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Gender transformations in physics in the 1960s: The case of the Greek Research Center ‘Dimokritos’

IN THE 1960S LABORATORIES of particle physics were transformed into factories centered around the function of the bubble chamber, a new instrument used to track charged particles. The new laboratory technology came hand in hand with new science buildings, more sophisticated strategies for funding, new relationships among the interdisciplinary personnel and new gender politics in the laboratory. Kilometers of 70mm film were produced by the double chamber experiments, producing at the same time an immense amount of data which were waiting to be scanned, measured and interpreted. Although trained men physicists took over the creative and skilful task of data interpretation, nonphysicists, who were mainly women, were assigned the “unskilled” job of scanning and computing. Paradoxically, in the new factories-like US research centers women’s role was downgraded compared to the European physics laboratories before the II World War. Although this shift has been extensively discussed for the case of the United States, there has been hardly any reference to the periphery of scientific research and to European countries such as Greece. This paper traces the ways gender stereotypes were transferred to the nuclear research center “Demokritos,” the most important physics laboratory in Greece during the 1960s and 1970s.

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