A CONTENT ANALYSIS: THE MARKETING AND ADVERTISING OF THE BREAST CANCER MOVEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Breast cancer is one of the most recognizable diseases in the world. Across the globe, the breast cancer movement unites under the universal symbol of the pink ribbon. With the creation of the pink ribbon and the rise of the breast cancer movement came a new era of political activism that was rooted in consumerism. The marketplace is saturated with a plethora of pink products that offer consumers an opportunity to financially contribute to the breast cancer movement. Marketing and advertising are the drivers behind consumerism. Social marketing efforts advanced by the breast cancer movement aim to influence consumer decision making and thereby raise funds for the breast cancer movement. Through their marketing strategies, these institutions convey calculated messages and ideas about what it is like to face breast cancer. Society’s images of and ideas about breast cancer are constructed by these institutions through the media that they share with the public. This study is a content analysis of the advertisements advanced by different players of the breast cancer movement. 200 advertisements were selected and critically analyzed. On the whole, these advertisements neglect to highlight what is really necessary in order for breast cancer to be eliminated. Additionally, they fail to accurately portray a woman’s breast cancer experience.
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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The earliest recorded organized effort to stop breast cancer was in the 1930s when large groups of white, middle-class women were used as an unpaid labor force to carry out the work of male physicians (King 8). As a way to generate more business for their medical practices, these physicians urged prevention through early detection. Groups of women were put to work to spread this message through “media campaigns, leafleting, public lectures, and exhibitions” (King 8). The more well-known beginning of the breast cancer movement occurred when Evelyn Lauder, who was the senior-vice president of Estée Lauder, and Alexandra Penney, who was the editor of Self magazine, collaborated for a special October 1992 issue of Self that focused on the breast cancer movement. In this article, they positioned the pink ribbon as the symbol for the breast cancer movement. “Today, the pink ribbon is one of the most widely recognized symbols in the world” (Harvey & Strahilevitz 27). The pink ribbon symbolizes the breast cancer movement’s goal to prevent, cure, and eliminate breast cancer.

Under the symbol of the pink ribbon, breast cancer soon became recognized as the largest disease on the cultural map (King xx). While for the most part, breast cancer activists identify “as white, middle-class, [and] middle-aged,” the movement can be seen across many cultures and in many countries (King 111). The movement swept the nation and the globe, establishing a presence through all types of media outlets, events, and organizations.

Breast cancer is also one of the most prominent diseases in contemporary society.

Indeed, it is difficult to go for even a few days without coming across a magazine article about the disease; a news story about it; a brochure for a breast cancer walk or running event; a pink ribbon attached to someone’s backpack or jacket; or an announcement of a company’s pledge to donate a percentage of its sales of its food products, cars,
appliances, cosmetics, clothes or other consumer goods to a breast cancer organization.

Soon after the movement took off, “pink culture” was created, and the breast cancer movement’s ties to consumerism began. The breast cancer movement’s roots in consumerism are largely responsible for the movement’s continued growth and success. “Because of an information alliance of large corporations (particularly pharmaceutical companies, mammography equipment manufacturers, and cosmetic producers), major cancer charities, the state, and the media that emerged at around the same time and was able to capitalize on growing public interest in the disease” (King xx). All types of organizations and institutions put their weight behind the cause and eventually their support evolved into an opportunity for corporate gain. “Indeed, the logo has... become a powerful tool used by for-profit businesses to attract new customers as well as increase brand loyalty among existing customers” (Harvey & Strahilevitz 30).

Since the breast cancer movement sparked a new type of consumerism, it required an entirely different kind of marketing. This style of marketing is called social marketing, and is defined as “the adaption of commercial marketing technologies to programs designed to influence the voluntary behavior of target audiences to improve their personal welfare and that of the society which they are a part of” (Andreasen 110). When it comes to the breast cancer movement, we see social marketing efforts being executed in two main ways. First, social marketing efforts are carried out by breast cancer foundations like the National Breast Cancer Foundation, Susan G. Komen, and the American Breast Cancer Foundation, to name a few. Organizations like these have mission statements that focus on providing financial support, saving lives, contributing to research efforts, and increasing awareness (ABCF.org, komen.org, nationalbreastcancer.org). These organizations are able to fulfill their missions because of the
funds that they generate. Their target audiences donate to and support the cause through their organization of choice. Largely because of successful social marketing campaigns, these organizations are able to spread the word about their efforts and ultimately raise more funds.

Under the umbrella of social marketing comes another marketing strategy that has been widely adapted by the breast cancer movement. “Breast cancer remains as a—if not the—favorite issue for corporations seeking to attract consumers through cause-related marketing campaigns” (King xix). Cause-related marketing is a mutually beneficial agreement between a non-profit and a for-profit organization. This agreement is a calculated strategic relationship that promotes the for-profit’s product and supports the non-profit’s social cause (Harvey & Strahilevitz 26). This type of marketing serves three primary purposes: to increase awareness about charitable efforts, to make financial contributions to charities through the sale of goods, and to increase profits for the businesses that participate in this type of marketing activity. “It offers distinct benefits for an effective marketing campaign that fulfills social responsibilities, satisfies specific market-related objectives, and enhances corporate image” (Smith & Alcorn 20).

