

## Freezing Social Relations: The Role of Technology in Structuring Knowledge about Health

Ellen Balka, School of Communication, Faculty of Applied Science, Simon Fraser University

In this talk I will discuss the role of information technology systems in structuring knowledge about health in general, and women's health in particular. In a world where increased emphasis is being placed on evidence based medicine and evidence based decision making in health, databases, which, it can be argued represent frozen social relations, are playing an increasingly important role in structuring knowledge about health in general and women's health in particular. In this presentation I will reflect on what I have learned from working for 5 months "inside the belly of the beast"-- at the Vancouver Coastal Health Authority, one of Canada's largest health authorities. Material collected through participant observation will be used to illustrate how 'measurement madness' -- felled by the utopian dream of large databases, operates in an institutional context. After outlining how measurement madness works, an example of how clinical databases are structuring knowledge about women's health will be presented.