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When Breast Cancer Is All About the Boobs: Postfeminist Culture's Influence on Breast Cancer Awareness Campaigning

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WHEN BREAST CANCER IS ALL ABOUT THE BOOBS:
POSTFEMINIST CULTURE'S INFLUENCE ON BREAST CANCER AWARENESS
CAMPAIGNING

by

Robin Turnblom

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ABSTRACT

WHEN BREAST CANCER IS ALL ABOUT THE BOOBS: POSTFEMINIST CULTURE'S INFLUENCE ON BREAST CANCER AWARENESS CAMPAIGNING

by

Robin Turnblom

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2014
Under the Supervision of Associate Professor Elana Levine

This project analyzes the relationship between breast cancer culture and postfeminist culture, looking at materials from both American and international breast cancer activist groups. Postfeminist culture has an influence on breast cancer culture in several ways, through a neoliberal focus on consumption as a form of activism, continual self-monitoring for beauty and health, a “girling” of women, and the sexual subjectification of women. This project focuses on four main breast cancer activism groups and includes a textual analysis of the groups’ awareness and education materials. Included in the textual analysis are responses from popular press and blog sites, which have reacted to the sexual subjectification present in some of the campaigns. This study asserts that sexual subjectification has become a dominant marketing tactic with the rise of postfeminist marketing as a whole.

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Breast cancer activism is all about the boobs. And, yes, in some ways this makes sense in terms of the origins of the disease – a majority of cases arise in women and are most often detected first in the breast. But as opposed to being woman- or patient-centered, some campaign ads have made breasts the main focus: “You know you like them. Now it’s time to save the boobs. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in young women ages 20-49,” reads the text in a 2009 viral video campaign created by the Canadian nonprofit, Rethink Breast Cancer.¹ The majority of the ad is made up of tight camera shots trained on a pair of bouncing, bikini-clad breasts that belong to an MTV News anchor, Aliya-Jasmine Sovani. Although this could be contextualized as a fun, harmless celebration of sexuality in the name of a good cause, something more complex and problematic is going on with the Rethink ad and other breast cancer campaigns such as “I love boobies!” or Save 2nd Base. In a shift that reflects a broader cultural reaction to feminism in the United States and globally, some breast cancer awareness texts of the last decade – print advertisements, viral videos, T-shirts, bracelets, and more – have taken on an overtly postfeminist tone. Some elements of mainstream breast cancer culture have always been postfeminist, which is perhaps reflective of a broader cultural shift, but these campaign materials specifically use certain aspects of postfeminist culture, mainly sexualization, a youthful approach, and neoliberalism. This arises in the commercialized nature of breast cancer awareness, the positioning of breasts as objects and women as sexualized subjects, and the burden of cancer prevention being placed on the individual, a neoliberal public health shift that in effect ignores that

¹ “SAVE THE BOOBS!” YouTube video, 1:02, posted by “thesocietyglobal,” September 8, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQI1tzkwpkI>.

environmental and institutionalized factors play a role in cancer death. Using Angela McRobbie's and Rosalind Gill's work on postfeminist culture as the cornerstones of my analysis, I ask, are these campaign materials endorsing postfeminist culture? How are the groups that produce these campaigns using postfeminist culture as a tactic to stand out from mainstream breast cancer culture?

Elements of postfeminist culture have long been a part of breast cancer culture. The discursive impact of neoliberal makeover messages and commodity activism surrounding breast cancer has been widely covered by scholars such as Samantha King, Ellen Leopold, and Gayle Sulik, among many others.² Their work has been crucial in calling into question the effectiveness of cause-related marketing and systems of governmentality regarding women's health, including defining the term pinkwashing, which in a broad sense is the appropriation of women-empowering symbols for corporate interest.³ In a narrower sense, the term has come to refer to the process of branding products for breast cancer support that are known to be linked with incidences of cancer, such as makeup containing parabens. What have the aforementioned scholars said about the ties between breast cancer awareness, neoliberalism, and the beauty industry? What then is the relationship between neoliberalism, makeover culture, breast cancer awareness, and postfeminism?

As evidenced above, some breast cancer awareness campaigning has become highly sexualized. Breasts, which in American culture are already fetishized and held up

² See: Samantha King, *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2006; Ellen Leopold, *A Darker Ribbon: Breast Cancer, Women, and Their Doctors in the Twentieth Century*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1999; Gayle A. Sulik, *Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women's Health*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011; Barbara Ley, *From pink to green: disease prevention and the environmental breast cancer movement*, Piscataway: Rutgers University Press, 2009.

³ Pezzullo, Phaedra C. "Resisting "National Breast Cancer Awareness Month: The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and their Cultural Performances." *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 89 (2003): 362.

as central symbols of motherhood and sexuality, become objects to be admired and a commodity with the potential to be lost. Some of these campaign ads go beyond objectification – they position women as postfeminist sexual subjects who are desiring and knowledgeable about sex, but present that sexuality within the confines of the male gaze and a narrow definition of beauty.⁴ In postfeminist culture women are, to borrow from McRobbie, in on the joke of sexualized postfeminist messages,⁵ such as the “I love boobies!” campaign. Drawing on Rosalind Gill’s work on postfeminism and sexual subjectivity, I ask, what messages about femininity, sexuality, and health identity do these campaigns contain? Are these messages actually supporting the health of all women?

It is questionable whether these postfeminist campaigning tactics are “worth it” in the name of a good cause. These become even more difficult to challenge when they are touted as such, because challenging them positions a person as critical of an important endeavor: keeping women healthy. While this shift could be explained as a new twist on nonprofit marketing made to garner attention (a common goal for nonprofits in a sector struggling to maintain funding while continually reproducing the same tropes), I look into this question further in terms of cause-related marketing and how these messages fit into this discourse.

In this project I use textual analysis to look at campaign materials from a variety of sources, including Rethink Breast Cancer, the Keep A Breast Foundation, Save the Tatas Foundation, and Save 2nd Base, as well as international groups, and other groups not

⁴ Laura Harvey and Rosalind Gill, Spicing it Up: Sexual Entrepreneurs and *The Sex Inspectors*,” *New Femininities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism, and Subjectivity*,” Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, eds, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011: 56.

⁵ Angela McRobbie, *The Aftermath of Feminism: Gender, Culture, and Social Change*, Trowbridge: The Cromwell Press, 2009: 17.

related to breast cancer. This includes examples from Chile, France, and England, and an analysis of a breast cancer donation video from a YouTube channel usually devoted to explaining how to pick up women. The bulk of my analysis comes from the four aforementioned groups, and it is clear that these groups are making an attempt to stand apart from mainstream breast cancer culture, often through messages of youth, sex, and humor. For the purpose of this project, I have named these groups the “fun, fearless, female” (FFF) groups, evoking the feminine identity presented in *Cosmopolitan* magazine and analyzed by Machin and Thornborrow.⁶ The influence of *Cosmopolitan* is wide. As of 2012, the magazine had 64 international editions and a readership of 3 million in the United States.⁷ When Helen Gourley Brown became editor-in-chief of *Cosmopolitan* in 1965, she drew in new readers and increased ad revenue with her “Cosmo Girl,” a “sexualized symbol of pink femininity.”⁸ Similar themes of independence and empowerment in sexuality, consumption, and the workplace abound in more current issues of the magazine. The “Fun Fearless Female” phrase is on the cover of the UK version of the magazine, but the refrain is also found throughout many other issues. It signifies the *Cosmo* brand, which is based around fun, power, and independence, which is then expressed through social practices such as work, sexuality, health and beauty.⁹ This “fun, fearless, female” outlook embodies the approach the breast cancer groups take. The FFF groups do not always take this approach in every single instance of education and awareness campaigning, but the majority of the materials from

⁶ David Machin and Joanna Thornborrow, “Branding and Discourse: the Case of *Cosmopolitan*,” *Discourse & Society*, 14 (2003): 461.

⁷ Edith Zimmerman, “99 Ways to Be Naughty In Kazakhstan: How Cosmo Conquered the World,” *New York Times Magazine*, August 3, 2012, accessed July 7, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/08/05/magazine/how-cosmo-conquered-the-world.html?pagewanted=all>.

⁸ Laurie Ouellette, “Inventing the Cosmo Girl: Class Identity and Girl-Style American Dreams,” *Media, Culture & Society*, 21, (1999): 359-383.

⁹ Machin and Thornborrow, 458.

them take on at least one of these characteristics (fun, fearless, female). The moniker encapsulates the basic themes I discuss in the following chapters, apparent in postfeminist culture's influence on these breast cancer awareness materials, which have a main focus on the young, sexy body.

I conduct an analysis of overarching campaign messages put forth by these groups on their websites and in other materials, such as magazines, and I look at how the “fun, fearless, female” groups attempt to differentiate themselves from mainstream breast cancer culture, often times with messages that promote postfeminist culture, through support of a neoliberal society and a focus on the body as a site of identity expression. Throughout, I also do in-depth textual analysis of exemplary campaign texts created and distributed by these organizations, for example, the web video by Rethink Breast Cancer introduced above, and the “I love boobies!” bracelets sold by the Keep A Breast Foundation, which landed two students in federal court.¹⁰

This thesis idea was in part inspired by a 2012 article on the feminist-oriented website, *Jezebel*, titled “Save the Women, Not the Boobies,” which discussed the problematic nature of objectifying women in breast cancer awareness campaigns. The *Jezebel* article is part of a real-world conversation in which the participants collectively comment on many of the ideas of postfeminist culture becoming dominant in breast cancer awareness. These conversations are occurring between bloggers and in newspapers and magazines, and they are necessary to my analysis because they help me to better contextualize how people interested in advertising, feminism, or women's health

¹⁰ The courts kept ruling in favor of the students' free speech rights, and in March 2014 the Supreme Court denied the final appeal made by the school district to censor the bracelets. Lawrence Hurley, “Supreme court declines to hear ‘I (heart sign) boobies’ case,” *Reuters*, March 10, 2014, accessed June 12, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/03/10/us-usa-court-freespeech-idUSBREA290SA20140310>.

are receiving these awareness campaigns. I support my analysis of the sexualization of breast cancer with responses to these campaigns, found in a variety of feminist and popular press sources such as *Jezebel*, *The New York Times*, *Slate*, and *The Huffington Post*. The sexualization of the “fun, fearless, female” groups’ campaigns draws much attention from writers at these sources, perhaps because it is becoming a dominant element in the marketing of the FFF groups’ campaigns. This part of my analysis requires more space to discuss because of the plethora of examples, and so it is devoted to the third chapter of my thesis.

My analysis of the breast cancer organizations’ awareness campaigns and the response to them allow me to assess how certain elements of postfeminist culture, especially sexual subjectification, have become dominant in U.S. discourse. This suggests that other elements of postfeminist culture, such as citizen participation through consumerism, have become engrained enough in U.S. culture that they are no longer as effective as marketing tactics, hence the emergence of sexualization and breast cancer. What does it mean for women’s health, and for culture in regard to bodies, health, and sexuality, when breast cancer is framed in these terms?

Literature Review

Breast cancer culture in America is highly established. Groups attempting to challenge the dominant discourse, such as San Francisco-based Breast Cancer Action, are attempting to make changes to a well-entrenched system.¹¹ Not only does it pay culturally for people and companies to support breast cancer research, breast cancer itself is a highly valued commodity in the cause-marketing sphere.¹² The fact that a once invisible,

¹¹ King, 59.

¹² *Ibid.*, 57.

female-oriented disease is now publicly supported in such major cultural arenas as the National Football League is rooted in a specific cultural context. Changes in public health, health campaigning, and marketing have taken place in a society marked by a hegemonic governance of women's bodies, which together have made a fertile site for neoliberal practices and the woman as citizen-consumer to emerge. Concomitantly, elements of postfeminist culture, which has many parallels with breast cancer culture, have surfaced in breast cancer campaigning. This includes a focus on a narrowly achievable "sexy" body through makeover, consumption as a key practice for societal participation, and the endorsement of the neoliberal governance that supports these.

Public health and cause-related marketing

Before discussing breast cancer culture specifically, it is useful to lay out the larger tradition of public health and health campaigning breast cancer activism exists within. The maintenance of the self has long been a successful marketing strategy. For example, the general household disinfectant Listerine was pulling in profits of about \$100,000 annually in 1920, when a successful rebranding of the product as "a cure for halitosis" increased profits to \$4 million by 1927.¹³ Capitalizing on Roland Marchand's notion of "social shame," this type of ad was almost exclusively aimed at women.¹⁴ Along with the increased use of the social shame concept in advertising, there has been a shift in the theorization of public health, from traditional models that had a focus on environmental factors to the "new public health" model, under which individuals are responsible for their own health.¹⁵ This rings true within cancer awareness movements as

¹³ Leopold, 158.

¹⁴ Ibid., 159.

¹⁵ Shona Crabb and Amanda Lecouteur. "Fiona Farewells Her Breasts': A popular magazine account of breast cancer prevention," *Critical Public Health*, 16 (2006): 5.

well, wherein the individual body is at risk based on a person's health practices,¹⁶ instead of bodily risk based on the relationship cancer may have with toxic waste or chemicals the person is exposed to.

Corporate interest now also plays a bigger role in health research. Corporate giving has a long tradition in American culture, dating back to industrial business moguls such as Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller.¹⁷ More recently, cause-related marketing, or CRM, has seen a rise in popularity. Marketing is defined by the American Marketing Association as “the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, marketers and society at large.”¹⁸ Cause-related marketing, then, is this activity when it is operating under a mutually beneficial partnership between a nonprofit and a corporate entity; mutual benefit flourishes when both groups have a positive association as a part of the relationship.¹⁹ Breast cancer is one of the more popular CRM choices, but it has also received some of the harshest criticism.²⁰ One of the more notable examples of a failure of breast cancer CRM was the Kentucky Fried Chicken-Susan G. Komen for the Cure partnership, which resulted in an imbalance in positive association.²¹ While KFC may have gained positive association (and profited) from partnering with Komen, Komen suffered from being linked with a food associated with unhealthy living practices that can increase cancer risk.

¹⁶ Ibid., 8.

¹⁷ Matthew Berglind and Cheryl Nakata, “Cause-related marketing: more buck than bang?” *Business Horizons*, 48 (2005): 444.

¹⁸ Alan R. Andreasen, “Rethinking the Relationship Between Social/Nonprofit Marketing and Commercial Marketing,” *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, 31 (2012).

¹⁹ Berglind and Nakata, 445; Jennifer A. Harvey and Michal A. Strahilevitz, “The Power of Pink: Cause-Related Marketing and the Impact on Breast Cancer,” *Journal of the American College of Radiology*, 6 (2009): 28.

²⁰ Berglind and Nakata, 445.

²¹ Mara Einstein, *Compassion, Inc.*, Berkeley: University of California Press (2012): 77.

However, nonprofits sometimes put out original campaign materials without a corporate partnership. Having a nonprofit status can be beneficial to marketing, advertising, and branding in a way that is distinct from for-profit entities doing these acts. Nonprofits have no shareholders to worry about, and thus campaigns can focus more on public education rather than the aggressive, for-profit promotion of a specific product or service. In nonprofit healthcare marketing, for example, the marketers are setting up a product that the consumer may not need any time soon.²² This point is especially useful when thinking about breast cancer marketing, because many people will never get breast cancer; however, it is important to note that in much breast cancer awareness campaigning, the market is primed to believe that breast cancer will definitely touch their lives in some way (according to the National Cancer Institute, one in eight women will develop breast cancer in her lifetime²³). However, eventually people simply get tired of seeing the same cause repeatedly in the media. When the market is too saturated with one cause, the citizen-consumer will feel tapped out on giving to that cause and experience giving fatigue, which keeps nonprofits and for-profits alike searching for novel ways to market the cause.²⁴

Breast cancer culture in the United States

Americans pump money into the eradication of, and awareness for, breast cancer to the point that it is almost iconic as a cause. Discourse surrounding the common disease is rooted in a specific history that informs the way it functions in American culture today. Women's bodies have for centuries been a site of governance and control; the group is

²² Various, "Advertising by Nonprofit Health Care Organizations," *Inquiry Journal*, 45 (2008): 256.

²³ "Breast Cancer Risk in American Women," *National Cancer Institute*, accessed July 10, 2014, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/detection/probability-breast-cancer>.

²⁴ Berglind and Nakata, 451.

consistently presented as inherently at risk because of, even due to, the female body.²⁵ Twentieth century Victorian etiquette helped to keep breast cancer a hidden disease.²⁶ It was a problem of the weaker sex, whose primary social function was family caretaking (and childbearing), and so a publicly ill mother meant a dysfunctional nuclear family.²⁷ In her theorizing on AIDS, Paula Treichler writes that when the AIDS epidemic came to national attention, the historical, complex links between women's bodies and disease had to be addressed. In fact, "this was a subject with heavy baggage: indeed, with bags that in 1981 were already packed."²⁸ In an epidemic, existing social divisions are intensified and cultural stereotypes are codified, because "there seems to be no time to do otherwise;" these are then reinforced through scientific and medical authorities' communications.²⁹

Although public discontent over breast cancer did not appear until just after *Roe v. Wade* in 1973,³⁰ change had been brewing for years. In the days before easy mass communication in the 1930s, there was the Women's Field Army, who used war-like language and traditional gender roles in their informative pamphlets in an effort to raise awareness about cancer.³¹ One of the first discussions of cancer, and breast cancer, on television in America was the mini-series *Tactic* in 1959.³² Though it may have helped to give breast cancer some well-deserved attention, it also set the tone for the way television would handle the repercussions of breast cancer for women for years to come: that the

²⁵ Tasha N. Dubriwny, *The vulnerable empowered woman: feminism, postfeminism, and women's health*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press (2012): 13.

