

Community Report: LivecoderA

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SUMMARY

In March of 2022, LivecoderA, a new live coding community came into being, coalescing around the need to recognize a specific cohort of live coders who identify as women. The group is inherently feminist and intersectional, and its creation was motivated by many desires. Among them: solidarity and visibility, to be counted as sisters, and to reflect to each other the strength of our numbers. A manifesto and several events have since been produced, and the community is active online while also making more in-person connections whenever possible through the coordination of gigs, residencies and meetups. At the time of publishing, the community connects through Telegram and Discord, with channels consisting of 48 and 27 members respectively.

1 Introduction

LivecoderA is a community of live coders who identify as women. The community aligns itself with intersectional feminism and is inclusive to trans, femme and non-binary people and those who experience gender-based discrimination. The group formed in early 2022 with the purpose of organizing an online event for International Women's Day 2022 on 8th March. The motivation of the event was to recognise and increase the visibility of women-identifying live coders, as well to act as a site of exchange and sisterhood.

With a collective recognition that there was a need and enthusiasm for this group to persist beyond a single event, the group wrote a manifesto and published a website to make its existence more visible to potential new members. As an organic, non-hierarchical, and self-identifying community, the group is inherently feminist, inclusive, and intersectional. Its creation was motivated by many desires such as desires for solidarity and for visibility, to be counted as sisters, to share experiences, and to reflect to each other and to the wider community the strength of our numbers.

The group aligns with intersectional feminism due to its multicultural, geographical, and generational diversity. We respond to an expanded mode of intersectionality suggested by Bassett, Kember and O'Riordan (2020, 97), which recognises heterogeneous intersections at multiple scales (identity, social situation, geopolitics, economics, environmental...). The group is welcoming to multifaceted intersectionality, yet it is beyond the scope of this community report to elaborate on the specificities of these intersectional complexities.

2 Group Organisation

The community is organised through an active Telegram group which has 48 members and a discord channel with 27 members. Links to these groups can be found on the LivecoderA website: <https://livecodera.glitch.me/>

An initial group was formed by Alexandra Cardenas, Shelly Knotts and Iris Saladino who each invited all the women-identifying live coders they knew to the Telegram group. Now, any member can invite a new member to the Telegram or Discord channels.

The LivecoderA group has a non-hierarchical structure and members write in the Telegram and Discord groups in English and Spanish. The channels are used for organisational, informative and supportive purposes. They are used as asynchronous meeting point spaces for discussion and sharing.

Members often post about local and online live coding and music technology events and opportunities including residencies, open calls, and conferences. Other initiatives have included starting an online list of women-identifying livecoders: <https://github.com/toplap/livecodera/blob/main/README.md>

The organisation has emerged from a bottom-up approach. It is purposely horizontal, fluid, and organic, and moves with a natural flow. The group identifies primarily as a solidarity group more rather than as an action group. Hence, specific goal statements are beyond the group's agenda at present. Having said that, members of the group are proactive in organising relevant activities within and outside the group such as workshops, talks, and performances, which raise awareness of the group's existence and mission.

We envision that a group that requires less time commitment can be more accessible, flexible, sustainable, and realistic in the long run. By placing lower demands on group members, such a group can provide a center point to gather and regroup while we navigate busy and demanding schedules in other domains. The group is still young (one year-old at the time of this writing) and is still exploring its group identity. The busy agendas of the group members make it difficult to even organise group events such as the 8th of March of 2023. We focus on incarnating the group ideas in our daily lives as opposed to performing regular organised feminist acts. Our central mission is on providing a space for solidarity and exchange in a masculine-driven technological environment.

3 Why a Woman-Identifying Live Coding Group?

There is continuous evidence about how women are still a minority group in the music technology field. In the past decade, there has been an increase in awareness of the underrepresentation of women in the sound and music computing fields as highlighted by a number of meta-review studies presented in conferences such as the International Society for Music Information Retrieval Conference (Hu et al. 2016); the Audio Engineering Society Convention (Mathew, Grossman, and Andreopoulou 2016); the International Conference on Auditory Displays (Andreopoulou and Goudarzi 2017); and the International Computer Music Conference (Frid 2017).

The community of New Interfaces for Musical Expression (NIME) has a representation of 14% of women authors from 2001 to 2017 (Xambó 2018). The International Computer Music Association (ICMA) and the Audio Engineering Society (AES) reported ranges between 14.5% and 19.6% in the former, and less than 10% in the latter (Mathew, Grossman, and Andreopoulou 2016). The results are also consistent with the automatic calculation of the NIME authors in (Frid 2017), where the percentage ranged from 7.4% to 17%.

