HUM 370-5 / GNDR_ST 332 / SOCIOL 376

“Race/Gender/Sex & Science: Making Identities and Differences”

Fall 2022

Tuesdays and Thursdays, 3:30-4:50, in Kresge 2-430

Professor Steven Epstein
Department of Sociology
Northwestern University

Contact info:
Office phone: 847-491-5536
E-mail: s-epstein@northwestern.edu
Web page: https://www.sociology.northwestern.edu/people/faculty/core/steven-epstein.html

Office hours this quarter (by appointment):
For exact availability and to sign up for a slot in advance:
https://calendly.com/professor-epstein

A copy of this syllabus can be found on the Canvas site for the course:
https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/175241
Summary:

Over the course of this quarter, we will keep coming back to two reciprocal questions:

- How do scientific claims and technological developments help transform cultural understandings of race, gender, and sexuality?
- How do cultural beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality influence scientific knowledge and medical practice?

That is, we will focus on the dynamic interplay between science, technology, and medicine, on the one hand, and race, gender, and sexuality, on the other. Taking up a series of controversial issues and cases from the recent past and the present, we will explore the connections between expert findings, social identities, and political arguments. The assumption is that studying these controversies sheds light on how developments in the life sciences affect our understandings of who we are, how we differ, and how social inequalities are created, perpetuated, and challenged.

In our readings and discussions, we will examine the roles of science, technology, and medicine in redefining race, gender, and sexuality; the ways in which cultural beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality have influenced scientific research and the development of knowledge; and the efforts by individuals and social movements to challenge scientific institutions and assert new claims about identity, difference, and inequality. More specifically, over the course of the quarter, we will take up such questions as:

- How many sexes are there, and how do we know?
- What is the scientific status of our ideas about race?
- How are medical and legal ideas invoked in determinations about people’s gender identities?
- How do medical technologies become “gendered”?
- How are ideas about racial differences reproduced by algorithms?
- How have new reproductive technologies, and new methods of tracing ancestry, changed notions of kinship and racial belonging?
- Is sexual identity a biologically determined state, and what is at stake in asking the question?
- How should gender, race, and sexuality be taken into account when human populations are studied in clinical research? When patients are examined in the clinic?
- 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 people, groups, and social institutions have taken positions in relation to them.
Course Requirements:

Your grade for the quarter will be calculated on the basis of the following course requirements:

- Class attendance and participation: 15%
- Short critical summary of a reading (twice): 20% = 10% each
- Paper topic, partial biblio., office hours visit: 5%
- In-class midterm: 20%
- Outline of your paper: 5%
- Short oral presentation based on research paper: 5%
- PowerPoint accompanying oral presentation: 5%
- Research paper: 25%

A number of the assignments, including the submission of the paper topic and the outline, are intended to encourage you to move forward with the final paper in a timely way and—importantly—to give me the chance to weigh in with suggestions and feedback. The short oral presentation has the same function, but it also allows each student in the seminar to learn a bit about what everyone else is working on.

Here are the details:

1. **Class attendance and participation (15%)**: This is a small seminar, and people who take the class do so in the hope of enjoying the conversations and the interactions. Your presence and participation are expected. (Just to prevent any misunderstanding: even attendance and participation constitute only 15% of the grade, that doesn’t mean that you can never attend, turn in the assignments, and still pass the course. You do have to show up regularly!)

2. **Two critical summaries of an assigned reading (10% each)**.

For your first critical summary, choose one of the readings assigned for either September 27 or September 29. For your second critical summary, choose one of the readings assigned for either October 4 or October 6.

Please submit each summary as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.” Each summary must be submitted at least 24 hours before that class meeting (that is, by 3:30 pm on the day before). Each summary should be 1½ to 2 pages, typed, double-spaced, with a standard font and one-inch margins.

Your summary should carefully summarize the main arguments and discuss the reading critically in relation to the themes of the course and concepts we have developed. While you should be clear about what the author argues, try to avoid a mere “plot summary”; instead try to abstract beyond the specific claims of the author. A critical summary also provides you with the opportunity to present any critiques that may occur to you (but don’t force it if you don’t disagree with anything).
These summaries should be written out in full paragraphs; 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. (If your paper has a lot of careless errors and does not seem to have been proofread adequately, I will ask you to re-do it.) You do not need to provide a reference list, but quotes and paraphrases should be followed by in-text citations placed inside parentheses—for example, “(Richardson, 912).”

Note: Because writing the critical summary should help prepare you for the seminar discussion, I will look to the people who wrote summaries to take the lead in participating in the discussion that day.

3. **Paper topic and partial bibliography, plus office hours visit (5%)**: By **noon on Wednesday, October 12**, please submit a 1-2 paragraph description of your paper topic, along with a partial and provisional bibliography (at least 5 sources), as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.” (See point 7 below for more information about the paper assignment.)

