Abstract:
Environmental epigenetics is the study of how environmental signals affect gene expression. Within this growing field, experiments on the effects of “maternal care” on offspring health have received much attention. In this chapter, we show how commonsense assumptions about sex, gender, sexuality and class are present in the design, interpretation and dissemination of these experiments. We show how claims about human motherhood are supported through a dense speculative cross-traffic between epigenetic studies in rodents and psychological and epidemiological studies in humans, and how research therefore tends to illustrate rather than interrogate existing stereotypes about maternal agency and responsibility. Consequently, we draw attention to the need to analyze the political dimensions of environmental epigenetics and to the potentials and challenges for (collaborative) biosocial knowledge production.