Notice of the Final Oral Examination for the Degree of Master of Arts of

ALEXA NORTON

BA (University of British Columbia, 2013)


Social Dimensions of Health

Wednesday, April 25, 2018
2:00 P.M.
Saunders Annex
Room 130C

Supervisory Committee:
Dr. Charlotte Loppie, School of Public Health and Social Policy, University of Victoria (Co-Supervisor)
Dr. Susan Boyd, Human and Social Development, UVic (Co-Supervisor)

External Examiner:
Dr. Bernie Pauly, School of Nursing, UVic

Chair of Oral Examination:
Dr. Marie Hoskins, School of Child and Youth Care, UVic

Dr. Stephen Evans, Acting Dean, Faculty of Graduate Studies
Abstract

This study traces the evolution of motherhood discourses in 41 fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) public awareness documents produced in British Columbia from 1979–2015. These documents offer a window for understanding how dominant cultural values and motherhood norms are upheld and promoted via FASD prevention, with special implications for women marginalized by race, culture, and socioeconomic status. To deconstruct dominant discourses, this project is rooted in feminist post-structuralism and uses a Foucauldian-inspired discourse analysis as its method. Drawing on Carol Bacchi’s (2009) problematization framework, I analyzed the documents using two questions: 1) What is ‘the problem’ represented to be? and 2) What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of ‘the problem’? Findings indicate that FASD public awareness-raising overwhelmingly positions maternal substance use as a woman’s individual choice. Alcohol abstention is framed as a duty to the fetus, although it is framed differently depending on the desired audience. Findings show that documents present maternal substance use as a gauge of fitness for motherhood and unfairly focus on women who are racialized, low-income, and young. Uniquely, documents produced by and for Indigenous populations differed thematically than for the general population. In conclusion, this study highlights how FASD public awareness-raising promotes dominant cultural values and adheres to a neoliberal health promotion tradition.