

Pretty in Pink: The Susan G. Komen Network and the Branding of the Breast Cancer Cause

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The pink ribbon is a ubiquitous fixture on the consumer landscape of contemporary America. Emerging over the last two decades as the symbol for the fight being waged against breast cancer, the color and image now adorn packaging for everything from trash bags to cosmetics, cereal to cleaning products, postage stamps to guacamole. The already pink Energizer bunny now dons a pink ribbon as he keeps going and going to fight breast cancer as well as power the nation's electronic devices. The National Football League donned pink during October 2009 in support of October's National Breast Cancer Awareness Month and Muslim women veiled themselves in pink hijabs for the annual Global Pink Hijab Day at the end of October.¹

Aging baby boomers, those most at risk from the disease can now write with, drink out of, sleep under, read with, and indulge their inner chocoholics with products designed to remind them of that threat. This blitzkrieg of cause marketing, spearheaded by the Susan G. Komen Network and its army of corporate sponsors is admittedly taking the fight to this dread disease. The plethora of pink ribbons to be found in virtually every shopping venue represents a marketing bonanza for those corporations savvy enough or committed enough to jump on board the Komen bandwagon. The millions of dollars that have been raised to fight breast cancer are unquestionable evidence of an ardent desire to eradicate this disease. The invasion of the pink ribbon into the visual lexicon of virtually every American adult has raised awareness of the disease, a vital step in the detection and treatment of most cancers. Despite all this apparent good however, manifested in dollars for research and

¹ For more details on these campaigns go to the NFL A Crucial Catch site at www.NFL.com/pink and the Global Pink Hijab Day official site at <http://www.pinkhijabday.net/>.

cognizance of the need for exams and screening, the pink ribbon phenomenon spearheaded by the Susan G. Komen machine reveals much darker realities about American marketing, consumerism, philanthropy, gender relations, and the perils of branding. The Komen brand has achieved virtually unrivaled cachet in the philanthropic world. With all of this quasi-consumer success however, has come all the pitfalls inherent in such success. This analysis will show that while philanthropic brands must undertake many of the same strategies for success as corporate brands, and while philanthropic brands are not immune to the problems facing corporate brands, their cultural resonance and ultimate non-capitalist orientation do afford them a more readily earned and maintained social legitimacy than their corporate counterparts. This raises the question, are the capitalist strategies of corporate branding prettier in pink?

Background

Susan G. Komen the network takes its name from Susan G. Komen the woman and breast cancer victim who died of the disease in 1980. Out of her sister Nancy Brinker's grief came the organization that has shone a brighter light on the tragedy of breast cancer than any other advocacy group in the country.² Additionally, because Brinker's focus was always on her sister and her sister's memory, the network gave a face to the disease.³ At a time when breast cancer was discussed in hushed tones and treated with a certain taboo by its victims, their families, and the public

² The Porter Prize is an annual prize given by the University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health. Ms. Brinker received this honor in recognition of her work at the helm of Susan G. Komen for the Cure (Collins 2009).

³ Breast cancer remains the most prevalent form of cancer to afflict women. About 207,090 new cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed in women in the United States in 2010 and about 40,000 will die (Breast Cancer Statistics). There are 2.5 million people alive today who have survived the illness. The World Health Organization estimated that there are 519,000 deaths worldwide from the disease (Fact Sheet No. 297). That reality and those numbers should serve as a backdrop for all that is said here.

at large, the Komen Network, building upon the work done by former first lady, Betty Ford, removed the stigma, started the conversation, and prompted a complete reversal in public perceptions and attitudes. Today breast cancer is an openly discussed part of American culture with the month of October devoted yearly to its eradication in the United States for nearly a quarter century.

