

Gender & Science

A Lecture Series

Abstract

This lecture series offers an introduction to the relationship between gender and science, with a focus on the specific intersections with the sciences taught at ETH.

It is designed to acquaint participants from all scientific backgrounds with the various ways in which gender perspectives matter for specific scientific disciplines, as well as for science in general.

There is agreement across academic disciplines today that gender influences and structures the production of knowledge and that scientific knowledge production in turn shapes gender notions. Even within “hard” sciences such as biology, physics, engineering, etc., gender is a significant factor in determining what counts as “objective” knowledge, who can know it, what kind of knowledge is produced, or how this knowledge is acquired and justified. Feminist research aims to reveal how dominant conceptions of science and knowledge practices disadvantage women*, and other subordinate groups, with the goal of reforming these practices. An important part of feminist critique is to show that such efforts substantially improve the overall quality of research.

In a series of guest lectures, scholars from different scientific disciplines provide accessible insights into the intersection between gender studies and the guest lecturers’ respective fields of research. The lecture series thus encourages learning from concrete examples rather than abstract theory. The goal is for participants to be able to compare different approaches used to speak about gender and other types of bias in scientific research and to eventually apply relevant concepts and methods to critically evaluate practices their own disciplines of study and research.

Time and Venue

Tuesdays, 12.00-13.30

Public participation is only possible via zoom.

Permanent zoom link: <https://ethz.zoom.us/j/62251041246>

Meeting-ID: 622 5104 1246

Contact

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Detailed Program

Relational Ethics for Data and Computing: Traits, Origins and Projects of Relation-Centered Approaches to Technology Ethics

Prof. Dr. Margarita Boenig-Liptsin

Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, ETH Zurich

October 18

Scholars have long documented gender and racial biases in computing technologies and algorithmic models. In order to help prevent and remedy this, education institutions and corporations frequently put in place ethics initiatives. But what if these ethics initiatives themselves showed a bias towards a specific way of thinking about the human, about agency and responsibility in sociotechnical systems, and about human flourishing? This talk contrasts data and computing ethics initiatives that are centered on the rational, self-knowing individual with approaches that foreground the relational aspect of the human condition, which have been on the rise in the last few years. Many of these approaches have been put forward by women, queer people, people from minoritized populations and scholars from the Global South, which warrants the question of what role positionality plays in contemporary technology ethics. This talk explores this question by sketching the various origins and touchstones of relational ethics approaches, their key shared traits, and examples of how they are put into practice for the governance of data and computing. The talk opens out to a discussion with the audience about how relational ethics approaches can be promoted at ETH and in the Zurich community.

Gender-Science Stereotypes under Study

Dr. Michal Berkowitz Biran

Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, ETH Zurich

October 25

Different branches of psychology address questions about “gender and science”, mostly to understand uneven gender distributions in certain scientific disciplines. Multiple factors are at play here, among them also beliefs and stereotypes people hold about men, women, and science. The lecture will first provide a brief overview of research topics in psychology pertaining to the issue “the underrepresentation of women in science”. Then, it will take a closer look at gender-science stereotypes through research examples, discussing both insights and limitations.

Women Scientists in Europe - from Outsider to Normality?

*Prof. Dr. Annette Vogt
Max Planck Institute for the History of Science*

November 1

In 1928 the German biologist and tissue researcher Rhoda Erdmann (1870-1935) published an autobiographical article in the then famous book "Leading Women of Europe", edited by Elga Kern (1888-1957). As a female researcher who was working in the world of academia more than 20 years she summarized her experiences - with discrimination as a woman and female professor - and wrote:

"Evaluators are looking into all countries. Sometimes they find separate women whose productive work had left certain traces in the development of the sciences concerned. But these traces seem to be weak, often fade away. Very rarely a name enters your head with unambiguous energy like the name of Madame Curie" (p. 35).

