

# LIFE OF BREATH

**KEY THEMES:**

- \* language pathological experiences.
- \* how to describe such ineffable experiences?
- \* tools of biomedicine do we need a more non-pharmacological approach?

This inconsistency is what interests **MEDICAL HUMANITIES**

Symptom → experience

FEELING medically measured event

BREATHLESS

\* Reason to visit a doctor

\* guides examination + diagnosis/assessment.

breathlessness can mask meaning in its lack of specificity.

breathlessness can mean:
 

- liminal edges of breath, first and last.
- chest drain
- pneumothorax

EXTREME BREATHLESSNESS

does it reduce our ability to understand deeply negative feelings of pathological breathlessness? \* EXTREMES STRETCH THE SPECTRUM capacity

are you suspicious of the lack of consistency in meaning?

HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS

clinical engagement typically demands QUANTITATIVE DATA over experiences.

Testing doesn't measure breathlessness THE DOMAIN OF FEELING IS TOO RICH TO NARROW DOWN TO A SURVEY.

RESPIRATORY CLINIC

How do we acknowledge this bias? DO WE appreciate biomedical limitation? DO WE need a more subjective approach?

Breathlessness is a part of a COMMON SYMPTOM \* spectrum?

10% of the UK general population, and rising to 30% in older people.

is this just part of getting older?

anthropology can offer a critique of the biomedical approach to symptoms.

eg Breathlessness = POLYMODAL EXPERIENCE

compared to the static expectations of medicine.

Anthropology can debunk the assumption that patients understand, engage with or use clinical language to describe their experiences.

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ideas of "bodily spirits"

liver = NATURAL SPIRITS

heart = VITAL SPIRITS

brain = ANIMAL SPIRITS

breath is believed to cool the heart, allowing vital spirits to become animal spirits, responsible for sensation and thought.

PRE-CARTESIAN THOUGHT

embodied notions rather than binaries, shows the subjective + profound connection of emotion and physical experience

vs. MODERN BIOMEDICINE


reliance on quantitative data, physical, measurable.

For example: studies of Welsh miners took their "normal" from miners who already worked in mines

So any comparison extrapolates normality from already abnormal lungs.

essentialising groups of people into "normal" and "abnormal"

OBSCURE COMPLEXITY in lived experience.



14th century Middle Age literature

The book of Margery Kempe.

overcome by the holy spirit, wailing + screaming.

Troilus and Criseyde Geoffrey Chaucer

medicalised, swooning + love

notions of the breath, of balance, 4 humours, a mind-body continuum.

Prof. Corinne Saunders

LITERATURE

Prof. Jane MacNaughton

PANEL CHAIR

What does the word mean?
 

- lack of breath?
- chasing breath?

benign vs. threatening

NORMAL vs. PATHOLOGICAL BREATHLESSNESS

engaging with bodily capacity vs. limiting

enjoyable vs. frightening

out of control vs. out of control

"A concept, a SPECTRUM OF BREATHLESSNESS"

How can we make more for us? language

Medical school teaches you that breathlessness is a major warning sign.

Dr. Alice Malpass

ANTHROPOLOGY

Dr. James Dodd

RESPIRATORY MEDICINE

Minical perspective

What is a body? transdisciplinary approach and new, sensate vocabulary.

SENATORIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

\* How do symptoms come about?

There is a discordance between clinical and patient descriptions, something "dyspnoea" or shortness of breath.

importance of LANGUAGE

Margaret Lock on local biologies \*

Biomedicine is one language of meaning that engages with the body, but it has to open up to local biologies as well.

A MATTER OF LIFE AND BREATH.

HISTORY

Dr. Corinne McGuire

Campbell + Howell (1983)

Historically, "vital capacity" was synonymous with lung capacity.

John Hutchinson (1811-1861)

Why did women have lower lung capacity? do they rely less on breathe from their chest rather than the diaphragm? (much more mammary gland...)

do they rely less on breathe from their chest rather than the diaphragm? (much more mammary gland...)

in comparison to the norm... taken from a group of men.

civilised breathing became caught up in notions of being genteel + racial purity.

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