The success of cause-related marketing is contingent on the strength of the relationship between the non-profit and for-profit organization. This technique is successful when corporations latch onto a social cause that aligns with their company’s mission statement and target consumers. “Marketers do not just look for worthy charities their management cares about; they also look for causes that will appeal to the customer base or target audience they hope to attract with the campaign” (Harvey & Strahilevitz 28). In the context of the breast cancer movement, if breast cancer foundations primarily target women, then they would ideally collaborate with for-profit companies that also primarily target female consumers.
Social marketing and cause-related marketing are not new concepts, though they recently have become the new trend in corporate marketing. More and more corporations have adapted this practice by pairing with non-profit organizations and supporting social causes. This is a more complex style of marketing, which means there are more stakeholders involved. When it comes to social and cause-related marketing, the stakeholders include the non-profit organization, the for-profit organization, and those whom the social cause is intended to support. If these marketing efforts are fully successful, all stakeholders benefit and are better off because of the partnership. In the case of social marketing campaigns and partnerships, often the stakeholder that is neglected is the group of people whom the social cause is intended to benefit. “Marketing professionals are explicit in their belief that cause-related marketing should be first and foremost a strategy for selling products, rather than an altruistic or philanthropic activity”(King 124). Problems arise when the interests of one group or multiple groups of stakeholders are neglected. In the case of the breast cancer movement, these stakeholders are often the individuals, specifically women, who are affected by breast cancer.
INTRODUCTION

The breast cancer movement, or “pink culture,” is a phenomenon that has a solid presence in the marketplace. The creation of “pink products” has turned into the most recognizable element of the breast cancer movement. Western culture is saturated with a plethora of pink products that offer consumers an opportunity to contribute financially to the breast cancer movement. “The donation to the cause serves as a purchase incentive to customers. The consumer psychology behind this is…the ‘warm glow’ of supporting a worthy cause” (Harvey & Strahilevitz 28). The “warm glow” is the feeling of doing “good” that comes from supporting a social cause through consumerism. A new era of social activism has begun that links the selling of consumer goods to important social causes.

While it would be easy to dismiss ‘pink ribbon’ merchandise as a superficial and insignificant by-product of the upsurge in interest in the breast cancer cause, I prefer to approach it as a particularly prominent manifestation of the tight alliances that have formed between large breast cancer foundations and corporations, of the insidiously gendered nature of cause-related marketing that helps reproduce association between women and shopping, and of a more general tendency to deploy consumption as a major avenue of political participation. (King xxv)

This poses the question: is purchasing consumer goods the best way to support this particular cause? Is consumerism the answer to helping and supporting the women that breast cancer plagues?

Where there is consumerism, there is also marketing and advertising. Marketing and advertising are the drivers behind consumerism. The messages that marketing efforts send through advertising ultimately aim to influence consumer behavior and generate revenues for the
company. The breast cancer movement does this through cause-related marketing campaigns and advertisements. “Breast cancer has become one of the most mass-mediated illnesses of our time” (Sulik 113). The movement’s advertisements attempt to influence consumer decision making and thereby raise funds for the breast cancer movement. This practice began with the emergence of breast cancer foundations and organizations. “Nancy Brinker, [the] founder of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation…is widely credited with turning the disease into a marketable product with which consumers, corporations, and politicians are eager to associate” (King iiv). The breast cancer movement markets itself through many different media outlets. One of the movement’s most prominent media vehicles is print advertising.

Through print advertising, the breast cancer movement sends calculated messages to its target audience about what is valued and important when it comes to a woman’s experience with breast cancer.

In a modern capitalist society, everything has a price—food, clothing, shelter, education, healthcare, information, ideas, and even advocacy. Marketing and advertising are pervasive, and those who sell Americans our way of life use these promotional strategies to influence how we spend our money. The culture that arises from consumption-based logic shapes what we believe to be important and worthwhile, what we do in everyday life, and how we do it. Likewise, a culture of consumption influences Americans’ understanding of, and social response to, social issues of the day. Breast cancer is no different. (Sulik 111)

Through print advertising, the breast cancer movement has embedded its idea of what pink culture, and illness experience, should look like. “Abundant through mass media, these representations ensure the mass distribution of the culture they produce and serve as explicit
guides about how to be an exemplary breast cancer survivor” (Sulik 94). The messages that these foundations put forth through their advertisements are calculated, and intentional. They aim to convey certain messages and enforce certain ideas about what it means to support the movement, spread awareness about the movement, and live with breast cancer. Society’s ideas about breast cancer have been constructed by these institutions through the media that they share with us.

Despite the positioning of the breast cancer movement as a “pro-woman” effort, its advertisements often fail to assign value to the women that are affected by cancer. The breast cancer movement does not consistently send empowering messages to women and make marketing decisions that are in the best interests of women. This happens when these advertisements portray women in an unrealistic way that removes their humanity, and falsely constructs what the experience of a person with breast cancer is like. These advertisements place unrealistic expectations on women and their bodies, as well as their cancer experiences. They do not accurately demonstrate the physical, mental, and emotional burdens of breast cancer. Rather, women's experiences with breast cancer are depicted as overly optimistic and sexualized. These images and messages hold women to impossible standards when it comes to their outlook on their disease, and their physical appearance. This study is a content analysis of the advertisements put forth by different players of the breast cancer movement and the impact that they have on the movement’s least valued stakeholder: women with breast cancer.
METHOD

A qualitative, feminist content analysis was performed on the marketing efforts of the breast cancer movement. “Content analysis entails a systematic reading of a body of texts, images, and symbolic matter, not necessarily from an author’s or user’s perspective” (Krippendorff 3). Specifically, the print advertisements of the breast cancer movement were examined and critically analyzed. The purpose of this type of analysis is to get to know the breast cancer movement through its print advertisements and therefore see the movement through the eyes of consumers and women with breast cancer. Advertisements contain images and convey messages that hold larger social implications than what is evident to the untrained eye. Through this research methodology, the breast cancer movement will be analyzed through a critical feminist lens “outside of what can be sensed or observed” (Krippendorff 18).

These advertisements hold different meanings to every stakeholder of the movement. “The crucial distinction between text and what other research methods take as their starting point is that a text means something to someone, it is produced by someone to have meanings for someone else, and these meanings therefore must not be ignored and must not violate why the text exists in the first place” (Krippendorff 19). This type of analysis considers the objective and subjective meaning behind every aspect of the content. Specifically, it will look at the kinds of messages that the movement sends to women about what the experience of a woman with breast cancer should be like, and what we as consumers can do to cure and eliminate breast cancer.

