Llewellyn Louderback's classic *Fat Power* (1970), which challenged the medical literature on fat, through explorations of femininity like Marcia Millman's *Such a Pretty Face* (1980), critiques of diet culture like Shelley Bovey's *Being Fat Is Not a Sin* (1989), Dr. Cheri K. Erdman's *Nothing to Lose: A Guide to Sane Living in a Larger Body* (1995), and contemporary takes on fat activism like Marilyn Wann's *Fat!So?: Because You Don't Have to Apologize for Your Size* (1998), Wendy Shanker's *The Fat Girl's Guide to Life* (2004), and Kate Harding and Marianne Kirby's *Lessons From the Fat-O-Sphere: Quit Dieting and Declare a Truce with Your Body* (2009).

Books like these have introduced countless readers to fat activism and/or the more general idea that it is okay to be fat. Tovar's book is more focused on intersectionality than those of earlier authors in this genre. While intersectionality and the discussion of race is not new in the context of activism, blogging and scholarship, readers unfamiliar with the links between diet culture, misogyny, and white supremacy will get an effective introduction from this text. Through anecdotes and personal stories, Tovar shows that cultural anxieties about weight are built into existing power structures. She also notes that diet culture "maps seamlessly onto the preexisting American narrative of failure and success as individual endeavors," obscuring the reality that attitudes toward gender and embodiment are socially constructed (37). Fat activism disrupts this narrative and deeply entrenched ideas about gender differentiation.

Tovar concludes the book with a long chapter critiquing body positivity. When she came to fat activism around 2010, she recounts, the movement was radical, anti-assimilationist and liberationist. Body positivity has begun to eclipse the radical branch of the movement, according to Tovar, who says that the approach is driven by cis-gender women who are seeking to appease men and are afraid of confrontation.

As a historian of fat activism, I struggle with such absolute statements about different approaches in the movement. There are many ways to be fat and an activist. The movement has taken many forms over the last sixty years, and groups have rarely been divided on strict ideological lines. I would have liked to hear more from Tovar on the radical future instead of a take-down of other approaches to liberation.

While not everyone will embrace the movement with the same power as Tovar, this book will inspire readers to reflect on their lives in a meaningful way. It is a valuable contribution across the genres of fat activist self-help guide, memoir, and heroic journey, written to appeal to contemporary readers.

DISRUPTING BREAST CANCER NARRATIVES: STORIES OF RAGE AND REPAIR

Emilia Nielsen
Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019

REVIEWED BY DIANE DRIEDGER

This book resonates with me as a breast cancer survivor. It is an excellent book for anyone interested in the power of the stories that women tell about our experiences. Emilia Nielsen, through the study of women's narratives, unpacks the mainstream breast cancer narrative in Western societies. That is, that a woman with breast cancer should always be upbeat, cheery, courageous, hopeful, a survivor, never a downer. Nielsen paints the picture of the supposed true breast cancer patient, one who goes along with the medical professionals who will "cure" them so that their lives will be happy and the same as before they had cancer. This book discusses women's breast cancer narratives that upend the mainstream, feminine trope. Nielsen mines print, blog, film, and television narratives to present an analysis that disrupts the usual talk about breast cancer.

The American Cancer Society started The Pink Ribbon initiative to raise awareness and funds for breast cancer prevention and treatment. The "pink washing" of the breast cancer story that we all see in the media is promoted and supported by the same corporations that may also be causing the breast cancer epidemic through their own profit-making operations that pollute the environment. In fact, Nielsen's narrators tell us that our society does not really want a cure for breast cancer, as there is too much money to be made in treating cancer.

When I had breast cancer almost fourteen years ago, I noticed the pink ribbons, pink ribbon Barbies, pens, pins, ads. I thought, *this is interesting. Let me collect these while I have breast cancer and build an art installation in my study. Surely, this will make me feel comforted about the treatment, and I will feel that I am not alone*. Interestingly, the installation grew to cover a third of the floor of my room, but it did not make me feel better. In fact, I could hear its hollow ring every time I entered my study. After cancer treatment, I dismantled it, seeing no artistic or personal meaning to it—after all, what did it really mean to me?