²⁶ Sulik, 36.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Paula A. Treichler, *How to Have Theory in an Epidemic: Cultural Chronicles of AIDS*, Durham and London: Duke University Press (1999): 43.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Leopold, 193.

³¹ Ibid., 165; King, xiii.

³² Leopold, 238.

diagnosis will affect her self-esteem and relationships.³³ “It means I’ll be permanently disfigured, doesn’t it?” says Diana Van der Vlis’ patient to William Shatner’s doctor, when she finds out that removal of the breast is her only option.³⁴ But beginning in the 1970s, the Women’s Health Movement, in which feminists played a main role, sought to stop women from suffering in silence, and to bring them together to share information and build community over their illness, ultimately working to stop extreme and often unnecessary procedures, such as the Halsted radical mastectomy or high-dose chemotherapy.³⁵ In the early 1970s, an interesting juxtaposition arose between increasing media interest in breast cancer and feminists calling out sexist advertising, creating a conflict between different representations of the breast in media; however, despite any controversial choices, the press remained a critical intermediary for breast cancer patients to get access to medical and scientific information.³⁶ Support groups began forming in the 1990s when feminists found that sharing individual stories could be a powerful tool for organizing and coping.³⁷ The fact that awareness was rooted in feminist movements is important to my analysis of postfeminist breast cancer awareness campaigns, because postfeminist culture acknowledges feminism.

Despite any advances, the discourse surrounding breast cancer has its pitfalls, including a limit on who the discourse includes, a deflection of attention away from other cancers, and an increased focus on neoliberal solutions to the prevention and treatment of the disease. On one hand, it is important to openly discuss a cancer that affects mainly a

³³ Ibid., 241.

³⁴ “William Shatner 1959 Tactic,” YouTube video, 1:10, posted by “Zainin999,” December 1, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wnu9ibzx2Oc>.

³⁵ Barbara Ehrenreich, “Welcome to Cancerland,” *Harper’s Magazine*, 303 (2001): 47.

³⁶ Leopold, 230-231.

³⁷ Ibid., 205.

“private” or “invisible” organ, but breast cancer may still have an uneven visual advantage when it comes to cancers killing women. The consumer citizen is invited to visualize breast cancer as opposed to internal diseases such as ovarian cancer, which has a higher mortality rate than breast cancer and affects 1 in 57 women.³⁸ And although African American women have a lower incidence of breast cancer, they are still more likely to die from the disease than women from any other ethnic background.³⁹ Yet the mainstream public discourse of breast cancer is focused on privileged, white women.⁴⁰

As mentioned previously, consumerism has become a staple of breast cancer culture. Wearing pink T-shirts, buying pink water bottles, consuming pink-frosted cookies, watching *other* people wear pink (in the case of NFL players) have all become synonymous with supporting breast cancer research. However, this is problematic in several ways. One is that because the use of pink to represent breast cancer and the pink ribbon are not trademarked,⁴¹ consumers opting to purchase these products may be duped into thinking they are giving money to a cause they care about when they are not. A potentially deeper problem of positioning the fight against breast cancer as driven by the market is that a neoliberal society supports it. This society is one marked by a civic identity built through consumption practices⁴² and a demand that individuals take responsibility for their own health and psychological wellbeing.⁴³ It touts that the body is

³⁸ Martha Stoddard Holmes, “Pink Ribbons and Public Private Parts: On Not Imagining Ovarian Cancer,” *Literature and Medicine*, 25 (2006): 481.

³⁹ Sulik, 41.

⁴⁰ Dubriwny, 33; Leopold, 20.

⁴¹ Harvey and Strahilevitz, 30.

⁴² King, 39.

⁴³ Lisa Blackman, “‘It’s Down To You’: Psychology, Magazine Culture, and the Governing of Female Bodies,” Reed, Laurie and Paula Saukko, eds, *Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power*, New York: State University of New York Press (2010): 20.

a site of “pleasure, self-expression, and personal fulfillment,”⁴⁴ and that one can live life with freedom and choice, though the choices available may actually be quite limited.⁴⁵

Neoliberalism and breast cancer are linked in several ways, in the notion of the fight against breast cancer as driven by the consumption of the “right” products, in the normalization of breast cancer through aesthetics and makeover, and in the greater discourse of individual responsibility as central to breast cancer prevention.

Breast cancer, and cancer in general, is discussed in terms of a war with individual “soldiers” fighting the disease. Someone who does not die after her first diagnosis of breast cancer is a “survivor,” even though the cancer may come back, and she may still “lose” the battle. The diagnosis and subsequent treatment of breast cancer is framed as a personal battle, something that can be overcome with the right attitude and access to treatment. The patient’s success is dependent on “submission to mainstream scientific knowledge.”⁴⁶ “The new medical consumerism” of the 1990s positioned women as “empowered” breast cancer survivors, and asked them to choose which care or prevention method available was best for them, rather than questioning the options.⁴⁷ Within this neoliberal, postfeminist framework, women are led to believe that there is something they can do to prevent breast cancer; they are told that diet and exercise can work as preventative methods, even though women who stay in shape, who eat right, and who get mammograms can still get cancer. The risk of breast cancer is tied to choice; a woman must be fully aware of her risks and even has a moral obligation to reduce that

⁴⁴ King, 49.

⁴⁵ Adrienne Evans, Sara Riley and Avi Shankar, “Technologies of Sexiness: Theorizing Women’s Engagement in the Sexualization of Culture,” *Feminism & Psychology*, 20 (2010): 117; Shelley Cobb and Susan Starr, “Breast cancer, breast surgery and the makeover metaphor,” *Social Semiotics*, 22 (2012): 89.

⁴⁶ King, 104.

⁴⁷ Sulik, 35.

risk.⁴⁸ The discovery of breast cancer risk-correlated genes BRCA1 and BRCA2 have introduced another dimension of required preventative action. A woman with knowledge of her own genetic mutation then has to make the call – income and health insurance plan aside – on whether a double mastectomy is right for her.⁴⁹ Within this discourse, a focus on environmental factors would threaten breast cancer as corporate America’s “darling” cause, because this would mean corporations were funding research that could challenge unhealthy corporate practices (perhaps not a positive alignment for cause-related marketing). A shift to increased research on environmental factors challenges the dominant paradigms of public health and charity, which rely on individual solutions to societal issues.⁵⁰ Patients, survivors, and their families are not meant to question other factors in the diagnosis of breast cancer, which may be greater health and social issues that are not so easily solved with regular mammograms or routine self examination.⁵¹ Neoliberalism is an important part of postfeminist culture as well; it is no coincidence that popular breast cancer prevention methods and postfeminism developed as a neoliberal framework began to dominate U.S. society.

Despite the key role that feminism played in bringing breast cancer to the forefront of America’s consciousness, part of the normalization of breast cancer has come to fruition through specific aesthetics. Breasts have come to be more than just an appendage, they are for many women a point of identification as women, mothers, wives – reconstructive surgery then is a return to self-identification.⁵² But the aftermath of being diagnosed with breast cancer has also been framed as an opportunity to find one’s “true

⁴⁸ Dubriwny, 40.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ley, 8.

⁵¹ King, 104.

⁵² Cobb, 87.

self.” Though not all patients agree that “cosmetic deceptions” such as wigs or implants are the right idea, between those who think baldness can be sexy or those who look forward to the “surprising new color” their hair may take, women on both sides of the aisle may agree that “breast cancer is a chance for creative self-transformation—a makeover opportunity, in fact.”⁵³ Reconstructive surgery can have a “gateway” effect – when Leopold published *A Darker Ribbon* in 1999, one-quarter of women who had reconstructive surgery on one breast elected to have work done on the other; opening the door to continual “self-improvement” and other “necessary” surgeries.⁵⁴ In addition, these positive makeover stories are accompanied by images of young, “ultrafeminine” survivors beaming with joy and health.⁵⁵ Although breast cancer is most common in women age 40 and older,⁵⁶ youth takes a central role in breast cancer patients reimagining themselves, and this traditional, fresh-faced femininity is cast as an empowering coping strategy.⁵⁷

With the passing of the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act in 1998, the U.S. government helped solidify the dominant way to fight breast cancer in the country.⁵⁸ Seventy percent of the funds raised by the purchase of a specific USPS stamp go to the National Cancer Institute, and 30 percent to the Breast Cancer Research Program of the Department of Defense.⁵⁹ In a neoliberal era, governments tend to enact programs that encourage individual and outside participation from corporations, charities, and other

⁵³ Ehrenreich, 47-49.

⁵⁴ Leopold, 266.

⁵⁵ King, 102.

⁵⁶ Harvey and Strahilevitz, 27.

⁵⁷ Sulik, 39.

⁵⁸ King, 79.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 61.

institutions rather than creating state programs that foster a national society.⁶⁰ The passing of this bill epitomizes the neoliberal role the U.S. government has taken in the “fight” against breast cancer; it is largely hands-off and requires no more from citizens than the purchasing of an item marked pink. This consumer-as-activist mindset is complicated when pink products do not contribute money to breast cancer research, when they contribute relatively little, or when they are “pinkwashed.”⁶¹ The government involvement in the breast cancer movement highlights how discourse surrounding NBCAM has become hegemonic common sense,⁶² to question how the War on Cancer is fought is to question something American.⁶³

Postfeminist culture

Although its name may suggest that it might be another wave of feminism borne out of the previous three, postfeminism is not the logical “next step” for feminism in the way supporters of the ideology might describe it. Postfeminist discourse doesn’t usually say outright that feminism should be rejected but more that it has been “successful.”⁶⁴ What postfeminism does is take feminism into account; it operates as a hegemonic ideology by suggesting that feminism has accomplished its goals and young women have “gained recognition as subjects worthy of governmental attention,” and thus have no need to critique the dominant, patriarchal system.⁶⁵ In doing this, the cultural response to feminism is “inherently contradictory,” because it works to position feminism as a past thing, but suggests that feminism’s success is what makes feminism irrelevant in the

⁶⁰ King, 66.

⁶¹ Pezzullo, 352 and Sulik, 370.

⁶² Pezzullo, 346.

⁶³ King, 103

⁶⁴ Yvonne Tasker and Diane Negra, “Introduction,” *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker, eds, Duke University Press, (2007): 5.

⁶⁵ McRobbie, 57.

present.⁶⁶ It can simultaneously celebrate and blame feminism.⁶⁷ For Angela McRobbie, “feminism taken into account is feminism undone,” and postfeminism allows reconfigurations of the traditionally feminine to surface.⁶⁸ In postfeminist culture, sexism is bound up with discourses of empowerment. What is called “sexual empowerment,” and by association “confidence” and “adventurousness,” has become a compulsory part of young, female subjectivity.⁶⁹ Coinciding with a shift in focus from coalition politics to individual empowerment, the mainstreaming of feminism leads to a diffusion of its politics.⁷⁰ The “fun, fearless, female” texts I look at appear to address this young, white, female subject specifically, and I analyze how the creators do this.

Not only does postfeminism cement traditional forms of femininity within the confines of heterosexual monogamy,⁷¹ postfeminism gives women visibility only through their status as consumers; they are new participants in a “commercially bounded culture,” individuals with purchasing power in a neoliberal society.⁷² As Gill writes, feminism and antifeminism are sutured together with the neoliberal language of individualism.⁷³ This positions postfeminism as greatly different from third wave feminism. While the third wave may have described gender politics as “old-fashioned and dreary,” postfeminism refigures gender politics within these economic confines.⁷⁴ Postfeminism in part constructs empowerment in a material and consumptive manner that is dependent on

⁶⁶ Tasker and Negra, 8.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ McRobbie, 60.

⁶⁹ Gill, “Media, Empowerment, and the ‘Sexualisation of Culture’ Debates,” *Sex Roles*, 66 (2012): 743.

⁷⁰ Sarah Banet-Weiser, “What’s Your Flava? Race and Postfeminism in Media Culture,” *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker, eds, Duke University Press, 2007: 208.

⁷¹ Harvey and Gill, 64.

⁷² Banet-Weiser, 207.

⁷³ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, Cambridge: Polity Press (2007): 270.

⁷⁴ Banet-Weiser, 207.

buying products, because “in the postmodern world the domain of aesthetics has become one of the primary arenas for postmodern forms of governmentality.”⁷⁵ Rosalind Gill sees neoliberalism and postfeminism as so closely related that she asks, “Is neoliberalism always gendered, with women as the ideal subjects?”⁷⁶

Corporeality also takes a main role in the embodiment of femininity in postfeminism,⁷⁷ as it does with the citizen in neoliberalism. Gender and racial identities in a postfeminist cultural context have become commodified because, “it no longer makes sense” financially for the reproducers of ideology to ignore women or people of color.⁷⁸ The focus on the body allows for gender to be partially lived out aesthetically, and the shift from objectification to subjectification requires women to enact a “narcissistic, self-policing gaze.” Rather than being a passive object of the male gaze, this gaze has been internalized.⁷⁹ Sexual subjectification as a concept grew from Foucault’s notion of power exerted “in and through subjects,” rather than as a top down process; the significance of feminism, sexual liberation, and consumerism all play a historical role in bringing this subject into existence.⁸⁰

If having a “sexy body” is presented as a significant source of a woman’s identity,⁸¹ then this notion paired with subjectification means the makeover becomes an important part of the consumerist, postfeminist repertoire. “Empowerment” in postfeminism, dependent on self-confidence and a narrow sexual attractiveness, relies on

⁷⁵ Martin Roberts, “The Fashion Police: Governing the Self in *What Not to Wear*,” in *Interrogating Postfeminism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007): 243.

⁷⁶ Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, “Introduction,” *New Feminities: Postfeminism, Neoliberalism and Subjectivity*, Rosalind Gill and Christina Scharff, eds. New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2011: 7.

⁷⁷ Rosalind Gill, “Postfeminist media culture: Elements of a sensibility,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 10 (2007): 149.

⁷⁸ Banet-Weiser, 203.

⁷⁹ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 90.

⁸⁰ Harvey and Gill, 55-56.

⁸¹ Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” 149.

the fashion and beauty industries,⁸² and these traits are seen as power over patriarchy rather than subjection to it.⁸³ Irony plays an important part in the representation of this postfeminist woman in advertising, film, and television (and, as we will see, in breast health campaigning and advertising). She “gets it” about objectification,⁸⁴ she won’t critique it outwardly lest she be discounted as a “modern, sophisticated girl.”⁸⁵

In Western cultures, ageing for women is mainly about loss; it is presented as a traumatic experience.⁸⁶ Postfeminism is extremely age conscious, and the cult of youth permeates media representations of women in particular.⁸⁷ The post-makeover self is pictured as a “brave new postfeminist self,” who requires continuous self-monitoring and considerable monetary investment in beauty products, salons, spas, and gyms.⁸⁸ Youth and the makeover are also important to breast cancer culture in general, which makes appeals for breast cancer awareness with a postfeminist tone very fitting, as I discuss in chapter two.

Breast cancer culture, then, is highly parallel with many concepts of postfeminism, including women as empowered through individual action and self-monitoring, as participatory citizens in the culture through consumerism, and as sexual subjects who are concerned with the maintenance of their bodies.⁸⁹ Postfeminist health

⁸² Roberts, 229.

⁸³ Ibid., 233.

⁸⁴ Banet-Weiser, 211.

⁸⁵ McRobbie, 18.

⁸⁶ Sadie Wearing, “Subjects of Rejuvenation: Aging in Postfeminist Culture,” *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, Negra, Diane and Yvonne Tasker, eds, Duke University Press, (2007): 280.

⁸⁷ Tasker and Negra, 11.

⁸⁸ Roberts, 237.

⁸⁹ Venke Frederike Johansen, Theresa Marie Andrews, Haldis Haukanes, and Ulla-Britt Lilleaas in “Symbols and Meanings in Breast Cancer Awareness Campaigns” in the *Nordic Journal of Gender and Feminist Research* found objectification in some breast cancer awareness ads, but I will argue that it is in fact sexual subjectification. Rebecca J. Haines, Joan L. Bottorff, Stephanie Barclay McKeown, Erin

discourse offers women empowerment through consumption of pharmaceuticals⁹⁰ and other preventative or treatment methods. In a harkening back to traditional gender roles, women are continually seen as protecting their health not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of others.⁹¹ Tasha Dubriwny calls this subject the “vulnerable empowered woman”: she is postfeminist, has some agency when it comes to her own health, and places the burden of maintaining her health on her own shoulders, freeing other entities from any responsibility.⁹² When women’s health is not looked at through a feminist lens, Dubriwny argues, an understanding of oppression is lost. What takes its place is “a neoliberal equal opportunity or ‘choice equality’ that denies the presence of gender hierarchies and material structures that make opportunity a distinctly unequal phenomenon.”⁹³

There are plenty of parallels between postfeminism and breast cancer culture as it stands, but this correlation is further solidified in the “fun, fearless, female” campaign texts. Within these texts, elements of postfeminist culture are brought to the foreground, and even acknowledged in some instances. This thesis highlights those elements in the text within the context presented above. These texts reveal, within breast cancer culture and perhaps larger U.S. culture as well, that while certain elements of postfeminist culture have begun to solidify themselves as part of the dominant discourse, the sexual subjectification of women appears to be the prevailing element in marketing for

Ptolemy, Joanne Carey and Kelli Sullivan also found sexualization of breast cancer in their study, “Breast Cancer Messaging for Younger Women: Gender, Femininity, and Risk,” in *Qualitative Health Research*.

