of the Lick Club as a case study, I sought to determine if womxn-focused spaces are still needed to foster the careers of womxn, trans and non-binary DJs, and the answer is both yes and no. While women-centered spaces are certainly not a necessity for womxn, trans and non-binary people seeking to become professional DJs, I have demonstrated that womxn-centered spaces definitely do foster their DJ careers. Other studies have confirmed the value of womxn's and/or queer networks and scenes for fostering womxn, trans and non-binary DJs in Canada. By example, David Madden (2016) demonstrated how Montreal's DJ Mini "benefitted from a local mixed queer network of people working in various music-related clusters of street level activity . . . who acted as mentors and collaborators throughout her career trajectory" (34).

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[74] For more information on "Man Up!" see "King for a Day". See also the "Man Up!" Facebook page: https://www.facebook.com/manupvancouver/.

Moreover, there are several instances of past and present all-womxn and/or all queer DJ networks, crews, club nights and festivals throughout Canada. For example, the Calgary-based DJ collective Girls On Decks was founded in 2003 to create opportunities for women to DJ (https://www.facebook.com/Girls.On.Decks/). The fact that this collective is still active after seventeen years demonstrates not only womxn's avid interest in DJing, but also the continued need for and popularity of womxn-based DJ networks. Created in 2009, the collective DnB Girls is also heavily populated with Canadian DJs (https://www.facebook.com/drumandbassgirls/). A further example of the strength of collectives can be found in "Yes Yes Y'all" (YYY), a Toronto-based DJ and party promotion crew founded by queers of non-dominant and differing genders and ethnicities whose monthly club nights have enjoyed massive success since 2008, routinely selling out (Adams 2019). In 2015, Chhavi Nanda, aka Chippy Non-stop, held the first Intersessions DJ workshop geared towards womxn and non-binary folks in Vancouver; notably, she was inspired in large part due to the "gatekeeper-y" older men" (Thomas 2020) that dominated the Vancouver scene at that time. I discuss Chippy and Intersessions in more detail in the next chapter. A final example is Discwoman, a "New York-based platform, collective, and talent agency—that showcases and represents talent in electronic music" (Discwoman.com/about). Discwoman's artist roster is comprised of womxn and non-binary DJs, many of who are BIPOC (Discwoman.com/roster). Although not a Canadian agency per se, Discwoman represents Cindy Li, aka Ciel, a DJ and activist who informs a great deal of the next chapter of this study.

Thus far this chapter has examined the positive effect of queer and womxn's networks and safe(r) space(s)on the careers of Canadian womxn DJs during the 2000s, specifically those of us that played at Lick. The next section documents the ways in which my tenure at Celebrities often

stood in stark contrast to my time at Lick, and while Celebrities did greatly contribute to the advancement of my career, it did not have a profound impact on the careers of womxn and other marginalized queers in Vancouver in the demonstrable way that Lick did.

### 6.9. Stacked Tuesdays: A Different Experience from Lick

Stacked started in 2003 in Vancouver when drag artist/promoter Michael Venus and I were recruited to DJ and promote a night featuring cheap drinks at a club called Voda housed in a swanky hotel. We named the night Stacked Tuesdays, and it gradually gained popularity amongst a mixed straight and queer crowd who were lured by cheap, $2 drinks, which was unusual at the time for a downtown Vancouver club. Cheap drinks resulted in patrons' loosened inhibitions, and Stacked gained a reputation as wild, queer, and hip. In that sense, Stacked started out like Lick; we were given a space to do what we wanted, play the music we wanted, and invite who we wanted. Drinks and cover were cheap, and we were not under pressure to pack Voda on a Tuesday night, as clubs typically rely on the money made on weekends.

Although Stacked was picking up steam after a year, Voda's management were not interested in continuing it, and at that time a large and legendary nightclub named Celebrities[75] was re-opening after having been closed for renovations for years. Celebrities hired Michael Venus to do promotions, and asked if we wanted to move Stacked there. We agreed, and although initially I was offered the entire door for the Tuesday night (the total cover charges paid by guests to enter) on a weekly basis to promote and DJ, I opted for a paltry but guaranteed $200 a night, which at the time seemed like fair recompense. As I was frequently touring with StinkMitt and devoting so much time to the band I thought I would not have the time to promote

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[75] The Vancouver Heritage Foundation officially declared Celebrities nightclub a heritage site in 2017. The structure was built in 1911 as one of the city's first ever dance halls. Since then, the building went through many incarnations, including a stint as a live music venue where artists like The Jimi Hendrix Experience, The Doors, and Led Zeppelin played.

the night properly, and was worried it would be 'dead' (devoid of patrons) and I would not make any money. Unlike Lick, which could look busy with only 50 people inside, Celebrities was a huge club with a legal capacity of 600, and it was a challenge to attract enough people to the venue on any given night for it not to look dead. I realized quickly that I had made a huge mistake.

Stacked at Celebrities was instantly successful and the club was almost at (illegal) capacity on our opening night with approximately 800 people eager to see the newly-renovated club and take advantage of free entry during opening week. Not long after Stacked launched at Celebrities, the artist Peaches (in town to shoot a cameo on the TV show *The L-Word*) made a surprise guest appearance to DJ with me (for free). Peaches' endorsement meant that Stacked was suddenly on everyone's radar. Kelly Osbourne (in Vancouver to shoot a pilot TV series) started attending, and Stacked was written up in American gossip magazines like *People*. Soon, on Tuesday nights Celebrities had two separate lineups snaking down the block in opposite directions and meeting at the club's entrance. These lines started forming earlier and earlier on Tuesday evenings as time went on. When facing the main doors of Celebrities, the VIP lineup was on the left, consisting of people on the guest list (or those paying the bouncers sometimes upwards of $100 to bypass the line. The bouncers at Stacked made far more money than I ever did), and on the right were those without the cultural or financial capital to be VIPs. I lived a few blocks from the club and walked to work, and as I passed by the non-VIP line up I grabbed the queers, artists, club kids, and those I knew contributed something vitally subversive to the party, and brought them in with me.

Stacked often brought in more revenue than Friday and Saturday nights combined,[76] but

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[76] Even though drinks were only $3, when combining alcohol sales, cover charge (which Celebrities had inflated to $10), and coat check revenue, you arrive at a hefty sum. Stacked was still going strong in early March 2020, and

despite its success I was only earning $200 weekly.[77] I began to push for more money, which the owner did not like; he also did not like me (I was basically told that by another staff member). At the same time, straight men who promoted other nights at Celebrities that generated less revenue and status were treated more like long-term stakeholders in the club, earning a percentage of the door for the nights they programmed and promoted, assisted by the club's resources; these promoters would also golf with the owner. One such promoter is now a co-owner of Celebrities; he also owns an affiliated events and promotions agency that Chippy Non-stop referenced in an interview as "a company in Vancouver that has a monopoly over bookings and venues, and they mostly don't care about the youth and queer culture" (Cliff 2017). Despite being the resident DJ and literal face of the night (my picture was on the posters, fliers, and online images promoting Stacked), the promotions manager had to advocate for me to earn more than $200 a week, and so eventually I was earning $400 weekly. This income, while granting me a measure of financial stability and allowing me to tour, was still grossly exploitative.

**My!Not!Gay!Harasser!**

Speaking of grossly exploitative, I experienced a significant amount of harassment at Celebrities during the four years I DJ'd there. When Stacked moved to Celebrities, Michael Venus no longer wanted to DJ and recruited My!Gay!Husband! (who is not actually gay) as my co-DJ. Initially My!Gay!Husband! and I got along, but after a few months he started to harass me, often trying to sabotage me while I played so that I would mess up and lose credibility in front of 800 or more people. His efforts ranged from deliberately scratching up my rarer records so they were unplayable, to approaching me from behind, pinching my nipples hard and twisting them as though they were dials on a radio and not parts of my body, while screaming "Tune in

surely Tuesday nights have made Celebrities millions of dollars.

[77] Each individual bouncer was making more money than I in 'grease', or bribes, to get past the long line-ups.

Tokyo!" in my ear *while I was mixing in my next track*. Obviously what he did was physically painful and deeply infuriating, but somehow I would maintain control in the booth and continue playing well. After approximately half a year and a whole series of events that I do not have space nor stomach to cover in this section, My!Gay!Husband! was fired and I was able to choose Trevor Risk as my new co-DJ.

Aside from being harassed by my first co-DJ, another major problem with Stacked was the influx of straight and 'mainstream' patrons, including many post-secondary students from nearby UBC. This new crowd was neither queer nor interested in underground music and culture, and after about a year Stacked was absolutely packed with this very young and straight crowd and therefore had completely lost its 'cool' factor. I was constantly fielding requests for top 40 and cheesy music, and was devastated and infuriated to watch Stacked get overrun by straight people who were not politized as queer allies, and had awful taste in music to boot. Soon Stacked was known as "straight night". In fact, in 2009, Xtra Magazine ran an article about how Tuesdays at Celebrities was referred to as "straight night", and the problems of losing gay space (Correia 2009). But before that, by 2006, two years into its run at Celebrities, it was evident that Stacked was now attracting a testosterone-fueled, mainstream crowd. By example, a man was stabbed by another man outside of Celebrities at 3am after leaving Stacked (Hainsworth 2006). Two groups of people attending Stacked had clashed in the club first before being sent outside by the bouncers. A *dailyXtra.com* article mentions how unusual that kind of violence–a bar fight between two men that escalates to the point of one of them stabbing the other–was for Davie Street (the heart of Vancouver's gay village), and how that type of violence usually happened on Granville Street (a strip with Vancouver's mainstream, commercial night clubs) (ibid).

Despite no longer having to battle My!Gay!Husband! I was deeply unhappy at Celebrities.

It was personally heart wrenching to witness Stacked become a beacon for straight white

mainstream university students, to the point where I hated playing my own night (a development

that was similar to what happened at Kits, except that Kits was a terrible venue to begin with).

My allies in lower management and I fought to keep Stacked resolutely queer. We tried catering

to our original queer crowd by playing certain music, hiring renowned queer guest DJs, and

maintaining exclusive door policies. To make things worse, from the time Celebrities reopened

there were serious moral and ethical problems with the behavior of the club's general manager,

both at and away from the club.[78] My close friends and allies were let go from Celebrities, and I

knew that I too would be driven out shortly.

Soon the new promotions managers started pressuring me to agree to book DJs of their

suggestion that were totally inappropriate for Stacked, as they tried to take control of

programming away from me in an attempt to disassociate me from any sense of 'owning'

Stacked because it generated so much money and prestige.[79] The club's management and

ownership recognized that I had built Stacked's branding and success over the course of four

years as its co-creator and resident DJ. Celebrities wanted me gone, but they wanted my co-DJ

Trevor Risk to remain as he was popular as a DJ and as a person, and (presumably) because he

was a man. Trevor did not like what the club was doing either however, and rather than throw me

under the bus, we agreed that it was time to relocate Stacked to a different club. We moved

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[78] The following news piece ran in the August 26 2005 edition of *The Vancouver Sun*: "A former head of the Vancouver police gang squad who now manages a gay nightclub is facing a sexual assault charge stemming from an incident that allegedly occurred Aug. 15 in Vancouver. Thomas Ross Pascuzzo, a 52-year-old Vancouver resident, was to make a first appearance on the charge in provincial court Thursday. He was not required to appear in person at the hearing, however, and was absent from the courtroom when the formal charge was read into the record and a Sept. 9 date set for his next appearance" (Hansen 2005).

