

FAMILIES * CANCER

SUMMARY: “Spence + Lila” Bobby Ann Mason

A working-class woman Lila is hospitalized for a mastectomy. Her husband, son, and daughters each express concern and caring in different ways. Patient and family meet with the surgeon to discuss the upcoming operation. One daughter, Nancy, confronts the physician’s authority by arguing about the respective merits of lumpectomy vs. mastectomy. Later Lila herself challenges his smug assertion that she “can live without a breast.” After surgery, the oncologist arrives to tell her the cancer has spread to the lymph nodes and she will require a course of chemotherapy. The daughters team up to defend the mother against the onslaught of science, but then pair with the doctor to advise Lila to stop smoking.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. How would you describe Lila and Spence’s relationship?
2. What role do the daughters play in the family?
3. On what terms is the surgeon allowed into the family system? The oncologist?
4. What role does the daughter Nancy assume toward these professionals?

TRIANGULATION ISSUES:

1. Dyadic enmeshment/adequate therapeutic alliance –
 - a. Shifting of alliances: mom and daughters, mom and dad, daughters and doctor
 - b. Doctor seen as necessary