⁹⁰ Dubriwny, 140; Joshua Gunn and Mary Douglas Vavrus, “Regulation through Postfeminist Pharmacy: Promotional Discourse and Menstruation,” Reed, Laurie and Paula Saukko, eds, *Governing the Female Body: Gender, Health, and Networks of Power*, New York: State University of New York Press (2010): 121.

⁹¹ Dubriwny, 29.

⁹² Ibid., 9.

⁹³ Ibid., 23.

postfeminist culture. The neoliberal society that supports postfeminist culture has already allowed for women as citizen-consumers to be normalized, concomitantly the focus on youth and the makeover that comes with this newfound power as a consumer. But sexual subjectification, internalization of the male gaze as sexual empowerment, as a defining point of confidence and adventurousness in young women⁹⁴ has become a more dominant aspect of postfeminist culture.

Methods

In this project, I analyze the relationship between neoliberalism, makeover culture, breast cancer awareness, and postfeminist culture. I use textual analysis to analyze the discourse of postfeminist culture that permeates the campaign materials of the “fun, fearless, female” groups. I also look at other breast cancer related materials that do not originate from these groups, but also contribute to postfeminist discourse about breast cancer, most prominently the sexual subjectification of women within the breast cancer context.

My textual analysis looks at campaign materials from a variety of sources, including Rethink Breast Cancer, the Keep A Breast Foundation, Save the Ta-tas Foundation, and Save 2nd Base. I analyze the overarching themes expressed in the campaign materials, and include in-depth textual analysis of texts created and distributed by the organizations, including websites, printed material I found through the websites, advertisements, and products (e.g. “I love boobies!” bracelets). I analyze the themes, specific messages and techniques that convey a postfeminist sensibility in these texts. The textual analysis is modeled after Joshua Gunn and Mary Douglas Vavrus’

⁹⁴ Gill, “...the ‘Sexualisation of Culture’ Debates”: 743.

“Regulation through Postfeminist Pharmacy: Promotional Discourse and Menstruation.”

In their 2010 article, the authors look at advertising campaigns surrounding three medications marketed toward women in different stages of menstruation.⁹⁵ The authors build a foundation for analyzing the campaigns, as I have done in my literature review, and then turn to the advertisements themselves to do a close reading of the meaning behind the images and text presented. The authors place their analysis of postfeminist messages in the pharmaceutical campaigns in context with other advertising and with popular health discourse.⁹⁶ I also contextualize the postfeminist messages within mainstream breast cancer culture and discourses of public health.

In my analysis I include press and blog responses to the sexualized breast cancer campaign materials, as I wanted to gain a better understanding of how people are reacting to the advertisements, both positively and negatively. As Tasha Dubriwny writes:

“discourse (language and other symbolic systems we use to understand the world) matters.”⁹⁷ I look at how people see the sexualized campaign materials and how they engage with “the authority of common sense” in this discussion of women’s health.⁹⁸

Similarly, Paula Treichler engages in this type of analysis when she looks at dominant discourse in medical literature and how it was subsequently interpreted in other publications.⁹⁹ I looked at a variety of sources, from feminist-oriented websites such as *Jezebel* and *Bitch Magazine*, to the wider popular press, such as *Slate*, *The Huffington Post*, and *ABC News*.

⁹⁵ Gunn and Vavrus, 113.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁹⁷ Dubriwny, 3.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹⁹ Treichler, 7.

Chapter Breakdown

My project is organized into four chapters. Following this introduction, chapter two will introduce the backgrounds of the “fun, fearless female” groups: Rethink Breast Cancer, The Keep A Breast Foundation, Save the Ta-tas Foundation, and Save 2nd Base. I then analyze some of the themes similar across the campaigns, and the way that the campaigns use these themes to stand out as different from mainstream breast cancer culture. These themes tend to fall into the categories of humor, a youthful address, “cool” product consumption, art, and “fearlessness.” What do these materials have to say about femininity, sexuality, and health within a postfeminist culture? Are the FFF groups reinforcing the mainstream breast cancer culture that they are intending to distance themselves from? What elements of postfeminist culture are apparent in these campaign materials?

In chapter three, I discuss the sexualization of breast cancer in these campaigns. I divide the chapters in this way because, while the strategies I address in chapter two stand out from mainstream breast cancer culture and sometimes reproduce discourses of postfeminist culture, the sexualization of the disease in the FFF groups’ campaigns is a stark difference from the mainstream. It is also a difference that causes the most critical response, and therefore real-world reactions for me to include in my analysis; it is apparent that of the different forms postfeminist culture can take in this situation, sexualization has become dominant.

In the final chapter, I bring together my findings and address the greater implications of the project. These breast cancer awareness campaigns appear to be “justified” in many ways, including the fact that they are for a “good” cause. I ask, what

are the implications of this? Are these arguments valid in any way? What do these breast cancer campaigns indicate about larger postfeminist cultural trends? Lastly, I assess the limitations of my project and suggest paths for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

Markers of difference: The “fun, fearless, female” groups and mainstream breast cancer culture

In a TNT “Dramatic Difference” television spot, Keep A Breast Foundation founder Shaney Jo Darden asserts that what her group does is different from mainstream breast cancer activism. “What makes us [KAB] different is that we focus on prevention.”¹⁰⁰ Mainstream breast cancer activism also focuses on prevention through early detection, but by framing what KAB does as somehow “different,” Darden perhaps hopes to attract a different crowd that is fed up with mainstream breast cancer culture.¹⁰¹ In this chapter, I introduce the “fun, fearless, female” groups of my study, and analyze the ways they attempt to differentiate themselves from the mainstream breast cancer movement. Because their difference from the mainstream is so central to their messages, I focus on some of the main strategies the FFF groups use to differentiate themselves: humor, a youthful address, “cool” product consumption, art, and “fearlessness.” Sexualization is another way the FFF groups market themselves as different. It is closely connected to other aspects of postfeminist culture, such as the focus on a specific type of feminine body and the material consumption required to maintain it, but this campaign tactic stands out as distinct from mainstream breast cancer culture and requires a more in-depth discussion in chapter three.

In this chapter, the tactics I discuss are sometimes simultaneously progressive and regressive, supporting the idea that social change often happens with two steps forward

¹⁰⁰ “TNT Dramatic Difference features Keep A Breast Founder Shaney Jo Darden,” 1:37, posted by “Keep A Breast Foundation,” November 15, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IhIlySJYF98>.

¹⁰¹ Although she didn’t say it, it is possible that Darden was describing KAB’s Non Toxic Revolution work as the KAB difference, an aspect of this group that I discuss more in depth later in the chapter.

and one step back, disadvantaging certain groups while supporting others.¹⁰² These breast cancer awareness materials do not fight directly for the rights of an oppressed group, rather they demonstrate a symbolic tension between discourses that are progressive for women and discourses that are not. In this attempt to stand apart from mainstream breast cancer culture, the discourse still has implications of privilege in terms of race and class, namely that white, upper middle-class women are the central concern. Although these campaigns draw attention for the FFF groups and breast cancer, what are they saying about women's identities in a postfeminist culture? Several of these groups attempt to challenge the problems with mainstream breast cancer culture, such as normalized ideals of beauty and the consumption of "pinkwashed" products, but sometimes the FFF groups' challenges to mainstream breast cancer culture also uphold it. A postfeminist thread that accounts for feminism and subsequently challenges it ties these assertions of difference together. To reiterate, mainstream breast cancer culture is also steeped in postfeminist cultural values, but the FFF groups make an address specifically to a woman who identifies with postfeminist values, including sexual subjectivity, a striving for youth, and neoliberal health practices.

The "fun, fearless, female" groups

Keep A Breast Foundation, Save Second Base, Save the Ta-tas Foundation, and Rethink Breast Cancer are key examples of groups that, in many of their campaign materials, address the "fun, fearless female." Additionally, there are groups who are not necessarily affiliated with breast cancer – such as a YouTube channel devoted to teaching viewers how to pick up women – that create postfeminist breast-cancer-related materials.

¹⁰² Kristan Poirot, "(Un)Making Sex, Making Race: Nineteenth-Century Liberalism, Difference, and the Rhetoric of Elizabeth Cady Stanton," *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, 96 (2010): 202-203.

Rather, a postfeminist breast cancer awareness discourse originates from various spaces, and the varied origins highlight just how common these ideas are. But the main four groups I draw examples from have certain common threads that make them distinct from mainstream breast cancer. The FFF groups all have a youth focus or sensibility, which “girls” women, even through language of empowerment. The FFF groups all have campaign materials/products that position women as sexual subjects, with an internalization of the male gaze, often reinforcing traditional gender norms and standards of beauty. They all also endorse on neoliberal practices, including preventative measures and “correct” product consumption, as ways to keep from getting breast cancer. What is complex about the FFF groups is that they attempt to stand out as different from mainstream breast cancer culture, while often incorporating common tropes utilized in mainstream breast cancer culture.

The Keep A Breast Foundation (KAB) was first a coalition of artists called Modart, based in southern California, according to the KAB website. Founder Shaney Jo Darden was drawn to the “do-it-yourself” style of action sports culture (e.g., skateboarding), and the group’s marketing style continues to be inspired by this aesthetic. After a friend was diagnosed with breast cancer, Modart members created a breast cast art project, consisting of plaster chest casts decorated by local artists. This project was eventually showcased as “Keep A Breast” in 2000 and, with a mission to reach young people about breast cancer “in their comfort zones,” the Keep A Breast Foundation was officially recognized as a nonprofit in 2005.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ “KAB Story,” *Keep A Breast Foundation*, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/about/kab-story/>.

Save 2nd Base is the for-profit partner of the nonprofit Kelly Rooney Foundation, both of which began in 2006 in Pennsylvania after Kelly Rooney, 43, died of breast cancer.¹⁰⁴ The foundation is focused on raising awareness and research money for breast cancer in young women,¹⁰⁵ while Save 2nd Base is committed to raising awareness about breast cancer with some humor, through the selling of breast-cancer-related products.¹⁰⁶ Many of my examples from these two groups come from Save 2nd Base; however, the distinction about cancer in young women that the foundation makes is important to the two groups' part in postfeminist breast cancer awareness discourse.

Save the Ta-tas Foundation is the California-based nonprofit component of the Ta-tas Brand; the foundation is supported by five percent of gross sales from the brand. The Ta-tas Brand mainly sells T-shirts, but also an assortment of other items including mugs, baby bibs, and water bottles. The “for-profit, cause-related” Ta-tas Brand was founded in 2004 by fashion designer Julia Fikse, according to the website. In 2008, Fikse founded Save the Ta-tas Foundation to fund independent cancer research. The group has funded five researchers thus far.¹⁰⁷ The Save the Ta-tas brand and Save 2nd Base are retail campaigns attempting to raise awareness and fundraising for breast cancer through giving to their nonprofit arms.¹⁰⁸

Rethink Breast Cancer, a Canadian charity, was started in 2001 by two women with backgrounds in academic cultural studies, according to the website. The group's

¹⁰⁴ “Foundation,” *Kelly Rooney Foundation*, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://kellyrooney.org/foundation/>; “Our Story,” *Save 2nd Base*, accessed June 14, 2014, <http://save2ndbase.com/story.php>.

¹⁰⁵ “Foundation,” <http://kellyrooney.org/foundation/>.

¹⁰⁶ “Home,” *Save 2nd Base*, accessed June 14, 2014, <http://save2ndbase.com/index.php>.

¹⁰⁷ “About Us,” *Save the Ta-tas Foundation*, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://savethetatas.info/get-involved/about-us/>.

¹⁰⁸ Einstein, 144.

awareness message is oriented toward younger women, “no pink ribbons required.”¹⁰⁹

The group is known for throwing fundraisers that attract a younger crowd, including the Rethink Romp and annual Boobyball.¹¹⁰ Rethink also partners with several companies through sponsorships and cause marketing.¹¹¹

These “fun, fearless, female” groups are making a marked attempt to stand out from the crowd, and to distinguish what they are doing as different from the mainstream breast cancer movement. Their marketing tactics vary, and range from a youthful address to “sexy” breast cancer humor. What these strategies have in common is that they are all ways to attempt to differ from (but nonetheless sometimes uphold) common aspects of mainstream breast cancer culture, such as product consumption for breast cancer, or a sense of empowerment through awareness.

Young people with breast cancer and neoliberal idealism

A youth address has been a popular method with the “fun, fearless, female” groups in order to make them stand out from mainstream breast cancer awareness movements. Additionally, a few of the groups state explicitly in their mission statements that they are attempting to reach a younger audience. This address to youth ranges from a literal statement expressing the desire to reach a younger demographic, to a humorous, youthful address aimed at the “girls” developing cancer in their 30s.¹¹² It is in the Keep A

¹⁰⁹ “About Rethink,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/about-rethink/>.

¹¹⁰ “Event coverage,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/about-rethink/our-press/event-coverage/>.

¹¹¹ “Cause marketing,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 16, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/get-involved/corporate-fundraising/cause-marketing/>.

¹¹² “Libbi Gorr #itouchmyselfproject Ambassador, 3:22, posted by “Chrissy Amphlett,” April 13, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vbq8BLKB1fo>; “Our Story,” <http://save2ndbase.com/story.php>; “TEDxSanDiego 2011 – Shaney Jo Darden – Keep A Breast Foundation,” 8:55, posted by “TEDx Talks,” March 14, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC1NcZNOCuw>.

Breast Foundation's mission to be "youth-focused,"¹¹³ as it is for Rethink Breast Cancer. On Rethink's website, the mission is "To continuously pioneer cutting-edge breast cancer education, support, and research that speak fearlessly to the unique needs of young (or youngish) women."¹¹⁴ The added mention of "youngish" women suggests that although they are appealing to younger women, older women are invited to identify with the group. Despite the focus on younger women, age is still a main, unchangeable risk factor in getting breast cancer. According to the American Cancer Society, about 1 out of 8 invasive breast cancers are found in women under the age of 45, while 2 of 3 invasive breast cancers are found in women age 55 or older.¹¹⁵

For women in Western culture, ageing is presented as a traumatic experience, and postfeminist culture is highly age conscious. Not only is a woman supposed to maintain a specific expression of sexuality, she is also supposed to remain young, or at least maintain a youthful look and attitude. As Projanksy writes, the postfeminist woman can be thought of as "quintessentially adolescent," with popular slogans such as "girls rule" or "girl power" marketed to both grown women and young girls and teens.¹¹⁶ Rethink is addressing this woman in its mission statement. Part of KAB's mission statement is to eradicate breast cancer for future generations with "youth-focused" messaging. This address is carried out in a few different ways, with KAB touring its education booth at outdoor music festivals Warped Tour, SXSW, and skateboarding demo festival Zumiez

¹¹³ "Mission," *Keep A Breast Foundation*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/about/mission/>.

¹¹⁴ "Our manifesto," *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/about-rethink/old-think-vs-rethink/how-we-think/>.

¹¹⁵ "What are the risk factors for breast cancer?" *American Cancer Society*, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/detailedguide/breast-cancer-risk-factors>.

¹¹⁶ Sarah Projanksy, "Mass Magazine Cover Girls: Some Reflections on Postfeminist Girls and Postfeminism's Daughters," *Interrogating Postfeminism: Gender and the Politics of Popular Culture*, Diane Negra and Yvonne Tasker, eds, Duke University Press, 2007: 45.

Couch Tour, its website and YouTube account featuring videos set to the music of bands such as All Time Low and Passion Pit, and videos highlighting do-it-yourself craft projects.

These are all in keeping with the action sports aesthetic founder Darden originally wanted to achieve. Action sports, also called extreme sports, are sports that are seen as having a high level of risk or element of danger associated with them, such as surfing, snowboarding, or skateboarding. This KAB aesthetic grew out of Darden's community before she began the nonprofit, and lends itself well to KAB's youthful, edgy sensibility. It is progressive that women are included in what could arguably be perceived as "manly" sports, but sometimes these women are still sexualized, as in a PSA featuring surfer Kassia Meador, who at the top of the video says, "So...I have something to tell you. I touch myself in the shower. No, not like that!"¹¹⁷

But youth participation seems to prevail over gender. In an ongoing KAB project titled, "This Is My Story," interviewees tell how breast cancer has touched their lives. A majority of the video participants identify themselves as under 30 years old.¹¹⁸ However, some visible supporters of KAB are older than this, including actors Jason Lee¹¹⁹ and David Arquette,¹²⁰ and burlesque performers Dixie Evans,¹²¹ Candy Caramelo,¹²² and

¹¹⁷ "Keep A Breast PSA with Kassia Meador," 1:09, posted by "Keep A Breast Foundation," January 16, 2008, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o0tVCGiVICc#t=23>.

¹¹⁸ "This Is My Story," *Keep A Breast Foundation*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/programs/this-is-my-story/>.

¹¹⁹ "Stereo at Zumiez for Keep A Breast Magazine Launch - Jason Lee, Chris Pastras and Clint Peterson," 1:55, posted by "Keep A Breast Foundation," October 31, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxZAwioifmU>.

¹²⁰ "David Arquette Wants To Talk About Boobies – PSA For Breast Cancer Awareness," 1:01, posted by "Keep A Breast Foundation," February 27, 2013, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rbcdNLMo8c>.

¹²¹ "Keep A Breast's This Is My Story with Dixie Evans and BOB," 2:10, posted by "Keep A Breast Foundation," February 8, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDklLT809HA>.

¹²² "Keep A Breast's This Is My Story with Candy Caramelo," 1:41, posted by "Keep A Breast Foundation," January 22, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj3GHBxY31c>.

