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Medicine and Mobilization as Metaphor:

The March of Dimes, the War on Cancer, Silence = Death, Race for the Cure

The image of marching resonates with Americans as it links the present all the way back to the founding of the United States of America. American troops, protesting the British occupation, played instruments and sang songs to keep in time while marching into battle. Americans continued marching after the revolution, and by the nineteenth century, Americans were marching for social causes. In 1913, five thousand women marched on Washington D.C. fighting for their right to vote. In 1963, thousands of people arrived in D.C. to hear Martin Luther King Jr. deliver a speech, and many joined his march in Alabama to fight for civil rights.¹ We were still marching in 1970, when marchers protesting the Vietnam War took over Washington. Sometimes we march for the sake of our political and social bodies. But sometimes, we march for the sake of our physical bodies. Large crowds marched again in 1974 to protest the Roe v. Wade court decision. In 1987, more than two hundred thousands Americans marched to end a plague.

America has used the protest march time and time again as a way of getting things done. One of the things we focus on is advocating for treatment and cure of disease. Time and time again, America has waged war against disease, planning to obliterate the cause of the illness, and building organizations to aid in this goal. Such wars on disease consist of intense focus on specific diseases instead of overall wellness and the mindset that people are at the mercy of disease, so we must spend our time preventing the contraction of diseases or optimizing living with chronic conditions. Americans eat, sleep, exercise, and follow regimes to prevent bad health; and the American people march for progress in disease

¹ Turkewitz, Julie. "How Marches in Washington Have Shaped America." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 21 Jan. 2017. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

research, treatment, and cure. The war America has waged on disease has allowed America to rise to the top in medical research, to fund immense amounts of basic research, and to play a large part in giving medical and healthcare aide to other countries. But what other effects has this mindset had on America?

Marches have elements of both the military and the crusade, both conquest and salvation. Our wars on specific diseases have a clear enemy, one we are determined to blast, burn, slash, kill, and eradicate. This war mindset has permeated our medical rhetoric, creating a dominant metaphor in which the patient is a battleground, the doctors are warriors whose job is to defeat the disease, which is the enemy. This mindset has shifted the focus from the well-being of the patient's body to the conquering of diseases, and from the relationship between the patient and the caretaker to the battle between the disease and cold, antiseptic smelling hospitals, doctors, and machines.²

Starting with the Polio epidemic of 1938 through the Breast Cancer epidemic of the 1980s, Americans have banded together in large numbers, committed to finding cures, funding research, providing care for people affected by certain diseases, and driving change in law and policy. My term for these alliances is *diseases armies*. These disease armies march to raise awareness for their diseases and give their stories public exposure. There are some key features of these "Find a Cure for Disease X" campaigns. They emerge from the affected community, lobby for federal research funding, create public narratives and shape public discourse, and advocate for enabling structures and institutions to support affected communities and individuals. In this paper I will examine how such communities are created around diseases, and the two dominant *metaphors* that characterize these communities and their activism *models*. These are: first, a *war model* in which civilian activism takes on a military quality, and second, a *rally model*, where civilian activists mobilize to build community and affiliation.

Let's make a brief detour to look at the background against which disease armies are mobilizing. The American healthcare system is a complex network of interactions among players, and competition for

² Fuks, Abraham. "The Military Metaphors of Modern Medicine." (2009): n. pag. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

funding among medical establishments and treatment and therapy centers. Scientists and doctors have to compete for a limited resource: money. Where does this money come from? Who are disease armies petitioning for money?

Federal funding comes government agencies, specifically from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the Center for Disease Control (CDC). NIH was founded in 1930, as part of a reorganization of the government provided health care system.³ Previously, government agencies had been a disorganized collection of both small committees and big organizations. NIH was created as an umbrella organization.⁴ The CDC was founded in 1942 in response to the malaria outbreaks on American military bases. After the end of World War II, CDC's mission became "investigating and controlling communicable disease outbreaks" anywhere in the nation.⁵ Each of these organizations reviews hundreds and thousands of scientific and medical proposals each year, but very few get farther than a description on a piece of paper.

In the private sector, individual citizens donate to causes they care about, and influencers and celebrities create or fund organizations. These individuals may be survivors, advocates or champions, or celebrities who use their fame to reach the rest of the public. Families and friends raise awareness for diseases that affect their loved ones. Politicians and public officials align themselves with diseases to gain political support, often diseases that they have personal connections with in some way.

Still in the private sector, foundations and corporations fund medical research to improve their public images. Major donors -- today, billionaires like Michael Bloomberg and Bill Gates -- exert their power and influence through donating money to support health causes, just as Franklin Delano Roosevelt did in his time.

³ "History." *National Institutes of Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 13 Dec. 2016. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴ "Chronology of Events." *National Institutes of Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 27 Oct. 2016. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁵ "Our History - Our Story." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 22 July 2015. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

Pharmaceutical companies also play a part as they commercialize basic research funded by NIH and CDC, when they bring new drugs and treatments to market.

Now back to disease armies. I will further show the circumstances in which these groups may begin to embody related social and political movements. They may even replace those movements. I will examine four disease cases: Polio, Cancer, HIV/AIDS, and Breast Cancer as a specific case. I chose these four diseases because of certain shared characteristics. To start, all four of these diseases have appeared in public discourse as epidemics, although they may not actually be epidemics. An epidemic is defined as an outbreak of a contagious disease that is quickly transmitted and affects a substantial number of individuals in a community at the same time. While not all four diseases are epidemics, this description resonated powerfully at each of the four moments.

