

Strange and Familiar:
Narratives of Embodiment and Objects After Breast Cancer

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ABSTRACT

Pink ribbon culture has, for better or worse, helped to transform survivors' experiences with breast cancer. Scholars argue that pink ribbon culture has shaped the types of narratives shared, informs normative depictions of the post-breast cancer body, and contributes to cultural understandings of breast cancer in general (King 2006, Sulik 2012, Dubrinwy 2013). Through analysis of data from interviews and participant observations I add to this discussion by first examining underrepresented narratives and embodiments in pink ribbon culture; namely, those that detail discrepancies with the dominant narrative related to race, class, gender, sexuality, and health. I argue that the absence of these narratives contributes to a survivor hierarchy, which ranks women's experiences according to the extent to which they approximate the dominant narrative. Finally, I provide an analysis of narratives that feature cancer artifacts and pink ribbon commodities in order to demonstrate the complexity of survivor embodiment. Ultimately, breast cancer survivors are tasked with easing cultural anxieties through their bodies and narratives. This is exacerbated by a neoliberal political climate which emphasizes individual responsibility for health, privatization, and equates purchasing pink ribbon goods with altruism.