Tura Satana.¹²³ Although KAB is mainly targeting a younger demographic, the group is not excluding adults, and shows these adults engaging in youthful endeavors such as skateboarding. It seems to send the message that by supporting KAB, a person does not have to shed youthful pursuits; that a young and playful approach to dealing with breast cancer can be fun for both men and women. In many of the FFF group campaigns, “fun” is generally incorporated as an alternative to fear – fear of cancer, fear of the loss of body parts (hair, breasts, etc), fear of death. I discuss this emphasis on fearlessness (and fearless messaging) more in depth further in this chapter.

Related to the importance of youth is the importance of the makeover in postfeminist culture. As Roberts and others write, if a woman is getting old, postfeminist culture offers rejuvenation and a return to her younger, “better” self through makeover.¹²⁴ The importance of girliness and youth is reiterated in the repeated reference to women as “girls” across the campaigns. In breast cancer culture, makeovers and aesthetics are cast as empowering coping strategies. This may actually help some chemo patients feel a return to normalcy, but it reinforces the cultural standard that normalcy for women is achieved through a certain physical appearance, usually also presented as white. Postfeminist breast cancer campaigning then can be problematic in that it presents a young, ultrafeminine body that may be unachievable after a diagnosis; this body is in fact an impossible standard that many healthy women cannot live up to without the “right” genes or access to surgeries and cosmetics. For example, the women who model the Keep

¹²³ “Tura Satana Talks About Her Experiences With Breast Cancer - Keep A Breast This Is My Story,” 2:01, posted by “Keep A Breast Foundation,” January 21, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8n3wzOcerY>.

¹²⁴ Roberts, 237; Tasker and Negra, 11.

A Breast garments are traditionally “model-thin,”¹²⁵ and a professional model is displayed on the website as the “Featured Caste.” The I Touch Myself project is an Australian breast health campaign that utilizes the double meaning of the Divynls’ 1990 song “I Touch Myself,” which was inspired by the death of Divynls lead singer, Chrissy Amphlett, due to breast cancer.¹²⁶ The project website features many photos of Chrissy Amphlett as a young woman. Amphlett is described as sexy by the project’s ambassadors, and her image fits a traditional standard of sexiness, although the campaign videos feature women who are a range of ages and races. And Rethink’s focus on young women means that many of their campaign videos feature young, conventionally attractive people – Boobyball has been described as a fundraiser attended by “the youngest, best-looking philanthropists.”¹²⁷

In an educational video for teens made by Rethink titled *Be Pink*, survivor Marijana Dumbovic recounts her experience with breast cancer, during which she says, “My first thought was – my hair – oh my god I’m going to lose my hair – I don’t want to lose my hair,” and in a matter-of-fact tone, “You know I’m born with two breasts, and that’s what defines us – our body parts, you know? That’s what people tend to think of – you being a woman – is your female body parts. And I thought wow, I’m gonna lose, you know, a breast.”¹²⁸ She expresses the postfeminist notion that the corporeality of femininity is central to a person’s identity as a woman, and reinforces this idea for the

¹²⁵ “Make Your Actions Reflect Your Words – Keep A Breast i love boobies!” 2:02, posted by “Keep A Breast Foundation,” July 31, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i74xQypcmEk>.

¹²⁶ “Chrissy’s Legacy,” #itouchmyselfproject, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://itouchmyself.org/chrissy/about>.

¹²⁷ “BOOBY BALL 2011,” 1:25, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” October 20, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BKP8-WxBVvQ>.

¹²⁸ “Be Pink,” 17:05, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” April 15, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S918ETYLs>.

intended teenage girl audience of *Be Pink*.¹²⁹ She promotes the idea that losing a breast means losing your identity as a woman. By saying, “I’m born with two breasts,” she places breasts as so integral to feminine identity that it seems as though they were always there, despite the fact that breasts develop with puberty. From a young age, then, postfeminist culture asks girls to be body conscious and aware of their feminine difference. In a marrying of the postfeminist need to maintain this specific body and the idea that exercise can help reduce the risk of cancer, Rethink has a “Fitraising” suggestion for those who want to help raise money for the group. The website reads, “Creating your own Fitraising campaign is about whatever turns you on and gets you moving.”¹³⁰ Now a woman can not only raise money for breast cancer, but also use it as an opportunity to get fit as well, and be empowered through both of these actions. The group also has a series of makeup videos for chemo patients,¹³¹ because, they suggest, even when women have cancer they are uncomfortable looking sick. Discourses of postfeminist culture tell women they can find empowerment through looking good and having a sexy body,¹³² and these are extended to actions you can take to feel better about breast cancer, through fundraising or personal aesthetics.

Connected to the importance of the makeover is the idea that women must take it upon themselves to keep from getting breast cancer; both of these notions are supported by neoliberalism, and both mainstream breast cancer activism and postfeminist logic

¹²⁹ Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” 149.

¹³⁰ “Fitraising,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/get-involved/fitraising/>.

¹³¹ “Rethink Breast Cancer Beauty Blog Part 1 Applying Concealer,” 2:53, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” October 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qw5U6Io5Upw>; “Rethink Breast Cancer Beauty Blog Part 2 Applying Foundation,” 1:56, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” October 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2okWqD99aT4>; “Rethink Breast Cancer Beauty Blog Part 3 Applying Bronzer,” 0:44, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” October 24, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnizCG0DF2c>.

¹³² Gill, “Postfeminist media culture,” 149.

suggest that women can be empowered by these preventative choices. A neoliberal governmentality of health promotes the body as a site of personal fulfillment, and rewards or penalizes individuals for their choices regarding biological self-betterment.¹³³ Again, postfeminist culture suggests that certain bodily aesthetics are central to femininity (and a woman's identity as a woman), and asks that women police themselves to maintain this aesthetic and be empowered by doing so.¹³⁴

Within the “fun, fearless, female” groups’ campaigns and postfeminist culture, women are said to be “empowered” in ways that may not actually be helpful for a positive body image or for breast cancer avoidance. As Projansky writes, a postfeminist approach to breast cancer involves an investment in the “truth the female body can reveal (the ‘breast cancer gene’),” rather than a focus on external factors such as women’s lack of access to healthcare or the environment.¹³⁵ And as Dumbovic suggests in *Be Pink*, breast cancer threatens the literal feminine body, and by extension, a woman’s identity in postfeminist culture.¹³⁶ By preventing this threat from coming to fruition, a woman can be empowered through her choices. Rethink writes that the group’s aim is to empower through education, and to get a woman to be “an ambassador to [her] own health.”¹³⁷ Chicago-based Bright Pink, a group that also focuses on young women with breast cancer, also aims to empower in the face of cancer.¹³⁸ In a postfeminist world, where women are supposed to be men’s equals, the dominant logic of “choice equality”¹³⁹ suggests that there should be nothing stopping them from fending and caring for

¹³³ King, 49.

¹³⁴ Roberts, 229 and 243.

¹³⁵ Projansky, 53.

¹³⁶ “Be Pink,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-S918ETYLYs>.

¹³⁷ “Education,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/our-work/education/>.

¹³⁸ “About Us,” *Bright Pink*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.brightpink.org/about-us/>.

¹³⁹ Dubriwny, 29.

themselves. Postfeminist culture simply assumes this to be true, and does not look at why institutionalized oppression against women and minorities (such as lack of resources to purchase non-toxic makeup or organic food), might complicate a woman's complicity in her cancer developing.

This is similar to the way public health is considered in America on a larger scale, wherein people are educated about disease prevention and are then expected to take the necessary precautions to keep themselves healthy (and, in the case of communicable disease, to keep the people around them healthy). This logic suggests that if a woman discovers she has a BCRA1 or BCRA2 gene mutation,¹⁴⁰ she is expected to take necessary action to prevent breast cancer. This preventative treatment can range from enhanced screening to double mastectomy.¹⁴¹ The expectation is that she will take these steps not only for the sake of her own health but that of her potential future children, although the materials from the “fun, fearless, female” groups tend not to mention future childbearing as a main point of concern in their promotional campaigns. It is also worth mentioning that the “fun, fearless, female” groups place a high value on the self breast exam as an integral way to catch cancer, despite the fact that research suggests the self breast exam does nothing to reduce mortality rates due to breast cancer.¹⁴²

Advocacy groups might be organized around funding research into possible environmental toxins that cause cancer,¹⁴³ but the “fun, fearless, female” groups largely

¹⁴⁰ According to the National Institutes of Health National Cancer Institute website (accessed June 17, 2014), BCRA1 and BCRA2 gene mutation can increase a person's risk for certain types of cancer.

¹⁴¹ “BCRA1 and BCRA2: Cancer Risk and Genetic Testing,” *National Cancer Institute*, January 22, 2014, accessed June 17, 2014, <http://www.cancer.gov/cancertopics/factsheet/Risk/BRCA>.

¹⁴² “Myth #1: Monthly breast self exams save lives,” *National Breast Cancer Coalition*, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.breastcancerdeadline2020.org/breast-cancer-information/myths-and-truths/myth-1-monthly-bse-save-lives.html>.

¹⁴³ Such as Breast Cancer Action, based out of California (<http://www.bcaction.org/our-take-on-breast-cancer/environment/>).

fund awareness education projects and researchers looking into more mainstream prevention measures, such as genetic links. Concomitantly, within this discourse, if a woman has no history of breast cancer and takes the “right” preventative action toward not getting cancer but gets cancer anyway, she is still considered culpable. The neoliberal emphasis on individual responsibility in cancer development through consumptive practices ignores inequalities for women and minorities, and does not question these inequalities. In this, there is an acceptance that cancer can be prevented through individual actions, of which there are suggested several – not eating red meat, not wearing a bra too many hours of the day – even though many of the risk factors associated with breast cancer are unchangeable.¹⁴⁴ With the focus on individual prevention, there is a lack of attention paid to other systemic factors, such as toxic environmental practices, or institutionalized inequalities limiting certain poor or minority women’s access. Then, those women who get cancer despite taking preventative measures are essentially pushed aside in an attempt to explain their cancer with more research into some unknown genetic or preventative link. These patients are seen as empowered through the medical choices available to them, and are not invited to question these choices,¹⁴⁵ just as postfeminism does not invite women to question the striving for a certain young, white, feminine body as potentially problematic.

Breast cancer prevention through consumption

The Keep A Breast Foundation created a social media campaign that involves KAB supporters sharing photos of themselves wearing a KAB shirt or “I love boobies!”

¹⁴⁴ “Truth #7: We don’t know how to prevent breast cancer,” *National Breast Cancer Coalition*, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.breastcancerdeadline2020.org/breast-cancer-information/myths-and-truths/truth-7-dont-know-how-to-prevent-bc.html>.

¹⁴⁵ Sulik, 35.

bracelet with the caption, “This is my pink ribbon.”¹⁴⁶ It is a direct acknowledgement and a rejection of mainstream breast cancer culture – pink ribbons, a central icon to the breast cancer awareness movement, are recognized but dismissed when KAB suggests that the nonprofit’s merchandise can stand in for the pink ribbons. The pink ribbon is old news, and KAB wants to usher in something different to replace it. But wearing an “I love boobies!” bracelet is essentially doing the same thing as wearing a pink ribbon. It is buying a product to support an organization and to declare to the world that the wearer cares about breast cancer. An article in KAB’s free magazine declares that pinkwashing is misleading to consumers and potentially harmful to their health.¹⁴⁷ In the same issue, there is an article on “cool stuff” – products without harmful chemicals KAB wishes to promote, such as paraben- and aluminum-free deodorant, “MUST HAVE” bamboo makeup brushes, and “non-toxic” clay blush.¹⁴⁸ None of the proceeds from these products go to cancer research. KAB is promoting the idea that environmentally friendly product purchase is more effective for breast health than indirectly giving money to cancer research groups by purchasing potentially harmful products. This standpoint assumes that readers will still have a need to use beauty products in a postfeminist culture in which aesthetics are important. Instead of suggesting that a woman stop buying harmful makeup products, instead she must purchase the “right” products, lest she be complicit in her own cancer development. Additionally, while KAB is attempting to distance itself from the pinkwashing of mainstream breast cancer culture, the group still upholds the consumerist

¹⁴⁶ Kimmy McAtee. “This Is My Pink Ribbon – Why Do You Wear Your Keep A Breast I Love Boobies! Bracelet?” *Keep A Breast Foundation*, posted December 3, 2013, <http://keep-a-breast.org/blog/this-is-my-pink-ribbon/>.

¹⁴⁷ “The Dirty Little Secrets of Pinkwashing,” *Keep A Breast Magazine*, Issue 5, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://issuu.com/keepabreast/docs/kabmag5>: 5-8.

¹⁴⁸ “Cool Stuff,” *Keep A Breast Magazine*, Issue 5, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://issuu.com/keepabreast/docs/kabmag5>: 21.

aspects of mainstream breast cancer culture and a sense of progress or empowerment through purchase. The higher average price of these “natural” products is not mentioned. In a YouTube video displayed on the KAB website, a staff member walks the viewer through why she loves her Toyota Prius, complete with Seventh Generation product placement – both brands known for their eco-friendly benefits.¹⁴⁹ While it is progressive that KAB wants its supporters to live a green lifestyle in the hopes that this will lead to decreased environmental toxins (and therefore instances of cancer caused by this), this lifestyle is unachievable for people with limited resources and this standpoint still relies on the neoliberal ideology of consumerism as a type of activism, as long as a person is purchasing the “right” products.

Other of the “fun, fearless, female” groups embrace women’s stereotypical love for shopping, an assumed consumption practice often used in marketing for mainstream breast cancer awareness, and a key way women can be visible in a postfeminist society.¹⁵⁰ Rethink Breast Cancer offers a T-shirt to purchase in support of breast cancer instead of pink “tchochkes,”¹⁵¹ which is not so different from the culture they are trying to distance themselves from. It is pink, it is consumerist, it is using similar fundraising methods, just with different events targeted to a younger demographic. The group also recommends “Retail Therapy” on its website as a way to “get involved”: a list of companies offering products or promotion codes that will benefit Rethink, from water park admission to

¹⁴⁹ “Keep A Breast’s Kimmy McAtee Loves Her Prius,” 2:33, posted by “Keep A Breast Foundation,” August 4, 2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6O1hxRyObwQ>.

¹⁵⁰ Banet-Weiser, 207.

¹⁵¹ “How We (Re)think,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 18, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/about-rethink/old-think-vs-rethink/>.

motorcycle jackets.¹⁵² In a video for Fashion Targets Breast Cancer, supported by Rethink, celebrity endorser Kim Cattrall tells viewers, “Now ladies – like me, I know you like to shop.”¹⁵³ The Rethink website promises readers, “It’s guilt-free when you support Rethink and its partners,” and then offers a list of pink products to choose from.¹⁵⁴ The group also offers a full page of past campaigns.¹⁵⁵ Even though these past partner companies no longer make products tied to Rethink support, Rethink suggests a shopper can still exert her economic power “guilt-free” by buying from companies that at one time had an interest in supporting breast cancer awareness or eradication, seemingly because these brands are more breast cancer aware than others. This cause-related marketing is no different from what many other breast cancer awareness groups do, such as Avon labeling products in support of breast cancer for its Avon Foundation for Women. What is different is that the FFF groups are addressing a specific type of woman as they suggest products to purchase. This is a postfeminist woman who is empowered in her body (health-wise and aesthetically) by purchasing the right products, whether they are products that give proceeds to breast cancer groups or products that are nontoxic.

Empowerment through positive thinking

Another common marketing theme throughout the “fun, fearless, female” groups is the notion that these groups are an aid to empowerment in the face of a scary disease whereas more mainstream breast cancer groups are not. Mainstream breast cancer culture is rife with unflinching positivity and optimism, but the FFF groups are quick to

¹⁵² “Retail Therapy,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/get-involved/retail-therapy/>.

¹⁵³ “Fashion Targets Breast Cancer Canada 2010 – Kim Cattrall,” 1:26, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” April 27, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WvDpd4qjAFw>.

¹⁵⁴ “Retail Therapy,” <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/get-involved/retail-therapy/>.

¹⁵⁵ “Past campaigns,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/get-involved/retail-therapy/past-campaigns/>.

categorize the awareness and education tactics of mainstream breast cancer culture as scary. This is in keeping with postfeminist culture's tendency to make ageing seem scary – the natural end to ageing is death, and breast cancer makes a sickening body and death a real potentiality, perhaps made even scarier in a postfeminist culture that requires its women to be young, sexy, and carefree. For example, Rethink Breast Cancer devotes space on its website to distinguishing itself from the mainstream breast cancer culture Rethink has deemed “old think.”¹⁵⁶ The list is divided into two sections, “old think” and “rethink,” and, at first glance, the nontraditional font makes it look fresh and nonclinical. Although Rethink rejects pink ribbons, pink is still clearly prevalent in the theme for the image, and the group overall. The list distinguishes the “old think” of “scary, complicated” breast exam brochures with the “fearlessness” in its own educational materials, positioning younger women as separate from other adult women, almost as emotionally fragile. This woman, who is both fragile and fearless, is a product of Projansky's “at-risk” and “can-do” girls within postfeminist culture, who are seen as vulnerable at a certain age and suddenly culpable at an older one.¹⁵⁷ She is the adult version (who is still “girlish” within the culture) of the pressures postfeminist culture puts on girls; she is vulnerable to breast cancer, but empowered through awareness (and later responsible for her own survival if she does develop it). She is similar also to Dubriwny's “vulnerable empowered woman” in health, who is at risk for disease but empowered through taking on the burden of her own health through medical choice,¹⁵⁸ but the FFF groups' focus on youth is an important difference between the “vulnerable empowered woman” and the woman they address.

¹⁵⁶ “How We (Re)think,” <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/about-rethink/old-think-vs-rethink/>.

¹⁵⁷ Projansky, 66.

¹⁵⁸ Dubriwny, 140.

