



# Scientific Characters: Rhetoric, Politics, and Trust in Breast Cancer Research (Albma Rhetoric Cult & Soc Crit)

*Lisa Keränen Ph.D.*

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*Scientific Characters* chronicles the contests over character, knowledge, trust, and truth in a politically charged scientific controversy that erupted after a 1994 *Chicago Tribune* headline: “Fraud in Breast Cancer Research: Doctor Lied on Data for Decade.” In the aftermath of this dramatic news, Dr. Bernard Fisher, the eminent oncologist and celebrated pioneer of breast cancer research, came under intense scrutiny following allegations that one of his investigators falsified data in landmark breast cancer research. Although he was eventually cleared of all wrongdoing, the controversy called into question the treatment decisions of tens of thousands of women, because Fisher’s research had demonstrated that lumpectomy and radiation were as effective as breast removal for early stage cancers—a finding that was hailed as revolutionary in women’s health care.

Moving back and forth between news coverage, medical journals, letters to the editor, and oncology pamphlets, Lisa Keränen draws insights from rhetoric, literary studies, sociology, and science studies to analyze the roles of character in shaping the outcomes of the “Datagate” controversy. Throughout the scandal, debates about the character of Fisher and other key players endured, showing how scientific knowledge is shaped by perceptions of the personal temperament, trustworthiness, integrity, and transparency of those who produce it. As administrators, politicians, scientists, patients, journalists, and citizens attempted to make sense of what had happened, and to assess the integrity of the research, they raised questions, assigned blame, attributed responsibility, and reshaped the norms of scientific practice. *Scientific Characters* thus addresses what happens when scientists, patients, and advocates are called to defend themselves in public concerning complex technical matters with direct implications for human life. In assessing the rhetoric that animated Datagate, *Scientific Characters* sheds light on the challenges faced by scientists and citizens as science becomes more bureaucratized, dispersed, and accountable to varied publics.

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