



NATIONAL CORE FOR NEUROETHICS
LA NEUROÉTHIQUE



THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

NEUROETHICS SEMINAR SERIES 2009-2010

Me, my brain, and I: Functional brain imaging in popular culture

Dr. Louise Whiteley, University of British Columbia

**Thursday, July 29, 2010
12:15pm - 1:15pm**

Functional neuroimaging increasingly promises to reveal our thoughts and intentions, the source of disease and dysfunction, and the basis of fundamental human traits and experiences. Cultural theorists have worried that this accommodation of the 'mind-in-the-brain' is dangerously selective; essentialising contested social and medical categories and encouraging deterministic perspectives.

In this seminar, Dr Whiteley argues that analysing popular media is a key source of insight into the formation of (or resistance to) this kind of neuroessentialist discourse. She presents key findings from a discourse analysis of a sample of newspaper and feature articles, comment pieces, blogs, adverts, and illustrations. In line with previous research on press coverage (Racine et al., 2005), this study found that news sources tended to focus on technical issues, failing to interrogate the easy metaphors of the revelatory scanner. But it also found evidence for a growing neuroessentialist critique in the blogosphere and 'travelogue' journalism, and for the highly flexible use of brain-map metaphors in advertising and illustration. Dr Whiteley will conclude by asking how such analysis might be used to inform science communication.

The National Core for Neuroethics Conference Room
UBC Hospital Room S117
2211 Wesbrook Mall – Koerner Pavilion
Vancouver, British Columbia

About the speaker: Dr Louise Whiteley is a Visiting Research Fellow at the National Core for Neuroethics. She received a PhD in Neuroscience from UCL, and an MSc in Science Communication from Imperial College London. She is interested in investigating the ethical issues that surround neuroscience and its impact on our conceptions of human nature, health, and normality, through applied research, interdisciplinary scholarship, and work in public communication.

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