

Overview:

Every day, 5,480 people are diagnosed with cancer but rarely is it ever discussed how that cancer diagnosis impacts a person's sexual and intimate desire with a partner. In *Fragments of the Body*, bestselling author, Emily Nagoski, and blog writer, Melanie Mogensen, team up to collect a compilation of essays, written by cancer patients and survivors, exploring the interplay of cancer, desire, and identity through their diagnosis, treatment, and healing. In these deeply personal and courageous narratives, a diverse array of voices – each grappling with their own experiences – share their raw, honest reflections on how cancer reshapes the body, the psyche, and sexual desire.

Chosen contributors reflect on the effects cancer has on intimacy, arousal, and the changing dynamics of relationships while also confronting the isolation and alienation that often accompanies a diagnosis. The collection is a mosaic of diverse perspectives: some essays are marked by stark realism, others by lyricism or humor, all navigating the complicated terrain where vulnerability and strength coexist. From the disorienting physical changes that come with treatment to the new ways of relating to one's body and sexuality, these pieces reveal how cancer disrupts, and sometimes deepens, our understanding of what it means to desire and be desired.

With a foreword by Emily Nagoski that explores the already present complications of arousal and an introduction written by Melanie Mogensen briefly mentioning her experience with cancer, *Fragments of the Body*, will create a foundation for open conversation within society. At its heart, it is about the search for wholeness amidst fragmentation and the authors who are courageous enough to share their stories which are often silenced in mainstream conversations about illness and sexual desire. It is a celebration of fighting and survival, a

critique of social expectations, and a new understanding on how we redefine our identities when faced with life-altering circumstances.

Table of Contents:

1. Foreword written by Emily Nagoski
2. Introduction written by Melanie Mogensen
3. Please Don't Touch Me
 - a. Made up of 12 different essays exploring people's experience with a lack of sexual desire, feeling unattractive and unsure how to voice that feeling to said partner, and the overall lack of arousal within the relationship due to the treatment process going underway
4. Bury Me with You
 - a. Made up of 12 different essays exploring people's experience of an influx of sexual desire as a way to cope, to feel something, and as a distraction from the diagnosis and how that may impact the "romantic/love" aspect between committed partners
5. Do you still love me?
 - a. Made up of 13 different essays exploring the fear of not being desired by a partner due to the changes that occur physically to one's body while treatment is in process
6. Hear me Out
 - a. Made up of 15 different essays exploring diagnosed individuals exploring their sexuality, fantasies, and new kinks in the eyes of a life-changing diagnosis as well as their partner's response.

7. Survivor Sex, Survivor Guilt

- a. Made up of 15 different essays exploring sexual desire, relationships, and guilt in the remission process

Here is a selection of titles that could be considered competitive for *Fragments of the Body*.

They are:

BETWEEN TWO KINGDOMS by Suleika Jaouad (Random House, 2021, paperback, \$20.00, ISBN 978-0399588600). This memoir follows the life of Jaouad after being diagnosed with leukemia and continues with her life story into remission. Although this memoir highlights the intricacy of illness and identity, it fails to mention how cancer impacts Jaouad in her intimate relationships and desires. Instead, Jaouad focuses more on navigating her life and relationships through her 20s as a newly diagnosed cancer patient and how it immediately impacted her and those around her. Mogensen's book, INSERT TITLE HERE, uses a compiled essay memoir format to show the experiences of different people diagnosed with cancer and how their sexual desires were explicitly impacted. Mogensen's compiled essays from strangers from all walks of life will touch on identity but will have a focus on sexual desire and how that is defined when battling an illness that eats away at the host.

SEX AND CANCER: INTIMACY, ROMANCE, AND LOVE AFTER DIAGNOSIS AND TREATMENT by Saketh R. Guntapalli and Maryann Karinch (Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 2017, hardcover, \$44.00, ISBN 978-1442275089). While this book highlights specific stories of various patients, its personal stories focus more on sex after treatment. Not to mention, this book strictly focuses on overcoming gynecologic and reproductive cancer issues in a self-help light. It advises on how to overcome intimate relationship struggles, while Mogensen's compilations will highlight people's experiences with sexual struggles and identity to create a sense of community.

Peyton Sammons

Mogensen's chosen essays will also highlight other cancers, not just gynecologic and reproductive cancers, and how other cancers still impact romantic relationships and desire.

WHAT DOESN'T KILL YOU: LIFE WITH CHRONIC ILLNESS – LESSONS FROM A BODY IN REVOLT by Tessa Miller (Henry Holt and Co., 2021, paperback, \$19.99, ISBN 978-1250751478). Miller's book neglects to mention cancer throughout her memoir and instead covers the topic of incurable diseases. While she mentions how loved ones are impacted and how these relationships will struggle, she misses the aspect of sexual desire and how this affects someone's self-worth and identity. Mogensen's compiled essays will have a broad scope of perspectives instead of having a restricted point of view that a memoir would offer. These essays will show how a diagnosis impacts relationships beyond just regular turmoil. INSERT TITLE HERE will demonstrate how cancer can impact romantic relationships in various ways and how that might mentally impact an individual living with this experience.

