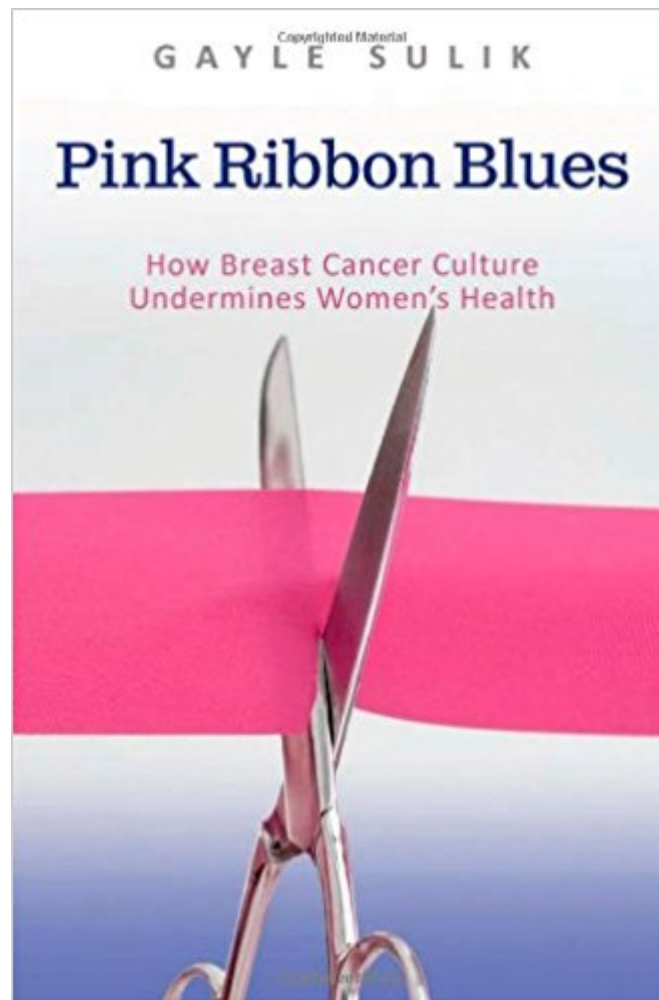




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# Pink Ribbon Blues: How Breast Cancer Culture Undermines Women's Health



## Synopsis

Medical sociologist Gayle A. Sulik reveals the hidden costs of the pink ribbon as an industry, one in which breast cancer functions as a brand name with a pink ribbon logo. Based on historical and ethnographic research, analysis of awareness campaigns and advertisements, and hundreds of interviews, *Pink Ribbon Blues* shows that while millions walk, run, and purchase products for a cure, cancer rates continue to rise, industry thrives, and breast cancer is stigmatized anew for those who reject the pink ribbon model. Even as Sulik points out the flaws of "pink ribbon culture," she outlines the positives and offers alternatives. The paperback includes a new Introduction investigating Susan G. Komen for the Cure and a color insert with images of, and reactions to, the pinking of breast cancer.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

In this eye-opening story about the ubiquitous pink ribbon, medical sociologist Sulik reveals the dark side of the "breast cancer awareness" movement. She argues that breast cancer has become a "brand," complete with its own logo and self-serving corporations. Zeneca, which makes the treatment drug tamoxifen, has, for instance, always put money into the 25-year-old National Breast Cancer Awareness Month. Sulik is no fan of the October celebration – she calls it "the official platform for pink ribbon culture to advertise treatment, promote early detection, encourage fundraising, and promise eventual eradication." Despite the sea of pink, no cure is in sight and treatment and detection efforts remain flawed. The Institute of

Medicine reported that 75 percent of positive mammograms are, upon biopsy, false positives, and that mammograms miss 25 to 40 percent of tumors that actually are cancerous. Americans don't even know how much of the money they spend on pink products goes toward legitimate breast cancer research. In the end, this well-reported book (Sulik interviewed hundreds of sources) will make readers think twice before they shell out extra bucks for a pink mixer. --Karen Springen --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"You may never think pink again about breast cancer after reading Sulik's sobering and lucid critique of what she calls 'pink culture'.... Sulik's call to 'take a road less pink' demands to be heard." --Publishers Weekly "In this provocative and eye-opening critique, medical sociologist Gayle Sulik makes the case that breast cancer culture is increasingly frivolous and commercialized--with patients paying the price."--Catherine Guthrie, Better Homes and Gardens "Breast Cancer Awareness Month has become a distracting sideshow, a situation that sociologist Gayle A. Sulik explores in compelling depth in her new book, *Pink Ribbon Blues*." --Katherine Russell Rich, Slate "Treads an interesting middle ground between the academic and the journalistic as she analyzes giant hunks of information and opinion, and also interviews patients to illustrate her points." --Abigail Zuger, M.D., New York Times "Well-written and extremely well researched, *Pink Ribbon Blues* demonstrates how pink consumption has transformed breast cancer from a stigmatized disease and individual tragedy to a market-driven industry of survivorship." --Sukari Ivester, Sociology of Health and Illness "Gayle Sulik takes us behind the pink curtain to a peculiar culture where sentimentality takes the place of scientific evidence, personal transcendence fills in for political action, and lofty platitudes replace actionable goals. *Pink Ribbon Blues* is the Frommer's travel guide to the country of breast cancer." --Sandra Steingraber, author, *Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment* "An excellent book that sheds new light on the construction and implications of breast cancer culture in American society. Her extensive research and thought-provoking analysis challenge current beliefs of what breast cancer means for diagnosed women, survivors, and advocates. This book is a must-read for all players in the breast cancer culture and anyone interested in women's health."--Kathy Charmaz, Professor of Sociology, Sonoma State University "In *Pink Ribbon Blues*, Gayle Sulik has brought sociological, feminist and media theory together for a deep and broad analysis of the consumer world of breast cancer. She has complimented all of that with a deeply humane and personal engagement with the women who are living with breast cancer in a world where the pink ribbon culture constantly needs disruption and questioning. BRAVO!!!!!"--Janet Gray, Director, Program in Science, Technology and Society,

