

The Invisibility of Women Streamers in Game Studies

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ABSTRACT

Videogame live streaming has become a significant cultural phenomenon within the online gaming community; however, women's participation remains shaped by structural inequalities and discrimination. This scoping review of the DiGRA library (2020–2025) examined 471 records and identifying five key articles that contribute to the understanding of female representation in live videogame streaming, with a specific focus on inclusion and women's empowerment within the sector. This scarcity may reflect the recent emergence of streaming as a central research topic in game studies conferences, such as DiGRA, rather than broader institutional disengagement. The core studies explore the emotional labor of female streamers, platform materialities, affective economies, queer conviviality, and gender performativity. The findings reveal a concerning gap between the social magnitude of the phenomenon and the academic attention devoted to it. This study proposes future research directions structured around five priority axes, underscoring the urgency of centering social justice, digital equity, and intersectional perspectives in contemporary game studies.

Keywords

Live streaming, gender studies, game studies, women in games, scoping review.

INTRODUCTION

Videogame live streaming has emerged as one of the most significant cultural phenomena of the last decade, fundamentally transforming the forms of consumption, participation, and content production related to digital games (Consalvo et al. 2025). Platforms such as Twitch and YouTube Gaming have become central spaces for contemporary gamer culture, attracting millions of users daily and generating revenues in the order of billions of dollars (Johnson and Woodcock 2019). Even as streaming has become central to game culture, women's participation

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remains constrained by structural inequalities, discrimination, and systemic barriers (Cullen 2022). Female streamers face unique challenges, including online harassment, objectification, questioning of their legitimacy as gamers, and specific pressures related to gender performance (Engelberg 2019).

The primary aim of this study is to map and critically examine the scholarly production on women's representation and participation within the videogame live streaming culture published in the DiGRA digital library between 2020 and 2025, a period marked by the accelerated rise of live streaming during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has continued to the present day. The choice of the DiGRA digital library as the primary data source is grounded in the organization's central role within the academic landscape of game studies. The DiGRA conference has established itself as a major scholarly venue in the field, providing a structured forum for academic discourse in which methodological approaches are scrutinized, and topics such as gender, representation, and inclusion are regularly addressed and debated. Over its 22-year history, DiGRA has played a pivotal role in legitimizing game studies as an academic discipline, helping to transform what was once often perceived as a frivolous object of inquiry into a robust and theoretically sophisticated field of research (Consalvo and Dutton 2006).

In this article, we examine the research on gender and streaming, as well as the conceptual entry points for current and future research into the gendered dynamics of videogame live streaming. The article is organized into three main sections. In the first section, we outline how past research on gender and streaming has been presented, identify the problematic aspects of these presentations, and discuss what these prior scholarly accounts can offer to ongoing and future examinations of gendered streaming dynamics. Then, we explore the research field of gendered streaming culture through an analysis of articles published in the DiGRA digital library. In the third section, we examine the types of gender-related issues raised in these publications and how such matters can be situated across the various sectors of live videogame streaming culture, including streamers, platforms, audiences, and industry stakeholders. The relevance of this study extends beyond the mapping of research on this topic, as it touches on fundamental issues of social justice and digital equity.

Finally, we argue that the study of gendered streaming culture necessitates a conceptual framework that can define and support this line of inquiry as a legitimate component of the disciplinary field of game studies. To this end, we offer preliminary considerations for conceptualizing this research domain, outlining its central research topics and their positions within the broader landscape of live videogame streaming culture.

A BRIEF REFLECTION ON GENDER AND STREAMING RESEARCH

Research on gender in game studies has a complex and evolving history, marked by tensions between inclusion and exclusion, as well as representation and participation (Friman 2015). Early studies primarily focused on the representation of female characters in games, analyzing stereotypes and objectification (Heritage 2020). However, more recent literature has expanded to examine the lived experiences of female players and content creators, as in the study by Consalvo et al. (2025). Brehm (2013) highlights how online game spaces can simultaneously offer opportunities for empowerment and perpetuate gender-based exclusions. Streaming platforms exemplify this tension: women can build substantial audiences while simultaneously

facing marginalization and discrimination that their male counterparts rarely experience (Hayes 2005, 2007).

The practice of videogame live streaming represents an evolution in digital participatory culture, enabling synchronous and asymmetric forms of interaction between streamers and audiences (Consalvo 2017; Consalvo et al. 2025). Jenkins (2009) defines participatory culture through three features: low barriers to expression, strong support for sharing creative work, and meaningful social connections among participants. In the specific context of videogame streaming, this participatory culture manifests through donation systems, subscriptions, real-time chat, and the creation of communities around streamers/ players (Johnson and Woodcock 2019). However, female participation in these spaces is often conditioned by gender expectations and norms that are frequently sexualized and stereotyped, which can limit the authenticity and autonomy of female streamers (Ruberg 2021; Ruberg et al. 2019).