Mobilization around each of these four diseases intersected with closely related and important political and social moments: Polio and the New Deal, the War on Cancer and the Vietnam War; HIV/AIDS and the rise of gay rights; and Breast Cancer and the rise of feminism. Let's start with the similarity between President Roosevelt's personal narrative of an individual living with Polio taking control and strengthening his body with the political narrative of taking responsibility and working together that he instilled in the public when leading America out of the Great Depression and into World War II. President Nixon was faced with the failure of American involvement in Vietnam and violent protests when he shifted his battle focus from Vietnam to Cancer. The AIDS epidemic was intertwined with the gay rights movement of the 1980s, pushing gay individuals out of the dark and into the public spotlight. Forty years later, we recognize this an emergence of identity politics, defined as a group of individuals who all share a piece of their identity, creating their own political and social groups, leaving the previously established behind. Breast Cancer became overlapped with feminism, mainstreaming and even commercializing it. At a critical moment, feminism became a battle over women's right to abortion, which pro-life supporters view as the murder of babies. This tainted feminist discourse. Feminism shifted

to another front, away from abortion, and towards Breast Cancer. Breast Cancer is still a war, and there is still a focus on killing the cancerous cells, but everyone can support protecting women's breasts in a way that not everyone could get behind supporting abortion.

In all four cases, the politics of the disease armies influenced public discourse and action. So, what is the impact of these disease armies? How do these campaigns evolve? What do they lead to? Keep reading!

March of Dimes: 1938

From 1916 to the mid 1950s, Poliomyelitis was raging across America, with a heightened epidemic appearing each summer. Polio is a virus known to weaken muscles, even to the point of paralysis, but until 1955, it had no preventative vaccine or cure. Polio spreads by fecal-oral transmission, and during this period, when the cleanliness of public facilities was not yet monitored, thousands of children playing in these dirty facilities over the summer would contract Polio. Parents were terrified of the prospect of their child suddenly falling sick, and desperately tried to protect them. In 1921, Franklin Delano Roosevelt was diagnosed with adult-onset Polio and the disease acquired the most powerful champion imaginable.⁶ While keeping the details of his post-Polio paralysis and disability private, Roosevelt was very public about the struggles of what it was like to live day-to-day with an incurable disease.

Soon after being diagnosed, Roosevelt visited Warm Springs, Georgia, which housed natural mineral baths supposed to work wonders for those affected by Polio. After visiting, Roosevelt purchased Warm Springs and turned it into a center for Polio rehabilitation, the Warm Springs Institute for Rehabilitation.⁷ Roosevelt had been born into a wealthy family, and thus was a member of the elite political class: two Roosevelts became president, one became a first lady, and many others were lawyers,

⁶ "A History of the March of Dimes." *March of Dimes*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁷ *NMAH | Polio: Timeline*. N.p., 01 Feb. 2005. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

philanthropists, and such. FDR was connected to the establishment and political institutions from the time he was a Congressman through the time he served as President.⁸ Roosevelt invested his own money into Warm Springs, and was one of the first philanthropic patrons to use his own money, resources, and connections to attract attention to a disease that affected him and others.⁹

Creating a location that both active sufferers of Polio, post-suffers of Polio, and medical care-takers could come together entirely changed the way individuals with Polio were perceived by the public. At Roosevelt's Warm Springs foundation people living with Polio "worked at the Foundation as officials, staff people, and teachers.... New Polios saw the old Polios as persons with a paralysis pattern similar to their own, living a normal life, functioning as productive human beings. The value of such an example was enormous."¹⁰ After being elected President in 1932, Roosevelt was no longer content with only serving the Polio population that came to Warm Springs, he wanted to be able to respond to Polio across the nation. Roosevelt changed his Warm Springs foundation into The National Foundation for Infantile Paralysis (NFIP) in 1938. The mission of NFIP was to understand how Polio was contracted, how it affected the body, and to provide services to Americans living with chronic Polio.

However, launching the foundation in 1938 proved to be difficult, as the attention the American public was increasingly focused on the events that would lead to World War II. The NFIP began to run radio ads and a media campaign for the public's support. The message was that every dime donated to Polio would create a personal bond with FDR.

In this first case, there are elements of both the war metaphor and the rally metaphor. Let's look at a fascinating pair of NFIP posters that will show the intersection of these two models:

⁸ "The Rise of the Roosevelts in New York." *Gotham Magazine*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁹ Perkins, Frances, and Adam Seth Cohen. *The Roosevelt I Knew*. New York: Penguin, 2011. Print.

¹⁰ Hugh S Gallagher Quote, *NMAH | Polio: Franklin D. Roosevelt*. N.p., 01 Feb. 2005. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.



