

ABSTRACT

Title: Different shades of pink - exploring the consumption of contemporary breast cancer charity

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Author: Britta Leurs

Supervisors: Peter Svensson and Sofia Ulver-Sneistrup

Keywords: Charity, breast cancer, consumption, death, CCT

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding about the consumption of contemporary charity in Western society on the example of the Swedish breast cancer charity Rosa Bandet.

Methodology: Phenomenological long interviews are used to generate qualitative data.

Theoretical foundation: This study resides in the tradition of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT).

Empirical foundation: This study is based on 11 long unstructured interviews with Swedish girls and women between 19 and 67 years.

Summary findings: The study reveals exciting nuances of contemporary charity consumption, among them the glamourisation and disarming of cancer, the commercialisation and merchandisation of charitable giving, the changing role of the donor and the new tasks of contemporary charities. The research offers a number of new perspectives for the research on charity, and moreover also elaborates on one of these perspectives, demonstrating that people use the consumption of charity to handle death. The assumption that consumers actively use charity for managing death challenges the actual suppression of contemporary consumers and the question is posed if the consumer today really is suppressed and wants to escape the market or if he maybe is the one in control.

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“Pink Ribbon ‘Love My Wine’ glass by Lolita is a fun and festive collector's item that's loaded with cool features! Not only is it a beautiful piece of hand-painted art, there's a recipe on the bottom for a ‘pink ribbon’ wine cocktail! The entire glass is painted with pink breast cancer ribbons and the words sister, mother, daughter, friend, and promise. The stem is polka-dotted with pink spots and studded with sparkling crystals. Lolita's Pink Ribbon wine glass includes a removable and reusable glass charm that hugs the stem with pink satin breast cancer awareness ribbons and pink crystal bead accents. As if all that wasn't enough, Lolita is packaged in a hat-box-like cylindrical box whose festive pink ribbon themed design mirrors that of the wine glass. It's ready for gift-giving! Makes a great hostess gift or door prize! Perfect for survivor celebrations or just an evening of fun with girlfriends! Pink Ribbon martini glass by Lolita also available. See all of our breast cancer awareness party supplies here.”

(Product description of the Pink Ribbon ‘Lolita’ wine glass, www.pinkribbonshop.com, 2010)

INTRODUCTION

Every year in October, Sweden turns pink. During the so-called breast cancer awareness month, buildings get illuminated in pink light, shop windows are decorated with pink ribbons, and in stores, an extensive product range of pink products supporting breast cancer charity awaits the consumer, offering everything from pink golf balls and sport bras over mascara and jewellery up to pink toilet paper, mops and agendas (www.cancerfonden.se, 2010). Bakeries and cafés complement this with an assortment of different muffins and cakes, lavishly decorated with pink frosting and miniature marzipan ribbons, available in either traditional or breast shaped form. To make sure that really nobody misses that October is breast cancer awareness month, Rosa Bandet, the main breast cancer charity in Sweden, in addition organizes various events, including anything between marathon and glamorous TV gala. Chaired by the Swedish crown princess and supported by countless local celebrities, Rosa Bandet has so far raised about 27 million Euros for the fight against breast cancer (www.cancerfonden.se, 2010) and moreover managed to establish itself as a household name, turning breast cancer charity into one of the most popular causes in charity-minded Sweden.

But Sweden is not the only nation that ‘thinks pink’ during October - breast cancer charity has conquered large parts of the globe, steadily increasing its global popularity within the last two decades. Founded in the early 1990s in the US, breast cancer charity has evolved in less than 20 years from a small charity focusing on handing out pink ribbon tags into a huge global cause (Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009), pursuing the fight against breast cancer by spreading awareness and raising money through high-profile mass events, collaborations with Hollywood stars and an ever-expanding assortment of products carrying the pink ribbon. From pink make-up sets and agendas over carrots and soft toys up to cupcakes and cleaning equipments - today one can find pink ribbons on nearly any type of product (Goldman, 1997).

Breast cancer charity has not only surpassed most of its fellow charities in terms of fundraising and popularity, it also differs from them by its ‘merchandised and commercialised’ approach to charity. In contrast to most other causes, where a ‘direct’ consumption of the charity is limited to some T-shirts or pins, breast cancer charity, internationally known under the name Pink Ribbon, has developed into a brand of its own, using its symbol, the pink ribbon, to sell an enormous range of things (Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009). In addition to products which are directly sold through breast cancer charity organisations, money is also raised by allowing other companies to use the pink ribbon on their products, much like a co-brand. This increases the range of breast cancer charity related products available for consumption even further. By providing consumers with cause-related products

covering almost every aspect of the consumer's life, breast cancer charity has become one of the most consumed, or at least one of the most consumable, charities ever.

All in all, "breast cancer has blossomed from wallflower to the most popular girl at the corporate charity prom" during the last two decades (Ehrenreich, 2001: 45). But while large parts of the public have a mainly positive opinion about breast cancer charity (e.g. King, 2004; Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009), recently, voices of criticism have been raised as well, pointing at negative side effects of this 'commercialized' kind of charity (e.g. Goldman, 1997; Ehrenreich, 2001; Leopold, 2001; Ehrenreich, 2010). These critics claim that breast cancer charity 'infantilizes' and tames breast cancer - "the diagnosis may be disastrous, but there are those cunning pink rhinestone angel pins to buy and races to train for" (Ehrenreich, 2001: 49). So instead of providing a solution to the 'problem' breast cancer, breast cancer charity is seen here as an "outbreak of mass delusion, celebrating survivorhood by downplaying mortality and promoting obedience to medical protocols" (Ibid: 52). In addition, breast cancer charity is accused of concealing the severity of cancer as "by transforming the spoiled, abject parts that are the unspoken imaginary of cancer into strenuously upbeat pastel trinkets, however, non-profit campaigns 'disappear' the realities of fatigue, nausea, bone pain, neuropathy, constipation, and anaemia" (Stoddard Holmes, 2006: 481).

But despite of the above discussed criticism, breast cancer charity is still one of the most important and influential 'players' in today's global sector of charitable giving and overall, it is safe to say that not only breast cancer charity, but also charity in general have become essential elements of contemporary society (e.g. Bajde, 2009). Despite the exceedingly voluntary nature of charitable gifts (Godbout and Caille, 1998; Komter, 2005), charitable giving is nowadays almost imperative due to what Berking (1999) calls the remoralization of the individual-society-nature triad. The subsequent increase in moral and social sensibility has considerably increased the pressure on both companies and individuals to do good deeds and 'give back' to society. Both charitable giving and the voluntary sector have therefore grown substantially during the last decades, with an enormous amount of different causes being today available to the willing donor. The Times even declared charity as the new favourite national pastime, replacing the former number one activity of watching television:

"Which favourite national pastime employs more than 500,000 people in 136,000 organisations, turns over £14 billion a year, gives pleasure to millions of people in Britain and is renowned across the world? If you are expecting the answer 'British television', you are in for a surprise. It is charitable giving and the voluntary sector." (The Times, 2001 in Bajde, 2009)

Charity is an equally important topic for academia, since charitable giving is regarded as an essential constituent of collective and individual identity because it gives people the possibility to prove themselves as human beings (Berking, 1999). Although an individual is born as a human by default,

one's 'humanity' needs to be maintained, if not even earned, through behaving in an appropriate way and having proper relations with distant others (Ibid.), which can be for example achieved through the contribution to charity. It is extremely important for people to maintain their humanity, as humanity is generally considered as the basis of one's personhood (Vaughan, 2006), or, in Godelier's (1999) words, represents the 'sacred' element of persons. Therefore, humanity must be kept and nourished as "losing one's humanity equals losing one's soul" (Bajde, 2009: 71). If a person fails to prove himself as a human being, this "is generally met with social castigation that can in extreme cases lead to social exclusion" (Ibid: 71).

Next to its close connection to the notion of humanity, contemporary charity is also often related to the postmodern ideas of imagined communities (e.g. Anderson, 1991) and 'spectacularization', as charitable giving produces imagined communities and also "exhibits a potential to transform itself into a spectacular happening that incites the senses and provokes passionate responses" (Bajde, 2009: 77). Due to this appetite for spectacle, lately charity has become increasingly dependent on the global media (Darling, 2000), with the market providing essential structural support for the charity (Bajde, 2009). As the "diverse and fluid nature of the imaginary and ideological constructions related to charitable giving are characteristic of postmodern charity" (Ibid: 73), the research of charity does not only deliver insights about the charitable giving itself, but moreover also offers "several insightful observations regarding the relationship between postmodern charity and the market, consumer culture and the marketing discourse" (Ibid: 77). Although based on this it should be clear that charitable giving represents an important topic for both consumer research and marketing (Ibid.), this phenomenon has so far been largely overlooked by academics, with the social expressivity of charitable giving remaining underexplored up to date (Bajde, 2009).

In addition to the scarcity of research available, in the few studies that deal with charity consumption, the consumer's perspective is for the most part missing. The existing literature on charity available within the field of consumer research almost exclusively analyses charity from a corporate perspective and examines its use as a marketing tool that enables companies to increase profit and brand awareness (so-called cause marketing; e.g. Fellman, 1999; Thompson, 2006; Taranto, 2007; Hammerbeck, 2008). Due to this corporate perspective, the consumer's motives for charitable giving have been touched upon only superficially - King (2001) for example mentions in her discussion of corporate philanthropy the consumer's desire to be generous and civic-minded - but unfortunately, a more detailed analysis of the consumption of charity from a consumer's point of view is not available to date. Although largely ignored by the field of consumer research so far, it would be fruitful to research charity from the consumer's perspective. After all, charity possesses

without a doubt a special social and personal quality (Bajde, 2009) and therefore, providing an account of the charity consumption as experienced by the individual consumer would help to complement the existing body of literature on the topic.

But it is not only the approaching of charity from a mainly corporate perspective that has led to a rather one-sided presentation of the topic in academia. Instead, researchers also apply almost exclusively a certain theoretical framework to understand charity consumption - the framework of gift giving. Looking at the nature of charity, it is maybe not surprising that charitable donating is perceived as part of the gift-giving phenomenon (e.g. Sherry, 1983; Belk, 1979). After all, charitable giving can be regarded as giving gifts to society, as a form of 'giving back' to society (Strathern, 1997). Moreover, charity is often seen as being oppositional to market exchange, with those involved in charity emphasizing the distinctiveness between consumption and donation (Belk 1996; Berking 1999).

But although these points are undeniable arguments in favour of treating charity as a form of gift giving, it should nevertheless not be regarded as given that the gift paradigm is the best framework available to understand all facets of charitable giving. Fischer et al. (1996) for example claim that charitable donations are not gifts at all, since donations fail to reproduce social relationships between donor and recipient and do not entail any significant communication between them. And it is indeed astonishing that up to now, no research study has explicitly tried to analyse charity using a different theoretical framework, especially when looking at the transformation of charity during the last decades. Today, charity "entails a complex and ambiguous relationship with the market and postmodern consumer culture" (Bajde, 2009: 66) and the charity sector has become very heterogenic, including many fragmented subtypes of different causes and offering a whole new range of ways for contributing to charity. Developments like the commercialisation of charity or its 'merchandisation' are exciting tendencies whose study promises interesting new insights for researchers. As research using the paradigm of gift giving has failed to grasp these nuances so far, one could wonder if gift giving is really the 'one and only' theoretical framework there is for researching charity consumption from a consumer's perspective. Maybe it is time to open up the research on charity for new theories and perspectives, since "both our theoretical understanding, and such practical interests as promoting charitable donating, would be furthered if we regard charitable donating and gift giving as distinct phenomenon" (Fischer et al., 1996: 175).

All in all, the discussion above shows that charity is an under-explored, but highly promising phenomenon to research. Since the consumption of charity only recently caught the attention of a

small group of consumer researchers, large parts of this phenomenon are left unanalysed up to today (Bajde, 2009), leaving many nuances of modern charity undiscovered. Approaching the topic from an explicit consumer perspective would complement and enrich the existing literature by delivering interesting new insights into the consumption of charity. In addition, disentanglement of charity from the theoretical framework of gift giving could help to deliver findings that help to understand until now unexplored facets of contemporary charity consumption, such as said commercialisation and 'merchandisation' of contemporary causes. Breast cancer charity is the perfect subject for such a research on charity as it is one of the most popular and important causes of today, displaying exciting tendencies which are rather novel in the field of charity. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the consumption of contemporary charity in Western society on the example of the Swedish breast cancer charity Rosa Bandet.¹ By detaching it from the paradigm of gift giving, this research aims to explore contemporary charity and to identify emerging themes which characterize charity consumption as experienced from a consumer perspective, thereby responding to Bajde's (2009) call that "much additional research needs to be performed in order to attain a comprehensive understanding of charitable giving and its position in postmodern society" (81).

¹ Swedish breast cancer charity is chosen here since Sweden is believed to have one of the most developed and most popular breast cancer charity organisations worldwide. In addition, the researcher is located in Sweden.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

In general, the field of science can be divided into two parts, the natural and the social sciences. Consumer research clearly belongs to the social sciences (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988), and, just like the other social sciences, it therefore aspires to some degree of understanding or 'Verstehen' of consumer behaviour instead of explaining and predicting it (Anderson and Ozanne, 1988). The notion of 'Verstehen' is central here since both social sciences in general and consumer research in particular deal with people and "one quintessential characteristic of humans entails their unremitting tendency to seek meaning in their lives" (Holbrook and O'Shaughnessy, 1988: 400), with people living "embedded within a shared system of signs based upon public language and other symbolic objects that confer a sense of social existence and identity" (Ibid: 400). Consumers thus "differ from atoms and molecules in their endless quest for meaning" and therefore, interpretation is needed in all research that aims to analyse the meanings embedded in consumer behaviour (Ibid.).

The complexity of consumption is increasingly recognized as it involves a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). It is therefore very important to also pay attention to the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption, even though they are not plainly accessible through experiments, surveys, or database modelling (Sherry, 1991). Unfortunately, in the general field of consumer research, a rather positivistic perspective is still dominant (e.g. Thompson et al., 1989) which tries to measure, explain and predict consumer behaviour through the application of mainly quantitative methods. Thereby, the experiential, social, and cultural dimensions of consumption are mainly neglected in this field (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982). Moreover, most of consumer research seems to be unduly wedded to the managerial perspective, which poses considerable barriers to the investigation of consumption in its full experiential and sociocultural scope (e.g. Holbrook, 1987). Due to these shortcomings of 'mainstream' consumer research in providing a holistic understanding of consumer behaviour, this study will reside in the research tradition of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) instead.

CCT is an interdisciplinary research tradition that advances knowledge about consumer culture by focusing on the neglected experiential and sociocultural dimensions of consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). In contrast to mainstream consumer research, which is sometimes criticized for ivory tower theorizing (Lehmann, 1996), CCT research is fundamentally concerned with the cultural meanings, sociohistoric influences, and social dynamics that shape consumer identities and experiences in everyday life contexts (e.g. Holt, 1997; Thompson et al., 1990). Instead of prescribing to one particular point of view, CCT refers to a family of theoretical perspectives that address the

dynamic relationships between consumer actions, the marketplace, and cultural meanings (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Through this presence of different conversations, cross-paradigmatic engagement and enrichment is supported (Ibid.) and a more holistic understanding of consumer behaviour is provided. Since the aim of this research is to understand the complexities of charity consumption, the field of CCT therefore offers the best theoretical context available for this study.

Despite the range of distinct theoretical approaches within CCT, researchers within this tradition still share a common theoretical orientation towards the study of cultural complexity (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Instead of viewing culture as a homogenous system of meanings, values and lifestyles collectively shared by a society, CCT explores the “heterogeneous distribution of meanings and the multiplicity of overlapping cultural groupings that exist within the broader sociohistoric frame of globalization and market capitalism” (Ibid: 869). Consumer culture thus denotes a “social arrangement in which the relations between lived culture and social resources, and between meaningful ways of life and the symbolic and material resources on which they depend, are mediated through markets” (Ibid: 869). As culture in CCT is regarded as possessing a fragmented complexity and is conceptualized as the very fabric of experience, meaning, and action (Geertz, 1983), action is thus not perceived as a causal force. Instead, consumer culture frames consumers’ horizons of conceivable actions, thoughts and feelings, making certain patterns of behaviour and sense-making interpretations more likely than others (Askegaard and Kjeldgaard, 2002; Holt 1997; Kozinets 2002).

As mentioned above, CCT research focuses on the experiential, contextual and symbolic aspects of consumption, acquisition, possession, and disposition processes, which are analysed from “macro-, meso-, and micro-theoretical perspectives” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 871). The amount of studies dealing with acquisition and possession processes is limited so far, with consumption and possession practices being the two most intensely studied phenomena within CCT (Ibid.). In particular, CCT research has so far emphasized the productive aspect of consumption, exploring how consumers actively rework and transform material goods and symbolic meanings encoded in everyday settings to “manifest their particular personal and social circumstances and further their identity and lifestyle goals” (Ibid: 871). The marketplace is regarded as offering consumers a range of resources with which they can construct both individual and collective identities (e.g. Thompson and Hirschman, 1995; Murray, 2002).

Overall, the field of CCT can be divided into four main research domains - consumer identity projects, marketplace cultures, the sociohistoric patterning of consumption, and mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretive strategies (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Although this

categorisation provides a good overview of the tradition, these different research programs should not be regarded as clearly defined segments in which each CCT study can be 'neatly typologized', since many studies in CCT include aspects that refer to more than one of these categories (Ibid.).

In the domain of 'consumer identity projects', consumers are regarded as identity seekers and makers. The main research interest is how consumers construct a sense of self by using 'marketer-generated materials' (Belk, 1988; McCracken 1986). The market provides individuals with resources which they use to create their 'narratives of identity' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). A very essential notion characterizing this type of research is Belk's (1988) extended self, which has encouraged various examinations of how consumption helps to define people's sense of self (Ahuvia, 2005). Another central element is the theory of conspicuous consumption, which entails that individuals consume products that are viewed as status symbols consciously and publicly to construct a certain identity (LaBarbera, 1988). The relationship between consumers' identity projects and the marketplace is a central point of attention here as the market is seen as producing "certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 871).

Studies in the category of 'marketplace culture' view the consumer as culture producer, thereby rejecting the traditional anthropological view of individuals as culture bearers. The main research interest is to find out "how the emergence of consumption as a dominant human practice reconfigures cultural blueprints for action and interpretation, and vice versa" (Ibid: 873). This includes for example the ways in which consumers create feelings of social solidarity and construct "distinctive, fragmentary, self-selected, and sometimes transient cultural worlds through the pursuit of common consumption interests" (Ibid: 873). A central notion is here Maffesoli's (1996) so-called 'neotribalism'. Maffesoli claims that in today's society, the traditional bases of sociality have been eroded as a radical form of individualism has taken over. In order to find a substitute for the traditional solidarity of the past, "consumers forge more ephemeral collective identifications and participate in rituals of solidarity that are grounded in common lifestyle interests and leisure avocations" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 873), thereby forming 'tribes' around certain lifestyles.

In the domain 'sociohistoric patterning of consumption', institutional and social structures such as class, gender and nationality are addressed that have the potential to systematically influence consumption (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Consumers are regarded as enactors of social roles and positions (Otnes et al., 1993) and the main research focus rests upon the investigation of those processes by which consumer behaviour is influenced by factors such as gender, social class, gender, nationality, ethnicity, civil status etc. Important in this domain is Holt's (1997, 1998) notion of high,

medium and low cultural capital and how this capital structures consumer preferences. The relationship between experiences, practices and 'belief systems' of consumers and the underlying institutional and social structures are examined in this domain (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), including for example the transformation of ethnic identities into something 'hypercultural' since national culture is today socially reconstructed as something that can be consumed (e.g. through music, food and clothing).

The category 'mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers' interpretive strategies' refers mainly to the analysis of consumer ideology, or more specifically to the examination of the "systems of meaning that tend to channel and reproduce consumers' thoughts and actions in such a way as to defend dominate interests in society" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 874). Consumers are here not conceived of as passive dupes, but rather as interpretive agents who create meaning in various ways, for example by accepting the representations of identity and lifestyle ideals of the market and mass media or by consciously deviating from these 'ideological instructions' (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 874). An important concept in this domain is the design and management of servicescapes and how these servicescapes influence consumer experiences (e.g. McAlexander et al. 2002) by transforming cultural ideals into material realities. Culture texts from the media are read by researchers as 'lifestyle and identity constructions' that communicate an idealised type of the contemporary consumer (Belk and Pollay, 1985; Schroeder and Borgerson, 1998). But it is not always necessarily the market that controls the consumer; Deighton and Grayson (1995) for example see consumers as willing accomplices in their own seduction by marketplace narratives (Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Consumers bend messages from the market to fit their life circumstances rather than feeling a pressure to conform to these communicated ideals (Mick and Buhl, 1992). Moreover, various forms of consumer resistance exist which "inevitably greet the dominant normative ideological influence of commercial media and marketing" (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 875), with consumers creating lifestyles that challenge dominant consumerist norms and corporate power (e.g. Murray and Ozanne, 1991; Murray et al., 1994; Kozinets, 2002).

As can be seen from the discussion above, CCT is a complex tradition that offers a number of different theoretical perspectives and approaches for the examination of consumption. Instead of enforcing the application of one certain theoretical framework, researchers can pick from a range of theories those ones that are most appropriate and promising for their studies. As mentioned before, this research aims to explore the complexities of charity and discover new facets of this phenomenon outside the gift giving paradigm. This study thus needs no particular theoretical framework, as a selection of a framework before the analysis would limit the possibilities to explore the phenomenon

entirely. By selecting a framework beforehand, the observations on charitable giving would get 'squeezed' into this framework and additional nuances of the phenomenon outside the range of this theory would remain undiscovered. Therefore it is here opted for the application of a broader theoretical context instead. By positioning this study in the field of CCT, a set of theories on consumption is available, which help the researcher understand the phenomenon of charity consumption, but do not limit what is discovered and revealed to such an extent as would be the case with an established theoretical framework like the one of gift giving.

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the methodology used in this research is presented. First the theoretical departure is defined, followed by a discussion of the research and sampling methods applied in this study. In addition, it is described how the data was collected and analysed. This is followed by a section of reflections on qualitative data in general, which rounds off the chapter.

METHODOLOGICAL DEPARTURE

Despite the fact that up to today, the dominant paradigm in marketing and consumer research seems to be the one of logical positivism (Thompson et al., 1989), it was decided to study the consumption of breast cancer charity under the world view of existential-phenomenology instead. Quite recently, an 'experiential view' on consumption has been introduced to consumer research, with consumption seen as "primarily subjective state of consciousness with a variety of symbolic meaning, hedonic responses, and esthetic criteria" that involves "a steady flow of fantasies, feelings, and fun" (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982: 132). As this experiential perspective of consumption is phenomenological in spirit (Ibid.) and moreover the aim of this research is to understand the consumption of charity rather than to rationally explain it, the existential-phenomenological paradigm was chosen for this study. In addition, the fact that "experiential and socio-cultural dimensions of consumption" are often seen as being "not plainly accessible" through quantitative methods, shows as well that logical positivism is a rather inappropriate paradigm in this context (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 870).

In contrast to logical positivism, existential-phenomenology aims to provide a 'thematic description' of individuals' experiences by detecting certain patterns which emerge from context (Kohler, 1947), which in turn matches with the purpose of this research, namely to explore consumers' experiences of charity consumption. In existential-phenomenological research, patterns are viewed as 'perceptually distinguishable', but they cannot exist separate from their context (Thompson et al., 1989). Therefore, the aim of existential-phenomenological guided research is to study the 'totality' of human-being-in-the-world (Heidegger, 1962 [1927]). Research focuses thus on the life-world of individuals with existential-phenomenology seeking to be a rather descriptive science (Thompson et al., 1989). Human experiences are regarded as both reflected and unreflected (Pollio, 1982), which means that "reflected meanings and symbols emerge from the ground of unreflected experiences" (Ibid: 137).

RESEARCH METHOD

In accordance to the research tradition of CCT that this study is positioned in, a qualitative research method was chosen for this research because the experiential and sociocultural dimensions of charity consumption are not “plainly accessible through experiments, surveys, or database modelling” (Arnould and Thompson, 2005: 870; Sherry, 1991). Reality is regarded as socially constructed and it is not believed that data can be collected on the ‘one’ real world, therefore calling for the application of an interpretive method (Hudson and Ozanne, 1988). Accordingly, based on this view of reality and the methodological departure chosen, it was decided to use the qualitative research method of phenomenological interviewing for this study. As mentioned before, the research of consumer experiences demands in-depth data of a usually qualitative nature (e.g. Arnould and Thompson, 2005). Phenomenological interviewing is believed to be able to provide this in-depth data (Thompson et al. 1989) and moreover, interviewing in general is also often seen as one of the most powerful tools for attaining an in-depth understanding of people’s experiences (Kvale, 1983).