With Susan G. Komen as the personification of breast cancer's everywoman, the network launched its advocacy efforts in 1982. Prior to launching the network, Brinker had been a member of the executive training program for Neiman Marcus, a talk-show host, and a director of public relations for the Hyatt Regency Hotel in Dallas. More recently, Brinker served as United States Ambassador to Hungary and Chief of Protocol in the George W. Bush Administration (Leone 2009). She took her experience and success in the corporate arena and applied it to the non-profit sector. The result was the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation (which changed its name to Susan G. Komen for the Cure in 2007), an organization that boasts more than 100,000 volunteers working through a network of 125 United States and international affiliates (Collins 2009).

The structure and attitude of the network as well as its unparalleled success reveal sometimes unfortunate realities of corporate America and women's place in it as much as they reflect the tragedy of breast cancer. Nancy Brinker set out to found an organization of women for women in which they would be empowered, not just to fight a disease intimately associated with femininity, but to run a multi-million dollar, multi-national organization committed to the eradication of that disease. According to the Susan G. Komen for the Cure website, "we're proud of the fact that we don't simply dump funds and run. We create activists – one person, one community, one state, one nation at a time – to try and solve the number one health concern of women" (Brinker 2010).

The Network's claim that breast cancer is the "number one health concern of women" alludes to both the character and critique of the Komen Network's activism. By the numbers, breast cancer should not be the number one health concern of women. According to the American Heart Association half of all women who will die this year will die from heart disease or stroke; 500,000 per year compared to 40,000 from breast cancer. Yet 67% of women name breast cancer as their biggest health concern compared to 7% for heart disease and 1% for stroke (Mosca et

al. 2003). Thus, breast cancer is the health threat about which women are most aware. Additionally, though men can get and are getting breast cancer in increasing numbers, the disease is generally perceived of as a female affliction. Thus, breast cancer activism targets women and when it reaches out to men, as it frequently does, it is typically in the context of helping women. Women have been victimized by breast cancer but spouses, fathers, brothers, and sons can take up the fight to protect and/or save women from this disease by participating in breast cancer philanthropy.

The Komen for the Cure website claims that every major advance in the fight against breast cancer has been touched by the network, its people, and its advocacy. Komen for the Cure has “helped train more than 400 breast cancer researchers and funded more than 1,800 research projects over the past 26 years.” They have provided more money for breast cancer research and community health programs than any entity besides the United States government, and Komen for the Cure’s goal is to “energize science to find the cures” (“Why Komen?”). The Komen Network has raised 1.3 billion dollars for research, education, and health services. Today Komen for the Cure has members and conducts activities in over 50 countries.⁴

The measure of Komen for the Cure’s success in the battle against breast cancer is found as surely in these numbers of billions of dollars raised for research as in the survivorship rates of those stricken with the disease. In these two sets of numbers, we see the two faces of the Komen organization. The former is the face of high finance and corporate America where the skills Nancy Brinker honed in her for-profit past have been put to good use in her not-for-profit present. These numbers encompass an advertising/marketing juggernaut in which dozens of high profile national sponsors help Komen for the Cure raise millions annually to continue its work against breast cancer. Komen’s Million Dollar Council, for example, is comprised of twenty businesses with million dollar annual contributions. Corporations such as Avon, General Electric, Bristol Myers Squibb, Ford Motors, and Lee Jeans are among

⁴ To review where Susan G. Komen For the Cure stands on Breast Cancer Research, Early Detection, Access to Quality Care, and Health Reform issues go to <http://www.komenadvocacy.org/content.aspx?id=58>.

the ranks of Komen's corporate sponsors (Million Dollar Sponsor). On the other end of the philanthropic/activist spectrum are the tens of thousands of grassroots volunteers, many of them breast cancer survivors, who take the Komen message from Wall Street to Main Street and personalize the battle being waged against this disease. It is through the efforts of this latter group, the everyday activists, that the Komen Network achieves and maintains much of its social legitimacy, a legitimacy sometimes threatened and even eroded through corporate sponsorship.