Figure 1: Donald Eugene Anderson, Polio's first poster child. He is first shown hospitalized in braces, and after second, after therapy, in uniform, a little boy marching unassisted.¹²



Figure 2: The image of an all-American farm boy on crutches, imposed against an American soldier fighting in Korea.¹¹

In using the rally metaphor, Roosevelt was able to advance his message of unity and inclusion, both in the disease case -- "old polios" and "new polios" -- and obviously, consistent with his rallying Americans around the elements of the New Deal. A rally implies a crowd. To create these crowds, it is necessary to extend from a core group of the affected, and include families, survivors, those at risk, and as many champions as possible. Roosevelt seemed to get the entire American nation to march together, to support his cause, and to come together as a community. For rallied communities, the emphasis is on the

¹¹ No. 1527: *Polio and Clean Water*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

¹² "In Memoriam: Donald Anderson, First Poster Child, 1940-2014." *In Memoriam: Donald Anderson, First Poster Child, 1940-2014 | March of Dimes*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

challenge of living day-to-day with the disease, just as old and new Polios lived together with their condition in Warm Springs. The emphasis is not on the disease as an enemy.

Roosevelt hired a close friend, Basil O'Connor, to run his foundation. O'Connor's innovation was to source funding at the local level nationwide, and deliver aid whenever and wherever an outbreak occurred. The campaign took the form of petitioning the public to donate a single dime. Donation after donation, coin after coin: a march of dimes.¹³

The actual marches organized by NFIP did not remain an important part of their history. Instead, what remained important was the mental model of collected effort. The metaphor and image of marching citizens was translated into an image of the collective action of individuals putting a dime in the mail.



Figure 3: Missy LeHand, President Roosevelt's secretary, opening one of the 30,000 envelopes that had arrived in the morning mail.¹⁴

After Salk's invention of the Polio vaccine in 1955, the Foundation officially changed its name to The March of Dimes Foundation and shifted its focus to preventing all birth defects and disabilities in

¹³ NMAH | *Polio: March of Dimes*. N.p., 01 Feb. 2005. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

¹⁴ *Missy LeHand*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

babies as well as promoting healthy pregnancies. The March of Dimes model has become a dominant template for many charitable organizations, both medical and general.

The War on Cancer: 1971

In 1937, President Roosevelt signed the National Cancer Institute Act, founding the National Cancer Institute (NCI). This act established NCI as a department within the Public Health Service, and as the official government agency for “conducting research and training on the cause, diagnosis, and treatment of cancer.”¹⁵ Today, NCI is a sub-organization of NIH, which is part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). But it wasn’t until 1971, when President Richard Nixon signed the National Cancer Act, that NCI gained authoritative status in the hierarchy of cancer funding organizations and agencies. In response to the act, NCI was reorganized in 1972 and four domains of focus were created: cancer biology and diagnosis, cancer cause and prevention, cancer treatment, and cancer grants.¹⁶

The National Cancer Act supported NCI’s efforts to mobilize a national attack on cancer. Unlike other health agencies where the annual budget was subject to review by Congress, by the NIH, or by the Department of Health and Human Services, NCI’s annual budget was originally subject only to Presidential authorization. The act provided NCI with over a hundred million dollars of additional federal funding: in 1938, NCI’s annual appropriation was \$400,000, and in 1972 it was \$337,531,000.¹⁷

These developments are usefully examined in the context of the dramatic events of the day. President Nixon was faced with an American nation exploding in protest against continued US military involvement in Vietnam. By 1971 it was clear that the US involvement in Vietnam needed to end. There had been a decade of fighting, but by 1970 the military, the government, and the public all recognized that an American victory on behalf of South Vietnam was not possible. Furthermore, the war for the hearts

¹⁵ "National Cancer Act of 1937." *National Cancer Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

¹⁶ "National Cancer Institute (NCI)." *National Institutes of Health*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 30 Jan. 2017. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

¹⁷ "National Cancer Act of 1971." *National Cancer Institute*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

and minds of Americans at home, especially students and civil rights activists, and an increasing body of allies, had been lost.

The anti-war movement was quickly gaining massive scale. In 1969, more than five hundred thousand people marched on Washington D.C.. These protests provoked fear and anxiety in some constituencies, to the point that in 1970 a student rally at Kent State University, protesting the invasion of Cambodia, was met with armed National Guardsmen who killed four college students. The battle had come home and onto American soil.¹⁸



1971 Pulitzer Prize; John Paul Filo
Courtesy: John Paul Filo

Figure 4: Many Americans die from cancer, this young man was killed for joining a demonstration against civilian and soldier deaths in Vietnam and Cambodia.¹⁹

By this time, Nixon was pulling American troops out of Vietnam. The last American troops left in 1973. Given the disaster of the American war in Vietnam, attempts to shift the nation's attention to a

¹⁸ J.D. *The Pop History Dig*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

¹⁹ "Kent State Incident." *Vietnam Conflict*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

feel-good and winnable war were highly attractive to Nixon and other national politicians. Nixon was trying to satisfy the citizens who wanted a war, but also heal the polarization that had evolved during the anti-war protests by attempting to unite everyone around a single cause, that is, cancer. Thus began what was called at the time, and has been ever since, the “War on Cancer.”

