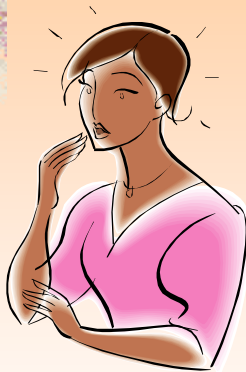
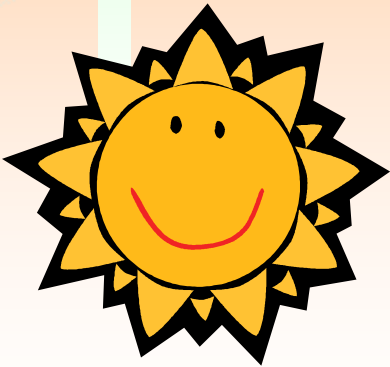


Woman after breast-cancer

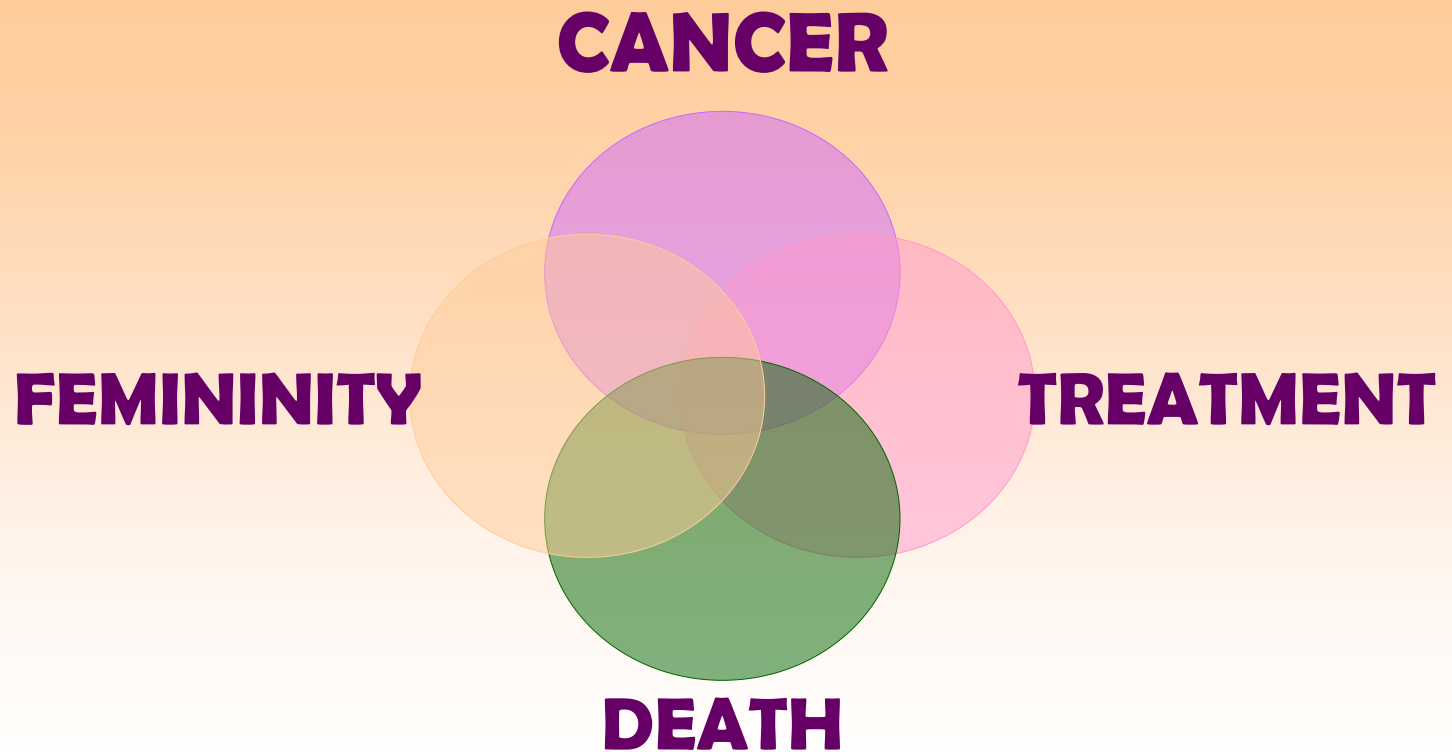


Michèle Lachowsky
Consultant Psychosomatic Gynecology
PARIS, 2014

• **NO CONFLICT of INTERESTS for this PRESENTATION**



When breast or genital organs
are the targets:



CANCER of the BREAST, the 2 most dreaded words....

