

Workshop

Are Science and Technology Gendered? Insights from Philosophy and Sociology

Politecnico di Milano, March 28, 2019 || 15:30, Auditorium, Via Pascoli, n. 53

This workshop has the aim to offer to a large audience of Politecnico di Milano's scholars an in-depth and accessible understanding of the differences between the professional trajectories of men and women in science and technology, by detailing some of the main cultural, symbolic and economic barriers that women have faced in these fields. Moreover, by relating to research and reflections matured on the ridge among sociology of work, philosophy of science and culture studies, the workshop will analyse controversies and conflicts inherent in the production of expert knowledge and technologies, as well as their social consequences as regards to gender dimension.

Workshop Programme

15:30 // Introduction to the workshop by META Study Unit, Social Sciences and Humanities for Science and Technology

15:45 // Presentation of the PoliMi Equal Opportunities Programme (POP), by Mara Tanelli (Politecnico di Milano)

16:00 // *Technosocial Nodes: A Performative Approach to Gender and Technoscience*, by Federica Timeto (Sociologist, Accademia delle belle arti di Palermo)

16:30 // *Discrimination and Collaboration in Science*, by Cailin O'Connor (Philosopher, University of California, Irvine)

17:00 // *Gender Asymmetries in Academia: A Focus on STEM Disciplines*, by Annalisa Murgia (Sociologist, Università degli Studi di Milano)

The workshop is coordinated by META Study Unit and supported by SILFS (Società Italiana di Logica e Filosofia delle Scienze), and STS Italia (Italian Society of Science and Technology Studies).

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Short Abstracts

Author: Federica Timeto (Sociologist, Accademia delle belle arti di Palermo)

Title: *Technosocial Nodes: A Performative Approach to Gender and Technoscience*

Gender is a technology and technologies are engendered. But how can the link between gender and technology be taken into consideration without leaving the two related terms unquestioned? Merely exploring the under-representation of women in the STEM field, as well as the patriarchal “nature” of it, or the different uses and effects of technologies on the gendered subject, still maintains a descriptive-dialectical approach that rests on a series of essential dichotomies at the level of onto-epistemological categories and social relations. On the contrary, a more fruitful perspective is offered by a consideration of the coimplication and mutual shaping of technology and society, developed in particular by the techno- and cyber-feminist approaches in Science and Technology Studies (STS), in which both the performativity of technology and of gender are foregrounded, so as to look at technosocial bodies as situated “nodes in fields” (Haraway), which are produced and reproduced in processes of constant material and semiotic negotiation.

Author: Cailin O’Connor (Philosopher, University of California, Irvine)

Title: *Discrimination and Collaboration in Science*

Why do women tend to collaborate with other women? And why do men tend to be first authors more often? We use game theoretic models to take an in-depth look at the dynamics of discrimination and academic collaboration. We find that, in collaboration networks, small minority groups may be more likely to end up being discriminated against while collaborating. We also find that discrimination can lead members of different social groups to mostly collaborate with in-group members, decreasing the effective diversity of the social network. Drawing on previous work, we discuss how decreases in the diversity of scientific collaborations might negatively impact the progress of epistemic communities. As we point out, though, we need to be careful in attempting to rectify this situation. Simply bringing diverse groups into contact can increase instances of discrimination, even if it creates more diverse working groups.

Author: Annalisa Murgia (Sociologist, Università degli Studi di Milano)

Title: *Gender Asymmetries in Academia: A Focus on STEM Disciplines*

The under-representation of women at all levels of academic careers and their over-representation in not tenured positions – especially in STEM disciplines – can be considered as a mirror of a wider and deeper problem, namely the lack of recognition of the relevance of gender in science and the ways in which it affects contents, methods and priorities. In this contribution the key quantitative and qualitative findings from the European FP7 project GARCIA – Gendering the Academy and Research: Combating Career Instability and Asymmetries – are presented. From a quantitative point of view, we disentangle the gender gaps within STEM disciplines, looking at the individual and family characteristics. The qualitative analysis is instead based on twenty in-depth interviews conducted with men and women early career researchers in a department of Information Engineering and Computer Science in Northern Italy. In the conclusion we discuss how the current system is re-producing gender inequalities in academic careers.

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