In fact, the President is not granted the power to declare (actual) war, only Congress is. And indeed, Nixon personally referred to his disease war as a “conquest.” When signing the National Cancer Act, Nixon compared the importance of curing cancer to victory in World War II: “more people each year die of cancer in the United States than all the Americans who lost their lives in World War II. This shows us what is at stake. It tells us why I sent a message to the Congress the first of this year, which provided for a national commitment for the conquest of cancer, to attempt to find a cure.” Note that Nixon refers to World War II, the last “good war,” and not the most recent war in Vietnam. In another speech, Nixon makes a call-to-action, an “all-out assault,” on “one of mankind’s deadliest and most elusive enemies.”²⁰

Moving from the political to the medical establishment, even the nature of the disease was thought of in a war frame. Cancerous cells were viewed as invaders of human bodies and as enemies in a war, requiring us to use the weapons of chemotherapy and radiation therapy to kill them.²¹ Medical professionals describe cancers as being “malignant” -- vindictive and deadly -- or “benign” -- good-natured, non-harmful.^{22,23} Following Susan Sontag, many have written about how war language dominates discourse on cancer, and as Gary M. Reisfeld and George R. Wilson explain: “There exists a seemingly perfect metaphoric correspondence: there is an enemy (the cancer), a commander (the physician), a combatant (the patient), allies (the healthcare team), and formidable weaponry (including

²⁰ "Richard Nixon: Statement About the National Cancer Act of 1971 - December 23, 1971." *The American Presidency Project*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

²¹ Faguet, Guy. "The War on Cancer." *An Anatomy of Failure, A Blueprint for the* | Guy Faguet | Springer. Springer Netherlands, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

²² "Journal of Clinical Oncology." *ASCO Journals*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

²³ Sontag, Susan. *Illness as Metaphor ; And, AIDS and Its Metaphors*. New York: Picador/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1989. Print.

chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons.”²⁴ Physicians, among themselves, called cancer treatment by surgery, radiation, and chemotherapy, “slash and burn.”²⁵ (Compare this to the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam.) The use of war metaphors extend so far that medical successes are deemed “medical victories,” victory being the absolute defeat of an enemy.

While President Nixon could not declare *war* on cancer, a woman named Mary Lasker did. Lasker’s goal was to raise awareness for cancer, and create institutions where cancer research unparalleled anywhere else in the world could take place. Lasker repeatedly petitioned the government to spend more money on research into the prevention and cure of cancer, and eventually she got her way by comparing lives lost each year in war and defense spending with lives lost to cancer and cancer-research spending.²⁶ In 1969, Mary Lasker’s Citizens Committee for the Conquest of Cancer placed this advertisement in the New York Times and Washington Post:

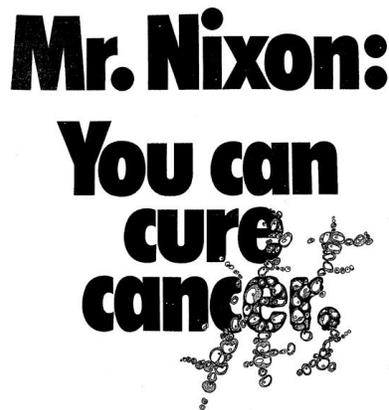


Figure 5: Lasker makes an extraordinary direct appeal to President Nixon.²⁷

²⁴ Khullar, Dhruv. "The Trouble With Medicine's Metaphors." *The Atlantic*. Atlantic Media Company, 07 Aug. 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

²⁵ Mukherjee, Siddhartha. "The Improvisational Oncologist." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 12 May 2016. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

²⁶ "The Mary Lasker Papers: Cancer Wars." *U.S. National Library of Medicine*. National Institutes of Health, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

²⁷ "The Mary Lasker Papers: Cancer Wars." *U.S. National Library of Medicine*. National Institutes of Health, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

This advertisement begged Nixon to consider how many people die each year of cancer, and set aside more federal funds for cancer research. Lasker believed the goal of eradicating cancer was within reach.²⁸ So close, that she proposes reaching the goal by America's 200th birthday, which was only five years away. Lasker directly evokes Vietnam, saying "surely, the war against cancer has the support of 100% of the people. It is a war in which we lost 21 times more lives last year than we lost in Viet Nam last year. A war we can win and put the entire human race in our debt."²⁹ At the bottom of the advertisement was a coupon that every citizen was urged to sign and send to the President, asking him to dedicate more funds to cancer.³⁰

Two years later, in 1971, President Nixon directed that the Fort Detrick military complex in Maryland should be transformed into cancer research center, one of the first.³¹ Ironically, the complex had previously been used as a biological warfare housing and testing facility. Later, as the Frederick Cancer Research and Development Center, it was the site of important research into HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS: 1981

In 1981, the CDC began to receive reports of rising numbers of rare forms of pneumonia and cancer in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and New York.³² Further investigation revealed that this new disease was appearing in close communities of gay men. In these early years, the disease was thought of as an illness that only affected homosexual men, and HIV/AIDS quickly got characterized as "Gay-Related Immune Deficiency (GRID)," or the "gay-plague," or "gay cancer." In the early years, with no cure in sight, public hysteria concerning the risk of transmission, and the association of AIDS with

²⁸ Coleman, Michael P. "War on Cancer and the Influence of the Medical-industrial Complex." *Science Direct*. N.p., 17 July 2013. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

²⁹ Lasker, Mary. "Mr. Nixon You Can Cure Cancer." *National Institutes of Health*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

³⁰ Lasker, Mary. "Mr. Nixon You Can Cure Cancer." *National Institutes of Health*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