[79] With Stacked now the biggest night in Vancouver, it began to drain other successful Tuesday nights, including a long-running drum n' bass night at the Lotus (the dance club below Lick), and a retro 80s and 90s night with DJ Daryl-O at the Plaza, owned by the same people as Celebrities. Darryl-O was reportedly unhappy that his Tuesday residency was now dead, and started agitating to play Stacked. As a straight-white male with zero cultural capital and who attracted a cheesy heterosexual crowd, Darryl-O was completely the wrong DJ for Stacked.

Stacked to a club on Granville Street (huge mistake) called Republik that was owned by another male-run Vancouver hospitality company, the Donnelly Group. Despite Trevor and I pulling the night from Celebrities, the club tried to keep the night going under the name Stacked Tuesdays, thereby stealing my intellectual property. I had trademarked the name "Stacked Tuesdays", as well as the text copy I had written for the promotional materials ("It's about drinking, sweating and forgetting"). I explicitly and in writing denied Celebrities permission to use any of my intellectual property, which they ignored. As a result, I paid a lawyer $1000 to write Celebrities a cease and desist letter, which thankfully promptly worked. Celebrities simply renamed the night "Tuesdays" (because they were so rife with imagination), and dropped all my text copy from all promotional materials and media.

Unfortunately, the challenges did not dissipate after moving Stacked Tuesdays from Celebrities to Republik, which, as mentioned, was located on Vancouver's mainstream party strip Granville Street. I quickly realized that the location itself doomed the night from the get-go. I also discovered that Republik's management expected me to do all of the promotion for the night, while Trevor just had to roll in and DJ–with the same pay. Also, the Republik's owners promised me that in taking on the night, we would keep the name Stacked Tuesdays. However, the Republik team ended up backing down when Celebrities' owners appeared ready to do battle in court, and the Republik never delivered the legal support they promised me.[80] The night failed within a year for various reasons to do with the club's location as mentioned, as well as its structural and interior design that resulted in poor sound and a sterile vibe. The club also employed homophobic staff, despite Republik's assurance that they would have queer and allied

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[80] Even though I had a viable case against Celebrities, according to my expensive lawyer (who also represented the children's singer Raffi, which I found funny for some reason).

staff working the night. The whole experience proved to be devastating enough to contribute to my choice to move from Vancouver to Toronto.

Thus far, this chapter has explored two different case studies that illustrate the importance of physical, permanent space and ongoing financial and other supports for cultural spaces for queer and marginalized communities. Both the Lotus Hotel (which housed Lick) and Celebrities occupy heritage properties over a century old that played significant roles in Vancouver LGBTQ+ history, as well as in the gentrification of the neighbourhoods wherein they were established, Gastown and the West End respectively. There were far more differences than similarities between the two clubs however. Celebrities competed to be a state-of-art-nightclub with world-class sound and lighting; Lick did not. As discussed, Lick was not under pressure to make a profit, given that Mark James wanted a dedicated queer cultural space commemorative of his mother's allied fight for queer rights. On the other hand, Celebrities operated to generate as much profit as possible, even if that meant endangering the queer community by catering to a violent, heterosexual crowd, and employing an alleged sex offender and former police officer as general manager. This chapter concludes with a third case study, based in Toronto and concerning the vital work done by queer people of colour to regain and maintain crucial cultural and community spaces. Specifically, I examine Desmond Cole's discussion of the centrality of queer Black activism to Toronto Pride celebrations, and the ongoing struggle to maintain queer BIPOC cultural events such as Blockorama at Toronto Pride.

### 6.10.    BLM-TO and Blockorama: Taking Back Space

In a chapter titled "honoured group (june)" from his book *The Skin We're In,* Desmond Cole (2020) outlines the history of protests, cultural events, and organizations that generated Toronto's Pride celebrations as we now know them. To provide background, Cole emphasizes

the central roles played by queer and trans people of colour in the 1969 riots in response to the raid on the Stonewall Inn in New York City, long attributed as a major catalyst for subsequent marches and protests for LGBTQ+ rights and freedoms. Yet despite the centrality of the Stonewall riots to Pride's legacy, over fifty years later the fierce protest that generated Pride has been all but forgotten in mainstream Pride celebrations. As Cole points out, "at some point the 'Pride march' became the 'Pride parade'" (211).

Cole describes the history of the queer Black activists that fought for space for queer BIPOC in Toronto Pride, drawing on research from University of Toronto Gender Studies professor Dr. Beverly Bain. Dr. Bain recounts how a small group of queer Black activists assembled in 1998 to discuss "the absence of a Black queer and queer of colour presence in the Toronto Pride festivities" (Cole 2020, 211). These activists formed a coordinating committee called Blackness Yes! in 1999 and proposed a stage programmed by and for Black queers in Toronto Pride's weekend festivities. Although it took hard work to convince Toronto Pride how important it was for Black diasporic queers to have their own space, Blackness Yes! held its first Blockorama event during Toronto Pride in 1999.

Blockorama was a success from the start, and by 2007 had attracted up to 25,000 participants (Cole 2020). Yet, that same year Toronto Pride moved Blockorama to a smaller site, resulting in the first ever-medical emergencies occurring at Blockorama. Blockorama's organizers and stakeholders continued to fight for their space when Toronto Pride tried to relocate Blockorama again in 2010–"for the third time in four years" (214). Black queer and trans people and their allies protested, and Blockorama was allowed to remain in their present site. The Blackness Yes! members continued to advocate for a return to their bigger, original stage. Pride Toronto gave Blockorama back their original space in 2011, only to also demand

that Blockorama let their stage be licensed for alcohol. Having a licensed stage meant that

attendees would have to line up for hours to gain entry, and moreover, they would be subject to

searches and ID checks–clearly problematic practices given the well documented hostility and

brutality toward people of colour on behalf of the Toronto police. Blockorama's supporters

rallied again, and in 2012 the event ran in its original space, without having to be licensed; a

success, but again, one that was hard fought for.

Despite the return of Blockorama to its original, larger, and safer location, queer and trans

BIPOC people continued to be marginalized by Toronto Pride in other ways. It should not have

been a surprise thus, that after Toronto Pride made BLM-TO[81] the "honoured group" in the 2016

parade, BLM-TO bravely asserted their status by shutting the parade down for approximately 30

minutes and presenting a list of nine demands to Pride Toronto. One of the nine demands was to

increase the funding and prestige of Blockorama, recognized as an integral part of Toronto

Pride's annual street celebration. However, the demand that got the most media attention by far

was that uniformed police not be permitted to march in the Pride parade.[82] BLM-TO's shutdown

created massive controversy, and exposed the racism and homonationalism of white queer and

allied communities. As Cole states, "the mainstream just couldn't fathom that Black people are

also queer and trans people, that Black queer and trans people would unapologetically claim their

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[81] Cole points out that since it was created "in late 2014, BLM-TO had become a consistent and effective force in Toronto, a city where powerful white people endlessly boast about how good they are to the rest of us. The group's advocacy exposed the limitations and exclusions of Toronto's claims to multiculturalism and diversity" (2020, 189).

[82] As Cole explains, BLM-TO was not advocating that law enforcement workers be prohibited from marching and participating in the Pride parade, but rather that their presence in uniform and carrying weapons be barred from marching in the official parade:

> We have to consider Pride Toronto's commitment to 'the continued fight for Black lives' alongside the fact that the largest delegation at Toronto's 2016 Pride Parade was a group of hundreds of police from across southern Ontario…a video of the police delegation passing by a stationary camera is almost nine minutes long. Many officers were in full uniform and were carrying their weapons. There was even a Pride in Corrections delegation of prison staffers, which included a bus with tinted windows. The *Toronto Star* had reported on this vehicle at previous Pride parades, describing it as 'what looked like a prisoner bus decked out in rainbow flags.' Does *your* parade have a prison bus? (Cole 2020, 222)

historical and ongoing role in Toronto's queer liberation struggles" (2020, 187-188). BLM-TO and Blockorama's organizers, and their respective communities and allies, understood how vital it was to have their own space as queer people of colour to celebrate their cultures, communities, struggles, and achievements.

As I demonstrated in regard to Lick, having a permanent space with material supports can be crucial in fostering cultural scenes and communities for marginalized groups. Having a permanent space with material supports enabled Lick to establish itself as an underground queer bar whose staff and patrons sought to make a safe party space for womxn and trans people who were marginalized in Vancouver's night life culture. As demonstrated in regard to Celebrities, cultural spaces for marginalized groups are always under the threat of being co-opted by mainstream and commercial forces if and when they garner mainstream attention. The struggles of Blockorama to at first obtain and then retain the space for their celebration reflects both the importance of having permanent space, and the reality that such spaces must continually be vigilantly defended from interference from the dominant culture.

The following chapter continues to explore the cultural activism of womxn, queers, and people of colour, as I examine three different call-outs that occurred in underground dance music scenes in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver. I document the backlash that occurred when Ciel (aka Cindy Li) called out an all-male DJ crew for failing to book womxn DJs for their large and prestigious DJ parties, thereby advocating for increased representation of womxn and non-binary artists in Toronto DJ lineups. I then look at Catherine Cola's call out of an established male DJ in Montreal who had allegedly sexually assaulted several women the city's underground dance music scene (Bachman 2017; Forster 2017). Following, I discuss events in Vancouver's underground club scene revolving around allegations made on social media about male DJs and

promoters that had allegedly sexually assaulted womxn in the scene (Bula and Lederman 2017).

I conclude the next chapter by discussing what my interview and survey participants said about

the sexual harassment and assault they experienced in their respective scenes, in order to draw

connections between times and places in light of sexism, sexual harassment, and sexual assault in

Canadian DJ culture.

# CHAPTER 7: CALLING (OUT) ALL BOYS: FEMINIST DISCURSIVE ACTIVISM IN DJ CULTURE

## 7.1.    Introduction

*It goes to show how truly the world is held together by the silence of women. There's no woman on earth who has not held together a relationship, a job, a community, a family, by their silence – our whole lives, every power structure, every scene, every dance club, everything is held together by the notion that women will not talk about certain things that have happened to them, because if we did, the shit would hit the fan so fucking hard and so fucking fast.* (The Blessed Madonna, in Brailey 2016)

Social media has enabled the discursive activism that is currently a mainstay of modern feminist movements. Campaigns such as #MeToo (created by Black feminist Tarana Burke) and the Hollywood-led #TimesUp have mobilized people to break the silence around sexual harassment and assault. Sexism and sexual assault are as prevalent in both mainstream and underground dance music scenes as they are in society at large.[83] In Chapter 2 of this study I demonstrate how womxn and non-binary DJs have been historically under-represented in DJ culture in terms of numbers and media representation. Fortunately, things have been changing over the past decade as social media interactions between DJ industry stakeholders concerning gendered discrimination begin to afford womxn DJs ways to disrupt the industry's male networks (Gadir 2016). This discursive activism employs various methods, such as forming

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[83] A *Vice.com* article expounds: "The entire music industry has a big problem with incidents of sexual harassment and assault. Dance music is far from exempt; if anything it's even further behind in terms of attitudes towards women than other areas of the [music] industry. The problem runs the full gamut . . . from internet trolls telling women to stop complaining about the gender gap in dance music, to dudes wearing Eat, Sleep, Rape, Repeat t-shirts at Coachella, through to women being raped in club toilet stalls" ("The Music Industry Has A Problem With Sexual Assault. Here Are 11 Stories You Can Read About It").

collectives of womxn and non-binary DJs to produce events and claim space (Li 2017), pressuring festivals and music labels to book and sign more womxn and non-binary DJs and producers (Julious 2017), calling out sexist artists, curators, and label managers (http://verymalelineups.tumblr.com), and speaking out about sexual assault in dance music scenes, including underground scenes (Hutchison 2017).