Grassroots activism

Many of the everyday pink ribbon volunteers, participants in the Komen for the Cure activities, and consumers of the Pink Ribbon products are motivated to participate in Komen's quest for a cure for breast cancer because the disease has personally affected them. The Race for the Cure events are annual events held in scores of cities around the country and likely the most well known and most effective elements of their advocacy and awareness-raising campaigns. They attract some serious runners and tens of thousands of walkers. Each participant's admission and/or pledges provide the basis of the fundraising effort. Equally important to the revenue raised however, is the politicized character of the races that take on many of the sociological characteristics of a march as opposed to a fun run. The racers occupy a public space. By their sheer numbers and location they garner media and popular attention. Additionally, due to the prominent place afforded current patients and survivors in the races, they are truly empowering events that succeed in turning an everyday activity and its participants, into activists marching for a cure. As evidence of the widespread success of the Races for the Cure, Komen announced on March 10, 2009 the first annual Global Race for the Cure. The Global Race for the Cure funds breast cancer programs for the medically underserved throughout the National Capital Area and abroad ("International Races").

The runners and walkers in the dozens of Races for the Cure that take place annually remind all who see them of the human tragedy that is cancer and as such form a crucial moral and empathetic bulwark of the Komen for the Cure initiatives. It is unquestionable that the Komen Network could not have reached its present level of success without the

invaluable assistance of the members of its Million Dollar Council, but it is these tens of thousands of runners and walkers that form the socio-cultural structure upon which the marketing campaigns of the iconic Komen brand find resonance with American consumers. As shall be discussed below, the pink ribbon affixed to the box of cereal or bottle of detergent prompt us the American consumer to purchase said cereal or detergent not because it symbolizes the corporate beneficence of Kellogg's or Tide, but because it reminds us all of the mothers, daughters, sisters, friends who have been afflicted by this disease and those who run or walk on their behalf or perhaps in their memory every year. As we shall see, the corporate component of the Komen agenda is formidable and lucrative, but much of that strength and success rests on the individuals whom the disease has affected and who take to the streets to march for the cure.

Marketing a disease

When the noble actions of these running, walking, buying activists are juxtaposed with the far more questionable actions of corporate profiteering, the Komen for the Cure organization becomes the subject of greater scrutiny and the focus of legitimate criticism. The Komen Network has been questioned, even vilified for a marketing strategy that at best makes it a pawn to the corporate mandate and at worst makes it complicit in the manipulation of American consumer behavior and philanthropic impulse. Those that question it point out that Komen is profiting from a disease that it claims it wants to eradicate. If this disease is indeed eradicated, how will the Komen Network sustain itself? Inherent in all the philanthropic rhetoric surrounding the organization is this "conflict of interest" and the fact that the organization is using for profit corporate marketing strategies and making millions of dollars. To understand its conflicted polarity and the development of this conflict of interest, we must examine the history of the Susan G. Komen brand, the nature and meaning of iconic brands, the unique characteristics of branding in the non-profit and/or philanthropic sector, and the cultural context within which all of this occurs and exists.

The branding of Komen for the Cure made it the organization it is today. As an advertising executive Nancy Brinker was well aware of the power of a brand. Ad agency founder David Ogilvy's, definition of a

brand is “the intangible sum of a product’s attributes: its name, packaging, and price, its history, its reputation, and the way it’s advertised” (Quoted in Dvorak 2009: 10). A brand is a promise that a product or an organization makes to its constituency. It is successful by making an emotional connection to a target audience (Dahlén et al. 2010: 195). The genius of the Susan G. Komen brand is that it taps into highly emotional issues. Founder Nancy Brinker used the name and memory of her dead sister to start this organization and launch its activism. The power of this message is that most Americans can relate to the loss of a loved one or have lived with the fear of such a loss.