Vassar College; Board Member, Breast Cancer Fund "In this thoughtful, eye-opening and searing examination of the pinking of breast cancer, Sulik shows how pink culture lurches from selflessness to selfishness, giving new meaning to the ferocity of survivors and she-roes."--Devra Davis, National Book Award Finalist, author of Disconnect: The Truth about Cell Phone Radiation and Your Health (2010), and The Secret History of the War on Cancer (2009), Founder, Environmental Health Trust, and Visiting Professor, Georgetown University "It's about time! We've been needing this book--a smart, critical, thoughtful analysis of pink ribbon culture and the damage it is doing. Thank you Gayle Sulik!"--Barbara Katz Rothman, Professor of Sociology at the City University of NY "Provocative." --Library Journal "Many of [Sulik's] insights are striking and she pulls together a wealth of historical material and data.... Recommended."--Choice "This is the first book to provide a comprehensive ethnographic analysis of breast cancer culture in American society. It presents a thought-provoking and probing argument against the industry of awareness-raising and describes real ways to help breast cancer patients and their families. This book will be valuable for all those interested in breast cancer management and in women's health."--Anticancer Research "Sulik takes us behind the pink curtain to a peculiar culture where sentimentality takes place of scientific evidence, personal transcendence fills in for political action, and lofty platitudes replace actionable goals. Pink Ribbon Blues is the Frommer's guide to the country of breast cancer." -- Sandra Steingraber, author, Living Downstream: An Ecologist's Personal Investigation of Cancer and the Environment "In this thoughtful and searing examination, Sulik shows how pink culture lurches from selflessness to selfishness, giving new meaning to the ferocity of survivors and she-roes." -- Devra Davis, author, Disconnect: The Truth about Cell Phone Radiation and Your Health and The Secret History of the War on Cancer, Founder, Environmental Health Trust, and Visiting Professor, Georgetown University

I have the kindle edition of Pink Ribbon Blues and until one year ago, I was part of the "problem" with the pervasive pink culture that Gayle exposes in this spectacularly researched and easily understood book. Many of us simply do not know, did not know.... and too many of us pick up ribbon products thinking we are doing something good. The reality? The ribbon has become so ingrained in our society, it has not only lost its effectiveness, it's stalled progress. The ribbon has given us hope and has created an illusion of progress where there is none. Meaningful progress matters. That doesn't exist. I can say this from my own first hand experience with breast cancer in my own family. There is so much wrong with this nonsense and it's interesting that those who promote the ribbon (and frequently criticize those of us who take issue with it) are rarely people who

have been intimately touched by breast cancer. Supporting the ribbon doesn't buy anyone a "get out of breast cancer free" card. I highly suggest anyone interested in seeing things change, in moving the face of this disease in a new direction, read this book. Share what you learn with just one person and let's begin a ripple effect so that the status quo DOES change. Demand transparency. Understand where your money is going when you pick up that pink trinket. Is someone turning you into a for profit brand..... or are they actually doing something with your funds that will save lives, advance research, help someone who is struggling due to the financial drain of a cancer diagnosis (even with excellent insurance....). Pink Ribbon Blues explains it from every angle. As the insanity that has become the October circus approaches, I hope many people will read this book and that we can begin to change the tide. Gayle has started a very important conversation but until many more of us become part of the conversation and engage those around us, we are destined to a future that mimics the past 20 years. I hope this is not the case. If you are considering the purchase of this book, you've already begun to question the status quo. Get the whole story from a trusted, well researched and highly respected source: Gayle Sulik.

By the time my father died of complications from surgery (not cancer related), he had endured 30 days of hell. At his memorial service, the minister earnestly said, "He suffered." Those words were a comfort to me. In not minimizing his suffering, his life was more fully honored. After reading "Pink Ribbon Blues," I think that breast cancer patients must feel exactly the opposite. If pink buckets of fried chicken and pink Barbie dolls are emblematic of your disease, how bad can it be, really? We are not recognizing their suffering if we think we can merely "shop for a cure", treating ourselves to a new pair of shoes in the name of support. I'll take that new pink designer tshirt, but I don't want to see anyone's mastectomy scar. Sulik's book presents many aspects of the pink ribbon culture including the profits of the drug companies, the sexualization of breast cancer, and the real statistics on cure rates. I was interested to read the details of DCIS and how it is classified and treated as cancer, which pollutes the stats of more serious forms of breast cancer, making the cure rate appear higher. I encourage others to read this book, not only for the well-reasoned arguments and comprehensive research presented, but also because it forces us to face the truth of what breast cancer patients endure. And it's definitely not pink.

Pink Ribbon Blues is an excellent book that explores the ways our society deals with breast cancer, and the many problems with the "Pink Ribbon" culture. The author illuminates key issues by discussing history, politics, and science. Her descriptions of women's individual psychology as well

as complex sociology in the breast cancer arena is fascinating. The chapter on medical aspects effectively reveals the impotence of mammography. She shows the reader that squelching the individual voice and raising money for the breast cancer "pink ribbon" machine is counter-productive. This book will educate the reader, and allow us to develop a more intelligent, thoughtful, and effective approach to breast cancer. As a male physician, I recommend this book to all physicians and all interested in breast cancer.

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