And she answered the question why this observation is made:

"The lack of positive achievements, regarding scientific results by female scientists has much less to do with their talent. It has to do much more with the circumstances under which female scientists have to live and work." (p. 26)

In my lecture I'm giving an overview about the situation for female scientists in Europe from about 1800 until the 20th Century. First, I'll sketch out the situation before 1800, regarding the circumstances under which the very few female scientists were able to enter the world of academia. Second, I'm describing the situation in the 19th Century, and I'll present the "role models" (by definition) at this time, including Marie Sklodowska-Curie. Third, I'm giving an overview about the situation for female scientists in Europe in the 20th Century.

I'll describe the differences between the European countries, and the differences between scientific disciplines. In addition to Rhoda Erdmann, we will see that "the lack of positive achievements" had not only to do with the circumstances, it had to do also with the scientific disciplines, women scientists studied.

Sex/Gender in the Brain: Critical Notes on fMRI-Studies

Prof. Dr. Anelis Kaiser Trujillo
Department of Computer Science, University of Freiburg (D)

November 8

Brain research today attracts acute scientific and public interest. Publications explaining why women and men feel, think, act, or talk differently are increasingly encountered. This practice can turn into an explosive topic when human behaviour is directly linked to structures and activities of the brain. In this talk, I aim to present and discuss how sex/gender is categorised, treated, measured and discovered in (f)MRI studies, i.e. in studies that look at how women and men differ in structure and function of the brain. Central to my research is a transdisciplinary background based in Neuroscience and Gender Studies. While in neuroscience gender is a hard variable, in gender studies gender is a social phenomenon, a result and a facet of human action and social structures – in short: a social construct. My aim is to bridge the divide between these two epistemologically different approaches.

Bringing Gender into Focus in International Efforts to Promote Conservation

Prof. Dr. Rachael Garrett
Department of Geography, University of Cambridge /
Department of Environmental Systems Science, ETH Zurich

November 15

Achieving a socially just forest transition in the tropics requires inclusion and empowerment of the most vulnerable and underrepresented actors in society. Numerous social movements now exist across different vulnerable groups, including indigenous, riverine, and former slave communities, among others. But even within these communities, the voices of women and the youth are particularly hidden, despite their unique potential to contribute to a forest transition. This lecture explores the invisibility of women in tropical agricultural forest-frontiers and highlights bright spots where their inclusion into forest governance processes and overall empowerment has led to improved outcomes both for forests and community wellbeing. To the extent possible given the state of the data, it will give insights based on recent pan-tropical interviews and focus-groups conducted with women in the Brazilian Amazon, Ghana, and Indonesian Sumatra within commodity chains. I close by discussing parallels between the invisibilities of women in international value chains and within academia.

Muddy Waters: Swamps, Architecture, and an Alternative Ecosystem

Dr. Rebecca Choi

Institute for the History and Theory of Architecture, ETH Zurich

November 22

In 1940, Amaza Lee Meredith designed Azurest North, a marshland development project, a site with vacation homes for rent aimed at middle-class Black families, bolstered by the creation of Azurest Syndicate, a group formed to sustain the growth of community relationships. Meredith, herself a Black woman from Virginia, was one of few women practicing architecture in the US in the 1940s, and one of an even smaller cohort of Black women to do so.

This presentation is premised on the notion of the swamp a site of contradictions: unlike a plantation, a swamp has little to contribute in the way of monocrop capitalism; yet as the host for alternative ecosystems, it could also be a site of environmental and social rebirth. Part of my project "Swamp Life," this presentation considers Meredith's work as developer-architect on land considered otherwise derelict, or of little use.

Women as Mathematical Objects, Women as Mathematicians

Prof. Dr. Roy Wagner

Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences, ETH Zurich

December 6

In this talk I will touch on two problems. First, I will present a case study of a mathematical problem that is presented in terms of men and women (the stable marriage problem). I will discuss the implications for gender and for mathematics of the use of "men" and "women" as components in a mathematical problem. Second, I will consider why are there "no women" in the history of mathematics, or rather, why it appears to be the case. I will discuss this question from the point of view of the contexts of doing mathematics across history.

Title TBA

Prof. Dr. Vera Regitz-Zagrosek

Institute of Gender in Medicine, Charité Berlin

December 13

Abstract to follow.