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“Qualified women are not promoted” or “women are favoured”?

Contradictory experiences of gender-based discrimination in the workplaces of higher engineering graduates

In this article, we analyse gender-based discrimination experienced by higher engineering graduate women and men in their workplaces. Previous studies in the field of technology have focused on discrimination towards women, rendering the experiences of men mostly invisible. Our data are based on two surveys conducted by a union of engineering professionals: the questions regarding discrimination come from a large-scale survey conducted in 2015 and a sample survey conducted in 2020. Our results confirm discrimination experienced by women yet provide new insights about how it materialises in the workplace. We show how women’s experiences of discrimination are strongly linked to the masculine culture prevalent in the workplaces and compare these experiences with men’s experiences of women being favoured, which we also associate with the prevailing norm of masculinity in the field of technology. In conclusion, we suggest that the dominance of masculinity in the field of technology is the main cause for discrimination against women, and the dismantling of masculine privilege gives rise to men’s experiences of discrimination. We conclude that acknowledging gender differences in understandings about equality and discrimination is a requirement for a successful change of culture.