

# Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal

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Volume 2 | Issue 1

Article 5

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2015

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### Recommended Citation

Schroeder, Sarah M. (2015) "Photography: The Silent Savior of Breast Cancer Patients," *Scholarly Horizons: University of Minnesota, Morris Undergraduate Journal*: Vol. 2: Iss. 1, Article 5.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.morris.umn.edu/horizons/vol2/iss1/5>

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## Photography: The Silent Savior of Breast Cancer Patients

Breast cancer is among the top killers of women in the United States today, but hope remains in specialized photographers and brave patients. These specialized photographers are called radiologists, and they use mammography, a form of photography, to identify potential tumors in women's breasts. Radiologists use two forms of mammography which use x-Rays to search for cancer. The mammogram is an important tool involved in early diagnosis, and thus treatment, of breast cancer. However, many women do not attend mammography screenings. Women may be deterred from their screenings by their photographer, the radiographer. Gender of the photographer matters to women due to the fact that many feel more comfortable being examined only by females. Although some patients object to being photographed by a male radiographer, and still more would prefer not to have their photographs viewed by the public, some brave patients are willing to share photographs of their bodies post-cancer treatment or post-surgery in order to help women undergoing or recovering from treatment. These women challenge society's restrictions on beauty and teach women to embrace their healthy bodies. A breast cancer patient discovers all of these trials and tribulations on her journey to overcoming breast cancer. Digital mammography, proper patient-radiologist accommodations, and positive images of women post-cancer are essential to encourage women to attend screenings and increase the likelihood of discovering breast cancer at an early stage, potentially saving more lives.

Digital mammography is a form of photography more efficient at discovering breast cancer in a vast majority of patients than traditional mammography. Traditional mammography, the first form invented, involves a form of x-ray printed directly onto film to be analyzed by professionals

for tumors (Grady). Recently however, a new form, digital mammography, has been increasing in usage. Digital mammography results in the image being directly uploaded to a computer screen which is then analyzed by doctors. According to Denise Grady of the *New York Times*, studies have shown that increase in the use of digital mammography "...is occurring in part because for certain women — younger ones and others with dense breast tissue — it is better than film at finding tumors" (Grady). For these women, digital mammography is excellent at pinpointing calcium deposits, which can be a sign of breast cancer (Grady). The original goal of the scientists creating digital mammography was to make a more accurate screener that used less radiation (Nobbe). In an article detailing these studies, George Nobbe described original digital mammography in a simple, yet intelligible way:

The light-detector array, which uses sophisticated charged-coupled devices (CCDs), can record 20 million individual pixels, each 30 times smaller than the period at the end of this sentence. And because the system records the images directly in digital form, they can be computer-enhanced, permitting diagnosis of potentially cancerous lesions and tumors far smaller than those detectable by current mammography techniques. (Nobbe)

To test the accuracy of the digital mammography compared to traditional mammography, many trials were subsequently enacted. In one study, titled "Diagnostic Performance of Digital versus Film Mammography for Breast-Cancer Screening," 49,528 women in the United States were tested through screenings over a period of two years (Pisano). These women each underwent digital and traditional and one of five digital mammographies in random order. Two radiologists then analyzed the images, one inspecting the traditional film mammogram and the other evaluating the digital mammogram. The results showed that, although the diagnostic accuracy of

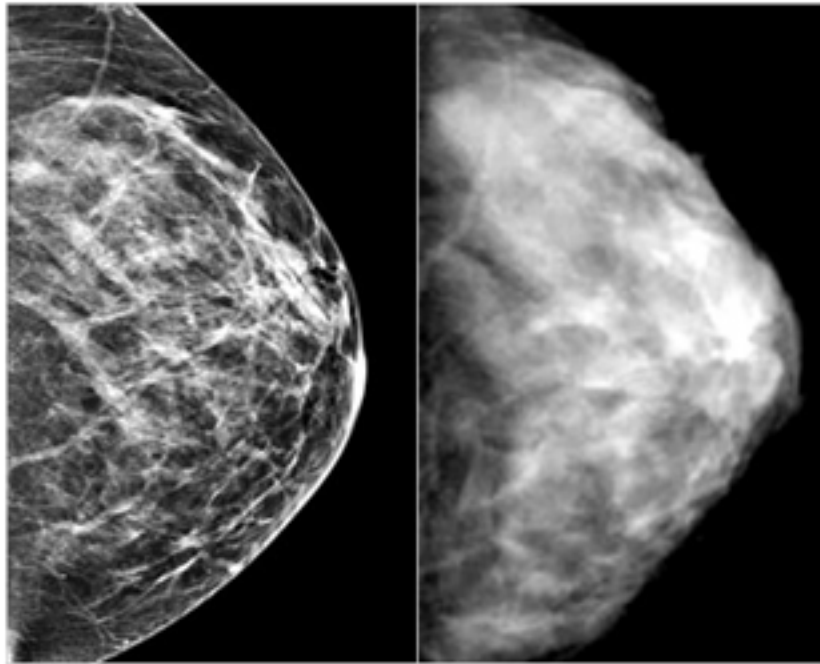
the two mammographies were similar for the entirety of the women tested, in women under age fifty, digital mammography was much more accurate in discovering tumors (Pisano). The overwhelming evidence in favor of digital mammography shows its benefit as a screening technique that better aides radiologists in finding tumors, thus allowing for earlier treatment.