By reviewing contemporary academic debates, we establish a foundational understanding of how feminist perspectives have been articulated within digital media environments, particularly in platforms where content creation, audience interaction, and representation converge to form new sites of cultural negotiation and critique. (Banet-Weiser 2018), for instance, argues that digital platforms both empower and objectify women, producing a 'marketplace feminism' stripped of radical political content. This perspective is particularly relevant in the context of videogame live streaming, where women can use digital platforms to build independent careers and dedicated audiences, but frequently do so within structures that perpetuate the commodification of their bodies and personalities (Cullen and Ruberg 2019; Hayes 2005)

Feminist epistemology has been applied to digital game studies with significant development. Since the seminal works of Cassell and Jenkins (2000) on gender and technology, through Consalvo (2012) critical analysis of gamer culture, to contemporary intersectional approaches that recognize the multiple oppressions faced by women in digital spaces (Li 2024; Uttarapong et al. 2021; Lima 2023). Shaw (2014), for instance, demonstrates how the "gamer" identity remains deeply gendered, with women frequently positioned as outsiders or inauthentic, regardless of their experience or technical competence. This marginalization extends to streaming spaces, where women's legitimacy as content creators is constantly questioned and subject to differentiated scrutiny compared to their male peers.

Gray (2015) proposes the concept of "strategic visibility" to describe the complex negotiations that women and other marginalized groups undertake in digital spaces, balancing the desire for professional recognition with the need for protection against online harassment and violence. This tension is particularly evident in videogame live streaming, where visibility is both the product and the currency of exchange, yet it can also render streamers vulnerable to intensified forms of surveillance, objectification, and abuse (Ruberg and Ruelos 2020; Ruberg 2021).

Studies such as those of Cai et al. (2023) and Wu et al. (2022) documented the specific forms of toxicity that characterize online gaming environments and, by extension, streaming spaces. Fox and Tang (2017) explain that they identified gender-based harassment as endemic in gaming communities, with women reporting experiences of sexism, threats of sexual violence, and doxxing at significantly higher rates than men. Massanari (2017) examines how the architectural structures of social and

streaming platforms can either facilitate or hinder toxic behaviors, arguing that many platforms operate according to logics that prioritize growth and engagement over the safety of marginalized users. According to Cullen (2022) and Ruberg (2021), this attrition is not attributable to lack of interest or competence, but rather to hostile environments characterized by persistent sexual harassment, objectification, constant questioning of legitimacy, and pressures to conform to stereotyped gender performances that limit authenticity and creative autonomy.

Finally, at a time when digital platforms play a central role in contemporary creative economies and modes of socialization and identity construction, particularly among younger generations, understanding the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder the complete and safe participation of women in these spaces becomes a matter of fundamental rights in digital society.

RESEARCH STRATEGY

This study adopts a scoping review approach because the aim is not to evaluate the quality or effectiveness of interventions, but rather to map the extent, range, and characteristics of existing research on women and gender in live videogame streaming within the DiGRA digital library. Scoping reviews are particularly appropriate for emerging fields characterized by conceptual fragmentation, heterogeneous methodologies, and limited scholarly consolidation (Arksey and O'Malley 2005). In this case, the review seeks to identify dominant themes, methodological tendencies, and significant gaps in the literature concerning gendered streaming cultures.

The search strategy was developed iteratively through a series of preliminary exploratory queries in the DiGRA library, conducted by the first author as part of an ongoing stage of her doctoral research. The two co-authors, supervisors of the first author's doctoral work, were actively involved in preparing the study, including discussions and successive refinements of the search strategy and the operationalization of the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The first author was solely responsible for applying these criteria across all screening stages and conducting the final article selection. The co-authors subsequently carried out an independent review of the selected corpus to verify the consistency of the inclusion decisions and to refine the analytical precision of the thematic categorizations. Any disagreements were resolved through discussion until a consensus was reached.

The final search strategy, applied to the DiGRA digital library combined multiple operators to maximize the retrieval of relevant records, as follows:

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("streaming" OR "live streaming" OR "game streaming" OR "broadcast*" OR "Twitch" OR "YouTube Gaming") AND ("women" OR "woman" OR "female*" OR "gender" OR "feminist*" OR "feminism" OR "representation" OR "participation" OR "inclusion" OR "inequality" OR "equity") AND ("videogame*" OR "videogame*" OR "gaming" OR "gamer*" OR "game*" OR "esport*" OR "e-sport*").
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Additionally, complementary queries were conducted using simplified combinations:

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"women AND streaming" | "gender AND gaming" | "female streamers" | "Twitch AND gender" | "representation AND gaming".
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All queries were performed without restrictions on specific fields (title, abstract, full text), allowing for maximum retrieval. The selection process followed a structured,

multi-stage protocol, documented through a flow diagram (Figure 1), ensuring transparency in methodological decisions. A detailed record of included and excluded articles, including the rationale for exclusion, is provided in the Appendix.