³¹ "National Cancer Act of 1971." *Milestone (1971): President Nixon Declares War on Cancer*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

³² "Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR)." *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 07 Oct. 2011. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

other vilified groups such as “gay men, injecting drug users, [and] sex workers,” few healthcare professionals were willing to provide any services to gay men. A diagnosis was a death sentence for many young men.³³ In 1981, 121 individuals out of the 272 reported cases had died.³⁴ Due to the stigma surrounding homosexuality, the medical establishment was slow to respond to the climbing numbers of diagnoses, and many men watched their friends, lovers, and communities die around them.³⁵

Of course there was transmission of HIV/AIDS in other populations, including recipients of blood transfusions, women who had HIV positive sexual partners, and drug users who shared needles. In this paper we will focus particularly on the “gay-plague” aspect, because this community was the most active advocates and its story has become inextricably intertwined. But there are many other ways to tell this story.

In 1982, 80 men held an impromptu meeting in the home of writer and activist Larry Kramer to figure out how to raise money for research into the treatment and cure of this new disease.³⁶ This meeting was the beginning of the Gay Men’s Health Crisis (GMHC), the first AIDS organization to provide services to those living with AIDS. The GMHC describes their mission as wanting to “promote education, increase awareness, improve care, reduce stigma, elevate policy, and build strong supportive communities.”³⁷ For the GMHC, the disease was not an enemy but a rather challenge to be overcome, much like FDR and his Polio foundation. In 1982, the GMHC created the first AIDS hotline; started producing a newsletter and distributing it to doctors, hospitals, clinics, and the Library of Congress; opened their first GMHC office in New York; and, created the Buddy Program, a program that provides day-to-day services to people incapacitated by AIDS.

³³ "Emergence of the AIDS Crisis." *Khan Academy*. N.p., n.d. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

³⁴ "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS." *AIDS.gov*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

³⁵ "HIV/AIDS and Education: Lessons from the 1980s and the Gay Male Community in the United States | UN Chronicle." *United Nations*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

³⁶ "About Us." *GMHC - Fight Aids. Love Life*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

³⁷ "About Us." *GMHC - Fight Aids. Love Life*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.



Figure 6: The GMHC's logo is pink, which is transgressive in a queer context.³⁸ The encoded message here is that practicing safe sex is taking up arms against AIDS.

FIGHT AIDS. LOVE LIFE.

In 1987, Larry Kramer, who had by then broken away from GMHC, founded ACT UP! (the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power). Kramer wanted more and more radical action on the AIDS frontier than the community-building and peacemaking GMHC could provide.³⁹ ACT UP! called itself a group of individuals "united in anger and committed to direct action to end the AIDS crisis. We advise and inform. We demonstrate. WE ARE NOT SILENT."⁴⁰ Where the GMHC focused on building, ACT UP! focused on disrupting.



Figure 7: Pink triangles were the badges used by the Nazis to mark and isolate homosexuals.⁴¹ ACT UP! reclaimed the pink triangle as a separatist symbol of empowerment and defiance.⁴²

³⁸ "GMHC Relaunches Historic Buddy Program in Commemoration of National HIV/AIDS Long-Term Survivor Awareness Day." *Gmhc.org*. N.p., 5 June 2015. Web. 24 Apr. 2017.

³⁹ *ACT UP New York*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴⁰ *ACT UP New York*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴¹ *ACT UP New York*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴² *Pink-triangle.org*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

ACT UP! saw their enemy as the medical and political establishment, including the pharmaceutical industry who refused easy access to treatment and prevention drugs.⁴³ ACT UP!'s first protest in 1987 was launched on Wall Street against the high cost and low availability of HIV treatment drugs.⁴⁴



Figure 8: ACT UP! occupies Wall Street in 1987.⁴⁵

In 1982, the CDC finally changed GRID to to Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS), and two members of the House of Representatives sought funding. CDC and NIH finally received federal funds to support HIV/AIDS research.

During this period, a few celebrities went public about their struggles with the disease. Rock Hudson, a Hollywood leading man and the heartthrob of the older generation, was the first celebrity to go public about being diagnosed with AIDS. His public statements served to champion individuals who had

⁴³ "HIV/AIDS and Education: Lessons from the 1980s and the Gay Male Community in the United States | UN Chronicle." *United Nations*. United Nations, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴⁴ *ACT UP New York - 25 Yr Chronology*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴⁵ Dailymail.com, Alexandra Klausner For. "When AIDS Was a Political Football: Newly Released Pictures from NYC Public Library Reveals the Passionate Protests against Federal Healthcare Cuts as the HIV Epidemic Ravaged the Big Apple in the Early 1980s." *Daily Mail Online*. Associated Newspapers, 18 Jan. 2016. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

“prayed for a day when the disease struck someone who mattered, prayed for a weaponizing of AIDS.”⁴⁶

Both private donations and federal funding skyrocketed. After Hudson’s death in 1985, his close friend Elizabeth Taylor “hastily organized Hollywood’s first star-studded AIDS fund-raiser” and later created the Elizabeth Taylor AIDS Foundation.⁴⁷ In the illness-as-war metaphor, the true heroes are those who survive. Of course, as Susan Sontag and many others since have pointed out, this analogy is both flawed and pernicious. In Hudson’s case, while he was not a disease hero in this sense, his willingness to come out immortalized him as an AIDS hero.



