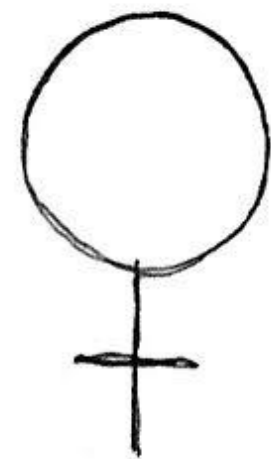**Maastricht University** *Leading in Learning!*

# Breast Cancer in BIogosphere

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## Background

Thanks to medical developments, many women survive breast cancer and continue to live without one or both breast(s). This raises the issue (if and) how these women manage to (re-)identify with their body after having lost such a symbolically charged body part. A significant dimension in investigating this issue is that, nowadays, we have the possibility to construct bodily identities not only in real life, but also online. Women with disfiguring breast cancer seem to (re-)construct bodily identities on the personal blogs they have.

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## Introduction

Research questions:
How do women with disfiguring breast cancer (re-)construct their bodily identities in the blogs they have? And what kind of identities do they (re-)construct?

Theoretical framework
- Identity construction in patient narratives (Frank 1995, Egerod 2011)
- Identity construction in textual or visual online sources (van Doorn et al 2008, MacDougal 2005)
- Theories about freedom to invent and perform 'new' bodily identities online:
        then (Turkle 1995, Wilding 1998)
        … and now (van Doorn et. al. 2008, Orgad 2007)

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## References

Doorn, N. v., Sally Wyatt, Liesbet van Zoonen (2008). "A body of text, revisiting textual performances of gender and sexuality on the internet." *Feminist Media Studies* 8(4): 357-374.
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Frank, A. W. (1995). *The wounded storyteller, body, illness and ethics.* Chicago and Londen, University of Chicago Press.
MacDougall, R. (2005). "Identity, Electronic Ethos and Blogs." *American Behavioral Scientist* 49(4): 575-599.
Orgad, S. (2005). "The transformative potential of online communication, the case of breast cancer patient's Internet spaces." *Feminist Media Studies* 5(2): 141-161.
Turkle, S. (1995). *Life on the screen, identity in the age of the internet.* Londen, Phoenix.
Wilding, F. (1998). "Where is the feminism in cyber feminism? ." *n.paradoxa* 2: 6-13.

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## Methods

1. Interpretative discoursanalyses of 30 blogs (Dutch, Flemish and American).
   *In progress*
2. In-depth interviews with 3 bloggers about their motives to blog and the way in which blogging constructs their bodily identity.
   *In progress*

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(give me feedback)

Pink Happy Thoughts

## Preliminary results

1. The use of texts
(Non-)chronological structure of the text, use of hypertext, use of words, style of writing, change of texts, etc.

2. The use of visual material
Photos, videos, pictures, symbols, change of the visual material, etc.

3. The design and structure of the blog
Colours, background, banners, buttons, short screenful or long stroll, links within the blog, change of the structure or design, etc.

4. The involvement of others
Feedback of others, links to others, stories about others, visual material of others, blog statistics, etc.
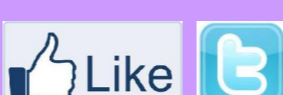
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## Provisional conclusion (1)
### Ways of constructing bodily identities

Bodily identity is constructed…

… through a fragmented, non-synchronous way of using text.

… through both text and visual material, which are indistinguisable.
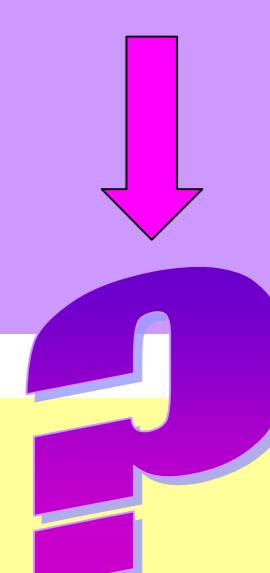
… in relation to others.

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## Provisional conclusion (2)
### Interpretative repertoires of identity

1. Drag queen reportoire

2. Cancer patient repertoire

3. Survivor repertoire

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I blog therefore I am

?

| | |
|---|---|
| 438,019 | Visits |
| 294,474 | Absolute Unique Visitors |
| 761,800 | Pageviews |
| 1.74 | Average Pageviews |
| 00:02:01 | Time on Site |
| 71.46% | Bounce Rate |
| 66.05% | New Visits |

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