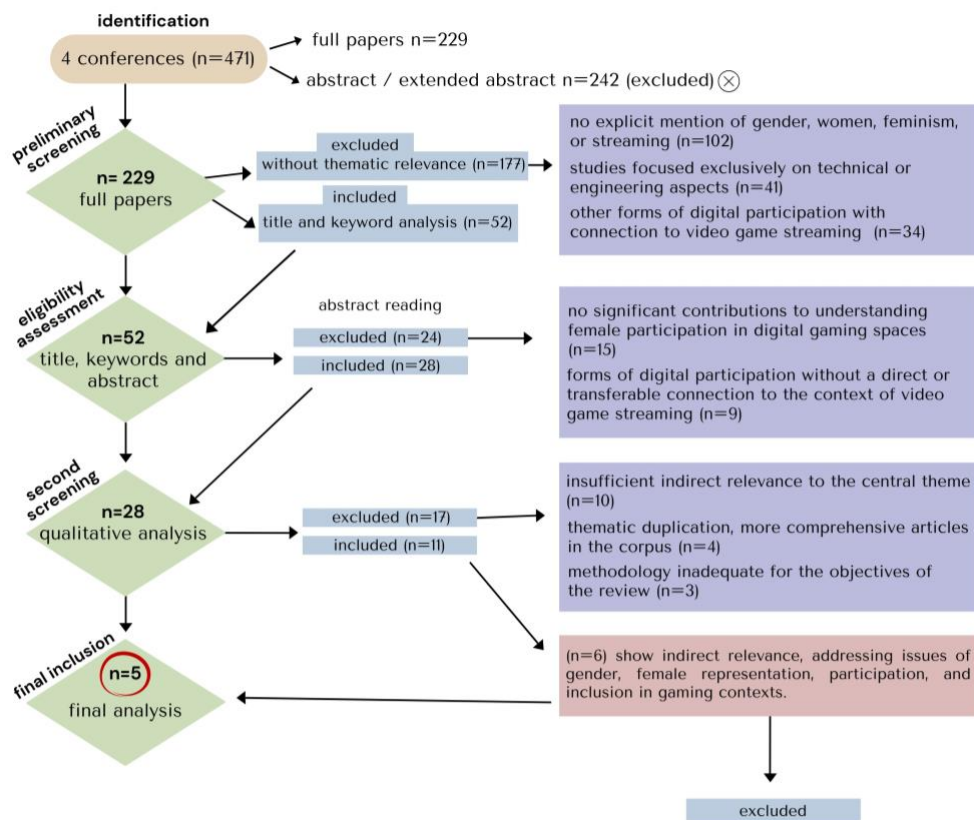


Figure 1: Flow diagram of the four-stage article selection process applied to the DiGRA digital library.

Step 1 - Identification: The application of the search strategy to the DiGRA digital library returned 471 records corresponding to all conference outputs published in the proceedings between 2020 and 2025, inclusive of full papers, extended abstracts, abstracts, posters, and panel proposals. These records were exported in their entirety and constituted the initial pool to which the inclusion and exclusion criteria detailed in Step 3 were subsequently applied.

Step 2 - Preliminary screening: The 471 records were first filtered by document type, restricting the pool to the 229 full papers, and then screened by title, keywords, and abstract for thematic alignment with the topics of gender and videogame live streaming, as documented in Figure 1. This stage retained 52 full papers, which proceeded to full-text eligibility assessment.

Step 3 - Eligibility assessment: The 52 retained full papers were read in full by the first author against a set of predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and the resulting decisions were subsequently reviewed by the two co-authors. Articles were included if they met all of the following criteria: (1) full papers published in the DiGRA proceedings between 2020 and 2025; (2) studies explicitly addressing gendered dimensions of participation in videogame streaming cultures; (3) studies focused

either on videogame live streaming platforms (e.g., Twitch, YouTube Gaming) or on adjacent media practices that directly shape streaming cultures, such as platformed spectatorship, monetization, audience participation, and performative intimacy, since these practices constitute the material and cultural conditions under which gendered participation in streaming takes place; (4) studies in which gender operated as a central analytical category rather than as a merely descriptive demographic variable; and (5) studies addressing cisgender and transgender women, non-binary individuals, queer communities, and other marginalized gender identities, where relevant to the analysis of streaming culture. Articles were excluded if they: (1) appeared in formats other than full papers, including extended abstracts, abstracts, posters, and panel proposals; (2) addressed forms of digital participation unrelated to videogame live streaming or (3) to the adjacent platform cultures specified in inclusion criterion; or (4) constituted duplicate publications or pilot studies subsequently expanded into full papers already retained in the corpus. The application of these criteria yielded a final corpus of five full papers, all of which satisfied every inclusion criterion and were retained by consensus among the three authors. Prior scoping and reviews retrieved during the search were considered eligible for inclusion if they met the criteria outlined above; however, none of the review-oriented works identified addressed live streaming, streaming platforms, or gendered participation in streaming cultures, and were therefore excluded under inclusion criteria (2) and (3).

It is important to emphasize that systematic reviews published in the DiGRA digital library on topics such as multiplayer online gaming communities (Warmelink and Siitonen 2011) and narrative game-based interventions for mental health (Devasia et al. 2025) suggest that these topics have occupied a more central position in the field. By comparison, research specifically focused on women's participation and gender inequalities in videogame live streaming remains comparatively marginal. This imbalance may also reflect broader structural inequalities in academic production and circulation, since topics related to gender, marginalization, and underrepresented populations are often researched by scholars from the Global South and other less institutionally and economically privileged contexts, who may face greater barriers to attending and publishing in conferences that are frequently held in the Global North.

Characterization of the Articles Focused on Streaming (Results and Findings)

Of these 11 articles (for full documentation of all included and excluded records, see the supplementary dataset Appendix), only 5 focus on live streaming of digital games on platforms such as Twitch and YouTube Gaming, the remaining six articles address gender issues, female representation, participation, and inclusion within broader gaming contexts, including online communities, gaming practices, game design, and player cultures, which, although not exclusively centered on live streaming, offer theoretical and empirical contributions that can inform the understanding of women's participation in streaming platforms.

The exceptionally low retention rate obtained not only reflects the limited number of studies directly addressing gender and streaming within the DiGRA digital library corpus but also becomes particularly significant when contrasted with the much broader body of game studies research dedicated to themes that appear to have attracted greater attention from researchers publishing in DiGRA conferences.

To facilitate the visualization of this review’s results, Table 1 summarizes the main methodological and thematic characteristics of the selected studies.