Although the aim of this research is to better understand consumers’ experiences of charity consumption, it is important to clarify that consumption does not only refer to the actual purchase or use of products here. Instead, consumption is viewed in the above mentioned ‘experiential’ way (Holbrook and Hirschman, 1982), including therefore also feelings, thoughts, talk and fantasies about consumption. The researcher cannot observe all of these forms of charity consumption directly, but has to rely on what interviewees say about the consumption. Because of this heavy reliance on interview data, some researchers do not believe that interviews can produce data mirroring phenomena (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Van Maanen, 1995; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000) and regard interviewing as incapable of producing any kind of data on phenomena existing outside interviews (Alvesson, 2003).

These critics suggest that an interview is an “empirical situation that can be studied as such” only (Ibid: 16) since the interviewer has social control over interviewees not only in structured, but also in open-ended interviews and thereby shapes what is being said (Silverman, 1993). Therefore, supporters of this so-called localist view of interviewing do “not ascribe to the interview an ontological status different from other events and situations” (Alvesson, 2003: 16), meaning that the only data possible to collect with interviewing is data on the behaviour of interviewees during the interview. Another argument often put forward to support this view concerns the use of language in interviews. Instead of mirroring reality, some researchers believe language is used for productive,

forward-oriented purposes (Ibid.). This implies that interviewees use “language to do things, to order and request, persuade and accuse” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987: 32) rather than to ‘only’ communicate their reality.

As response to this critique, one could argue that localists underestimate the ability of their interview partners to communicate insights about their own social reality. In its most radical form, localism could be interpreted as claiming that individuals are completely incapable of sharing any aspect of their social reality through language with others. That would mean that individuals are regarded as almost helplessly exposed to external influences, unable to escape them. Although this might apply to some people, the assumption seems quite absurd when looking at society in general. Individuals in the 21st century are often, at least to some extent, aware of external influences, have a rather strong sense of self and do possess a certain amount of reflexivity. Increasing education and easier access to knowledge through the Internet are making people more emancipated, self-confident and self-aware. This is not to say that people are nowadays completely immune to influences or entirely aware of how their social reality is constructed. But the contemporary should also not be underestimated as there is quite some reason to believe that he very well is capable of communicating certain information about his social reality.

Despite its apparent advantages, qualitative interviewing proved to be not sufficient on its own to completely fulfil the task of collecting meaningful data. Instead, it was decided to complement interviewing with a form of photo elicitation to overcome and eliminate problems potentially arising from the ‘seasonal’ character of breast cancer charity. As mentioned earlier on, breast cancer charity concentrates most of its activities on the month of October, the official breast cancer awareness month. This means that the major part of the charity’s products are only sold around that time and in addition, all important and big events like the glamorous TV gala take place during October as well. As the field work for this study was conducted during the months of March and April, some interviewees perceived it as difficult to talk about their charity consumption without any visual aid that helped them remember the products they had seen in shops or the things they had bought. To solve this problem, it was therefore decided to support the interview with a form of photo elicitation as photo elicitation is “a creative process which relies on hindsight, recollection, and interaction in its reconstruction of the past” (Tyson, 1996: 89).

For the photo elicitation in this research, a couple of pictures showing the most popular and well-known Rosa Bandet products of the last years were used, an overview of which can be found in the appendix. The pictures were displayed as needed during the interviews, helping interviewees to

remember what they had seen and bought from Rosa Bandet so far. In addition, towards the end of the interview, respondents were also given two screenshots from breast cancer charity websites (also available in the appendix) to help revitalizing the discussion one more time and thereby maybe delivering insights, that might otherwise not have been mentioned (Tyson, 2009). Critics of the photo elicitation method claim that it includes a high level of subjectivity since “photographs are unique and have multiple meanings” (Warren, 2005: 876), which can have an immeasurable, but direct effect on the interview data and conclusions drawn from that (Tyson, 2009). Pictures can thus not be used as ‘neutral evidence’ (Rose, 2000). But this subjectivity can actually also be seen as a strength as it helps the researcher to recognize and ‘evidence’ multiplicity of voice (Warren, 2005). All in all, it is important to keep in mind that photo elicitation functions best if it is used as support for another research method. Therefore interviewing is clearly regarded as the main research method in this study, with photo elicitation only complementing this method by providing an aide-mémoire for interviewees.

THE SAMPLE

As the aim of this study is to explore the consumption of breast cancer charity, it was important that the group of interviewees reflected a certain degree of variety as a heterogeneous sample supports this exploration process by providing as many different points of view on the topic as possible. Therefore it was decided to keep the group of potential interviewees as broad and open as possible, only requiring interviewees to be female and to be familiar with breast cancer charity. The second criterion probably does not need further elaboration - after all, it would be quite difficult to talk about the consumption of breast cancer charity with someone who does not even know that this charity exists. In contrast to this, the choice to only use female interviewees here might seem contradictory as it collides on first sight with the call for variety.

Despite the quest for variety, the target group was limited to women as they are the main customers and consumers of the cause. Therefore, women are most likely more interested and engaged in this particular charity than men are. Without a doubt, this research would have also profited from the inclusion of a male perspective, but due to time limitations, it was uncertain if the available time would be sufficient to analyse the phenomenon in-depth from both a male and female point of view. Therefore it was decided to narrow down the focus on women instead, attempting to at least provide the reader with a thorough presentation of charity consumption from a female perspective.

Once the requirements for informants were clear, the process of recruiting interviewees began. The strategy of theoretical sampling developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) was applied since probability sampling was deemed inappropriate here regarding the qualitative nature of this study. Theoretical sampling can be described as “the process of generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes, and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges” (Ibid: 45). Data collection is controlled by the emerging theory and theoretical sampling is thus an ongoing process rather than a single event. The aim of theoretical sampling is to refine ideas and densify categories rather than to ‘boost’ sample size (Charmaz, 2000). As this study does not claim to mirror a certain population in society, a sample size of 11 women was regarded as sufficient here. This view is supported by McCracken (1988a), who states that, instead of focusing on quantity, it is more important to work with fewer people, but in-depth. True to the idea of theoretical sampling, after interviewing the first five participants, the interview data was scanned and similar themes were detected. Another set of four interviewees was sampled subsequently and it appeared that many of the things said in these interviews fit within the already detected themes. It was then decided to perform two additional interviews to see if any completely new insights would come up, and when that was not the case, it was assumed that a certain level of theoretical saturation had been reached.

Interviewees were recruited through advertisements and bulletins in various on- and offline settings, including online communities, public facilities, university departments and stores. In addition, both online communities and blogs were searched for possible interview partners, who then were contacted via email. Based on the impression that breast cancer charity is very popular in Sweden with the main part of women having a positive image of Rosa Bandet and contributing to the charity, the first assumption of the interviewer was that it therefore would be rather easy to recruit interviewees. After all, judging from all the attention and support that breast cancer charity seemed to get from Swedish women, it would only be reasonable to assume that some of them also would be willing to contribute to a study about said charity. But it soon became apparent that this thought was rather naïve, as it turned out to be harder than expected to find interviewees. Despite all that talk and support of breast cancer charity, people seemed to be not that excited to contribute to a research about this charity.

Although this on the one hand complicated the research, at the same time it was also a first hint towards what should be found out later on, namely that people’s support of breast cancer charity and thereby apparently also their willingness to talk about it seem to depend heavily on the point in time - more specifically, on the month. Even a representative of the biggest Swedish breast cancer

organisation, who was contacted for some help in this matter, suggested that it would be much easier to find interview partners during October, the official breast cancer awareness month, and advised the researcher to wait with the interview process until then.

THE DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

When working with phenomenological interviews, it is important to deal with ethical considerations arising from this particular method before actually conducting the data collection process. For example, due to the in-depth nature of this type of interviews, interviewees often reveal a substantial part of their personal life that they otherwise probably would not share 'just like that'. It is thus essential that the interviewer aims to reach an 'informed consent' with the interviewee prior to the interview (Thompson et al., 1989). Therefore, in this study, the purpose of the research was presented shortly at the beginning of every interview. Moreover, informants were asked for permission to record the conversations and were guaranteed anonymity. To attain anonymity, all respondents were assigned different names, and critical personal details that could reveal an interviewee's real identity (e.g. place of residence, names of family and friends) were removed from the transcripts and are not presented here.

The aim of applying phenomenological interviewing in this study was to get 'first-person' descriptions of the experiences people have with breast cancer charity. To attain these first-person descriptions, phenomenological interviews try to assemble conversations, meaning the course of the interviews is largely set by respondents (Thompson et al., 1989), with only an opening question being predisposed by the interviewer and the remaining questions asked by the interviewer flowing from the established dialogue, thereby following the course of thinking of the interviewee. In this research, the opening question was used to shortly indicate what the general topic of the interview, namely, breast cancer charity, and gather spontaneous first thoughts of respondents around this topic to then build up a conversation based on these thoughts.

In a few cases though, this tactic had to be slightly adapted as some interviewees appeared a bit nervous in the beginning, which is maybe not that surprising regarding the quite sensitive topic of breast cancer charity. Therefore, in these cases two or three rather straight forward and closed questions were asked to give the interviewee some time to acclimatise to the interview situation. Although these questions did maybe not produce great additional enlightening insights, it was still necessary to ask them since one of the most important tasks of the phenomenological interviewer is

to “provide a context in which respondents freely describe their experiences in detail” (Thompson et al., 1989: 138). Therefore, it was also important to show respondents that the interviewer was neither an expert in the topic of breast cancer charity nor more knowledgeable about it. Here it was actually helpful that the interviewer had a different nationality than the informants. Since the interviewer was foreign, he was not regarded as being an expert in the topic and instead, interviewees happily shared their knowledge on Swedish breast cancer charity, trying to help the foreign researcher understand Swedish phenomenon.

DATA ANALYSIS

Once the interview process was completed, interviews were fully transcribed since the transcribed interviews are the text from which interpretation ensues (Kvale, 1983). This reliance on transcripts reflects three methodological criteria of phenomenological interpretation - autonomy of text, the emic approach and bracketing (Thompson et al., 1989). Existential-phenomenology treats the text of an interview as “an autonomous body of data comprised respondent reflections on lived experiences”, meaning “there is no attempt to corroborate a respondent’s descriptions with external verification” (Ibid: 140). After all, these descriptions are not regarded as ‘copies’ of the remembered event, but instead constitute reconstructions of the event emerging in the context of an interview (Ibid.). In order to assure this autonomy of the text, preconceived theoretical notions about the subject researched have to be ‘bracketed’. This does not mean that the researcher needs to have an entirely neutral perspective, but instead specific preconceptions about the phenomenon should be if possible avoided as the aim is to “grasp, rather than to impose, meaning emerging from the dialogue” (Ibid: 140).

The above discussed methodological aspects were considered when analysing the interviews, with once again the foreignness of the researcher facilitating especially the bracketing process. As the researcher did not bring along specific knowledge about breast cancer charity when coming to Sweden, not too many preconceptions and opinions existed as there had simply been no opportunity to develop them yet. Instead, on the side of the researcher there was a feeling of curiosity and the wish to learn more about the phenomenon, and therefore the research approached the phenomenon in a quite open way. But of course this is not to say that in this study a completely neutral perspective was applied; this is most likely never possible. Researchers always see the world from a certain point of view, but what is important is that they try to be as open as possible when in the field and try to limit the influence of preconceptions.

The analysis of interviews followed the part-to-whole mode of interpretation called hermeneutical circle (Arnold and Fischer, 1994). This means that first, each interview was analysed on its own, analysing separate passages within the overall context of the interview (Ibid.). After having interpreted each interview at the idiographic level, in the next step all interviews were analysed intertextually, i.e. in relation to each other, and common patterns were detected. These patterns are also known as 'global themes' (Kvale, 1983) and should be seen as "capturing figural aspects emerging from a given set of experiences" (Thompson et al., 1989: 141) instead of providing an exhaustive description of the phenomenon researched.

REFLECTIONS ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In general, it is often demanded that research should fulfil the criteria of validity, generalizability and reliability. This means for example that the same results would be produced if the study was repeated, and that the sample is chosen in such a way that it is possible to generalize from it to the whole population. In contrast to research that takes a positivist perspective and applies mainly quantitative research methods, which has a set of rather fixed and straight forward criteria to evaluate the 'quality' of the research, for qualitative research there are no such standards available (Bryman and Bell, 2007; Prasad, 2005). As many qualitative studies do not necessarily fulfil the demands of validity, generalizability and reliability, qualitative research is often accused of being worthless and inexpressive by critics.

But such criticism is mainly voiced by quantitative researchers with a positivist background. In contrast, many other research traditions do not regard the fulfilment of criteria borrowed from quantitative research as the most important aspect of their research (Prasad, 2005), nor are they too concerned about the objectivity, repeatability or generalizability of their research methods. After all, qualitative researchers do not aim to generalize from their sample data to a population, they generalize to theory. And generalizing from population to theory is possible, with the generalization depending on the "quality and cogency of theoretical reasoning" (Mitchell, 1983: 207). Another point of critique that qualitative research is often confronted with is that some see it as being too subjective, as its results seem to heavily depend on the interpretation of the researcher. This critique towards subjectivity is quite inappropriate, since most qualitative studies are conducted by researchers from interpretive traditions. And as in these traditions reality is viewed as socially constructed anyway with human interpretation being "the starting point for developing knowledge

about the social world” (Prasad, 2005: 13), subjectivity is actually an essential ingredient for qualitative research.

Due to the qualitative nature of this study and the existential-phenomenological perspective it takes, this research does not claim to produce a definite explanation of the consumption of charity that is valid for the complete Swedish population. It is quite unlikely that a repeat-study would deliver the exact same results and it is absolutely possible that one can, despite all efforts, find traces of the researcher’s subjective opinion. But since this study aims to provide a first exploration of the topic and does not try to deliver a complete overview of charity consumption in Swedish society, these aspects are regarded as rather irrelevant for this research. This does however not mean that qualitative researchers are completely free of any considerations regarding the quality of their work. It is very important for qualitative studies to demonstrate a high level of transparency on aspects like the data collection process and the analysis. To achieve this transparency, one can find in this study for example a personal description of each interviewee (see appendix). In addition, a large number of direct quotes from the interviews are used in the analysis to make conclusions drawn in this study comprehensible and traceable, and of course, both audio recordings and transcripts of the individual interviews are available upon request.

A SHORT GUIDE TO BREAST CANCER CHARITY

In the first part of this chapter, the reader is introduced to the global movement of breast cancer charity, internationally known under the name 'Pink Ribbon'. The success story of breast cancer charity is summarized and negative side effects of this success are shortly discussed. The chapter ends with an introduction of Rosa Bandet, the Swedish breast cancer charity this research mainly focuses on.

THE RISE OF THE RIBBON

As already mentioned earlier on, breast cancer charity is well-known around the globe today (e.g. King, 2004; Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009), with a small pink ribbon being the symbol that internationally represents this cause. Although the pink ribbon is probably the most famous ribbon that is nowadays used as a symbol for charity, breast cancer was by no means the first cause to use a ribbon as symbol. During the temperance movement, white ribbons were used as a symbol for men who had signed pledges that they would give up drinking alcohol (Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009). Between 1979 and 1981, yellow ribbons helped to remember American citizens who were held hostage in Iran and a little later, red ribbons entered the scene creating awareness of AIDS (Ibid.). In the early 1990s it was then the turn of the pink ribbon, starting in the US where the Komen Foundation began with handing out pink ribbons to participants of the Race for The Cure in Washington, a charity event to raise money for supporting the fight against breast cancer. Only one year later, pink ribbons were distributed at a similar event in New York City as well. This is today regarded as the hour of birth for the pink ribbon charity (www.pinkribbon.org, 2010).

In the following years, the pink ribbon became more and more known throughout the whole US. The overall awareness of breast cancer increased and many international organisations used the pink ribbon as symbol for breast cancer, with the ribbon today being represented in more than 30 countries over 5 continents (Ibid.). In addition to winning over non-profit organisations, the pink ribbon also started getting the attention of many for-profit corporations. For example in 2006, one of the main pink ribbon organisations, the Susan G. Komen Foundation, raised \$267 million through personal giving and partnerships with 129 corporations (Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009). Two main reasons of corporations to cooperate with breast cancer charity are an increase of short-term sales and an improvement of both brand and corporate image (Ibid.). The pink ribbon edition of the well-known Campbell Soup for example helped the company to double its sales to its biggest retailers in

the US in 2006 (Thompson, 2006). The pink ribbon symbol thus became a “powerful tool used by for-profit businesses to attract new customers as well as to increase brand loyalty among existing customers” (Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009: 30) and breast cancer charity is today one of the most wanted cooperation partners for many for-profit companies.

THE DARK SIDE OF FAME

With the growing popularity of breast cancer charity, both voices of support and of critique have been increasingly raised as well. Arguments brought up by pink ribbon supporters in favour of the increasing popularity of the charity are often that the level of awareness of breast cancer has risen, that more women control their breasts regularly and that a lot of money has been collected to support breast cancer research (e.g. Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009). Contrary to this, critics look at the increasing popularity of the charity from a more negative perspective. They perceive the amount and variety of products displaying pink ribbons as overwhelming and think that “the ubiquitous appearance of pink ribbons could potentially cause them to become less meaningful and therefore less effective” (Ibid: 30).

In addition, a number of companies adorning their products with the pink ribbon donate little or nothing to breast cancer charities. This is possible because, unlike traditional marketing symbols like the star of Mercedes Benz or the M of Mc Donald’s, the pink ribbon is considered almost everywhere in the world a public domain, meaning that nobody possesses the right for an exclusive use of it (Harvey and Strahilevitz, 2009). As anyone can use it, it is also easy to misuse it, for example as a sales booster, thereby profiting from the positive, purchase-stimulating effects the pink ribbon has on consumers.

Several big charity organisations have recognized this problem and try to reduce misuse of the symbol by publishing lists of official corporate partners on their websites and advising people to check products with a pink ribbon regarding their trustworthiness before buying. The initiative ‘Think Before You Pink’ was launched in 2002 as a response to the growing concern about the overwhelming number of pink ribbon products and promotions on the market (www.thinkbeforeyoupink.org, 2010; www.pinkribbon.org, 2010), presenting a list of ‘evil’ companies to the consumer that have either misused the pink ribbon symbol for own profit purposes or use ingredients in their products, that are believed to cause breast cancer.

ROSA BANDET - THE SWEDISH ANSWER TO PINK RIBBON

Breast cancer charity has turned within a decade into one of the most popular and well-known charities in Sweden (www.cancerfonden.se, 2010). In general, there are two main breast cancer charities, known as Rosa Bandet and Bro. Bro stands for 'Bröstcancerföreningarnas Riksorganisation' and is a non-profit organisation that focuses on helping people with breast cancer. Breast cancer patients are supported by for example providing psychological support or access to rehab programmes to them. Rosa Bandet is the second and better known main breast cancer charity in Sweden. Mainly active during the awareness month of October, Rosa Bandet is an extensive campaign of the national general cancer charity. The campaign is directed towards the entire Swedish population, but mainly targets women. Rosa Bandet aims to increase breast cancer awareness and raises money for breast cancer research. Due to the campaign's presence in the media and its famous supporters, among them the crown princess of Sweden, Swedish people usually refer to Rosa Bandet when they talk about breast cancer charity. As most of the fundraising events and many pink ribbon edition products also belong to the Rosa Bandet campaign, this research study will focus on Rosa Bandet and not on Bro.

For reasons of simplicity, the terms 'breast cancer charity' and 'Rosa Bandet' are regarded as interchangeable here. Moreover, although up to now being officially 'only' a campaign of the national cancer organisation, in this study Rosa Bandet is referred to as an own charity organisation in order to do justice to its increasing importance and popularity. It is noted that this categorisation might not provide a completely accurate and detailed picture about the exact organisation of breast cancer charity in Sweden, but since it is not the purpose of this research to produce that anyway, this way of classifying is deemed acceptable. Moreover, Swedes often regard Rosa Bandet as the one and only breast cancer charity organisation, and since this research focuses on the thoughts, feelings and ideas of consumers, it is only appropriate to take over the classification applied by people themselves.²

² For more detailed information on Swedish breast cancer charities, please visit <http://bro.org.se> (Bro) and <http://www.cancerfonden.se/Rosabandet/> (Rosa Bandet).

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the main findings from the conducted interviews are presented. When analysing the data, a number of similar patterns were detected among respondents. These patterns were summarized into ten themes, which in turn were assigned to five broader guiding themes. In the first part of this chapter, the glamour of breast cancer charity is analysed together with the question if this kind of charity trivialises cancer. This is followed by a discussion of the commercialisation of charity and the spoiled contemporary consumer. Subsequently, breast cancer charity is examined from a gender perspective and the question is posed how much cancer there actually is to breast cancer charity. The chapter ends with the theme 'In charity we trust', which deals with the ways in which breast cancer charity seems to provide security to consumers. But before digging deeper into this, it is first time to look at the glamorous side of breast cancer charity.

GLITTER AND GLAMOUR: Does Rosa Bandet trivialise cancer?

Lately, breast cancer charity has been increasingly criticized by a number of persons for its 'trivialisation' of cancer. Barbara Ehrenreich for example, a previous breast cancer patient herself, claims in her essay "Welcome to Cancerland" (2001) that the pink ribbon charity is in large parts infantilizing as it engages in a brightsiding of breast cancer. Ehrenreich states that the aim of this so-called breast cancer culture is to normalize and tame the disease - "the diagnosis may be disastrous, but there are those cunning pink rhinestone angel pins to buy and races to train for" (2001: 49). In her eyes, breast cancer charity encourages women to regress to a child-like state, suspending any sense of critical judgement. Stoddard Holmes (2006) agrees that this charity is trivialising cancer as "the realities of fatigue, nausea, bone pain, neuropathy, constipation, and anaemia" (Ibid: 481) disappear. Therefore the first part of the analysis is dedicated to the question if Rosa Bandet engages in this trivialisation of cancer. And indeed, a number of aspects were mentioned during the interviews that can be interpreted in favour of a disarming of a cancer. The first theme 'Glamorous Charity - Pretty in pink' analyses in this regard the product range of Rosa Bandet, while the second theme explores the images of cancer from both the charity's and the consumer's perspective.

Glamorous charity - pretty in pink

A theme that often is mentioned by the interviewees when sharing their feelings and ideas about Rosa Bandet is glamour. Anna for example thinks that Rosa Bandet is "commercial, it has to be pretty and it seems that Rosa Bandet tries to be a bit more glamorous (...), because the subject isn't that

glamorous". Although breast cancer itself is by no means a glamorous thing, respondents nevertheless perceive the charity as glamorous, pink and pretty. This is an interesting development as not so long ago, breast cancer charity was free of any glamorous connotations. Instead, companies were even afraid of working together with breast cancer charity as they feared a 'contamination' of their products with cancer. A well-known example for that is the story of the founder of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation, Nancy Brinker, who approached a lingerie brand for a possible cooperation in the early 1990s. Brinker asked the company to include a pink ribbon tag in their bras, helping to remind women to get regular mammograms. The company rejected her idea stating "We sell glamour. We don't sell fear. Breast cancer has nothing to do with our customers." (Davidson, 1997: 36). So within a little more than a decade, an unattractive outsider cause has evolved into a glamorous and global charity, with plenty of companies lining up to profit from its glamour - the ugly duckling of charity has turned into a beautiful swan.

The fact that Rosa Bandet is a glamorous charity can maybe best be understood when looking at the products the charity sells. Despite current efforts of expanding the product assortment to include also more 'everyday' products like basic food items, many of the products offered by Rosa Bandet are still of a more exclusive nature as they often are meant for special occasions. Moreover, there is an additional touch of glamour to many of those products as they are often related to beauty, cosmetics, fashion or jewellery. So, maybe not surprisingly, during the interviews, respondents often connect Rosa Bandet charity to pretty products, beauty and glamour. When describing Rosa Bandet, Anna for example says that she thinks that "right now they seem to focus on products that are a bit more glamorous".

The symbol of breast cancer charity, the pink ribbon itself, is also perceived as pretty and appealing. Christina describes it as "well, it is pink. Fluffy and appealing to warm emotions, round, nice, cute..." while Sara adds:

"I think it is a good thing that it is kind of simple and more flattering in a way than other charity pins...I think it is more simple, flattering...you can more easily put it on a jacket or a bag...it goes well with it. I like it more than other charities because in a way it is only a ribbon. Not too much plastic..."

