

How do the historical roots of 20th century music technology and production still impact women's participation in these fields today?

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Music has always reflected technological change, but perhaps there was never an era in which technology impacted music more than did the 20th century, as electronic innovations changed the world's soundscape.

Today, we take for granted the magic of music technology. Not only does technology create brand-new timbres and "sound effects," but it also has been used to record and edit live performance. In the studio, recordings can be "produced" to alter the original sound that was captured. In many ways, the music technology expert is a "composer" who creates the hallmark sound of many artists.

Historically, electronic technologies required extensive knowledge of electricity, mathematics, and physics. Long before synthesizers could create electronic sound at the touch of a button, musicians literally had to understand and alter sound waves, for example. Similarly, recording technology required sophisticated knowledge of physics. Much of this **early work took place in university lab settings**, and in the **early 20th century, relatively few women held positions in these settings**. Further, **math and physics were fields that have been very male-dominated**. Women were not encouraged to participate.

Techniques perfected in the physics lab quickly moved into public spaces, as radio and recording technology became more commercially available. Still, gender segregation persistently lingered. In the **"gear heavy" music technology world**, for example, it is **imperative to have access to equipment** like sound boards with which to experiment. An **informal gigging culture** has kept many women out of

settings where they could attain important **“hands on” experience**. The fact that only 5% of sound engineers in 2020 were women is reflective of historical trends. Despite more involvement from women every decade, the fields of music production and technology have remained challenging for women to enter.