Keep A Breast Foundation also echoes this sentiment, and describes the desire to encourage a “positive, ‘can-do’ attitude to prevention dialogue.”¹⁵⁹ This fearlessness is a common refrain in postfeminist culture, particularly women’s magazines, wherein the “fun, fearless female” has agency in her sexuality and the workplace with the right attitude.¹⁶⁰ Gayle Sulik calls this pink ribbon beacon of “feminine style, optimism, courage, humor, and resolve” in the face of breast cancer a “she-ro.”¹⁶¹ This unflinching warrior’s fight against breast cancer sets the tone for how women are required to engage with breast cancer, and Sulik argues these entertaining stories trivialize breast cancer.¹⁶² While fear-mongering is not a positive tactic, this idea of fearlessness in the FFF campaigns seems to downplay the seriousness of the disease by disallowing legitimate fear to be a part of the discourse, and again ignores the fact that larger breast cancer groups such as Susan G. Komen for the Cure are all about a positive attitude and celebrations of survival. Save the Ta-tas Foundation and Save 2nd Base both have a marked effort to be “playful” and humorous as a tactic to separate them from other breast cancer groups. The FFF groups do not directly denounce the mainstream breast cancer movement, but rather use these traits as their unique selling proposition in their marketing schemes. As with the other groups, the address is to a woman with a postfeminist sensibility, no matter her age, who embraces “fun” in the face of breast cancer, which is at the most potentially life-threatening, and at the least a life-altering experience.

Language about living through breast cancer as a positive, or knowing someone who had breast cancer as a positive, is found throughout the “fun, fearless, female”

¹⁵⁹ “Frequently Asked Questions,” *Keep A Breast Foundation*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/faq/>.

¹⁶⁰ Machin and Thornborrow, 458.

¹⁶¹ Sulik, 101.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 104.

groups' web materials. In a video about Kelly Rooney, one of her family members describes the last year of Kelly's life as a "gift," because the family enjoyed themselves, because they got to say what they wanted to say to each other, go on trips, and live in the moment.¹⁶³ This is not to say that being positive in the face of cancer is a bad thing, but this commitment to celebrating unwavering optimism already permeates mainstream breast cancer culture, and diminishes voices of people who are legitimately angry or upset.

Can't you take a joke?

The depictions of breast cancer offered by the "fun, fearless, female" groups are complicated by the humor and irony these campaigns often include. Save 2nd Base's motto is "Pink with a wink."¹⁶⁴ Save the Ta-tas Foundation sells a T-shirt that says, "Laughter heals."¹⁶⁵ As Gill writes, in postfeminist culture, "irony means never having to say you're sorry" for sexist humor, because it's only a joke. Irony is a novel marketing technique, because it flatters audiences through the notion that audiences can "see through" what advertising is doing and it acknowledges that fact.¹⁶⁶ Irony can also be expressed through "silly neologisms," because this couches it in harmless fun – in the case of breast cancer it's ta-tas, boobies, Boobyball, etc. Sometimes sexist humor is presented in period style, which roots the sexism in the past and allows it to have second life as irony today.¹⁶⁷ Rethink employs this nostalgia tactic in a video for its 2008 Fashion Targets Breast Cancer (FTBC) promotion. The video is set up as a "how-to," featuring a

¹⁶³ "Kelly Rooney Honored by the American Cancer Society," *Save 2nd Base*, video, 6:15, http://www.save2ndbase.com/gallery_ACSaward.php.

¹⁶⁴ "Home," <http://save2ndbase.com/>.

¹⁶⁵ "Product Details," *Save the Ta-tas Foundation*, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://savethetatas.spreadshirt.com/official-save-the-ta-tas-laughter-heals-logo-tee-A12318060/customize/color/1>.

¹⁶⁶ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 266.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 111.

male boss and female secretary discussing where to buy the FTBC T-shirt the secretary is wearing.¹⁶⁸ The boss says things such as, “Do those come any bigger?” and, “Say, are those for sale?” while pointing at her chest. The secretary scoffs and slaps him in three different takes until he asks in a nonsexist way. This is slightly different from the irony that never apologizes, but it still harkens back to a “laughable” time in which a woman’s sole defense against sexism in the workplace was a slap across the offender’s face, if that. A postfeminist sensibility requires that women shrug off potentially sexist humor. This is because women are now supposed to “get it,” they’re expected to participate in the joke or else be considered uncool. They’re supposed to know no one *really* thinks of women like this any more—we are “past” a time that needs feminism, after all—so they should just let it go, because men need a space to express their manliness (expressed as chauvinism) in the wake of feminism’s achievements. Ann Johnson discusses this masculine agitation in her analysis of *The Man Show*, which urges viewers to embrace a hegemonic masculinity in the face of the “feminist enemy.”¹⁶⁹ The “fun, fearless, female” breast cancer ads specifically do not point out a feminist oppression, but rather place feminism as a past phenomenon, an “enemy” that no longer has an effect on culture. Without an oppressor, there is nothing to rebel against and no limit on what can be said.

The irony is often couched in innuendo, as in a 2012 “Camp Booby”-themed Boobyball video, which includes interviews with “campers” who “this one time at booby camp” did things such as “pitching tents all over the place.” The video also describes how there “were way too many beavers,” and how “you should have seen the owls at booby

¹⁶⁸ “Fashion Targets Breast Cancer Canada 2008 Video,” 1:07, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” July 22, 2010, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_WGROClxU8.

¹⁶⁹ Ann Johnson, “The Subtleties of Blatant Sexism,” *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 4 (2007): 179.

camp. Enormous hooters.” The humor is framed as humor rather than objectification or sexism because of the postfeminist logic that requires women to be in on the joke, and in fact some of the people speaking the innuendos are women. Because of this, by contrast, the sexuality in the Australian I Touch Myself campaign seems aggressive compared to Save 2nd Base’s joke about sexuality, because the Divinyls’ song the campaign is based around is inextricably tied with female sexual empowerment through a challenging of gendered sexual norms.

Humor can also spread through viral Internet videos, which in the case of a 2013 Internet breast cancer campaign results in the circulation of postfeminist discourse in everyday culture. This campaign, deemed “#mamming,”¹⁷⁰ was created by two women advertising specialists, one of whom had breast cancer.¹⁷¹ Mamming involved an embracing of “the awkwardness of mammograms,” by “laying your (clothed) boobs on a flat surface...or the body of a person who is #planking.”¹⁷² Planking, a viral Internet sensation in the late 2000s, involves lying on top of things with your body flat like a plank; the more bizarre or more dangerous the location, the more impressive the plank,¹⁷³ such as on the railing of a bridge, or across the backs of two camels. The creators of #mamming address a younger audience who know what planking is – and then ask women (some men, too) in a funny video to lay their “boobs on stuff.”¹⁷⁴ It’s an attempt to make the (mostly) private experience of mammography feel more lighthearted, and to do so, asks women to draw attention to their breasts in a public way. All of these uses of

¹⁷⁰ The video is no longer available on the #mamming website. “Mamming Want to find out what is it Look no further,” 1:49, posted by “exclusiveworldnews,” October 22, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4n0CbjpK7c>.

¹⁷¹ “About,” #Mamming, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.thisismamming.com/>.

¹⁷² “What is #Mamming? #Mamming, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.thisismamming.com/>.

¹⁷³ “Who, What, Why: What is planking?” *BBC News Magazine*, May 16, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-13414527>.

¹⁷⁴ “Mamming...” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M4n0CbjpK7c>.

humor still enforce the notion that, in postfeminist culture, women are located in their bodies, *as* bodies, especially when they are bodies at risk.¹⁷⁵ The viral nature of this campaign (as well as others of the “fun, fearless, female” groups, which I discuss more in chapter three) means its hypothetical reach is global, allowing unprecedented interactivity, with less control over the message. As Mara Einstein writes, because of the Internet, brand managers have much less control over brand messaging than even a decade ago.¹⁷⁶

Challenges to the status quo

The “fun, fearless, female” groups consistently try to make themselves distinct from the status quo of mainstream breast cancer culture, and at times fall short of disrupting it, in the process perpetuating the postfeminist culture mainstream breast cancer culture does. However, what these groups are doing is complex, and at times they execute choices that are challenges to the dominant postfeminist discourse about the female body. Sometimes art is a way for the groups to do this, and carve out difference. For the Keep A Breast Foundation, this is rooted in its history – when KAB founder Shaney Jo Darden found out a young friend had breast cancer, she organized an art exhibit called Keep A Breast, featuring plaster breast molds of friends that had been painted on by local artists.¹⁷⁷ This art trend is continued by the group with professional artists, and is also featured in the Treasured Chest Program, wherein KAB (and the Young Survivor Coalition) will send interested groups their own chest-cast making

¹⁷⁵ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 111.

¹⁷⁶ Einstein, 12.

¹⁷⁷ “KAB Story,” <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/about/kab-story/>.

kits.¹⁷⁸ KAB casts all different shapes and sizes of chest, sometimes chests with one breast, or post-mastectomy chests with no breasts at all. Sometimes male chests are cast. However, the “Featured Caste” on the main breast cast art webpage is a professional model,¹⁷⁹ making a statement that the representative “castee” should fit traditional norms of feminine beauty. Darden also places importance on finding beauty through the breast cast project when she explains she began the project when a friend who had undergone a mastectomy told Darden it made her feel beautiful.¹⁸⁰ Her friend made a one-breasted cast, which is challenging hegemonic norms of beauty, and yet the importance of beauty as central to feminine identity is reinforced.

In another progressive embrace of the female body, the I Touch Myself Project in Australia uses an artistic address, with various Australian female singers performing the Divynyls’ “I Touch Myself” as the core of its message to promote self exams.¹⁸¹ The I Touch Myself project aims to empower women through their level of comfort with their own bodies, and willingness to “touch themselves.” The campaign’s core message is grounded in the message of the song, which challenges gendered norms and taboos about masturbation.

Rethink Breast Cancer is also turning to art to raise awareness. In early 2014 Rethink Breast Cancer raised enough funds on IndieGoGo to host “The SCAR Project” photography exhibition in Toronto. The SCAR Project is a series of photos of young

¹⁷⁸ “Treasured Chest Program,” *Keep A Breast Foundation*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/programs/treasured-chest/>.

¹⁷⁹ “Breast Cast Art,” *Keep A Breast Foundation*, accessed June 20, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/breast-cast-art/>.

¹⁸⁰ “TedxSanDiego2011,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC1NcZNOcuw>.

¹⁸¹ “About,” *#itouchmyselfproject*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://itouchmyself.org/project/about>.

breast cancer survivors by fashion photographer David Jay.¹⁸² The subjects have literally been scarred by breast cancer, many of them without breasts. Rethink also hosted panel discussions about the art, one of which questioned beauty norms in the face of mastectomy scars and included as a panelist a Ph.D. candidate who specializes in visual communication, mass media, and health.¹⁸³ When raising funds for the project, one of the Rethink staff asserted that people have never seen anything like it before.¹⁸⁴ Displaying mastectomy scars has a feminist tradition, as it was one of the first tactics feminist groups used to raise awareness about the disease. This is nothing new, but it is telling that it *seems* new in the context of what breast cancer culture is today. Within postfeminist culture, feminism has been taken into account; it is no longer necessary.¹⁸⁵ Concomitantly, a feminist tradition such as photographing mastectomy scars would seem new, especially because neither Rethink nor David Jay label it as a feminist project.

The “fun, fearless, female” groups are paying some attention to environmental factors. Rethink Breast Cancer mentions eating organic food and using natural household cleaning products as a few of the ways to help reduce breast cancer risk.¹⁸⁶ The Keep A Breast Foundation also now has an offshoot project called the “Non Toxic Revolution.”¹⁸⁷ The website offers “non toxic” alternatives for all aspects of life, such as what to consume, what to put on the body, and what to feed the pet. However, research money from the FFF groups still largely goes to research looking into genetic factors or other,

¹⁸² “Mission,” *The SCAR Project*, accessed July 9, 2014, <http://www.thescarproject.org/mission/>.

¹⁸³ “Are We Beautiful?” 57:31, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” May 8, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_459bYcvl10.

¹⁸⁴ “The SCAR Project,” 3:15, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” February 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1LXFsQFFw>.

¹⁸⁵ McRobbie, 57.

¹⁸⁶ “Prevention,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 20, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/breast-cancer/prevention/>.

¹⁸⁷ “Home page,” *Keep A Breast Foundation Non Toxic Revolution*, accessed July 28, 2014, <http://www.kabntr.org/home/>.

more common, preventative research, and the groups are not doing any activism as far as legal action that could put restrictions on harmful environmental practices. Again, this neoliberal notion of purchasing “healthy” products to reduce cancer risk excludes disadvantaged women.

The “fun, fearless, female” groups use many different marketing tactics to stand out from mainstream breast cancer awareness, as evidenced above, at times reiterating the refrain of mainstream breast cancer awareness and at times providing a direct challenge to it. Often, the FFF groups add to a postfeminist cultural discourse through their awareness materials, reinforcing that for women in postfeminist culture, value and identity are rooted in the physical body and the purchasing power to acquire and maintain it. These ideas work well to sell breast cancer awareness because breast cancer poses a direct threat to a defining characteristic of a woman’s body, the breast. The FFF groups also use sexual subjectification as a marker of distinction from mainstream breast cancer culture, and the use of sexual subjectification as a marketing tactic reinforces the points of postfeminist discourse presented in this chapter, including the importance of youth, consumptive practices, and the location of the feminine in a specific body type. In the following chapter, I analyze how the FFF groups use sexual subjectification as a marketing technique within a postfeminist cultural context and the ways other media have engaged with and responded to these specific awareness and education materials.

CHAPTER THREE

Saving the boobs or the women? The sexualization of breast cancer awareness campaigning

One of the most distinct aspects of the campaigns such as the “I Love Boobies!” bracelets and others is a focus on the breasts themselves. While some of the “fun, fearless, female” groups’ campaign materials still participate in the other problematic messages about breast cancer, the materials I address in this chapter are distinct from mainstream breast cancer culture because of their apparent objectification of the breast. I am not the first to recognize this phenomenon – there has been a cultural reaction to these instances across the United States. From bans on the “I love boobies!” bracelets in schools, to blog posts on women-centered websites, to coverage of “shock” advertising on ABC’s *Good Morning America*, this trend stands out as particularly disturbing to some people. I include analysis of these viewer responses to help illustrate how pervasive the “sexy” messaging is, and to better understand the postfeminist cultural context the messaging exists in. *Huffington Post* writer Jessica S. Holmes calls the increased attention to breast cancer “a window of opportunity” for the commercial sector to “‘sexify’ breast cancer.”¹⁸⁸ Surely, the marketing aspect plays into these decisions to sexualize breast cancer, but postfeminist culture also asks women to participate in their own objectification as a central part of their identity, and the tactic distracts from the sometimes unpleasant, sometimes terrifying realities of breast cancer.¹⁸⁹

What the “fun, fearless, female” group materials I will discuss contain is something more than objectification, because women are active participants in the objectification. As scholar Gayle Sulik has explained on her Breast Cancer Consortium

¹⁸⁸ Jessica S. Holmes, “Save the Ta-tas, Save Women?” *The Huffington Post*, October 19, 2012, accessed June 30, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jessica-s-holmes/breast-cancer-awareness_b_1988050.html.

¹⁸⁹ Gill, “...the ‘Sexualisation of Culture’ Debates,” 743.

website, the marketplace has primed girls and young women “to believe that choosing their own objectification is empowering.”¹⁹⁰ In postfeminist culture, this is better labeled sexual *subjectification*. Rather than being passively objectified through the male gaze, postfeminist culture encourages women to enact a self-policing gaze,¹⁹¹ which is harkening back to traditional gender roles and is constantly trying to achieve a narrow view of sexuality and beauty as young, white, and heteronormative. This view relies on the fashion and beauty industries, and thus, a woman’s power as a consumer. Enacting subjectivity through these means is considered a form of empowerment in postfeminist culture; power *over* patriarchy rather than subjection to it.¹⁹² Sexual subjectification is different from objectification and sex positivity, although what makes postfeminist culture so insidious is that both of these ideas are recognized and accounted for within sexual subjectivity.¹⁹³ Within feminism, empowerment through sexuality is a debated issue that can lead to different conclusions in different contexts.¹⁹⁴ In postfeminist culture, this sexual “empowerment” is depoliticized and framed as a means to engage with one’s own desire, choice, and pleasure, by having sex or making oneself over to be an object of another’s (a man’s) sexual desire. When the threat of breast cancer comes into the picture, this empowerment and sense of identification are deeply imperiled because of the reliance on the body as *the* site of power and expression, but these campaigns do not directly address the threat of breast cancer except for the fact that breasts may be a resulting cost.

¹⁹⁰ “Sexual Objectification,” *Breast Cancer Consortium*, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://breastcancerconsortium.net/resources/beyond-awareness-workbook/trends-in-awareness-campaigns/sexual-objectification/>.

¹⁹¹ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 90.

¹⁹² Gill, “...the ‘Sexualisation of Culture’ Debates,” 743.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Nicola Gavey, “Beyond ‘Empowerment’? Sexuality in a Sexist World,” *Sex Roles*, 66 (2012): 718-719.