Digital mammography may be the most reliable form of photography for discovering breast tumors, but every photograph requires a photographer, which for mammography is the radiographer. The radiographer's role in breast cancer diagnosis is controversial because of gender conflict, which is why it is important that women have access to care from female radiologist's if they prefer it. In a Cancer Research UK study on Radiographer Gender and Breast-Screening Uptake, researchers found that 60% of the 1716 women who participated would prefer a female radiographer (Fitzpatrick). Furthermore, the study found that 8.8% of the women polled wouldn't have had their mammogram if their radiographer was male and only 37.4% said that they would definitely have their mammogram done by a male radiographers. Also concerning, 41% of the women stated that they would have felt embarrassment should they have had a male radiographer do their mammogram, and 7.5% of the women tested strongly agreed that they would not have returned to the BreastCheck company if there were male radiographers (Fitzpatrick). This is an issue because if women are deterred from their screenings by the gender of their radiologist, they risk having an undetected tumor. It is therefore extremely important that patients' needs involving their photographer, the radiographer, are met. Female radiographers should be available as an alternative to ensure that the maximum number of women receive breast cancer screening and feel comfortable attending.

Cancer is a devastating illness that requires a great deal of courage, some of which may be supplied through photographs of post-cancer patients. On August 15, 1993, a photographer named Matuschka published "Beauty Out of Damage" in *The New York Times*, and made history (Dykstra). Matuschka was a breast cancer survivor who had a mastectomy, or removal of one or both breasts, because of cancer in her right breast. "Beauty Out of Damage" exhibited a photographic self-portrait of Matuschka openly displaying her mastectomy scar on the front page of the *Times*. Although the article mainly focussed on politics of fundraising for breast cancer research, analyst Jean Dykstra notes that Matuschka's article also hinted at the politics of representation in stating that her goal was "...to suggest a reevaluation of standards of beauty and acceptability of images of the female body" (Dykstra). Beauty standards of today's society require flawless skin, which inevitably excludes breast cancer patients who have mastectomies. In the event when a woman could choose to have a mastectomy which would eradicate any future chance of breast cancer, it is important that her decision is not hindered by the beauty standards of society. Though the health of an individual should always be placed first, exclusion from society by differences in image is a difficult burden to overcome. Positive exposure to images of women who have undergone mastectomies reassures patients and reforms society's views on mastectomies for the better. Matuschka's photograph caused so great a response it was in *The Times'* "100 Photographs That Changed the World" ("About the Photo"). Being proud of one's own body requires courage, especially in the face of cancer. Photographs which encourage positive body image in women with or recovering from breast cancer are important because they change the views of society, but they also change the view of the women with breast cancer and give them hope.

It may be possible, however, that women with breast cancer are impacted by more photographs than just those from breast cancer survivors, and can in fact be changed by their own art. A study titled "Using Photographs to Capture Women's Experiences of Chemotherapy: Reflecting on the Method" found that women are significantly aided throughout and after their cancer experience through creating a photographic documentary of themselves (Frith). The study stated using photography as a record of their experience of cancer "enabled patients to retain control over their images of themselves and how they choose to represent their experience" (Frith). In something so chaotic and uncontrollable as cancer, having something within their control is important to breast cancer patients. This boosts the moral of the patient and also allows the patient to place a positive lens on her experience. Photography of an individual during and post-treatment is essential to the mental health of an individual and both encourages treatment and also doubles as a coping mechanism.

Photography is a necessary part of cancer diagnosis and treatment which allows for a greater chance of healthy and happy living for breast cancer patients. Digital mammograms are superior in detecting breast cancer in a patient. However in order to receive a screening, a patient must be present for the radiographer to scan. Radiographer gender can sometimes be a deterrent certain patients, thus it is important to give women access to another female radiographer. The road to recovery is paved with many trials and tribulations, however transition is made easier with photographs that change society's perception of beauty and breast cancer and individual documentaries chronicling a journey that hopefully leads to success. Photography is found in all paths of breast cancer, and from mammography to auto-photography, it has a great impact for the betterment of breast cancer patients.



Digital Mammography vs. Film Mammography (Digital Mammography)



Beauty Out of Damage (Matuschka)

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