This chapter explores the discursive activism deployed by womxn and non-binary DJs and their allies to advocate for increased representation and safer spaces in DJ culture. Specifically, I examine the online discourse that occurred subsequent to Toronto DJ Ciel calling-out an all-male DJ crew in Toronto for failing to book womxn DJs for their long-standing events. These discussions reveal how long-held claims about the rarity of 'good' womxn DJs (Gadir 2017) continue to be invoked by members of the Toronto underground disco and house music scene, and are retrenched through online discourse. Following, I discuss far more extreme events taking place in Montreal and Vancouver involving call-outs of men accused of sexual assault. I illustrate the links between womxn DJs' representation in Toronto and safer spaces in Montreal and Vancouver to demonstrate how a lack of womxn and non-binary representation in DJ line-ups nurtures sexism, and by extension, sexual assault, in underground dance music scenes. I conclude this chapter by analyzing interview and survey responses that discuss participants' experiences with sexism and sexual harassment while working and participating in DJ culture. In addition to the literature reviewed and the survey and interviews conducted for this dissertation, this chapter also draws on qualitative data from public Reddit posts, a semi-structured interview with Toronto-based DJ, producer and promoter Ciel, and participant observation at two panel discussions in Toronto; in December 2017 and May 2018 respectively.[84]

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84 The December 2017 panel discussion I attended was titled "Femme/Female Representation in Toronto's Music Scene" and was a part of a series of talks on inclusivity in Toronto's music scene titled *Control/Shift*. This event

Similar to different factions of feminist movements, underground dance music scenes are comprised of networks of individuals who interact with each other in various sites online and off, forming a "discursive community" (Shaw 2013, 91). Facebook in particular is heavily trafficked with discourse from these overlapping communities, which are often referred to as 'scenes' in dance music culture, in accordance with Woo et al.'s description of a 'scene' as outlined in the prior chapter of this dissertation. For the purpose of this discussion, I define "discourse" as that which "constitutes situations, objects of knowledge, and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people" (Fairclough and Wodak 1997, in Jackson and Banaszczyk 2016, 395). This definition references events, different perspectives on gender and DJ culture, and the various players who occupy diverse positions along the intersectional axis of gender, race, sexuality, class, age, ability, and other societal identity factors.

I posit that the words and actions of feminist activists in dance music scenes constitute a "critical discourse", which seeks to "intervene in institutional, social or political issues, problems and controversies in the world" (Gee 2014, 9). In this way, feminist activists comprise a discursive community within DJ culture that is pushing for change. Indeed, "interactions and engagement on social media are often directly linked, or even result from, events taking place outside of it. Moreover, they are produced within a specific historical, social, political, and economic context" (Quan-Haase and Sloan 2017, 3). The acts of calling out–and calling in–[85]

included Ciel as a panelist and focused on how to increase women-identified representation in Toronto's underground dance music scenes. The May 2018 panel discussion was sponsored by Smirnoff and was a part of their *Tomorrow/Tonight* campaign that focuses on making nightlife more inclusive for BIPOC, womxn, and/or queer people.

[85] "Calling in" refers to having the time, patience, and desire to help someone understand how their behaviour and/or actions are hurtful or have negative repercussions. "Calling in" as a concept was popularized by queer, disabled writer and activist of colour Ngọc Loan Trần (2013), who defines it as a practice of loving each other enough to allow each other to make mistakes, a practice of loving ourselves enough to know that what we're trying to do here is a radical unlearning of everything we have been configured to believe is normal." Tran is careful to point out that both calling in and calling out are useful tools: "I don't propose practicing 'calling in' in opposition to

constitute types of feminist critical discourse or feminist discursive activism that womxn

stakeholders in DJ culture use to challenge sexism and sexual assault in Canadian DJ culture.

In regard to the three case studies examined in this chapter, calling-out denotes an online

public shaming (public shaming for the twenty-first century if you will), as much of this

discursive activism is done online (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller 2019). Mobile technology

accelerates ease and access to social media, therefore call-outs and their ensuing discussions

erupt and spread rapidly throughout social networks, because people can post and share to a

multitude of social media sites from almost anywhere at any time (Sloan and Quan-Haase 2017).

These far-reaching social media platforms are highly advantageous to feminist organizing, to the

degree that Facebook is identified as a key site of "fourth wave" feminist activism (Crossley

2015). Munro (2013) explains further:

> Many commentators argue that the Internet itself has enabled a shift from 'third-wave' to
>
> 'fourth-wave' feminism. What is certain is that the Internet has created a 'call-out' culture,
>
> in which sexism or misogyny can be 'called out' and challenged. This culture is indicative
>
> of the continuing influence of the third wave, with its focus on micro politics and
>
> challenging sexism and misogyny insofar as they appear in everyday rhetoric, advertising,
>
> film, television and literature, the media, and so on.
>
> Those who maintain that increased usage of the Internet is not enough to delineate a
>
> new era have challenged the existence of a feminist 'fourth wave'. But it is increasingly
>
> clear that the Internet has facilitated the creation of a global community of feminists who
>
> use the Internet both for discussion and activism. (23)

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calling out. I don't think that our work has room for binary thinking and action. However, I do think that it's
possible to have multiple tools, strategies, and methods existing simultaneously. It's about being strategic, weighing
the stakes and figuring out what we're trying to build and how we are going to do it together" (Trần 2013).

Megarry (2017) cites several theorists in support of conceiving of a fourth wave of feminism as defined by online feminist activism and alliances:

Much feminist organizing now takes place on public, internationally accessible social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, and YouTube. Academics and social commentators alike have suggested that women's use of social media technologies for feminist activism denotes a fourth wave of the movement (Kira Cochrane 2013; Elizabeth Evans 2015; Ealasaid Munro 2013) . . . Celebratory narratives suggest "we are witnessing seismic shifts around the uptake of feminism," and position social media platforms as offering unique opportunities for women to challenge the dominant social and political order (Hanna Retallack, Jessica Ringrose, and Emilie Lawrence 2016, 86; Roopika Risam 2015; Alison Dahl Crossley 2015). As a recent report from the US-based Barnard Centre for Research on Women claims, social media has reanimated feminist activism, and enabled increasing numbers of women to "share their stories and analysis, raise awareness and organize collective actions, and discuss difficult issues" across cultural, geographical, and generational lines (Courtney Martin and Jessica Valenti 2012, 6). (Megarry 2017, 1071)

A specifically Canadian "celebratory narrative" centers Alice Glass, the ex-vocalist of Canadian electronic group Crystal Castles, who called out former band mate Ethan Kath over Facebook in the fall of 2017 for emotionally, physically and sexually abusing her during their time together in the band ("Alice Glass Statement"). Glass' call out resulted in Kath and the new formation of Crystal Castles to cancel all of their forthcoming tour dates (Britton 2018). Recently, Glass has forged a career under her own name and released solo work, including a single titled "I trusted you", about Kath's abuse. In 2018 another four women came forward to

accuse Kath of similar crimes. As of April 2020, the most recent article I could find on the topic was from the CBC on December 22, 2017, and it confirms that at that time, Kath was under active investigation by the Toronto Police Sex Crimes Unit ("Toronto police confirm sex crimes investigation into Ethan Kath of Crystal Castles").

Regardless of its effectiveness, calling-out is a problematic tactic and as such is subject to backlash, fuelled by the criticism that it is a manifestation of vigilante justice with the potential to ruin innocent lives. Moreover, just as social media enables the effectiveness of call-outs, the visibility of social media also raises the chances of online harassment and abuse being directed at the person calling-out (Megarry 2017). These conditions ensure that calling people out constitutes risky, emotionally draining, and often thankless unpaid labour (Kale 2018; Nakamura 2015).

## 7.2. Specific Methodological and Ethical Considerations

I will outline the key ethical considerations specific to this chapter. As discussed in my methodology chapter, it is pertinent to recognize that feminist research is defined by a refutation of claims to objectivity, a reciprocal relationship with the research subject, and the concept of reflexivity. Regarding reflexivity, I must remain aware of how my subjectivity may influence my perspective. I lived and worked as a DJ for ten years in Vancouver before moving to Toronto in 2009, where I have continued to DJ to this day. Additionally, as an avid dancer I attended many underground parties in Vancouver and Toronto over the past twenty years. I danced and socialized at the Toronto party with the all-male DJ lineup that Ciel called-out; I was not there to conduct participant observation. I am acquainted to various degrees with many of the people involved in the events in Toronto and Vancouver discussed herein. Lastly, I had slight personal and/or professional connections to some of the people being called out both in Toronto and

Vancouver. As a result, this project has been personally difficult, and I have struggled to be

acutely aware of any personal biases I might hold, understanding that objectivity is impossible,

and self-reflexivity is crucial, given the complexity of my position as researcher (Oakley 1988 as

outlined in Olszanowski 2012; Rogers 2010).

The third characteristic of feminist research stated above demands that the researcher

maintain a reciprocal relationship with the research subject, which entails knowing how

participants feel about their data being used for research. Ciel is the only person whose Facebook

posts I quote from, and I obtained her informed consent.[86] The panel discussions and media texts

that I explore I treat as public data because they are public data, as is the Reddit thread; but the

latter I treat with more caution. Researchers have noted that the blur between private and public

data poses new and unique challenges regarding methodology and ethical considerations. By

example, even data that is technically public, such as a public post or the content of an open

group on Facebook, is not considered public according to some researchers (Sloan and Quan-

Haase 2017), although other researchers have made the case that social media data such as that

from Facebook is public data and hence can be used ethically (Willis 2017).[87]

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[86] In a 2019 report titled "Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0" the International Association of Internet Researchers state that one way to mitigate risk when using data from social media sites like Facebook is to obtain "informed consent from specific subjects for the publication of a quote or other data that might make them and their personal information identifiable" (2019, 10). Again, I received informed consent from Ciel (aka Cindy Li) to publish her Facebook post. See AoIR.org "Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0".

[87] Willis outlines the major researchers and approaches taken with regards to informed consent and online research:
It is widely accepted in the social sciences that ethical research will aim to obtain informed consent from all participants involved (Bakardjieva and Feenberg, 2001; Barnes, 2004; Eynon et al., 2008; Gaiser and Schreiner, 2009). Bledsoe and Hopson (2009: 397) describe it as the most basic aspect of the research process. This principle, as Boellstorff et al. explain, was derived from biomedical research, and while it is problematic trying to translate this into ethnographic research, researchers are nevertheless obliged to inform participants about the study (2012: 132–133). But the degree to which there is flexibility with this approach is somewhat contested. Bruckman (1997), for instance, asserts that no matter how public some information is, unless informed consent can be obtained, then a study should not go ahead (cited in Sveningsson, 2004). Similarly, Duncan (1996) proclaims that gathering data without informed consent will always violate privacy (cited in Roberts et al., 2004). Nevertheless, there is wide acceptance that a flexible approach to research ethics is required (Ess and the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR) ethics

In order to exercise caution, my position as an insider who is familiar with various underground music scenes in Vancouver and Toronto should be viewed as a resource in both positive *and* problematic ways. By example, when the list of Vancouver men accused of sexual assault was first posted on Facebook it appeared on a closed group page comprised of Vancouver-based feminists, that I was granted access to through my friendship with one of its members. My friend alerted me to the list because I knew three of the seven men named; I briefly worked with one of them, and shared a volunteer space with another. This is one of several examples of how my insider status intersects with my presence on social media to function as a resource for my research. This example also illustrates the complexities and complications afforded by my connections to the Vancouver underground dance music scene.