Making women's work in music and sound, as well as publishing statistics about gender imbalance, has become a useful tool for raising awareness about the issue and responding to it. A relevant example of regularly making visible the existing gender imbalance in international music festivals is the female:pressure's Facts survey with results from 2013, 2015, 2017, 2020, and 2022 (<https://femalepressure.wordpress.com>). After a decade of pressure, "FACTS 2022 reveals a rise in the proportion of female acts from 9.2% in 2012 to 26.9% in 2020–2021. The data on non-binary artists shows an increase from 0.4% to 1.3% from 2017 to 2021." This indicates that publishing the statistical figures is important and that it takes time and perseverance to enact change. As a future goal, it is in the LivecoderA agenda to work on statistical figures in the live-coding community.

Although, to our knowledge, there are still missing formal publications with statistics on the underrepresentation of women in live coding, there has been relevant qualitative research on the need of sharing concerns and uniting as an all-women group. Knotts, Cárdenas and Armitage presented a paper on "Women in Live Coding: Evolving Diverse Communities of Practice" at Women In Sound/Women On Sound Symposium, 2015, which included current estimated statistics on gender diversity in live coding scenes. Armitage and Thornham (2021) discussed the importance of acknowledging the values brought by women live coders into the live-coding practice, such as failure, slowness, and embodiment to counterbalance the normatively masculine value of emphasizing and fetishizing code or software.



Figure 1: Screenshot of the LivecoderA event on International Women's Day. Photo © Joana Chicau, 2022.

Arguably, an all-women identifying group provides a necessary safe space to help the group members develop their individual voices, without the risk of getting overshadowed within the larger male-dominated group. Dobson (2018) claims the need for supporting Digital Audio Ecofeminism (DA'EF) as a particular set of values that emerge from communities almost exclusively for women and girls. Dobson provides evidence that shows that all-female and feminist sound/music communities “are providing women with alternative spaces for learning and creating in digital audio domains” (Dobson 2018: 202).

4 International Women's Day Event

The IWD event took place on 8th March in 2022 on Mozilla Hubs and consisted of performances, installations, and communal events over a 24 hour period.

To organise the event, a Jitsi call was scheduled for interested group members to discuss how to organise the event. From that meeting a list of tasks was created and any member could agree to take on a task that suited their skills and interests. Further discussion and coordination was done via the Telegram group.

Alexandra Cardenas set up the Mozilla Hubs space and invited others to contribute. Prior to the event, an online spreadsheet was shared amongst the members to organise the line-up across different time zones.

During the event itself the participants used the ICLC youtube channel for streaming their performances in real-time or pre-recorded videos. Participants included: irisS, Jessica Rodriguez & Marianne Teixido, Naoto Hieda & Flor de Fuego, Celeste Betancur, Alicia Champlin, Earth to Abigail, Alexandra Cardenas, Jude Montague, Anna Xambó, nervousdata, Codie, djmelan3, Shelly Knotts, Ezra, Sarah Imrisek, Astro Mel “Mekium”. A Collaborative Jam unfolded in Estuary (both in English and Spanish) and another in MiniTidal with Claire Autorino, Rachel Devorah, Natalie Hogue and Maya Wagner.

A smaller group of participants (Joana Chicau, Earth to Abigail, Shelly Knotts, Flor de Fuego, Raia, Jessica A. Rodriguez) came together to discuss some of their motivations around being part of the event. The topics discussed included inclusivity and diversity in live coding. Participants shared personal stories around their journey in the live coding practice and scene. They used the platform Jitsi that was streamed to the same youtube channel.

The lively and iconic flyer was designed by Flor de Fuego and Joana Chicau using Olivia Jack's Hydra and adapted from Lynn Randolph's 1989 painting “Cyborg”, used in Donna Haraway's book cover of “Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature”. This same visual was added to a website hosted on Glitch, using hydra and P5.JS to communicate about the event.

A hallmark of the event was a tendency to bring together collaborators from different countries and cultures. It was an open platform inclusive of any LivecoderA who wanted to participate. In many ways this event was a love letter by, for, and to this community, in celebration of perseverance, in solidarity with the fight of women everywhere to exist and thrive in tech and music spaces.

A smaller event took place in 2023 which included two jam sessions and a discussion. The first jam took place in Estuary and included members of the group in the UK and Argentina. The second jam included women-identifying live coders from the TOPLAP Barcelona community. Both jams were live streamed to the Eulerroom youtube channel. A discussion session also took place in Jitsi but was not publicly streamed.