Figure 9: Here, the palette is purple and red. Lavender was a traditional symbol of closeted queerness. The image of a heart in a pair of hands symbolizes charity and inclusion, instead of separatism, defiance, or gay sexual practice.⁴⁸

Eight years later celebrity tennis player Arthur Ashe died from AIDS, shocking the public. When Earvin “Magic” Johnson announced that he was living with AIDS, the prejudice against gay men living with HIV/AIDS began to dissipate further. At this point the gay community began to look back, and

⁴⁶ France, David. *How to Survive a Plague*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2016. 189. Print.

⁴⁷ "Private Reasons Behind Elizabeth Taylor's Fight Against HIV/AIDS." *Elizabeth Taylor Official*. N.p., 01 Dec. 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁴⁸ "Private Reasons Behind Elizabeth Taylor's Fight Against HIV/AIDS." *Elizabeth Taylor Official*. N.p., 01 Dec. 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

reflect on the history of HIV/AIDS. Larry Kramer wrote and produced *The Normal Heart*, about this story, set in 1985 New York. One of the characters, a sympathetic doctor, was based on Dr. Linda J. Laubenstein who herself had contracted Polio as a child and was confined to a wheelchair for her adult life.⁴⁹ A bittersweet link to FDR and his struggles both with Polio, and as a champion and leader.

The AIDS epidemic began in the early 1980s, at the beginning of Ronald Reagan's first term in office. The Reagan administration was silent and did not even publically acknowledge HIV/AIDS until 1985, in Reagan's second term.⁵⁰ Because Reagan was a former actor from California, with friends in the movie-making community, who knew many gay individuals personally, activists may have expected Reagan to take a stance sooner. When he consistently remained silent, gay rights activists and healthcare professionals began to pressure him. But even after thousands of people had died from AIDS, Reagan remained silent.⁵¹ It took until 1987 for Reagan to speak up. In his speech he outlined a plan to increase federal funding into research for treatments and cures and to make routine testing for HIV/AIDS more accessible to more people. Reagan had finally come out and taken a stance against defining the disease as divine punishment -- he was insistent upon the innocence of the people living with HIV/AIDS -- but instead as an infectious disease. Reagan rejected the idea that HIV/AIDS was a punishment, stating that "this is a battle against disease, not against our fellow Americans. We mustn't allow those with the AIDS virus to suffer discrimination."⁵² Reagan explained that as risky behavior leads to the possibility of contracting AIDS, every member of the general public has a "moral obligation" to get routinely tested. Even though Reagan had finally addressed AIDS and had come out as a friend of those affected, this speech did not raise hope in the heart of the gay community who had already seen 20,849 of their close

⁴⁹ Kramer, Larry. *The Normal Heart*. London: Nick Hern, 2014. Print.

⁵⁰ "A Timeline of HIV/AIDS." *AIDS.gov*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁵¹ White, Allen. "Reagan's AIDS Legacy / Silence Equals Death." *SFGate*. N.p., 08 June 2004. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁵² *PBS*. Public Broadcasting Service, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

friends and relatives die.⁵³ Nor does history remember President Reagan as a hero of the AIDS epidemic, but instead as having taken long to respond to the deaths of American citizens.

Breast Cancer: 1982

As with HIV/AIDS and the gay right's movement, feminism followed an arc from radical and separatist to inclusive mainstream. The HIV/AIDS crisis spurred a relatively fast shift during the span of the 1980s and 1990s. The feminist movement made a similar shift, but it took far longer; from the radicalism of the campaign to gain the vote of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, through the feminist waves of the 1950s and 1960s, and further through *Roe v. Wade* in the 1970s. But a move to the mainstream did come. I am going to look at the role that Breast Cancer activism played in driving this shift. We will start this story with the founding of the Susan G. Komen Search for the Cure Foundation.

In 1982, Nancy G. Brinker founded the Susan G. Komen Foundation with the mission of eradicating Breast Cancer as a promise to her sister, Susan, who had died of Breast Cancer in 1980.⁵⁴ The Komen Foundation quickly became the largest and best-funded Breast Cancer organization, and remains a leading player in Breast Cancer action. It receives both federal NIH funding and individual donations. In our scheme, Komen uses the inclusive rally metaphor, seeking to inform all women about their health and possible medical conditions, and build communities by connecting the personal stories of each sufferer of Breast Cancer.

Where Komen creates communities of individual Breast Cancer survivors, friends and families, the National Breast Cancer Coalition (NBCC), founded by Dr. Susan Love and Susan Hester in 1991 is focused on “influencing government policy on the disease.”^{55,56} NBCC’s target is to eradicate Breast

⁵³ PBS. Public Broadcasting Service, n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁵⁴ "Learn More About Susan G. Komen®." *Susan G. Komen®*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁵⁵ King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. XV. Print.

⁵⁶ King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. XV. Print.

Cancer by 2020.⁵⁷ (A bittersweet link to Mary Lasker.) NBCC and allied groups have been remarkably successful. Federal funding for Breast Cancer research has increased to such a high that it is now considered to be overfunded compared to other cancers and diseases.⁵⁸

Starting in 1938 with the March of Dimes, Americans have walked for a cure. In 1982 the walk became a race. Wearing running shoes, women competed in Komen-sponsored 5K Races for the Cure, where men and women, sufferers and survivors, family and friends rally together and raise contributions. This marked a significant point in the development of a new kind of philanthropic consumerism, cause-related marketing.

