Please Stop Staring at my Breasts!
The Sexualization of Breast Cancer

Presented by:

Lori Baralt
California State University, Long Beach

AnneMarie Ciccarella
BCAction member, patient advocate and blogger at CHEMOBRAIN...In the Fog
Agenda

- Sexualization & Objectification
- Why is it Harmful?
- Experiences of Real Women
- What You Can Do
Our Mission & Vision

To achieve health justice for all women at risk of and living with breast cancer

VISION: A world where lives and communities aren’t threatened by breast cancer.
BCAction’s Core Values

- Health justice
- Honesty, fearlessness, and truth-telling
- Honoring diverse voices
- People’s health and well-being
- Transparency and accountability
- Collective action
- Freedom from conflict of interest
Our Commitment to Social Justice

• Unequal burden of disease
• Root Causes
• Intersectionality
• Allyship
BCAction’s Strategic Priorities

1) Breast Cancer Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment

2) Root Causes of Breast Cancer

3) Pink Ribbon Marketing and Culture
Lori Baralt
Assistant Professor Department of Women’s, Gender & Sexuality Studies at California State University, Long Beach
AnneMarie Ciccarella

BCAction member, patient advocate and blogger at CHEMOBRAIN...In the Fog
Sexualization of Breast Cancer
Sexualization

• The act or process of turning someone into a sexual object

• More specifically, it is when:
  – Worth = Sexiness
  – Treated as a sex object
  – Emphasis on physical traits
Sexual Objectification

- **Objectification** = viewing or treating a person as an object

- **Sexual objectification** = viewing or treating someone as an instrument of sexual pleasure
  - Focus on sexualized body parts
  - Mostly done to women
Sexual Objectification of Women in Advertisements
Sexualization and Breast Cancer

• Focus exclusively on breasts as a sexualized body part

• Women are often not referred to or portrayed in their entirety
Here are some examples
Do We Sexualize Other Diseases?

1 in 72 women gets ovarian cancer.

Those are tough odds. Good thing you’re tougher.
SO WHAT?
Bad for Everyone

• Women only valued for our bodies/breasts

• Culture of fear around loss of femininity/sexuality

"I FELT LIKE I WAS LOSING EVERYTHING THAT MADE ME A WOMAN."
Nicole Dove
Misleading about Breast Cancer

• Images mostly of young, white, and thin women

• Light-hearted messages

• Breast cancer as threat to breasts, not to women’s lives and quality of life
Trivializes and Silences Experiences of Women At Risk of and Living with Breast Cancer

• Importance of breasts over women’s lives and quality of life

• Cancer as a fun, sexy, upbeat disease

• Silences women’s real experiences
IT’S NOT JUST A BOOB JOB

and it’s not sexy either.....

Cancer treatment and its aftermath
SHARE THOSE MOMENTS

Survey to explore issues surrounding body image and sexuality

First glimpse of initial responses presented here

Launched with hopes of opening up honest dialogue

Plan for book with medical oncologist as co-author
SURVEY POPULATION

Voluntary participation, open ended questions

Over 100 responses, primarily women in 40’s

Approximately 10% living with metastatic disease

Responses from all over the US & Canada, approximately 10% from other countries

Not only breast cancer: several ovarian, uterine, cervical cancers

Women along entire continuum of care: newly diagnosed to years beyond active treatment
TWO MAJOR THEMES EMERGE

• *The Mind: Body image* left many respondents *emotionally* traumatized

• *The Body: Pain* or lack of sensation and its affect and effect on sexual activity
THE MIND

• Negative vocabulary

• Blow to confidence

• Disconnect between body and reconstructed breasts
HOW DO WE GET OUT OF OUR OWN HEADS?

• Cover Up/Remain semi-clothed

• Don’t look

• Permanent ink/Tattoos
The following slides contain images of mastectomy with and without reconstruction.
You gain strength and confidence in the
experience in which you must stop to look fear in the
eye, you think you can

www.flatandfabulous.org
THE BODY

- Lack of sex drive
- Painful intercourse
- Sensation in chest area
- Nipples
- Hot flashes
- Difficulty achieving orgasm
WHAT’S GOING ON BEHIND CLOSED DOORS?

• Lubricants

• Sexual acts that don’t involve intercourse

• Communication

• Being affectionate outside of the bedroom
AND THE REST OF IT……

• Limited discussion with medical team

• Married participants feel badly for spouse.

• Is my partner acting out of desire or obligation?

• Who to tell, how to tell, when to tell……
BOTTOM LINE

• There is nothing sexy about breast cancer

• Sexual issues can be physically and emotionally debilitating

• Problems rarely discussed
DON’T GIVE UP!

• Seek support

• Be gentle with yourself

• Give yourself permission to grieve

• Keep talking

• And…. keep listening
Think Before You Pink

Sexy campaigns are a reminder of what we no longer have, who we long to be…….
Degrade Women

Making breast cancer playful and sexy hide the lived experiences of women in all their diversity and complexity.
Obscures the Harsh Realities

The pink ribbon covers up the devastating, harsh reality that so many women and their loved ones are dealing with.
Review emails/website mentioned in the presentation

- New England Journal of Medicine article
- Flat & Fabulous
  www.flatandfabulous.org
- Scar Project
  http://www.thescarproject.org
- Sex & Intimacy Survey
  http://sharethosemoments.wordpress.com/
- Think Before You Pink 2014
  www.thinkbeforeyoupink.org
Join BCAction!

- Signup for BCActions’s newsletter and e-alert [www.bcaction.org](http://www.bcaction.org)
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More questions? Contact us!

Email: info@bcaction.org
Toll-free: 877-2STOPBC
Breast Cancer Action

Challenging Assumptions. Inspiring Change.

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