



## Pink Thinking

Posted by Molly Brenner on Dec 8, 2010

Though December is just beginning, the pink of October, **National Breast Cancer Awareness Month** (NBCAM), still lingers on through its association with a number of products, and particularly in my own thoughts. During this month, medical sociologist **Gayle A. Sulik** visited my college to discuss the issues in her new book *Pink Ribbon Blues*, which examines the complicated medical, social, political, and economic factors wrapped up in the mainstream breast cancer movement. As a Strong Women, Strong Girls Program Intern this past summer, the color pink has become an increasingly thought-provoking topic for me.



In her book, Sulik outlines several problems with the “**pinkwashing**” of NBCAM. She urges us to “listen to the voices that are routinely omitted or marginalized from pink ribbon culture,” such as those that choose not to approach breast cancer with a cheerful “warrior” attitude, along with men with the disease. Additionally, she highlights gender’s role in pink ribbon culture, noting that pink “signifies the innocence and sometimes childishness, nurturance, emotional sensitivity, and selflessness associated with traditional femininity,” along with the feminine side of heteronormativity.

Sulik also touches on a counterpoint to anti-pink feelings. She writes of the associations with the color, “Images abound of a **sisterhood of courageous women draped in pink**, enthusiastically supporting one another, selflessly organized, and optimistically calling attention to the need for awareness, research, and funding in the battle against breast cancer.” Sulik’s statement indirectly references the idea of reclaiming pink for activist or feminist purposes, of which the pink-branded **Feminist Majority Foundation** is a good example. After all, the image of a “sisterhood” of women “supporting one another” is a positive one. And certainly, Strong Women, Strong Girls’ pairing of the word “strong” with the color pink can be seen in just this way.

Ultimately, pink holds different meaning for everyone; some women may consider pink branding an empowering reclamation of the color, while others may feel isolated by its classical femininity and cheerfulness. Because the breast cancer movement and SWSG are two very different uses of pink, it is interesting to ask: **how does pink branding function variably in different contexts?** There is no right answer, but rather a need to hear all voices.

<http://swsg.org/pink-thinking/>