5 Manifesto

A manifesto was written collectively to reflect the motivations and ethos of the group. The manifesto was written prior to the IWD event and distributed across group members social media channels. The text of the manifesto is as follows:

What, how, and who is a livecoderA?

- *A livecodera is a woman who arrived to code to use it as a weapon, a song, a dress. Looking to society, she decided to create a different possible future for it through its most potent element: culture.*
- *I care about eating, doing art, fucking, sleeping and coding.*
- *A livecodera, with some or a very few privileges, made a life route through patriarchal hostility. This livecodera is fully aware. Each space gained is an opportunity to subvert logic, to weave ties, to implant love.*
- *A livecodera is a code worker (which is never neutral) who has to fight for her rights on several spaces. Daily she faces different types of gender violence (symbolic, psychological, economical, physical, sexual), but she debates them in order to mend it collectively.*

Qué, cómo, y quién es una livecoderA?

- *Una livecodera es una mujer que ha llegado hasta el código para usarlo como un arma, como un canto, como un vestido. Mirando a la sociedad ha decidido crearle un futuro posible a través de su componente más potente: la cultura.*
- *Me importa comer, hacer arte, coger, dormir y codear.*
- *Una livecodera, con algunos o pocos privilegios, armó un recorrido abriéndose paso en la hostilidad de la opresión patriarcal. La livecodera es plenamente consciente. Cada espacio ganado es una oportunidad de subvertir las lógicas, de tejer lazos, de implantar amor.*
- *Una livecodera es una trabajadora del código (que nunca es neutro) y por lo tanto debe pelear por sus derechos en diversos ámbitos. Por su condición de mujer, se enfrenta a diario a distintos tipos de violencias de género (simbólica, psicológica, económica, física, sexual) e intenta debatirlas, repararlas y combatirlas colectivamente.*

6 Collaborations Among Members

6.1 Novel Partnership in the ALGORAVE Birthday Event

Sarah Imrisek and Alicia Champlin met through the LivecoderA community and collaborated on an improvised duet for the ALGORAVE 10th Birthday stream with Imrisek performing visuals with Hydra and Champlin performing audio with TidalCycles. Champlin is based in Spain and Imrisek in Canada, and the set was performed with Champlin streaming live audio to Imrisek, who added visuals and re-streamed to the live channel in real time.

6.2 Digital Art Zurich Festival

Alexandra Cardenas invited Earth to Abigail to participate in the DAZ Festival in October 2022 because of the relationship they developed through being part of LivecoderA. They met there for the first time in person.

7 Positive Outcomes

The LivecoderA community is not only geared towards the organization of events and collaborations, it also provides its members a safe place to freely share their experiences as women identifying live coders. It's a place where all of us can express our doubts, fears, frustrations, desires, and maybe more importantly, celebrate our successes as individuals and as a group. LivecoderA's growth comes from its members recognizing the value in having such a judgment-free space combined with a shared understanding of the challenges women identifying tech artists face.

Through the support we give each other, as well as through our work and collaborations, true and meaningful friendships are formed that live outside the boundaries of location, language, or culture.

8 Future Plans

The LivecoderA community has been coming together for one year, having the group come together for the event described above on the 8th of March 2022 and again this year, 2023, on the same date. There have not yet been many opportunities to collectively talk through the dreams and expectations of those involved.

At an individual level, different live coders are active in their local communities. Many of them participate in and organise workshops, performances, meet ups and other formats of skill sharing and co-creation.

As discussed by some LivecoderAs, one future aim is to gather the links to portfolios of women-identifying live coders. At the moment an etherpad is circulating, but it needs to be further shared to reach out to more people. The most recently updated version of this list lives in this link: <https://github.com/toplap/livecodera>

Over time, this list, alongside other forms of data gathering (such as women-identifying live coders in the line up of events), will start providing a more dynamic insight around representation in the field. Moreover, this community report space has been proven useful to articulate the group's history, identity, and intentions.

The LivecoderA community acts as a solidarity group that tries to minimize the pressure around the activities it puts together and works within their individual capacities and time dedication. The Telegram, among other channels, informs how the community moves, and most importantly, it offers a continuous safe space for coming together.

9 Community Links

Website: <https://livecodera.glitch.me/>

International Womens Day 2022 youtube stream recordings: <https://youtu.be/hm8dE539cvk>

List of women identifying livecoders: <https://github.com/toplap/livecodera/blob/main/README.md>

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