Sexual subjectification is evident in the names of some of the breast cancer nonprofits, such as the Keep A Breast Foundation, Save 2nd Base, or Save the Ta-tas. In these campaigns, the breast, a symbol of femininity and womanhood, is presented as an object to be protected in the right way or lost to disease, and, by extension, the person's identity as a woman is presumably lost as well. In an overt sexualization of breast cancer, a message from the group Essentially Pink's website (which is affiliated with Keep A Breast Foundation) suggests women take care of themselves with four regular habits: "Self Breast Massage and the Tulip Tap," "Emotions and Environment," "X Out Stress" and "Yes Foods" – or the acronym S-E-X-Y.¹⁹⁵ This focus on sexuality is not totally out of the realm of concern, as breasts are a part of how some women express sexuality, and breast cancer can not only lead to losing a breast, but treatment can also directly affect a patient's sex life.¹⁹⁶ The problem arises when this becomes the main marketing strategy of these campaigns – using the breast as the point of identification for breast cancer awareness campaigning towards the line of defining women by their sexuality with the breast as the central part of that sexuality, and deviates attention away from saving lives. But these campaigns have gotten and are getting attention, explained succinctly by a *Thought Catalog* writer as "sex sells."¹⁹⁷ Postfeminist culture allows this marketing tactic to work because of what it expects from women: sexual subjectification and a focus on their breasts as central to femininity. Additionally, these marketing tactics become a part

¹⁹⁵ "Home page," *Essentially Pink*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://essentiallypink.com/index.php>.

¹⁹⁶ "Sexuality after breast cancer," *American Cancer Society*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancer/detailedguide/breast-cancer-after-sexuality>.

¹⁹⁷ Parker Marie Malloy, "Breast Cancer Awareness Month is a Marketing Scam," October 7, 2013, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://thoughtcatalog.com/parker-marie-molloy/2013/10/breast-cancer-awareness-month-is-a-marketing-scam/>.

of the “construction of culture”¹⁹⁸ when they normalize these ideas instead of engaging with and challenging them.

Defense of these campaigns often stems from a “means to an end” standpoint. In a *Los Angeles Times* article (which was subsequently quoted and responded to on various websites) assessing the new “sexy” breast cancer awareness ads, columnist Dan Neil argues that the ads “represent the rare occasion that the male tendency to objectify the female body is put to good use.”¹⁹⁹ A doctor and blogger for the *Huffington Post* urges, “Can we lighten up? As a card-carrying feminist, I for one am not offended by this ad.”²⁰⁰ In this chapter I am not analyzing the direct effectiveness of the ads, but I will discuss the postfeminist cultural norms they reproduce and question whether they are contributing to potentially problematic discourse regarding women’s health.

Harmless, sexy fun

The sexualized breast cancer awareness and promotional materials are often defended as harmless fun, especially in the case of the Keep A Breast Foundation’s “I love boobies!” bracelets, and various products from Save the Ta-tas and Save 2nd Base. These campaigns are spoken of in a different light, perhaps because they are not *visually* sexual or objectifying, but only *verbally* so. In a local Missouri newscast covering a porn website’s attempt to donate money to the Susan G. Komen Foundation, one interviewee remarked, “I didn’t say it’s not okay to make it sexy or funny, but you have to do it

¹⁹⁸ Susan Bordo, “Introduction,” *Twilight Zones: The Hidden Life of Cultural Images from Plato to O.J.*, Berkeley: University of California Press (1997): 16.

¹⁹⁹ Dan Neil, “‘Save the Boobs’: Breast Cancer Awareness Ad Raising Eyebrows,” September 22, 2009, accessed July 6, 2014, <http://www.latimes.com/kiah-breast-cancer-ad-story-story.html>.

²⁰⁰ Dr. Judith Rich, “Breast Health Month: Know Your Girls, Take the Pledge,” October 7, 2009, accessed July 6, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-judith-rich/breast-health-month-know_b_306328.html.

tastefully like ‘I Love Boobies’ or ‘Bikers Love Boobies.’”²⁰¹ The breast cancer survivor positions these instances as different from the porn website raising money for breast cancer. Although the level of explicitness between these may be different, all of the examples contribute to the perpetuation of a postfeminist culture that asks women to be fun, flirty and (hetero)sexual, and embody these characteristics in the face of breast cancer, as well.

Peggy Orenstein writes of the “I love boobies!” bracelets, “My friend’s daughter may have been uncertain about what her bracelet “for breast cancer” meant, but I am betting she got that femininity equation loud and clear”²⁰²: that breasts are central to embodying the feminine. She questions the value of the “I love boobies!” bracelets when the message about femininity they send is potentially overpowering the message of breast cancer awareness. Although criticism of sexy breast cancer campaigns can include criticism of the bracelets,²⁰³ these bracelets are widely defended, usually in the context of free speech. Two students in a Pennsylvania school district brought the case to national attention when the Supreme Court refused an appeal to hear the case for offensive language, but the bracelets have been banned in other districts as well in Washington state, Wisconsin, and several others.²⁰⁴ In a TEDx Talk in San Diego, KAB founder Shaney Jo Darden shared an example of the self-described hate mail she received at the height of the controversy. It read, “Good Morning Shaney Jo, ...the ‘I love boobies’

²⁰¹ Holly Brantley, “Survivors: Sexualizing breast cancer is wrong,” *KFVS12*, October 31, 2012, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.kfvs12.com/story/19969491/survivors-sexualizing-cancer-is-wrong>.

²⁰² Peggy Orenstein, “Think About Pink,” *New York Times Magazine*, November 12, 2010, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/magazine/14FOB-wwln-t.html>.

²⁰³ Tracy Clark-Flory, “Why I do not “heart boobies,”” September 2, 2010, accessed June 30, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2010/09/02/i_love_boobies/.

²⁰⁴ Coral Garnick, “‘i (heart) boobies!’ bracelet ban continues to ignite debate,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 8, 2013, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://www.jsonline.com/news/wisconsin/pennsylvania-court-allows-bracelets-that-wisconsin-court-turned-down-b9971115z1-218884811.html>.

bracelet further dumbs down the very same target age you are wanting to educate. Honestly, you are creating a sexual divide that was not there before. Wonderful job at making being a female more difficult, kudos to you!”²⁰⁵ Darden goes on to defend the “target age” group – teenagers – as anything but dumb, and as fully aware of the meaning behind the bracelet, but she does not address the second half of the comment, which argues that the attention to “boobies” reinforces a focus on the female body and in some way oppresses women and girls. Wearing an “I love boobies!” bracelet may send the message that the wearer is aware of breast cancer, though it also sends the message that the wearer is at ease with making breasts the focus of the fight as a means to an end for a good cause. This anonymous commenter is getting at the deeper meaning behind some people’s offense at the bracelets: a normalization of language that objectifies the breast rather than simply an issue of free speech, leading some “enthusiastic” male students to tell their female peers, “I love *your* boobies.”²⁰⁶ The phrase on the bracelet has been described as “tongue-in-cheek,”²⁰⁷ “cheeky fun,”²⁰⁸ and “not inherently lewd,” according to the Third Circuit Court of Appeals.²⁰⁹ Though it is not sexually explicit, it is somewhat infantilizing,²¹⁰ and reinforces postfeminist culture’s tendency to “girl” women. I am not arguing that the bracelets should be banned – because this could set a negative precedent for youth free speech – but taken in the wider discourse of trends in breast cancer

²⁰⁵ “TedxSanDiego 2011,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fC1NcZNOCuw#t=119>.

²⁰⁶ “Does the constitution have a heart for boobies?” *Los Angeles Times*, November 20, 2010, accessed July 2, 2014, <http://articles.latimes.com/2010/nov/20/opinion/la-ed-boobies-20101120>.

²⁰⁷ David L. Hudson, Jr., “A call to arms,” *ABA Journal*, 97 (2011): 11.

²⁰⁸ rollover, comment on “‘I Love Boobies’ Bracelet Ban Heading to Supreme Court,” *Jezebel*, October 30, 2013, accessed June 30, 2014, <http://jezebel.com/i-love-boobies-bracelet-ban-battle-heading-to-supreme-1454819846>.

²⁰⁹ Katherine Beard, “Supreme Court Declines to Hear Case on ‘Boobies’ Ban,” *U.S. News and World Report*, March 10, 2014, accessed June 30, 2014.

²¹⁰ In a pop criticism on the immaturity of the bracelets, they even appear on a BuzzFeed listicle by Justin Abarca titled, “18 Things Guys Need to Stop Wearing After College,” April 24, 2014, <http://www.buzzfeed.com/justinabarca/things-guys-should-never-wear-after-college>.

awareness campaigning, this reaction echoes the harmless irony Gill writes about,²¹¹ and arguably serves as a successful marketing tool to hail the “fun, fearless, female.”

Other of the “fun, fearless, female” groups have similar campaign examples following this lighthearted approach, except these are more directly sexualized through innuendo, often placing the women in a place of sexual subjectification. Save 2nd Base, for example, is founded on this notion of a woman as a fun, flirty being. A staple pink T-shirt from the group reads, “Save 2nd Base,” underneath two baseballs that are placed where breasts would be located underneath the shirt.²¹² It draws attention to not only the chest area, but the breasts themselves through representation. A woman who chooses to wear this shirt is intentionally drawing attention to her chest. She is sexual and proud of it, because she is wearing a shirt that declares she wants to make sure she can continue to engage in an act of foreplay; by logical conclusion, she will be excluded from this act if she loses her breasts (or her life) from cancer. The positive response to this generally celebrates the upbeat, humorous nature of the shirts. They’re described as an “allusion to that quaint high-school system in which the bases signify the progression from kissing to sex,”²¹³ “playful,”²¹⁴ and a way to laugh in the face of cancer. The allusion to high school again echoes the postfeminist sentiment that women must remain youthful in order to be considered relevant. In popular responses, the Save 2nd Base T-shirts are often talked about concurrently with Save the Ta-tas. T-shirts from Save the Ta-tas Foundation also offer various messages of postfeminist empowerment through an embracing of one’s

²¹¹ Gill, *Gender and the Media*, 266.

²¹² “Kelly – Fitted T-shirt,” *Save 2nd Base*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://save2ndbase.com/store/kelly-fitted-t-shirt.html>.

²¹³ “Cancer’s New Pitch,” *Newsweek*, September 2, 2007, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.newsweek.com/cancers-new-pitch-100575>.

²¹⁴ Kristen A. Graham, “Going for a double,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 13, 2008, accessed July 1, 2014, http://articles.philly.com/2008-01-13/news/25253680_1_breast-cancer-family-history-mammograms.

“assets” – including shirts that read, “My ta-tas could beat up your ta-tas,” “Caught you lookin’ at my ta-tas – Save the ta-tas,” and “Warning – I have ta-tas and I know how to use them.”²¹⁵ Again, a woman wearing these shirts is enacting her sexual subjectivity, because she is drawing attention to the fact that people will be looking at her breasts and embraces it. She is also positioning herself as a “modern, sophisticated girl”²¹⁶ who within postfeminist culture is in on the joke of objectification. These slogans are another site where the real cost of breast cancer is conflated with the breast as a necessary part of a woman’s sexuality, her awareness of it, and her embracing of it as a key marker of her social identity as a woman in a postfeminist society. Criticism of both Save 2nd Base and Save the Ta-tas generally centers around the argument that the texts are offensive, especially to women who have lost their breasts to cancer.²¹⁷

Health empowerment through mandatory (hetero)sexual femininity

The “fun, fearless, female” groups sometimes push sexual subjectivity into the more literal realm, in which campaign materials “celebrate” female chests. Rethink Breast Cancer has produced several videos to promote events or raise awareness over the years, but a 2009 Internet video promoting Rethink’s annual charity fundraising event, Boobyball, illustrates well the postfeminist worldview espoused by the FFF groups.²¹⁸ Intended by Rethink to be a “viral” video, it welcomingly stirred up controversy in America, and news networks ABC and CNN picked up the video and covered it, with

²¹⁵ “Shop,” *Save the Ta-tas Foundation*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://savethetatas.spreadshirt.com/>.

²¹⁶ McRobbie, 18.

²¹⁷ Solvej Schou, “‘Save the boobs’: breast cancer awareness gets feisty, sexy to lure in younger women,” *The Star Tribune*, October 5, 2009, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://www.startribune.com/lifestyle/63542772.html?page=1&c=y#hvMm3bBmVQ0KsKEq.97>; Lisa Hix, “Save the Women, Not the Boobies,” *Jezebel*, October 23, 2012, accessed July 1, 2014, <http://jezebel.com/5953952/save-the-women-not-the-boobies>.

²¹⁸ The video is not found on Rethink Breast Cancer’s official YouTube channel. “SAVE THE BOOBS!” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CQI1tzkwpkI>.

CNN running the ad in its entirety. *Good Morning America* did a segment inspired by the ad that questioned the value of shock advertising.²¹⁹ Boobyball began as a fundraiser for a 23-year-old woman with cancer, Rethink describes on its website. She survived, and the Boobyball is still held every year to raise money for Rethink.

The 2009 video was produced by MTV for the promotion of Boobyball, and after several rounds of casting to no avail, the producers decided to cast fellow producer and MTV News anchor Aliya-Jasmine Sovani as the main character.²²⁰ Sovani, wearing a bikini, walks around a party, and these wider shots are intercut with close-ups of her chest moving in slow motion. Characters in attendance at the party ogle her. What first distinguishes this as sexual subjectification as opposed to objectification are the knowing glances from Sovani at the beginning of the ad as she begins to walk around the pool. She watches people watching her, and she is visibly enjoying it.²²¹ Though the camera imposes a male gaze on her at times throughout the ad, she is knowingly participating in what is contextualized as a celebration of female sexuality within a certain box. She is young, and she is thin but has large breasts, a beauty standard that is impossible for many women without surgical intervention. She is not white, although she is light-skinned – but racial minorities are not excluded from the postfeminist beauty ideal, as Sarah Banet-Weiser has posited.²²² The setting positions the character as fun and social; she attends parties, parties with pools, which has implications about class status. Postfeminist culture

²¹⁹ “‘Save the Boobs’ Ad Controversy,” *ABC News*, September 23, 2009, accessed July 2, 2014, <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video?id=8648769>; “‘Save the boobs’ ad too sexy?” *CNN*, September 24, 2009, accessed July 2, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/video/#/video/health/2009/09/24/cho.save.boobs.cnn>.

²²⁰ “Behind-the-scenes with Aliya-Jasmine: Save The Boobs,” 2:34, posted by “thesocietyglobal,” September 8, 2009, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYzWv8Ads>.

²²¹ McRobbie, 16. In 2011, British breast cancer awareness group CoppaFeel! remastered the billboard McRobbie references to say “Hello Boobs,” with the permission of the original creator. Smaller text below the ad reads, “Knowing your breasts could save your life” (“What we’ve done so far,” *CoppaFeel!* Accessed July 3, 2014, <http://coppafeel.org/what-we-do/what-weve-done-so-far/>).

²²² Banet-Weiser, 203.

is oriented toward a middle class woman who has the purchasing power necessary to participate in the market of beauty products, salons, spas, and gyms. The video copy reads, “You know you like them. Now it’s time to save the boobs. Breast cancer is the leading cause of cancer death in young women ages 20-49.” Women from vastly different risk groups – 20 to 49 years old – are lumped together and described as “young,” which echoes this idea of “youngish” women hailed in the Rethink mission. In a making-of video for the ad, Sovani says, “Instead of making breast cancer awareness month about an old grandma like, getting a mammogram and making it clinical, I thought, let’s be real with it. Let’s make it very MTV, because the truth is, we all love boobs, so let’s celebrate boobs and save the boobs.”²²³ She positions the loss of breasts as the important cost of breast cancer, as does the video. Rethink has used this tactic in its promotional materials for years, in print and video.

Another fundraiser called “Rethink Romp” has featured print ads for various themes containing innuendo related to that theme, for example, “Where Nautical Gets Naughty,” “Brick won’t be the only thing exposed,” and “With a great rack comes great responsibility.”²²⁴ The latter ad’s tagline has a double meaning – not only should a woman take care of her breasts because of the potential of cancer, but also she is aware of her body and the sexual object that it can be (“a great rack”), and is empowered by this fact.

In another link between female sexual performance and breast cancer, Keep A Breast Foundation made videos of burlesque dancers in which women discuss the literal value of their breasts to their work – they are in an industry in which breasts are “tools of

²²³ “Behind-the-scenes,” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NYzwEFv8Ads>.

²²⁴ “Creative,” *Rethink Breast Cancer*, accessed June 3, 2014, <http://rethinkbreastcancer.com/our-work/creative/>.

the trade.”²²⁵ Performer Candy Caramelo adds, “It’s what’s upfront that counts in burlesque.”²²⁶ By highlighting these women, for whom sex is a part of their industry, KAB normalizes what the women do, supporting a trend of the normalization of porn Angela McRobbie discusses.²²⁷ The neoliberal aspects of the importance of the body in postfeminist culture are made literal when women are profiting directly because of their bodies. A step further than participating in the market as a citizen consumer, these women are capitalizing on the exclusionary beauty standards set forth by that market. Obviously, there is some level of performance skill involved in burlesque, but the women interviewed by KAB make clear that they could not be successful in their profession if not for their breasts. Along the same lines, KAB also did a set of chest casts of “pin-up girls” (models, performers, photographers).²²⁸ Rethink Breast Cancer appeared to share this sentiment when the group accepted a donation from the Exotic Dancers for Cancer, after the Breast Cancer Society of Canada turned down the donation.²²⁹ This is another way the FFF groups differentiate themselves from mainstream breast cancer culture as young, hip, and at ease with an aspect of postfeminist culture that mainstream breast cancer culture is not.

Yet the “fun, fearless, female” groups are not the only groups adding to the discourse of sexual subjectivity for breast cancer. In fall 2012, adult entertainment website Pornhub proclaimed that for every 30 videos watched that are tagged “big tit” or

²²⁵ “Keep A Breast’s This Is My Story with Dixie Evans and the World Famous BOB,”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mDkILT809HA>.

²²⁶ “Keep A Breast’s This Is My Story with Candy Caramelo,”

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj3GHBxY31c>.

