Symposium

Sponsored by the Consortium for Science, Policy & Outcomes and the School of Social Transformation

with Marisa Brandt
### Tuesday, December 16, 2014
2:00 pm - 3:30 pm
Tempe Campus: Coor 5536

The Problem of Making Cool Therapy for Soldier 2.0

During the Global War on Terror, the U.S. military has invested heavily in research and development to address the mental health care needs of the estimated 11-30% of veterans and active duty service members with post-traumatic stress disorder. One of the fastest growing areas are digital media based "cybertherapies." The first cybertherapy to garner both significant military funding and media attention is a system called Bravemind, a virtual reality system that immerses patients' senses in simulations of traumatic scenes from their deployment. How did Bravemind come to be considered the right tool for the job of addressing the military PTSD crisis? Through socio-technical analysis of its development and promotion, I show that contrary to the most common arguments in its support—that it both enhances and destigmatizes therapy—Bravemind's success is based far less on clinical outcomes than on its charismatic and highly gendered qualities. My analysis of its social and material construction also reveals how militaristic understandings of subjectivity are inscribed in the system. I conclude by suggesting ways to support social justice and avoid the pitfalls of gendered technological charisma as cybertherapies come to play an increasingly important role in providing support for mental health.
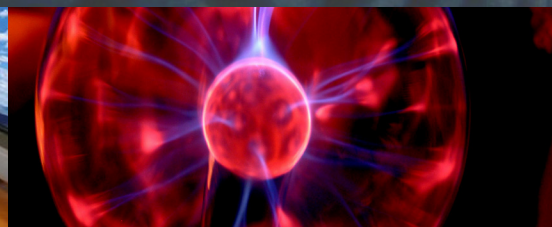
Dr. Marisa Brandt is a Lecturer in Communication and teaches in Science, Technology, and Society at the University of California, San Diego. Her research is broadly concerned with practices of cultural mediation at sites of technological innovation. Her current research investigates how the introduction of digital media technologies reconfigures clinical psychology and mental health care. She is currently working on a book about the development and promotion of virtual reality applications for treating military post-traumatic stress.

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