

**HUM 395 (Humanities Seminar) & GNDR 390 (Topics in Gender Studies)**

**“The Politics of Gender and Sexuality  
in the Modern Life Sciences”**

**Spring 2010**

**Tuesdays, 2:00-4:50 pm, in Kresge 2-370**

**Prof. Steven Epstein  
Department of Sociology  
Northwestern University**

**Contact info:**

**Office phone: 847-491-5536**

**E-mail: [s-epstein@northwestern.edu](mailto:s-epstein@northwestern.edu)**

**Web page: <http://www.sociology.northwestern.edu/faculty/StevenEpstein.html>**

**Drop-in office hours this quarter:**

**Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10:30-11:30 am, in 1808 Chicago Ave, Rm. 206  
(or by appointment)**

*A copy of this syllabus can be found on the Blackboard site for the course.*

## Summary:

The biological and biomedical sciences are increasingly potent forces that restructure the social and natural world and generate new possibilities for living. In this seminar, we will focus on the interplay between science, technology, and medicine, on the one hand, and gender and sexuality, on the other. We will take up a series of controversies from the recent past and the present in order to consider the implications of developments in the life sciences for political expression, social identity, and cultural belonging.

In our readings and discussions, we will consider the roles of science, technology, and medicine in redefining gender and sexuality, as well as efforts by individuals and social movements to challenge scientific institutions and assert new claims about gender and sexuality. Although our focus will be on the categories of gender and sexuality, studying them necessarily means discussing other social division and hierarchies, particularly including race and social class.

We will address such questions as:

- How many sexes are there, and how do we know?
- How has the availability of sex reassignment surgery changed what we understand sex, gender, and sexuality to be?
- How do medical technologies become “gendered”?
- How have new reproductive technologies changed notions of kinship?
- Is homosexuality a biologically determined state, and what is at stake in asking the question?
- How are categories of gender and sexuality made relevant to biomedical research?
- How have scientists and physicians sought to study and repair human sexual functioning?

Our goal is not to “resolve” these controversial issues but, rather, to understand their stakes as well as the ways in which different actors in society have taken positions in relation to them.

## Course Mechanics:

*Please read the following bulleted items carefully. Aside from providing basic information, this section also serves as “fair warning” of my classroom policies and expectations:*

- ◆ This course will make use of the “**Blackboard**” course management system (<https://courses.northwestern.edu/webapps/login/>). Students are responsible for logging in, checking regularly for posted announcements, and obtaining readings and assignments from the site.
- ◆ Important course **announcements** will be sent to students’ registered campus email addresses. You are responsible for monitoring those email accounts.

- ◆ This syllabus and schedule are **subject to change** in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Announcements of changes will be posted on Blackboard and emailed to students.
- ◆ There are three **books** assigned for this course:

Meyerowitz, Joanne J. 2002. *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Epstein, Steven. 2007. *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Maines, Rachel P. 1999. *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

These books are available for purchase from Beck's Books at 716 Clark Street (847-492-1900). Copies have also been placed on reserve at the main library.

- ◆ All **other course readings** are available for download from the Blackboard site in the form of PDFs. I recommend that you print readings so that they can be read carefully and brought with you to class.
- ◆ Your **grade** for the quarter will be calculated on the basis of the following four **course requirements**:
  1. Class attendance and participation (15%). This is a seminar, and your participation is expected.
  2. Two written critical summaries (3-4 pages each) of the readings for any two weeks of the quarter (Weeks 2-8) (15% each). Please submit these summaries using the inboxes set up for that purpose on Blackboard under "Assignments."

You may pick whichever weeks you like (though I would advise you to pick at least one week early in the quarter). However, no summary may be turned in more than 10 days after that class meeting. Each summary should take the readings for that week (in full), carefully summarize the main arguments, and discuss the readings critically in relation to the themes of the course. These summaries should be in proper essay format; they should not take the form of a list or bullet points. Please proofread carefully and pay close attention to matters of style, syntax, and organization.
  3. A research paper (about 15 pages, not including references), due by noon on Monday, June 7 (40%). Please submit the paper as a hardcopy in my mailbox in the Sociology department (1810 Chicago Ave.).