THE BRIGHT HOUR: A MEMOIR OF LIVING AND DYING by Nina Riggs (Simon & Schuster, 2017, paperback, \$18.99, ISBN 978-1501169373). Riggs' memoir focuses on the idea of mortality and how that word alone can result in turmoil not only for the person diagnosed with cancer but also for their family. However, the main focus will continue to be how cancer has impacted someone's intimacy, sex drive, and the definition of sex inside and outside the hospital. Although Riggs also touches base on the treatment process, an essay will also shed light on how the treatment process impacts a person's idea of identity and attractiveness, sometimes leaving them groggy and overall still sick

WANT SEXUAL FANTASIES BY ANONYMOUS collected by Gillian Anderson (Harry N. Abrams, 2024, hardcover, \$28.00, ISBN 978-1419777295). Anderson's book offers the same format that Mogensen and Nagoski's will have compiled essays. However, Anderson's book was

Peyton Sammons

strictly focused on sexual fantasies written by anonymous self-identifying women from around the world. Although Mogensen and Nagoski's book will also have anonymous contenders talking about sex and desire, it will have a primary focus on how those feelings and/or actions are inherently impacted by cancer. There will be a diverse collection of writers with different lived experiences involved in order to make a more inclusive community for people who have gone through similar traumas. Identity and self-worth will be tied to the impact of sex and cancer in several of the compiled essays. Still, Mogensen and Nagoski believe that the anonymity of these essays will allow writers to be more open and honest about their experiences.

Author Profile:

Emily Nagoski is a well-recognized sex educator and author of the New York Times Bestseller, *Come As You Are*, published by Simon & Schuster as an updated version in 2021. The book discusses different kinds of sexual desires that self-identifying women experience. Nagoski has received praise from The Huffington Post, The Guardian, and authors John Gottman and Ian Kerner. She has also been featured in a Netflix docuseries, *The Principles of Pleasure*, which focused on sex. Not to mention, Nagoski is also active with her own podcast, *Come As You Are*, where she answers specific sex questions and engages with her audience, leaving her a 4.7-star rating.

Nagoski began her sex educator career in 1992 at the University of Delaware, where she started out as a peer health educator. After pushing the bounds of the curriculum, Nagoski returned to school to continue her own education, where she interned at several different health clinics. For eight years after receiving her Masters, Nagoski worked as a lecturer and Director of Wellness Education at Smith College. However, she is now a full time author and speaker, traveling all over the United States to train and teach her followers the science and art of sexual wellbeing.

Nagoski has since published two other self-help books since her original debut release in 2015, *Burnout* and *Come Together*. Both have received great praise and reviews. Nagoski's primary goal is to continue to circle education and understanding within the sex field. Emily Nagoski now continues to write and speak while living with her husband and two rescue dogs.

Author Profile:

Melanie Mogensen is a wife, mother of three, and a cancer survivor. In 2018, Melanie was diagnosed with Stage 3 Hodgkin's Lymphoma and started her Hopeful Warrior blog and Facebook to keep her family informed during her treatment journey. However, her journey quickly struck the lives of hundreds and a following began. Thankfully, the doctors were able to diagnose her early enough to sign her up for clinical trials at Northwestern, but that doesn't deter from her years of struggle. Not only did Mogensen battle with cancer, but also her relationship, identity, and sexual desire.

During her battles, Mogensen struggled with the idea of womanhood, motherhood, but most of all her marriage. She looked towards faith, hope, and had to relearn what desire in her relationship would look like. Upon talking to other cancer patients and survivors, she realized this was not something that she alone struggled with and started brainstorming ideas on how to make others feel less alone. She hopes that readers and her followers will gain inspiration and understanding through the essays that she and Emily Nagoski have compiled for this book.

Additionally, after going into remission, Mogensen started the Hopeful Warrior Project, which you can find more information on through their Facebook page. This project aims to inform and create a community of fellow warriors to better prepare cancer victims. Through her Facebook page, you can see how she has inspired her followers and is giving back to a part of a community that she was once a member. Mogensen is now six years cancer-free and counting. Melanie now resides in the greater Chicago area with her family and will continue to raise awareness for cancer patients past the general information.

Personal Statement:

Cancer patients are people through and through, and I have watched firsthand cancer ravage a person's life and body. However, I never took the time to think about how this impacts immediate romantic relationships. After reading Annie Ernaux's article and *Want* a few weeks later, I felt enraged for many reasons. One, sex is still a taboo topic in the 21st century, which is something that truly gets under my skin. It is such a natural part of life, yet we aren't allowed to discuss it without feeling shameful. That is not to highlight my number two: cancer patients struggle with their sense of self-worth, and I have watched relationships die due to a lack of intimacy in several formats. I thought, "Why hasn't this been explored more?"

That led me to this final piece, which took weeks and weeks of curating before I had an AH-HA moment. Sure, a memoir would have impacted one person, but anonymous essays and stories based on several different cancers, outcomes, relationships, sexualities, and results could impact hundreds. One of my major goals is to create a diverse community in which people feel like they are welcome. How can life be impacted by words? How could it change a person's life? When looking for comp titles, I found several books that could be called similar, but I couldn't find anything representing what I was bringing to the table. It motivated me to reach further than what I had started to create and come up with this new idea.

No one should be shamed for the feeling of desire or to be desired, especially with cancer patients who are struggling with so many aspects of their new lives. There are support groups, cancer survivor talks, and cancer survivor walks, but no one mentions desire, sexuality, and how that is tied into self-worth, or the lack thereof. There was a hole missing in this realm. I wanted the chance to create something that would fill that hole, one that I have limited experience with but one that I know impacts hundreds of thousands of people.