



Friedrich-Alexander-Universität
Erlangen-Nürnberg

Office of Equality and Diversity
Emmy Noether Lecture 2023

Maria Rentetzi
Seduced by Radium:
How Radioactivity
Entered the Bedroom

Foto: Glasow

15. 06. 2023
Senatssaal im
Kollegienhaus, KH 1.011
Universitätsstr. 15
91054 Erlangen

fau.de



Seduced by Radium: How Radioactivity Entered the Bedroom

By today's standards, it is almost shocking to see how radium was handled in the US in the early 20th century. Its inward journey from the exclusionary space of the scientific laboratory to the intimacy of the bedroom highlights first and foremost how corporate priorities and the emerging nuclear industry dictated the scientific agenda. Radium – a scientific element – entered the home, where it was consumed liberally, ending up in the medicine cabinet or on the bedside table. By doing so, radium became a catalyst of social expectations and a force in shaping perceptions ranging from gender roles, health and safety, to science itself. The talk traces the extraordinary path of commodified radium. It is a story of exceptional entrepreneurial and scientific acumen, but also of tragic and even heroic loss, of especially women's exploitation, and of a lack of radiation protection standards.

Maria Rentetzi studied physics at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, Greece. She then changed her career path by turning to humanities where she could ask questions about gender and the diversity of the scientific community. She studied history of science and technology (MA, National Technical University of Athens-NTUA, Greece), philosophy (MA, Virginia Tech, US) and science and technology studies (PhD, Virginia Tech, US). Her work focuses on the history of gender and nuclear physics. She completed her postdoctoral degree at the Max Planck Institute for History of Science in Berlin, and in 2004 returned to her home country to receive a professorship in sociology of science (NTUA). She has also been a guest professor at TU Berlin and Silverman Professor at Tel Aviv University, Israel. In 2021, she became Chair of Science, Technology and Gender Studies at FAU. She is currently leading a research project on Diplomatic Studies of Science and the role of the International Atomic Energy Agency in shaping radiation protection standards funded by the European Research Council.

Emmy Noether Lecture

The mathematician Emmy Noether (1882-1935) was one of the first women to study at university in Erlangen. She was awarded a doctoral degree at the age of 25. Only twelve years later, she qualified to teach at the University of Göttingen. In 1933, the Nazis stripped her of the authorization to teach due to her Jewish roots. Emmy Noether emigrated to the US, where she died two years later. The lecture is held at FAU in memory of the day when Emmy Noether finally obtained her hard-fought authorization to lecture at a university, on June 5, 1919, and introduces contemporary women scientists who are successful in their area of research.