While pins of other charities look cheap and rather ugly, Sara sees the pink ribbon as a much more beautiful symbol. The frequent use of adjectives like 'pink', 'cute', 'pretty' and 'flattering' by interviewees when describing the pink ribbon points towards the fact that the ribbon is not only a symbol for breast cancer charity, but also possesses some of the characteristics of a fashion item. Other charities rely solely on their good cause to provide their symbols with meaning and make them attractive to people, but Rosa Bandet offers in addition appealing aesthetics. The charity is

represented by a beautiful, subtle but glamorous symbol which can also serve as an accessory that “goes well” with clothes and bags. These observations can be interpreted as reflecting the postmodern notion of aestheticization of contemporary culture (e.g. Cova and Svanfeldt, 1992; Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Today, it seems that technology does not matter that much anymore; instead the focus is on the aesthetics of a product (Cova and Svanfeldt, 1992). Aesthetics is omnipresent in all aspects of life and “there is an aesthetic pleasure in postmodern everyday life” (Ibid: 299), with consumers nowadays looking for aesthetic appeal, meaning and values, while taking the functionality of products for granted. Exactly this development seems to be mirrored by Rosa Bandet. The charity offers people an ‘aesthetic’ way to do good deeds through an appealing and glamorous symbol and a range of not less appealing and glamorous products, which is gladly accepted by consumers as it gives them the possibility to contribute to a, borrowing Sara’s words, more beautiful and aesthetically flattering charity.

But interviewees do not only connect glamour and pleasant aesthetics to the charity, its products and its symbol; they also closely relate the notions of fun and positivity to Rosa Bandet. Julia for example describes the charity as “very feminine, positive, a little bit comedy or entertainment, like the Rosa Bandet TV gala” and thinks that Rosa Bandet tries to make the unpleasant topic of breast cancer a bit more bearable:

“They [Rosa Bandet] transfer a topic that is very serious into a bit more fun...not making a panic thing about it. I think that is the whole idea, to make a serious topic a bit more fun; that helps. It helps to create awareness, that people don’t see it as a negative but rather a positive thing”.

Tina also thinks that providing a positive atmosphere is essential for Rosa Bandet as “it would not do any good to say like ‘oh, you will die’ (...), positive is better”. Maria agrees on Rosa Bandet’s role in ‘defusing’ the severity and seriousness of the topic breast cancer as well and states that Rosa Bandet is very positive to her, with only “thinking about breast cancer, that is the negative part maybe”. Linn feels in a similar way as she explains:

“I think pink when I think breast cancer...which is quite nice in a sense because that is why I don’t think about the disease so bad, but instead think of a nice colour, pink. A pink disease...like ‘oh maybe it is OK to have it’. Makes it easier because of the colour.”

Interestingly enough, Gudrun and Pernilla, who both know about the real severity of the breast cancer as they have personal experience with it, also underline this function of Rosa Bandet. While Gudrun admits that it “it is very difficult to draw the line between appropriate and inappropriate” especially when it comes to products that should carry the pink ribbon, she says that ultimately, even the rather unconventional use of the pink ribbon on products like candy (here Ahlgrens Bilar) “is also OK. We discussed if it was OK because there is this connotation of breasts in the product name, but

you must have a sense of humour, you also have to be able to laugh...” . Pernilla has no problem either with such a use of the pink ribbon symbol. She states that the most important thing for her is not which product the ribbon is put on, but that she gets a positive feeling from Rosa Bandet instead of being reminded of the full severity of breast cancer:

“If it gave me a sad feeling or I would be just sad or something like that, then it wouldn’t be so nice to buy it...because I have breast cancer myself, I don’t want to think about it all the time, I have to forget it and think about other things...have a good time with the rest of my life, you can’t think about these things all the time. That is why I think that it is very important that Rosa Bandet, all these round pink ribbons have to make you feel good. The feelings must be positive. When I see all the products I don’t think about my breast cancer. Of course I am aware of that, but I don’t think actively about that.”

Moreover, one could argue that in the context of this promotion of positivity by charity, the pink ribbon symbol has slowly lost its connotation of breast cancer. Although the ribbon is still recognized immediately by all respondents as representing breast cancer charity, there are signs for a slow loss of its ‘cancer’ part; Anna for example states that the first thing that comes to her mind when thinking about Rosa Bandet is not breast cancer:

“The first thing I think of is the pink ribbon, not breast cancer. I think of pink ribbons that they sell...it is not that much that...I know it is against breast cancer but that is the only thing I know about it...it is not that I think about that when I see the ribbon (...) maybe because the ribbon is cute and pink”.

In addition to analysing direct reactions to the pink ribbon, it is also interesting to look at how the symbol is used by charity and corporations and which reactions it causes in special contexts. In general, when examining Rosa Bandet products, interviewees often prefer for a more subtle use of the ribbon and refer positively to that as “ways of playing with the ribbon”. Julia for example remembers a “fun way to use the ribbon” when talking about the hostess of Rosa Bandet Gala 2009, who was wearing “this dress out of pink ribbon, it was pretty, cute” during last year’s fund-raiser. Stina reacts similarly to a number of Rosa Bandet products, among them a pair of special edition high heels displaying the ribbon in a playful way:³

“Oh, that is a nice looking shoe! It is a nice way to play with the ribbon. That is a good idea too...and cute. And I think a lot of women who like pink and shoes would buy it....I still see the pink ribbon and I think that women would buy that shoe if they had a passion for shoes.”

Besides favouring this ‘playing’ with the ribbon, respondents also seem to prefer smaller pink ribbon symbols which are used in subtle ways. One of Sara’s favourite products is a golf ball with a small pink ribbon on it as “that is a cute detail, it is more subtle”. In contrast, none of the interviewees likes a plain white T-Shirt with a big pink ribbon centrally printed on it. Julia for examples thinks the T-Shirt is “ugly and too in your face. It would definitely be different if the pink ribbon was much smaller and somewhere in a corner...then it would be a cute product”, and even Pernilla, although in general a

³ For pictures of the Rosa Bandet products discussed in the analysis, please refer to the appendix.

passionate buyer of Rosa Bandet products, states quite decisively that she dislikes this T-Shirt, dismissing it by saying:

“No, that is too much. I wouldn’t buy it. I would rather have a small discrete one. If they had a small ribbon up here I would buy it but not this one. It is too much. It reminds me more of breast cancer. It is like ‘Oh’. You can’t avoid seeing it. Perhaps I am more sensitive now that I have breast cancer myself, but do I have to announce that to everyone?”

A possible explanation for these reactions might be the fact that on most of the Rosa Bandet products, though the pink ribbon is usually used in a quite visible way, the symbol is also often surrounded by other things like texts or pictures, putting the ribbon into the respective product’s context. For example, the packaging of the Rosa Bandet version of the Swedish candy Ahlgrens Bilar displays a pink ribbon in the middle of the candy bag, but in contrast to the ribbon on the T-Shirt, the symbol is here not displayed on its own. Instead it is surrounded by the company’s trademark car logo, a colourful background and various short texts, all in different shades of pink so that the ribbon becomes part of the product’s ‘composition’. Thereby the ribbon’s outstanding symbolic power gets diluted as the consumer’s attention is occupied by the other elements on the package as well. This contrasts with the white T-Shirt, where the ribbon is both unusually large and also the only graphical element represented on the white fabric - the ribbon seems to regain its symbolic power of representing breast cancer. Because of the lacking context, the ribbon seems here to be recognized by consumers as the symbol for breast cancer it originally is, which in turn is the reason why the T-Shirt is perceived negatively by some people. A similar thing seems to happen to Linn when she looks at the pair of Rosa Bandet high heels that feature a rhinestone embroidered ribbon. Although these shoes are perceived positively by other interviewees as they “play nicely with the ribbon”, for Linn the ribbon is too visible, “damaging” her perception of the shoe:

“It is a beautiful shoe, but I don’t know...the ribbon destroys the shoe, the cause destroys the shoe. I would use it just for special occasions like a pink ribbon party, but I wouldn’t have it at a normal party. It would be better to have something less obvious, maybe saying on the back ‘oh this is a collaboration’. They can say this is for this cause, but not like this, in your face. I mean it is a beautiful shoe, but too connected to the cause.”

But the pink ribbon symbol does not only regain its cancer connotation if the pink ribbon symbol is enlarged and stands more or less on its own. Instead, the same can happen when the symbol is used on products which carry negative connotations themselves, for example of disease or death. Anna refers to that when thinking about Rosa Bandet food products: “Food maybe...cereals or soda, that is ok. But maybe not meat, that would be gross. If a piece of meat would have something to do with Rosa Bandet there would be a sensation of breast cancer to it...”. It is interesting that Anna however does not completely exclude food products from a possible cooperation Rosa Bandet. She has no problem with the pink ribbon symbol on soft drinks or breakfast cereals, but on meat, the ribbon is

perceived as disturbing. This could be explained by the fact that meat carries, unlike most other groceries, a quite direct connotation to death as it basically is dead animals. Although today there is a “tendency for meat to appear on our tables looking less and less like the animal that it was” (Corrigan, 1997: 115), at least in its fresh form meat is usually not processed completely behind recognisability, meaning one can still connect it with the animal that was slaughtered for it. There is thus a certain context of death around meat and even if consumers are not bothered by that when buying meat, subconsciously they still might see this connection to death. By putting the symbol for a disease into the context of death, unpleasant associations might arise which are expressed in feelings like Anna’s “gross”.

Although interviewees in general reject a connection of Rosa Bandet and death and welcome the charity’s efforts to turn breast cancer into something more bearable, that does not mean that all efforts to turn breast cancer into something positive are deemed appropriate by consumers. Instead, there still seems to be a fine line between transforming breast cancer into something positive and beautifying the disease too much. Sara for example has mixed feelings about the annual campaign of Rosa Bandet as she thinks it features too many beautiful pictures:

“Maybe they should have other campaigns that are more real. It is like you are loosing your hair and that becomes a symbol of a horrible disease, but they still have a body and face like a model and then they have this piece of fabric around their head and it looks just like they have been photoshopping the hair away...maybe that is the point because otherwise they would scare people away, but in a way I don’t think our society would die if we would talk about things like they are.”

Anna has similar thoughts when describing her impression of a campaign picture of the international pink ribbon organisation that features the face of a carefully, but ‘naturally’ styled beautiful model. This picture makes her think “of like plastic surgery because she is so perfect. But without all this pink ribbon text, I would not think it is for charity, but plastic surgery”. Maria has problems with that way of representing breast cancer charity as well, as “I don’t really think the picture suits together with the message. I think she is a little too seductive for the message, my first thought would be cosmetics”, while Tina just states resigned “I suppose this is like with everything else like that, those fashion ads, everyone is always pretty”.

In addition to crossing the line with too pretty commercials, a number of consumers are also reluctant to the use of the pink ribbon on certain ‘inappropriate’ product types. Sara and Christina share for example quite negative feelings about Rosa Bandet cleaning products, stating they “get annoyed by them”, while Gudrun perceives “this use of the pink ribbon on things like toilet paper or cleaning stuff...it sounds maybe stupid, but it feels degrading”. In order to understand the rejection of having the pink ribbon symbol on this kind of products, one could refer to the notion of the sacred

and the profane (Belk et al., 1989) which claims that “for many contemporary consumers, there are also elements of life with no connection to formal religion that are nonetheless revered, feared, and treated with the utmost respect” (Ibid: 2). Consumers treat these elements as set apart, extraordinary or sacred, and the “same revulsion may occur when these objects are not treated with respect” (Ibid: 2). A prominent example for the sacralisation of the secular is science, as in today’s society science has taken over the religion’s former role as ultimate source of truth (Ibid.).

Relating the theory of the sacralisation of the secular to the example of breast cancer charity, the charity could be regarded as the secular which has been sacralised. Due to its scientific focus on supporting research, which is permanently repeated and communicated to the market, breast cancer charity has a direct connection to the sacred domain of science. Moreover, it carries a connotation of death as the charity aims to save lives by defeating cancer and, incontestably, life and death are sacred things in today’s society. In addition, the charity and its symbol, the pink ribbon, are treated with a lot of respect by most people, which also points towards the sacralisation of this charity, with the pink ribbon providing a symbol for the sacred. This might explain the consumers’ disapproval of certain Rosa Bandet products - after all, if the pink ribbon is regarded by them as a sacred thing, it is not surprising that the ribbon’s placement on quite banal things like cleaning equipment or toilet paper, which in addition also carry negative connotations of dirtiness, is not perceived well by consumers.

The disarmed cancer - inconvenient, but not fatal

For a long time, breast cancer was one of the most feared and fatal diseases in society. Due to a lack of available treatments, breast cancer was up to the second half of the 1900s similar to a death sentence as it usually ended deadly. And even though medicine and research have made a lot of progress during the last decades, resulting in much improved treatments and an increased probability of survival, breast cancer is still a possibly fatal disease and a not so uncommon death cause among women. Interestingly though, almost none of the interviewees connects breast cancer directly to death. Maria for example answers to the question if she connects breast cancer with death “no, not really. Because I know people have been cured, so I don’t immediately think about death, of course it could happen, but hopefully not.” Anna does not see a direct connection either as “it seems that it is curable...most of the time. I don’t know, but it seems that it is more controllable than for example a heart attack”. Sara has a similar impression as she states “I feel like breast cancer is not really something you die of...of course it is but it feels like something you can cure”. Although she regards breast cancer as a sickness, at the same time she does not see it as a very severe disease since in her eyes, breast cancer often can be treated and controlled as she states that regarding the

rapid scientific progress today “I don’t think it will be so hard to understand how that cancer type is starting”.

Sara thus stresses the controllability of breast cancer and calls it “a process disease” that is not immediately fatal, but leaves time for treatment. In addition to relying on medicine to cure cancer, Sara also thinks that people can actively influence breast cancer substantially by a healthy diet and regular exercising. This is expressed in her wish that Rosa Bandet products should ideally have a positive influence on the health because “if you have breast cancer, you are sick...and it [the product] should be something like a pro life thing”, for example healthy yogurt, sports clothes or sport activities - “it could also be connected to a gym...where you go and try out the Yoga for 20 SEK and the money goes to Rosa Bandet”. Stina also prefers Rosa Bandet products that support one’s health in some way:

“I think a sports bra is more relevant than cosmetics...It is more suitable with sportswear and Rosa Bandet...it is the healthy lifestyle, to be active. One way for not having cancer is to be healthy. And a healthy lifestyle ensures that.”

Both Stina and Sara could be regarded as disarming breast cancer by constructing it as treatable by medicine and controllable by pursuing a healthy lifestyle. The consumption of products and activities that are said to be good for one’s health gives Sara and Stina the feeling they can exert some sort of control about the risk to fall ill.

In addition to disconnecting breast cancer from death, one can take this even one step further and look at the decreasing direct association of the pink ribbon symbol with breast cancer and even the charity behind it. Not only does the pink ribbon seem to lose its connotation of cancer (as discussed in the previous section) - it almost seems like the ribbon and the name Rosa Bandet are transforming into brands of their own. Interviewees sometimes refer to Rosa Bandet in a way similar one refers to consumer good brands. Tina for example relates “automatically those pink collections to Rosa Bandet” and thereby treats Rosa Bandet not so much like a charity anymore, but regards it as a brand providing collections of pink products. Anna thinks similarly. Even though she immediately connects pink ribbons with the name Rosa Bandet, on the other hand she also admits that she does not directly relate the ribbon to breast cancer charity - “it is not that I think about breast cancer when I see the ribbon”. When asked why she does not initially make this connection, she replies that “I don’t know, because the ribbon is cute and pink (...). It is more that it is a symbol like on products they want to sell”. To Anna, Rosa Bandet “is more like a brand than something more...you don’t think about charity when you see the pink ribbon, it is more the ribbon itself”. The ribbon has thus become a logo itself representing the brand Rosa Bandet, with the connection to the actual charity

organisation that lies behind this name slowly fading, resulting in a reduction of Rosa Bandet to the pleasant aesthetics it offers as a brand.

A similar thing happens to Christina when she shares her thoughts on a pair of high heels with a pink ribbon, which she recognizes as 'only shoes', nothing more:

"It is a shoe. That is what it is. And the whole pink ribbon charity symbolism is sort of lost. For me it is a nice pink thing with some stones on it. It is a fashion thing. The charity falls off (...). If I would see these shoes on someone's feet I would not think about the charity at all, I would see a cool shoe, with some pink stones on it, but I would not at all connect it with the charity."

The power that Rosa Bandet seems to have developed as a brand becomes once more visible when Anna comments on a golf ball that has a small pink ribbon symbol on: "It is more like they are supporting golf than golf supporting them. This is more like trying to show off your brand.". Maria has the same impression when stating that "the ribbon promotes the ball. Because you can see more text on the ball, so there are obviously more sponsors on the ball.". From being a good cause that is supported by established brands selling special edition products, here the roles seem to be reversed with Rosa Bandet now being the party lending its support to something, in this case a golf tournament.

In addition to the decreasing connection of charity and breast cancer and the 'defatalization' of the disease, it seems that the 'ugly' and painful consequences of having cancer are also disarmed continuously. For example in the annual campaign of Rosa Bandet, mainly pretty and positive pictures are used, largely ignoring the 'negative' side of breast cancer (www.cancerfonden.se, 2010). The few pictures that show breast cancer 'victims' do not reflect the image of sick women, but instead manage to portray those women as looking rather healthy, almost radiating. According to Sara, even when they have lost their hair due to chemotherapy, these women "still have a body and face like a model" and therefore, "it looks just like they have been photoshopping the hair away". This concealment of breast cancer's 'ugly side' by charity is also mentioned by Harris (2006), who uses the example of a Pink Ribbon edition Barbie to argue for the disappearance of the seriousness of cancer as she wonders "shouldn't Pink Ribbon Barbie at least have a bold head and no boobs?" (Ibid: 10).

This poor representation of the effects of breast cancer is maybe one of the reasons why Linn describes breast cancer as "not deadly, but hard to have it. No fun, you maybe loose your hair, and breasts. It seems people survive, so it is good". The cancer is here limited to the eventual loss of hair and maybe breasts, leaving out other, much nastier and not so uncommon side effects of having

cancer and being treated for it. Another good example for this tendency is when Anna talks about a friend's sister who has cases of breast cancer in her close family and is therefore thinking about removing her breasts as a precaution:

A: "I have this friend of mine; his mother has removed them [the breasts], and his grandmother, so his sister is trying to figure out if she should remove them."

I: "Oh that is hard..."

A: "Yes...but I don't think it is such a big deal anymore. Of course it would be terrible if something would happen, but, as in her case, if you know that you are in the risk zone, you can always get fake ones. I don't think the aesthetics are such a problem anymore like they were before maybe."

Anna seems to regard the removal of breasts as a clear and safe solution to the problem breast cancer and describes the removal of the breast as a minor surgery, which is as 'easy' as getting plastic surgery. Moreover she reduces breast cancer to the loss of breasts and only looks at this loss from an aesthetic perspective. Breast cancer is here a little less fatal disease and becomes instead a little more 'complaint', as it is put into the context of plastic surgery. This point of view is similar to what Ehrenreich (2001) describes as the transformation of breast cancer into a rite of passage. According to Ehrenreich, in today's society breast cancer is not an "injustice or a tragedy to rail against, but a normal marker in the life cycle, like menopause or greying hair." (Ibid: 49). This could explain why Anna's compassion for her friend's sister seems to be limited - breast cancer could be in her eyes a rite of passage, something temporary that one can overcome by removing the diseased breasts, which in turn is not that bad, since "you can always get fake ones".

Looking at this 'trivialisation' of breast cancer and its side effects, one cannot help but wonder who is the driving force behind this disarming of cancer. Critics of this trivialisation clearly see the charity organisations as the 'villain' since "everything in mainstream breast cancer culture serves, no doubt inadvertently, to tame and normalize the disease" (Ehrenreich, 2001: 49). This assumption seems on first sight reasonable, as it most likely were the breast cancer charities that started 'taming' cancer by painting positive pictures full of hope for consumers. But on the other hand, it is doubtful that breast cancer charity was able to disarm the disease on its own. After all, the contemporary consumer is not necessary a 'passive dupe' anymore (Arnould and Thompson, 2005), but as informed, critical, emancipated and aware as never before. Therefore one could assume that consumers themselves also play their part in disarming breast cancer. Sure, breast cancer charity might have started the trivialisation of the disease, but judging from the astonishing success of breast cancer charity, consumers also seem to have warmly welcomed this.

Combining this complicity of consumers with the above discussed disarmed view of breast cancer that interviewees seem to have, one could argue that consumers selectively absorb the information

about cancer that they are comfortable with, here everything that helps weakening the seriousness of the disease, and use this information to support their world view. By actively focusing on receiving mostly positive information about breast cancer like an increased rate of survival and enormous amounts of money disposable for research, people might be able transform the once so dreaded disease breast cancer into a not anymore so deadly threat. Instead of a death warrant, now there are good chances that there might be a 'happy end' to it, a belief that is conveniently nurtured by breast cancer charity. Breast cancer is disarmed of its fatality and the ugly and painful consequences of having it are defused by the pink colour and the overall positive atmosphere which the charity creates and the public happily echoes back. It seems to be actually sometimes the consumer, who actively demands from the charity to 'conceal' the negative sides of breast cancer. Pernilla for example thinks "that it is very important that Rosa Bandet, all these round pink ribbons have to make you feel good. The feelings must be positive.". If the charity chose to display the 'negative' side of breast cancer too much, Pernilla even would reconsider her otherwise almost unconditional support for the charity, stating "if it gave me sad feeling or I would be just sad or something like that, then it wouldn't be so nice to buy it".

THE COMMERCIALISED CHARITY: Serving the spoiled consumer

Breast cancer charity can be regarded as representing a rather new type of charity as it differs from 'traditional' charities in a number of aspects. Maybe the most obvious difference is the fact that breast cancer charity is much more commercialised than most of its fellow causes and due to its additional 'merchandisation', meaning that the charity sells many different products, people can consume the cause easily and in a variety of ways. The Swedish charity Rosa Bandet is no exception here. Continuously expanding its product range and cleverly promoting its cause, Rosa Bandet seems to transform more and more into a commercial entity, with the pink ribbon being the symbol for its brand. But what characterizes this new type of charity and how does the relationship between charity and consumer get affected by this commercialisation of charity? The following two themes pick up these questions and analyse the changing relationship between charity and donor in today's society.

The spoiled donor - I give you money, you give me charitainment

It seems that today, it is not always enough for people to get a 'clear conscience' and the feeling to have done something good in return for donations to charity. Instead, consumers expect in addition to either get a good product in return or to be entertained. Bajde (2009) refers to this when he

claims that “postmodern charity in the age of spectacle thus exhibits a potential to transform itself into a spectacular happening that incites the senses and provokes passionate responses while often failing in its fundamental mission” (77). Rosa Bandet is a good example for a charity that tries to fulfil all of these demands of contemporary givers.

Quite a lot of the respondents mention during the interview that they would probably not buy a product just because it supports Rosa Bandet. Instead, they expect to get something more out of it. When looking at the picture of a Rosa Bandet cupcake, Tina for example states that:

“I think I would buy it because it is cute rather than for the ribbon. If there was only a muffin with a pink ribbon on it I would probably not buy it, but if it is fluffy and cute like that one...it is like ‘Oh they are cute....and they have a pink ribbon, good’.”

Stina reacts in a similar way, saying she “would buy that. It is pretty, looks very good, delicious...the pink ribbon you see at second sight. It is a pretty and delicious cupcake with a good purpose...you can eat it with a clear conscience”. Sara is also quite explicit about that she would not buy a product just to support Rosa Bandet, but instead the product should also “provide me with something”. She thinks that for example the Rosa Bandet sports bra is a good idea as “this is something you actually need and use and not only buy for supporting. It is nothing you only buy and put maybe in a drawer, but you can actually use it”.

