

Sophie Gerber & Eleanor Armstrong

Queer(y)ing STEM Collections: A workshop on STEM Museums, Gender and Sexuality



Dr.in Sophie Gerber has been a custodian for household technology and food since 2019 and leads the "Focus Gender" venture at the Technical Museum Vienna. She studied history and cultural and social anthropology at the University of Vienna. She gained her Ph.D. in the history of technology at the Technical University of Munich in 2014. She was involved in exhibitions at Deutsches Museum Munich, the University of Vienna and the House of Austrian History. Her research interests include collections research and material culture, the history of technology and consumption in the 20th and 21st centuries, gender and queer studies.



Eleanor Armstrong is a doctoral candidate at University College London, researching queer feminist approaches to pedagogy in science and technology collections. She has a focus on learning in science museums, having previously worked at institutions such as the Science Museum, London; the Science Gallery London and the Edinburgh Science Festival. Eleanor also works on interventions into the museum space to prioritise alternative narratives, including the 'Queering the Science Museum' guided tours and the 'Behind the Glass Cabinet' podcast. Her research interests are particularly around space science, material culture, pedagogy in the museum, gender, and queer studies.

Please contact Eleanor and Sophie on gender@tmw.at for any questions and more information on the workshop.

Museums displaying science and technology shape the way that we talk about the pasts, presents and futures of our interactions with science and technology. Museums have been slow to make this visible. The history of science, technology is still told as a history of male ingenuity, while the mutual constructions of gender, science and technology – including queer (hi)stories – are often marginal. This is at odds with the ways that science and technology permeate our contemporary lives, and intersect, reproduced and challenge the social constructions of gender and sexuality.

How can the science and technology museum, as a cultural and social institution, explore the opportunities of reflecting and developing a plural society? In what ways are these museums still bound by existing collecting, labelling, and exhibiting practices? How are museum curators, practitioners, scholars grappling with these problems, and what tools, tactics and methods are helping tackling these tasks?

Since early 2019, the Technisches Museum Wien focuses explicitly on gender and sexuality in its "Focus Gender" and asks how a queer reading and diversification of collections is possible and who is able to do so? How can multi-layered, yet excluded

knowledge be documented e.g. in databases? On 5 and 6 March 2020, the Technisches Museum Wien deals with such questions in “Outer Edge: Queer(y)ing STEM Collections”, the first Vienna workshop on gender and sexuality in STEM collections.

As a part of the museum’s “Focus Gender”, this workshop will critically attend to constructions of gendered and/or heteronormative technology and science, and to emphasise the role of the object and material culture in queer and feminist approaches to science and technology studies. Led by Sophie Gerber (Technisches Museum, Vienna) and Eleanor Armstrong (invited expert, University College London), the workshop brings together scholars and practitioners to scaffold actions in museums, and build a network of interested parties.

Papers, workshop activity ideas and creative responses will engage with collecting, representations and enacting gender and sexuality in science and technology museums. This workshop will offer innovative approaches and perspectives for engagement with gender, LGBTIQ+ and activist movements in museums beyond a science and technology context.

Participants will address:

- Intersecting marginalizations of gender and/or sexuality in particular with ethnicity, religion, disability, race, nationality in science collections,
- Collecting diversity in gender and/or sexuality in science museums,
- Data quality, collections labelling, and fixity around gender and/or sexuality in science collections,
- Categorization, fixed categories and/or science collections,
- Language is describing and explaining STEM fields and/or collections,
- Exhibiting STEM collections in equitable ways,
- Working groups, publics, and involving ‘outside’ expertise in science museums and collections.