Your paper should investigate a specific research topic related to the themes of the course. It must draw on course materials but must also extend beyond course readings. The paper should state and prove an identifiable central argument. Please proofread carefully and pay close attention to matters of style, syntax, and organization. Use parenthetical citations for quotes and references to other texts. List all such texts in your bibliography.

You must get my approval of your proposed topic for the paper by submitting a written description by no later than Sunday, April 25 (1-2 paragraphs plus a short reference list). There will be an inbox for this purpose on Blackboard under “Assignments.” If your paper will be thematically similar to, or will have any overlap in actual content with, any other paper you have written in the past or are writing this quarter, please also provide a clear description of the overlap as well as an explanation of how your paper for this class will differ.

In addition, I strongly advise you to come to my office hours to discuss your paper topics.

4. At our last class meeting (May 25), each student will deliver a 5-minute oral presentation (using PowerPoint) briefly describing his or her research paper (15%). Please submit your PowerPoint on Blackboard by 5 pm on Monday, May 24.

- ◆ Students are responsible for all material presented in the readings, films, and class discussions. **Class attendance** is required. While selected class materials may sometimes be made available on Blackboard, generally students are expected to attend class in order to learn the course material. It is expected that students will be not just physically present in the classroom but also mentally present (that is, conscious and not otherwise occupied with email, texting, computer games, or other online activities).
- ◆ Class will be conducted as a seminar, not as a lecture course. Come to class having *already read* the readings for that day (bring them with you), and be prepared to **participate!** Please do ask questions and offer opinions! Disagreement with the instructor or fellow students is fine, as long as you are polite and patient in how you go about it.
- ◆ **Critical summaries** may not be turned in more than 10 days after the class meeting unless you have a medical excuse or comparably serious justification. Except under very unusual circumstances, **late final papers** will be marked down sharply; they may not even be accepted at all, if they arrive too late for me to grade them. Please note that there is no excuse for failing to keep **electronic backups** of your data (for example, on flash drives, CDs, external hard drives, or other computers) in case your primary computer fails or your hard drive crashes.
- ◆ All written work for the course must be **typed, double-spaced**, using standard fonts and 1-inch margins on all sides.

- ◆ Any student with a documented **disability** who needs accommodations should contact the Office of Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD; 847-467-5530) and should speak with me as early as possible in the quarter, ideally within the first week of class. All discussions will remain confidential.

Please note that my office is not wheelchair-accessible. Any student who cannot attend my office hours as a result is welcome to make an appointment with me to meet elsewhere.

- ◆ A course on sexuality may include material that will startle or even upset some students. Please keep this possibility in mind and be forewarned.
- ◆ I am committed to strict enforcement of university regulations concerning **academic integrity**, which means that **I report all suspected violations** of the policy (including suspicion of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining an unfair advantage, and aiding and abetting dishonesty) to the Assistant Dean for Advising and Academic Integrity, who then carries out a formal investigation. Please be certain to familiarize yourself with the university's policy on academic integrity (see <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/>). You should understand that examples of **plagiarism** include obtaining text from any source (including the internet), and passing off such text as your own work, rather than citing the source of the material. In addition, while I encourage students to collaborate when studying or learning course material, it should be clear that **no collaboration** is permitted on written work, and any collaboration in those cases constitutes academic dishonesty.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, I strongly encourage you to speak to me or your TA about it. Confirmed violations of academic integrity will result in both an administrative penalty and an academic penalty. The administrative penalty, assigned by university officials, typically is suspension for one quarter; any such suspension becomes part of your record, which is made available on request to potential employers and graduate school admissions committees. The academic penalty is assigned by the instructor, and my own policy in almost every case is to assign a **failing grade FOR THE ENTIRE COURSE.**

- ◆ Please be respectful of those around you. At the beginning of class, please make sure your **cell phone** is turned off or set to vibrate. And please don't chat with other students during class. In addition, arriving late, leaving early, and walking in and out of class are distracting to those around you. Obviously they are sometimes unavoidable. But I'd appreciate your keeping them to a minimum.
- ◆ This syllabus and all materials for this course are copyright 2010 by Steven Epstein. Students are prohibited from selling (or being paid for taking) notes during this course to or by any person or commercial firm without the express written permission of Professor Epstein. No **audio or video recordings** of class are permitted without the instructor's permission.