Over the twentieth century, with the transition from small and local stores and companies, with locally meaningful brands, to large corporations and conglomerates, these large companies needed to forge personal connections with their customers in order to distinguish themselves from the competition. One approach is cause-related marketing. Cause-related marketing is when an organization agrees to work with a nonprofit group to raise money for a designated cause or charity.⁵⁹ This is implemented in the business world in two ways: corporations pick a specific charity to support and donate some percent of what they make to this charity; or they present their consumers with a choice of charities to support. Cause-related marketing is extremely beneficial to big companies, as it increases sales, increases customer loyalty, helps to differentiate a company from the competition, and helps to improve the employee body.⁶⁰

What color is Breast Cancer? PINK!!! Since its founding, Komen has been rigorous and controlled in its branding: it rallies us to come together to Search for a Cure, and gives us a pink uniform. A key element of that uniform is a PINK!!! ribbon.

⁵⁷ Nbcc. *Are You With Us?* N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁵⁸ Chan, David. "Where Do the Millions of Cancer Research Dollars Go Every Year?" *Slate Magazine*. N.p., 07 Feb. 2013. Web. 29 Apr. 2017.

⁵⁹ King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. 6 - 7. Print.

⁶⁰ King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. 6 - 7. Print.



Figure 10: The Susan G. Komen Foundation's pink ribbon.⁶¹ The form of a running woman is both graceful and playful. A feminine ideal, but not a feminist manifesto.

Let's stop here and investigate the use of ribbons and ribbon imagery to establish solidarity. What a striking thing that the form of a ribbon -- a line, a string, a loop, and a feminine one at that --- is used to represent *solidarity*.

In 1979, Penney Laingen tied a yellow ribbon around the trees in her front yard to bring public attention to the fate of her husband who was being held as a hostage in Iran.⁶² She drew her inspiration from the popular 1973 song, "Tie a Yellow Ribbon 'Round the Ole Oak Tree" which is about a Union prisoner of war coming home to his girlfriend.⁶³ That soldier would have been fighting the last war on American soil and for the cause of American unity. In response to her example, Americans all across the country began to tie yellow ribbons around trees in their yards.

In 1991 both HIV/AIDS activists and Breast Cancer activists began to use ribbons as part of their uniforms of support. HIV/AIDS activists wanted a ribbon for the "boys dying at home." They chose red, the color of passion and of blood.⁶⁴ A collective of artists joined together to make and distribute red

⁶¹ "Susan G Komen Pink Ribbon Clip Art." *ClipartFest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶² Crook, Richard. "The History of the Yellow Ribbon." *BBC News*. BBC, 07 Oct. 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶³ "Tie a Yellow Ribbon Round the Ole Oak Tree." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 22 Apr. 2017. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁴ AIDS, Visual. "The Red Ribbon Project." *Visual AIDS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

ribbons to be pinned onto shirts and jackets and worn in public as a badge of solidarity and support. They created a red ribbon template for others to follow at “ribbon bees.”⁶⁵ The initiative expanded and became organized, and was especially prominent in the performing-arts community. Throughout the ribbon was explicitly intended not to be copyrighted, trademarked, or commercialized, but to remain in the public domain as something everyone could use it and no would profit from.⁶⁶

The symbol proliferated across many organizations and causes, and became particularly identified with Breast Cancer support.⁶⁷ Also in 1991, the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation gave a pink ribbon to every participant in the New York race. In choosing the color PINK!!! Pink which reads as transgressive in a queer context, registers as comfortable and virtuous in a hetero-female context. This refuted the metaphor of the individual with the disease as having brought the disease on herself or as an innocent victim of a disease enemy.⁶⁸

The pink ribbon was the result of combined efforts of media star Alexandra Penney and entrepreneur Charlotte Haley. Penney was directing the second annual “Breast Cancer Awareness Month” issue of *Self* magazine, and Haley had a small business creating peach-colored Breast Cancer ribbons. Penney thought that images of Haley’s ribbons were just the thing to include in the issue. Carol Cone, founder of marketing agency Cone Communications, used the technique of cause-related marketing to turn Breast Cancer into the blockbuster disease it is today.⁶⁹ Thanks to her efforts, companies began to pin pink ribbons on their merchandise. Some companies even began to compete with each other, creating pieces of jewelry dripping with expensive stones based on the ribbon. Today, the pink breast-cancer ribbon has become a truly global symbol.

