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978-1-107-65146-3 - *Unnatural History: Breast Cancer and American Society*

Robert A. Aronowitz

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## UNNATURAL HISTORY

*Unnatural History* explores the change over the last two centuries from isolated, private fears to an immense individual and collective risk of breast cancer. The book begins with the experiences of a Quaker woman diagnosed with breast cancer in 1812, and ends with our problematic era in which almost every woman is waiting for “the axe to fall.” In between, the book traces changes in the beliefs and values of women and their doctors, medical knowledge and technology, clinical and public health practices, and the biological impact of the disease.

The picture that emerges from *Unnatural History* is that our clinical, public health, and societal responses to breast cancer have radically transformed the experience of disease and its apparent societal impact, without necessarily having had much effect on the disease’s biological devastation.

*Unnatural History* suggests that we have oversold both the fear of breast cancer and the effectiveness of screening and treatment, leading to miscalculation at the individual and societal levels.

**Robert A. Aronowitz** studied linguistics before receiving his M.D. from Yale. After finishing residency in internal medicine, he studied the history of medicine as a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Clinical Scholar at the University of Pennsylvania. Dr. Aronowitz is currently Associate Professor in the History and Sociology of Science Department at the University of Pennsylvania. He holds a joint appointment with the medical school’s department of Family Medicine and Community Health. Dr. Aronowitz was the founding director of Penn’s Health and Societies Program. He also codirects the Robert Wood Johnson Health and Society Scholars Program, a postdoctoral program focused on population health. In 2005–2006, he was a Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin.

Dr. Aronowitz’s central research interests are in the history of twentieth-century disease, epidemiology, and population health. He is the author of *Making Sense of Illness: Science, Society, and Disease* (Cambridge, 1998). He is currently working on a historical project on the social framing of health risks, for which he received an Investigator Award in Health Policy from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.

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# Unnatural History

BREAST CANCER AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

**Robert A. Aronowitz, M.D.**

University of Pennsylvania



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*For Jane*

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Part of what I hope is valuable about *Unnatural History* is the close examination of the patient experience of cancer and the doctor–patient

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