One of Komen for the Cure’s attributes is its logo or trademark, the pink ribbon, which is the centerpiece of its brand. According to published reports the pink breast cancer ribbon was originally peach. In the early 1990s, 68-year old Charlotte Haley, whose mother, grandmother, and sister had all had breast cancer, made peach-colored loops at her dining room table. She distributed the ribbons in sets of five along with a card that said: “The National Cancer Institute annual budget is \$1.8 billion, only 5 percent goes for cancer prevention. Help us wake up our legislators and America by wearing this ribbon.”⁵

In a truly grassroots campaign to defeat breast cancer, Haley passed out cards in her community, wrote to prominent women, and spread her message by word-of-mouth. *Self Magazine* asked Ms. Haley if they could take her peach ribbon campaign national, but she did not want her crusade to bring awareness to the cause to become too commercial. To avoid legal trouble, *Self Magazine’s* attorney advised it to use another color; and they chose pink. In 1991, pink ribbons were handed out at the

⁵ Komen is routinely criticized for supporting research for a cure to the detriment or virtual exclusion of funding for preventative measures. However, as the story of Charlotte Haley and her peach loops reflects, Komen is not alone in this perspective or the critique of it. Haley was taking a purposeful political step and asking all those who received a peach loop to do the same. Her goal was not to promote exams or mammography, but to enlist thousands of recruits in a Capital Hill budget battle over the allocation of funds. While her efforts were ultimately eclipsed by the Komen Network and a variety of other breast cancer advocacy organizations, her prescience in identifying a basic and ongoing flaw in the governmental response to cancer is undeniable (Fernandez 1998).

Race for the Cure in New York City. In 1992, *Self Magazine*, in partnership with Estee Lauder, launched its pink breast cancer ribbon campaign. Estee Lauder distributed 1.5 million ribbons along with laminated cards describing how to conduct breast self-examination. Within the year, the peach ribbons were forgotten (Fernandez 1998).

Of course, the ribbon is a symbol that dates back decades and was for much of its iconographic history associated with the return of soldiers from war. Similarly the color pink has been associated with femininity since the 1940s though more directly associated with infants and children than with adult women. Thus, the fusion of the ribbon and the color pink became one of the most potent branding symbols in modern marketing. Komen adopted a familiar advertising technique by using an already popularized symbol, making it their own, and expanding its influence in the consumer marketplace.

When this technique is used successfully to create a symbol that resonates widely in the marketplace it is said to have acquired brand recognition. When this recognition increases to a point where there is enough positive attitude and response to it in the culture in which it exists, it is said to have achieved brand franchise. The Pink Ribbon campaign can be said to have reached brand franchise proven by the sheer fact that 67% of women said that breast cancer is their number one health concern when, as mentioned previously, the health statistics do not support that this should be so. As a brand's franchise grows, if its attributes are such and conditions are right, it can become an iconic brand. An iconic brand is a brand that is so successful that it takes on a larger meaning than simply symbolizing a product, company, or service. An iconic brand symbolizes a belief system, shared experience, or emotion widely held in a particular society (Holt 2004: 1). Examples of iconic brands include Harley Davidson Motorcycles, Coca Cola, and McDonalds.

Susan G. Komen for the Cure has followed what Douglas Holt, author of *How Brands Become Icons: The Principles of Cultural Branding* (2004) called the cultural branding model to achieve iconic branding status (Holt 2004: 36). First, the organization began by addressing a contradiction in our society: the notion that very few dollars were being devoted to breast cancer research and yet each year 200,000 people became victims of the disease. Second, the organization's belief that the disease can and will be completely eradicated has provided a

positive outlet for much of the fear and anxiety surrounding this deadly disease and has perpetuated a necessary story or myth upon which a brand develops. By using a personal tragedy to convey a need, Komen and its cause-marketing partners have helped to establish the cultural relevance of the pink ribbon specifically and the breast cancer cause more generally. Third, wearing the pink ribbon or buying a pink ribbon adorned product has provided society with a ritual action in which people can participate and do their part, helping to buy into the belief that the disease will be eradicated.

