

The scripted breast: affective bodily engagements with medical devices and prosthetic objects in breast cancer.

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Women who have (had) breast cancer relate to, interact with, and to some extent incorporate various medical devices and prosthetic objects. These objects contain scripts: they attribute and delegate certain competencies, actions and normative structures to its users. In this presentation, I will explore how such scripted objects play a role in the construction and transformation of bodily experiences of women-users who have (had) breast cancer. In turn, I will examine how these women-users actively reconstitute their embodied experiences by 'playing' and negotiating with scripted objects. By drawing on different kinds of empirical material (blogs, in-depth interviews), I will discuss three cases of actively (re-)scripted bodily experiences: 1) Dealing with the painful mammography, 2) Customizing the pirate bra and 3) Wearing the pink prostheses. On the one hand, these cases show how medical devices and prosthetic objects involved in breast cancer prescribe specific norms of sickness, raciality and femininity, and how such scripted norms affect women's embodied experience at various levels (looks, felt sensations, capability, stamina, etc.). On the other hand, these cases also reveal that in their embodied engagements with medical devices and prostheses, women actively navigate – reject, transform and replace - these scripts, thereby actively reconstituting their embodied experiences. As such, the discussed cases disrupt any understanding of the use of (medical, prosthetic) objects as a one-way street in which its scripted norms are inscribed onto the bodies of its users. Rather, this presentation brings into view how scripted objects both shape and are shaped by its users.