Nielsen's narratives tell us that all the pink is about consumerism. That is, women are traditionally seen as the buyers, and it is supposed to make us feel better to be able to buy pink stuff. It didn't make me feel any better.

In fact, narratives of breast cancer by women such as Audre Lorde, Barbara Ehrenreich, Kathlyn Conway, and Wendy Mesley disrupt the cheerful narrative. They remind us that cancer sucks, that it instills many women with rage, and that sometimes women don't survive. The traditional story told to women undergoing breast cancer treatment is:

> "suck it up." Which is to say they are expected to endure whatever cancer brings in its wake—first and foremost often debilitating treatments and perhaps later post-treatment symptoms—silently and stoically. Women are not to "bleat" negatively about their experiences of breast cancer. (8–9)

Women are instead supposed to play our usual role of pushing down any anger and negativity. No one wants to hear our painful stories.

Women in these disrupting narratives react with rage because women have been told that we will be "cured" by going through tortuous surgeries, by having toxic chemicals shot through our veins, and radiation aimed at our chests. Lo and behold, many women found that these treatments came with their own side effects, chronic illnesses and disabilities that did not go away post-treatment. Maybe our cancer was stopped in its tracks, but new disabilities began. Suddenly, our bodies were different. We may have nerve damage to our ears or eyes or have lasting prickling sensations, fatigue, brain fog, and sometimes depression. Most women were not prepared for this by their medical providers, and the cheery pink ribbon master trope certainly did not help with preparation for this outcome.

The upshot of Nielsen's examination of these narratives is that breast cancer is not only an individual problem, but rather a societal problem. In contrast, the Canadian Cancer Society's campaign for breast cancer prevention is for women to eat fresh fruits and vegetables, exercise, and stay out of the sun, putting the onus on the individual woman to stay well. Somehow, it appears that our environment is causing cancer, but stopping pollution of the environment is not the master narrative.

In the end, women change the cancer narrative by writing disruptive narratives to repair the broken tropes of breast cancer. As Nelson says, "the immediate purpose of a counter story is to repair narratives that have been damaged by oppression" (qtd in Nielsen 138). In fact, the writers and filmmakers in Nielsen's book have taken to stitching back together their identities and experiences after surviving cancer. And this is still not yet the master narrative.

Nielsen examines many feminist and narrative theories, so the book can be a dense read at times. However, the main themes are there and not to be missed by anyone who has questioned mainstream narratives of women's experiences with serious illness.

THE MISSING LIST: A MEMOIR

Clare Best
Linen Press, 2018

REVIEWED BY IRENE GAMMEL AND JACLYN MARCUS

In a 1999 volume of essays entitled *Confessional Politics: Women's Sexual Self-Representations in Life Writing and Popular Media*, one of the authors of this review explored the intricate rhetorical and performative strategies used by women in the telling of their intimate lives. One of the essays in that book highlights aesthetic strategies as a way of coming to terms with childhood sexual abuse, whereby a lyrical speaker can both assert control through aesthetic composition and seek a sympathetic readership through empathic language. Nowhere is the inherent power of such consciously aesthetic retelling of childhood sexual abuse made more clear than in Clare Best's lyrical memoir *The Missing List*. Prompted by her father's terminal illness, Best's autobiographical narrator gives birth to her own life and identity through an experimental narration, creating a self-narrative that is ultimately beyond her father's grasp, even as it recounts his abusive control. She does so by engaging a number of documentary media testifying to the truth of her experience; she relies on transcribed audio recordings, film clips, lists, photographs, and personal journals to explore and share her experiences.

In the foreword to *The Missing List: A Memoir*, Clare Best writes:

> The way I've written this story does not form a narrative in any conventional sense. My collection of offcuts is more like a collage, but this reflects my experience. (8)