Despite the ‘good cause’ cover on Rosa Bandet products, consumers are nevertheless not willing to buy product just because they have a pink ribbon on them. Instead, they demand the products to fulfil a number of additional criteria as well and are not willing to make substantial compromises just because it is a good cause. For example, most of the Rosa Bandet products are up to now not explicitly promoted as being environmental friendly or having been produced under fair labour conditions. But it seems that most of the interviewees do not forget about these aspects that easily, even when the product sold is supporting a good cause. Elin for example says she would probably not buy Rosa Bandet cleaning products or food because she buys environmental friendly. Pernilla agrees on that. Although she is an avid consumer of Rosa Bandet products who is “positively surprised” when discovering new Rosa Bandet products and thinks “oh they offer this too, this is good, I must support it”, she nevertheless expects Rosa Bandet food products to be of high quality and ecologically produced:

“Yes, I think, perhaps not fruit that comes from far away, from the other part of the earth with a lot of travelling, I think of vegetables coming from South Africa or Chile, they shouldn’t support that with the Rosa Bandet, because it is not ecological with all this travelling, how sure can you be that there is no poison on it just to get a good harvest...I am a bit suspicious there. I want things that are growing close to Sweden or in Sweden. It should be high quality. Quality and the ribbon. A very good match. “

Sara also demands Rosa Bandet products to live up to diverse expectations such as high quality and sustainability. For her it is important that the products do not rely on the good cause to sell them and she fears that charity products can possibly 'work against' other good causes like fair trade or the protection of the environment:

"I would like it to be something that is kind of healthy and long-lasting, something that is not made in China, and would just be rubbish...the quality thing, it should be something of quality...you know what I mean? It should not only be like giving money to a good thing but support other things as well...that would be doing something good but working against something else in a way...you have to think of the whole circle."

According to Sara, if Rosa Bandet sells products like pink soft toys which seem to be produced in cheap labour countries and lack both quality and sustainability, this is "like Mc Donald's having commercials where they tell everyone that they recycle all the materials...of course it is good, but it would be better if they did not have that much waste in the first place.". So for her the good cause cover is not a legitimate reason on its own to buy a product.

In addition to providing products that have an added value for consumers, Rosa Bandet also offers a range of entertaining activities and events, with the main happening being a huge annual TV gala filled with entertainment. It is often referred to this TV gala during the interviews, for example by Julia who says she "saw the gala, there was a lot of comedy in it, I thought it was entertaining". Christina talks about this gala as well and remembers:

"Did you this Gala on TV (...)? It is not an unusual way for a charity to raise money, you call for various artists to perform and then you show situations from people's life who have been through horrible experiences and there have been near death situations where the cancer has been very very far (...). And there was Leona Lewis, this famous singer from X factor, and she was singing this song 'I just wanna be happy'. And you could see when she was singing it with her beautiful voice, it affected people and they started crying."

The fact that Rosa Bandet provides public events and a TV gala for its consumers is an attempt to cater to society's appetite for spectacular entertainment (Darling, 2000). It is not enough anymore to offer information and insides about breast cancer and the charity itself; instead customers want an experience for all senses. Therefore the TV gala includes in addition to some facts on the charity and cancer also appearances of celebrities, glamorous fashion, comedy and music performances, mixing charity with entertainment to cater to the pleasure-seeking public. This matches with Bajde's (2009) observation that today, "in many ways, the charitable causes must first establish a certain entertainment value in order to pass through the media sieve and effectively reach the masses of potential donors" (76). Just like in the case of Rosa Bandet's TV gala, charitable giving in general is becoming 'spectacularized', with the spectacular being "erected both by ways of 'scaling down' and 'scaling up' charity" (Ibid: 76). Breast cancer charity is scaled down as it lets consumers take part in what Christina called "situations from people's life that have been through horrible experiences",

while the charity at the same time is scaled up, 'dazzling' the consumer with by powerful images of pink solidarity and "epic, record-breaking mobilizations of charitable support" (Ibid: 76).

All in all, it can be said that the contemporary donator seems to be not necessarily satisfied with receiving a 'clear conscience' in exchange for a donation anymore. Instead, he wants something else on top of that in return. Rosa Bandet tries to live up to the expectations of this new type of donor, who could maybe be called the 'spoiled donor', by offering both products and entertainment services. But, true to his spoiled nature, the donator of today is not satisfied with just any product; instead he requires even charity products to meet his high standards. Supporting a good cause by shopping for it may seem like a perfect match for the consumer of today, but if that means one has to make any kind of trade-offs, the shopping trolley will most likely remain empty.

The convenient cause - make it easy for me to contribute

Another notion that frequently appears in the interviews is the relative convenience of Rosa Bandet. Interviewees see the charity as a rather convenient way to do good deeds and state that they do not have to get involved to a high degree in the charity, as might be the case with other charities. Christina's comparison of Rosa Bandet to other charities is interesting in this context:

"A lot of times I feel really guilty. I feel guilty for not knowing how to handle it, it makes me think about what is right and wrong to do. It stirs up a lot of emotions. But when it comes to Rosa Bandet, it is vaguer in a sense. When you think about giving 20 SEK, I am thinking OK (...). To buy a ribbon for 20 SEK, maybe it is a naïve idea that this money will go to the research, that hopefully one day it will help, but I am not involved at a high level."

As Christina mentions, in comparison to other charities, the amount of money Rosa Bandet 'expects' from one seems to be not particularly high. It is inexpensive to contribute to Rosa Bandet - after all, buying a ribbon for 20 SEK (around 2 Euro) in a country where a simple cup of coffee often already costs more should be bearable for consumers. And with the contribution to breast cancer charity costing them as much as their daily morning coffee, people do not have to get "involved at a high level" in this charity, just like Christina states. In addition, Rosa Bandet also offers the possibility to support the cause by purchasing products instead which are suitable for every budget. There might be Rosa Bandet products like jewellery or fashion that are a bit pricier, but there are also lower priced things available - why not for example choose Rosa Bandet toilet paper if "you need it anyway" like Tina puts it.

Even if neither direct donations nor the purchase of products are attractive ways for one to contribute to charity, Rosa Bandet still has another option up its sleeve - namely the participation in its events and activities. Stina for example likes the annual marathon 'Race for a cure' where people

participate and companies donate money for every person taking part. She thinks “it was a really good thing and they raised a lot of money. It is an easy way to get people involved, you don’t have to do a whole lot to get involved and raise money”. So even if one does not want to donate his own money, one can still contribute to the charity by providing something else. But it is not so much voluntary work for the charity; instead people take part in a fun activity like a marathon and, next to raising money, also enjoy themselves. One could even wonder what the real motivation of people participating in fund-raising activities like a marathon is - is the charity really the main reason or has it become reduced to a pleasant side effect of a sports event? Anyhow, the most important observation is here that Rosa Bandet provides numerous ways of how to support the cause without ‘getting too involved’ at a both financial and personal level. This observation refers to what King (2004) calls “a common theme in contemporary discourse on philanthropy” which is based on the assumption that “convenient and relatively inexpensive consumption-based acts of generosity have nonetheless powerful political effects and deep spiritual meaning constitutes” (480). According to King, contemporary citizenship is less about the actual exercising of right and a real fulfilment of obligations and instead focuses more on fulfilling “one’s political responsibilities through socially sanctioned consumption and responsible choice” (ibid: 480) of appropriate products, like the ones offered by Rosa Bandet to support breast cancer charity. Supporting Rosa Bandet is thus a convenient way for every budget to support a good cause and engage in doing good deeds without any discomfort, thereby fulfilling one’s societal responsibilities.

Interestingly, consumers seem to not only gladly accept the convenience that Rosa Bandet offers; instead they demand Rosa Bandet to undertake even more efforts in order to make it even easier for consumers to get involved in the fight against breast cancer and thereby meet their target of good deeds. Linn for example admits that although that “of course I can think myself why I should give money to them”, she does not “want to have to do this. I want them to motivate me to give money”. Even though Linn regards Rosa Bandet as an important cause and admits that it would probably be easy to find additional information about the cause as “it is easy to just go online”, she appears rather unmotivated to do so. Actually, Linn does not even consider looking for the information herself, but instead demands Rosa Bandet to provide it in order to motivate her to give them money:

“It [Rosa Bandet] is not really helping me to become active in any way, it is just there, they don’t tell me anything specific, it doesn’t tell me why really, or some stories...I can of course think myself why I should give money to them, but if I’m not actively thinking about this in the beginning, I don’t want to have to do this...I want them to motivate me to give money, then it would be easier for me to donate (...).I am thinking it is hard to motivate myself, it would be much easier if they would say on the commercial whom you are helping.”

Pernilla thinks similarly when stating that she has not “had the opportunity to give money directly” to Rosa Bandet so far because she simply does not know how to donate directly. Usually, Pernilla

donates directly to causes from which she gets “letters in my mailbox and you can donate 100 or 200 SEK and send the letter away. I do that, but not Rosa Bandet because I haven’t got anything from them to my mailbox”. Just like Linn, Pernilla wants Rosa Bandet to show her clearly how she can contribute as she wishes to receive a letter from them, which she can easily send away with a donation. She does not think about looking up the information on how to donate directly herself, but wants Rosa Bandet to provide her with that information.

This way of thinking is especially interesting as it points towards a transformation of breast cancer charity into a more commercial entity, almost like a company that in order to make money has to meet all demands of the customer. In general, it seems that charity organisations so far usually had not too much work with their supporters who willingly donated their money and did not expect much in return, except of maybe some transparency on the use of the money and what had been achieved once in a while. But Rosa Bandet in contrast does not only have to offer added value in return as discussed in the previous theme, the charity seems to also have to put down much more work to persuade consumers. Consumers think that Rosa Bandet should make an effort when ‘selling’ its charity and therefore, people refuse to take an active role here - just like in any other for-profit corporation, the customer is king.

AN ULTRA-FEMININE CAUSE: Breast cancer charity from a gender perspective

A large part of the critique towards breast cancer charity today stems from the feminist community. Although the rise of breast cancer charity was originally initiated by feminists and their claim that this female type of cancer did not receive as much attention as the male forms of the disease, now that breast cancer charity has arguably surpassed and overtaken most of its ‘male’ colleagues, feminists are not happy with this success. In their eyes, breast cancer charity treats women as dupes as it infantilises cancer, promotes the obedience to medical protocols, forces women to suspend any sense of critical judgement and thereby push women to regress to a child-like state (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2001). But is this also the case when looking at Rosa Bandet? Judging from the interviews, there seems to be a certain truth to this, but in fact, the analysis of Rosa Bandet also reveals additional nuances, which are presented in the theme below.

Female, yes - feminist, not so much

A topic that interviewees immediately connect to Rosa Bandet is ‘the femininity’ of this particular charity. On first sight, it might seem quite clear why this theme of femininity appears frequently

during the interviews - after all breast cancer charity is a cause mainly targeting women. In addition, a clear connection to females is also visible in both the charity's symbol and its products. Julia for example describes Rosa Bandet as "very feminine" as she associates it with "very light, pink colours" and Stina sees it "clearly as female cause". Linn refers to the charity by calling it "pinkish, girlish, womanly" and sees the cause more or less clearly restricted to women:

"It is pinkish, it is girlish...womanly...when men have it, it is strange. I don't know...it feels like they are trying to...I mean it is good that they are trying to...give money to the research as well, but it is just a bit strange when a guy has a pink ribbon...it is kind of a woman's...I don't know, I mean of course money could come from any place. But I mean guys have the moustache for cancer [prostate cancer charity], so..."

Moreover, when looking at the products, it is apparent as well that women are by far the main target group of Rosa Bandet - the pink ribbon adorns plenty of rather 'stereotypical' products that are usually connected with female buyers, including cosmetics, underwear, chocolate and jewellery (e.g. Stalp et al., 2009). Anna describes Rosa Bandet's products as "stuff that women buy. I remember it was on Kellogg's Special K flakes, and that's like, I think it is mostly women who buy them, so it seems they focus on women".

But what kind of woman is Rosa Bandet associated with? Stina sees "strong and independent women trying to raise money for other women with a problem". Similarly, Julia believes that Rosa Bandet's products are meant to 'empower' women:

"These are products that somehow empower women...like for example the sport items, I think that is a good match, you imagine the woman among other women, maybe dealing with the same issues...I mean, you go to the gym to empower yourself and exercise for your health. That feels coherent with the aim of the charity."

Sara agrees and states that the products should be "something you do for yourself, it should be some kind of freedom feeling...like Ahlgrens Bilar [candy] a bit, it should be something that you enjoy, you spoil yourself with". Sharing Sara's standpoint, Elin especially likes Rosa Bandet products that are somehow connected to leisure activities, for example a golf ball with a pink ribbon symbol on it as "playing golf is pleasure, you want to do it".

Although this might be interpreted as indicating that Rosa Bandet and its products reflect and support a true feminist attitude with women empowering themselves, one could also observe a form of 'commodity feminism' (Goldman, 1992) here. According to Goldman, commodity feminism means that feminism is seen not as real social movement and ideology, but is instead regarded as a state that can be attained by consuming the right products. The feminist becomes a consumer category and feminism is associated in advertisements with independence, activeness and individual freedom (Ibid.). In the case of Rosa Bandet this is shown by the interviewees' call for products that "empower", "spoil" and "provide pleasure and freedom". Additional support for questioning the

feminist value of Rosa Bandet comes from feminists themselves. Lately, feminists have been increasingly critical towards breast cancer charity, accusing it of brightsiding the disease and describing it as an “outbreak of mass delusion, celebrating survivorhood by downplaying mortality and promoting obedience to medical protocols” (Ehrenreich, 2001: 52). They claim that all those ‘cute’ pink products and events breast cancer charity offers have an infantilizing effect, turning women into ‘dupes’ and encouraging them to “regress to a little-girl state, to suspend critical judgement, and to accept whatever measures the doctors, as parent surrogates, choose to impose” (Ibid: 52).

Additional reason for doubting that breast cancer charity has the traits of a feminist cause can be found when analysing the charity’s product range. While all interviewees connect Rosa Bandet with strong, emancipated and empowered women, this notion is not necessarily reflected by the products that carry the pink ribbon. Especially a set of pink-coloured cleaning equipment is clearly an example for a product that most likely does not gain approval from feminists. Maybe that is also the reason why this particular product causes strong reactions among interviewees, with almost all of them dismissing it right away. Elin for example describes the cleaning equipment as “rather strange” and adds that “cleaning is nothing nice; it is something you have to do”. Julia does not like this product either, citing as reason for her disliking that “the first thing that popped up in my mind was housewife and cleaning”. Linn even feels that female independence and emancipation is at danger here as she disapproves of the cleaning equipment:

“No.... No. Oh no, cleaning equipment. It is just...you are a woman...I don’t know, it is like you are a woman, you have to clean, assuming only females would buy it...it is like underlining that it is women who buy that. I don’t like it. It would piss me off. It is also maybe in Sweden it would piss me off, maybe in other countries people wouldn’t mind. But we want equality in Sweden...of course that doesn’t exist everywhere, but you don’t want it to be rubbed in your face.”

It is interesting that respondents, although stating unanimously that Rosa Bandet is a very feminine cause almost exclusively connected to women, at the same time are not too fond of the charity explicitly targeting female customers with its products. Sara for example admits she likes pink cleaning equipment in general, but that she nevertheless is really annoyed by pink ribbon cleaning equipment:

“This annoys me actually a bit. Because it is many things: First thing is to say that women and cleaning are connected (...), because before it was like ‘oh the woman should be home and clean’. (...) I like cleaning and I think I clean very good, but to me it is more a social construct, something that we learn, women should be more like a perfectionist...so this annoys me a bit, I like pink and I like roses, so I would like to have maybe this pink sweeper, but this annoys me...there is not very much humour in it...it is too flat. Too easy. It also says that breast cancer and cleaning are women’s problems... this is like putting something on people.”

But why is the connection between cleaning equipment and a female charity perceived as so unfortunate by interviewees? Apparently, cleaning equipment still carries a strong connotation of the woman's role as a housewife dating back to the 1950s. By clearly connecting cleaning to women through the usage of both the very feminine colour pink and the very feminine charity Rosa Bandet, the respondents seem to feel pushed back into old roles and traditions. Cleaning products still represent the antique image of the woman as housewife to many people. As the strong, independent and powerful vision of a woman that so many consumers associate with Rosa Bandet is not reflected by things like cleaning equipment, products like that therefore risk getting dismissed by many consumers as in Sara's words "you don't give much to the progress of women with that pink cleaning equipment".

But it is not only typical household-products that seem to promote an ancient and rather old-fashioned image of the woman. Instead, also hyper-female products like a pair of very glamorous pink high heels displaying a rhinestone-covered pink ribbon or expensive beauty products in limited pink editions can be seen as supporting the old-fashioned vision of a woman's role, needs and wants. Of course one can claim that these products are consumed by the independent woman of today solely because she derives pleasure from them and likes to treat herself with cosmetic and fashion, as these are things she enjoys. But on the other hand one could also regard this kind of products as very stereotypical, with the choice of products being based on what men picture women to use, need and want. Sara refers to this when she talks about the Rosa Bandet high heels:

"It is a bit like a group of men sitting and trying to make a campaign for Rosa Bandet to get in touch with the target group and then they don't think further than this, this girly thing. A problem I could get offended by today is this male bonding that women are not very good at. We should have real sister bonding. It doesn't matter if you have this kind of shoes; there are other ways to connect women."

It seems that the 'femininity' that many Rosa Bandet products try to reflect indicates more a performance of 'doing gender' appropriately (West and Zimmerman, 1987) than the reflection of an inherent female quality. Consumption enables a successfully gendered performance and by offering typically female products, Rosa Bandet provides women with the possibility to 'be female'. But this is not perceived well by all interviewees. In Sara's eyes, both glamorous 'hyper-female' products and stereotypical household goods do not really reflect what the independent and powerful women of today want, but rather how men and society would women like to be. Sara seems to dislike the gender role she feels pushed into by some of the charity's products. Sara's disliking can be understood by relating it to the notion of the male gaze. The conspicuous consumption of 'female' products can namely indicate adherence to gender norms and recognition of the so-called 'heterosexist male gaze' (Stalp et al., 2009), which defines "heteronormative standards of hegemonic femininity" (Ibid: 234). The male gaze assumes that girls and women learn to see and evaluate

themselves and other females through the lens of the male gaze. The preferences of men thus shape femininity and aesthetics become an important part. This importance of beauty becomes apparent when Sara reacts to a Rosa Bandet cupcake which is formed like a breast and decorated with a pink marzipan nipple:

“I don’t like that. That annoys me actually quite much. I actually didn’t think of this before, but TV 3 [Swedish TV channel] had these spots where they present their logo as a Rosa Bandet edition and they used round symbols that looked like silicon breasts to represent it...and that annoys me because two round symbols are maybe not a correct representation of breasts. These round cupcakes don’t represent female breasts (...). I would prefer another shape. I would appreciate if they were more honest, not like oh, these are a pornstar’s breasts. It is like making fun of it on women’s cost. It is kind of vulgar. It is representing how women should be (...). Of course you could see it as celebrating women’s bodies, but I think it is objectifying (...). That is not helping the image of women.”

It is indeed striking how many of the products adorned with pink ribbons are connected to beauty and appearance (e.g. cosmetics, jewellery, healthy food and clothing). Sara thinks that those products are not matching with Rosa Bandet’s purpose as a charity since “breast cancer is something that is scary for women, it is such an opposite of this superficial façade”, but she also admits resigned “that today it is about this plastic surgery and how you should look like”. Christina has a similar feeling when commenting on a picture that shows a woman’s hand, gently holding a pink ribbon golf ball, with the fingernails painted in a pink colour to match the ball. According to Christina, “it is just bizarre. I just find it very strange and it annoys me. Because her nails, sure they are very nice, but why are they matching? What is the purpose of doing that?”. She also dislikes that breast cancer charity uses pictures model to promote the cause as she criticizes the website of the global Pink Ribbon charity that features a rather glamorous portrait of a model on its welcome page:

“It doesn’t fit at all for me. I don’t think that is appropriate, it is too much. It is this typical sleazy marketing thing...I think it is bad taste. I just don’t see what information...who is she in this context? She is nobody. She doesn’t give me any information or sensation in this context ...and with her lip gloss and everything...it doesn’t fit. It [the cause] gets diluted in this context; I loose my respect for it. “

It almost seems that breast cancer charity has partly gotten traits of a fashion thing and a beauty contest - or as Tina puts it “I suppose this is like with everything else like that, those fashion ads, everyone is always pretty”. The use of models in a breast cancer charity context seems to stir up negative emotions in some interviewees and one could wonder what the reason for that is. Do they really only dislike this ‘beautifying’ of the cause because they think that models are not appropriate for representing breast cancer charity since they most likely do not reflect how women with cancer look like? Or could they maybe also feel threatened by all those pretty pictures? Could women feel that they are put under pressure by those beautiful pictures and think that they are supposed to also look as perfect as those models? In the end, no matter how much Rosa Bandet cosmetic is bought, for the majority of women it nevertheless remains impossible to compete with professional models.

Today's society is characterized by this pressure to be beautiful and the focus on outward appearance, which most women seem to have accepted in some way (Stalp et al., 2009). But having this pressure present in a charity, which in itself should not be about "this superficial façade" as it deals with much more existential problems, namely fighting breast cancer, is perceived negatively by women. Maybe that is because breast cancer charity is based originally on an idea of solidarity and there certainly is not much solidarity to a beauty contest. Sara refers to this when she complains that the value of "sisterhood" is not incorporated in the charity Rosa Bandet:

"A problem I could get offended by today is this male bonding that women are not very good at. We should have real sister bonding. It doesn't matter if you have those pink ribbon high heels; there are other ways to connect women (...). Sometimes I feel like the way that women should be...either they should be more like men to get up higher in the career ladder, or they should show their body...in a way to offend other women...we are not working together (...). I think Rosa Bandet is to me more like giving money and not creating sisterhood...but maybe we should talk about it more."

This lack of sisterhood in breast cancer charity is compensated by the individual consumption of products that "women should like". Many of those products focus on beautifying women, making them pretty for their environment and letting them "show their body". This focus on appearance shows that up to today, the cultural category of femaleness is thoroughly inscribed in the material world. According to McCracken, "sexist stereotypes are thoroughly grounded in even the subtlest details of everyday life and the object code" (McCracken, 1988b: 132) which could explain why both companies and Rosa Bandet apparently think it is a good idea to put the pink ribbon on products that have been perceived as ultra-female and have been sold almost exclusively to women for decades. But the gender roles in society, maybe especially in Swedish society, have been changing and loosening up and, even if women are today still the main customers of certain gender stereotypical products like household items, they seem to not like to be reminded of this 'inequality' by companies 'rubbing' it in their faces.

Next to the design and type of Rosa Bandet's products, there seems to be even more pointing towards that the charity, probably indirectly and involuntarily, promotes an aged image of women. Although the charity's trademark colour pink is without a doubt a very female colour that evokes positive emotions, it could also be seen as the colour representing naïveté and a little bit of dullness. After all, pink is often connected to little girls, princesses and their naïve dreams as well as it is related to 'bimbo' girls, who are perceived as human versions of Barbie with limited mental capacities. Although no one of the respondents makes this direct connection, a number of them do report an association with childhood when talking about the pink ribbon symbol. Julia for example states that "I associate that [the pink ribbon] with childhood, with those things you had when you were a kid...it is hard to describe", while Christina thinks of "in general the pink colour, little girls, and

princesses and pink castles and all that stuff“. Pernilla refers to something similar when she describes a pink cupcake by putting it into a ‘little girl/doll’ context:

“For special occasions...but it is too pink. Just the ribbon and other colours would have worked, but not the whole thing pink. No. It doesn’t look so good; I don’t think it looks tasty. I don’t feel like I want to try it because it doesn’t look too tasty. It is too much. It is pink and sweet and maybe if you were a little girl and had a doll house you could have that to play with, but not really to eat. “

This “little girl” notion illustrates what critics of breast cancer charity refer to when they accuse the charity of being ‘infantilising’. In their eyes, breast cancer is brightsided through the consumption of nice harmless pink ribbon products and the creation of an almost naïve cheer- and hopeful atmosphere around the disease (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2001; Harris, 2006). According to Ehrenreich, “the diagnosis may be disastrous, but there are those cunning pink rhinestone angel pins to buy and races to train for” (2001: 49). Women are thus distracted from the horrible disease breast cancer is by giving them something pink, fun and rather silly to occupy or ‘play’ with. The association of breast cancer charity with childhood, dolls and princesses that is experienced by interviewees supports this assumption. Rosa Bandet seems to appeal in large parts to the ‘girly, childish’ side of women and, taking that to an extreme, this could be interpreted as a regression to a child-like state, where charity and science take on the parental role of telling grown-up women what is good and what is true, demanding ‘obedience to medical protocols’ (Ehrenreich, 2001). Although it remains unknown here to what extent this obedience exists among the women of today, all in all it seems that Rosa Bandet clearly has traits that do not match with the ideas of feminism.

PINK AND BLACK: How much cancer is in breast cancer charity?