²²⁷ McRobbie, 17-18.

²²⁸ Susana Vestige, “Ink n Boobies: Sullen Art Collective’s Kulture Klash Art Show to Debut Pinup Breast Casts,” June 4th, 2014, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://www.keep-a-breast.org/blog/tattoos-pinups-boobies-sullen-art-ink-n-iron/>.

²²⁹ Stuart Hunter, “B.C. exotic dancers’ group finds new charity to accept their donation money,” *The Canadian Press*, published February 14, 2007.

“small tit,” the site would donate 1 cent to the Susan G. Komen Foundation.²³⁰ Komen rejected the donation, and Pornhub donated \$75,000 to various other breast cancer organizations.²³¹ Criticism of this campaign is similar to that of criticism of Rethink’s “Save the Boobs” video: that the women suffering and dying from breast cancer are forgotten when making breasts central to breast cancer awareness campaigning.²³²

Many of these videos and materials are circulated on the Internet, rather than in traditional media. The scope of their reach is then potentially global, and it would be an oversight to ignore the viral nature of some of these campaigns and the lived examples of women expressing sexual subjectification. As mentioned in chapter two, the #mamming movement urged participants to lay their “clothed” boobs on surfaces,²³³ perhaps in an attempt to keep the goal of the movement more about the awkwardness of mammograms and less about the visceral and fleshy sexual definition of breasts. Perhaps the cultural association is inevitable anyway, clothed or not. But, participants’ Instagram photos displayed on the #mamming website actively engaged in sexual subjectivity when they took selfies of themselves mamming with cleavage exposed, oftentimes removing their own faces from the picture, in a photo framed in a stereotypical male gaze. As with Save

²³⁰ Kat Stoeffel, “Is This the Worst Breast Cancer Month Idea Ever?” *New York Magazine*, October 3, 2012, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://nymag.com/thecut/2012/10/this-the-worst-breast-cancer-month-idea-ever.html>.

²³¹ “Pornhub Triples Donation for October’s ‘Save the Boobs’ Campaign,” *AVN Media Network*, November 19th, 2012, accessed July 4, 2014, <http://news.avn.com/company-news/Pornhub-Triples-Donation-for-October-s-Save-the-Boobs-Campaign-494824.html>.

²³² Lisa Knisely, “Enough About Saving the Boobs. What about Saving Women’s Lives?” October 17, 2012, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://bitchmagazine.org/post/enough-about-saving-the-boobs-what-about-women>.

²³³ “What is #Mamming?” <http://www.thisismamming.com/>.

2nd Base and Save the Ta-tas, praise for the movement sums it up as fun and humorous (as the women of *The View* express²³⁴), and criticism calls it ineffective and “cutesy.”²³⁵

Similarly, while the Australian I Touch Myself project is centered around a song that “celebrates female sexuality like no other,”²³⁶ the project asks women to share “#itouchmyselfies,” which are selfies of women grabbing their chests. This again is based on the notion that a woman’s source of empowerment is through breast self exams, but also in her sexual nature. One of the Australian women acting as an ambassador for the project was quick to make a distinction between what the song means and what it means “now,”²³⁷ but more of them focused on the sexual nature of the song in interviews. There is an inevitability to sexuality being a main part of the conversation when you choose a song such as “I Touch Myself.” Again, this is not by nature problematic – the original message behind Chrissy Amphlett’s song was, and still is, empowering for women’s expression of sexuality, but it is part of this larger postfeminist discourse of emphasis on a certain body and sexiness as very important to a woman’s identity.

The KAB YouTube account endorsed the I Touch Myself Project video, and received some backlash from a user who commented, “You guys **would** (sic) approve of someone else sexualizing this disease, wouldn’t you?”²³⁸ KAB defended itself by writing, “We respect that not everyone will resonate with that slogan [“I love boobies”]. We want

²³⁴ “Mamming,” *The View*, 2:19, accessed July 6, 2014, http://abc.go.com/shows/the-view/video/hot-topics-politics-and-social-issues/_m_VDKA0_2u0kxte2.

²³⁵ Mary Elizabeth Williams, “The latest offensive breast cancer meme: Mamming,” October 28, 2013, accessed July 6, 2014, http://www.salon.com/2013/10/28/the_latest_offensive_breast_cancer_meme_mamming/.

²³⁶ “About,” <http://itouchmyself.org/project/about>.

²³⁷ “Clementine Ford #itouchmyselfproject Ambassador,” 3:25, posted by “Chrissy Amphlett,” April 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EeRhkwLxWPU>.

²³⁸ TruWatcher, comment on “I Touch Myself Breast Cancer Anthem #itouchmyselfproject,” 2:32, posted by “Chrissy Amphlett,” April 13, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FeaO2BrrIf8>.

to remove the shame associated with breasts and breasts health,”²³⁹ which is curious considering the hypersexualized nature of some American media and the upward trend of postfeminist culture, which embraces female sexual subjectivity, albeit in a narrow and sometimes exclusive way. Shame is not a part of the conversation in postfeminist culture unless a body does not fit the ideal, but these bodies are not put on display in the first place and so the notion of shame is not in the forefront.

Exhibiting the global reach of these campaigns, a French website launched in the early 2010s called Boobstagram aggregates photos of breasts from Instagram and encourages women to post photos of their chests to raise awareness for cancer. The tagline of the campaign is “Showing your breasts on the Internet is good, showing them to your doctor is better.”²⁴⁰ There are no faces in any of the photos displayed on the home page of the website – the women are actively cropping that out, and many of the photos were already on Instagram when the website began.²⁴¹ Perhaps these women are cropping out their faces for privacy purposes, but it could be that the camera framing is the manifestation of the internalization of the male gaze that defines sexual subjectivity within postfeminist culture. In some instances, the reason for the photos is completely lost, as in a *Gizmodo* article titled, “Boobstagram Is How You Will Spend the Rest of Your Day,”²⁴² which does not mention that the site has anything to do with breast cancer awareness. Boobstagram does not stand alone as an example of potential loss of message

²³⁹ Keep A Breast Foundation, comment on *ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Laura Hibbard, “‘Boobstagram’ Website Curates Photos Of Boobs For Breast Cancer Awareness,” *The Huffington Post*, April 13, 2012, accessed June 4, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/13/boobstagram-photos-of-boobs-breast-cancer-awareness_n_1424241.html.

²⁴¹ Laura Stampler, “Boobstagram Wants Women To Instagram Their Breasts to Fight Breast Cancer,” *Business Insider*, April 13, 2012, accessed June 4, 2014, <http://www.businessinsider.com/boobstagram-wants-women-to-instagram-their-chests-to-fight-breast-cancer-2012-4>.

²⁴² Casey Chan, “Boobstagram Is How You Will Spend the Rest of Your Day,” April 12, 2012, accessed July 6, 2014, <http://gizmodo.com/5901436/boobstagram-is-how-you-will-spend-the-rest-of-your-day>.

in a viral breast cancer awareness campaign. Ambiguous Facebook status updates for breast cancer awareness have also been circulating, which one year included women updating their statuses vaguely naming colors or patterns, and another year had women listing “where they like it.” These were, respectively, inside jokes about underwear type and where these women like to put their purses.²⁴³ The inside joke of the status and the lack of any obvious mention of breast cancer distances this Internet awareness strategy from the disease doubly, instead opting to be fun and flirty. But, whether these Internet campaigns are understood as related to breast cancer or not, they are still a part of the same postfeminist discourse, and they are a part of the discourse in whatever way they are interpreted.

Again, this all evidences the postfeminist cultural norm of sexualized feminine expectation. Within postfeminist culture, this is presented as a choice, but to be seen as a viable, attractive woman in this culture it is more of a requirement to attempt to attain this specific body and put it on display, at minimum through innuendo. This can obscure the real loss of breast cancer, lives, and essentially exclude women who have lost their breasts to cancer. It also works to solidify certain gender expectations, with women as desiring sexual subjects who present it in traditionally hegemonic ways, and this aspect of postfeminist culture has become prominent in recent years. It also raises questions about men’s involvement in breast cancer awareness, including how they perceive their own risk for breast cancer.

²⁴³ Megan Gibson, “Breast Cancer Awareness: ‘I Like It On My Status Update,’” October 5, 2010, accessed July 6, 2014, <http://newsfeed.time.com/2010/10/05/breast-cancer-awareness-i-like-it-on-my-status-update/>.

Postfeminist men and breast cancer

When breast cancer is sexualized, men at risk for breast cancer are essentially ignored. The incidence of breast cancer in men is about 100 times less than women, but the American Cancer Society estimates that in 2014 about 2,360 new cases will be diagnosed in men in the United States.²⁴⁴ When the site of the breast is defined as a point of sexual identification and as part of womanhood, men will inevitably be excluded. However, men actually do factor into these campaigns, perhaps more than would be expected given this perspective. In the heterosexual postfeminist world, women, because they are now allowed to be empowered by their newfound sexuality, want men to be a part of the conversation in certain ways, often explicitly tied to sexuality. As David Arquette says in a PSA for Keep A Breast Foundation, “a large percentage of self-found breast cancer is discovered by a spouse or loved one,”²⁴⁵ bringing sexuality to the forefront of self-detection (whether or not his statement is true). In other similar videos produced by the group, *New Girl* actor Lamorne Morris claims he loves “boobies more than Lamborghinis,”²⁴⁶ and Travis Clark of the band We the Kings proclaims, “I’m a guy and I do love boobies”²⁴⁷ (which caused him confusion before he knew what “I love boobies!” represented), along with numerous other remarks similar to these made in KAB’s videos of its traveling education booth. Save the Ta-tas sells a few T-shirts only

²⁴⁴ “What are the key statistics about breast cancer in men?” *American Cancer Society*, January 31, 2014, accessed July 4, 2014, <http://www.cancer.org/cancer/breastcancerinmen/detailedguide/breast-cancer-in-men-key-statistics>.

²⁴⁵ “David Arquette Wants To Talk About Boobies,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5rbcnLmo8c>.

²⁴⁶ “Lamorne Morris Loves Boobies! PSA For Breast Cancer Prevention – New Girl,” 1:52, posted by “Keep A Breast Foundation,” August 29, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rO7Hxc3OYpQ>.

²⁴⁷ “Travis Clark of We The Kings opens up about Breast Cancer – This Is My Story,” 2:20, posted by “Keep A Breast Foundation,” November 8, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QP2YfttBXM>.

available in a traditional men's style with slogans that echo this sentiment, such as, "If loving ta-tas is wrong, I don't wanna be right," and "Save a life! Grope your wife!"²⁴⁸

Within these contexts, men's participation is not a challenge to anything they have ever done previously in regard to breast cancer, or in their relationships with women. These campaigns equate feeling up a woman's breasts to actively doing something to eradicate cancer. In a *Good Morning America* clip, Rethink Breast Cancer founder MJ DeCoteau says, "I've heard time and time again from young women that have found a lump that they asked their husband, or their boyfriend, to come and just, they're scared and 'can you just check this for me'? We encourage people, you know, have a little fun with your breast check if you want to get your partner involved."²⁴⁹ Fun again crops up as something that can be maintained even when doing something as serious as breast cancer self-exams. This quote from DeCoteau also presents women as vulnerable and fearful of a potentially life altering self-discovery, a fear that can be put at ease, even made fun, when a man steps in. The support of a partner is highly valuable when dealing with disease, but this anecdote adds to potentially problematic discourse of male agency in regard to breast cancer. Men in these instances are represented as "heterosexual gazers" in the background of postfeminist culture²⁵⁰ who can now have a more active role through doing something they hypothetically already enjoy (also like the logic behind the Pornhub "big tit" or "small tit" campaign).

²⁴⁸ "Shop," <http://savethetatas.spreadshirt.com/>.

²⁴⁹ "Save the Boobs' Ad Controversy," <http://abcnews.go.com/GMA/video?id=8648769>.

²⁵⁰ Sarah Projansky, *Watching Rape*, New York: New York University Press (2001): 84.

This is similar to male representation in Rethink Breast Cancer’s PSA video “Man Breasts,” wherein men are depicted with boobs, and seem to be aroused by this fact.²⁵¹ Also a part of this discourse internationally is a 2012 Chilean ad encouraging men to remind the women in their lives to get checked for breast cancer. The ad features footage of women’s chests, with zero footage of women’s faces. At the end of the ad, the text reads, “If we like them so much, we should take care of them. Make a woman get a breast exam.”²⁵² Though most women in the ad (and it is an assumption, on the viewer’s part, to say that they are all women) are sitting around in passive activities, a few women are working and a few are doing other things, such as playing pool at a bar, playing sports, and having sex. The viewer assumes that all of the women (as characters) have picked their own cleavage-accentuating outfits, placing them as postfeminist sexual subjects, the “fun, fearless females” these campaigns hail. Rethink also created a website, no longer online, called checkoutmybreasts.com, wherein a model takes off her shirt, and goes on to perform a self breast exam if the site visitor prompts it with a click on the right link. The website is no longer active, but it experienced several crashes during the time it was online due to a high volume of traffic.²⁵³ This is another example of postfeminist culture positioning this sexual subject as empowered because she is knowledgeable about her own breast health, but also empowered through her expression as a sexual subject. When postfeminist culture asks that women express sexual subjectivity for their own pleasure, any problematic nature of the male gaze is explained away and he is even invited to look.

²⁵¹ “Man Breasts – Commercial,” 0:33, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” March 3, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrcKyc9Baso>.

²⁵² “Breast Cancer PSA Focuses on Boobs, Not Women,” *The Huffington Post*, October 25, 2012, accessed June 4, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/25/breast-cancer-psa-focuses-on-boobs-not-women_n_2018080.html.

²⁵³ Lindor Reynolds, “Just be sure to check your own breasts.com,” *Winnipeg Free Press*, published May 7, 2006.

As a tactic for spreading breast cancer awareness, this could be construed as a means to an end, but these campaigns are upholding postfeminist discourse that no longer questions why this could be troubling for women, and even for men.

In a slightly different (but still postfeminist) light, men show up as eye candy in the Your Man Reminder breast checkup app from Rethink. The promotional video for the app was recognized in 2012 as a TED Ad Worth Spreading,²⁵⁴ although it still garnered some criticism: as one NPR writer put it, “it’s still disconcerting to see breast cancer treated like a flirty game.”²⁵⁵ As character Dr. Rothaford Grey tells the viewer at the beginning of the video, “Studies have shown that women are more likely to watch a video if it features a hot guy,”²⁵⁶ in a postfeminist assumption that heterosexual women embrace that they are now allowed to enjoy men as objects as a way to assert their own heterosexuality. The main hot guy of the video, Andrew, tells the viewer she must give her breasts some “T.L.C.” or, “Touch, look, check.” A feminist blogger raises the question, “Do gay women not also suffer from breast cancer? The fact that men can also develop breast cancer seems to remain fairly invisible, but I guess their breast tissue just isn’t as sexy as women’s.”²⁵⁷ Gay women are never addressed directly by the FFF groups, but sometimes men are. In 2012, British breast cancer awareness group CoppaFeel! partnered with the Male Cancer Awareness Campaign to release a video to address men

²⁵⁴ “Ads Worth Spreading: Your Man Reminder,” *TED*, February 2012, accessed July 6, 2014, http://www.ted.com/initiatives/aws/your_man_reminder.html.

²⁵⁵ Mark Blankenship, “‘Your Man Reminder:’ A Cheeky Breast Health App That Raises A Few Questions,” October 25, 2011, accessed July 6, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/blogs/monkeysee/2011/10/25/141688696/your-man-reminder-a-cheeky-breast-health-app-that-raises-a-few-questions>.

²⁵⁶ “Rethink Breast Cancer Presents: Your Man Reminder,” 2:27, posted by “rethinkbreastcancer1,” October 5, 2011, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VsyE2rCW71o>.

²⁵⁷ “The Hypersexualization of Breast Health and Breast Cancer,” *Feminist Dating*, May 24, 2012, accessed July 3, 2014, <http://feministdating.wordpress.com/2012/05/24/the-hypersexualization-of-breast-health-breast-cancer/>.

with breast cancer. It stars Chris O’Dowd as Lars Larson, the man with “the best job in the world,” the health and safety inspector for the “Topless Female Trampolining World Championships.”²⁵⁸ There is no indication that this is a PSA about breast cancer in men until the last minute of the nearly five-minute video. The video is censored, but it is clear not all of the viewers are watching for awareness purposes; one YouTube user commented to point out the nanosecond that a partial breast and nipple are visible in the video.²⁵⁹ On the website associated with the video, there is a gallery of photos of the women from the video in T-shirts and underwear, distinguished from one another only by their character names (“Miss Wales,” “Miss Norway,” “Miss USA”). They all appear to be Caucasian, despite the attempt at globalizing the fake competition, which reinforces Westernized beauty norms, and serves as a reminder that white women are privileged in breast cancer discourse, despite the fact that African American women die from breast cancer at a higher rate. In all of these ads, men are positioned as onlookers or objects to be looked at – not as victims, and not as having agency in supporting the women in their lives who may have breast cancer, or in doing something to contribute to eradicating breast cancer.

These depictions of men’s involvement in the breast cancer community are narrow, and problematic when they endorse stereotypical gender roles and even encourage unwarranted touching. “Groping” largely has negative connotations when it is in reference to women’s bodies, as in being groped on the bus by a stranger, and it is an unfortunate choice of words to use in reference to helping your wife check for lumps in

²⁵⁸ “Topless Female Trampolining World Championships by MCAC and Coppafeel!” 4:43, posted by MCACtv, September 11, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niO_xtIEFAM.

