Technical boys and creative girls: the career aspirations of digitally skilled youths

# Details

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## Authors

Wong B.;Kemp P.

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## Topics

Literacy and skills

## Sample

32 digitally skilled teenagers (aged 13–19) attendees of a fully funded computing summer school,
which ran across two sites in England, UK.

## Implications For Educators About

STEM Education

## Implications For Policy Makers About

Other

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

STEM education

# Abstract

Digital technology is increasingly central to our lives, particularly
among young people. However, there remains a concern from
government and businesses of a digital skills gap because many
youths, especially girls, tend to be consumers rather than creators of
technology. Drawing on 32 semi-structured interviews with digitally
skilled teenagers (aged 13–19), this article investigates their digital
career aspirations and examines how identities and discourses
of gender can interact with the type of digital careers that are of
interest to these youths. While it was found that digitally skilled
young people still articulate traditional gendered discourses of
digital competence, especially around technical abilities, the growing
importance of creativity as a career pathway into digital technology
is highlighted. Implications of the findings are discussed in relation
to the new computing curriculum in England, which prioritises
technical computing skills, and the discontinuation of Information
and Communications Technology (ICT), which facilitates a broader
usage of software and digital productivity.

# Outcome

"While digitally skilled youths have expressed educational and career aspirations in computing
and information technology, we found that few girls are interested in technical-oriented
computing, which continues to attract gendered discourses of computing as ‘for men’. By
contrast, creative-oriented computing careers appeared popular for both girls and boys,
which seem to attract few, if any, gender stereotypes. Indeed, many of our youths may have
become digitally skilled as a result of their creative interest and determination, and may have
mastered digital technologies and software in order to advance their digital creations. As such, a creative route into computing may be a more viable option for those less interested
in technical computing, especially girls (Doubé Lang, 2012). Yet, it would be dangerous
to assume that a focus on creative computing would eradicate concerns of digital gender
inequality. If girls are only encouraged to pursue computing-related careers that prioritise
creativity, we are at risk of reproducing a gender digital divide within CIT, as currently
seen in major technology companies (e.g. Google and Twitter). As such, we revisit the
emphasis of the new computing curriculum in England on technical abilities as well as the
importance of more generic digital and software skills, which were part of the soon-to-be
discontinued subject, ICT." (Wong and Kemp, 2018: 310-11).