Author	Study focus	Sampe/Empirical material	Methodological approach
Brewer, 2023	Qualitative ethnographic study of LGBTQIA+ speedrunning communities on Twitch	Purposeful recruitment of LGBTQIA+ speedrunners; long-term observation plus interviews	Multi-year ethnography combining participant observation of streams and in-depth interviews
Kunigita et al., 2022	Quantitative study of Twitch monetization and donation behavior	Secondary data from TwitchTracker (top 100–350 Partner channels); no direct human recruitment	Extensive--N-panel data analysis with multiple regression models on PWYW (gifting) behavior
Guajardo, 2022	Qualitative study of women’s emotional labor in Twitch streaming	Eight women Twitch streamers were recruited via the researcher’s networks and snowball sampling	In-depth semi-structured interviews; thematic analysis informed by feminist sociology
Coema, 2022	Conceptual study of Twitch platform affordances and spectatorship	No human participants; platform, interface, and community practices analyzed as materials	Media and platform analysis (materialities, affordances, sociability, “multiplayer entertainment”)
Guajardo, 2024	Comparative game-analytic- study of TV dating shows as games	No direct participants: analysis of 10 popular reality dating shows as game systems	Game analysis (object inventories, interfaces, interaction maps, gameplay logs)

Table 1: Overview of the five studies included in the scoping review.

The analysis of the five articles suggests that the studies within the DiGRA digital library have primarily focused on: (i) labor, affective, and experiential dimensions, particularly the emotional labor and burnout experienced by women streamers; (ii) community and resistance dimensions, especially in queer and LGBTQIA+ contexts; (iii) performative dimensions, including the negotiation of gender, intimacy, and visibility in streaming cultures; and (iv) platform materialities and political economies, particularly the ways in which platform architectures, monetization systems, and affordances shape unequal experiences of participation.

ANALYSIS OF CENTRAL STUDIES

The final sample enables a deeper understanding of the multiple dimensions that characterize women’s participation and gender issues within the context of

videogame live streaming. Each study offers a distinct perspective on different facets of this phenomenon, from the labor experiences of women streamers to the economic dynamics that sustain these platforms, as well as the analysis of technology and the forms of resistance and alternative community-building that emerge within them. This section conducts an in-depth analysis of each study, examining its theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and key contributions.

(i) **Guajardo, 2022**

Guajardo's study (2022) constitutes a fundamental contribution to the understanding of the labor dimensions of women's participation on Twitch. Drawing on Arlie Hochschild's (1983) theory of emotional labor (originally developed in the context of flight attendants), Guajardo (2022) applies this conceptual framework to the world of women who professionally stream videogames, revealing layers of labor often rendered invisible in discussions about streaming. The author conducted eight in-depth interviews with international English-speaking women streamers who earn primary or secondary income through videogame broadcasting on Twitch. The qualitative methodology allowed the capture of nuanced lived experiences, demonstrating that streaming involves more than the technical work of playing games or the performative work of entertaining audiences. It also entails a third, often overlooked dimension: the emotional labor of managing feelings, suppressing authentic emotional responses, and shaping one's affectivity in accordance with audience expectations and the platform's implicit norms.

One of the study's central contributions lies in demonstrating that women streamers often perform three overlapping forms of labor: technical gameplay, performative entertainment, and emotional labor. This emotional labor includes moderating communities, responding diplomatically to inappropriate comments, managing viewers' feelings, and presenting an appearance of confidence, friendliness, and emotional stability even in situations of distress. Guajardo also highlights how women often rely on informal networks of support from other women streamers, rather than on platform protections, to cope with sexism and hostility. The study's title, "It Sucks for Me, and It Sucks for Them," encapsulates participants' recognition that harassment affects not only themselves, but also their audiences and communities, creating emotionally exhausting and ultimately unsustainable conditions for long-term participation on the platform.

(ii) **Coema, 2022**

Coema's article (2022) focuses on the material and phenomenological dimensions of the Twitch platform and the practices of spectatorship. The study shifts away from approaches that prioritize either the content of streamed games or the individual characteristics of streamers, instead focusing on the platform's technological affordances, its socioeconomic structures, and the specific modes of consumption that these materialities both enable and constrain.

Methodologically, Coema (2022) adopts a qualitative, multi-method approach that combines ethnographic observation of live broadcasts on Twitch.tv, systematic analysis of the platform's interfaces and affordances, and examination of real-time chat interactions. This multi-method approach reveals how platform architecture actively shapes spectatorship rather than neutrally transmitting content. The theoretical framework employed in the study draws on insights from phenomenology,

materialism, and the concept of “platform capture”, the idea that digital platforms do not merely host pre-existing cultural practices but actively reconfigure them in accordance with their economic logics and technological architectures. This perspective aligns with critical approaches in platform studies that seek to highlight how technology companies exert power not only through direct control but also through the design of affordances that channel user behavior in specific directions.

One of the study’s central contributions lies in its problematization of the dichotomy between playing and watching games. Coema (2022) argues that spectatorship on Twitch does not constitute a passive form of consumption but rather an active practice that transcends mere observation. Coema (2022) suggests that Twitch’s tools and practices enable distinctive forms of sociability within participatory gaming communities, modes of co-creation in multiplayer entertainment, and modalities of interactivity and agency that redefine traditional relationships between media content producers and consumers.