²⁵⁹ Pedro Gabriel, comment on “Topless Female Trampolining World Championships by MCAC and Coppafeel!” 4:43, posted by MCACtv, September 11, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=niO_xtIEFAM.

her breast. A T-shirt slogan that has cropped up in different instances reads, “If you don’t check them – I will.”²⁶⁰ But, if the men ask nicely first and say it’s for a good cause, then some women might allow it. In these ways, men are accepting that feminism has come and gone, and they are able to solidify themselves as supporters of activism for breast cancer. In postfeminist culture’s support of breast cancer activism, these men are not asked to do anything more than continue to engage in the historical objectification of women, which is now not being challenged because of what postfeminist culture requires of women as willing sexual subjects.

In a YouTube stunt that took these shirt mottos to a literal interpretation, three young men asked random women if they could “motorboat” their breasts (the act of rubbing one’s face back and forth between two breasts) for a \$20 cancer donation by the men per motorboat, and over 100 women participated.²⁶¹ All of the women in the video (who were almost exclusively young, and slender) agreed to participate, although some look uncomfortable in the process of receiving a motorboat from a stranger. The three men are creators of a California-based YouTube channel called Simple Pickup, an account devoted to coaching men on how to pick up women.²⁶² The men also vowed to donate \$100 for every 100,000 views of the video. The Breast Cancer Research Foundation rejected their final donation of \$7,000, and so the three of them decided to find a breast cancer patient through Internet research and donate the money directly to

²⁶⁰ Omayah Atassi, “Relay for Life raises \$138,000 to fight cancer,” *The Michigan Daily*, April 14, 2005, accessed July 4, 2014, <http://www.michigandaily.com/content/relay-life-raises-138000-fight-cancer>; Maria Benson, “Letter to the Editor: Breast Cancer Awareness Shirts Are Distasteful,” May 18, 2009, accessed July 4, 2014, <http://www.westernherald.com/opinion/letter-to-the-editor-breast-cancer-awareness-t-shirts-are-distasteful/>.

²⁶¹ “MOTORBOATING GIRLS FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS,” 4:34, posted by “SimplePickup2,” November 21, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AP8zXJ_xsEc.

²⁶² “About Us,” *Simple Pickup*, accessed July 4, 2014, <http://www.simplepickup.com/aboutus>.

her.²⁶³ They also set up an IndieGoGo fund for the woman that raised another \$17,709.²⁶⁴ The individual donation and IndieGoGo fund are signifiers of a neoliberal society, one that answers a social issue with a personal remedy. In the video chronicling the donation to the single mother of three, the BCRF rejection is explained as the doing of “a small group of feminist radicals” who “thought [the] video was offensive.”²⁶⁵

The video puts into lived practice the implications of postfeminist discourse, in a way that could be linked with prostitution. It is unclear how many women rejected the request for a motorboat, but within postfeminist discourse, even if a woman were uncomfortable with it she is expected to be “playful” and have a sense of humor about it. The added pressure of the motorboating being “for a good cause” may also have influenced some of the women’s decisions. Much of the comments on the original video are about the chests of the women in the video, but some comments raise questions about the motives of the three men, resulting in requests to “stop hating,”²⁶⁶ to “stop acting all sensitive,”²⁶⁷ and to “chill.”²⁶⁸ One female user (assumed female based on avatar and username) wrote, “And they can’t understand why this is offensive why don’t they motorboat a load of nut sacks for prostate cancer?”²⁶⁹ She was subsequently called many things, from “Debbie Downer,”²⁷⁰ to “dumb Cunt.”²⁷¹ A common refrain in responses to

²⁶³ Neetzan Zimmerman, “‘Motorboating for Cancer’ bros do something classy with rejected donation,” December 4, 2013, accessed July 5, 2014, <http://gawker.com/motorboating-for-cancer-bros-do-something-classy-with-r-1476664498>.

²⁶⁴ “Crystal Cody Breast Cancer Fundraiser,” *IndieGoGo*, accessed July 5, 2014, <https://www.indiegogo.com/projects/crystal-cody-breast-cancer-fundraiser>.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ Amy, comment on “MOTORBOATING GIRLS FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS,” 4:34, posted by “SimplePickup2,” November 21, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AP8zXJ_xsEc.

²⁶⁷ jaydeclassik, comment on *ibid.*

²⁶⁸ Nathaniel Greene, comment on *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ victoria mannion, comment on *ibid.*

²⁷⁰ bryco32, comment on “MOTORBOATING GIRLS FOR BREAST CANCER AWARENESS,” 4:34, posted by “SimplePickup2,” November 21, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AP8zXJ_xsEc.

²⁷¹ i am the best, comment on *ibid.*

users criticizing the video was to label them as feminists, despite them never self-identifying as such. Perhaps this is simply echoing what the Simple Pickup men have said about “radical feminists,” but either way, feminism is positioned as something holding back progress and sucking the fun out of something for a good cause. In postfeminist culture, feminism is seen as no longer necessary, and these comments make clear that not only is feminism unnecessary, but it is completely undesirable. Again, the cost of breast cancer is reduced to saving breasts, sometimes specifically for the purpose of men’s pleasure, and if the men are not the ones donating money for motorboats, in these campaigns men are relegated to the roles of sexy breast cancer detectors and loved ones of victims but never as potential breast cancer sufferers.

The viral nature and global scope of these campaigns are making an impact in spreading these messages about postfeminist culture and breast cancer around the world. The fact that *Cracked*, an entertainment website, discussed the trend in a satirical article is perhaps an indicator of the widespread attention these campaigns are getting.²⁷² That this sexualized advertising tactic with regard to breast cancer has picked up traction as a marker of difference from mainstream breast cancer culture has implications about which aspects of postfeminist culture have become dominant. In the concluding chapter, I will discuss this further, as well as assessing the larger implications of the solidification of postfeminist culture in breast cancer awareness campaigning.

²⁷² Soren Bowie, “A Bizarre New Trend in Advertising: Sexualizing Illness,” *Cracked*, May 1, 2012, accessed July 6, 2014, <http://www.cracked.com/blog/a-bizarre-new-trend-in-advertising-sexualizing-illness/>.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

This project highlights the pervasiveness of postfeminist discourse within breast cancer culture, in the United States and even internationally, suggesting that postfeminist ideology has formulated as a reaction to feminism in multiple cultures. The discourse's influence is not limited to the United States alone. In the U.S., the commonality of this discourse coincides with the rise of a neoliberal society that supports individual solutions to societal problems, often through market solutions. In this project, I have distinguished between mainstream breast cancer culture and the “fun, fearless, female” groups, but there are several parallels in the way they both address education and awareness. Certain aspects of postfeminist discourse have always been, and continue to be, a part of breast cancer culture, beginning with prevention. Postfeminist culture assumes that women now have an equal place in society, without recognition of lingering difference between each other and between women and men, including race, class, sexual orientation, etc. With this assumption in a neoliberal culture, women in theory have no limitations to access for preventative cancer care, from eating organic foods to visiting the doctor regularly. This also assumes that individual preventative care is the best option to keep from getting cancer, despite studies that show mammography and breast self exams are perhaps not as effective as once thought.²⁷³ When a woman is free to make the “right” choices, based on what little is really known about the development of cancer, she then appears somewhat culpable if she does actually develop cancer. However, as a cancer patient she has the limited option to become Gayle Sulik's upbeat, sexy warrior “she-ro” in the face of breast

²⁷³ “Myth #2: Mammograms can only help and not harm you,” *National Breast Cancer Coalition*, accessed July 22, 2014, <http://www.breastcancerdeadline2020.org/breast-cancer-information/myths-and-truths/myth-2-mammograms-only-help-not-harm.html>.

cancer,²⁷⁴ empowered through the available medical options (again, somewhat limited) in fighting for her survival.²⁷⁵

The postfeminist discourse that encourages striving for a narrow definition of a feminine beauty through consumptive practices has also permeated breast cancer culture. In mainstream breast cancer culture, this manifests itself as makeover during cancer treatment, wherein looks become an outlet for a return to “normal” life. The “fun, fearless, female” groups also incorporate some of this makeover aesthetic, but a narrow standard of beauty is more often presented in awareness or education materials, suggesting that this body is both something to attempt to achieve and something that could be lost to breast cancer. Examples of this are the standard of beauty presented in Rethink Breast Cancer’s “Save the Boobs” video, or with Keep A Breast Foundation’s “Featured Caste” on its website. These bodies, which measure up to an idealized standard of beauty and are often unachievable without surgical intervention before a breast cancer diagnosis, are emphasized as the ones to admire and are positioned as the ones the world should be concerned about losing to breast cancer.

When it comes to mainstream activism for breast cancer, a neoliberal focus on consumption and individual prevention tends to outweigh critique of larger societal factors involved in breast cancer development, such as toxins in the environment or health care discrimination. Purchasing a product becomes the dominant and acceptable form of activism. As Einstein writes, when people act as consumers, they are looking to fulfill a personal need – which is why cause marketers are reaching out through products

²⁷⁴ Sulik, 101.

²⁷⁵ Sulik, 35.

in the first place.²⁷⁶ And purchasing natural deodorant or an “I love boobies!” bracelet is more than just an attempt at being eco-friendly or supporting breast cancer because, in America, brands are a part of identity creation.²⁷⁷ Donning an “I love boobies!” bracelet says something about the wearer; it says that he or she is not only a supporter of breast cancer, but he or she endorses the brand that KAB is: youthful, fun, and edgy. Similarly, to take an #itouchmyselfie, a photo of oneself mamming, or a picture of one’s breasts for Boobstagram, a person is endorsing the specific way these groups are asking women to think about and present their bodies in the world, and accepting that this is a form of activism.

How education and awareness are marketed, and the audience they are targeted to, are two key differences that distinguish between mainstream breast cancer culture and the “fun, fearless, female” groups. The FFF groups tend to target a younger audience with their breast cancer messaging, an audience perhaps better primed for a postfeminist address, because they were simply born later and have not experienced significant feminist achievements first hand. Although the groups are trying to reach a younger audience, postfeminist discourse that “girls” women makes room for older women to identify with the groups. The motive to reach a younger group of women manifests itself through the ways the FFF groups market their campaign materials, namely in taking a light-hearted, sexy, fun tone. The groups assume that their target audience is attuned to certain things that mainstream breast cancer culture is not, for example, the acceptance of sexual humor as a marketing tactic.

²⁷⁶ Einstein, 133.

²⁷⁷ Einstein, 16.

This messaging relies on a postfeminist cultural shift wherein women, in theory sexually liberated thanks to the feminism of the sexual revolution, express sexual subjectification in media, and sometimes life. As opposed to sexual objectification or sex positivity, sexual subjectification is the internalization and subsequent expression of a male gaze that has been trained on women's bodies in media for decades. Again, Aliya-Jasmine Sovani is expressing sexual subjectification in the Rethink Breast Cancer video "Save the Boobs," as is a woman in real life who wears a "Warning – I have ta-tas and I know how to use them" T-shirt from Save the Ta-tas brand. The FFF groups consistently try to stand out from mainstream breast cancer culture – and sexual subjectification stands out as perhaps the greatest distancing factor between the two. The closest a major mainstream breast cancer group came to sexual subjectification was in a 2009 Susan G. Komen-Yoplait ad, which depicted women pledging allegiance to their "girls," "chichis," "hooters," "ta-tas," and "gazongas," using terms of innuendo to describe their own chests.²⁷⁸ The ad begins on a close-up of a woman with a hand over her chest, and while the camera slowly zooms out, different women's bodies are shown in the frame. The frame never zooms out far enough to show any faces. The ad was a part of a Yoplait "Know Your Girls" campaign partnership with Susan G. Komen, which ended October 31, 2009.²⁷⁹

The sexual subjectification present in breast cancer awareness campaigning incites a range of reactions, from breast cancer survivors who feel the ads take away from the realities of the disease, to newspaper columnists who justify the ads in the name of a

²⁷⁸ "Yoplait Pledge," 0:50, posted by "modem media lab," 2010, <http://vimeo.com/6595055>.

²⁷⁹ "Yoplait 'Know Your Girls' Campaign Educates Young Women About Breast Cancer," *PR Newswire*, September 23, 2009, accessed July 23, 2014, <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/Yoplait-Know-Your-Girls-Campaign-Educates-Young-Women-About-Breast-Cancer-61210277.html>.

good cause. This argument in the name of a good cause is often the main angle in defense of the campaign materials. But like media that have glorified a young, sexualized, usually white, feminine body through the male gaze, this breast cancer advertising is sending messages to women about ideals of beauty, sexuality, and femininity that can be highly exclusionary, even if it is “for a good cause.” Any one woman’s choice to wear a Save 2nd Base T-shirt could have several different outcomes, and it is not possible to speculate over each specific reaction to any of these campaigns materials I discuss in this project. But as a part of wider postfeminist discourse, these materials may be doing less for breast cancer activism than they seem and more harm toward the way women’s bodies are continually regarded in society. Gavey expresses the importance of individual sexual actions as inescapable from a wider discourse when she writes, “As acts in any individual women’s life, they could have a wide range of possible meanings and consequences, but they do also have meaning within a wider logic of gendered sexuality as parts in the broader social (dis)order of gendered sexuality.”²⁸⁰ Sexual subjectification may very well be the way some women feel empowered in their sexuality. But within postfeminist discourse, sexual subjectification is less of a choice and more of a necessity, because the discourse does not include alternatives.

In her book *Watching Rape*, Sarah Projansky categorizes five postfeminist themes she discovered in the popular press. These are linear postfeminism, backlash postfeminism, equality and choice postfeminism, (hetero)sex-positive postfeminism, and postfeminist men.²⁸¹ Although the book was written over a decade ago, many of the points Projansky makes continue to ring true, especially in her analysis of (hetero)sex-

²⁸⁰ Gavey, 721.

²⁸¹ Projansky, 67-68.

positive postfeminism in the context of my project. She writes, “Advertising, in particular, contributes to this version of postfeminism, celebrating women’s ‘equality’ and their access to ‘choice’ (feminism), while marketing commodities that call for and support constant body maintenance (femininity).”²⁸² While purchasing products that support body maintenance is a part of breast cancer culture, so is constant body maintenance for health, in order to keep the threat (cancer) to femininity at bay. Thus far, most research analyzing postfeminist discourse focuses on how dominant postfeminist discourse has become. The longer certain aspects of postfeminist discourse have influence on culture, especially within breast cancer culture (such as consumption for a cause), other aspects of postfeminist discourse arise as dominant. This (hetero)sex-positive postfeminism Projansky describes has become a dominant marketing tactic since she wrote the book.

The “fun, fearless, female” groups are doing “what works” in order to compete in the market of philanthropy. They recognize the establishment of mainstream breast cancer culture and work to change the way breast cancer is marketed by taking an “anti-establishment” stance of sorts. The FFF groups present themselves as a different option, but they are still bound up in a neoliberal society that supports this individualistic idea (or illusion, to some) of choice. This is problematic in the sense that the groups are extremely aware of the rigid societal structure of breast cancer culture, but they continue to be a part of the patriarchal structure that allows postfeminist culture to flourish without question. When even a perceived anti-establishment group continues to reinforce a patriarchal structure, it gives the structure weight, and postfeminist culture is further normalized.

²⁸² Projansky, 80.

It is particularly troubling to some people that these messages of fun and sexiness are being so closely associated with a disease that brings with it suffering and sometimes death. In the documentary *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, Maricela Ochoa, who had stage IV breast cancer at the time of her interview, says:

As much as I know that many people who are – you know, really do have good intentions with a “pink ribbon,” however, maybe that’s all they’re seeing is a pink ribbon. I want them to see the faces. I want them to see women. I want them to see lives. I want them to see people that are hurting and people that are living with stage-four breast cancer. You know, we’re living, we’re human beings. We’re not just a little pink ribbon.²⁸³

Ochoa was expressing her frustration at mainstream breast cancer culture, but her message also works as criticism for breast cancer awareness materials from the “fun, fearless, female” groups, that position breasts as the real cost to cancer, and concomitantly with the loss of breasts, the loss of womanhood, sexual agency, and beauty. Arguably, these things should not be the main focus of breast cancer messaging, as loss of life weighs in as a greater cost than all of these, regardless of a goal of “fearless” awareness campaigning. Additionally, if culture allowed for more definitions of what identifying as a woman means, these fears would not be able to take center stage as the main cost of breast cancer.

This project has only scratched the surface when it comes to analyzing how the “fun, fearless, female” breast cancer messages are received. It would be irresponsible to imagine how these materials are received in any given situation, because as some defenders of the materials argue, they very well may work to get people talking and caring about breast cancer who may never have given it a second thought. This project was limited by method, and a path for future research on this topic may include

²⁸³ *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, directed by Léa Pool, (2011; Montreal: National Film Board of Canada; 2012), DVD.

interviews, surveys, or focus groups that try to get a larger number of real world responses to the FFF groups' campaigns. This could help better answer the question of how, as a society, we weigh the cost-benefit of potentially problematic messaging "for a good cause."

It is a challenge to critique materials created by people who likely have nothing but the best intentions for making positive changes in the world. I am also "enmeshed" in the same culture that the people creating and reacting to the breast cancer materials are. However, while it is possible to sympathize with individual choices that can reinforce problematic discourse and norms, it is vital to see these choices within a broader context, because individual choices also work to construct culture.²⁸⁴ By taking a step back and choosing to look at individual actions in regard to breast cancer as a part of a bigger discourse about women's bodies and health, we can attempt to make changes that can guide research and awareness in the right direction – to a point where women are not defined by strict body conventions and where the burden of breast cancer development is not placed solely on individual action or inaction, but recognizes that larger societal and environmental factors play a role.

²⁸⁴ Gavey, 723.

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