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RHE 330 Fall 2013
Visual Argument Two

Analysis of [Back the Cause](#)

Ovarian cancer has been called “the silent killer” because its symptoms are subtle enough to go unnoticed and it spreads very quickly. By the time most women go to the doctor, they are already in stage three or four of the disease. The National Ovarian Cancer Coalition’s campaign to “break the silence” aims to teach women to recognize the subtle symptoms of ovarian cancer and so to save lives: perhaps yours, your mother’s, your daughter’s, your wife’s, or your BFF’s. By supporting their annual 5k run in Austin, Texas, individuals can help spread the word and beat back this deadly disease, one woman at a time. The video, created for NOCC’s website, aims to provoke a sense of hope and to motivate people to participate.

The music was chosen for its tempo and tone, which is not sad but somewhat intense and hopeful. The theme was chosen for the same reasons: the play of light in certain slides draws attention to the text and captions while nonetheless remaining optimistic, not too dark. The teal background color was chosen because that is the official color for ovarian cancer awareness.

The first text slide begins to set up the situation to be addressed, but it does not finish the thought: “The American Cancer Society estimates that 14,030 women...” That is enough to provoke in the viewers a sense of expectation—the recognition that this will be serious—and to hold their attention, to instill an interest in how that sentence will conclude.

As the first image comes into focus, there is a pan and zoom in on the picture of a beautiful and apparently vibrant woman smiling, eyes twinkling. Above the image a white sticker reads, partially in teal ink, “In Memory of Jeanne McNeely,” indicating that this once beautiful woman was taken out by ovarian cancer, and that her image is pinned to a memorial wall. Below the image, also in teal ink, someone (presumably a loved one) has written her birth and death dates, along with a heart and the symbol for love and kisses: “xox.” The zoom-in on the image tilts slightly so that it seems not quite

graspable as the caption comes into focus: “will die of ovarian cancer in 2013.” The woman is an example, then: she is one of the 14,030 women whose life has been taken this year by ovarian cancer. This image aims to provoke a sense of sadness because this woman, once so happy and healthy, is now gone, and of sympathy for those who loved and lost her and who are, clearly, still grieving for her.

The image transitions to another text slide that opens with a flash of bright light (hope) before the text twists into view. The text, which has no punctuation, reads: “The National Ovarian Cancer Coalition / 5k to Break the Silence / Austin, TX / August 25, 2013 / Be there” The slide assures the viewer that there is something s/he can do to help “break the silence” and so prevent this disease from taking the lives of more women. The text is designed to provoke hope by articulating a task to be accomplished. To the question “can anything be done to prevent this?” or “what can I do to help?” the text slide responds: “yes” and “participate to spread the word.”

The final image zooms and tilts in exactly the same way the first image did, tying the two images together in style and structure, but this time we are zooming in on a young woman dressed in running shorts, running shoes, and a t-shirt, walking away from the camera, presumably at the end of the above-mentioned 5k. As the image comes into focus, it becomes clear that on the back of this woman’s t-shirt is the same photo we saw pinned to the memorial wall in the first image. Above the photo on the t-shirt are the words: “I’ll remember.” So here, presumably, we are seeing the loved one (daughter?) who pinned the first woman’s photo to the memorial wall and drew the heart and the “xox” at the bottom of it. She has taken the challenge to participate in the campaign to “break the silence,” which suggests to the viewer: so can *you*. The caption twists in, again with a beam of light, enjoining the viewer to “Back the cause.” The pun on the word “back” aims to give the reader a sense of “getting it” and so of being an intended addressee. The understanding that this woman is walking in memory of the other woman, perhaps her mother, provokes a sense of sympathy or compassion for her—for her loss and her grief—

but also of hope more broadly because she is doing something with that grief, she is supporting a cause devoted to fighting the disease that took someone she loved (her mother?) from her.

The presentation as a whole evokes the emotions of sadness or sorrow, of compassion, and then finally of hope: there may indeed be a way to fight this disease, and I might be able to help. The behavior the emotions are designed to prompt is active participation in the “break the silence” campaign. The video aims to get the viewer involved in the cause. The interpretation necessary to link the emotions to the desired behavior is a belief that spreading the word could actually make a difference, and that my participation could help to spread the word.

Photo Credits:

Image one: Memorial wall. Taken by Paul Mowery. Private collection.

Image two: Woman walking. Taken by Paul Mowery. Private collection.