With an ever-growing offer of pink products and an untiring spreading of a positive pink atmosphere of hope, some people have lately started to wonder how much cancer there actually is left in breast cancer charity. Rebecca Harris (2006) for example criticizes the introduction of a pink ribbon edition Barbie doll, wondering “what an anatomically incorrect Barbie doll in a pink dress can teach kids about the horrible, ugly disease that is breast cancer (and why you'd want to tell a five-year-old about it anyway)” (10). In Harris’ eyes, this Barbie conceals the ‘ugly’ side of breast cancer and the side effects of the disease’s treatment. Based on this, she asks herself and the reader “shouldn't Pink Ribbon Barbie at least have a bold head and no boobs?” (Ibid: 10). It seems thus not given anymore that breast cancer charity actually includes cancer per se. In this section of the analysis, the ‘black’ is put back into the ‘pink’, trying to understand which role breast cancer plays in breast cancer charity.

Breast cancer, public enemy no. 1 - it's not fair

Many interviewees describe breast cancer charity as one of the most important charities today. Stina for example thinks Rosa Bandet “is a really really good thing (...), it is one of the most important charities I think”. Gudrun agrees that “it is good to pay attention to breast cancer” as “every year, 7000 Swedish women are diagnosed with breast cancer and about 80000 are living with this diagnosis”. Sara also regards breast cancer charity as being “very important in different ways...it is important as it is kind of a common cancer type that women get, so it is important to prevent it”. Despite the fact that the chance to survive breast cancer is today much higher than 20 years ago, this does not mean that breast cancer charity does not need that much support anymore. Instead of being satisfied with what has been reached so far, the focus is instead on what still has to be done. Pernilla shares this opinion as she talks about Rosa Bandet’s extraordinary importance:

“I am thinking of women in general, breast cancer is a very common disease, I had it in my family and...I always thought it is important to support that sort of science, research to find a solution to this problem. And they have all this money now that goes to breast cancer research which is a good thing because nowadays you often survive, 86% of the women survive after 5 years and that is very good. But still 1500 are dying every year so there are lots of things to do still.”

Breast cancer is by many interviewees perceived as one of the most threatening diseases, as “many people have someone near who has this illness” (Gudrun). Rosa Bandet supports this point of view by stressing how ‘common’ breast cancer seems to be and thereby, the charity also manages to stay relevant and needed. Although breast cancer is without a doubt a rather common form of cancer, there are nevertheless also voices that blame breast cancer charity for creating an ‘excessive’ atmosphere of worrying. Glassner (2000) for example thinks that contemporary women “overestimate the prevalence of the disease” (xvi) and thereby regard breast cancer as much more common as it really is and feel exposed to a very high risk of breast cancer, which in that intensity actually does not exist.

Regardless of the question if breast cancer is the most common disease among women or not, it definitely seems that it is the disease that society has chosen as the public enemy number one, at least for women. To fit into this role, breast cancer had to be adapted by society. Originally ‘only’ a disease, lately, it seems that breast cancer has been transformed into a personal villain of society that needs to be defeated. This becomes especially apparent when looking at the terms and expressions that both charity and people use to talk about breast cancer - women have to be strong, they have to fight and defeat the cancer to become survivors (e.g. King, 2004). Tina for example connects Rosa Bandet with “women joining forces to fight breast cancer” and Maria says “let’s do what we can together to defeat breast cancer”. Stina also talks about the Rosa Bandet supporters as

“strong and independent women fighting breast cancer” and refers to women with breast cancer as “victims”. Terms like ‘victim’, ‘fight’, ‘defeat’ and ‘join forces’ all stem from the field of military and were originally used in the context of battles and wars. Thereby, these terms reflect the construction of breast cancer as public enemy and indicate that in today’s society, the disease has been assigned its own discourse, ‘the war against breast cancer’. And charity contributes to this war with both calls for solidarity, asking the women of today to ‘join together against breast cancer’ (www.pinkribbon.org, 2010), and the creation of heroic warriors, constituting “breast cancer survivors as the bearers of a heightened sense of wisdom, courage, and values” (King, 2001: 131).

Breast cancer charity promotes a certain image of the strong, cancer-fighting woman in order to create hope, but for some women the charity’s efforts are more curse than blessing as they feel pressured to fight breast cancer in the same energetic and perfect way. Gudrun talks about this pressure when remembering the time that she had cancer:

“And that summer I got cancer, it was also Ludmila Engquist who got breast cancer, she was an athlete. And it was so much about her, about her treatment and how fantastic she was, she was competing despite cancer...and I was...I felt so bad, it was terrible. It was so much and she was so good and I felt so bad, I felt worthless. I was nothing. I was tired and I had surgery and everything was bad. And she was so good and I wasn’t. It was terrible. But I cannot say it was not OK to do it. They supported her...but when you yourself are in the situation, you are so sensitive...it is difficult. Nobody applauded for me when I got better.”

By actively promoting positivity and a fighting spirit, breast cancer charity has created what some call a survivor culture around breast cancer, in which the focus is clearly on those who successfully beat the cancer. According to Ehrenreich (2001), people who survive breast cancer achieve the status of ‘survivor’, but there is not much attention left for those who ‘lose the battle’ as in the “overwhelmingly Darwinian culture that has grown up around breast cancer”, it only is the “survivors who merit constant honour and acclaim” since they “offer living proof that expensive and painful treatments may in some cases actually work” (Ibid: 48). Dying from breast cancer almost seems to not be an option any longer and if a person despite all efforts of science and medicine manages to die, one has ‘lost the battle’ against cancer, which almost makes the death appear like a failure. This complies with Aries’ (1974) claim that in modern society, “death may be tamed, divested of the blind violence of natural forces, and ritualized”, but it is never accepted as natural and necessary phenomenon. Instead, death is regarded as a failure, a ‘business loss’ (Ibid: 586). Baudrillard (1993) also refers to this ‘discrediting’ of death in the Western society of today, as he states that today all types of ‘unnatural’ death are regarded as unfair and not normal.

This ‘discrediting’ of death could also help understanding why interviewees, when talking about the possibility of dying from breast cancer, always connect breast cancer to an ‘unfair’ kind of death. For

example, the first thing that comes to Julia's mind when thinking about breast cancer in connection to death is a tragic family history she saw during the TV gala of Rosa Bandet:

"They had some reports on families having dealt with breast cancer and that got me thinking how common it is to be the one getting it. For example it was about a man who lost his wife and 2 out of 3 daughters to breast cancer...and of course that was very emotional and you could really feel for him. It must be a terrible, terrible thing, having this thing in your genetics, 3 out of 4 people you love. That really made an impression on me."

Pernilla also mentions a rather tragic story when asked to reflect on breast cancer and death as she remembers the painful and clearly 'unfair' death of her grandmother in the 1950s:

"I think of my grandmother, 1954. And she died, and this was terrible, it was terrible. I was just a young girl then. And we lived here in the South of Sweden and the rest of our relatives lived in the middle of Sweden, north of Stockholm. So it is far away, 1000km. So we couldn't come to visit our grandmother who was very ill. And she was at the hospital; we heard about it afterwards, I get terrified still when I think about it. She was so horribly suffering because the cancer had spread and she had lots of pain and they wouldn't give her morphine because she could have become addicted from that. How could they think like that?! She was lying there, in this hospital, just screaming because of her pain and there she died. We heard about that afterwards and I just thought this should not happen to any person anymore. Because if you are dying, what does it matter if you get addicted from morphine, to make the pain as bearable as possible."

Although interviewees clearly regard dying from breast cancer as something unfair and terrible, interestingly, when discussing death in general, a second type of death emerges, standing in contrast to this unfair notion of death. For example, Elin's initial reaction to dying of breast cancer is similar to the one of Pernilla and Julia, as she calls this death immediately 'unfair'. But surprisingly, she also mentions a type of death that seems rather 'fair' to her:

I: "When you spontaneously think about death [caused by breast cancer], what comes to your mind?"

E: "It is always unfair. Because some people get ill and then they don't manage...I think 'why is it me' in the end. I have this feeling that it is unfair to have a disease that makes that you cannot see your grandchildren."

I: "What about dying when you are old?"

E: "That is natural."

So despite regarding death in general death as unfair, Elin's eyes there also exists a type of death she does not perceive as unfair, the 'natural' death. Sara also mentions this natural death when talking about the death of her grandfather not long ago:

"It was not long ago that my grandfather died and that was the second time that someone very close to me died...so maybe that means...closer to the death in a way, closer to thinking about it...it made me more comfortable in a way...more like 'OK, that is the way it is'. This is how I am going to end and that is nothing really to think of that much now."

It is interesting that the death of her grandfather made Sara feel "more comfortable" with the idea of death. It seems she feels more comfortable with death now because her grandfather died what is considered as a 'natural, normal' death. In general, interviewees often refer to two types of death, one being this so called natural one, while the other is the unexpected, 'unfair' and out of the ordinary death, here represented by breast cancer. Unlike with the unfair death, which is discredited

by interviewees by for example regarding breast cancer as 'enemy' that has to be defeated, respondents display no overly negative feelings when talking about natural death. Stina for example states that the severity of death "depends on the phase of life you are in, if you are a 90 year old it would maybe be nice to die peacefully". Pernilla also sees this type of death as a natural part of life and, although admitting "it is sad", she thinks that ultimately, "every human being has to die. Animal, human, whatever. That is sad, but that is the way, we can't choose anything else...".

In general, interviewees seem to thus differentiate between two types of death, namely the 'bad', unfair death and the 'good', natural death. Dying from breast cancer is clearly regarded as belonging to the category of unfair and unnatural death. The differentiation between good and bad death has also been detected by Baudrillard (1993), who states that in the Western society of today, death is discredited as only the 'natural' death is considered 'normal', because it comes 'at life's proper term'. But according to Baudrillard, even though this natural death might be seen as rather normal, it is still not accepted as a part of life. Instead, this demonstrates a systematic denegation of death as the 'natural death' has become subject to science and "death's call is to be exterminated by science" (Ibid: 162). This means that society sees death as an irrational, senseless and inhuman event that has to be defeated, which is reflected in the 'war' against breast cancer that society so untiringly engages in. Women having breast cancer are 'victims' and breast cancer charity tries to save them from the evil murderer the disease is.

Although the 'natural' death is without a doubt a quite frequent form of death up to today, interviewees hardly talk about the natural death when discussing the topic death. Instead, they immediately relate the topic to the second type of death, the 'unfair' one and feel that their life is mainly threatened by diseases like breast cancer, accidents or terrorists. Anna for example connects death to suicide or accidents and explains that when she talks about death, "it is not about natural death, more about accidents and suicide that you talk about it". Sara also refers to accidents when describing her first thoughts on death:

"When I think about it, it is more about disease or the accidents...that part is kind of cruel when a young person is taken...there was a young girl who died in the architecture school and that kind of touched me very much...in that way it felt not fair..."

Baudrillard (1993) refers to this as the paradox of modern bourgeois rationality, stating that it is "remarkable that we have returned, in the heyday of the rational system and as a full logical consequence of this system to the 'primitive' vision where we impute a hostile will to every event, and particularly to death" (Ibid: 161). This seems to be exactly what has happened in the case of breast cancer - society has imputed a hostile will to a disease and thereby transformed it into a

villain. To defeat this 'murderer', consumers support charity, who in turn has taken on the responsibility to lead the war against breast cancer.

But why is the unfair, unnatural death so much more present in people's minds than its natural and more common counterpart? As discussed above, in the case of breast cancer it seems to be at least partly the charity organisations that contribute to an 'overly excessive' worrying about this particular form of cancer as they seem to overemphasize the commonness of breast cancer to keep their charity relevant. But looking at it from a more general perspective, another possible reason for the domination of the unfair death notion could be that many people have few or no direct experience with death. Much like Christina says, "death is not something that happens every day, at least not to people living here...so people don't know how to deal with it". Sara agrees that "we don't get fed by that kind of information like maybe other parts of the world where death is maybe more like a natural part". Due to the lack of direct encounters with death, instead the media becomes a primary source of information for this topic. And the media is mainly interested in catastrophes and the 'unfair' death. The extensive coverage of diseases like breast cancer, but also the focus on terror attacks like September 11, global epidemics such as the swine flue and natural disasters including tsunamis and earth quakes creates the impression in people that life in the 21st century is permanently exposed to a growing number of fatal threats (Pyszczynski et al., 2003).

Especially the communication media of Internet and television are very rich sources of information on death. Anna for example knows about websites that show people actually dying and thinks "it is terrible...I know that there are several pages on the Internet where you can see things like executions and that stuff, I don't see how people can want to see that, but obviously there are people who are interested in seeing other people die". While Anna sees a lot of death on the Internet, Maria has the impression that death is omnipresent on television:

"It is everywhere. You hear something every day about death. You get a weird feeling; I cannot put it into words (...). There are horrible things you hear about people who die and get shot in wars and everything (...). You can hear every day in the news about suicide bomb, accidents in Iraq...so many people die every day because of such unnecessary stupid things."

In today's Western society, it is not only the possibility of becoming a victim of breast cancer that is overemphasized and therefore seems omnipresent - it is also the possibility of an early and unnatural death in general that dominates people's view on death. It seems like both media and breast cancer charity indirectly remind people constantly of their own vulnerability and mortality, even if these people's life is not threatened directly (Ferraro et al., 2005). Especially the seemingly increase of both terrorism and cancer creates an overall threatening atmosphere in which people are, consciously or subconsciously, almost permanently exposed to the inevitability of death and face uncertainty about

their future (Pyszczynski et al., 2003), or, in Maria's words "you hear something every day about death...you get a weird feeling".

Despite being aware of the rather low risk of dying any of those uncommon deaths shown in the media, it seems that people nevertheless are scared to die in such a way. Breast cancer might not be the most common cause of death for women, but interviewees still feel threatened by the disease and fear to get it. Sara for example, although admitting that "it is not that common to have breast cancer when you are 25", is still scared of breast cancer as "when you are a woman, it is something you actually think of quite often...if you are in the shower and you feel a lump or something...it scares you". Similarly, when talking about her fear about death in general, she admits that her fear about death gets affected by those deathly threats the media talks about so untiringly, although it is unlikely that these threats are relevant in her situation:

"It feels like we are surrounded by death in a way that is not really spiritual or religious we don't talk much about death in that way, we don't have that religious view of it. Here it is like we have murders, and all the movies, it is a lot about death, but in a very unusual way. But I actually feel affected by these kinds of movies because you think of it as it is kind of common that someone runs around with a knife or bomb (...). But it is not really like it...I mean, here we are kind of free from nature disasters and war and everything. I have been thinking a lot about this actually that I am so happy that we live in a part of a world where we have the infrastructure that everything is right; that we don't have to be afraid during the day in any way, but then when I saw on the news about this girl who was killed in Sweden probably by her boyfriend. When they spoke of it, I thought that it does not really often happen. I mean it happens in movies, but people don't get murdered every day. The reality is more about violence and accidents, but not something that is really planned (...). Maybe you don't have to be scared of dying like in a *Scream*-manner."

What Sara refers to as non-spiritual approach to death is called 'pornography of death' by Gorer (1955). According to Gorer, death has become much like sex a taboo in our society and therefore is "suitable material for the joker and the prurient" (Gorer, 1965: 93). Aries (1974) also compares the taboo of death to the Victorian taboo of sex and claims that society is ashamed of death, but at the same time also strangely fascinated by it. Due to its remoteness, death "has aroused the same strange curiosity, the same fantasies, the same perverse deviations" (Ibid: 608) as sex. Although maybe not the most pleasant topic, death has something interesting to it, and the fact that it up to today still seems taboo in public discourses only makes it more interesting. Death is thus used by the media to shock and Hollywood blockbusters and zombie thrillers make death and dying appear unreal (Ibid.). Relating this back to breast cancer charity, one could argue that, although the notion of death is not explicitly presented in the charity, death is probably still indirectly present. After all people seem to still be afraid of the disease subconsciously and that indicates that, although maybe not in a direct manner, people nevertheless still sense some connection of death and breast cancer. With death being a 'taboo' which in some way is included in breast cancer charity, this could help making the charity even more interesting for consumers. Although there might be a lot about death

in the media, large parts of what is covered there refers to death forms that are not very relevant for the average person in Western society. It is for example probably not so easy for the contemporary Western consumer to relate to dying in a natural disaster or in a war. In contrast, Rosa Bandet provides access to another form of death, the death through cancer, which is a more common cause of death in the Western world. Therefore the charity might attract consumers as it provides the possibility to take a glimpse at death, for example through statements of cancer victims.

Special occasion - let's talk about cancer, baby, but only on my terms

The charity Rosa Bandet and its products are both frequently connected by interviewees to special occasions. For example, the first thing that comes to Tina's mind when hearing Rosa Bandet is that "they have like this period where they promote it more than otherwise...when you can buy things like the pink ribbon and support. I know in Malmö the street lights were covered in pink wrapping...that was nice...spontaneously I think about this period." Maria has a similar first thought when she remembers that "I think they used to have a special week for the pink...also like a pink TV gala...in autumn or summer or something".

At first sight, it is maybe not that surprising that interviewees connect Rosa Bandet with a special occasion since the majority of the charity's activities takes place during the breast cancer awareness month in October every year, when most of Rosa Bandet's products are also sold exclusively. But the partly restricted presence of the charity is not the only reason why interviewees connect Rosa Bandet to special occasions. Instead, it is also the nature of the product types and the design of them that creates this connection in people's heads. When asked what kind of products she does connect to Rosa Bandet, Julia answers for example "I think of something for a special celebration...like with SATC [Sex and the City, a TV show] when they had the breast cancer episodes, something special". Although recently Rosa Bandet has started to introduce commodities like food and toilet paper to its product range, interviewees still rather see Rosa Bandet products as something for a special occasion and often prefer buying these special products over commodities, like Gudrun:

"I don't buy these common products because of Rosa Bandet, I buy the special ones...for example Geisha chocolate had this year for the first time a Pink Ribbon edition and that I found very nice...and Goldfynd they have all these necklaces and bracelets with pink ribbons."

Overall, interviewees have very positive feelings to the Rosa Bandet products that seem to be designed for special occasions. A favourite among interviewees is for example a Rosa Bandet cupcake that is lavishly decorated with pink ribbons. This cupcake is perceived as special occasion product, with Maria describing it as "oh, wow, special occasion. Really. That is typical for the pink ribbon days...I don't think we can see that every day. Really cute.". Sara also draws the connection between

special occasion and Rosa Bandet products as she states that the cupcake is “nothing you buy at a supermarket, but you go to a café and they have a certain day, a special occasion. It is something you buy once.”. In general she is fine with the idea of using pink ribbons on pastry as long as it is “something like semlor [Swedish pastry], where you have a special date for it”.

It seems that Rosa Bandet’s nature of being a ‘special occasion’ charity also makes consumers approve of products they otherwise might not be too fond of. Although Elin is not too enthusiastic about the pinkness of the said cupcake, it is the special occasion that makes her approve of it: “There is a certain day for these things, right, a special day for pink ribbon. That is OK for a special occasion.”. Pernilla has similar feelings. She initially dismisses the cupcake as it is “pink and sweet and maybe if you were a little girl and had a doll house you could have that to play with, but not really to eat”, but when putting it into the context of the breast cancer awareness month, she changes her opinion:

“If it is just once a year I have a different view. One day, yes, if it was just one special day...we have other special days for food as well, kanelbullar day, Gustav den Andra Adolf day where we celebrate his death with a special cake and that is one day. One day only a year, then I can think it is good. But not every day. One day.”

This ‘special occasion’ and ‘seasonality’ of charity is also mentioned by Bajde (2009), who claims that “instead of operating on a consistent basis, the thin solidarity of postmodern charitable giving often manifests itself in sporadic spectacular bursts” (76). According to Komter (2005), these sporadic outbursts are facilitated by the lack of thick, “direct personal responsibility and the low level of personal and emotional commitment” (198). Although a large number of people can be mobilized for charity, solidarity is reduced “to exchange of information, consciousness raising, or a simple donation” (Ibid: 198). The breast cancer awareness month and the Rosa Bandet TV gala that rounds it off are examples of these ‘media-exposed charity spectacles’ that charity is condensed into today (Bajde, 2009). Charity is ‘scaled up’ by ‘dazzling’ people with “powerful images of epic catastrophes”, resulting in “colossal, record-breaking mobilizations of charitable support” (Ibid: 76). The fact that charity today manifests itself in such sporadic spectacular bursts could also explain why many interviewees are not very fond of Rosa Bandet being active all year around - consumers cannot handle spectacle on a daily basis. Sara for example thinks that “you would not really see it anymore if Rosa Bandet had many products, it would become common”. Maria feels the same way, comparing Rosa Bandet to a special occasion that loses its exclusiveness when being equally present all year around:

“I think it is better to have it as a special occasion rather than all year long because people will forget...if they would always have commercials, you would stop bothering because you get used to it. During this week, people are more into it...during the year they are not interested and then it comes back. It is like a special collection, it gets hyped.”

Julia is also sceptical about too many pink products and states she would rather not buy too many “because I don’t think it [Rosa Bandet] is such a big part of my personality, so I don’t want to display it that much and permanently”. Christina has an even more extreme opinion about Rosa Bandet all year around as she states that she “would be really annoyed” by having Rosa Bandet charity working on full capacity all year around because she wonders if that is “the only way to reach out? Do you want to link breast cancer to everything you do? It would be bizarre for me to have everything that I buy to be connected to breast cancer...”.

Especially women with breast cancer experience in their personal or close environment seem to clearly dislike a permanent presence of Rosa Bandet. Pernilla states for example that “because I have breast cancer myself, I don’t want to think about it all the time, I have to forget it and think about other things...have a good time with the rest of my life, you can’t think about these things all the time”. Gudrun feels in a similar way. Although she thinks it is important that Rosa Bandet is present in order to create awareness, she also admits that an omnipresence of the charity would probably cause more harm than do good:

G: “Often TV and media, they want sensation, spectacle. So they often send stories with people crying, very much in that direction. They do it because they want to raise as much money as possible. And I think people in general think that is OK. But people who have been in that situation like me, we feel bad, we don’t like that. They should have it differently; it is exploitation of women, even if it is for a good cause.”

I: “So sometimes having Rosa Bandet present everywhere is not good for women who had or have breast cancer?”

G: “Absolutely not. Absolutely not. I got breast cancer and from the first moment I knew, you see it everywhere. It was in the newspaper, it was on the radio, it was on TV, it was breast cancer everywhere. And my husband said the same. Can we not open a paper, can we not turn on the TV, just for fun. It was awful.”

Looking at the discussion above, it can be said that Rosa Bandet has been, at least up to now, a charity of seasonal character that peaks in October and keeps rather quiet for the rest of the year. Even though recently adding increasingly commodities to its product range, in general Rosa Bandet’s products often carry a connotation of special occasion. In today’s society, social engagement is of a non-permanent nature as people are willing to support the charity, but only on an occasional base. They display selective and thereby limited commitment (Turner and Rojek, 2001). The breast cancer awareness month provides people with the possibility to, once a year, at will and with limited discomfort, be part of a temporary limited imagined community which mainly exists during October. By narrowing its activities to one month, Rosa Bandet prevents to ‘overstrain’ its supporters and respects their limited commitment to the charity.

Moreover, the consumers’ resistance to the idea of Rosa Bandet all year around also could be interpreted as people not wanting to be reminded of breast cancer on a daily basis. Christina for example does not want breast cancer to be linked ‘to everything you do’ as that would mean giving

breast cancer a too prominent spot in her daily life. Gudrun and Pernilla reject an omnipresence of Rosa Bandet as it would remind them too much of their personal struggle with breast cancer. In general, it seems that people do not mind the enormous presence of Rosa Bandet during the official breast cancer month, but in return for 'enduring' a whole month of being exposed to breast cancer everywhere, they would rather be left alone of the topic for the rest of the year.

The observation that consumers seem reluctant to deal with Rosa Bandet on a permanent, daily basis is maybe not that unexpected. After all, it is a charity related to breast cancer and even though Rosa Bandet might focus on creating a positive atmosphere full of hope, for consumer, like Sara puts it, "there is always that thought when you hear about someone with cancer and you don't know how long that person will live". Even though Sara claims to not be "afraid of getting breast cancer like that", she admits that "you always have in mind when you hear the word cancer that I am lucky that I do not have it and I will be lucky if I do not get it...you want to skip it, it is not a nice sound in your ears". This corresponds also with the negative view interviewees have towards death in general. For Christina for example "it is not linked with any positive feelings, it is a fearful thing in my world", while Stina describes death as "not the happiest thing...it brings a lot of negative things". Julia refers to it as "emptiness, black" and Linn has similar associations:

"It is sad and it is black (...). It comes up sometimes; I don't think about it that much. It comes up when something in my environment triggers that thought, maybe someone passed away or if somebody got killed in a car accident, then I think about it. It is a very uncommon topic. Normally when we discuss it everybody is sad and the environment is very special, very sad."