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, you are required to attend my office hours no later than Wednesday, October 19** to discuss your paper topic with me. I will hold extra office hours that week and the week before.

4. **A closed-book, in-class midterm on Tuesday, October 25 (20%)**: On the midterm, I will ask you to provide 2-3 sentence definitions of terms and concepts that have been covered in readings and seminar discussions. In some cases, I will also ask you to give an example. To help you prepare, I will provide a longer list of possible terms and concepts one week in advance, out of which I will ultimately choose 12. You will write in a blue book that I will provide—no notes, books, or electronic devices are permitted.

5. **An outline of your research paper (5%)**: By **noon on Friday, November 4**, please submit an outline as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.” The outline doesn’t have to be fancy or highly detailed, but it should clearly convey the main sections and topics of your paper. A simple way to structure it would be to create a numbered list of the main sections of the paper and then, for each section, add a sentence or two explaining what you will be doing in that section.

Of course, if you prefer to submit a more detailed outline that breaks each section down into sub-sections (and sub-sub-sections), that would be welcome, but it’s not required.

Optional: I encourage you to begin the outline with a statement of your research question or (even better) a first attempt to summarize what you will be arguing in the form of a thesis sentence.
6. At our last two class meetings (Tuesday, November 15 and Thursday, November 17), each of you will deliver a short oral presentation (using PowerPoint) describing your research paper (10%). Your PowerPoint file must be submitted on Canvas in the inbox set up for that purpose by 9:00 am on Tuesday, November 15. (You do not need to submit a text for the oral presentation.) Please do not use any file type other than PowerPoint. You will be graded on the quality and clarity of the oral presentation as well as the quality and clarity of the PowerPoint (5% each).

I will provide details about the length of your presentation. (Please use a timer or stopwatch to keep track of the time.) To permit time for everyone to present, I request that you stay till 5:30 for those two class meetings unless you have an irresolvable conflict. (In exchange, we will not meet on November 22.)

In your presentation, you should identify the topic of your paper, present your research question in relation to the topic, give an explanation of what you did to research it, and tell us your preliminary findings. If there is anything you would like feedback on or suggestions from the group about, please also say so. We will devote some time after each presentation to Q&A and feedback.

The PowerPoint should include both text and images. Please make sure slides are easily readable. It can be useful to include an “Overview” slide near the beginning to outline where you will be going.

7. A research paper, due by 9:00 am on Monday, December 5 (25%). The paper must be no less than 10 pages (typed, double-spaced, with a standard font and one-inch margins), not counting the bibliography. (Nothing longer is expected, but if you do submit a longer paper, please don’t exceed 13 pages, not counting the bibliography.) Please submit your paper as a Word document using the inbox set up for that purpose on Canvas under “Assignments.”

Your paper should investigate a specific research topic of your choice related to the themes of the course—that is, you should select a topic that draws together race, gender, or sexuality on the one hand with science, technology, or medicine on the other. To give you an idea of the kind and scope of project I’m looking for, I am including (below) a list of some of the paper topics from previous years.

Please note that your paper should not be a “report” on a topic that simply pulls together what other authors have written. While you should definitely engage with published work on your topic, I would also like you to do at least some modest research of your own. That said, I am realistic about the kinds of original research that students may accomplish in the course of a quarter. Often, for this class, students find some original data online—for example, by analyzing websites or social media commentary.

The paper must be in essay format and must advance or prove an identifiable central argument (or thesis) that is stated clearly at the beginning. It must draw on course materials but must also extend beyond course readings. Please proofread carefully and pay close attention to matters of style, syntax, and organization. (If your paper has a lot of careless errors and does not seem to have been proofread adequately, I will not accept it.)
Your paper should include a title and should be broken into sections with headings. Use parenthetical citations for quotes and references to other texts. List all such texts in your bibliography. (You may use any standard bibliographic style, as long as you are consistent.)

Here are some examples of topics that students have investigated in previous years:

- Cultural competence in medical care
- Counting LGBTQ people on the census
- The emergence of multifaceted asexual identities
- Use of puberty suppressing drugs for transgender youth
- Racial aspects of human experimentation in Japan during WW2
- Race and gender politics in the history of birth control
- Gynecological care for lesbian and bisexual women
- Consequences of genetic explanations of differences in athletic ability by race
- Racial exclusion in Silicon Valley
- The relation between masculinity and political extremism online
- The female condom
- The work of gestational surrogate mothers
- Conceptions of sexuality in abstinence-only sex education programs
- Multiracial identity and the U.S. census
- Gender stereotypes in online gaming
Course Mechanics and Policies:

Please read the following bulleted items carefully. Along with providing basic information, this section also serves as fair warning of my classroom policies and expectations:

♦ The past two-plus years of disruption from Covid have affected all of us, though in many different ways. As we continue to adjust to changing circumstances, I encourage you to keep me posted about any issues you may be experiencing that might impact your attendance at, participation in, or work for this course. Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and wellbeing at the NUhelp website (https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/) and on the NUhelp app (https://www.northwestern.edu/nuhelp/get-help/nuhelp-app-features.html).