## **Schedule of Readings and Assignments:**

TUE, MAR 30 (WEEK 1): INTRODUCTION: SEX AND GENDER

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 1993. "The Five Sexes: Why Male and Female Are Not Enough." *The Sciences* 33 (2): 20-26.

Fausto-Sterling, Anne. 2000. "The Five Sexes, Revisited." *The Sciences*, July/August, 19-23.

TUE, APR 6 (WEEK 2): TRANSGENDER POSSIBILITIES AND THE REMAKING OF SEX AND GENDER

\*\*Film clip in class: "The Brandon Teena Story," by Susan Muska and Gréta Olafsdóttir (1998).

Meyerowitz, Joanne J. 2002. *How Sex Changed: A History of Transsexuality in the United States*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1-129.

Valentine, David. 2007. *Imagining Transgender: An Ethnography of a Category*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 173-203.

TUE, APR 13 (WEEK 3): TECHNOLOGIES OF GENDER AND THE GENDERING OF TECHNOLOGIES

Oudshoorn, Nelly. 2003. *The Male Pill: A Biography of a Technology in the Making*. Durham: Duke University Press, 19-51, 171-190.

Mamo, Laura, Amber Nelson, and Aleia Clark. Forthcoming. "Producing and Protecting Risky Girlhoods." In *Three Shots at Prevention: The HPV Vaccine and the Politics of Medicine's Simple Solutions*, edited by K. Wailoo, J. Livingston, S. Epstein and R. Aronowitz. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Epstein, Steven. Forthcoming. "The Great Undiscussable: Anal Cancer, HPV, and Gay Men's Health." In *Three Shots at Prevention: The HPV Vaccine and the Politics of Medicine's Simple Solutions*, edited by K. Wailoo, J. Livingston, S. Epstein and R. Aronowitz. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

TUE, APR 20 (WEEK 4): KINSHIP, SEXUALITY, AND THE QUEERING OF REPRODUCTION

Thompson, Charis. 2005. *Making Parents: The Ontological Choreography of Reproductive Technologies*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 145-178.

Mamo, Laura. 2007. *Queering Reproduction: Achieving Pregnancy in the Age of Technoscience*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 157-223.

**\*\*REMINDER: PAPER TOPICS DUE BY SUNDAY, APRIL 25**

**TUE, APR 27 (WEEK 5): THE BIOLOGY OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION**

Terry, Jennifer. 1999. *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine, and Homosexuality in Modern Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 40-73.

LeVay, Simon, and Dean H. Hamer. 1994. "Evidence for a Biological Influence in Male Homosexuality." *Scientific American*, May, 44-49.

Byne, William. 1994. "The Biological Evidence Challenged." *Scientific American*, May, 50-55.

Terry, Jennifer. 2000. "'Unnatural Acts' in Nature: The Scientific Fascination with Queer Animals." *GLQ* 6 (2): 151-193.

**TUE, MAY 4 (WEEK 6): BIOMEDICAL INCLUSION AND DIFFERENCE**

Epstein, Steven. 2007. *Inclusion: The Politics of Difference in Medical Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1-16, 30-115, 203-257.

**TUE, MAY 11 (WEEK 7): GENDER, HEALTH, AND THE TECHNOLOGY OF SEXUAL SATISFACTION**

**\*\*Film clip in class: "Passion and Power: The Technology of Orgasm," by Wendy Slick and Emiko Omori (2008).**

Maines, Rachel P. 1999. *The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1-123 (whole book).

**TUE, MAY 18 (WEEK 8): REPAIRING SEXUALITY**

Irvine, Janice M. 2005. *Disorders of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Modern American Sexology*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 187-227.

Loe, Meika. 2004. *The Rise of Viagra: How the Little Blue Pill Changed Sex in America*. New York: New York University Press, 63-93, 125-165.

Fishman, Jennifer R. 2004. "Manufacturing Desire: The Commodification of Female Sexual Dysfunction." *Social Studies of Science* 34 (2): 187-218.

**\*\*REMINDER: POWERPOINT FILES FOR STUDENT PRESENTATIONS DUE BY 5 PM ON MONDAY, MAY 24**

TUE, MAY 25 (WEEK 9): STUDENT PRESENTATIONS

**\*\*REMINDER: PAPERS DUE IN MY BOX (1810 CHICAGO AVE) BY NOON ON MONDAY, JUNE 7.**