Just like Linn, Anna's first reaction to the topic death is that she rather not thinks about it too much, admitting that "I don't like to think about it. I don't know, it is just sometimes you really try to not think about it. It is something that does not happen to me...or anyone close to me.". Linn's and Anna's reaction could be seen as supporting the thesis that today, we live in a time of 'death denial' (Aries, 1974), with people in Western societies often going to great lengths to avoid dealing with death (Baudrillard, 1993). According to Becker (1973), the fear of death is a 'universal' in the human condition and "mainspring of human activity - activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way" (xvii), for example by excluding it from everyday life and vocabulary (Bonsu and Belk, 2003). Anna seems to be involved in this denial of death as she avoids thinking about death and almost neglects its existence when saying that it is "something that does not happen to me".

But although all respondents agree on the fact that death is not a nice topic and Anna and Linn even seem to engage in some kind of death denial behaviour, interestingly, most interviewees state that they however have no problem to talk about death once in a while, given that both point of time and

mental state are appropriate. Christina for example claims that her ability to talk about death, just like her thoughts on death, depends heavily on her state of mind:

“I think it [thoughts about death] depends on the day you ask me. My connection to the death on that day depends on my mood, and how I feel. Because death has for me been very near in several ways. Both that I myself have been...for a long time I had problems and I thought I was dying and also that with my friend. Death can be a very fearful thing for me. The thought of it can induce a lot of fear. If it is any feeling that I feel with it, then it is fear. But when I feel more distant to it, I can think it is part of life and a natural thing. “

Maria also states that her feelings on death “depend on this up and down (...). I think about it more when I have a sad period or feel depressed I can think about death and things like that.” Although in general regarding death as a “bad” topic, she admits that “I don’t know if I like to think about it, but it is kind of interesting too, an interesting subject”. Sara’s feelings towards death also vary depending on the situation she is in, and, similarly to Maria, she experiences a certain curiosity when it comes to thinking about death:

“I think that I think of death quite often and...Hmm...It changes from one day to another...Sometimes I think of it quite often, I think that it is something far away that I am quite scared of. People say that they are not scared of death...but...sometimes I think we don’t talk much about death...it is so hard to find the answers when you start to think of it and (...).It is more like...sometimes I feel it is something scary, something hard to understand. Sometimes it is only weird that it is something you don’t really know anything about...”

Stina is not reluctant either to discuss this otherwise rather unpleasant topic once in a while: “Oh yes, sometimes I want to talk about it and have no problems talking about it (...). Sometimes it is just nice to talk to someone openly about it.”. Elin is also quite open towards talking about death now and then. Unfortunately, her desire to talk about it is not mirrored by her family as “we don’t talk about it. Sometimes I can talk to my daughter about this, but the whole family, no. Unfortunately not. I think I would like to talk about it, but my husband doesn’t feel comfortable because he had some problems...”.

This willingness of interviewees to talk about death once in a while stands in contrast to the above mentioned thesis of society being in deep denial of death nowadays (Aries, 1974). Instead, this readiness to talk about death supports Seale (1998) who, although admitting that there are people who suppress their fear of death, claims that “there are many others who engage in rather practical acceptance of the realities of death” (Ibid: 54). Seale criticizes the denial of death thesis as he thinks that “death is in fact actively managed in modernity and this can be understood as the result of a characteristically modern, full square and unflinching facing of death at the personal level” (54). This could for example explain why, although displaying certain levels of fear and disliking of death, in general, interviewees do not mind to deal with death once in a while. Even stronger, some of them, like Elin and Stina, actually mention that they have the wish to talk about it now and then and

thereby display what Seale refers to as a rather “practical acceptance of the realities of death” (Ibid: 54).

But is the occasional conversation with others about death the only way in which people nowadays deal with death? This seems to not be the case as interviewees mention at least one more option on how to deal with death. Elin is a good example here. Although she would like to talk about death, she cannot share her thoughts on death with her social environment due to the resistance of her family to talk about the topic. But Elin seems to have found another way as she turns to television programmes to deal with death:

“That [death on TV] interests me, I am interested in listening to people who have faced death...it gives you a lot to listen to a person who is ill and very open. There was this show on TV I didn’t want to miss called “Himlen kan vänta” about persons who had a deadly disease (...). And they talked very open about what they had, the treatment. I think a lot of people watched that programme. I admire these people who talk so openly about it, there were so many feelings. It was such a difference from the bad feeling of showing death negatively, people were happy. It was nice to hear someone talking about it. And you hope...you hope all the time that they get cured...and I have been waiting that they show how it went for the people after the show. I think three of them died. I think it was very good...very good TV...it was real (...). It was very good, to see something that real.”

Sara also seems to deal with death through the medium of TV, indirectly experiencing death by ‘putting herself’ into movies:

“Today I can be very touched by it [death], when I see a movie I really put myself in the situation and feel the things (...). Sometimes it is just so weird and I think I have to stop thinking about it because it is so abstract...like when you think about the space, black holes, where everything ends, you get nuts more than depressed.”

It seems that sometimes, this close experiencing of death through putting herself into the position of a movie’s characters evokes too strong emotions in Sara and she has to stop watching the movie in order to not get too affected by death. Similarly, Stina also has “no problem watching death on TV, but sometimes of course you get really into it and sometimes you cry...but it all depends on what day you had and sometimes you just cannot stand it. You can decide yourself.” The fact that with TV, “you can decide yourself” both when to be exposed to death and for how long, seems to be important for both Stina and Sara. Although they allow television to confront them with the quite ‘heavy’ topic of death, they still have the power to control their exposure - if death gets too close, all they need to do is switch channels. Dealing with death through the controllable medium of TV seems to be a rather convenient way of facing one’s existential fears. Even Anna, who in general does “really try not to think about” death, nevertheless ‘dares’ to face it on the Internet, for example in the online community ‘facebook’:

“There was a group for a guy, and I just wanted to see it because I got an invitation. And it had like 3000 fans and then it was a guy who had jumped in front of a train. So I don’t think he really had 3000 friends. But people get affected by it anyways. Then I was thinking how it can happen because he was much younger than me...!

got curious what happened to him. So I tried to find out what had happened, I don't know why, it is just terrible, but that...I thought it was terrible that this could happen."

Even though Anna seems on the one hand occupied with the denial of death, on the hand she also has a certain curiosity when it comes to death. Despite rejecting 'direct' interaction about death by for example talking about it, she seems rather comfortable when dealing with it online. Again, the controllability of exposure to death is an important aspect here - after having checked out said facebook group, Anna went quickly back to normal business as she started chatting with a friend of hers about completely other topics. Of course one could argue here that Anna's curiosity is the only motivating force behind her behaviour which matches the overall sensation and spectacle-seeking nature of today's society (e.g. Bajde, 2009). But looking behind this curiosity, this could also be interpreted as Anna, who does not like to think about death in general, actively deciding to dedicate some time to indirectly deal with the topic of death, as she is encouraged by the ability to control the exposure to this information and the seclusion of her private space.

The observation that interviewees seem to actively choose the media, especially TV and Internet, to deal with death in some way is once again contradicting the thesis that today we live in a society of death denial (Aries, 1974) where death is denied, dismissed, disbelieved in and ignored (O'Donohoe and Turley, 2000). According to Bonsu and Belk (2003), public discussions of death are either avoided or "frowned upon and related discourses in the public domain are highly regulated by sociocultural norms" (42). But surprisingly, this does not seem to stop interviewees from consuming what television airs about death. Instead of avoiding death on TV completely, interviewees seem to actually like to immerse themselves into the 'frowned upon' universe of death once in a while, displaying a certain degree of curiosity like Anna.

Relating this observation that people from time to time want to talk about death, given that it happens on their terms, back to breast cancer charity, one can see striking similarities between the ways in which consumers handle death and those in which they handle breast cancer charity. Just like with death in general, there is a willingness of consumers to deal with breast cancer on a temporarily limited basis. As Rosa Bandet concentrates its activities on one month a year, this seems to be a perfect way for consumers to get involved with breast cancer with limited said commitment (Turner and Rojek, 2001). Moreover, as the activities of Rosa Bandet are characterized by a national-wide participation, the consumer does not have to feel deal with breast cancer and death on his own, but can find comfort in the fact that a large number of other people go through the similar things at the same time. The consumer can almost entirely control the level of exposure to breast cancer and death as he knows more or less where to expect Rosa Bandet during the breast cancer

awareness month. If one for example at the end of the month does not feel like dealing with breast cancer anymore, he can limit his exposure to breast cancer and thereby death by avoiding to watch special Rosa Bandet concerts, shows and galas on TV and selecting carefully, which media output to consume. Of course, given the omnipresence of Rosa Bandet during October, this might be no easy undertaking, but what counts is that it is possible to deal with Rosa Bandet and breast cancer on one's own terms, much like the above discussion of dealing with death by selecting the occasions to talk about it.

IN CHARITY WE TRUST: Rosa Bandet will rescue us all

In general, it seems that breast cancer charity has during a short period of time achieved a very high position in today's society. The charity is extremely well-known, well-accepted and one of the most popular, if not the most popular, causes of today. People have a very high opinion of Rosa Bandet (e.g. King, 2004) and put a lot of trust in the charity and its quest for a cure against breast cancer. In the last three themes, this trust in the charity is the subject of analysis. In the theme 'Investing in the future', the belief of consumers that the charity can 'rescue' them from breast cancer is discussed, while the theme 'Mixed Emotions' looks closer at the claim that Rosa Bandet provides solutions and security. In the final theme 'Unaware Awareness', this trust in Rosa Bandet is then related to the consumers' lack of reflexivity about the cause.

Investing in the future - Rosa Bandet is close to me

Despite the fact that the commonness of breast cancer differs quite substantially between different groups of age, breast cancer charity seems to nevertheless be perceived by all females as very relevant and important, irrespective of their actual age. The young women among the interviewees for example, although not part of the high risk group yet, still regard Rosa Bandet as a crucial cause. Stina for example thinks Rosa Bandet "is a really really good thing and it is very important for the research. As I said, you can raise a lot of money for helping people who have it and people who had it...it is one of the most important charities I think". For Sara, Rosa Bandet is also a highly relevant cause despite that fact that she is not too afraid of breast cancer right now as she is still too young to fall into the high risk group:

"To me Rosa Bandet is important in different ways. It is important as it is kind of a common cancer type that women get, so it is important to prevent it...and it feels like from what I read a lot more effort is put into cancer types that men get. It is lower on the priority list (...). Rosa Bandet contributes a lot to research. In some way it feels like I am supporting myself in a way, and my female friends. It is a good thing; it is like investing in my future."

Linn admits that although “I don’t directly think ‘oh it is for me’ ” when supporting Rosa Bandet, “of course it is probably for me as well” and a similar logic is applied by Anna, who states that Rosa Bandet is the charity that she perceives as being closest to her:

“It is probably the cause that is the closest to me. Anyone can get affected by it (...). When giving your money to children in Africa, I think many think it is useless and you don’t even know where the money goes. Rosa Bandet is closer to yourself; that is why I think I would rather give money to breast cancer charity.”

But what exactly does Rosa Bandet provide to these young women that makes the cause so important for them? According to Sara, “with Rosa Bandet you can still feel like ‘oh but there are some people who think and deal with it [breast cancer]’, it gives some kind of security”. Supporting Rosa Bandet is regarded as an investment for the future, so that in case Sara would get breast cancer one day, her chances to survive it would be much higher due to the advanced research that was only possible with the donations of charity:

“For example this vaccination for young girls which prevents ovarian cancer. I think that is interesting. That is something that just came up. I think that is so annoying that we could not get that. I think it is so good because many have this problem and it is so common (...), it is very good that they came up with it. And then I think ‘oh but what if some more interest would have been put into that to do really good research earlier’, what if we had had the Rosa Bandet for that before. I don’t think it will be so hard to understand how that cancer type is starting.”

This notion of regarding breast cancer charity as a way of ‘investing in your own future’ shows that it is not necessarily (exclusively) the desire to help others that motivates people to support breast cancer charity. They seem to have a substantial self-interest as well. Sara for example is annoyed that there is up to now no vaccination available against breast cancer. She feels that the non-prioritizing of breast cancer research in the past can possibly endanger her life in the future. Sara sounds almost a little jealous of those young girls that are able to get vaccinated today against ovarian cancer. She seems here mainly occupied with her own interests and with what she gets out of supporting Rosa Bandet, namely a feeling of security as with “Rosa Bandet you can still feel like oh but there are some people who think and deal with it” and hopefully, the charity will on top of that provide a cure to breast cancer soon for the case that she one day falls ill herself.

This self-interest in charity could be seen as partly standing in contrast to a notion that is often connected to today’s charity, namely the notion of imagined communities. Charity is often seen as supporting the forming of imagined communities that in turn serve as a foundation for solidarity and commitment between individuals which are socially distant from each other (Anderson, 1991). As postmodern life is characterized by a certain degree of vulnerability and risk, manifested for example in global warming and health scares like Aids, swine flue or cancer, people are therefore aiming for a ‘one world solidarity’ (Berking, 1999). The world of today thus encourages individuals to envision

new worlds and seek new ways of creating 'good societies' (Friedman, 2003), with charity being one possible way to do so. But when relating this back to the case of Rosa Bandet, it is unclear if this kind of charity really aims to create a 'good society' and if its consumers feel like they are part of an imagined community. Why is that? To start, people seem to not only have the charitable benefits in mind when supporting Rosa Bandet, but instead they also pursue their own interest, an 'investment' in their own chances for survival. This actually points more towards an individual orientation and a lack of community feeling than to significant solidarity with a particular group.

Furthermore, one could question if Rosa Bandet tries to create a 'good society' at all. Sure, finding a cure for breast cancer and promoting prevention by creating awareness are useful societal purposes that can benefit people. But on the other hand, this charity only has direct benefits for a rather limited part of society, namely women who have breast cancer. In addition, looking at it from a more global perspective, even if the charity would succeed in defeating breast cancer, ultimately, this would unfortunately still only be a drop in the ocean as there are still a thousand of other fatal ways how to die an 'early' or 'unexpected' death. Therefore, it is not unproblematic to regard breast cancer charity as being directly connected to the notions of imagined communities and good societies, which in turn are often seen as essential elements of today's charity (e.g. Friedman, 2003).

Instead, a rather substantial self-interest can be detected in breast cancer charity that goes well beyond what has been up to now regarded as the 'selfish component' of charity, namely the use of charity as an extension of the self and for supporting one's identity. Instead of solidarity, the support of breast cancer charity seems to be at least partly guided by a quite economic logic - invest into research now, increase your chances of survival later. This contrasts with the common assumption that the support of charity mainly should be regarded as giving gifts to distant others (Bajde, 2009), with gift giving being influenced by agapic love (Belk and Coon, 1993). Instead, giver and receiver of the gift/donation can ultimately be the same here - of course it is nice if a couple of other women can be saved along the way as well, but the main motivation seems to be the fact that it is possible to benefit from the own donation as it increases the chances for one's own survival.

Looking at the perception of contributions to breast cancer charity as an investment in the future from a broader perspective, this also could be seen as showing that people in general want to have control over future events. Seale (1998) refers to efforts like this as the 'colonisation' of the future which is a "key element of late modern consciousness" (84). According to Seale, this colonisation of the future summarizes all efforts to minimize the risk for an unpleasant future by using for example insurances and welfare systems, but in this case also research and charity, to gain some control over

possible risks. Thereby, those risks are increasingly perceived as “subject to the human will” (Seale, 1989: 86).

This also helps to understand why most interviewees assigned great importance to the fact that Rosa Bandet collects money to support research and science - they gladly give money as long as in return they have the feeling that ‘science will take care of it’, meaning finding a solution to the problem of breast cancer. The effort of science to find a cure is a very important element in breast cancer charity. Even though a discovery of the cure might not be foreseeable yet and therefore, consumers try to ‘mentally’ disarm breast cancer (see the theme ‘Glitter and Glamour’), it is nevertheless essential for the disarming of breast cancer that there is scientific evidence pointing out that there is the possibility to find a cure. The whole concept of breast cancer charity would become meaningless if it did not connect itself so closely with research and science.

This importance of science for charity is not surprising when looking at the overall role science plays in today’s society. Nowadays, science has taken over the religion’s former role as ultimate source of truth (Belk et al., 1989) and has in many societies even replaced religion altogether (Seale, 1998), bringing along new ways of dealing with and seeing of death. While religion ‘softens’ the impact of death “as it can be ascribed to the divine will” (Ibid: 84), people without religion only have themselves or other people to blame and therefore attempt to gain control over the ‘adventitious’ nature. They feel the need to control all sorts of risk, and it is science that they turn to for guidance. According to Seale, science provides an “important set of cultural scripts concerning the meanings of life and death”, offering a “sheltering canopy for people who can appropriate them in order to make sense of their own lives and deaths” (Ibid: 88). This is also reflected in the consumption of Rosa Bandet. Consumers invest in the cause to support science, which they believe is the only instance that can protect them at least to a certain extent from death. Summing up, charity is thus used by consumers to not only help others, but also to help themselves by colonising the future through an investment in research.

Mixed emotions - a bit of guilt, but a lot of security

Looking at charities in general, the notion of guilt is usually quite present. Many traditional charities have based their campaigns around this particular emotion, trying to create a feeling of guilt in people which can only be soothed by donating money. Although the vast majority of respondents eagerly stress in the interviews that charity in general is something very good and one definitely should engage in it, they nevertheless also connect a few negative things to charity, among them said feeling of guilt. Christina for example is already a quite active donator, monthly giving money to the

charity organisations 'Amnesty International' and 'Rädda Barnen'. But even though she engages actively in charitable behaviour, she still feels hunted by the thought that she should do more:

"You have all these good causes thrown into this pot of things you could do, to help the world...I meet them every day, they are out in the streets and want to get members, and there are many, there are so many (...). It is a bit overwhelming (...). I feel guilty. A lot of times I feel really guilty. I feel guilty for not knowing how to handle it. It stirs up a lot of emotions."

Pernilla, another passionate donator, who, besides her enthusiasm for Rosa Bandet, also supports various charities on a monthly basis, experiences similar feelings. Although more than willing to contribute to good causes, she does not like to feel forced by other people to do good, e.g. when asked by cashiers at clothing stores to round up the sum she has to pay to support some kind of charity:

"But I don't like if they ask me to round up. I don't want people to beg. I would feel like it is begging. If you have this box standing there with an explanation of what the money is used for then I gladly put coins in there, but I don't want this direct [way]. I think that might be the Nordic feeling. I feel bad about this direct begging. I probably would have bad feelings if I say no. That would make me feel bad. And that is not good. So maybe I would avoid this shop the next time (...). You have these letters [of charities] in your mailbox and you can get rid of them...you can take each tenth and donate money. But I don't feel comfortable with people asking me directly. Like we have today in city centres these people who make music and they have this box where you can put money in if you want. But you don't have to. But if someone puts that box right under your nose...no, I don't feel comfortable with that."

Christina also feels that this direct approach of 'rounding up' is "too much and crossing the line". The only place where she has agreed to round up is a fair trade store because "there you expect it to happen, then I find that I am in a place where I can expect that good things will happen". But at more commercial venues like clothing stores, she does not see any connection with charity, therefore is not prepared to be approached with charitable matters and ultimately feels dumbfounded. Linn describes also describes feelings of pressure when remembering why she decided to buy a Rosa Bandet pin:

"I had seen it around for a while and had never bought it and then I thought oh well, now it is time to do some good thing so I bought it. After a while, if you see it in different places you just think oh well, I will buy one as well because everybody else is doing it."

Even though Linn herself had no particular interest in contributing to the Rosa Bandet charity, she noted her environment's support of the cause. After being frequently exposed to the pink ribbon, buying a ribbon pin turned into a 'must have', or maybe rather 'must do', for Linn. Although she did not experience any need herself for supporting the charity, she felt that society expected her to wear a pink ribbon tag, so she ended up buying one. It is interesting that the purchase of a Rosa Bandet pin was perceived by Linn as 'must do'; today, charity almost becomes an imperative in society with individuals who refuse to participate in charity risking to lose their humanity (Komter, 2005). Through supporting charity, people get connected with a shared humanity and the charitable

behaviour signifies that the giving person is 'one among many of the same kind' (Klein and Lowrey, 2006). Giving to charity thus provides an opportunity for individuals to show the world that they are human beings (Berking, 1999). Maybe even stronger, contributing to charity seems to have turned into an essential element of being a human being in today's society. People like Linn, who do not have any interest of their own to support charity, still do so since they want to be accepted. In today's fragmented, autonomous and individual society, people long for social integration (Turner and Rojek, 2001), and, just like Linn, they try to fit in by doing the things "everybody else is doing" (Linn). Even if individuals lack any personal interest for the cause they support, if contributing to it helps them to feel part of and accepted by their closer environment and society in general, then they simply do so.

Elin experiences the societal pressure to do good deeds as well when she admits that "when I see people on the streets wearing the pink ribbon and I am not wearing it, I feel guilty". To her, it is very important that the pink ribbon is easily visible. Therefore, she dislikes products like a pair of high heels adorned with a rather indirect ribbon as "the ribbon is supposed to be here [points to her upper body], not down there on shoes (...), the ribbon is too far down (...); you cannot see it easily anymore". It seems that said societal pressure is not necessarily limited to actually doing something good, but instead one should also have evidence of the good deeds. A pink ribbon pink that is attached to clothes or a bag lets everyone see that one is a 'good', a proper citizen. This could explain why Elin, although having fulfilled the requirement for a good deed as she contributed to Rosa Bandet by buying a pin, still experiences feelings of guilt. In situations when she is not wearing the pin, the public does not know about her support for the cause. When confronted with people who actually wear a ribbon, Elin might feel inferior to them, as the pin clearly identifies them as benefactors while her own contribution remains unseen, maybe even causing those people to question her social behaviour and looking down on her. In today's 'alienated Gesellschaft' where "nobody knows anybody else in the whirl of ever-circulating strangers" (Corrigan, 1997: 17), the conspicuous consumption of goods helps people to nevertheless display their 'pecuniary strength' to those people who know nothing about one except of what they see (Veblen, 1967 [1899]). Through wearing the pink ribbon, Elin can communicate her charitable contribution to society, displaying maybe not so much her 'pecuniary', but her social and moral strength.

Similarly, Stina also prefers Rosa Bandet products where the ribbon is clearly visible so "you can show that you are supporting (...), like you can actually see that you have done something good, you are a good person". She does not like Rosa Bandet sweets as "they are gonna go down in your mouth", leaving no evidence of her charitable behaviour. Just like Elin, she prefers to conspicuously consume

breast cancer charity. Supporting charity as a form of social engagement is today seen as a very important element of one's identity and as an important mode of the public presentation of self (Schwartz, 1967). As it is not so easy to consume Rosa Bandet candy in a conspicuous way since consuming it means literally swallowing it, this particular product does not contribute to a favourable presentation of Stina's self. The Rosa Bandet candy does thus not allow to be consumed in the way Stina would like it to and she therefore dismisses it for own use.

Although Rosa Bandet, like any other charity, without a doubt profits from the above discussed societal pressure to do good deeds, interestingly, in comparison to its fellow charities, it is actually not that often directly connected with strong feeling of guilt by interviewees. Sara for example feels that "when you see a commercial for the Red Cross for example, maybe that will affect you in a different, more negative way" while she gets a more positive feeling from Rosa Bandet, as "you can still feel like 'oh, but there are some people who think and deal with it', it gives some kind of security". It seems that breast cancer charity has decided, instead of evoking negative emotions like guilt and fear like traditional charities do, to go with positive emotions and to provide a 'solution' to the problem, here cancer.

Of course the charity does to a certain extent also profit from society's fear of breast cancer, but instead of creating panic based on this fear, Rosa Bandet only uses this fear to attract the attention of consumers. Instead of nurturing and actively increasing the existing fear, Rosa Bandet offers people a solution and, just like Sara mentions, "it gives some kind of security". In contrast to traditional charities like the Red Cross, which affect Sara negatively, leaving her perhaps helpless in the face of all that global poverty and dying, with Rosa Bandet, she feels "that there are some people who think and deal with it [breast cancer]". The charity thus takes on the responsibility for solving the problem, here finding a cure against breast cancer. Maybe this is one of the reasons why breast cancer charity has done so well and "succeeded compared to other charities, for example prostate cancer" (Gudrun). Instead of overstraining people with the problem of breast cancer, charity takes on the responsibility for solving this problem and thereby provides consumers with security, which is arguably a much nicer feeling than guilt.