♦ We will follow all announced Covid procedures. As of this writing, masks will not be required in the classroom. However, “the University strongly recommends masking in areas where distancing is not possible.” Furthermore, members of the campus community have been asked “to be conscientious of each other and honor individual requests where possible.” With these guidelines in mind, I encourage you to wear a mask in order to protect those who are most vulnerable.

♦ This course will make use of the Canvas course management system. The direct link for this course is https://canvas.northwestern.edu/courses/175241. Students are responsible for logging in, checking regularly for posted announcements, and obtaining readings and assignments from the site.

♦ Important course announcements may also be sent to students’ registered campus email addresses. You are responsible for monitoring those email accounts.

♦ Unless you are directed to do so by me, please do not use Canvas to send broadcast announcements to the rest of the class. If you have material that you think should be shared, please ask me to distribute it.

♦ You are welcome and encouraged to sign up to see me during my office hours using this link: https://calendly.com/professor-epstein. Please sign up in advance, choosing an available slot from either the in-person option or the Zoom option.

♦ This syllabus, schedule, and modalities of instruction (in-person, via Zoom, etc.) are subject to change in the event of unforeseen circumstances. Announcements of changes will be posted on Canvas and emailed to students.

♦ No books are assigned for this course. All course readings are available for download from the Canvas site in the form of PDFs. Please bring readings with you to class, either as printouts or on your laptops or tablets. Note that some PDFs appear sideways when viewed in Adobe Acrobat. They will print fine as is, but to read them on screen, select “Rotate View” from the “View” menu.
Over the course of the quarter, your grades will become accessible to you on Canvas. Please let me know immediately if there are any recording errors.

Your grades on Canvas will take the form of numerical scores (not percentages, even if Canvas displays a percent sign). For each assignment, you can convert your numerical score to a letter grade equivalent by using the following key:

- 97-100  A+
- 93-96   A
- 90-92   A-
- 87-90   B+
- Etc.

To reiterate a point that students sometimes are confused about: the grades you receive from me are scores, not percentages (even if Canvas sometimes displays a percent sign). Students sometimes think that if they meet a particular requirement then they should receive a grade of 100 for that assignment, but 100 corresponds to an A++. So, for example, if you are a great participant, you should expect to receive a 93 to 96 for your participation grade, because that corresponds to an A. You are not likely to get 100 unless your participation is beyond extraordinary. (Similarly, if you never participated, your grade would be 55, not zero, because 55 corresponds to an F.) If you have any questions about this, feel free to ask.

Your overall course grade will be calculated simply by multiplying each numerical score by its respective weight (for example, 0.2 for the midterm), summing up the results, rounding up or down to the nearest whole number, and then converting to the letter grade equivalent. (If your grade is right on the cusp—for example, 92.5—I round up to the higher grade, but I do not round up for anything below the “.5” cutoff.)

Students are responsible for all material in the readings, class presentations, and class discussions. Class attendance is required. While I will post my PowerPoints on Canvas, these are not intended to be comprehensive, and often they will not make complete sense by themselves. Students are expected to attend class in order to learn the course material.

I also fully expect that students will be not just physically present in the classroom but also mentally present (that is, conscious and not otherwise occupied—even intermittently—with email, texting, social media, computer games, shopping, or other online activities).

You may bring technology to the seminar room as long as you can handle it responsibly and respectfully. Laptops and tablets should be used for note-taking or other class-related purposes only.

Class will be conducted as a seminar, not as a lecture course. I will typically begin with a mini-lecture (some framing comments and background information), and then I will facilitate a discussion. 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! We will be discussing controversial topics, and debate is part of that. Disagreement with the instructor or fellow students is fine, as long as you are polite and patient in how you go about it. That is, I am open to a wide range of views, but I insist on our always showing respect for one another.

♦ I am granting every student a 36-hour “extension bank” that can be used up over the course of the quarter if needed. For example, if you turn in your first assignment two hours late, then you still have 34 hours “in the bank” that you can use later in the quarter if necessary. Once you have used up your banked hours, late assignments will be marked down except in unusual circumstances. Generally, it is still to your advantage to submit an assignment late rather than never. However, late final papers may not be accepted at all, if they arrive too late during finals week for me to grade them by the time grades are due.

NOTE: The extension bank may not be used for the midterm, which must be taken at the scheduled time, or for the oral presentation or PowerPoint, for which we need to stick to schedule. The extension bank may be used for the critical summaries, the paper topic, the outline, and the final paper.

