<ET>Girls' Bedroom Cultures
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<ABS>This entry examines the bedroom as a gendered site of cultural production. Building from McRobbie's contributions establishing the importance of the bedroom as space for teenage consumer culture among young women, this entry focuses on production. First, this involves seeing the bedroom as a space in which girls can engage with and make sense of culture, *and* as a space in which that engagement can be understood as productive. Following this, Kearney's scholarship on media production technologies, including film production and editing and zine making, is introduced and evaluated in light of Banet-Weiser's account of postfeminist self-branding. The entry concludes with examining girls' bedrooms as microcelebrity sites. While the Internet and social media have opened up opportunities for girls and women to participate in cultural production, particularly through beauty vlogging and blogging, there remains the imperative for women to engage in the labor of self-beautification McRobbie's early work critiqued.

<KW>bedroom cultures; gender; microcelebrity; postfeminism; social media
<FO>This entry addresses the concept of microcelebrity with specific reference to the bedroom as a gendered site of cultural production. This connection between microcelebrity practices and the bedroom is significant for understanding the social and technologic transformations associated with girls as media consumers and producers.

As a seemingly ordinary and mundane space, the bedroom might not overtly feature as a space for sustained analytical attention compared to, for example, shopping malls, workplaces, and cultural venues. In their essay "Girls and subcultures," McRobbie and Garber (1991) introduce "bedroom cultures" as a way to address the invisibility of girls within extant accounts of subculture. This work, and McRobbie's (1991) work on *Jackie* magazine, provide a useful starting point for conceptualizing the bedroom as a site for gendered cultural production in the age of social media. In "Girls and subcultures," McRobbie and Garber set out the importance of the bedroom as space for teenage consumer culture for young women. The "gendered cultural production" which occured in such settings centered on identity exploration, whereby the "rituals" (McRobbie & Garber, 1991, p. 6) of trying on clothes, experimenting with makeup and hairstyles, took place at home, within the confines of the bedroom.

For McRobbie and Garber, the bedroom was primarily a site for cultural consumption and a space for girls to explore their self-identity and experiment with self-beautification. The relationship between identity and cultural consumption among young people, and particularly young women, has been explored across a significant body of research, including by Willis in *Common Culture: Symbolic Work at Play in the Everyday Cultures of the Young* (1990) which identifies the bedroom as an "immediate life space" in which young people invest time and meaning. Baker (2004) engages with Willis's research in looking at popular music in preteen girls' bedroom culture. Her ethnographic research with a small group of 8- to 11-year-olds highlights that bedrooms are perhaps not the ordinary place they are assumed to be. As well as important points around how class and financial resources shape the type of bedrooms that can be created—namely, sharing with siblings and the kinds of technologies that are available—Baker examines how identities are negotiated and constituted in these spaces.

Furthermore, Baker makes insightful observations around the methodologic and ethical specificities of accessing and researching the bedroom as a private space. These points are also considered in Lincoln's *Youth Culture and Private Space* (2012) and her review of ethnographic methods. To address some of the challenges of ethnographic research, not just around access but also issues of researcher presence and the presence of other nonparticipants within the home research setting, Lincoln developed a three-stranded ethnographic approach including visual and multisensory ethnography. This research was still based on access to the bedroom as a site of fieldwork, and further ways to approach the bedroom as research site are bound up with understanding the bedroom as a gendered space of cultural production.

The bedroom, then, can be explored as a space in which girls can engage with and make sense of culture, *and* as a space in which that engagement can be understood as productive. McRobbie (1991) later shifts her focus from gendered cultural consumption to production in her analysis of the magazine *Jackie.* While *Jackie* did not offer its young female readers an "active presence" in which to participate, McRobbie noted that girls could still use the magazine in subversive ways, such as using it to signal boredom at school, for example (1991, p. 86). McRobbie's analysis of *Jackie* identifies the "how to" materials on applying makeup and shaving legs which instruct, step by step, the "care and improvement of each part of the body" (p. 120). Such routines are "secret rituals carried out in the privacy of the bedroom" and while they involve labor, they "become fun and leisure when carried out in the company of friends" (p. 121). This labor contributes to domestic production and thus the maintenance and reproduction of the family. In this sense, the labor of self-beautification within bedroom cultural practices can be connected with feminist theory accounts of social reproduction. In *The Aftermath of Feminism,* McRobbie (2009) discusses the fashion and beauty industries, which facilitate what she refers to as the "fashion–beauty complex" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 63). For McRobbie, the fashion–beauty complex serves to legitimize a "postfeminist masquerade," which is "a highly self-conscious means by which young women are encouraged to collude with the re-stabilization of gender norms so as to undo the gains of feminism" (p. 64). Here McRobbie develops her critical view of beautification and how it is impressed upon women by the popular media, in order to maintain patriarchal structures. As we will explore, the fashion–beauty complex is to some extent intensified in the social media age, and intersects with contemporary modes of cultural production which take place within the bedroom space: blogging, vlogging, and social media use.

A crucial contribution to understanding girls' bedroom cultural production comes from Kearney's (2007) article that responds to the consumerist framing that followed McRobbie and Garber's 1991 publication. Highlighting the increasing accessibility and decreasing expense of media production technologies, Kearney (2007) gives examples from film production and editing and zine making. The recognition and examination of increasing opportunities for girls making media have also been nuanced with reference to continual challenges. For Kearney, race, class, and gender remain factors shaping access to technologies and the social contexts and conditions for engaging in media production. Where the possibilities for access and engagement are not barriers, then reference to Banet-Weiser's (2011) discussion of postfeminist self-branding is essential. For Banet-Weiser, whilst self-disclosure can be empowering, there are also cultural scripts that can prescribe and limit. Banet-Weiser gives the example of girls performing dance to songs and identifies a branded postfeminism in which

traditional questions raised by adolescents of “Who am I?” become more about “How do I sell myself?”