(iii) **Kunigita, Javed and Kohda, 2022**

The study by Hisayuki Kunigita, Amna Javed, and Youji Kohda (2022), shifts attention toward the economic dimensions of live streaming, specifically examining voluntary donation behaviors under the *pay-what-you-want* (PWYW) model within gaming communities on Twitch. This research distinguishes itself methodologically by adopting a quantitative approach, statistically analyzing donation data from the 100 most popular streaming channels on the platform.

The theoretical framework draws on concepts from behavioral economics to understand the motivations underlying voluntary donations to streamers. The authors frame donations as gifts rather than charity transactions, providing financial support while expressing recognition and strengthening affective bonds between viewers and streamers. The results reveal that PWYW donation behaviors are significantly influenced by the degree of viewer congestion within a channel, suggesting complex dynamics between audience scale, individual visibility, and motivations for financial contribution. Additionally, the study highlights considerable diversity among the 100 analyzed channels, indicating that there is no single model of donation-based monetization but rather multiple strategies and community dynamics shaping patterns of financial contribution.

The analysis by Kunigita et al. (2022) contributes to a growing body of research on the *affective economies* of digital platforms, how affects, emotions, and social relations intertwine with economic flows and monetization processes. In the context of live streaming, these affective economies manifest through donation systems, subscriptions, gifted subscriptions to other community members, and other forms of resource transfer that simultaneously provide financial support to streamers and express affective bonds, value recognition, and a sense of community belonging. Although the authors report the gender distribution of the streamers included in the sample - 90 males, 7 females, and 3 unidentified (virtual or team streamers) - they do not examine whether monetization patterns, visibility, or donation behavior differ according to gender. Even so, the study remains relevant for understanding the affective and political economies of live streaming cultures, as it demonstrates that visibility, attention, and social recognition are central to monetization on Twitch, suggesting that unequal conditions of exposure and recognition may also produce unequal opportunities for financial sustainability on the platform.

(iv) **Brewer, 2023**

Brewer's article (2023) offers a distinct perspective by centering her analysis on LGBTQIA+ streamers engaged in *speedrunning*, the gaming practice focused on completing videogames in the shortest time possible. The study is based on digital ethnography of live speedrunning broadcasts with a significant presence of LGBTQIA+ participants, combining prolonged participant observation across multiple channels, analysis of chat and community interactions, and qualitative interviews with queer streamers and audience members.

The theoretical framework mobilizes concepts such as queer temporality, queer mobility, affective labor, and, most importantly, queer conviviality. Brewer argues that speedrunning resonates with queer temporalities because it rejects linearity, repetition is valued over progress, and players constantly challenge intended paths through games. In this sense, speedrunning becomes both a transgressive gaming practice and a metaphor for non-normative life trajectories. At the same time, livestreaming allows LGBTQIA+ speed runners to make their identities visible, share experiences of coming out, and create spaces where queer identities can be performed, negotiated, and celebrated.

One of the study's main contributions lies in its demonstration that queer streamers do not merely seek representation but actively produce alternative infrastructures of support and protection. Brewer shows how LGBTQIA+ communities developed tools, campaigns, and collective responses to harassment, including identity-based discovery systems, mutual aid networks, charity fundraising, and activism against hate raids. The article discusses initiatives such as Peer2Peer.live and campaigns like #TwitchDoBetter, which pressured Twitch to implement better moderation and verification tools. In this sense, the study reveals that streaming platforms can simultaneously enable visibility and intensify vulnerability, especially through mechanisms such as tags, discoverability systems, and live chat. By centering queer and trans experiences, Brewer demonstrates that marginalized communities are not only targets of exclusion but also important agents in the creation of safer, more inclusive, and more politically transformative forms of participation in live-streaming culture.

(v) **Guajardo, 2024**

The study by Guajardo (2024), expands the analytical scope beyond videogame streaming per se by examining *reality dating shows* through the lens of game studies. Although this study might initially appear tangential to the topic of live videogame streaming, it offers both theoretical and methodological contributions that are highly relevant for understanding the convergences among gaming logics, broadcasting, live entertainment, and reflection on gender.

Guajardo (2024) applies the game analysis framework developed by Consalvo and Dutton (2006) to examine ten high-rated reality dating shows drawn from the Internet Movie Database's Top 50 Romance Reality TV ranking, analyzing inventories of objects, interface studies, interaction maps, and gameplay logs. The corpus is anchored predominantly in U.S. productions distributed by streaming services and broadcast networks such as Netflix, ABC, MTV, HBO Max, Fox, and Discovery, with one program of British origin (Love Island) and one set in rural Japan (Love Village), reflecting the Anglophone bias of the underlying ranking. This creative application of

game studies methodologies to television entertainment formats demonstrates the productivity of approaching diverse cultural phenomena through ludic logics, revealing structures, rules, strategies, and mechanics that might otherwise remain implicit.

The results demonstrate that reality dating shows can be conceptualized as games, as they are structured around rules, objectives, reward systems, competitive strategies, and gameplay dynamics. This analysis reveals how these formats structure performances of gender, sexuality, and relationality through ludic mechanics that simultaneously reflect and shape broader social norms surrounding romance, attraction, and partnership.

In this light, women streamers often face pressures to incorporate elements of *performative intimacy* and *emotional sharing* that echo the dynamics of the reality shows analyzed by Guajardo. In this sense, Guajardo's study may be useful for understanding how the gendered structures of entertainment media interpenetrate streaming culture, shaping the expectations audiences hold toward women streamers and the performative labor these women are compelled to enact. This observation underscores the need for analyses that not only examine the specific content of streaming but also consider the multiple media and cultural genealogies that inform the practices, expectations, and norms shaping contemporary live streaming (Cote 2020; Williams et al. 2009).