In order to perform a content analysis on the advertisements produced by the breast cancer movement, the first step was collecting a diverse set of advertisements. Ultimately, 200 advertisements were selected for this study. A large sample set of advertisements was selected in
order to decrease the level of bias associated with the selection. Examining 200 advertisements would allow for a large variety of advertisements that encompassed all elements and positioning strategies of the breast cancer movement. The set included advertising campaigns designed by various breast cancer foundations, as well as advertisements put forth under cause-related marketing strategies.

The 200 advertisements were then analyzed for nine different characteristics. These advertisements were analyzed from a feminist perspective—looking critically at ways in which women were portrayed in a negative light or sent negative messages.

This methodology was selected as the most relevant approach to critically analyzing the marketing and advertising of the breast cancer movement. In performing a feminist content analysis on the movement, this study aims to unveil a new perspective of the breast cancer movement. In addition to gaining new insights on the breast cancer movement through a critical feminist lens, this study aims to gain a better understanding of the impact that these cause-related marketing efforts have on women with breast cancer.
RESULTS

Through analysis of 200 advertisements, a few major themes were identified. They included pink consumer products, links between breasts and feminine identity, objectified women, unrealistic beauty standards, inaccurate portrayals of breast cancer experience, and war and physical activity imagery and metaphors.

Figure 1: Chart of Advertisements of the Breast Cancer Movement

Out of the 200 advertisements, 175 of them contained some amount of the color pink, while 146 contained the actual pink ribbon. Of the 200 selected advertisements, 44 presented women in a glamorous fashion. The women were dressed up, polished, and presented in a conventionally beautiful way. Twenty-nine of the advertisements linked breast cancer to motherhood. Of the 200 selected advertisements, 55 featured naked, almost naked, or promiscuously dressed women. Out of the 55 naked women, 31 had bare, exposed breasts. Seventy-five of the 200 advertisements focused on breasts as the main theme of advertisement. Of the 200 advertisements, 80 linked breast cancer awareness to some sort of consumer good or
service. Twenty-eight of the advertisements used physical objects and women’s bodies interchangeably, manipulating women’s bodies into physical objects, or using physical objects to represent women’s bodies or body parts. Thirty-eight of the 200 advertisements contained “war” metaphors, using words like “fight”, “survive”, “beat”, “champion”, “battle”, “defense”, and “protect.” Twenty-six of the 200 advertisements portray women participating in some sort of physical activity, ranging from everyday activities like walking, to more extreme activities like skydiving.
DISCUSSION

The Color Pink

The breast cancer movement has chosen to position itself under the universal symbol of the pink-colored ribbon. The most common association between the breast cancer movement and for-profit organizations is the ubiquitous pink ribbon. According to Jennifer Harvey and Michal Strahilevitz in their article *The Power of Pink: Cause-Related Marketing and the Impact on Breast Cancer*, “the logo has…become a powerful tool used by for-profit businesses to attract new customers”(30). The adoption of the pink ribbon is one of the reasons for the profound success of the movement.

Figure 2: Advertisement by City of Knowledge

*Ciudad del Saber, The Ads of the World, November 2010*

The pink ribbon, and specifically the color pink, reflects the conventional femininity of the breast cancer movement.

The use of the color pink in the breast cancer ribbon easily conjures the imagery and discourse of pink femininity. The cultural representations in pink ribbon culture include...
national, regional, and local advertising campaigns and promotional materials, cause-marketing advertisements, newspaper and television shows, organization newsletters, and press releases. These resources are self-referential and mutually reinforcing, forming a narrative structure that incorporates aspects of pink femininity, thereby feminizing pink ribbon culture. (Sulik 94)

Of the 200 analyzed advertisements, 175 of them contained some amount of the color pink, while 146 contained the actual pink ribbon. The color pink and the pink ribbon are both strong indicators of the movement’s ties to femininity. “The subtle and consistent nature of pink femininity throughout American culture provide the backdrop for pink ribbon culture, which incorporates pink femininity into its media message and cultural representations to convey its message of breast cancer support, awareness, and survivorship”(Sulik 90). The pink ribbon symbol links breast cancer to traditional femininity, womanhood, and motherhood. “The color pink evokes traditional femininity and the goodness and decency it conveys: emotionality, beauty, morality, and nurturance”(Sulik 48). These links are made very evident through this sample of advertisements.

The feminine color pink was selected as the color for the movement since breast cancer is primarily a female issue. “Breast cancer remains the second leading cause of cancer death for all women (after lung cancer)”(Sulik 59). Women are most commonly affected by breast cancer, so it has been characterized as a female disease. “Breast cancer’s association with pink femininity helps to feminize it, or define it as a woman’s illness”(Sulik 95). Not only is breast cancer constructed as a women’s illness, it is constructed as a feminine illness.
The success of the movement relies heavily on traditional femininity because traditional femininity is tied to something that everyone has: a mother. Of the 200 selected advertisements, 29 of them linked breast cancer to motherhood. “Breast cancer is most common in women aged 40 years and older, who are frequently identified as wives, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. The group of women signifies home and family” (Harvey & Strahilevitz 27).
Women are traditionally known as the creators of life and the protectors of the home, and breast cancers threatens to takes their lives, and keep them from fulfilling these roles. With a mother figure serving as the face of the breast cancer movement, a powerful emotional connection is created between the general population and breast cancer. As a whole, the populations feels, “personally involved or emotionally attached to the Breast Cancer awareness campaigns” (Pezzullo 595). The cause resonates with a large percentage of the population and as a result, has acquired massive amounts of support.