I was privy to the Facebook debates around all-male lineups in Toronto also, because of my Facebook connections at the time with many of the key agents; both the people doing the call-outs, and the people who were being called out, as well as allies affiliated with both groups. Therefore I was able to see the heated debates as they unfolded on my various friends' Facebook pages, meaning I could also see the comments from people that I was not friends with on Facebook. While I make general reference to some heated exchanges occurring on specific Facebook friends' pages, I do not quote anyone's Facebook posts directly, aside from Ciel's. I do quote directly from two Reddit contributors, and in this case I am following Willis (2017) and treating the Reddit posts as "observational research in a public space", with Reddit being the

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working committee, 2002). Gaiser and Schreiner (2009), for example, advise that there are no hard and fast rules about whether or not it is ethical to use data from an online website. Whiteman (2012:9) also expresses how it is preferable to take a contextualised approach to each online situation, instead of adhering to generalised, context-free principles. (Willis 2017, para 4)

public space.[88] Furthermore, the Reddit users that I quote from are not identifiable by their Reddit usernames, nor do the phrases I quote reveal any specific, personal details about the person posting. Therefore, I am again following Willis (2017), who contends that "there are at least two ways informed consent could be waived in research: first, if the data are public, and second, if the data are textual" (abstract). Both circumstances apply to Reddit, as its users post publicly, using text.

### 7.3.    Et Tu Toronto?

*You can bully us, call us names, but you can't fucking silence us [because] I just wrote a fucking essay.* (Ciel, Facebook post, August 17, 2017)

In September 2017 Ciel[89] and Chippy Non-stop[90] created a public Google Doc listing womxn, femme and non-binary DJs currently active in Toronto, to function as a resource for booking agents and promoters seeking to diversify their DJ and artist lineups. Anyone can access the Doc online, and any relevant DJ can have their name added, as well as the genres that they

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[88] Willis (2017) expounds further on the ways researchers have interpreted online postings as either public or private texts:

> Sensitive to similar concerns, Whiteman (2010, 2012) deployed a strategy adopted by other online researchers (Hookway, 2008; Rosenberg, 2010). Their approach contends that the technical levels of access to some domain do not alone determine whether or not the domain is properly public or private, and therefore whether or not informed consent should be sought (e.g. see Whiteman, 2012: 61–62). Rather, it specifies a different (or extra) constraint: levels of privacy or publicness as perceived by the users of online communities. The way I adopt this strategy takes both definitions of the public/private divide as relevant ethical factors for online research. This means that a researcher collecting data from an online space ought to consider both the technical accessibility of information uploaded by users, *and* how those users treat that information. This approach is appealing since it embraces established norms of observation research – those that consider subjects' beliefs and expectations – and thereby widens the requisite considerations for researchers who use online, publicly accessible information. It follows from this approach that consent can only be waived for online, publicly (i.e. technically) available information when users treat such information as being public. (para 8)

[89] I first met Toronto DJ, producer, promoter and activist Ciel (aka Cindy Li) in person when I attended a panel discussion titled "Femme/Womxn Representation In Toronto's Music Scene". Li and the three other panelists shared their strategies for increasing performance opportunities and exposure for womxn and non-binary musicians and DJs in order to generate equity for these artists in cultural landscapes.

[90] As discussed in Chapter 6 of this study, Chippy Non-stop (aka Chhavi Nanda) organizes an on-going series of instructional DJ workshops titled *Intersessions* in Vancouver, Toronto, and elsewhere, for women and non-binary people (Baldwin 2019).

play and/or produce. By taking action, Li and Nanda echoed a global movement demanding more representation in DJ culture for womxn and non-binary artists (see "About Female Pressure" on femalepressure.net).

By early 2018 the Doc boasted over 200 Toronto-based womxn and non-binary DJs, thereby nullifying the excuse that it is difficult to book womxn and non-binary DJs because nobody knows of enough "good" ones in Toronto that play certain genres, and/or that play on certain formats (read: turntables and records). Ciel was personally inspired to create the Doc in part to provide a resource for a friend of hers who was seeking to diversify his parties. The response to the Doc was mainly positive, however 'haters' tried to delegitimize it by evaluating it according to bizarre and irrelevant standards (Edwards 2017). Fortunately, many people shared it on social media and used it to book more womxn and non-binary DJs, and the Doc is still active as I write this in 2020. Yet ironically, the Doc did not bear influence on some of the promoters and DJs that inspired it in the first place; specifically, those connected to the controversial party with the all-male DJ lineup, as outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Following is a brief outline of the series of events that occurred leading up to, and after, the Doc was posted. Ciel described these events to me in a personal interview (December 2017) and a follow-up Facebook Messenger exchange (29 February 2018). I also reference a *NOW Magazine* interview with Ciel (Edwards 2017).

A friend of Ciel's who threw underground dance parties asked her for suggestions on how to make their parties safer and more comfortable for women. Ciel gave him several suggestions, one of which was to book womxn and non-binary DJs for their long-running events that always had all-male DJ line-ups. Ciel outlines the situation in the following Facebook post from 17 August 2017 that garnered 366 likes, twenty shares, and forty-eight comments (most of them

supportive):

> A month ago, [a friend] called me on the phone bc [sic] he wanted some advice on how to prevent [sexual assault] from happening in our community and how to make his parties more inclusive. It was a very productive conversation and I was touched he felt he could ask me for advice. One of the things I told him was that he needed to book more women, which he admitted was a problem they needed to tackle moving forward. The very next party I saw him co-organize was this lineup of 8 male DJs, which made me feel like my time and energy had been in vain. After me + other women called them out, [my friend] and I had several conversations on the phone, regarding solutions and ways to move forward. He was never at any point upset with me, and was extremely humble and big-hearted every step of the way. The thing that he understood . . . is that a justified callout is not a form of bullying, it is an opportunity for growth. None of us are perfect, I have been called out many times. What's a measure of good character is not how many times we've been called out, but how we respond to it. [My friend] responded by vowing to do better, and suggested a revised 50:50 [line-up], which would have given new life to a party that everyone and their grandma already knows never ever books women–us calling it out was simply stating the obvious. Sadly, he presented it to his partners who immediately rejected it [on the grounds that to revise the line up to include women] would be like giving in to the lunatics. (Cindy Li, Facebook post, 17 August 2017)

Ciel's call-out generated an intense backlash from some members of the all-male DJ crew that she called out, as well as their allies, all of whom contested her assertion that the continual all-male DJ line-ups were a result of sexist gatekeeping. Supporters of the all-male DJ lineup harassed both Ciel, and her friend who was working towards gender parity in future DJ lineups.

These events–the creation of the list, Ciel's call-out, and the subsequent harassment–all occurred during the week leading up to Ciel's first Boiler Room DJ set, a major booking that has become somewhat of a right of passage for DJs over the past decade.

Due to the widespread popularity of Ciel and Chippy's Google Doc, in late September 2017 the Toronto weekly arts and culture magazine *NOW* ran an interview with Ciel about the progressive impact of the Google Doc, titled "Local Hero: Cindy Li is Making Toronto's Electronic Music Scene a Better Place" (Edwards 2017). Despite the positive tone of the article, the online comment board garnered so much horrific abuse directed toward Ciel that *NOW* had to take it down. When I interviewed Ciel on 19 December 2017, she described the cruel comments and accusations of illegal activity directed at her and some of her friends. Anonymous people posting on the *NOW* online comment board threatened to call the police on Ciel's events, and shortly after, police were called to two of her (legal) parties. People posted homophobic comments branding Ciel as a lesbian–as though it were an insult–fueled by the assumption that she was gay, because she advocated for diversity.

The *NOW* article, the Google Doc, and Ciel herself were also the subject of a Reddit thread wherein people argued for and against intentionally booking artists with gender parity or a certain quota as a goal. These sentiments are espoused in the comment with the most points (thirty-nine) in the Reddit thread: "House music has always been about leaving all the bullshit at the door and coming together for the music regardless of beliefs, sexuality, race and gender. The Toronto scene has never excluded women, and has always celebrated them. This all seems misguided and just another excuse to shove identity politics in a place where it doesn't belong" (Gottagetgot). According to this reasoning, the Toronto underground house music scene exists in a vacuum completely devoid of influence from patriarchal structures and socialization, and

moreover this decades-old scene has "never" excluded but "always" celebrated women. Obviously such generalizations are completely invalid, which is why these views are expressed as clichés such as "leave all the bullshit at the door and coming together for the music regardless of beliefs, sexuality, race and gender". These beliefs also run contrary to the history of disco and house music.

As discussed previously in this dissertation, it has been thoroughly demonstrated that house music was originally created by mainly queer and working class Black and Latinx men and trans folks who were *carving out their own space as a shelter in a racist, classist, homophobic and transphobic world.* House music is *inherently political*, and the desire to literally whitewash it does not change these historical facts. The person expressing that "identity politics" do not belong in underground music may feel that way because they feel an inherent belonging and therefore entitlement due to privileges garnered by gender, race, and sexuality. As discussed in Chapter 3, Gadir (2017) has demonstrated that it is not just mainstream, commercial dance music events that exhibit gender asymmetry, but also " 'alternative' events focused on niche musical genres in which participants identify with leftist, communitarian ideologies, and which promoters market on the basis of social and environmental consciousness" (Gadir 2017, 117).

Dumptruck_Cavalcade agrees with Gottagetgot "100%", because "Calling out other people who are spending their own time and money to put on dance music events for their supposed lack of diversity is really lame and honestly smacks of sour grapes" (reddit.com). In addition to being ablest ("really lame"), this statement is text-book victim-blaming, echoing the defense used by men accused of workplace sexual harassment; the old and tired 'she had romantic feelings for him that he did not reciprocate so now she is out to get him' narrative inferred by the expression "smacks of sour grapes". This is a classic trope in Western culture routinely invoked

to invalidate accusations of oppressive behaviour. Moreover, the all-male DJ line-up that Ciel called out did not "supposedly" lack diversity; it demonstrably and irrefutably lacked diversity *because it consisted entirely of cisgendered men*. To state otherwise is akin to gas lighting.

This lack of representation behind the decks reinforces the imbalance of power in dance music culture that renders men subjects and women objects. As Ciel stated, by failing to book womxn and non-binary artists, male gatekeepers demonstrate how they "don't see us as having value as artists and selectors" (Li 2017). Chippy further explains why womxn's representation in DJ lineups is important: "If there's women in the forefront, they will be in a power position enough to speak up" (Bula and Lederman 2017). In an interview with *DiSCORDER* Magazine, Montreal DJ and promoter Catherine Colas elaborates upon why all-male line ups need to be called out:

> When you have an all-male lineup, and the event is thrown by men as well, the event attracts a big swarm of men, and it doesn't really promote a diverse crowd. It just caters to people who don't really have to suffer sexual harassment that much, or don't have to deal with these kinds of things on a regular basis. So when I talked about that [on social media], I got a fuck load of backlash. A lot of people contacted me saying that I had 'a really shitty attitude' and was bringing 'bad vibes'. People would resort to homophobic comments too: 'Oh, she's an angry lesbian and that's why she's saying this, because she just hates men.'

Again, because Colas advocated for diversity she was also 'accused' of being a lesbian: "I find it frustrating when [homophobia] happens because another aspect of my prodding against all-male lineups is that not only are these lineups predominantly men, but they are predominantly straight, too. I have a lot of queer friends that I have to convince to come to events because they assume

the vibe will not be on par" (Bachmann 2017). As discussed in the previous chapter, Stacked lost a great deal of its safe and relaxed atmosphere when more and more straight people who were not committed queer allies started attending.

