Abstract

The dilemmas of young ICT women engineers

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ICTs offer opportunities for women, but also many challenges. It is therefore necessary to investigate the personal and professional reality, throughout the life-cycle, of women who are qualified and work in the ICT sector. This paper examines the major personal and professional dilemmas faced by a group of young women engineers who develop their careers in the university realm as well as in private companies. The dilemmas are related to different areas of personal and professional life: the choice of studies, the career pathway, the meritocratic model, motherhood, the balance between personal, family and career, the organizational culture, affirmative action and gender equality.

The methodology is based on qualitative techniques: ten in depth semi-structured interviews. Age is considered a key variable in selecting the sample of women engineers. First, these young women make up a generation who have benefited from the legacy of the pioneers, who years ago opened the door to areas previously closed to women. But at the same time, they present themselves as continuing the dynamic of progress, when choosing to study and to work in an eminently masculine sector. Secondly, the women interviewed are in a crucial moment in which key decisions regarding their professional development and personal choices must be taken. By exploring the discourses and strategies of young women engineers, the aim has been to throw further light over the tension that emerges between private life and professional demands, while discussing their approaches of conciliation and, ultimately, inquiring about their perceptions of the current policies of gender equality.