Having achieved iconic brand status, the Susan G Komen Network has been able to raise over \$30 million dollars a year since the early 2000s through an advertising and marketing technique known as cause marketing. Cause marketing is a type of marketing that involves a non-profit organization joining forces with for profit businesses. One of the first examples of this was when the March of Dimes teamed up with the Marriot Corporation in 1976 for the opening of a 200-acre family entertainment facility called Marriott's Great America. The complex was in Santa Clara, California but the campaign was held in 67 cities throughout the Western United States. This campaign broke all fundraising records for the Western Chapters of the March of Dimes, and it provided hundreds of thousands of dollars in free publicity for the successful opening of the Marriott entertainment complex. Bruce Burtch conceived of the program and went on to coin the phrase, "Do Well by Doing Good" (Burtch).

Over the last two decades, "cause-related marketing" and "cause marketing" have continued to grow as a means for product sales, promotions, and collaborations between companies and nonprofit causes. From 1990 to 1998 businesses involved in cause marketing increased over 400 percent. In recent years companies have made more long-term commitments to causes. These companies are what industry expert Carol Cone today calls "cause branders," companies that take a long-term, stake holder-based approach to integrating social issues into business strategy, brand equity, and organized identity.⁶

⁶ The 1999 Cone/Roper Cause Related Trend Report found that given a choice, 78 percent of adults said they would be more likely to buy a product associated with a cause they care about, 66 percent said they'd switch brands to support a

Susan G. Komen for the Cure has based much of their donation generation on this technique. They have received over \$30 million a year through corporate sponsorships. Their website lists over 185 corporate partners with almost as many programs for October 2009 alone. One can click on each program and get detailed facts on the partnership, its fiscal provisions and history, and its contribution to the Komen cause. For instance, the Energizer Family of Brands launched a Joining for the Cure platform in 2009 at the retail level. Through this combined effort Energizer will be making a contribution to Komen for the Cure for \$400,000. Beginning July 1, 2009 Schick, through the Quattro for Women brand, will donate an additional \$50,000 from a free music download promotion (“Corporate Partners”).⁷

Criticism: slactivism and pinkwashing

The Komen Network’s significant success with cause marketing both in terms of the number of corporate sponsorships and the amount of revenue generated however, has led some to question its methods and criticize its efforts. Such critiques have come from within the ranks of consumer advocates and industry watchdog organizations and as well as from those who share Komen’s goal of curing breast cancer. The organization Breast Cancer Action, for example, has responded to the use of cause marketing and corporate profiting from the pink campaign by

cause, 61 percent said they’d switch retailers to support a cause, and 54 percent would pay more for a product that supported a cause they care about (McConnell 2007: 70).

⁷ For other examples of cause related marketing see Sokol. Komen’s hold on female boomers and corporations eager to reach them however has sometimes been eroded by Komen’s support of controversial organizations like Planned Parenthood. Komen’s support for Planned Parenthood is rooted in the broad spectrum of female health services their clinics provide including breast cancer screenings for low-income women. When Komen refused to stop funding Planned Parenthood, the pro-life owner of the Curves fitness chain withdrew his financial support for the organization. Ironically, regular exercise is and has been a proven preventative measure for breast and several other kinds of cancers, but abortions like those provided by Planned Parenthood have been known to increase the risk of breast cancer in women (Stanek 2010).

creating a project called *Think Before You Pink*. The *Think Before You Pink* campaign has questioned many of the motives and tactics of organizations such as Komen for the Cure. The BCA has accused Komen and like organizations of slacktivism and pinkwashing tactics and calls for transparency and accountability in companies that participate in these efforts (“Think Before You Pink”).

The Urban Dictionary defines Slacktivism as “the act of participating in obviously pointless activities as an expedient alternative to actually expending effort to fix a problem.” Slacktivism applies to both individual activity and collective action. The latter is large-scale industrial-perpetrated slacktivism, which is highly planned, professionally coordinated and intended to advance a self-serving industrial agenda. Corporate-sponsored slacktivism is, in short, “implemented to stop social change that could, in the long run, be crucial to society’s long-term well-being” (Landman 2008a).