This dynamic around the production of public, branded identities directly ties in with how the bedroom becomes a space accessible to an “audience” of “followers” and “collaborators.” In the mid-1990s, Kearney (2007) referenced the Internet to examine the bedroom as a “distribution center.” This account of the diffusion of girl-made media is all the more applicable now with social media. Any account of the forms of media production and content creation taking place in bedrooms requires continual revision and updating. For example, the history of video games’ development in which bedroom developers grow into international organizations, and the continued importance of the bedroom as a site for microbusinesses orientated towards emerging mobile and app markets. These revisions should also attend to new industries, notably the rise of “entrepreneurial vloggers” and “social media influencers,” and related issues around gender and self-presentation online.

Vloggers are a hugely popular subset of Internet microcelebrity, which is a term used to describe the online presentation of oneself as a celebrity regardless of who is paying attention (Marwick 2013, p. 166). YouTube in particular provides a platform for seemingly “ordinary” young people to potentially become household names. Vlogging essentially involves a person, usually sitting at home and often in a bedroom, talking to the camera. The bedroom setting is a popular trope of vlogging practices which contributes to a staged authenticity designed to “attract high levels of conversational and inter-creative participation” (Burgess & Green 2009, p. 94) as part of the “affective economy” (p. 95) of YouTube. Returning to the earlier discussion of Lincoln and ethnography, vlogging cultural production situated within the bedroom becomes accessible not only to “audiences,” but also to researchers. Whilst this overcomes the challenges of access to the bedroom, there remain familiar and continued issues around the role of the researcher and the intended purposes of the practices and experiences being researched. This partly connects to debates dating back to earlier research from the Birmingham Centre for Cultural Studies on subcultures around whose experiences are being researched, and partly connects to more contemporary concerns around the ethics of researching social media platforms. The care and methodologic reflexivity demonstrated by Lincoln in physically entering into the bedroom space is equally relevant for researchers focusing on the bedroom as it features online, within the kind of postfeminist self-branding activities that Banet-Weiser identifies.

One of the most popular genres of vlogging is beauty and style (Burgess & Green, 2009), which is dominated by young girls and women, and videos are often situated in the bedroom space. Some of the most popular vloggers around the world originate from this category, such as Zoella in the United Kingdom and Michelle Phan in the United States. Both Zoella and Phan progressed in their careers from bedroom vloggers, to “influencers,” to celebrities with a degree of international fame. The labor of beautification as identified by McRobbie now feeds into the millions of globally circulated beauty and fashion videos and social media posts offering tutorials and step-by-step guides. Young female fashion and beauty vloggers engage in the labor of self-beautification as the face and voice of looking good and feeling good, alongside the labor of social media maintenance, video filming, editing, and research. Increasingly, vlogging is promoted as a viable option in creative career guides, where seemingly “anyone” can make a living from being creative and doing something they love. However, more recent research has shown that the reality of making a career out of such forms of online entrepreneurship is far from the dream that is sold. Ashton and Patel (2018)

discuss the precarity of vlogging careers and the potential barriers to access such as requiring time, money, and expensive equipment. They suggest that the experiences of vloggers mirror existing issues around inequality and lack of diversity in the wider creative industries.

In the case of vloggers, Jerslev (2016) and Ashton and Patel (2018) also highlight the demands of constant communication with audiences and other vloggers. Jerslev describes this as a "temporality of permanent updating" to cultivate microcelebrity online, which is characterized by "continuous and multiple uploads of performances of a private self" (Jerslev, 2016, p. 5238). The private self is performed in the ostensibly "private" space of the bedroom, to display the authenticity and relatability which, by and large, differentiates vloggers from mainstream celebrities. Ashton and Patel (2018) argue that the bedroom space is crucial for "staging" authenticity, and is a part of the relational expertise vloggers must develop in order to gain followers and cultivate microcelebrity. Another element of this relational expertise, they argue, involves collaborating with other vloggers, in order to facilitate a mutual raising of visibility, and this is evident among female fashion and beauty vloggers, such as the collaboration between Zoella and Tanya Burr. The collaboration amplifies the online popularity of both vloggers (however, Tanya may benefit more from Zoella's sizeable following), creating a sense of authenticity, female friendship, and "sisterhood." However, this could also exclude those not with a talent agency or not conforming to the aesthetic norms of bedroom-based vlogs. This can include the aesthetics of the production and setting, as well as the physical appearance of the vloggers themselves.

Early studies on girls' bedroom cultures highlight the bedroom as a space for consumer culture (McRobbie & Garber, 1991). The media and technologies used within the bedroom are argued to shape the purpose of the space as not only a site for consumption, but the negotiation and formation of identity. Later studies addressed the bedroom as a space for cultural production, and girls' bedroom cultures appear to have shifted from a subculture to the "mainstream" through the phenomenon of vlogging and blogging. While the Internet has opened up a range of opportunities for girls and women to be involved in cultural production, blurring the boundaries between production and consumption, there remains an imperative to "look good" as part of the postfeminist "fashion–beauty complex" which McRobbie argues retraditionalizes women and maintains gendered hierarchies. Such hierarchies are reflected in the wider creative industries, for example continued barriers of access for women and minorities to enter the workforce. The shift of girls' bedroom spaces as spaces of relatively private identity formation and cultural consumption, towards relatively public spaces where creative expression is also somewhat limited by the cultural scripts of online spaces and postfeminist practices of self-branding.

<XREF>See Also:

IEGMC016
IEGMC044
IEGMC048
IEGMC072
IEGMC087
IEGMC214

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<X>Further Reading

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