### 7.4.     #MeTooMontreal

*Calling out is not 'politics being brought into the music world,' but [pointing to] a problem that exists within society*. (Catherine Colas, in Bachmann 2017)

In the summer of 2017 Catherine Colas took to Facebook to call out a long-standing male DJ and promoter in Montreal's underground dance scene for allegedly sexually assaulting several women. In an interview with *DiSCORDER Magazine*, Colas describes how she was working the door at a nightclub one evening, and over the course of the night several women approached her to express their discomfort with the alleged offender's presence at the club. Over the next few days Colas learned of several women claiming that this same man had assaulted them. She then understood the magnitude of the threat that he posed to women's safety and realized that she had to call him out. This was a difficult task that Colas had to undertake alone at first, given that this person had amassed a great deal of cultural and social capital after being a part of Montreal's underground dance music scene for over a decade. Colas elaborates:

> I remember making comments to people, 'Why do you support this person's projects? and people would say things like, 'Ahhh, you know, it's the politics. Sometimes it's really hard to navigate, so we try to preserve the peace as long as nothing terrible is going on.' But through this [call-out], I have discovered that for many years, a lot of these same people I had conversations with knew about the *very terrible* things the [alleged offender] did that involved violently assaulting women. Some of these women had directly told these people

what had happened to them, and their experiences were so minimized that it almost

convinced [the victims] that assaults hadn't happened. (Bachman 2017)

Colas' comments describe enablers whose complicity with sexual assault is manifested in how

they work to silence people that speak out. Colas' call-out broke that silence, and she was

roundly criticized for "the way" in which she called the accused out.[91] Given the considerable

amount of power the accused wielded in the scene, people were reluctant to call him out on his

actions and/or impose consequences such as banning him from events or firing him from DJing

gigs. People also expressed gratitude and support to Colas (Bachmann 2017). Over Twitter, a

well-known restaurateur called for a boycott of the energy drink manufactured by a company co-

owned by the accused. The boycott proved unnecessary however as the accused's business

partner dissolved the company after the accusations went public (Forster 2017). The call out did

not result in any charges being laid or legal action directed at the accused, however at that time

he did not try to defend himself publicly from the accusations and apparently left Montreal's

trendy Mile End neighbourhood.

### 7.5. #MeTooVancouver

The events in Vancouver garnered far more publicity than those in Montreal, likely

because seven people were accused of sexual assault (or multiple assaults in some cases) and one

of them, Zachery Webb, committed suicide.[92] Central to the call-out was a list of seven names

that also indicated those who were accused multiple times, and the number of accusations against

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[91] Said Colas: "People keep writing me to tell me that the way I called out was bad, but how else could I have done it? I don't think there is a right way to call out, I think there is just a way. The reason why saying it publicly is good, is that it just gets the word out. I mean, I would like to know. I wouldn't want to hook up with someone who is a violent rapist, and has not acknowledged their problem or been seeking help" (Bachmann 2017).

[92] As Webb took his life two days prior to the list being posted to the private Facebook page, it is unclear as to whether or not he knew of the list and that his name was on it (I did not know Webb personally, nor did I know of him when I lived and worked in Vancouver).

each person (if there was more than one accusation). The list was circulated privately at first, and then posted on a closed Facebook group page a few days later, and a friend that I knew from the Lick days invited me to the closed Facebook group so that I could follow the discussion. Many of the men on the list had been active in the Vancouver scene for more than ten years by 2017, and as mentioned I had known two of them personally.

A *Globe and Mail* article about the events in Vancouver outlines the debate around "a women's right to speak out and an accused person's right to due process" (Bula and Lederman 2017). Erica Lapadat-Janzen was one of the people to post screenshots of the list, and as a result Facebook froze her account for a few days, therefore it is assumed that someone reported her. (Not surprisingly, Facebook also froze Ciel's account for a few days after she called-out the promoters and DJs responsible for the all-male line up, again, presumably after a complaint). As Lapadat-Jazen points out, "If none of us talk, it's silence" (Bula and Lederman 2017), and her point is echoed by several women interviewed for the *Globe* article, who agree that using call-outs and ostracism to fight sexual assault is just a Band-Aid tactic. The real struggle is in transforming patriarchal societal systems such as education, justice, law-enforcement, and culture, into egalitarian ones. The *Globe* article also points out the extreme problems associated with publicly accusing people of serious crimes, as exemplified by the tragedy of Webb's suicide. Furthermore, on top of fear of backlash, womxn in Vancouver's music scene may face even more pressure to stay silent about incidences of sexual assault, if they feel that speaking out could lead to accused people harming themselves or taking their own lives.

### 7.6. Backlash, Surveillance and Silencing Tactics

In a *Mixmag* article titled "Social Media is Dangerously Affecting DJs' Mental Health", Kale (2018) acknowledges that social media has been a democratizing force to help DJs get past

regional gatekeepers, but it has also created additional barriers as gatekeepers can often take the form of trolls. Kale discusses the glaring difference between harassment received by men compared to that which women endure: "social media is especially damaging for those on the receiving end of online trolling: be it homophobia, body shaming, or misogyny. Women and minority groups within the industry are most likely to cop abuse within dance music". Megarry studied men's surveillance of online feminist activism and "how strategies of male dominance on Social Media platforms influence feminist activism" (2017, 1070). According to Megarry, this activism is highly visible: "in contrast to the women only spaces of resistance sought by the second wave, social media platforms render feminist activists vulnerable to dismissive male interjections and violent strategies of harassment" (1070). Megarry calls for "further research into the ways in which male surveillance practices on social media platforms are shaping women's ability to organize for social change" (1071) because, as she explains, "the harassment of women online is more frequent and qualitatively different, to that which men receive– amounting to surveillance when theorized at the collective level" (1071). Again, recall how Ciel was surveilled and policed after the *NOW* article, with law enforcement officers showing up at two of her legal parties, indicating that perhaps someone had called the police on her parties, despite not having a legitimate reason to do so.

During the panel discussion I attended in December 2017, Ciel discussed how often she is tone policed and/or accused of "uncivil behavior", and it must be considered that as an Asian womxn she is policed more harshly than white womxn who call-out sexism and use other means to fight discrimination. As discussed in detail in Chapter 5 of this dissertation, womxn generally have to push back against gendered stereotypes that often differ according to our perceived race, class, age, sexuality, and overall appearance. Recall DJ Chiclet's description of how people

assume her to be passive, and heterosexual. Women from Asian backgrounds have to contend with the binary representations of the overly passive ("me love you long time!") or overly aggressive (dragon lady) feminine stereotypes applied to them. I interviewed Ciel in 2017, approximately two years after my interview with Chiclet, and so I was not surprised to learn how Ciel was also saddled with a sexist, racist, and binary stereotype: that of the dragon lady, whose assumed ruthlessness causes her assumed incivility (Gorilla Girls 2003).

The fact that Ciel and Chippy are both women of colour highlights the ways in which women of colour are consistently at the forefront of pushing for social change. Nakamura (2015) discusses the digital labour of women of colour who intervene in racist and misogynist discourses online: "often efforts by feminists and social justice activists to reduce misogyny and sexism online are unwanted, punished, and viewed as censorship, uncivil behavior, or themselves forms of sexism. Social justice venture labourers are often accused of 'policing' social media, of lacking a sense of humour, and of imposing 'pc' values on other users by protesting misogyny, racism and homophobia when they see it" (111). Nakamura posits these activists as "venture community" managers because she views them as knowledge workers, akin to venture laborers in software businesses.

In the previous chapter I documented the sexism and sexual harassment that I personally endured while DJing at Celebrities in Vancouver from 2004 until 2008. It is worth noting again, that when Chippy moved to Vancouver in 2015, she was disappointed by the lack of spaces for womxn (particularly BIPOC womxn) in Vancouver DJ culture, inspiring her to start Intersessions in Vancouver. Chippy's observation took place four years after Lick closed, causing me to wonder whether she would have found a more desirable underground DJ scene if the Lick club had still existed. I know that things were dire enough in Vancouver in 2011 that the

W2 Media Arts Society created a festival called Utopia in order to stage an intervention in Vancouver and create space for womxn in digital culture by putting on a large festival of women artists working in digital cultures. I was honoured to co-curate and produce Utopia, and I elaborate on this experience in my conclusion. When I conducted my interviews and survey for this dissertation in 2014 and 2015, my participants also related several incidences of sexism and sexual harassment that they experienced while DJing or participating in DJ culture. The following section analyzes this data.

### 7.7.    Sexism and Sexual Harassment in Canadian DJ Culture

Given that the survey was anonymous, I can not properly determine if any of my survey respondents from Vancouver, who comprise 22 percent of the total survey respondents, had experienced sexism, sexual harassment, or assault at the hands of any of the seven men accused over social media, or if any of the Montreal-based DJs that I interviewed had been assaulted by the Montreal DJ called out by Colas. Moreover, I did not ask a direct question about sexual harassment or assault in the interviews, nor in the survey. Still, some participants shared their experiences on their own volition. For example, below, Blondtron describes how her image as a sexually provocative performer sometimes is viewed as an invitation for people to overstep boundaries:

> Blondtron: I've had a lot more shitty interactions with people, and like shitty things happen to me at shows because I put myself… oh, you're asking for it kind of thing.
>
> Me: I'm sorry, are you [talking] about sexual harassment?
>
> Blondtron: Yeah, I think it hasn't changed how much I get booked or things like that but I definitely . . . get treated a lot differently [from other DJs] in a lot of situations.

Two interview participants mentioned being drugged; one interviewee described having her

drink drugged while playing at Sonar, a (now-defunct) nightclub in Vancouver where I had

played several times around the same time period as this interviewee. DJ Ariel, who lived in

Vancouver until moving to Toronto in 2009, also mentioned being drugged, and spoke clearly

about the safety risks of being a nightclub DJ during our interview: "Like, I don't know if

you're going to put something in my drink. I have been drugged before and I don't trust that

shit. So, you know, like there's also a line that I have to draw, which can inhibit, you know, like

further networking, because I can't, necessarily, assume that the people that I'm communicating

with, or trying to network with, or build with, are actually cool". Here, DJ Ariel describes how

the threat of sexual assault can prevent her from networking, as she can not be sure she will be

safe in any given club or party environment. DJ Ariel's words were echoed by one of my survey

respondents, who stated: "Being a female I find that almost every male I have encountered in

my career so far, has attempted to hit on me in some fashion. I just want to have more friends

that are like minded, so it's tough to decipher who is truly your friend". In this way, the potential

threat of sexual harassment and assault can be a barrier for womxn participating in DJ culture.

My survey respondents also described how the threat of assault could impede them from

fully participating in DJ culture, by relating negative experiences of sexism and harassment.

Again, while I did not ask a direct question in the survey regarding sexual assault or harassment

in DJ culture, I did pose the question: "What do you dislike about DJing?" Several respondents

to this question described experiencing sexism, harassment, and sexual harassment. After coding

the responses to this question, I ended up with twenty-four categories, and herein I will discuss

the top four things that my survey respondents disliked about DJing. The most disliked aspect of

DJing was encapsulated by the category "bad coworkers/politics", as described by 25 percent of

my respondents. Music "requests" was a close second at 23 percent, followed by "sexism" at 15

percent and "bad promoters/pay"[93] at 14 percent (all percentages are approximate). With regards to the 15 percent of survey respondents that directly mentioned sexism as something they disliked about DJing, it is worth noting that again, I did not ask survey participants directly if they experienced sexism while participating in DJ culture, so this 15 percent figure should not be interpreted as indicative of the percentage of my survey sample who have experienced these things as DJs.