Slacktivism dates back to the mid 1980s when the tobacco industry undertook a campaign to derail efforts to ban smoking in public places by promoting segregation of smokers into smoking sections in restaurants and other like facilities. Clearly limitations on public smoking would have had adverse effects on the tobacco company’s profitability, but to oppose the bans outright would have been to provoke popular backlash sustained by indignation at the obviously self-serving motives of the companies. So, in order to avoid such a backlash, the tobacco companies, led by Philip Morris, got out ahead of the issue and suggested and then supported the smoking section alternative, labeling it as progress and reform (Landman 2008a). If one thinks through the logic of smoking sections or recalls passing through a smoking section to reach a non-smoking section, the futility of attempting to confine smoke to one section of an open space is apparent. Nonetheless smoking sections are still used in some locales more than two decades later and in those intervening two decades, the cigarette companies were able to maintain the social acceptability of smoking in public and reap the profits therein.

Other slacktivist campaigns followed and included the effort to recycle plastic shopping bags promoted by the companies that manufactured said bags and the American Chemistry Council in order to make an end run around environmentalists who sought to restrict the use of plastic bags altogether (Landman 2008a). Students of slacktivism add the Susan G. Komen phenomenon to this list because of the network’s

successful integration of corporate incentive and individual philanthropy as manifested in the ubiquity of the pink ribbon.

In considering slacktivism one must place blame where blame is due. Slacktivism is a product of corporate malfeasance. Its victims however are the average citizens who are duped by such campaigns. “Most slacktivist individuals are probably genuinely well-meaning people who just don’t take the time to think about the value, or lack thereof, of their actions. They’re looking for an easy way to feel like they’re making a difference – how damaging is it to wear a rubber wristband or slap a magnetic ribbon on your car?” (Landman 2008a). For producer and consumer alike “donating by making a purchase is a really seductive idea” (Stukin 2006).

Komen has also come under fire for a related practice called pinkwashing, a quasi-philanthropic marketing strategy and form of slacktivism where corporations put the Komen brand on their products and give the organization a share of proceeds from the sales of said products. Pinkwashing has become a \$30 million a year moneymaker for the Komen Network and has contributed significantly to public awareness of the disease and the effort to cure it. As the name implies, however, pinkwashing is not without its critics. These critics generally fall into two camps.

The first group point out the limited profitability of these campaigns for Komen relative to their substantial profitability for the corporate sponsors. These critics further contend that committed citizens would be better off donating directly to Komen than indirectly through these third parties whose primary mandate is profit, not charity. For example, consider Yoplait’s donation compared to the profit the corporation makes in the name of charity. Yoplait donates 10 cents for every pink yogurt lid mailed back to the company. They guarantee a minimum of \$500,000 and cap donations at \$1.5 million. Yoplait is owned by General Mills, which did \$10.1 billion in sales in 2008. Fifteen percent of those sales come from the Yoplait brand. Therefore, if Yoplait contributes the full \$1.5 million that still only represents .10% of their net sales. Obviously using the Komen name has been successful since General Mills plans to expand their production capacity in 2010 with the growth of the Yoplait brand. When one considers it would take buying over 100 yogurts to make a \$10 contribution, the viability of pinkwashing for corporate

America is revealed. Questions as to why consumers do not simply make a direct donation remain (Reisman 2007).

Similarly, when Campbell's Soup changed their labels to pink from red in October to mark Breast Cancer Awareness Month, their contribution to Komen was \$250,000. However the actual amount contributed works out to 3.5 cents a can (Buchanan 2006). Barbara Brenner, executive director of Breast Cancer Action, told Newsweek: "Everyone's been guilt-tripped into buying pink things. If shopping could cure breast cancer, it would be cured by now" (Quoted in Venezia 2010).