**Consumer Products**

One very common type of breast cancer movement includes the advertising of “pink” products—or products that are stamped with the pink ribbon. “In the marketplace, we are surrounded by ‘pink’ products—pink sneakers, pink kitchen mixers, and even pink buckets of fried chicken—all designed to raise awareness and funds for breast cancer research and education” (Sulik vii). Of the 200 advertisements, 80 of them linked breast cancer awareness to some sort of consumer good or service. This means that almost half of the advertisements focused on consumerism as part of the solution to eliminating breast cancer.

Figure 5: BIC World Advertisement

*BIC World, GayleSulik.com, July 2011*
When it comes to relationships between breast cancer and consumerism, the most common tie is through partnerships made by breast cancer foundations and companies who agree to stamp the pink ribbon on their products. If both parties are benefitting mutually, the presence of the pink ribbon will raise revenues and serve as a marketing opportunity for the corporations. “Avon, BMW, Bristol Myers Squibb, Estée Lauder, Ford Motor Company, General Electric, General Motors, J.C. Penney, Kellogg’s, Lee Jeans, and the National Football League have all turned to breast cancer philanthropy as a new and profitable strategy through which to market their products”(King 2). In addition to this strategy being profitable for corporations, the stamp of the pink ribbon on consumer goods also raises funds and awareness for the breast cancer movement.

There are many feminist criticisms of this kind of partnership and marketing. First of all, it is important to look at who is the main benefactor of these types of partnerships. Ideally, when breast cancer organizations pair with businesses, the relationships are mutually beneficial. This means, that the participating parties have worked out a set of terms that provides returns to both parties. However, this is not always the case. The “Think Before You Pink” campaign highlights the importance of reading the “fine print” before buying something that has a pink ribbon on it. “It is unlikely that most consumers bother to read the fine print of how much is being donated and to what organization”(Harvey & Strahilevitz 31). Very often, the benefits lie heavily on the side of the for-profit corporations.

The funds raised for the breast cancer movement are promised to be contributed to prevent, cure, and eventually end breast cancer in women. While these products are advertised and sold as a way to financially contribute to the movement, often the specific products do not align with these overarching goals. Many of the products stamped with the pink ribbon
potentially contribute to causing breast cancer in women. “In particular, Breast Cancer Action’s ‘Think Before You Pink’ campaign sought to critique the involvement of cosmetic companies in breast cancer fundraising since many cosmetic products contain toxic ingredients with potential links to breast cancer” (Zavestoski, McCormick & Brown 567).

Figure 6: Estée Lauder Advertisement

These questionable products are not limited to cosmetics; they extend to all kinds of products across many different genres of consumer goods.

Consumers themselves have voiced concerns about the association of questionable products bearing pink ribbons and their potential to increase the risk for breast cancer, including yogurt with possibly dangerous hormones, cosmetics with possible carcinogens, and automobiles, which product unhealthy exhaust.

(Harvey & Strahilevitz 31)

Despite concerns raised by organizations like Breast Cancer Action, scientific evidence that links these products to breast cancer, and pleas of concerned consumers, breast cancer foundations continue to associate themselves with the companies that produce these potentially harmful products.
These foundations “[enable] corporate denial of accountability for the causes of breast cancer” (Pezzullo 359). In most cases, they still allow the corporations in question to stamp the pink ribbon on their products.

When it comes to stakeholders’ interests in these kinds of partnerships, the interests of the corporations usually take the top priority. Following the interests of the corporations come the interests of the breast cancer foundations, which are then followed by the interests of women with breast cancer. When it comes to the promotion of potentially harmful consumer products, women’s interests are completely neglected.

**Women as Objects**

The breast cancer movement objectifies women by isolating and primarily focusing on their breasts in print advertisements.
One of the major themes seen in these advertisements is the overwhelming focus on women’s breasts. Seventy-five of the 200 advertisements had breasts as the main component of the advertisement. They chopped women’s bodies apart so that only their breasts remained.

“Advertisers dismember women’s bodies to a greater extent than men’s, showing only certain body parts, such as legs or breasts” (Conley & Ramsey 470). This norm among the breast cancer movement contributes to society’s constant objectification of women. Most of these advertisements focus in on women’s breasts by cropping the woman’s face, head, and other body parts out of the image. In many cases, women’s breasts are turned into blank canvasses to be written on. These advertisements turn women’s bodies, and specifically their breasts, into blank slates that the movement then uses to project its messages.
This type of advertising dehumanizes women; it removes their humanity from the representation of breast cancer and turns women into objects. Dr. Lina Papadaki, whose research has focused on women’s sexual objectification, explains objectification as “treat[ing] a person as an object, in the sense of a mere instrument for someone else’s purposes, and consequently reduc[ing] this individual to the status of a mere instrument. Objectification, then, is a necessarily negative phenomenon because it involves seriously harming a person’s humanity. In being reduced to a mere thing for use, the objectified individual’s humanity is diminished” (Papadaki 17).

Women’s breasts are the primary subject of these advertisements, and as an extension, the primary subject of the breast cancer movement. This specific focus assigns a higher value to the women’s breasts than it does to the women themselves. “Fitts claims that cultural and medical discourses often promote the business of ‘saving breasts, not lives. Indeed, although cosmetic issues are important to many women, how one looks is usually relatively unimportant compared to reducing the lethal effects of cancer and the debilitating ordeal of treatment” (Pezzullo 346).

Figure 10: S Model Management Advertisement

S Model Management, Positively Inclined, November 2010
By doing this, the movement takes the focus away from the goal of saving the women who have breast cancer, and instead places it on saving the breasts that are attached to these women. Saving women’s breasts becomes the aspect of the problem with the highest level of importance.