⁶⁵ AIDS, Visual. "The Red Ribbon Project." *Visual AIDS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁶ AIDS, Visual. "The Red Ribbon Project." *Visual AIDS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁷ Williams, Frances. "Next Weekend... ..wear a Red Ribbon (or Don't)." *The Independent*. Independent Digital News and Media, 22 Oct. 2011. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁸ "Pink Ribbon." *Breast Cancer Consortium*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁶⁹ "History of the Pink Ribbon." *Think Before You Pink*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

By the 1990s, breast-cancer had become a replacement for more radical forms of feminism in the discourse of women's issues. It replaced the subversive and disruptive with the acceptable. As Samantha King says in her book, *Pink Ribbons Inc.*, a distinction between "prowomen" and "feminist" soon appeared. Supporting Breast Cancer allowed people to claim being "prowomen" without identity as "feminists."⁷⁰

This distinction became important when George W. Bush Jr. ran for the President in 2000. Given the issues and demographics at play in the election, Bush needed women's votes -- lots of them -- to win the election. He needed to win over "soccer moms" among other swing-voter constituencies.⁷¹ Bush needed to find a women's issue that he could safely and effectively leverage. That issue was Breast Cancer.⁷² Bush publicly identified himself with the cause, wore a pink ribbon on his lapel (where candidates may also wear American flags), and often appeared with breast-cancer advocate and survivor, Geri Barish.^{73,74}

Breasts are represented as soft, sometimes sexual, sometimes maternal. But the whole Breast Cancer story is not always so soft and generous. The dominant narrative is the rally model, in our framework, using the voices of champions as an advocacy strategy. But a common feature of many survivors is the lack of a breast. Let's consider the case of Angelina Jolie.

Jolie is famous for her badass persona and the kickass roles she plays in movies, including Lara Croft and Mrs. Smith. Jolie is physically striking -- tall, lean, androgynous, sharp-featured, and full-lipped. On the other hand, she has assumed the role of a super-mother, having adopted five children

⁷⁰ King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. 104. Print.

⁷¹ King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. 64. Print.

⁷² King, Samantha. *Pink Ribbons, Inc.: Breast Cancer and the Politics of Philanthropy*. Minneapolis, MN: U of Minnesota, 2008. 64. Print.

⁷³ Nagourney, Adam, and Richard Perez-pena. "Bush and McCain Trade Bitter Criticism As Campaigns in New York Gather Steam." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 02 Mar. 2000. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁷⁴ Nagourney, Adam, and Frank Bruni. "Bush and McCain Battle For Support on Tuesday In High-Stakes Territory." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 03 Mar. 2000. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

from different countries and giving birth to one. In 2013 and 2015, she published two opinion pieces in the *New York Times*, explaining her decision to undergo a preventative double mastectomy and oophorectomy because of her genetic risk.^{75,76} Following the publication of these pieces, testing for the Breast Cancer gene shot up 64% in the U.S..⁷⁷ This suggests how pop culture can influence not just what we buy and what we wear, but also our most personal medical choices. It is worth mentioning that the women who were influenced by Jolie to get tested were necessarily high-risk individuals. This spike in testing cost the health system \$13.5 million. Allowing a celebrity to be the face of a disease can be “extremely effective and relatively low-cost compared to a lot of public health awareness campaigns,” but this tactic does not necessarily reach the most at-risk population, but rather the population of Angelina Jolie fans.⁷⁸

While her message of inclusiveness and outreach to women everywhere, including women, refugees, and other disenfranchised groups across the world, Jolie positions herself as the leader of a rally.

⁷⁵Jolie, Angelina. "My Medical Choice." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 13 May 2013. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁷⁶ Pitt, Angelina Jolie. "Opinion | Angelina Jolie Pitt: Diary of a Surgery." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 24 Mar. 2015. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁷⁷ Harvard Medical School. "Breast Cancer: The 'Angelina Jolie' effect." ScienceDaily. ScienceDaily, 14 December 2016. <www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2016/12/161214213749.htm>.

⁷⁸ Johnson, Carolyn Y. "The Unintended Consequence of Angelina Jolie's Viral Breast Cancer Essay." *The Washington Post*. WP Company, 15 Dec. 2016. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.



Figure 12: Lara Croft, fully-armed female badass.⁷⁹



Figure 13: Amazon warrior, one-breasted badass.⁸⁰

But she has made her body into an Amazon's. For Jolie, the changes she has made to her body make her an even stronger fighter; just as the legendary Amazon warriors cut off their right breasts to improve the deadliness of their arrows.

Pussy Grabs Back: 2017

Let's knit these strands together; from a single diseased body to the body politic, from a pair of crutches to a pink triangle, from a small red ribbon to a global marketing campaign. In all these ways, we march for our solidarity. Now, I'll raise a final example. Consider the pink pussy hat, worn at Women's Marches across the globe on January 21, 2017.

⁷⁹ "Lovely Angelina." *Pinterest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

⁸⁰ "Amazons." *Wikipedia*. Wikimedia Foundation, 22 Apr. 2017. Web. 29 Apr. 2017.



Figure 14: Three to four million Americans marched to protest the results of the 2016 Presidential election.⁸¹

Many of these hats were knitted or stitched by hand following templates made by other women and posted on the internet, just as the creators of the red-ribbon campaign left behind templates for other activists to follow. In making their hats, stitch by stitch, women knit themselves into a community of people who assert their moral health, just as the suffragettes did precisely a century earlier. These hats, like ACT UP!'s pink triangle, reclaim the body: an unmissable, powerful and assertive statement of female strength. Just as FDR connected the health of individuals with the health of the nation, so today, women march not only for reproductive rights, but for our collective rights which, well-supported, contribute to a thriving nation.

⁸¹ "'Pussyhat' Acquired for Rapid Response Collection." *Blog*. N.p., n.d. Web. 25 Apr. 2017.

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