

Centre for Women's and Gender Studies, UBC
Spring 2010 Lecture Series

Wednesday, Jan. 20th, 2010. 12:00 – 1:00 pm

At the Centre for Women's and Gender Studies
2080 West Mall (028) Jack Bell Building

“Please note new location of Lecture Series”



Dr. Geertje Boschma

Associate Professor, School of Nursing, UBC

Gender, work, and rehabilitation in discourses on mental illness

Participation in meaningful work has long been an objective for recipients of mental health care. Late 19th century cultural ideals of moral treatment and guidance profoundly influenced the history of institutional care as did strategies of poor relief. Patient work by men and women became an essential component of asylum economies. As controversy over large mental hospitals grew in the latter half of the 20th century, a deinstitutionalization movement reshaped the context of mental health care. A new discourse of community mental health and rehabilitation replaced former discourses of work, constructing new identities of client, consumer, survivor, and peer support worker. This paper analyzes oral histories of people currently living with mental illness in the community who actively engaged with this complex process of change and negotiated new cultural identities. I examine how social relationships between gender, work, and mental illness shaped and constrained their cultural negotiation. Their stories provide a unique lens through which to explore larger social and cultural tensions between work and mental illness.

Bio: Geertje Boschma, PhD, RN, is an Associate Professor at the School of Nursing, UBC. She publishes on the history of nursing and mental health care. Current research includes an oral history project on the development of community mental health services in New Westminster (BC Medical Services Research Fund, Vancouver Foundation) and a SSHRC-funded project on the history of general hospital psychiatry.