Through emphasizing women’s breasts instead of the women themselves, these advertisements objectify women. Only including pictures of the women’s breasts and particularly excluding their faces removes their humanity and reduces them to mere body parts. Papadaki writes:

According to Kant, humanity is an individual’s rational nature and capacity for rational choice. The characteristic feature of humanity is the capacity for rationally setting and pursuing one’s own ends. A being with humanity is capable of deciding what is valuable, and of finding ways to realize and promote this value. Humanity is what is special about human beings. (Papadaki 17)

Body parts, and more specifically women’s breasts, do not have rational thoughts or feelings, so they therefore do not have humanity. Women however, do have humanity, and by limiting the focus of these advertisements to women’s body parts, all humanity is removed and only sexualized objects remain.

Figure 11: AVON Advertisement

AVON, The Inspiration Room, October 2006
According to philosopher Martha Nussbaum, objectification goes hand in hand with a woman’s identity as a female. “Catherine MacKinnon wrote, ‘Women's intimate experience of sexual objectification...is definitive of and synonymous with women's lives as gender female’”(Nussbaum 249). The breast cancer movement closely ties the objectification of women’s bodies with society’s perception of femininity. Since the breast cancer movement decided to unite under a pink-colored ribbon, it focuses on femininity, and specifically the preservation of femininity. “Pink also references a society that celebrates women’s breasts as the principal symbol of womanhood, motherhood, and female sexuality”(Sulik 15). Henceforth, the breast cancer movement has tied a woman having breasts, to a woman’s identity as a woman.

As a larger society, we associate breasts with being female. “The breast is an external symbol of femininity”(Harvey & Strahilevitz 27). In order to be considered a full woman, women must have breasts. “Breasts function as cultural symbols of female sexuality and motherhood; thus the disease can complicate women’s sense of identity and self-worth”(Ley 3). To lose one’s breasts, means to lose part of one’s identity as a woman. Many of these advertisements reinforce this idea, and send these negative messages to women. Through print advertisements, the breast cancer movement places a high level of importance on women’s breasts, since breasts are so closely associated with womanhood.

The EBCM questions the use of women’s breasts, especially the mastectomized breast, to symbolize lost femininity, whereas the mainstream movement emerged out of support groups and other programmes designed to help women learn to wear prosthetic breasts and hide the evidence of their disease so as to maintain their femininity. (Zavestoski, McCormick & Brown 567)
Since the loss of a woman’s breasts marks the loss of her femininity and womanhood, women are encouraged to undergo breast reconstructive surgery in order to restore their lost identities as women.

For women who have mastectomies, immediate breast reconstruction, using either an implant or tissue from elsewhere in the body, has become more routine, especially for younger women. The breast cancer treatment of today aims to avoid too much breast disfigurement: restore the feminine body ideal, and restore the feminine self. (Sulik 325)

Figure 12: Kuwait Breast Cancer Awareness Campaign Advertisement

Women are expected to come out of their breast cancer experience with their breasts intact. If a woman’s femininity can only be restored through reconstructive surgery, then women who do not opt to have breast reconstruction do not fully regain their femininity, according to this rhetoric.
The breast cancer movement also objectifies women by putting forth advertisements that focus on women’s sexualized, naked bodies. When female models are used in these advertisements, they very often are naked.

Figure 13: Breast Cancer Research Foundation Advertisement

![Breast Cancer Research Foundation Advertisement](image)

*Breast Cancer Research Foundation, Medusa, September 2009*

Of the 200 selected advertisements, 55 featured naked women, or women who were very minimally dressed. Out of the 55 naked women, 31 had bare, exposed breasts. According to Ferguson, Kreshel, and Tinkham, in their 1990 study that examined advertisements, sexism is present in advertising “if the woman was portrayed as a sex object and the focus was on her body”(Dahlberg 72). These advertisements are complicit in sexism since they focus on women’s naked, sexualized bodies. “Scantily clad, suggestively portrayed women sell every different type of product on television, in magazines, and now on personal computer screens, in increasing numbers, since the 1980s”(Dahlberg 71). Despite the identification of women as the target audience, the breast cancer movement is not exempt from the “sex sells” genre of advertising.
Advertisements for the breast cancer movement objectify women by using their bodies as a vehicle to “sell” the movement. The naked female body is featured with the hope and intention that it will generate more revenue and awareness for the breast cancer movement.

Finally, the breast cancer movement objectifies women by turning their bodies and body parts into literal things. Many advertisements for the breast cancer movement turn women into the products themselves, as seen in Figure 1, where a naked woman’s body is manipulated into the shape of a pink ribbon.

Figure 14: iGoPink Advertisement

Figure 15: Allergan Pharmaceutical Advertisement
“Advertisers more commonly objectify women (relative to men) by showing them transforming into objects” (Conley & Ramsey 470). This point is further supported by Jean Kilbourne, in her documentary Killing Me Softly which analyzes images of women in the media, and specifically in advertisements. “Kilbourne suggests that women are literally objectified by making women’s bodies into objects or making female models look like inanimate objects (e.g., a woman’s legs are portrayed as a pair of scissors)”(Conley & Ramsey 470).

Women are also objectified when these advertisements use literal things to represent breasts. Of the 200 collected advertisements, 28 used physical objects and women’s breasts interchangeably. They either manipulated women’s breasts into physical objects, or used physical objects to represent women’s breasts or body parts.

![Figure 16: Worldwide Breast Cancer Advertisement](image)

**Worldwide Breast Cancer, 2006**

Presenting breasts as objects removes their connection to the human body. By isolating women’s breasts and presenting them as physical objects, the idea is embedded in viewer’s minds that women’s breasts are objects even when they are attached to her body. In the process, their connection to women diminishes, and again, the women behind the breasts are neglected. This advertising theme perpetuates the idea that breasts are more important than the women attached
to them. Again, the idea of “saving breasts” instead of saving the women who are attached to these breasts is perpetuated as the focus of the breast cancer movement.