Double punishment...

- **CANCER**
- **BREAST**






From now on there will be

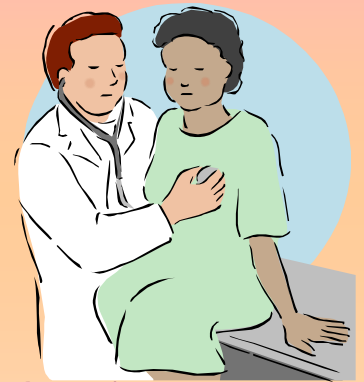
- A BEFORE
- And an AFTER
- A PAST, a dubious PRESENT
- But what about a FUTURE?



The present- the word is out: Cancer

- 
- What is going to happen to me now?
 - Fear: A threatening 'unknown' meaning death
 - Painful disease
 - Painful treatments
 - Body degrading, loss of hair, physical appearance
 - **Self image degrading**
 - **Love, desire, femininity ?**

The breast=no ordinary organ



The patient? What perception of the doctor's perception?

- A piece of herself he/she explores, a separate organ?
- A woman?


The breast=no ordinary organ

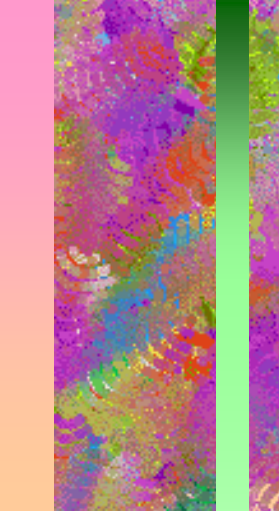
- Most visible attribute of femininity
- Symbol of life (of death?)
- Object of desire
- Glorified by poets, painters, all artists
- Thus major impact
 - on body image
 - relational life
 - intimacy
 - **sexuality**



Quality of life and cancer:

find the odd one out!

- Life AFTER
 - OR rather life WITH ?
 - Quality of life, simple pleasure to be alive? Simple, that pleasure? Certainly not, as it means what makes it valuable and specific for each of us, the colour of our days and nights, that personal, private « salt of life » now called QoL.
 - .
- 




3 stories in that story with
3 characters: the woman, her
breast and her cancer:

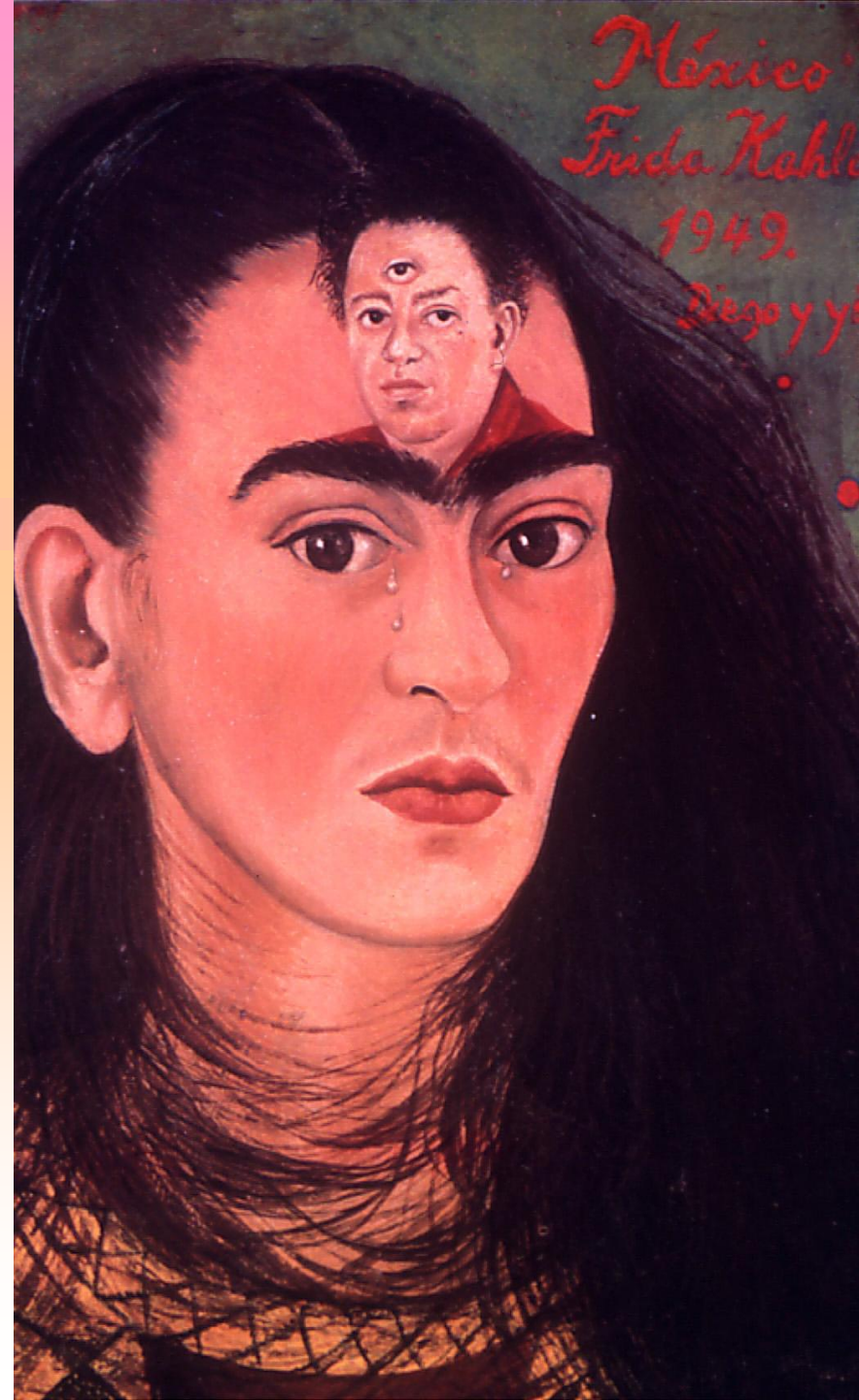
- 
- Announcement **Rumors, noises+++**
 - Treatments **amongst busy medical environment**
 - Cure ?..... **Silence**
feeling empty, lost,
abandoned



Cancer of my femininity



What about my
life as a woman,
as a wife, a lover,
a mother?