In response to the question "What do you dislike about DJing?" respondents of course had different words to describe the sexism they experienced, as follows: "Sometimes I hate the testosterone that pushes me out. Blah!" "Men who react and act differently around a female DJ"; "it's a boys club. It bothers me a lot how underrepresented women are in my scene", and "It can be intimidating for me, especially because it's SUCH a male-dominated industry". Two participants had more tempered responses, with one stating that while they did "experience sexism or hostility for being a woman doing what I do", they had "way more positive experiences than negative", and the other replied that there was "Nothing really" that they did not like about DJing, except "maybe condescending comments from other male DJs".

I also assigned the category of sexism to experiences illustrating more severe manifestations of sexism and misogyny, such as harassment and assault. Various survey respondents mentioned disliking "the slimy idiots who try to talk to you and pick you up while you are mixing", or " the misogynist club owners, ego of male djs", or "Getting sexually

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[93] I will explain how I differentiated the categories "bad coworkers/politics" from "bad promoters/pay". "Bad promoters/pay" was applied to respondents' descriptions of experiences of not being paid, or being paid less than promised, and other issues of not receiving what one was due. This category referenced other negative interactions with promoters and/or venues, usually to do with unrealistic promoter/venue expectations, faulty equipment, poor staging/location of the DJ workspace, not ensuring good sound or supports such as a proper sound person, and more. The category "bad coworkers/politics" referred to descriptions of incidents outside of those categorized as "bad promoters/pay", and involving other stakeholders in DJ culture, including participants in DJ workplaces, such as audience members, other DJs, sound and lighting people, graphic and visual artists, journalists and other media positions, and other staff at DJ workplaces. DJ workplaces encompass nightclubs, festivals, radio, online spaces, retail spaces, events, and more.

harassed by patrons and promoters. Discriminated against. being Trolled by haters", or "the amount of people who look at me, think they can get with me and then just drop off the face of the planet when I won't sleep with them". One respondent spoke of the negative impacts of "the bullying and sexism; the bullying is worse than anything I remembered in high school." This same DJ also described how they had spoken to "so many women" that "have experienced stalkers and some real creeps that make djing nightclubs and even traveling to other countries somewhat sketchy". One respondent spoke about getting manhandled, relating a negative experience involving "the new manager of a lounge I was playing at grabbing my upper arm tightly and hissing, "play more house!" in my ear".

Poignantly, one survey respondent managed to sum up almost everything there is to dislike about DJing from a womxn's perspective:

Being surrounded by shallowness and overblown egos, being surrounded by too much drugs and alcohol (no judgment, it just gets tiring when it's constant), being mansplained to, being in direct competition with close friends, flattering idiots and assholes, smiling off and 'appreciating' sexual harassment from fans, worrying that I'm just a cog in the wheel of the drug industry, getting paid for a tiny fraction of the effort involved, worrying about career sustainability (having to constantly stay a relevant 'hot' artist or fade very rapidly). Regular rejection/ anxiety/ jealousy when left off of important rosters. Knowing that music/skill/quality/professionalism are not what truly propel DJ careers.

The above response describes the often-toxic environment of male dominated DJ culture, an environment that does not encourage womxn DJs to speak out about sexism or sexual harassment and assault, thereby illustrating how calling-out sexual assault is often a solitary and difficult task. Colas describes how stressful it was to call out an alleged offender that held great influence

in her scene, without any initial support from others: "as a community, I think it is everyone's responsibility. Stop saying 'thank-you' to me. Don't make it sound like I am doing this great, rare work. We should all be doing this" (Bachmann 2017). As Colas, Ciel, and Lapadat-Janzen have stated, calling-out is an unpleasant process. Still, call-outs are currently the most effective tactic for enacting change in local underground dance music scenes.

This chapter examined Canadian womxn DJs' experiences of sexism, sexual harassment, and assault while participating in DJ culture, and illustrated the positive and negative ramifications of call outs. I have discussed how advances in technology have enabled womxn to take up DJing, and advocate for their place in the dance music industry by networking, organizing, and calling-out online. In these ways, DJ culture is presently at the intersection of two cultural shifts enabled by social media. One is comprised of the recent discursive activism on behalf of womxn and non-binary DJs pushing for gender parity, encompassed by another cultural shift as reflected in the greater #MeToo and #TimesUp feminist movements. (I would hope that Jimmy Savile would have been called out for his crimes, at least within his lifetime, if he had been alive when the #MeToo movement gained traction). In the 2017 panel discussion that I observed, Ciel discussed how social media call outs have given feminist advocates the most traction in disrupting the boys' clubs that dominate Canadian dance music scenes. As discussed, such remarkably public pressure has resulted in mainstream industry initiatives to address the lack of diversity. It has been harder to get past male gatekeepers at a local level however, which is one reason that activists resort to problematic tactics such as calling-out. As we reach critical mass within DJ culture, we will become increasingly effective in pushing for the structural changes needed to lessen the necessity of call-outs. The ultimate goal is to change the culture so that call-outs are no longer called for, a utopian goal, but a goal nonetheless. On

that note, in the following conclusion to this study I continue to discuss changes in DJ culture,

and what the future may bring.

**CHAPTER 8: CONCLUSION**

*More women are taking up more prominent roles in the culture and creation of electronic music and digital arts. And that is amazing to witness. There are still ingrained sexist attitudes and biases that dominant the culture at large, but I have never seen such an explosion of creation by women, as in the last 10 years or so.* (Patti Schmidt, "Interview With Patti Schmidt")

## 8.1. Changes

In 2012 Farrugia described how "… the changing climate of sexual politics discussed in third wave feminist discourse and popularized in popular music circles via the Riot Grrrl movement in the 1990s has not been noticeably reflected in EDM culture" (2012, 28). As of 2020, this climate has changed considerably, and these changes have been the main consideration of the majority of this study. Perhaps one of the (extremely few) advantages to taking approximately ten years to complete my doctoral studies is that I have been able to observe the rapidly changing landscape of Canadian DJ culture throughout the period of 2010-2020, and I have sought to document these changes in this dissertation. I have also drawn on my own observations, and those of my interview and survey participants, to inform my analysis of Canadian DJ culture during the three decades prior to 2010. Therefore, based upon thirty years of informal observation followed by ten years of focused research, this study attempts to sketch a preliminary, incomplete picture of how Canadian womxn DJs are impacted by the intersections of gender, race, and sexuality.

In my introduction, I outlined of the main themes explored in my study, described the technologies and practices associated with DJing, demonstrated the need for further research on Canadian womxn DJs, and provided an overview of each chapter. My literature review (Chapter

2) documented the ways in which womxn's contributions to DJ culture have been ignored or minimized by prominent authors. I also summarized the extant academic works on gender and DJ culture published during (approximately) 2000-2010, and presented an in-depth survey of the relevant academic works published during (approximately) 2010-2020. Chapter 3 outlined the various methods and methodologies I utilized to obtain and analyze my survey and interview data, as well as the ethical and methodological concerns that arise when adopting an insider perspective (mediated by my own social location as a white, cis-female). I begin Chapter 4 by highlighting the impact of *Video Hits'* Samantha Taylor and *Brave New Waves'* Patti Schmidt on Canadian DJ culture, as well as underground dance music progenitor Debbie Jones' influence on the burgeoning Vancouver house music scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Drawing on my survey data and my interviews with Double D, Mary Flavours, Jaala, Carrie Gates, Hotboxxx, Venus, and others, I examined how womxn in the 1980s and 1990s accessed DJ equipment, music, and mentorship, and highlighted the ways in which Campus and Community Radio (CCR) fostered womxn DJs during this time period.

As the number of womxn DJs in Canada slowly grew in the 1990s, womxn's participation in the culture took on political dimensions as we organized to push past male gatekeepers, forming alliances in order claim local space. Jaala recounts how she and DJ Magpie produced the three-day Gaia Festival in Calgary in 1996. Gaia's purpose was to showcase womxn DJs, therefore Jaala and Magpie recruited womxn artists from Alberta, BC, Saskatchewan, and Western USA. Jaala described how the festival achieved a mixed-response amongst the wider, male-dominated DJ scene in Calgary in 1996: "there was a lot of the guy DJ's who were like super into their misogynistic I'm a male DJ and girls are, you know . . . it kind of divided things. And then there were the people who supported me but they were still kind of afraid at that point

in time because you were venturing into sort of unfamiliar territory for them. They were kind of like oh shit what kind of monster did we just create here? We encouraged this person to become a DJ and now we've got this all female DJ party going."

Toronto was also home to grassroots initiatives targeting womxn DJs in the 1990s. In Chapter 4 Venus discussed being encouraged by Fiona York at York University radio station CHRY to join with two other womxn DJs and broadcast a weekly radio show, Best Kept Secret. Venus described how one of her first times playing out was at a weekly Monday night called Chicks Dig It. One of Venus' co-hosts on Best Kept Secret, DJ Chocolate (aka Lauren Speers), started Chicks Dig It at a Toronto club named We'ave in 1998. In *Then & Now: Toronto Nightlife History*, Denise Benson describes how Chicks Dig It featured womxn DJs, thereby having a significant impact on the Toronto scene in the late 1990s. As the night grew in popularity, more womxn DJs joined the roster, forming a community, and several started their careers at Chicks Dig It. In an interview with Benson for *Then & Now*, DJ/producer Amanda Lachapelle described how Chicks Dig It "'... was a place to play without being judged, and a place for many to get better as well. I loved having so much support, and a space to let loose and practice, and to play new tracks of our own. It was a great open forum, and people in the scene respected that. I am pretty sure we inspired a few girls out there!'" (Benson 2015, 305-6). Lachapelle's description of Chicks Dig It echoes the views expressed by my study participants in Chapter 6, which focused specifically on the homosociality of womxn-centered DJ networks in Canada, and how these networks were supported by club spaces like Lick in Vancouver, DJ collectives like Queerview in Winnipeg, and DJ schools like Mama Cutsworth's Academy (also in Winnipeg).

From the 1980s until the turn of the twenty-first century the number of womxn DJs in

North America and Europe slowly increased from roughly 2-5 percent, to roughly 5-15 percent, as the widespread introduction of the Internet in the mid 1990s led to online coalition efforts by the late 1990s. International networks popped up; two online initiatives that welded influence were Shejay.net (established in 2001, and retired 2017), and Female Pressure (establish in 1998, and still going strong, as is referenced throughout this dissertation). 2000-2010 saw a significant increase in the number of female DJs in America and Europe due to advances in technology resulting in ever-increasing access to cheap or free digital music and software, and inexpensive, user-friendly DJ hardware (such as controllers). These advancements were also due to the greater gains of the feminist movement in the previous century, which opened up male-defined occupations that were previously prohibitive for women to enter, such as medicine and law.

The rise of digital DJ technologies during the 2000s resulted in womxn's increased access to DJ culture. The correspondence of the two phenomena (digital DJ technologies and an increase in womxn DJs) crested as the 2000s progressed into the 2010s, giving rise to new types of barriers for womxn as manifested in the idea that less skill and cultural capital is needed to DJ on digital platforms, as compared the turntables and records (Montano 2008), and that womxn's credibility as DJs is mediated by our appearances.