**Unrealistic Beauty Standards**

Of the 200 selected advertisements, 44 presented women in a glamorous way. The women were dressed up, polished, and presented in a way that satisfied conventional beauty standards. The women had hair, make-up, and Photoshopped® bodies that perfectly met conventional beauty standards. If they were not naked, they were fashionably dressed. All were presented as thin, with long limbs, small waists, and slim wrists.

Figure 17: Elle Breast Cancer Campaign Advertisement

The imagery that represents the breast cancer movement mostly includes “traditionally” beautiful women, who are unblemished, and look almost completely unfazed by their cancer experience. The women featured these advertisements are “perfectly” groomed, thin, tall, airbrushed, and glamorous. “Kilbourne recognizes that advertising portrays everyone inaccurately” (Conley &
These are not accurate representations of women with breast cancer. These women are models, and are presented in the same way that models are presented in non-breast cancer movement advertisements. These advertisements send negative messages to women with breast cancer by reinforcing the notion that adherence to beauty ideals is more important than a women’s health.

“Research abounds concerning damaging portrayals of women in the media. These images are associated with negative outcomes for women including lower self-esteem, poor body image, self-objectification, and eating disorders” (Conley & Ramsey 469). In addition to being sick, these women are now burdened with living up to unrealistic beauty standards.

The messages that these advertisements send to women with breast cancer place high, unrealistic expectations on women’s aesthetics instead of their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. The reality is that women’s bodies, and particularly their breasts, are changed by cancer and cancer treatments. These women are encouraged to “fix” their bodies in order to restore the properly feminine qualities that they had before they were plagued with cancer.
“Since breast cancer places the social integrity of a women’s body in jeopardy, restoring the feminine body (or at least normalizing its appearance) is a sign of victory in the war on breast cancer” (Sulik 15). Women are expected to have their idealized femininity and physical appearance maintained in every way. Historically, [t]raditional feminine image and self-presentation became a touchstone for helping women to face breast cancer with great confidence. Prosthetic breasts, wigs, makeup, and accessories masked the damaged of breast cancer and contributed to an unblemished survivor identity. Instead of furthering the taboo related to a woman’s innate frailty, traditional femininity would be cast as an empowering coping strategy. Having solidified once again the roles of traditional femininity in relations to breast cancer, any woman who rejected the aesthetic approach was considered bad for morale. (Sulik 39)

A large part of the “healing process” now includes aesthetically-focused treatments.
A woman’s experience with breast cancer is far from glamorous, but many of these advertisements fail to portray women’s breast cancer experience in a realistic light, and instead glamorize breast cancer. In her graphic novel, Cancer Vixen, Marisa Marchetto reflects on her experience with breast cancer. “I’m too depressed to run around in 5-inch heels going from ‘it’ event to ‘it’ event!” (Marchetto 106). Breast cancer is certainly not glamorous, as these advertisements portray it.

**Inaccurate Representation of Illness Experience**

These advertisements fail to acknowledge all aspects of illness experience, which are very often negative experiences.

*Figure 20: AVON Walk For Breast Cancer Advertisement*

“Women with breast cancer experience suffering related to all dimensions of life: physical pain, emotional, psychological, spiritual and social forms of suffering” (Banning 1). Marchetto describes the physical toll that one of her treatments had on her body. “Here’s what neulasta feels like…Imagine being injected by a truckload of wet cement…Imagine that
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truckload…hardening…in your entire body, immobilizing you with extreme muscle and bone aches” (Marchetto 164). The physical strain and fatigue that comes from breast cancer is all-encompassing and grinds away at every aspect of a woman’s health and well-being. According to Wayne Bardwell and Sonia Ancoli-Israel, in their study *Breast Cancer and Fatigue*:

> Cancer fatigue differs from other manifestations of fatigue in that it generally is not alleviated by sleep or rest, typically is of greater duration and severity, often is associated with high levels of distress, and is disproportionate to the level of exertion [6–11]. Cancer-related fatigue often co-occurs with other troublesome symptoms such as pain, sleep disturbance, and depression [12–14]. Thus, the impact of cancer fatigue on health-related quality of life can be substantial, reducing the patient’s engagement in work and in personal and social activity [2,15–17]. Some studies have reported that fatigue in patients who have cancer has a greater negative impact on quality of life than all other symptoms, including nausea, pain, and depression [2,18]. Treatment of cancer-related fatigue has been recently identified as a priority by the National Institutes of Health [19]. Specific to breast cancer, fatigue is reported by a substantial majority of patients during their initial treatment (surgery, radiation, and/or chemotherapy). In addition, although estimates vary widely, approximately 33% of individuals who have breast cancer report persistent fatigue up to 10 years into survivorship. (61)

These advertisements fail to acknowledge how taxing breast cancer is on a person’s body and physical health, and how these negative physical symptoms affect all other aspects of their health.

The imagery of the breast cancer movement almost exclusively portrays women as healthy, composed, and optimistic. “The common image of the breast cancer survivor in pink
ribbon culture overwhelmingly represents the normalizing feminine aesthetic—a survivor, medical consumer who is happy, whole, restored, and better than ever”(Sulik 45). Despite the fact that women who face this disease are not always happy and optimistic, “[a]lmost all representations of breast cancer depict the same story of hope, courage, and joyous inspiration”(Sulik 97). By presenting these women as happy, courageous, and optimistic, these advertisements fail to show the mental and emotional toll that breast cancer takes on women.