Please note that there is no excuse for failing to keep electronic backups of your data (for example, on flash drives, external hard drives, “cloud” storage sites, 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 a standard font and 1-inch margins on all sides.

♦ Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (accessiblenu@northwestern.edu; 847-467-5530) and provide me with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential.

♦ Any course that includes the themes of sexuality, gender, and race may contain 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 I report ALL suspected violations of the policy (including suspicion of cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, obtaining an unfair advantage, unauthorized collaboration, and aiding and abetting academic dishonesty) to the Assistant Dean for Academic Integrity, who then carries out a formal investigation. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the university’s policy on academic integrity. See the WCAS website on academic integrity and Academic Integrity: A Basic Guide for more information.

Examples of plagiarism include but are not limited to: directly copying work written by another person without an appropriate citation; modifying a few words written by someone else, but otherwise presenting another person’s ideas as if they were your own
without appropriate citations; and using information from the internet without appropriate citation even if that information has no identifiable author (such as information from a Wikipedia page). 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 or exams, and any collaboration in those cases constitutes academic dishonesty.

If you have any questions about what constitutes plagiarism or academic dishonesty, please ask me! **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.**

♦ This course makes use of Turnitin, a software product that compares your work against other texts in its database in order to safeguard academic integrity. Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. Use of the Turnitin.com service is subject to the Usage Policy posted on the Turnitin.com site. Please contact me if you have any questions about Turnitin.

♦ Please be respectful of those around you. At the beginning of class, 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 PowerPoint presentations for this course are copyright 2022 by Steven Epstein. **Please do not post any materials related to the course on the internet without the permission of the instructor.** This includes sites such as “Course Hero.” Students are also 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:

WEEK 1

TUE, SEP 20: INTRODUCTION


Please also read pp. 2-10 of the syllabus carefully before coming to class.

THU, SEP 22: THEORETICAL BACKDROP: CO-PRODUCTION AND LOOPING EFFECTS


**REMINDER:** You must turn in a critical summary of one of the readings for either September 27 or September 29 by 3:30 pm on the day before that class.

WEEK 2

TUE, SEP 27: THE SEXING AND GENDERING OF SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE


THU, SEP 29: THE GENDERING AND SEXUALIZING OF TECHNOLOGIES, AND THE TECHNOLOGICAL PRODUCTION OF SEXUALITY


**REMINDER:** You must turn in a critical summary of one of the readings for October 4 or October 6 by 3:30 pm on the day before that class.

**WEEK 3**

**TUE, OCT 4: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND RACIALIZATION (I)**


**THU, OCT 6: SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY, AND RACIALIZATION (II): THE CASE OF GENETIC ANCESTRY TESTING**


**REMINDER:** Your paper topics are due by noon on Wednesday, October 12. You must also meet with me during my office hours by no later than October 19 to discuss your paper topic with me.

**WEEK 4**

**TUE, OCT 11: CATEGORICAL POLITICS IN SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIETY (I)**


**THU, OCT 13: CATEGORICAL POLITICS IN SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIETY (II)**


**WEEK 5**

**TUE, OCT 18: CATEGORICAL POLITICS IN SCIENCE, MEDICINE, AND SOCIETY (III)**

**Midterm discussed in class, and list of possible terms and concepts posted on Canvas**


**THU, OCT 20: NATURE, CULTURE, AND SEXUAL IDENTITIES**


**WEEK 6**

**TUE, OCT 25: ** **IN-CLASS MIDTERM**

No books, notes, or electronic devices. Blue books provided.

**THU, OCT 27: RECONSTRUCTING KINSHIP: IDENTITY, DIFFERENCE, AND THE TECHNO-ECONOMICS OF REPRODUCTION**


WEEK 7

TUE, NOV 1: CHANGING MEDICAL PRACTICE


THU, NOV 3: DIVERSITY AND INEQUALITY IN STEM FIELDS


**REMINDER:** Your outline of your paper is due by noon on Friday, November 4.

WEEK 8

TUE, NOV 8: SCIENCE, ACTIVISM, AND THE POLITICS OF EXPERTISE (I)


THU, NOV 10: SCIENCE, ACTIVISM, AND THE POLITICS OF EXPERTISE (II)

Vogler, Stefan. *Sorting Sexualities: Expertise and the Politics of Legal Classification*

**REMINDER:** Your PowerPoint file for your oral presentations is due by 9 am on Tuesday, November 15.

**WEEK 9**

TUE, Nov 15: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (CLASS RUNS TILL 5:30 PM)

THU, Nov 17: STUDENT PRESENTATIONS (CLASS RUNS TILL 5:30 PM)

**WEEK 10**

TUE, Nov 22: NO CLASS (IN COMPENSATION FOR THE EXTRA TIME ON NOV. 15 & 17)

**REMINDER:** Your research paper is due on Canvas by 9:00 am on Monday, December 5 (the first day of Exam Week).