On International Women's Day (March 8) 2011, the Utopia Festival of Women in Digital Culture brought together scholars and practitioners from experts to beginners to collectively troubleshoot the significant challenges faced by women creating digital culture. I co-produced the Vancouver festival, which consisted of a daytime conference that morphed into a nighttime party featuring over 100 artists working in different genres in music, literature, and visual arts, and attended by over twelve hundred guests. The Vancouver-based W2 Community Media Arts Society conceived of Utopia because they had money earmarked for a festival that would stage

an intervention into the male-dominated electronic music scene in Vancouver. Additionally, W2 had been given access to a massive space in Gastown, the site of the former (and ill-fated) Storyeum (a museum featuring live actors to depict the history of the city of Vancouver). It was an ambitious festival, enabled by the fact that it did not have to turn a profit (recalling my experience with Lick). Rather, to produce Utopia, we were given a sufficient budget and ample space, along with paid staff and volunteers. The daytime conference featured keynote speakers Tara Rogers, Charity Marsh, and Peaches, as well as more than a dozen workshops covering different aspects of digital culture. After the daytime conference, I co-produced an evening concert spanning three different stages and featuring over forty womxn and non-binary artists working in digital culture, including Tanya Tagaq, Peaches, and B. Traits.

The Utopia Festival was a smashing success, due in no small part to the fact that the organizers had access money, space, staff, and volunteers, and therefore the right infrastructure needed for a successful event. Because we were not required to turn a profit, the event was accessible in that tickets to both the daytime conference and night time concert were priced low, and anyone experiencing financial barriers was put on a free entry or pay-what-you-can list. Coinciding with the conference opening, attendees were invited to a mobile dance party at the International Women's Day march on Vancouver's Commercial Drive; participants then marched to the Utopia Festival's site in Gastown. In addition to being a kick-ass conference and concert, Utopia was also successful in showcasing womxn's presence and participation in digital culture (similar to how Ciel's and Chippy's public Google Doc demonstrated the presence of womxn and non-binary DJs in Toronto).[94] While Utopia did make an impact by creating space

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94 To see the complete lineup of artists, speakers, and activities, see "Utopia Festival" on *Resident Advisor*: https://www.residentadvisor.net/events/233588. To see my interview with Peaches about her career as a digital artist during Utopia's daytime conference, see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=utrnSVI5e1Y. To view footage of Tanya Tagaq performing earlier in the evening concert see https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wex20XB7t7w. To

for womxn working in digital culture in Vancouver in 2011, how much and how lasting of an impact is debatable (recall Chippy's description of her negative experiences DJing and producing events in Vancouver in 2015). Because I no longer live in Vancouver I am unable to make the kinds of observations that I can in regard to my current hometown of Toronto.

It apparent in 2020 Ciel's and Chippy's Google Doc had an immediate, significant and thus-far lasting impact on Toronto's DJ scene(s). For example, Promise (one of the biggest rave and techno event production companies in Toronto) assembled an all-womxn DJ bill for their big, multi-room Halloween party in 2017–only two months after the Google Doc was posted. Significantly, gender was not mentioned at all in the promotional media for the event; it was not billed as an "all-girl" or "all-female" DJ lineup. A noticeable change, as for years Promise usually had only a single token womxn DJ in any given lineup for any one of the dozen parties they threw annually. Promise also started booking more queer and non-binary DJs; for example, in 2019 they booked non-binary techno producer Boy Pussy, and raging queer Aeryn Pfaff (who rocked his debut set at Promise's weekly summer beach party wearing only a jock strap and shoes, bless him!).

In fact, currently in 2020 it is rare to see an underground or alternative party or club night in Toronto that does not have at least one female or non-binary DJ in the line up, which definitely was not the case when I moved here in 2009. After the show of support garnered by Ciel's and Chippy's Google Doc, Toronto male stakeholders in DJ culture are afraid of being called out for having a (sexist) DJ line up without womxn, and are finally booking womxn DJs, as there is demonstrably no shortage. Change has taken hold, most satisfyingly. The gains made

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view footage of Peaches' DJ set during the insane nighttime concert, see
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mF5aTf3UX5k.

by womxn are not really gains however if we do not use them to open up space and advocate for increased diversity in DJ culture, beyond just the inclusion of normatively-positioned womxn.

### 8.2.    BIPOC Femme and Non-Binary DJs Claim Space in Canadian DJ Culture

Another positive shift in DJ culture is the increased visibility of BIPOC artists, and their successes creating and maintaining their own spaces physically and digitally. By example, Toronto-based DJ Bambii and other queer BIPOC DJs are reframing the dialogue around womxn and non-binary DJs (Rosés n.d.). On May 3, 2018, I heard Bambii speak about her experiences at a panel titled "Progressive Nightlife as a Catalyst for Global Change", along with panelists Mykki Blanco, Ciel, and Winnie Luk from the queer Canadian charity Rainbow Railroad. The panel was moderated by Michelle da Silva from *Now Magazine*, and presented by Absolut Vodka as part of their "Tomorrow/Tonight" campaign, dedicated to "exploring inclusive nightlife and programming across Canada" ("Absolut Vodka Presents Tomorrow Tonight") (and to sell vodka, of course).[95] During the panel discussion, DJ Bambii was asked if she felt isolated in the DJ scene as a (Black) female. DJ Bambii replied that she did not, and stated that she was often asked that question in interviews, bringing to mind Desmond Cole's description of how the white queer community "just couldn't fathom that Black people are also queer and trans people" (2020, 187). Isolation did not describe DJ Bambii's particular experience: "I've got my community all around me. I'm not at all alone as an artist in the Toronto scene" ("Progressive Nightlife as a Catalyst for Global Change: A Panel Discussion"). I wonder if this type of question[96] is informed by LIO (James 2015). Perhaps there is a latent

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[95] Later that evening on May 3, 2018 I attended the accompanying live show at the Great Hall in Toronto featuring DJs Ciel and Bambii, alongside American queer Black rapper Mykki Blanco. In addition to Toronto Absolut Vodka presented "Tomorrow Tonight" in Vancouver and Montreal in 2018.

[96] This type of question could translate roughly to something like, 'how hard is it out there for you as a queer Black

expectation on behalf of white people, informed by ideals of MRWaSP, that DJ Bambii spectacularly demonstrate her resilience by "overcoming" her gendered and racialized oppression as a queer Black femme, instead of recognizing that she has her queer BIPOC community to support her, thereby accessing community resilience; or rather, having no need for resilience at all. DJ Bambii took up space for herself and her community by creating a party called Jerk, which "has become a safe space for the LGBTQ+ community and for people of colour, and the intersections between them" (Rosés n.d.). Although Jerk has grown in popularity and hence size since its inception, Bambii "has still managed to keep it as authentic and real as possible. This is her way of fighting against the pretentiousness and exclusionary nature normally associated with club culture, and this is also exactly what she wants to convey with her music, to be able to create social disruption" (Rosés n.d.).

DJ Bambii also resists the normative representations and perceptions of femininity that are mapped onto Black womxn DJs by presenting herself in a myriad of ways; from 'serious', to 'sexual', and everywhere in between, suggesting that she is not concerned with whether or not people perceive her to be relying on her looks in lieu of talent. DJ Bambii defies the idea that Black womxn DJs must downplay their appearances and sexuality to garner credibility. Furthermore, in considering how Black women are already overly sexualized in mainstream media, Bambii's choice to pose topless with her breasts fully visible seems even more defiant ("Bambii", 2019). Granted, the pictures she posed for appear in a European magazine (*Metal Magazine*) as opposed to *Resident Advisor, MixMag*, *DJMag*, or another, more widely read publication catering to white and western DJ culture. Still, DJ Bambii's pictures defy hegemonic DJ culture's policing of womxn DJs' appearances and sexualities. Her public Instagram

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womxn who is invariably going to experience oppression and therefore must feel isolated because there are not a lot of you in the scene, at least not from my perspective?'

(instagram.com/bam_bii) page depicts someone who does not seem to care if people judge her for 'sexualizing' herself. As discussed, in Chapter 2 of this study I recounted how Brewster and Broughton granted DJ Rap credibility because she downplayed her past work as a topless model: "Admirably (apart from a pneumatic album cover photo) she blocked any attempts to use her past career as a promotional gimmick" (2014, 464). Allow me to state how completely ecstatic I am that Brewster and Broughton's opinions no longer hold such influence currently, thanks to the considerable shift in DJ culture resulting from the activism of womxn and non-binary DJs. Indeed, even Brewster and Broughton's popular website DJhistory.com was shuttered in 2016 (Martin 2016).

In addition to Toronto, other Canadian cities are seeing the growing presence and influence of BIPOC womxn DJs and producers. It is worth referring back to Chippy Non-stop and her experience in Vancouver in 2015, which she described to *Fader* as being

> literally so terrible, but since we started [Intersessions] there have been so many more creative women, femmes, and non-binary folks starting their own nights and parties. Not to say there weren't amazing women, femmes, and non-binary folks doing this before, it is just really hard in Vancouver because there is a company in Vancouver that has a monopoly over bookings and venues, and they mostly don't care about the youth and queer culture. Shout out to parties in Vancouver now thriving with female/non-binary leads: Switch MP3 crew, Pep Talk Party, and artists like Prado, D. Tiff, and So_Loki" (Cliff 2017).

Here, Chippy gives "shout-outs" to several Vancouver DJ crews and cultural groups helmed by BIPOC and queer womxn.

**Indigenous Womxn DJs of Turtle Island**

In Vancouver and elsewhere, Indigenous womxn DJs are taking up space and disrupting white and male dominated DJ scenes. Vancouver-based DJ Paisley Eva (aka Paisley Nahanee) discusses how she founded the Dame Society in order to train womxn-identifying DJs by providing them with studio and equipment access, as well as opportunities to play events. Paisley started Dame in 2017, "as a response to the exclusionary culture of Vancouver's DJ scene at the time and to her own experiences as one of the few women of colour working with vinyl" (Bakke 2019). In a November 2019 interview with *DiSCORDER Magazine*, Nahanee describes how "'There wasn't really a community at all, and it felt like all these older white dudes who were 'vinyl heads' and who had been doing it for so long, just wanted to see my career end or wanted to fuck me, or a weird combination of the two–[it was] just horrible . . . But I loved [DJing] so much, I just kept doing it and kept showing up to these gigs'" (ibid). Bakke asserts Dame's impact on the Vancouver DJ scene, stating "In those two short years, the scene in Vancouver has palpably changed, and we largely have Dame to thank for much of that feeling".

Dame was also born of Paisley's experiences of harassment: "one of said 'vinyl heads' smashed her needles on the floor of the Fox's Projection Room" (Bakke 2019), thereby she was given "a solo weekly slot to use however she pleased. She decided to turn it into an all-girl, all-vinyl night, training some friends to DJ alongside her and telling them to play whatever they wanted" (ibid). Here, a clear pattern followed: "Eventually a system of mentorship formed, with a small number of new DJs being brought on every few months and passing their skills on to the next group in turn. 'It's always been very hands-on, everyone's helping each other,' Nahanee explains. 'It grew pretty quickly, [into] . . . bigger venues and spaces. Now we're two years in, we've trained probably around 40 women, queer and gender non-conforming folks how to DJ'" (ibid). Reminiscent of the Lick Club, Paisley hopes to secure permanent space for an artist-run

centre that provides workshops, shared studio time, and drop-in hours, in order to continue

fostering the careers of womxn, non-binary, and BIPOC DJs in Vancouver. Bakke elaborates:

> In the face of constant venue closures and strict city by-laws, this kind of community-run,
> creative space sounds like a utopia. 'They're closing down DIY spaces … but they're also
> the spaces that queer and BIPOC feel comfortable in,' [DJ Paisley Eva] attests. She names
> the venue crisis as perhaps Dame's biggest challenge. Regardless, the momentum of Dame
> as an inclusive movement, run by all who were previously excluded from Vancouver's DJ
> scene, is decidedly hopeful. "It's this community and network of support, and I think that
> it's just going to get bigger and bigger, and I think that even if Dame [ends], there'll still be
> remnants of it — people training other people," Nahanee explains. "It's never felt like it's
> just been my project. I just happened to start this thing, but then everybody made [Dame]
> what it is. In the beginning, when it felt like I was super isolated and alone and had no-one
> to really turn to, as an Indigenous woman, a woman of colour, in the DJ scene — I just
> don't think that's a thing anymore" (Bakke 2019).