Figure 21: Yoplait Advertisement

During an interview with a woman who survived breast cancer, Sulik captured the negative emotional effects breast cancer. “Sometimes I really lost it...I would succumb to the pressure around me. On my emotions I would take a ride. I’d fuss, I’d cuss, I’d cry in frustration until there was nothing left inside”(Sulik 96). As we can see through this personal account, optimism is hardly the only emotion that women feel during their illness experience. Breast cancer encompasses a range of emotions that women feel during their illness experiences, so the breast cancer movement should not exclusively value optimism in its advertisements.
One very common idea that is put forth by the breast cancer movement is that a physically, mentally, and emotionally strong woman is the only kind of woman who will ultimately survive breast cancer. King explains, “Personal strength and optimism on the part of breast cancer survivors alongside the research money that is generate by institutions and practices of consumer-oriented philanthropy, are now framed as the most effective tools for fighting the battle against the disease. This in turn has profound implications for how breast cancer is experienced by those who have the disease”(x). These advertisements present a skewed idea of what it takes to overcome breast cancer. By putting messages and imagery forth that exclusively focus on emotions like hope and optimism, the movement neglects an entire part of a woman’s illness experience.

**War and Physical Activity Metaphors and Imagery**

Figure 2: AVON Advertisement

*AVON, The Inspiration Room, October 2008*

Women with breast cancer are described as “heroes”, “she-ros”, “fighters”, and “warriors.” These terms are the primary identifications assigned to women with breast cancer. “The she-ro is an ideal type, which embodies pink femininity and pink ribbon culture’s model of
survivorship” (Sulik 101). The use of the word “warrior” to describe women with breast cancer is part of a larger metaphor that links breast cancer to a grandiose war or battle. “The psychologic adjustment that is central to survival is thought to be based on maintaining a fighting spirit and emotional anger” (Banning 1).

Figure 23: Susan G. Komen Race For The Cure Advertisement

Susan G. Komen Race For The Cure, Gayle Sulik, June 2011

In the context of breast cancer, a woman’s illness experience is the war, breast cancer is her enemy, and she is the fighting solider. Of the 200 advertisements, 38 contained “war” vocabulary, with words like “fight”, “survive”, “beat”, “champion”, “battle”, “defense”, and “protect.”
As a whole, the movement almost exclusively uses war and battle terminology in discourse about the disease. “Words such as fight, battle, and war commonly describe the relationship between those on the side of the diagnosed (soldiers, armies) and cancer itself (enemy, beats, and predator)” (Sulik 74). Phrases like “fighting breast cancer”, “beating cancer”, and “kicking cancer’s butt”, are all commonly used to describe a woman’s efforts to survive breast cancer.

These advertisements frame women as actively fighting for their lives. “They are not weak victims that cancer happens to. They are women who proactively fight against the invasions on their bodies” (Sulik 103). They do this by linking the breast cancer movement and physical activity. Of the 200 advertisements, 26 portray women participating in some sort of physical activity, ranging from everyday activities like walking, to more extreme activities like skydiving.
“The potency of the kinds of physically challenging activities that are so popular among women who want to play a part in the fight against the disease” (King 114) is achieved by creating and pumping resources into massive events like the Race for the Cure and the AVON Walk For Breast Cancer. These events, linking physical activity to the breast cancer community, bring like-minded individuals together under the cause and “make people feel a sense of community and [and ability] to share their fears and whatever they [are] feeling” (King 50). If individuals are not well enough to participate in these forms of physical activities, they are not fully receptive to the support that these events offer.

**Empowering Messages and Images**

While, in large part, the advertisements of the breast cancer movement send negative and inaccurate messages to women about the breast cancer experience and what it takes to overcome the disease, not every advertisement in the sample set was negative. Many of them did convey messages that were more pro-woman, and that focused on the women behind the cancer, instead
of their breasts. However, these advertisements were the minority. Out of the 200 advertisements analyzed, there were only a handful that did not fall into at least one of the categories discussed above.

Figure 26: Breast Cancer Care Advertisement

![Breast Cancer Care Advertisement](image)

*Breast Cancer Care, February 2012*

Figure 27: Pink Ribbon Magazine Advertisement

![Pink Ribbon Magazine Advertisement](image)

*Pink Ribbon Magazine, Ad Week, September 2010*
CONCLUSION

Due to its focus on consumerism, these advertisements largely serve as the voice of the breast cancer movement. As a whole, these advertisements neglect to highlight what is really necessary to address the problems of breast cancer. The messages and the imagery that we see in these advertisements lack substantive solutions for women with breast cancer, and suggestions for how people can help eradicate breast cancer. Sulik argues, “Without real advances toward the elimination of the disease, pink ribbon culture diverts attention to what people can do: get mammograms, participate in programs, and buy pink consumer goods”(63). She goes on to say, “[u]sing breast cancer as a brand name has helped to divert public attention to ‘the Cause’ and away from some of the key factors that are getting in the way of disease eradication”(58). What these advertisements do demonstrate are the shortcomings of the breast cancer movement. While cause-related marketing efforts contribute financially to the effort to eliminate breast cancer, they are not the solution to the problem of breast cancer.

Breast cancer is a complex disease that requires complex solutions. “Grounded in advocacy, deeply held beliefs about gender and femininity, mass-mediated consumption, and the cancer industry, pink ribbon culture has transformed breast cancer from an important social problem that requires complicated social and medical solutions to a popular item for public consumption”(Sulik 9). Breast cancer is more than the color pink; it is about the women and men behind the cancer and their experiences with the disease. “So what does 29 needles + 18 pounds + 15 radiation technicians + 11 medical assistants + 9 nurses + 8 doctors + $192,720.04 + 2 rabbis + 1 priest = ? Answer: It adds up to an experience that has changed me forever”(Marchetto 210). Breast cancer affects women in ways that “only individuals that have the experience can relate to”(Banning 1).
In large part, these advertisements fail to focus on the women with breast cancer, and instead they focus on the breasts attached to the women with cancer. Breast cancer is not a disease that is completely isolated to the breasts. The toll that breast cancer takes on those who have it extends beyond their breasts, and the treatments usually affect more than the mammary region.