Komen's corporate partners are using support for breast cancer research to market products. Problematically, some of these products actually cause cancer and have been linked to breast cancer in particular. For example, BMW's Ultimate Drive will donate \$1 per mile when people test-drive their cars. In Anne Landman's article "Pinkwashing: Can Shopping Cure Breast Cancer" (2008), the author points out, "it ignores the fact that the campaign encourages more and unnecessary driving, not to mention that automobile exhaust contains polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons, harmful chemicals known to cause cancer" (2008b). BMW is profiting from its association with the pink ribbon and as this case reveals "breast cancer has been transformed into a market-driven industry. It has become more about making money for corporate sponsors than funding innovative ways to treat breast cancer" (Samantha King quoted in Adams 2007).

On BCA's *Think Before you Pink* website, they advocate and provide a list of ways to take action against breast cancer that do not involve shopping. Their list includes using public transportation because pollution is one of the risk factors for breast cancer. They also recommend using non-rGBH dairy products for their role in reducing risk. Again this highlights the possible syncopation in the anti breast cancer movement from Komen's focus on cure rather than prevention. BCA speaks out against pinkwashing. They guide consumers to ask basic questions before buying such products. These questions include: how much of the purchase price will be donated and where is it going? What programs do the recipients fund? Is there a cap on donations? What does the company offering the pink ribbon product do to make sure that they are not adding to the problem of breast cancer ("Think Before You Pink")?

A second group of critics reject pinkwashing on more philosophical grounds contending that philanthropic schemes such as these undermine not only popular commitment to substantive social action but also reinforce traditional gendered power relations by targeting women as consumers. For instance, when Campbell Soup changed its label from red to pink last October to support Breast cancer month, its sales doubled. Campbell spokesman John Faulkner said, "We certainly think there is the possibility of greater sales since our typical soup consumers are women and breast cancer is a cause they're concerned about." He went on to say that he would "love to see the program expanded greatly next year" with other retail partners (Thompson 2006).

Interestingly, even though pinkwashing efforts seem to be targeted at consumers who are mostly women, breast cancer is personified not by the real life women struggling to cope with the disease, but by a small pink ribbon that can be affixed to any number of products. A commodity is something that has value in exchange. To commodify something is to artificially give it value in exchange. Breast cancer and the hardship and heartache it brings have been given value, \$30 million worth, in exchange. Komen's corporate sponsors for all their rhetoric would be more likely to maintain their current profitability were no cure to be found.⁸

⁸ King makes this argument in *Pink Ribbons, Inc.* by pointing out that Astra Zeneca, the pharmaceutical company that makes Tamoxifen, the leading breast cancer drug, was the primary corporate sponsor behind the declaration of National Breast Cancer Awareness Month in 1985 and controlled the production of all related materials. King further alleges that the more women are aware of the threat of breast cancer, the more women will get screened, the more screenings conducted, the more cases of breast cancer will be diagnosed, and the more doses of Tamoxifen will be sold. Additionally problematic is the fact that until 2000, Astra Zeneca was complicit in the production of petroleum-based herbicides that are known carcinogens with specific links to breast cancer (King 2006: xx-xxi).

Conclusion

From the outset, Komen for the Cure has been committed to finding a cure for breast cancer. While a laudable and certainly desirable goal, it stands apart from other related goals including raising awareness (which has actually occurred as a by-product of Network activity), discovering the cause or causes of the disease, and working on prevention techniques. For Komen the entire focus is on research for the cure and as a result, other breast cancer advocacy groups have criticized the network for not putting more of its vast resources into cause and prevention research. From a personal as well as societal perspective, preventing disease is as legitimate if not more legitimate than searching for a cure. Perhaps in response to this criticism, in 2008 Komen reexamined its research focus towards addressing the translation of this knowledge into “treatment, early detection and prevention” (“Research Grant Programs”). Regardless, the Komen Network is the big kid on the block and no other organization, with the possible exception of the umbrella organization, the American Cancer Society, comes close to Komen in name recognition or fundraising. And of course the American Cancer Society, divides its research and advocacy dollars among all types of cancers.