DISCUSSION AND CRITICAL ANALYSIS

Our findings reveal a multifaceted panorama of gendered experiences in videogame live streaming. Taken together, these studies mobilize diverse theoretical and methodological approaches that illuminate different dimensions of the phenomenon: Guajardo (2022) focuses on the emotional labor of female streamers; Coema (2022) examines platform materialities and spectatorship practices; Kunigita et al. (2022) analyze affective economies through donation systems; Brewer (2023) explores queer conviviality in speedrunning; and Guajardo (2024) investigates gender performativity in mediated entertainment. Each study illuminates specific dimensions (emotional labor, platform materialities, and affective economies) yet they rarely build upon one another. Without dialogue across approaches, the field of game studies struggles to develop coherent frameworks for future research.

Our analysis also reveals methodological patterns that warrant critical reflection. The studies employ qualitative methodologies predominantly, with the notable exception of Kunigita et al. (2022), whose quantitative approach draws on secondary platform data to analyze donation patterns. Four of the five studies privilege depth over breadth, which is suitable for exploring lived experiences and producing rich, contextually grounded understandings. However, the rarity of large-scale quantitative studies limits the ability to assess the prevalence and magnitude of the phenomena identified qualitatively.

Furthermore, four of the five studies examine predominantly Anglophone contexts, with the partial exception of Kunigita et al. (2022), whose authors are affiliated with Japanese institutions, although their dataset is drawn from English-language Twitch channels, particularly the United States and the United Kingdom. This geographical and linguistic limitation constitutes a significant gap, given that streaming culture is a global phenomenon with culturally specific manifestations. As Ruberg and Ruelos

(2020) argue regarding LGBTQIA+ demographic data, and Atrio (2018) demonstrates in relation to gender representations in game narratives, cultural contexts fundamentally shape how gender issues are experienced, negotiated, and resisted. The absence of research on streaming in non-Anglophone contexts within the DiGRA library constrains the generalizability of the findings and obscures potential cultural variations in gender dynamics.

Within the sectors that have received some attention, significant issues remain underexplored. For example, while emotional labor has been addressed, the resulting economic inequalities and long-term sustainability of women's participation have remained understudied. Although queer communities have been examined, intersectional analyses articulating gender with race, class, disability, nationality, and other dimensions of marginalization have remained underdeveloped.

A third limitation involves temporality. With the notable exception of Brewer (2023), whose multi-year digital ethnography of LGBTQIA+ speedrunning communities constitutes an extended longitudinal engagement, the remaining studies do not track streamers longitudinally, making it impossible to document how gender dynamics evolve as careers progress or platforms change. Given the rapidly evolving nature of streaming platforms, platform policies, community cultures, and streamer practices, longitudinal studies are necessary to understand trajectories, inflection points, and patterns of change (or persistence) in gender inequalities.

While some studies in the broader literature, most notably Gray (2015) on race, gender, and deviance in Xbox Live, and Uttarapong et al. (2021) on the harassment experiences of women and LGBTQ streamers, acknowledge the importance of intersectional perspectives that consider not only gender but also race, class, sexuality, and other dimensions of difference and inequality, none of the five analyzed studies develop substantive and intersectional analyses. Brewer (2023) study on queer conviviality comes closest to addressing these concerns by centering on LGBTQIA+ experiences; however, even here, issues of race, class, and other dimensions of difference remain underexplored. Gray (2015) documents in her study on race, gender, and deviance on Xbox Live that black women experience specific forms of discrimination that cannot be reduced to sexism plus racism but reflect the unique intersection of these dimensions. Similarly, in streaming contexts, women from diverse racial backgrounds, socioeconomic classes, nationalities, and sexual identities are likely to face qualitatively distinct barriers and opportunities that gender-only focused analyses fail to capture.

Academic Underrepresentation and Unexplored Sectors of Streaming Culture

As Shaw (2014) argues in her analysis of the concept of game culture, questions about who "counts" as a member of a culture are central to studying it within a cultural studies framework. Similarly, questions about which topics "count" as worthy of relevant academic investigation reveal epistemic hierarchies within the academic field itself. The underrepresentation of gender issues in streaming within the DiGRA library suggests that, despite growing rhetoric about the importance of diversity, inclusion, and social justice in game studies, these issues remain marginalized in the community's effective research priorities.

This gap between the social magnitude of the phenomenon and the academic attention dedicated to it raises important questions about the social responsibility of

academic research. As Massanari (2017) argues in her analysis of how social platform architectures facilitate or hinder toxic behaviors, scholars play a crucial role in making visible the power mechanisms and inequalities operating in digital spaces. The underrepresentation of research on gender and streaming in the DiGRA library suggests that the field is not fully meeting this responsibility, indicating a need for more committed and inclusive research agendas that address these urgent social issues comprehensively.

In addition, a productive tension can be observed between studies that emphasize constraints, violence, and inequality (e.g., Guajardo 2022 on emotional labor) and those that highlight agency, resistance, and the creation of alternatives (e.g., Brewer 2023 on queer conviviality). This tension should not be resolved in favor of one perspective or the other but instead maintained as an acknowledgment of the complexity of the phenomenon: live streaming platforms are simultaneously spaces of labor exploitation, gender discrimination, and online violence, and spaces of creativity, community, and resistance (Johnson & Woodcock 2019; Consalvo et al. 2025).