Paisley refers to the events in 2017 in Vancouver outlined in the previous chapter of this study,

describing how "'It all goes back to the conversation around these white, male gatekeepers who

had the scene for a really long time, and in the past few years we really saw the horrible,

disgusting consequences that came out of them having power. They still have a lot of power, but

it's so important to [also] have these really small communities [that prioritize] diversity; of race,

but also diversity in what you're playing,' " (ibid). In a July 2019 CBC interview with the CBC

Paisley discusses how her Indigeneity is foundational to the Dame Society: "I think it's personal

… when I started DJing, there were a lot of gatekeepers holding the skills to themselves … In

my culture, everything is shared … it's rooted in Indigenous culture and practice" (Mariam

2019). Paisley plays a diverse range of Indigenous music in her set, thereby leveraging another opportunity for increased representation (ibid).

Dene/Cree DJ Kookum (aka Cheyanna Kootenhayoo) is also based in Vancouver. As an open format DJ, Kookum has a promising career, with residencies at the Biltmore Cabaret and the Granville Room, and such gigs under her belt as the inaugural Vancouver Indigenous Fashion Week, the 18th Annual ImagineNATIVE Film & Media Arts Festival in Toronto, and supporting Princess Nokia in 2019. Kookum also works as a video editor and music supervisor for television, in addition to teaching videography and DJ workshops, doing sound and lights for community dance parties, and working as a DJ mentor at a weekly youth hip hop drop in program. At the time of writing in March 2020, DJ Kookum's website showed upcoming dates in BC, Alberta, and Yellowknife, as well as USA tour dates in support of Snotty Nose Rez Kids (djkookum.com).

### 8.3.     National and International Initiatives

In 2020, we are seeing emergent local, regional, national, and international initiatives to advance womxn DJs converging with established underground networks and initiatives. As discussed in the introduction to this study, there have been several corporate-backed initiatives to support womxn's participation in DJ and electronic music cultures. In addition to Absolut Vodka, Smirnoff, Bumble, Spotify, and Redbull, EMI Music ran an Australian campaign in 2012 (nauseatingly) titled She Can DJ. The campaign was centered on a womxn-only DJ competition (note that it was a competition that was promoted, as opposed to a collective approach). Womxn and BIPOC folks are now a target market for DJ software and hardware companies, as evidenced by the proliferation of advertisements for these products that depict womxn of varying ethnicities using the programs or equipment. Other companies that cater to DJ culture have also sponsored

initiatives, such as Redbull's #NormalNotNovelty, which started in 2017, and pivots around monthly workshops directed at "female sound engineers, DJs and electronic producers" ("Normal Not Novelty" 2017). As illustrated by these corporate examples, the underground activism that increased representation for womxn, non-binary, and/or BIPOC folks in DJ culture is increasingly vulnerable to co-optation.

By example, I confess to being a bit taken aback that Intersessions was, for a time, held in a studio space in the back of a Lululemon in downtown Toronto (Da Silva 2019). The space was donated to Intersessions, and of course, free space is exactly that: free space. Still, it seems a bit of a dissonant location for Intersessions, given how Lululemon's owner, billionaire Chip Wilson, also owns a property company that conducted a well-documented takeover of several Vancouver arts and culture spaces, generating a protest outside Wilson's mansion in Vancouver (Little 2019). These events recall DJ Paisley Eva's discussion of losing cultural space in Vancouver. Intersessions takes place within a dominant capitalist system that pays lip service to arts and culture by granting initiatives like Intersessions limited and controlled spaces, while simultaneously eradicating independent and underground artistic and cultural spaces, thereby threatening the communities that rely on those spaces. This contradiction exemplifies how formally underground or oppositional aesthetic strategies are re-directed in order to feed MRWaSP. Although having space and equipment for womxn, non-binary and BIPOC folks to learn DJing and build community comes at a cost, it is still preferable to *not* having those things. As Chippy Non-stop described in regard to initiating Intersessions in Vancouver, "they had to beg and borrow every last piece of equipment" (Thomas 2020).

Certain Canadian music festivals also reflect the increased presence of womxn DJs and producers in Canada. When I was recruited to co-curate the Utopia Festival, I worked closely

with Andrea Graham, whose artist name is The Librarian. Graham started the Squamish, BC-based Bass Coast Festival in 2007, which was attended by 450 people. By 2020 the festival had ballooned to accommodate 6500 guests annually. I went to see Graham DJ at the Velvet Underground in Toronto in 2018, and asked her how things had changed in the Canadian music festival scene based upon her experience of co-producing Bass Coast. She spoke about how the discourse had evolved over the approximate past decade. By example, Graham spoke about the widespread presence of harm reduction and safety initiatives at big festivals such as Bass Coast, and how these discussions were only whispered about a decade ago.[97]

## 8.4.    Questions for Further Research

While conducting research for this study I heard about other womxn DJs from the 1970s and 1980s that I did not have the time or resources to investigate. Therefore, future research should continue to probe the hxrstory of womxn DJs in Canada in order to make links between mentors and mentees in specific regions; archival research could be useful in this regard. Particular attention could be paid to uncovering womxn DJs in those regions that I did not address in this study, for example, cities in Quebec aside from Montreal. Further research should focus on exploring Canadian networks of womxn and non-binary BIPOC DJs and producers, as a majority of my subjects were white, and almost all identified as cis-gendered.

In regard to disseminating my research to the wider public, currently I am excited to be working on a documentary movie project exploring the stories of Canadian womxn DJs by relating them to Régine's stories. In 2020 my team secured substantial funding from a major media company to shoot a demo for the film, and it is my hope that we will be able to interview

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[97] For a profile of The Librarian and five other Canadian womxn event producers see Rebbetoy 2017, "Mapping a Lineage of Female Event Producers Living in British Columbia", online at https://dj.dancecult.net/index.php/dancecult/article/view/921/871.

Régine in person. I have also considered additional ways of publicizing my findings. For

example, I envision an infographic depicting a 'DJ family tree' that illustrates the connections

between womxn mentors and mentees, and clubs, CCR stations, and other sites of Canadian DJ

culture, with a trunk representing a timeline, and roots, branches, and leaves representing people

or sites. I have thought about making a blog or website wherein I post the bios and stories of

Canadian womxn and non-binary DJs both past and present, linking to their artist and social

media pages (if relevant). In these practical or imagined endeavors, I strive to continue following

Rodgers (2010) by acknowledging not only the necessity of retrieving lost histories, but the

complexities involved in such endeavors as well. Currently, women are excluded from the

majority of academic and popular culture discourse on the history of DJ culture (Gavanas and

Reitsamer 2013) therefore it is important to document their contributions in order to push for a

reconfiguration of this history.

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# APPENDICES

**APPENDIX A: TRIAL STUDY CODES**

1. Attendees

2. DJs/Other DJs

3. Emotions

4. Gear/Tech

5. Miscellaneous

6. Musical Activity

7. Place

8. Promoters

9. Researcher

10. Research Participant

11. Staff

12. Time

**APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND QUESTIONS**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. The purpose of this study is to explore people's experiences as DJs in relation to Canada's DJ scene.

The interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes. If at any point, you would like to stop the interview, feel free to do so.

Do you have any questions before we proceed?

<u>Interview Schedule</u>

Past

When did you start DJing?

Why did you start DJing?

How did you access gear?

How did you acquire music?

When you started DJing, did you have any "role models"? People who inspired you? Who?

Present

How often do you "play out"? Where else do you DJ? (radio, retail, parties, at home)

If you no longer DJ professionally, why did you stop?

What is good and bad about your job?

What is the most important aspect of your job?

Do you find it hard to get work as a DJ?

If you find it hard, have you always? Or if you find it easy, have you always? Was there a time when it was easier, or harder, for you to find work as a DJ?

Do you feel that you get paid enough as a DJ?

How many of your friends DJ? Is DJing a part of your general social circle/activities?

Gender, Sexuality, Race, Ability, Appearance & DJ Identity

How often do you see female DJs?

What about in Canada specifically?

Do you think female DJs face the same, or different, challenges as male DJs in Canada? What about in general?

How would you describe yourself? What factors influence your identity?

Do you feel that your identity helps you get work as a DJ, or does it hinder you?

Have you ever felt pressured to look a certain way in order to get work as a DJ? If so, how?

Additional Questions (if time permits)

What music do you play?

How do you feel about having to promote?

Audience Interaction

Do you think music influences the vibe? How?

When "playing out," who do you think it is most important to "play to?"

How important is it to you to "make people dance"?

How much do you watch/observe the dance floor?

How do you feel about "requests"?

What do you do when people want to talk to you?

What do you think people see/perceive your job to be?

How "safe" do you find the clubs that you play at to be? For you? For patrons?

Is there anything you would like to add or expand upon? Anything you would like to ask me?

## APPENDIX C: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. How old are you?

2. Whereabouts in Canada (name of city or town) do you call home?

3. What genres do you *prefer* to play? What genres do you play when gigging for pay?

4. Do you earn part or all of your income from DJing?

5. How often do you "play out" (at clubs, raves, parties, retail environments, radio, corporate or private events, etc.)?

7. Do you engage in promoting and/or social networking as a part of your job as a DJ?

8. Do you have a "day job"? If so, please list your occupation (s):

9. Are you a student, or have you been one? If so, what are you studying or what did you study?

10. What equipment do you usually play on? Please list (CDJs, mixer, turntables, midi controller, etc.)

11. Do you own or have unrestricted access to DJ equipment? If so, please list (CDJs, mixer, turntables, midi controller, etc.)

12. Do you DJ with software and/or digital platforms? Please list (Serato, Tracktor, Ableton, etc.)

13. How do you obtain music? Please list any/all methods: (digital or physical purchase, torrents, digital or physical pools, email lists, etc.)

14. What are your preferred formats? (Vinyl, MP3s, CDs)

15. Do you produce your own music and/or play any instruments?

16. What do you like most about DJing?

17. What do you like least about DJing?

18. Do you identify as female, transgendered, gender-queer, or otherwise?

19. Do you identify as LGBTTIQQ2SA? If not, would you identify as "straight" or heterosexual?

20. Do you identify as a person of colour or a racialized person? If not, do you identify as white?

21. Would you be willing to be contacted for a follow-up interview via Skype or another method of your choice?

**APPENDIX D Genres**

| Playing for pay | | Playing for pleasure | |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1.  House | 57.4% | 1.   House | 57.14% |
| 2.  Top 40 | 28.57% | 2.   Techno | 24.11% |
| 3.  Hip hop | 24.11% | 3a.  Hip hop | 21.43% |
| 4.  Drum n Bass | 23.31% | 3b.  Drum n Bass | 21.43% |
| 5.  Techno | 22.32% | 4.   Electronic | 14.29% |
| 6.  Breaks | 19.64% | 5.   Breaks | 12.5% |
| 7.  Electronic | 18.75% | 6.   Open format | 10.71% |
| 8.  Open format | 16.96% | 7.   Electro | 9.82% |
| 9.  Electro | 15.8% | 8.   R&B | 8.04% |
| 10. Retro | 15.18 | 9a.  Bass | 7.14% |
| | | 9b.  Funk | 7.14% |
| | | 10a. Garage | 6.25% |
| | | 10b. Retro | 6.25% |