Treatments



BODY IMAGE



SEXUALITY



BREAST CANCER



Everyday life



WORK



Cancer, BREAST cancer

*Death

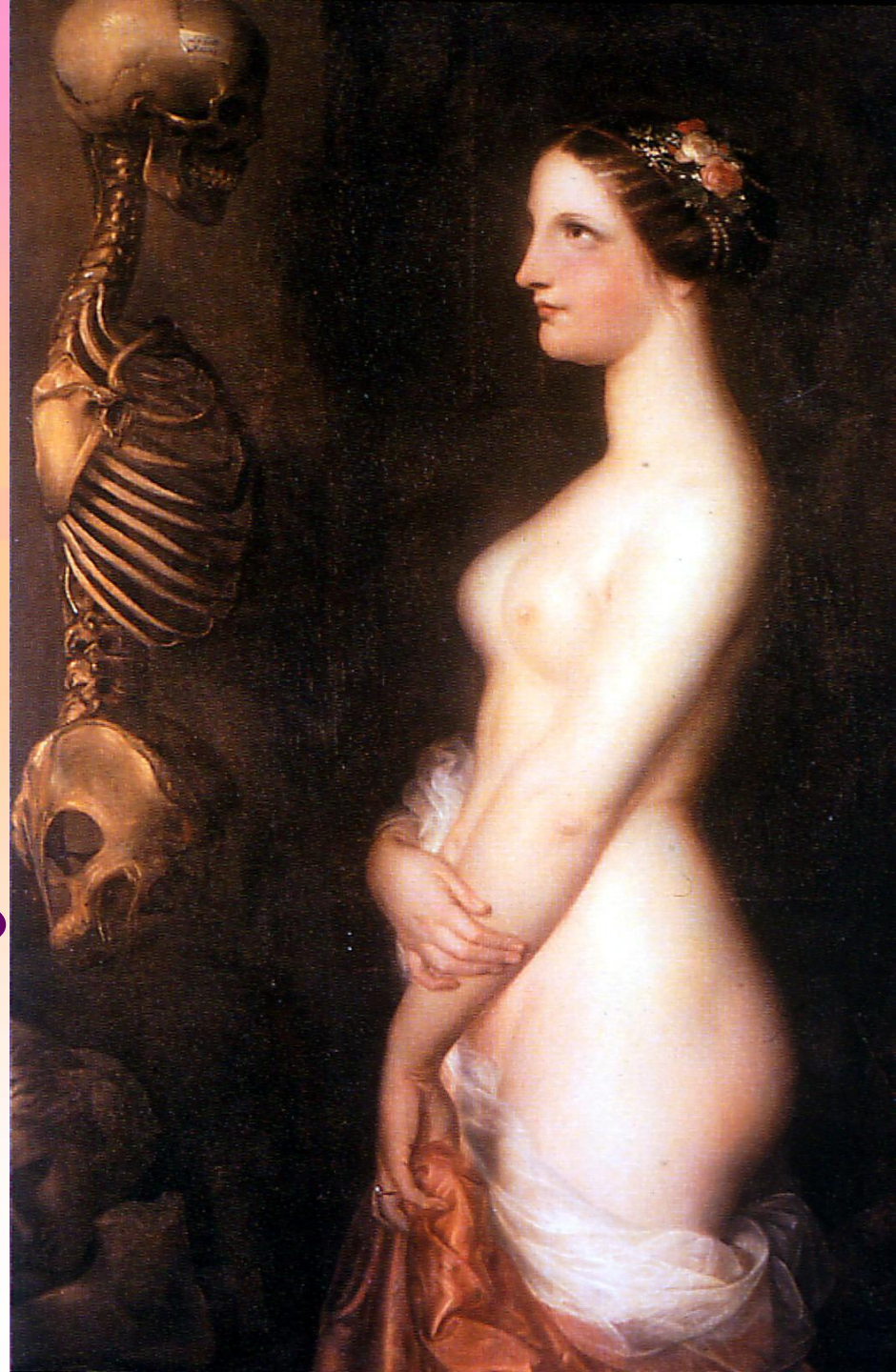
Death of femininity
of sexuality

*Times, past or present?

I had a cancer?

I have a cancer?

Afterwards, never the
same.





Quality of life

All those stressful life events since the “cancer disclosure” have an impact on:

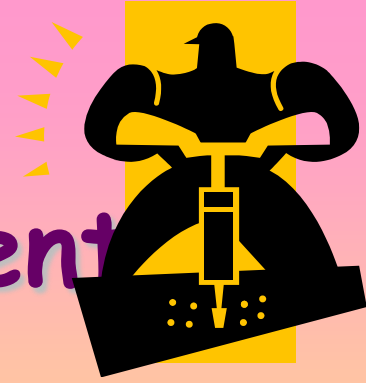
- Body image, accepting and being accepted
- Sexuality, somatic and affective difficulties
- Work, financial problems
- Fatigue
- Depression

**Assaults from
all sides
(words, instruments,
radiations)
are focusing on
this special organ,
the symbol of
life
beauty
pleasure
seduction**

**Symbol of herself,
whatever her age?**



During the first treatment



- Whirlwind of exams, of imagination and misconceptions, of known and unknown data, of expectations, results, controls...
-An orchestra without a conductor?
- No time for thought, just for battle
- Fighting for oneself/against oneself
- Survival and integrity rather than life and body image?






And then, a pause, and she enters a new time: the AFTER

- Thoughts, questions, fantasies, day and night...
- Now comes the time of reinsertion in real life, in the real world of "normal" healthy people
 - *everyday life, at home and outside: family, society, work
 - *couple and sexual life

We must help them to TALK



After tumorectomy

- My breast is still here, I can see it, can I look at it?
 - But what about the scar? How to look at it?
 - My breast is not the same anymore, not completely mine, not completely me...
 - What is it hiding? What menace, what risk not to be forgotten? Trace of death or of escape?
 - and what does it evoke for the hand that fondles it?
- 



Mastectomy

- Amputation
- Total, absolute transformation of the torso
- Half a woman, a-normal
- How to dress, to expose oneself ?
- Who would look at me, want to touch me, without dread?

Seduction, sexuality ?