As mentioned previously, a slight deviation between agenda and outcome in the work of the Komen Network is detectable. Komen’s agenda has been to eradicate the disease by finding a cure. The result, however, has been a huge sales boost for corporations willing to join the cause marketing bandwagon as well as a greater public awareness of the disease and its consequences. The high profile and impressively successful Race for the Cure campaign exemplifies an unintended consequence of Komen activism. Initially intended as a fundraising tool, thanks to widespread popular support, the Races for the Cure have become that and much more. In addition to raising \$4.3 million annually with estimated participation at 45,000 people nationwide, the races have become an outlet for female activism vis-à-vis breast cancer (Kurtianyk 2009). Women with no direct connection to the disease out of a sense of perhaps shared female solidarity and with the weighty recognition that someday any one of them could be benefactors of the work Komen provides participate. Others afflicted with the disease walk as a means of instilling or buffeting hope. Survivors walk for what is essentially a victory lap. And it is in the inspiration of the survivors that the Races take on perhaps their most obvious unintended consequence, a

conscience-raising social movement alerting women to take control by getting regular checkups that could lead to life-saving early detection.

The challenge in analyzing the Susan G. Komen Network relative to the slacktivist phenomenon is to place the Network on the spectrum between the well-intentioned but uninformed individual activists and their corporate manipulators. The Komen Network is not a corporation. It is not a for-profit entity. It is an organization dedicated to a meritorious cause. It seeks to bring about a change, the cure for breast cancer, that would enhance society's overall long-term well-being.

This begs the question, is Komen complicit or co-opted, victim or victimizer, manipulator or manipulated in their embrace of corporate modalities, including cause marketing. Does the Komen organization undertake a pragmatic calculus to determine that while a direct donation was preferable to one through a third party as provided by soup labels or yogurt lids, the latter was preferable to no donation at all. Further, how do we calculate into this equation the importance of raising awareness about the disease and the credit that Komen and its pinkwashing corporate sponsors necessarily deserve for raising awareness about a disease for which early detection can make a life or death difference?

Problematically few if any of the pinkwashing breast cancer organizations and their corporate benefactors make any mention of disease prevention. A cynical analysis of this reality would suggest that prevention is not promoted because to find a cure is to end the pinkwashing *raison d'être*.

According to the Komen website though, the organization is making a difference. They call their members activists, advocates, and global citizens. Consider the following:

nearly 75 percent of women over 40 years old now receive regular mammograms, the single most effective tool for detecting breast cancer early (in 1982, less than 30 percent received a clinical exam). The five-year survival rate for breast cancer, when caught early before it spreads beyond the breast, is now 98 percent (compared to 74 percent in 1982). The federal government now devotes more than \$900 million each year to breast cancer research, treatment and prevention (compared to \$30 million in 1982). America's 2.5 million breast cancers survivors, the largest group of cancer survivors in the U.S is a living testament to the power of society and science to save lives. ("Our Promise and Background")

Critics condemn Komen for pinkwashing and being complicit in slacktivism. There is as yet no universal cure for breast cancer, but the

above statistics leave little doubt that the network succeeds in its goal of creating activists. Saving yogurt lids, selecting pink ribbon adorned products, wearing pink bracelets, affixing pink magnetic ribbons to one's car are all examples of everyday activism. While not pivotal in leading to a cure as yet, the increased awareness that comes from these actions undoubtedly leads women to be more diligent about examination and mammography. Whether born of slacktivism or more philanthropic notions of activism the result of their diligence is the same—tangible differences being made in the lives of thousands of women yearly. That is success, “one person, one community, one state, one nation [one survivor] at a time” (Brinker 2010).

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