

Cool, creative and egalitarian? Exploring Gender in Project-Based New Media Work in Europe

The new media industries are popularly regarded as cool, creative and egalitarian. This view is held by academics, policy-makers and also by new media workers themselves, who cite the youth, dynamism and informality of new media as some of its main attractions. This paper is concerned with what this mythologized version of new media work leaves out, glosses over and, indeed, makes difficult to articulate at all. Themes include pervasive insecurity, low pay, and long hours but the particular focus of the paper is on gender inequalities in new media work. Despite its image as 'cool', non-hierarchical and egalitarian, the new media sector, this paper will argue, is characterized by a number of entrenched and all too old-fashioned patterns of gender inequality relating to education, access to work and pay. Moreover, a number of new forms of gender inequality are emerging, connected - paradoxically - to many of the features of the work that are valued - informality, autonomy, flexibility and so on. Drawing on a study of 125 freelance new media workers in six European countries, this paper explores these issues and argues that the new forms of sexism in new media represent a serious challenge to its image of itself as cool, diverse and egalitarian.

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