- Where, how, WHY, for whom ?
- Better to forget about it, to forsake before being forsaken
- Solitude = a protection against Rejection
Dread

And even worse.... Disgust





Sexuality

- What about all the side effects?
- lack of lubrication, painful dryness
- Pain or lack of sensations around the scar, or the “new” breast.
- Arthralgia
- Etc...
- **What about HIM ?**



Maternity

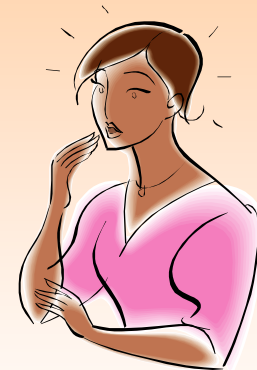
- Is it possible ?
- reasonable ?
- dangerous ?

What about my chances of seeing my child grow up?

Evolution often masked towards depression

Sadness, fatigue
Loss of self-esteem
DEVALORISATION

Lack of **DESIRE**



To be able to cope and go on feeling a full-blooded woman, undiminished, with all her rights as a woman, unblemished, being recognized as such:

Support, from her private environment and from her medical one :

Counseling, **IMPORTANT** part of our role



WHY is it so difficult to talk about all those problems?

- At home: husband, children, family
- At work: coworkers, boss, doctors
- Socially: friends, shops, clothes
- Etc.....





WHY is it so hard to talk about one of those problems?

PATIENT

- The « right » words
- Ridicule (age..), shame
- Not important enough, not medical enough?
- Embarrassing for the doctor?, the nurse
- Their time is far too valuable !

Medical environment

- Unease,
- Personal problems
- +ou- own difficulties
 - *indiscretion, intrusion
 - *violation of intimacy, privacy
 - *lack of tact






Am I still, always a woman ?

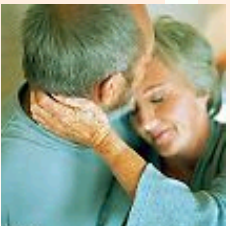
- The breast, maybe the most symbolically invested organ
- Now such a wound,
- Narcissistic wound
- Her body image, her woman's body , how to treat it?
 - * Forgiving its treachery
its lapses
 - * Reinvesting it
 - * Rehabilitate it
 - * Daring to look at it, daring others to do it
 - * Reconstruct it to reconstruct oneself as a whole
- The partner

The partner's role and place

- Misfortune=danger  distance!
- Death-angst=danger for the couple's sensuality/sexuality


HOW TO:

- Keep proximity, affective & physical
- Cultivate intimacy/intimity
- Dominate fears: *cancer
*castration
*loss of integrity
- The power of desire, to show one's desire =rehabilitation of the woman's desire: being desired= being desirable=**REGAINING** her feminity and her values.





Reconstruction, a remake?

- My breast, my body, will you give the old one back to me, will you make me a new one ?
 - Simultaneously?
 - When, sooner or later ...or never
 - For the patient, to help her deal with herself, with what she imagines of the others ?
 - Let us talk, propose, discuss, listen, counsel, let us accept the delays, the different chapters of a very personal saga.
- 



Screening, regular controls

- Reassurance for the physician, worry for the patient?
- Too little for some, too much for the others, or never the right way?
- Periodical revival and renewal of anxiety and questioning.
- Side effects of treatments
- Anyway allows women and their doctors to meet again, to hear them air their complaints, their fears, their everyday difficulties on all levels.



In this immediate AFTER, as well as later

- « My gynecologist » has a capital role
- Nurses as immediate healthcare and counselling workers, to whom one can talk to more easily
- Witness of the life BEFORE the ordeal, support in the life AFTER



Femininity, Sexuality Seduction

- THERE IS A LIFE AFTER BREAST CANCER,

- An enjoyable one

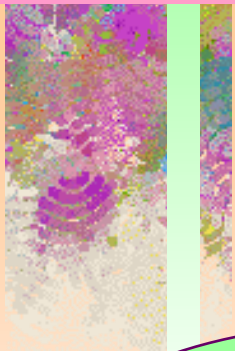
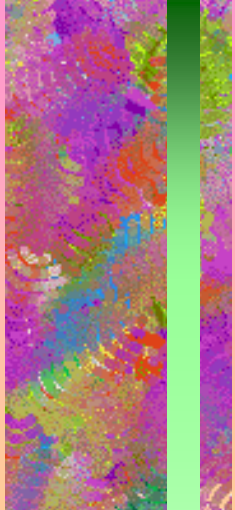
- a good one

- a long one

And let us bring the good news to our patients!







Thank you for
your attention