It includes diagnostic techniques such as surgical and needle biopsies. It also consists of treatment modalities such as mastectomies, lumpectomies, radiation, chemotherapy, and other therapies to remove the cancer from the body, halt its growth, prevent it from metastasizing to other organs, decrease its chances of reoccurrence, and ultimately cure it. In recent years, this focus on treatment has expanded somewhat to include complementary approaches such as psychosocial support, acupuncture, and relaxation practices. (Ley 5)

Breast cancer, and the treatment for it, is not just about women removing and reconstructing their breasts; rather, it is an all-encompassing illness that impacts every aspect of a woman’s health. In Cancer Vixen, Marchetto reflects on a conversation she had with her doctor during a check-up. The doctor questioned Marchetto on how she was reacting to her chemotherapy treatments.

Dr. Paula: “Nausea?”
Marchetto: “Yes.”
Dr. Paula: “Hot flashes?”
Marchetto: “Yes.”
Dr. Paula: “Night sweats?”
Marchetto: “Yes.”
Dr. Paula: “Fatigue?”
Marchetto: “Yes.”
Dr. Paula: “Diarrhea?”
Marchetto: “Yes.” (Marchetto 189)

Breast cancer impacted Marchetto’s physical health in many more ways than just the effects on her breasts, and this example fails to even delve into all of the ways in which Marchetto’s health was negatively affected. Marchetto, and many women who have breast cancer, are forced to face physical, mental, and emotional challenges that extend far beyond the realm of their breasts.

Breast cancer is a disease that threatens and takes the lives of many people. The reality is that breast cancer is “the number one killer of women between the ages of 35-50”(Ley 1). Breast cancer is not pleasant, beautiful, or happy, as these advertisements suggest. Rather, it is a disease that weakens, destroys, and depresses women. Breast cancer tears women apart, makes them weak, and slowly chips away their humanity. So why are we adding advertisements that objectify and devalue women to the mix? Why is the breast cancer movement creating and supporting imagery and messages that do just this?

The marketing and advertising of the breast cancer movement is not unlike the marketing and advertising done for other consumer products. Like for-profit corporations, non-profit breast cancer organizations objectify women in advertisements and use women’s bodies as devices to sell consumers on financially contributing to the breast cancer movement. By making women’s bodies as focal point of their advertisements, the breast cancer movement relies on women’s bodies to “sell” the cause. Essentially, women’s bodies are used to generate revenues for the breast cancer movement.

The breast cancer movement has the opportunity to influence the illness experience of women with breast cancer. “Social movements change illness experience…even social movements that do not specifically target disease regimes can have an impact on the illness
experiences of individuals” (Klawiter 867). What is scary is that the advertisements attached to this movement put forth imagery and send messages that do not always positively shape the illness experience.

Almost all of these advertisements paint an unrealistic picture of what a woman’s experience with breast cancer is like. They focus on the wrong things. By using the color pink and specifically the pink ribbon as the symbol for the movement, the gruesome side of cancer can easily go ignored. “The use of pink ribbons may give the public a method of identifying with cancer without having to visualize objectionable images of tumors, pains, or the side efforts of treatment” (Harvey & Strahilevitz 27). By glamorizing breast cancer, the movement plays into the traditional societal standards of beauty. By focusing on women’s breasts, the movement puts forth the idea that breasts are more important than the women behind the cancer.

Breast cancer plagues women across the globe, and these advertisements send negative messages to all of them. This is a cross-cultural phenomenon and a global problem that needs to be addressed, and rectified, before more negative images and messages are sent to women with breast cancer.
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RELATED EXPERIENCE

Administrative Assistant at The Penn State Center for Women Students
- Assisted in the completion of project and work to spread awareness about programs on campus
  University Park, PA
  2009-2012

Store Management Intern at Kohl's Department Stores
- Gained comprehensive knowledge of running a major department store
- Developed skills necessary to be a successful retail manager
- Completed a specialized independent project on Merchandise presentation
  Pittsburgh, PA
  Summer 2011

Merchandising Chairperson for the Penn State IFC/Panhellenic Dance Marathon
- Ordered and distributed quality, current products
- Protected the logos and trademarks of THON
- Ran an online THON Store ([www.store.THON.psu.edu](http://www.store.THON.psu.edu))
- Worked with five vendors to keep merchandise in style and up-to-date
- Delegated operating tasks to a team of 21 captains
- Oversaw the most successful effort to date, earning $184,000 in revenue
  University Park, PA
  2010-2011

Marketing Intern at The Women and Girl's Foundation of Western Pennsylvania
- Helped plan and execute fundraising events that spread awareness about the Foundation and contributed to the fundraising efforts
  Pittsburgh, PA
  Summer 2010

LEADERSHIP

Penn State Lion Ambassador
- Member of the student alumni corps that serves to communicate Penn State’s history and personality, strengthen its traditions, and instill Penn State pride in current and future students, alumni, and friends
- Conducted tours on campus for accepted and prospective students
  University Park, PA
  2010-2012

Resident Assistant
- Served as a Penn State representative and leader at the residence hall level in the role of an advisor and student advocate
  University Park, PA
  2010-2011

HONORS

Outstanding Women's Studies Undergraduate Student Award
Women's Studies Student Marshal
Accenture Scholarship Recipient
Liberal Arts Enrichment Award Recipient
TRIOTA Women's Studies Honor Society
Golden Key Honour Society
Fred Fotis Scholarship Award Recipient
Phi Eta Sigma National Honor Society
Dean's List
Spring 2012
Spring 2012
Spring 2012
Spring 2012
2011-2012
2011-2011
Spring 2011
2010-2012
2009-2012