Unaware awareness - it's a good cause, no need to think

Interestingly, although all interviewees know Rosa Bandet and state that they have encountered the charity organisation at different times and places, none of the respondents except of Gudrun, who is an active member of a local breast cancer charity, has a concrete idea what it is exactly that Rosa

Bandet is about and what the charity does in detail. Anna for example is not too sure about what really is the purpose of Rosa Bandet:

“I have no idea; I hope that they contribute to the research; that it is not just advertising...maybe they try to make people think about it more (...). It is like they try to get people’s attention to breast cancer, but I don’t know how it is working.”

Christina has similar problems when trying to describe Rosa Bandet a bit more concrete:

“The first thing that comes to my mind is “oh, these are actions for some sort of a good cause”. They try to raise money for something that will benefit the research in cancer. That is my main thought; it is as plain as that. No deeper thoughts. “

Both Anna and Christina immediately recognize the pink ribbon symbol and are aware that Rosa Bandet is a breast cancer charity, but they stay quite vague in their descriptions of what it actually is the charity does. That becomes for example apparent when Christina uses terms like ‘some sort of’ and ‘something’ for talking about the cause; and she even admits that her thoughts remain quite ‘flat’, at a superficial level. Similar to Anna, Christina’s hope is “that when I give this money it will go to the research somehow (...). It [Rosa Bandet] is making people more aware of breast cancer and these things, to create awareness.”. The terms ‘research’ and ‘creating awareness’ are mentioned by all interviewees when talking about Rosa Bandet’s purpose. Probably not coincidentally, these words are also central components in Rosa Bandet’s campaigns and quite essential messages of the charity. Interestingly though, when asked to elaborate on these two things, especially on the advantages of creating awareness, interviewees have a hard time describing the real benefits. Anna suspects that Rosa Bandet “doesn’t make it easier for women who have had cancer”, but on the other hand she is also not sure “if it is Rosa Bandet that has, like you know that they get girls to check their breasts, prevention, maybe the aim is something like that...ähm...but probably those who are in the risk zone profit the most...so maybe research is the purpose?”.

Linn understands that “the only aim is to collect money for breast cancer research and it is kind of ‘mellow’ (...), it is just there, they don’t tell me anything specific, it doesn’t tell me why research really, or some stories”. For her it is “not sure what it is you are contributing to” because “when you donate to research, it takes a while, you don’t know where it leads to”. Linn thinks that Rosa Bandet is not actively providing sufficient information since she has not been “exposed to explanations or anything... I mean Rosa Bandet looks nice and it is interesting to look at, but I don’t really know what it is about”. Christina also talks about this information issue and admits that “I haven’t looked into it (...), I don’t even know if the research, if that is an international thing, if it is only in Sweden, I am not even aware of that”. She experienced this lack of knowledge about Rosa Bandet for the first time

after having read an article which questioned the nowadays quite common assumption that the removal of a whole breast is often the only way for patients to fight breast cancer:

“But since this discussion of its usefulness I have become more...I realized that there are a lot more things that I probably should think about before I go and buy Rosa Bandet stuff. I became aware of my lack of knowledge of everything that is around it... How I generally think about it, for me to actually promote some sort of symbol that belongs to something, I really really need to know 100% what I am promoting. And perhaps there is a part of me that is insecure about what Rosa Bandet actually contains.”

Although clearly aware of her lack of knowledge about Rosa Bandet, Christina does not intent to fill that gap by doing research on the charity. She admits that “in this time of information, I could easily dig deeper”, but at the same time finds an excuse for not doing so as “there is no time for that. I would need to have...I could find the interest to do that, but...I mean...I haven’t done that”.

But what could be behind Christina’s and Linn’s refusal to look for information about Rosa Bandet despite their awareness of this lack of knowledge about the charity? Linn provides a possible explanation when summing up her thoughts on Rosa Bandet. According to her, “when you give money to Rosa Bandet, you just kind of hope that they do the right thing, you don’t know what they do....everybody knows it is a good cause, so why should I criticize it”. Linn does thus not feel that it is necessary to look for additional information about Rosa Bandet as she trusts them to do ‘the right thing’ with her donation - after all, Rosa Bandet is a charity. Even though she does not feel well-informed by Rosa Bandet, she seems to not even think about criticizing the charity because “everybody knows it is a good cause”. And criticizing a good cause is not regarded as proper behaviour in today’s society and can turn out to be quite problematic.

Christina refers to this when stating that everything that “has an ethical cover and has a good cause sort of flashing above it, is protected against criticism (...), so if you are criticizing one thing it will automatically criticize the goodness of the whole thing”. In the case of Rosa Bandet, this means according to Christina that “you have this good cause and everything that is attached to it would be hard to criticize because it is attached so strongly to something good”. Therefore, she admits choosing quite consciously to rather stay uncritical and not seek further information about the charity:

“When I get quite critical it is easier for me to put it under this social thing...there might be something wrong with Rosa Bandet but I don’t have enough time to dig into what it is. But if I had the time I would probably find something that is not correct. But at the same time to buy a ribbon for 20 SEK, maybe it is a naïve idea that this money will go to the research, that hopefully one day it will help, but I am not involved at a high level.”

But Linn and Christina are not the only ones who choose rather unreflective and non-critical attitudes towards Rosa Bandet. The ‘refusal’ to look at Rosa Bandet critically is also reflected in the

unconditional immediate acceptance of almost all types of Rosa Bandet products by interviewees. Elin for example claims that “there cannot be any products that are not suitable [for selling with a pink ribbon on them] because the purpose with it is good”. Maria thinks similarly, as whenever she shares her thoughts on Rosa Bandet products she does not like, she makes sure to end her thoughts with “but it is for a good thing, so it is OK” or “but it helps raising money, so it is good”. Anna tries to make sense of pink cleaning equipment in a similar way by following up her first spontaneous reaction “that is a bit too much I think” immediately with trying to find ‘excuses’ for the product and thereby weakening her initial reaction and preventing to criticize the charity:

I: “What do you think about cleaning equipment by Rosa Bandet?”

A: “That is too much I think...(pause) Maybe it is good that they try to...because it is the stuff that you have to buy anyway...then I think it is maybe good that some of the money goes to something good...but it seems like they try it on everything...so it gets a bit too much.”

Tina engages in the same careful formulations when sharing her opinion about certain Rosa Bandet products. When for example talking about Rosa Bandet toilet paper, she states to not having any particular good feeling about it, but as “it is a good cause, it is not that it bothers” either. The ‘ethical cover’ that Rosa Bandet has protects the charity not only from criticism, but also allows it as well to rapidly extent its product range, agreeing to collaborations with companies that are maybe not ideal cooperation partners for a breast cancer charity. A number of interviewees have problems connecting cleaning equipment to Rosa Bandet, but despite the collective disliking, the actually voiced criticism remains meagre because it is problematic to criticize a charity with good intentions.

Both this avoidance of open criticism and the almost unconditional belief that Rosa Bandet ‘knows what to do’ could even be interpreted as indicating that breast cancer charity represents a new type of ‘religion’ (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2001). Similar to religion, people seem to truly believe in breast cancer charity, despite their apparent lack of knowledge about the cause. And just like with religion, breast cancer charity seems to not encourage its consumers to engage in overly critical reflections, but instead shields itself from critique by flashing its ethical cover. Interestingly, most people seem more reluctant today to publicly criticize charity than religion, which could be explained by charity being perceived as ‘holy’ and sacred in society (see ‘Glamorous Charity’). Breast cancer charity could be regarded as unifying the ‘best’ parts of both science and religion. With its aim to support research and fight breast cancer, it includes the risk-minimizing, colonisation of the future function of science, while it at the same time also has ‘emotional appeal’ as the charity provides faces, stories and visuals to the ‘war against breast cancer’. Although it might not be clear from this study if charity today really is viewed as religion, what this research does to provide is the insight, that people have great trust in charity and do neither dare nor want to critically reflect about the charity.

DISCUSSION

Looking at the analysis, it is apparent from the variety of presented themes that the consumption of breast cancer charity is a rather complex phenomenon with many different facets to it. Breast cancer charity includes aspects as diverse as feminism, commercialisation, postmodern aestheticization and trust in science, and due to this diversity, it might seem complicated to find an overarching context that helps understanding how these individual themes are related and connected with each other. But when examining the different themes a bit more detailed, one detects that actually, most of them ultimately can be regarded as occupied with one main aim - trying to provide solutions to the problem of how to deal with breast cancer and death in contemporary society.

THE CONSUMPTION OF CHARITY AS A WAY OF HANDLING DEATH

Despite the fact that the consumption of breast cancer charity appears to be a rather complex and fragmented phenomenon, it seems that there is at least one 'problem' that unites the main part of the above presented themes - the question of how consumers should handle breast cancer. Examining the different consumption themes from this perspective, one can see that breast cancer charity actually offers a variety of ways to consumers on how to deal with breast cancer, from disarming the disease of its fatal connotation over actively fighting it by investing in research up to temporarily exposing oneself to the topic. The following sections discuss each theme regarding the respective strategy of dealing with breast cancer it includes.

Breast cancer charity - designed to help consumers with handling cancer

In the section 'Glitter and Glamour', the focus is on the trivialisation and the disarming of breast cancer. Rosa Bandet is perceived by consumers as a glamorous charity which has given breast cancer a major make-over by creating many aesthetically attractive products and a cheer- and hopeful atmosphere that substitute the scary context of cancer. By assigning the colour pink and the notion of positivity to it, breast cancer seems to have become more bearable for consumers, or, in Linn's words, "it is pink, so maybe it is OK to have it". The special attention Rosa Bandet seems to pay to the beautiful aesthetics of both its products and everything else surrounding the charity (e.g. events like the spectacular TV gala) could be seen as an attempt to balance out the unglamorous nature of breast cancer and its unpleasant side effect of death by 'over-glamorising' breast cancer charity (e.g. Ehrenreich, 2001). Moreover, Rosa Bandet also supports consumers in disarming cancer by spreading hope and positivity and in addition communicating that dying from cancer is not necessary anymore

and almost out of the question. Consumers in turn gladly accept these positive messages and use carefully selected information to continuously construct breast cancer as 'not that bad' in their minds. By removing death from breast cancer and keeping quiet about the 'ugly' sides of the disease, consumers and charity engage in active mitigation of cancer.

The themes summarised under the heading 'Pink and black' also offer two different ways to deal with breast cancer. In the first one, consumers try to make sense of these things by calling breast cancer a horrible, evil disease and an unfair type of death, transforming cancer into an almost human-like villain, as they assign a hostile will to the disease. The use of military terms like 'fight', 'defeat' and 'loose a battle' also reflects this hostile attitude and enables people to express and cope with their negative feelings around breast cancer. The second way of dealing with death presented in that section is characterized by a much more active approach consumers seem to take in their dealing with cancer and death. Although in general not so eager to discuss these unpleasant topics, people nevertheless are willing to deal with them once in a while. Important is here that the exposure to these topics only happens on a temporary basis, with consumers being able to control both length and intensity of the confrontation. Rosa Bandet is an ideal way for consumers to deal with breast cancer, a topic that seems too acute, common and important nowadays to just plainly ignore it. By focusing its activities on one month, the charity provides consumers with the possibility to reflect on breast cancer and death in a controllable environment.

The third and final group of themes containing methods to handle cancer is 'In charity we trust'. By supporting Rosa Bandet and thereby also breast cancer charity, consumers seem to also invest in their future, hoping that science will have found a cure by the time they might fall ill. They try to handle death by colonising the future, actively contributing to a possible minimization of the risk breast cancer presents for people. A more passive way of dealing with cancer is the consumers' almost unconditionally trust in charity to take care of the problem breast cancer. They get a feeling of security from Rosa Bandet as the charity promises to provide a solution, a cure, one day. By transferring the responsibility of 'solving' the problem breast cancer to charity, consumers manage to get rid of the heavy burden that responsibility is. In return for this, they accept to trust in the charity unconditionally and to not question it. In the theme 'Unaware awareness' at the end of that section, one can find the last method to handle cancer that is going to be discussed here, being the selective absorbing of information about breast cancer. By actively controlling what kind of facts are considered, the consumer composes and maintains a certain view on cancer, mainly that it is more harmless and curable than one might think. Although aware of a lack of knowledge about breast cancer and the related charity, people refuse to look for additional information on their own as they

are scared that what they find might conflict with their carefully cultivated assumption that breast cancer is 'not that bad'. So by regulating and controlling the intake of information, consumers construct and conserve the image of the 'disarmed' cancer.

Section	Themes	Way to handle cancer
GLITTER AND GLAMOUR	Glamorous charity	trivialising the severity of breast cancer by 'glamorising' it
	The disarmed cancer	disarming cancer by removing its connotations of death and suffering
PINK AND BLACK	Breast cancer, public enemy no 1	transforming cancer into a human villain
	Special occasion	temporarily exposing oneself to cancer in a controllable way
IN CHARITY WE TRUST	Investing in the future	colonising the future by trying to minimize the risk of cancer
	Mixed emotions	outsourcing the problem cancer and putting all trust into that science will fight it
	Unaware awareness	constructing disarmed cancer by selective information absorption

Table 1: Overview of ways to handle cancer as supported by charity consumption

Charity, a tool to handle death?

Examining the above described ways to handle cancer provided by charity in a broader context, one can argue that ultimately, consumers do not only handle breast cancer here, but these strategies also reflect how people deal with death in general. The close interrelatedness of cancer and death was already shown in the analysis, where it was for example demonstrated how the special occasion character of breast cancer charity is related to the willingness of people to deal with death under controllable circumstances once in a while. Moreover, the transforming of cancer into a public enemy and villain mirrors the general tendency of today's society as regarding death as 'unfair'. One

could therefore wonder if people maybe do not only 'handle' cancer by consuming charity, but also ultimately deal with death.

The general idea that people deal with death through consumption is not completely novel since consumption is recognized as a quite established way to cope with death (e.g. Mandel and Smeesters, 2008). There is a sheer "abundance of evidence in the social science literature suggesting a link between death and consumption" (Bonsu and Belk, 2003: 41; Arndt et al., 2004), with almost all existing literature on consumption and death being based on Terror Management Theory (TMT). TMT comes from the field of psychology (e.g. Greenberg et al., 1986) and is inspired by Becker's work of death denial (1973). According to TMT, there are two main mechanisms available to cope with death. People can either enhance their self-esteem or defend certain cultural worldviews which help to assign order and meaning to the world (e.g. Greenberg et al., 1989; Ferraro et al., 2005). Although no clear cut definition is available, 'coping' can be described as a rather passive handling of death with consumers either trying to make sense of it or simply avoiding and denying it (e.g. Greenberg et al., 1989). Based on this, when looking at the consumption of charity, one clearly can identify two of the above presented ways of how consumers deal with cancer as belonging to these said coping mechanisms.

Charity as coping with death

Many believe that today, we live in a time of 'death denial' (Aries, 1974), with people in Western societies often going to great lengths to avoid having to deal with death (Baudrillard, 1993). Aries for example (1974) claims that "except for the death of the statesmen, society has banished death" (560). According to Becker (1973), the fear of death is a 'universal' in the human condition and "mainspring of human activity - activity designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way" (xvii), e.g. by excluding it from everyday life and vocabulary (Bonsu and Belk, 2003). When looking at breast cancer charity, one can find some support for the thesis that people cope with death by avoiding it. The observations that people both seem to have outsourced the problem cancer to charity and that they as well unconditionally believe in charity and science taking care of this problem, reflect this avoidance of death. By transferring the responsibility for finding a solution, or maybe better a cure, for cancer, to charity and research, consumers 'escape' from having to actively deal with cancer and thereby clearly avoid the topic of death.

The second strategy that can be regarded as a rather passive coping with death is the construction of breast cancer as public enemy. In this case, consumers are not so much trying to avoid or deny death and cancer, but instead try to cope with these things by make sense of them. By assigning a hostile

will to the disease and transforming cancer into a human villain, people can cope with death and cancer by directing all their negative emotions caused by these two things towards a certain target. Personalizing cancer into an enemy that has to be 'fought' and, at least according to charity, can be 'defeated', supports people's feeling that death is unfair and could facilitate thereby the coping with it. Death is regarded as mainly unfair in today's society, but unfortunately it cannot be eliminated, so people have to find ways to cope with it. By making cancer the scapegoat for unfair death, people seem to suddenly have a more concrete enemy that they can blame for everything. This could especially help people who have personal experience with cancer to make sense of it and come to terms with e.g. the loss of a close person as they can identify cancer as the 'murderer' and regard the death person as a victim of it, enabling them to transform the impotent anger they initially might feel into a more direct type of anger that they eventually can get rid off by targeting this anger towards a specific target.

On a more general level, one could maybe even go as far as arguing that the overall concept of breast cancer charity, although increasing the awareness of breast cancer in general, at the same time also helps to conceal the disease's fatality by 'hiding' the people who actually die of breast cancer. This matches with Aries' (1974) statement that death is seen as ugly and dirty and it therefore has to be hidden, for example by transferring it to the hospital. According to Aries, the hospital has given people a place to hide the dying "whom neither the world nor they can endure. It also gives them a good reason to let someone else deal with all those awkward visitors, so that they can continue to lead a normal life" (Ibid: 570). Although charity has not 'gotten rid' of people dying from breast cancer by relocating them physically, one could state that by focusing so much on positivity, hope and survival, the charity has at least in parts excluded those persons from the public discourse of breast cancer, which in turn could be interpreted as a passive way of coping with death by avoiding and denying it.

Is coping all there is?

Although consumers clearly seem to consume charity partly to cope with death, one could wonder if this coping mechanism suggested by Terror Management Theory really is all there is available to the consumer for handling death. Most of the above presented ways charity provides to consumers for this matter seem to not really fit into this passive way of coping. And that is not that surprising when considering that in general, actually two opposite views exist on how people deal with death. One the one side, there is said idea of death denial with people engaging in rather passive sense-making of death or trying to avoid dealing with it altogether (e.g. Aries, 1974; Becker, 1973). But is also another alternative view available, which rejects the assumption of death denial and claims that

instead, people actually manage death actively (e.g. Seale, 1998; Parsons, 1978). Despite the lack of a coherent definition of what this management of death includes, one could state that overall, the management of death unifies those ways of handling death that are characterized by a more active role of persons, with individuals 'working' with death in fact and trying to consciously change and influence it. And when relating the idea of death management back to the consumption of charity, this alternative perspective actually helps to understand the remaining ways in which consumers use charity to deal with death.

Charity as management of death

Despite of the fact that breast cancer charity seems to be consumed in some ways that allow consumers to cope with death by either making sense of it or avoiding and denying it, there are also aspects that indicate a connection between charity and an active management of death. According to Seale (1998), "death is in fact actively managed in modernity and this can be understood as the result of a characteristically modern, full square and unflinching facing of death at the personal level" (54). He claims that "there are many others who engage in rather practical acceptance of the realities of death" (Ibid: 54) and refers to Parsons (1978), who thinks that, instead of denying death, society is actually actively constructing it by for example controlling early and deliberate death and relieving the physical pain of dying through medicine and science.

There are a couple of facets to the consumption of breast cancer charity that could be regarded as pointing to this active management of death. One could for example argue that through trivialising breast cancer by 'glamourising' the disease and connecting pink, harmless products to it, breast cancer charity provides society with a way to identify with cancer without having to visualize the negative effects of the disease (Stoddard Holmes, 2006). According to Stoddard Holmes, "by transforming the spoiled, abject parts that are the unspoken imaginary of cancer into strenuously upbeat pastel trinkets, however, non-profit campaigns 'disappear' the realities of fatigue, nausea, bone pain, neuropathy, constipation, and anaemia" (Ibid: 481). So by consuming the charity through pink products and cheerful events, consumers could be seen as actually managing cancer by making it pink and thereby bearable. Taking this thought further, one could even argue that this 'cancer disarming' consumption of charity could also be regarded as an effort of people to manage death in general. Maybe, consumers manage the threat of fatal diseases by selecting one of these diseases as a representative and defeating it. By supporting breast cancer charity to an extraordinarily high extent, people might not only engage in the battle against breast cancer, but also possibly in the battle against death, treating breast cancer as a representative for all fatal diseases and death causes. As it is impossible to fight each of these fatal diseases at once, all efforts are focused instead

on one disease. The reason for picking breast cancer as the ideal candidate for 'representing' potentially fatal diseases to society could be that breast cancer carries, unlike diseases like AIDS, no 'negative' lifestyle or sexual connotations and thereby does not potentially scare off the public (Ehrenreich, 2001). In addition, the breast is an external organ which people can identify more easily with than is the case for e.g. ovarian cancer (Stoddard Holmes, 2006).

But death and cancer are not only managed through 'glamourising' them, instead people also seem to remove all connotations of death and suffering from cancer. By doing this, consumers actively change the image of cancer and construct a form of disarmed cancer that is 'not so bad'. By removing the connotations of both death and disease from breast cancer and only absorbing positive information about it, consumers create a more bearable picture of cancer that is less frightening and scary as it does not directly include the fatal consequences of breast cancer and the possibility of death any more. Consumers focus on positive information and maybe therefore choose to be content with the little information about the cause that is provided directly, as this information is mainly 'pleasant' information, such as 'there are more than 80% of women surviving breast cancer in the first 5 years' and 'we are looking for a cure'. People are reluctant to search for further information as the digging for this might reveal inconvenient facts. These inconvenient facts possibly could damage the picture of the disarmed cancer they so carefully have constructed and would maybe even attack the soothing assumption 'breast cancer is not that bad'. By selectively absorbing only positive information and focusing on 'the good news', consumers and charity could be seen as managing cancer and death by actually changing and influencing how these things are perceived of society.

Another maybe more obvious and straight-forward way of using charity to manage death can be found in the theme 'Investing in the future'. By consuming breast cancer charity, people support science in its efforts to find a cure for cancer, which in turn might increase their chances of survival. Consumers thus use charity and science to colonise the future as they strive to minimize the threat that cancer presents. By doing so, people clearly manage death as they attempt to at least eliminate one possible death cause. In contrast to the above discussed disarming of cancer by changing one's perception and image of the disease, here the consumer actually goes one step further and aims to change the actual disease as well. Therefore, the investment in charity and science could be regarded as the maybe one of the most direct forms available of death management.

But consumers do not only manage cancer and death by changing these things both directly and perception-wise. They also use charity to manage death by actively getting involved with cancer as

consumers can temporarily expose themselves to death in a controllable way through the consumption of charity. This corresponds with the previously mentioned temporary willingness of people to talk about death. Despite an overall disliking of the topic of death, people do not necessarily have a problem with talking about it from time to time, as long as they can control place and length of their exposure to death. It seems thus that consumers do not aim to completely exclude breast cancer and death from their mindsets. Instead, they choose to get involved in these topics once in a while at own will. Charity helps consumers to do so as it provides a controllable and limited context to deal with these things by reserving one month a year, namely October, the official breast cancer awareness month, to the 'exposure' to cancer. One could argue that by dedicating one month to the disease and limiting all charity activities to this month, consumers are able to deal with death while exerting control over their exposure to breast cancer.

But why would people want to be exposed to death at all, even if it was only for a limited period of time? One could assume that due to the (seemingly) increasing vulnerability of life and the fact that "images of death are part of consumers' daily life" (Maheswaran and Agrawal, 2004: 213), people maybe have started to realize lately that it is impossible to 'kill' death. Despite all efforts of science and society to get rid of it, "pursued and censured everywhere, death springs up everywhere again" (Baudrillard, 1993: 185). The omnipresence of death makes it hard for the contemporary to deny it, so maybe people have started to search for alternative ways of how to deal with death. Another possible explanation could be derived from the 'taboo' character of death that creates interest for it. Aries (1974) compares the taboo of death to the Victorian taboo of sex and claims that society is ashamed of death, but at the same time also strangely fascinated by it. Due to its remoteness, death "has aroused the same strange curiosity, the same fantasies, the same perverse deviations" (Ibid: 608) as sex.

Maybe, after decades spent in exile, death is now slowly finding its way back into society, attracting the curiosity of people because of the thrill of the forbidden. Moreover, it could also be that people want to deal with death to improve their life. As death is a nuance of life (Baudrillard, 1993) and since there is no life without death, it maybe is important to learn about death to get a better understanding of life. Perhaps it is just like Sara states, "some people say that if you have been really ill that you will appreciate life much more, but I think that you can think of it and do that anyway...you don't have to be exposed to that personally". So by experiencing death in some way, one learns to appreciate life more. But it is here however not necessary to be exposed directly to it; dealing with death through the consumption of media output or cancer charity could also deliver the same result.