Locating the identified gender issues across various sectors of streaming culture reveals not only what has been studied but also, and perhaps more significantly, what remains unexplored. Entire sectors of streaming culture remain largely unexamined from a gender perspective in the analyzed DiGRA publications. The following reflections are proposed as areas for future research:

- *Gaming media and streaming coverage:* How do specialized and mainstream media cover female versus male streamers? Are there systematic patterns of difference in language, framing, and attention given? How does this media coverage influence public perceptions of the legitimacy and value of female streamers?
- *Streaming histories:* How do historical narratives about streaming's development include or exclude women's contributions? Which pioneering streamers are remembered or forgotten? How do collective memory construction processes about streaming operate in gendered ways? How do these narratives account (or fail to account) for the contributions of streamers with non-normative gender identities, including transgender and non-binary individuals, given that the corpus already includes a study specifically addressing LGBTQI+ communities? As (Nooney 2013) demonstrates regarding broader videogame histories, history writing is a gendered process that often marginalizes women's contributions, what Nooney (2013) memorably characterizes as a patrilinear history of digital games, one that traces its lineage through a succession of male pioneers while rendering invisible the labor and creativity of women who were equally constitutive of the field.
- *Streaming studies:* How does the academic field of streaming studies itself prioritize (or not) gender issues? This review provides preliminary evidence of underrepresentation, but deeper analyses are needed. What mechanisms (from peer review processes to funding decisions) contribute to this underrepresentation? Put differently: what does it mean that a field whose object of study is centrally constituted by gender, since platform cultures are always already gendered, has produced so little research that foregrounds gender as a primary analytical category? And how might scholars, editors, and conference organizers actively intervene to shift these epistemic priorities?

- *Platform policies and governance*: How do platform rules, moderation systems, and algorithms have differentiated gender-based impacts? As Cullen and Ruberg (2019) document in their analysis of live streaming community guidelines, platform policies often regulate female bodies differently, with "cleavage" and "inappropriate parts" subject to differential scrutiny. However, analyses of how recommendation algorithms, monetization systems, and moderation policies operate in gendered ways remain scarce in the DiGRA digital library.

Implications for Game Studies and Academic Practice

The scarcity of research on gender and streaming identified in this review suggests essential opportunities for the field of game studies to expand its scope and priorities. Based on these findings, several recommendations emerge for strengthening scholarly attention to these issues.

DiGRA conferences could consider implementing dedicated thematic tracks focused on gender, diversity, and social justice in emerging contexts such as streaming, e-sports, and other forms of digital participatory culture. Explicitly encouraging submissions on these topics in *Calls for Papers* would signal the field's commitment to addressing these underexplored areas. Additionally, examining peer review processes for potential biases against feminist and intersectional research could help ensure that diverse methodological approaches and critical perspectives receive fair consideration.

This review's findings also suggest that funding agencies and academic institutions might benefit from prioritizing support for research on gender, diversity, and social justice in digital contexts. Rather than treating such research as specialized or niche, recognizing it as central to understanding contemporary digital culture and its structural inequalities could help address the gaps identified in this study and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of digital participatory cultures.

Limitations

As a scoping review centered exclusively on the DiGRA digital library, this study acknowledges the limitations that must be addressed. Restricting the corpus to publications indexed within a single academic venue may introduce selection bias and limits the representativeness of the findings. Research on gender and live streaming published in other major game studies and digital media venues, including the Foundations of Digital Games (FDG) conference, Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI), CHI PLAY, and journals such as *Games and Culture*, was not included in the present analysis. Consequently, the exceptionally low retention rate identified (5 out of 471 records) should be interpreted as reflecting the current state of research on gender-and-streaming within the DiGRA community specifically, rather than the broader landscape of game studies or contemporary scholarship on digital streaming cultures more generally.

Consistent with the scoping review approach by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) this analysis does not include a formal quality appraisal of the included articles. This decision allows for the incorporation of a broader range of methodologies, theoretical approaches, and empirical materials, which is particularly important in an emerging and still fragmented field of research. However, it also means that this review cannot

draw conclusions about the relative methodological rigor, validity, or empirical robustness of the included studies. Instead, the focus remains on mapping the scope in the existing literature in the DiGRA digital library.

Despite these limitations, this review makes an essential contribution by documenting and critically analyzing the specific patterns of academic engagement (or disengagement) within a major game studies community regarding issues of gender and streaming. These findings have implications for research prioritization and institutional practices within game studies, highlighting the need for greater attention to gender justice in streaming research.

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE WORK

Given that women represent approximately 35% of active Twitch streamers, yet only 15% of those with more than 10,000 followers (Nakandala et al. 2017; Ruberg et al. 2019), this disparity does not directly reflect differences in technical competence or dedication, but rather systematic structures of discrimination operating at multiple levels: i) Algorithmic, through recommendation systems that favor male-coded content; (ii) Communal, through toxic cultures that render spaces hostile to women; (iii) Economic, through pay gaps and discriminatory donation patterns; and (iv) Psychological, through the disproportionate emotional labor required to manage constant harassment (Fox and Tang 2017; Massanari 2017).

Following the analytical model proposed by (Friman 2015) in her study of broadly gendered game culture, the study of gendered streaming culture demands two fundamental starting points. First, it is necessary to clarify how the concept of gender is understood in the specific streaming context, not as a unitary analytical category, but as a multidimensional phenomenon that can be mobilized through various theoretical lenses. Second, mapping of gender issues across the multiple sectors of streaming culture is required, identifying not only areas already explored but also, and crucially, gaps that remain unexplored. As Shaw (2014) argues, questions about who "counts" as a member of a culture are inseparable from questions about which topics "count" as worthy of serious academic inquiry. The underrepresentation of gender issues in streaming reveals epistemic hierarchies that warrant critical reflection and deliberate intervention.