Without a doubt, one could be tempted to argue that the above discussed active management of death is just another form of coping with death as suggested by Terror Management Theory. After all, the support of breast cancer charity could be regarded as corresponding to TMT's strategy of coping with death by defending one's worldview, since charity also offers to some extent answers to people's basic and universal questions. When consuming the charity, a certain worldview is supported and this might help people to regard their "place in the world as important and meaningful" (Schmeichel and Martens, 2005: 658). Despite the parallels, said management of death however still differs in parts from coping and TMT theory. While with coping, consumers try to handle death by e.g. investing in an existing world view, under death management consumers actually actively change meanings and develop new world views. Instead of trying to defend themselves from death by strengthening a world view, consumers play a much more active and offensive role in death management, in fact taking death and doing something with it. Unlike coping mechanisms, where people consume things that the market offers as connections to certain world view, here the market actually interacts with consumers. Consumption is used by individuals to both disarm cancer and deal with death by exposing themselves to it. As coping is based on the assumption that all dealing with death is driven by the wish to forget about death, the coping framework fails to explain several aspects of charity consumption, among them for example the willingness of consumers to talk and think about cancer and death once in a while.

One charity, two ways to handle death

Summing up the preceding discussion, it can be said that people seem to deal with cancer and death through the consumption of charity. Consumers use the charity to cope with death and cancer by either avoiding these topics or trying to make sense of it, but they also assume a more active role, managing death and cancer by using charity and science. In fact, most consumption of charity seems to be dedicated to not only cope with death, but instead to manage it. This is an interesting observation as in academia, the idea of death management is largely ignored up to now since the death-oriented idea of life being 'little more' than a denial of death still dominates (e.g. Ferraro et al., 2005), although it clearly is as important to acknowledge the existence of a more life-oriented view that sees death as a necessary sacrifice for life (Seale, 1998). As "clearly people may vary in their orientations towards life or death" (Ibid: 59), it is necessary to accept both views on death handling, which is also reflected in the co-existence of both coping and managing strategies when it comes to the consumption of charity.

Although this research has produced some facts that are in favour of the widely-accepted notion of passively coping with death in today's society, it has on the other hand also detected tendencies that

support an active management of death. While the management of death does differ significantly from the idea of coping with death regarding the active role it assigns to people, it does however not necessarily contradict the basic assumption that death cannot be present constantly in one's mental functioning as else the organism could not function and that therefore, human activity is "designed largely to avoid the fatality of death, to overcome it by denying in some way" (Becker, 1973: xvii). It is still reasonable to assume that people cannot 'function normally' when occupying themselves permanently with death. But, instead of solely seeking to overcome death by denying it as suggested by Becker, today's society seems to have started exploring additional paths for dealing with death. And maybe the consumption of breast cancer charity is one of the first obvious examples in which consumers take on a more active role and aim to manage death.

CHARITY, DEATH MANAGEMENT AND THE MARKET

The function of charity consumption as a form of death does not only challenge the dominant assumption that today's society is engaged in death denial and passively copes with the topic by largely avoiding it. Instead, looking at the active role that the consumer seems to take on in death management, this also raises the question of who is using and controlling whom here - are market and charity really suppressing the consumer, or is maybe the consumer using these entities for his purposes, here the management of death?

In favour of the suppressed consumer

Many contemporary researchers view the consumer of today as being suppressed by the market (e.g. Kozinets, 2002). The market is seen as having an increasingly 'totalizing' influence over consumers, limiting their freedom by the enforcement of particular views of reality and thereby making them passive (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995). Moreover, the market has been hypothesized to homogenize consumers and suppress their self-expressive capabilities (Kozinets, 2002). By its critiques, mainly feminists, breast cancer charity is also often regarded as engaging in a certain type of suppression, namely the suppression of women. Not only does the charity seem to reinforce female stereotypes by selling hyper-female pink products and thereby pushes women back into the aged role of a housewife. But one could also argue that the charity also infantilizes breast cancer through all those nice, cute and harmless products and events which are clearly dismissed by feminists as an "outbreak of mass delusion, celebrating survivorhood by downplaying mortality" (Ehrenreich, 2001: 52).

The infantilising effect that breast cancer charity has is believed to encourage women to regress to a child-like state and to suspend any sense of critical judgement (Ibid.). In addition, breast cancer charity can be seen as enforcing a particular view on reality - namely, that breast cancer is curable, but only by complete obedience to medical protocols (Ibid.) - which in turn refers to a passive role of the consumer. Breast cancer charity does not seem to encourage any critical reflections from its consumers as the charity relies on its 'good cause' to shield itself from critique. Instead of providing more detailed information about the charity and its work, it seems that efforts are focused rather on pushing sales of the charity's products and increasing the popularity of the pink ribbon 'brand'. Summing up, it is apparent that breast cancer charity engages in the suppression of consumers to some extent, discouraging reflexivity and requesting obedience to the principles of science and charity, and thereby partly supports the thesis of the market suppressing the consumer.

In favour of the emancipated consumer

Although the notion of the suppressed consumer is widely accepted in academia, some scholars do however see the possibility for some sort of consumer emancipation. The consumer might not be able to completely evade the market, but it is nevertheless imaginable that he could achieve at least a certain extent of emancipation from it (Kozinets, 2002). Consumers could be regarded as entirely suppressed by breast cancer charity, but the fact that they use the charity to manage death shows that there is more to this. Sure, there are several indications that breast cancer charity treats women in suppressing ways that feminists do not approve of, but it seems that women actually up to now seem to not really mind. And is that not strange regarding the fact that we today live in a time of emancipated, confident and independent women who usually have no problem to voice their opinions and pursue own interests? Referring back to the role breast cancer charity plays in the active managing of death, one could wonder if not the women themselves use breast cancer charity as a 'tool' instead of being used by it. What if consumers only support this charity because it provides them with what they want, namely a solution to a problem, making a fatal disease curable?

The increasing requests of consumers to receive added value in return for their donations is one aspect in favour of the assumption that consumers actually started to 'control' and 'use' the charity/market. Consumers are no longer satisfied with getting a 'clear conscience'; instead they demand more and more additional things in return. And charity has no other choice than to fulfil these demands as it depends on the benevolence of its customers. Moreover, it could be even argued that consumers control the general image of breast cancer through breast cancer charity. Sure, it is the charity that maintains an atmosphere of hope and sells those pink products, but it is the consumer who actively demands from the charity this sort of positivity and threatens to stop all

support otherwise. So is the charity really forcing its pink world view on the consumer, or is it maybe the consumer who uses charity to construct a new image of cancer?

Since the fall of religion, people only have themselves or other persons to blame for death, therefore having to take on a certain responsibility regarding death (Seale, 1998). This responsibility presents of course a heavy burden and one could argue that maybe, especially female consumers do not want to carry this responsibility and therefore try to pass it on, for example to charity. Instead of being permanently occupied with the fear of breast cancer and having to find solutions to it, women might outsource these tasks to charity, thereby actively improving their quality of life by reducing the need to worry about cancer. Women could thus use the charity to satisfy their demands and to get what they want. And would that in turn not be something feminists have to approve of since it is an example of ultimate female power and self-determination

The consumer takes control

All in all, it can be said that the consumption of breast cancer charity points to a certain level of consumer emancipation. The charity might try to control the consumer, but the consumer also exerts control over the charity, demanding added value in return for donations and actively using it for the management of death. The observation that consumers can actually use the market for their purposes as well is particularly interesting, as it contrasts with the existing assumptions on consumer emancipation. Researchers seem to regard it necessary for the emancipated consumer to somehow distance himself from the market and thereby have focused up to now on the question if it is possible to escape the market (Kozinets, 2002).

But regarding the results of this study one could wonder if the consumer really wants to escape the market. Kozinets' study of the Burning Man project showed that it almost is impossible to evade the market since it is such a established entity in today's society. So what if consumers have grown tired of trying to escape the market? Does that mean that the consumer is turned into a dupe again, suppressed by the market? Not necessarily. Maybe a new level has been reached where the consumer actually uses the market and regains control over it. After all, the market also has its advantages, so why escaping it?

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to explore the complexities of contemporary charity consumption. By approaching the topic without having a particular theoretical framework in mind, it was possible to detect new facets of charity consumption, thereby answering Bajde's (2009) call for "much additional research" to provide a more "comprehensive understanding of charitable giving" (81). The analysis of charitable giving off the beaten track of the gift giving paradigm brought forward exciting nuances of the phenomenon that showed how complex and multisided contemporary charity consumption is. Overall, this study has produced three main contributions to the field of CCT - an introduction to the complexity of charity consumption, a new perspective for the research on death and consumption and new material for the question of consumer emancipation - and one contribution to the general field of marketing.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The previous finding that charity is conspicuously consumed by people to improve their self was confirmed, as was the observation that charity today is increasingly commercialised and needs to offer spectacle to reach donors (Bajde, 2009). In addition, side effects of the commercialisation of charity were discovered, with charity today facing highly sophisticated consumers that demand the charity to on top of a clear conscience also deliver added value in exchange for donations. An analysis of the phenomenon from a gender perspective produced findings that supported the critique of feminists that breast cancer charity suppresses women by promoting obedience to science and discouraging reflexivity, but also revealed that the charity seems to promote an outdated image of women. A closer look at the image of breast cancer in today's society brought forward that cancer seems to be disarmed by both charity and consumers by constructing the disease as curable, fightable and 'not so bad'. Instead of being driven by the desire to help others, consumers seem to be motivated to support charity to help themselves. The support of breast cancer charity and research is seen as a life insurance and an investment in one's own future that might increase one's own chances of survival in case of falling ill. The consumption of breast cancer charity is thus not as altruistic as previous researchers might have thought and seems no longer based on the ideology of gift giving, but instead follows an economic logic of investment and rate of return.

By introducing all these new facets to the topic of charity consumption, this study contributes to the meagre body of literature that exists on this promising phenomenon. Breaking with the previous

perception of charity as gift giving, this research offers alternative perspectives that have the potential to enrich future research on charity by more fully embracing the phenomenon's complexity. In addition to offering starting points for a number of new perspectives, this study also elaborates on one of these perspectives, demonstrating that people use the consumption of charity to handle death. By relating charity consumption to the topic of death, two ways of death handling are identified as available for the consumer through charity. The consumer can either choose to remain passive and cope with death by denying or avoiding it through the consumption of charity, or he can take on a more active role and change death, thereby managing it. Thereby, this study also contributes to the area of research on death and consumption. As existing research on that topic has up to now focused on the coping function of consumption, this study adds a new function, the active management of death, to this field.

But the discovery of consumption as death management is not only a relevant observation for research on death and consumption. The assumption that consumers actively use charity for managing death also raises questions regarding the actual suppression of contemporary consumers. Is it really the charity that controls the consumer or is the consumer actually controlling charity? This refers to the suppression of consumers by the market and the question, if emancipation from the market is possible for consumers at all. As an emancipation from the market has been regarded as almost only possible through an escape from the market, this study contributes here with a discussion of an additional option for consumer emancipation, namely to intentionally take advantage of the market and thereby using it for one's own purposes. As the level of control consumers can achieve over the market remains unknown from this study, this research does not claim that today's consumers are totally emancipated and have complete control over the market. Instead, the aim is to show that it is not necessary that consumers have to escape the market in order to become emancipated, but they very well could get emancipated by interacting with the market instead.

On a more general marketing level, this study provides both charity organisations and companies with insights about the breast cancer charity consumer. This research presents the thoughts and ideas of a number of consumers on a range of different charity products and thereby could give hints to both charities and corporations which products sell best with breast cancer charity and which should maybe be not marketed with a pink ribbon or even taken off the market. Especially breast cancer charities can get useful information about their customers from this study, enabling them to get a clearer picture of their consumers so that they can direct their efforts even more effective to their target audience.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Although this research aimed to provide an as complex overview of charity consumption as possible, due to time restriction, this study focuses on charity from a female perspective. Due to the selection of only female interviewees, this study does not include a male perspective and thereby is limited in its expressivity and generalizability. Another main limitation of this research results from the research method chosen. By relying on interviewing, the empirical material might not accurately reflect the real thoughts and opinions of interviewees. Especially due to the rather sensitive nature of breast cancer and charity, it is possible that interviewees opted to present themselves during the interview in a way society approves of instead of sharing their true feelings. The quality of the empirical material collected could be further negatively influenced by both the rather long time span of 5 months between the breast cancer awareness month and the actual interviewing and the use of photo elicitation as a complementary method. Moreover, this study deals with a special type of charity, breast cancer charity. It is therefore unclear if similar observations occur when researching other charities.

A number of topics for future research can be derived from the limitations of this study. First of all, it is interesting to analyse the consumption of breast cancer charity from additional perspectives, for example by focusing on the point of view of men or breast cancer patients. Another promising idea is to conduct the field work during the breast cancer awareness month in October. Not only would it most likely be easier for people to remember the charity's activities, it would also be possible to do an ethnographic research that includes observations, enriching the empirical material collected and thereby the entire study of charity consumption significantly. Leaving the specific type of breast cancer charity behind, it would also be interesting to analyse other charities that show similar traits of commercialisations and spectacularization. An example for such a charity is prostate cancer charity which just entered the scene. This charity is especially interesting as it positions itself as the male response to breast cancer charity, using, just like Pink Ribbon, gender specific symbols to represent the cause, namely a moustache and the colour blue. The questions that this research posed about the interaction and power relation between market and customer are yet another area for further research, just as is further exploration of consumption as a tool for death management, which also could deliver exciting additional findings.

Summing up, it is important to stress once more that this research neither aims to provide a complete account of charity consumption nor does it claim that the desire to deal with death is the only motivation behind charitable giving. This study does by no means imply that all consumers

exploit breast cancer charity for their own interests, nor does it state that all breast cancer charity is infantilising and suppressing. Due to the complexity of charity consumption, many more interpretations are possible and this research does not provide the 'one and only' way to understand charity consumption. Instead, this study hopefully motivates researchers to further explore the exciting phenomenon of contemporary charity on their own and helps academia to realize the potential that the study of charity consumption obviously holds for consumer research.

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APPENDIX

OVERVIEW OF THE INTERVIEWEES

For this study, 11 Swedish girls and women between 19 and 67 years were interviewed. In the following, these interviewees are introduced individually and their backgrounds and prior experiences with breast cancer charity are summarized.

Anna

Anna is 24 years old and about to graduate from university. She is familiar with the name Rosa Bandet and knows “it is against breast cancer but that is the only thing I know about it”. Anna has never bought a pink ribbon pin and probably never will as “I am not that kind of person that would wear it”. She has bought a set of underwear from Rosa Bandet but “it was just because it was pink underwear, it wasn’t really that I thought I want to contribute to research or something”. She states that “it wasn’t because of that it was Rosa Bandet that I bought it. So I have never really thought that I contribute to that”. So far, Anna has not had any close experience with breast cancer. Although she admits that the importance of Rosa Bandet for her would probably increase “if something happened to someone close to me”, right now she does not feel very involved in breast cancer charity as this charity “has nothing to do with me”.

Elin

Elin is 52 years old and works as a controller in the public sector. She appreciates Rosa Bandet’s efforts of trying to find a cure and sees it as a charity that raises money for fighting breast cancer and promoting prevention. Elin has bought the pink ribbon pin several times because “I like to show my support, support for women with cancer. I think it is a nice way to show support”. Although she thinks that it is a good idea to sell products in order to raise more money for the charity, Elin has not bought any of these products yet, maybe because “I am not sure that all the money that could be going to research is maybe not going there”. Although having no persons with breast cancer in her social environment, Elin was confronted with the disease personally when she discovered a lump in her own breast some years ago, but “it ended well” as the lump turned out to be harmless.

Tina

Tina is 19 years old and just started studying at university. The first thing that comes to her mind when thinking about Rosa Bandet is the range of different activities during the annual breast cancer

awareness month. She remembers that in "this period (...) they promote it more than otherwise... you can buy things like the pink ribbon and support...I know in Malmö the street lights were covered in pink wrapping...that was nice". Of course she also thinks about the breast cancer charity part of Rosa Bandet, but "it is more like you see a pink ribbon and oh, it is a pink ribbon". Tina has never bought any Rosa Bandet product and describes this as "a bit shameful". She doesn't worry too much about breast cancer as "I feel like there is no need (...), if I get I get, I might already be sick with something else". Tina has not experienced breast cancer in her close environment. The last time she was confronted with breast cancer was when the mother of a friend got the disease, but "it doesn't really affect me, which maybe it should, but it is so hard to imagine it would happen to you or someone close to you".

Sara

Sara is 25 years old and has recently graduated from university. When hearing Rosa Bandet, she spontaneously thinks about "different types of design [of the ribbon] and that the money is collected to help people with breast cancer". She has bought pink ribbon pins in the past and has a positive attitude towards Rosa Bandet products that are "kind of healthy and long-lasting, something that is not made in China, and would just be rubbish (...), it should be something of quality (...). You have to think of the whole circle". In contrast, she heavily dislikes Rosa Bandet products that could be seen as stereotype products for women (e.g. cleaning equipment, high heels) as "it is a bit like a group of men sitting and trying to make a campaign for Rosa Bandet to get in touch with the target group and then they don't think further than this, this girly thing". For Sara, Rosa Bandet is "more like giving money and not creating sisterhood...but maybe we should talk about it more - breast cancer is something that is scary for women, it is such an opposite to this pretty façade". Sara's grandmother had cancer and she admits that breast cancer "is something you actually think of quite often...if you are in the shower and you feel a lump or something...it scares you".

Christina

Christina is 34 years old and has, after working in the tourism industry for several years, recently started doing a PhD. She sees Rosa Bandet as a charity that tries "to raise money for something that will benefit the research in cancer. That is my main thought; it is as plain as that. No deeper thoughts". She has bought some pink ribbon pins in the past, but has never put them on because "for me to actually promote some sort of symbol that belongs to something, I really really need to know 100% what I am promoting". Although Christina knows about Rosa Bandet's aim to fight breast cancer and create awareness, she feels she has a "lack of knowledge of everything that is around it".

She is quite critical towards the charity, stating that Rosa Bandet at times feels “absurd” to her and she fears that some people and for-profit organisations might use the charity as “vehicle for their own interests”. Christina lost one of her closest friends to ovarian cancer and her aunt recently got operated because of breast cancer, therefore breast cancer is a quite sensitive topic for her.

Julia

Julia is 28 years old and works as a marketing assistant. In her eyes, Rosa Bandet is an “effort to create awareness about breast cancer. (...) It is very feminine, positive, a little bit comedy or entertainment”. Julia appreciates that the charity tries “to transfer a topic that is very serious into a bit more fun...not making a panic thing about it”. She has bought a ribbon pin in the past and was thinking about buying a Rosa Bandet sports top, but dismissed it in the end because she did not like “the price and how it looked”. Although Julia likes the products offered by Rosa Bandet in general, she also says that “sometimes I can feel it is a bit too much (...); it is also in your face, too obvious to make money of something with the goal to create awareness...shallow somehow”. Julia doesn’t know anyone who has breast cancer, so “it is hard to identify with someone” for her. In addition, she thinks that “I actually don’t think I would get it, because I don’t have any relatives who have it” and therefore, she has no “personal connection” to Rosa Bandet.

Pernilla

Pernilla is 67 years old and a retired school director. She connects Rosa Bandet “100% to breast cancer” and has been “motivated from the beginning to support” this cause. Pernilla is a passionate buyer of Rosa Bandet products and has in the past among other things bought golf balls, pins, candy and other food items with the pink ribbon on them. She underwent surgery for breast cancer a year ago and decided to have one of her breasts removed to prevent the cancer from spreading. In addition, Pernilla lost her grandmother in the 1950s due to breast cancer. Her grandmother died under “terrible” circumstances due to the lack of medical care back then. This traumatizing event motivated Pernilla to support breast cancer charity as “I just thought this should not happen to any person anymore”. Pernilla herself is glad that she lives in “modern times” with “very good doctors with a lot of competence to treat me”. She is especially thankful to Rosa Bandet because “of their information I was very eager and very careful with examining my breasts”, resulting in her actually detecting the tumour in her breast at an early stage. In addition she appreciates that Rosa Bandet and “these round pink ribbons make you feel good, the feelings must be positive (...) because I have breast cancer myself I don’t want to think about it all the time”. When Pernilla looks at Rosa Bandet

products, she sees “all the products, but I don’t think about my breast cancer. Of course I am aware of that, but I don’t think actively about that”.

Gudrun

Gudrun is 64 years old and a retired civil servant. She is very well-informed about Rosa Bandet as she is actively participating in Bro, the other big breast cancer charity in Sweden besides Rosa Bandet. According to Gudrun, Rosa Bandet is a well-known and respected charity in Sweden with “some other charities being a bit envious” about its success. Gudrun has bought a number of products to support the fight against breast cancer, including pins, bags and home decoration. In general she thinks that selling Rosa Bandet products is a good way to collect money for a good cause, but she dislikes the “use of the pink ribbon on things like toilet paper or cleaning stuff” as that feels “degrading”. Gudrun had breast cancer herself in early 2000 and is therefore more sensitive to some of Rosa Bandet’s activities, especially things like the TV gala where they show “stories with people crying (...) and people who have been in that situation like me, we feel bad, we don’t like that (...), it is exploitation of women, even if it is for a good cause”. She also remembers that suddenly “breast cancer was everywhere” and she could “not turn on the TV, just for fun”.

Stina

Stina is 20 years old and studying civil engineering at university. She refers to Rosa Bandet a “fundraiser for helping women with breast cancer and whatever is around the fundraising...like products and concerts”. Stina thinks about “strong and independent women trying to raise money for other women with a problem”. She has bought and worn pink ribbon pins in the past but likes the idea of Rosa Bandet products, as long as the cause is visible and “you can show that you are supporting (...), you can actually see that you have done something good”. For Stina, Rosa Bandet is “one of the most important charities” and clearly “a female thing” showing that “females are strong, helping them on the way through recovery”. Her most recent encounter with breast cancer was when a friend’s mother was diagnosed with it and although she says that “it is not like that I am afraid of getting breast cancer like that”, she admits that “you always have in mind when you hear the word cancer that I am lucky that I do not have it and I will be lucky if I do not get it...you want to skip it. It is not a nice sound in your ears”.

Maria

Maria is 21 years old and studies Japanese at university. She thinks that Rosa Bandet is an important cause as “it is good to find any way to destroy cancer in any form”. “Pink and breasts” are the things

she spontaneously connects to Rosa Bandet and she gets a “positive feeling when I think about Rosa Bandet”. Maria has bought pink ribbon pins and a movie supporting Rosa Bandet in the past. She is relatively neutral towards the majority of Rosa Bandet products, often referring to them as “why nots”, which she would buy if the price and quality were OK. Maria thinks Rosa Bandet charity is only for a “special occasion rather than all year long because (...) if they always had commercials, you would stop bothering because you get used to it”. The mother of one of her friends has breast cancer and she admits that “I feel kind of worried because you never know, you could get breast cancer any time; it could happen to anyone anytime”.

Linn

Linn is 27 years old and works as a freelancer. She connects Rosa Bandet to breast cancer and describes it as a “pink and girlish (...) fashion thing” as the ribbon is often sold in fashion stores. She has bought both postcards and a pin from Rosa Bandet because “after a while, if you see it in different places you just think oh well, I will buy one as well because everybody else is doing it”. Linn feels it is “hard to motivate myself” to contribute to the charity. Still, in her eyes it is nice that “you think pink when you think breast cancer” as “in a sense that is why I don’t think about the disease so bad, instead I think of a nice colour”. In general, Linn feels she is not well-informed about Rosa Bandet as when “donating to research, it takes a while, you don’t know where it leads to, you are not sure what it is you are contributing to” and therefore she prefers causes like UNICEF or Greenpeace. Linn does not know any women who have breast cancer personally and feels not really affected or threatened by the disease.

OVERVIEW OF PICTURES USED IN PHOTO ELICITATION

Pictures



Mop 1: <http://nettansliv.blogg.se> **Cupcake:** <http://amylane.files.wordpress.com> **Cupcake 2:** <http://elle.se/>

Sports bra and pants: <http://www.stadium.se> **Golf ball:** <http://sparkibaken.se>

Toy: <http://whipitoutcomedy.com> **T-Shirt:** <http://www.sbcf.org.au> **Candy:** <http://www.brostdcancerfonden.se>

High heels: <http://2.bp.blogspot.com> **Toilet paper:** <http://feed.ne.cision.com> **Mop 2:** <http://esteline.blogg.se>

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Pink Ribbon Inc. is a New York registered, internationally operating charity organization aimed to create a global community to support breast cancer patients, survivors and their families all over the world. The Pink Ribbon website supports the community by facilitating forums and blogs where thoughts, experience and information can be shared. Pink Ribbon is dedicated to raising breast cancer awareness and funding for breast cancer research.

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