In response to the gaps identified in this review, a future research agenda is proposed, structured around five priority axes. These axes seek not only to fill empirical lacunae but also to interrogate the structural conditions (epistemic, institutional, and economic), that shape what kind of research is possible, by whom, and for whose benefit.

Intersectional and Transnational Research

Research should examine gender in its interaction with race, class, sexuality, disability, nationality, and other dimensions of difference across diverse cultural and linguistic contexts (Crenshaw 1991, 1989). In the streaming context, this means attending to how Black women, working-class women, queer women, women with disabilities, and women from non-Western cultural contexts face barriers and opportunities that cannot be reduced to generic "gender discrimination." All five central studies in this review examine predominantly Anglophone contexts; future work must expand geographically and linguistically to capture the culturally specific manifestations of

gendered streaming in Asian, Latin American, African, and other non-Western settings (Li 2024; Uttarapong et al. 2021).

It is necessary to acknowledge, however, that proposing transnational research without confronting its structural preconditions would be intellectually dishonest. Access to DiGRA, the very venue through which much of this scholarship circulates, is not equitably distributed. The conference has historically been held predominantly in the Global North, rendering participation economically inaccessible for many researchers whose work engages with marginalized communities in the Global South. This structural asymmetry is itself one of the mechanisms through which the invisibility documented in this review is reproduced: researchers working on the very populations this agenda seeks to center are systematically less able to submit, present, and be cited. Future transnational research agendas, including this one, must therefore be accompanied by institutional commitments to hybrid and remote participation, subsidized registration and travel grants, and the active recognition of non-English-language scholarship in the field's review and citation practices.

Critical Analyses of Streaming's Political Economies

Research is needed into the gendered implications of the economic and political structures of streaming platforms, including algorithmic architectures that structure visibility in gendered ways (Williams et al. 2009), monetization systems that produce and sustain income disparities between female and male streamers (Kunigita et al. 2022; Guajardo 2022), and content moderation and governance policies that regulate female bodies according to differentiated standards (Cullen and Ruberg 2019; Ruberg 2021). Critically, such analyses must attend not only to platform-level decisions but to the broader political economy of the tech industry within which these platforms operate, an economy that is itself structured by gendered and racialized hierarchies of labor and capital.

Participatory Action Research and Transformative Design

Research conducted in direct collaboration with female streamer communities is essential to co-designing interventions that make streaming safer, more sustainable, and more equitable (Engelberg 2019). This approach recognizes streamers not as passive research subjects but as epistemic agents whose firsthand expertise in navigating harassment, economic precarity, and platform moderation constitutes a form of knowledge that external researchers cannot replicate. Participatory methodologies are also better positioned to produce interventions that are contextually relevant and genuinely responsive to community needs. At the same time, participatory action research is resource-intensive: it requires sustained fieldwork, community trust-building, and, frequently, compensating participants for their time, conditions that depend heavily on institutional support and adequate funding.

Longitudinal Studies on Trajectories, Sustainability, and Attrition

Longitudinal research is needed to track streamers over extended periods, documenting the factors that facilitate or impede career sustainability. As Consalvo et al. (2025) and Johnson and Woodcock (2019) document, female streamers are disproportionately likely to discontinue activity within the first twelve months. Longitudinal studies could reveal the precise mechanisms through which emotional

labor, harassment, monetization structures, and algorithmic dynamics interact to produce this differential attrition and, crucially, document how these dynamics evolve as careers and platform contexts change. It must be acknowledged, however, that longitudinal studies are among the most funding-dependent research designs in the social sciences.

Proposing them as a priority without simultaneously advocating for structural changes in how gender-focused game studies research is funded, including recognition by national research councils and international funding bodies, risks framing an institutional problem as a methodological one.

Research on Resistance, Agency, and Alternative Futures

It is essential to center the ways women and marginalized groups not only face discrimination but actively create alternative spaces, develop resistance strategies, and imagine more equitable futures (Brehm 2013; Friman et al. 2024; Cote 2020). Brewer's (2023) study on queer conviviality in speedrunning provides a valuable methodological and conceptual model. This emphasis on agency should not minimize or romanticize the real violence and discrimination female streamers face; rather, it insists that even under significant structural constraint, collective agency is possible and must be documented, supported, and amplified.

Taken together, these five axes constitute not merely a research agenda but a call for structural reflection within the field itself. The invisibility of women streamers in DiGRA publications is not only an empirical gap; it is a symptom of who is resourced to do research, whose work is legible to reviewers, and which subjects are constructed as worthy of serious academic inquiry. Addressing it requires action at multiple levels simultaneously: individual researchers expanding their scope and methods, conference organizers building more equitable access structures, funding bodies recognizing gender justice in digital media as a priority area, and the DiGRA community critically examining the epistemic hierarchies that shape what counts as knowledge in the field.

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APPENDIX

Supplementary Dataset: Scoping Review Documentation

The complete documentation of this scoping review is made openly available as a supplementary dataset to ensure the transparency and reproducibility of the methodology:

Vieira, Maria Júlia; Cardoso, Pedro and Lima, Luciana 2026. "Scoping Review DiGRA 2020–2025 (The Invisibility of Women Streamers in Game Studies)." Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20134561>.

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