Uproar as Breast Cancer Group Ends Partnership With Planned Parenthood

Pink ribbons have for decades been a symbol of resolve and compassion in the face of the deadly disease of breast cancer. Now, that nearly ubiquitous icon has many women seeing red.

Susan G. Komen Top Officials Resign As Backlash Gains Steam

When the nation’s largest breast cancer advocacy organization considered in October cutting off most of its financial support to the nation’s largest abortion provider, the breast cancer group was hoping for a quiet end to an increasingly controversial partnership.

Instead, the organization, the Susan G. Komen Foundation, has come under fire.

Planned Parenthood, Out of the Shadows

How to drive Planned Parenthood out of the shadows.

By William Saletan

Susan G. Komen Foundation Kicks Off P.R. Rehab by Promoting Pink Handguns (UPDATE)

Just in time for the rising backlash to its self-created public relations disaster, the Susan G. Komen Foundation—which announced this week that it would pull its funding from Planned Parenthood—has teamed up with Discount Gun Sales to market pink handguns.

Susan G. Komen Reverses Planned Parenthood Decision, Does Not Promise To Renew Grants

By no longer donating to organizations “under investigation” by any federal, state, or local government, the Susan G. Komen Foundation is replacing its pink ribbons with a black list.
**Definition of a Crisis**

Any situation that is threatening or could threaten to harm people or property, seriously interrupt business, damage reputation and/or negatively impact the bottom line (publics, products, services or good name)

***

“Now Komen executives are faced with the task of restoring credibility to one of the strongest brands in the nonprofit world.”

“People may now question the role political ideology plays in their decision-making, and that didn’t enter into people’s minds in the past.”

About Susan G. Komen For the Cure

- **Annual Revenues:** $357,832,083 (April 1, 2010 – March 31, 2011)

- **Primary Activities:** Targeted population grants, disparities research, prevention screening, administration and fiscal management, fundraising, education/advocacy, and treatment

- **Scope:** International – Besides the federal government, the Komen Foundation is the largest funder of breast cancer research in the world, currently managing more than 500 active grants totaling $270 million. Komen also funds research in 18 different countries.

Mission: “To end breast cancer, forever”

About Planned Parenthood Federation of America

- **Annual Revenues:** $229,935,173 (April 1, 2010 – March 31, 2011)

- **Primary Activities:** Provides reproductive and complementary healthcare services and screenings, advocate public policies, provide educational programs, and promote research

- **Scope:** Planned Parenthood has 74 independent local affiliates that operate nearly 800 health centers throughout the United States, providing services to women, men, and teens

**Mission:** “A reason for being”

Planned Parenthood

- Fundraising/advocacy and programming have **different** operating mechanisms.
- The organization has a typical organizational website that lists its programs, services, and leadership.
- PP also has an **action center** that is used for their advocacy actions, mobilization and fundraising.
A timeline of key events in Komen Controversy

- **January 2011** - After an unsuccessful run for Georgia governor, Karen Handel joins the Susan G. Komen Foundation as a consultant. She was then hired as a senior vice president for public policy. During the Georgia primary, Handel’s platform included advocating for Planned Parenthood’s defunding.

- **Spring 2011** - The Komen board forms a three-member subcommittee to look into Planned Parenthood funding. Komen staff also begin meeting on the issue. Both the staff review and board subcommittee conclude that funding for Planned Parenthood should continue.

- **Sept. 29, 2011** - Rep. Cliff Stearns (R-Fla.) sends a letter to Planned Parenthood president Cecile Richards, notifying her of a Congressional investigation into whether her group has illegally used federal funds for abortions.

- **Nov. 29, 2011** - The Komen board votes unanimously to take action that would bar funding Planned Parenthood.

Although funding decision was made December 2012, Planned Parenthood released emotional statement to media January 31, 2012 igniting media mayhem.

- Included announcement of breast health emergency fund launch to offset lost support from Komen
- Stated past good works of organization, proactively shared performance statistics
- Within 4 days, 77,000 supporters donated more than $3 million to Planned Parenthood
- Original award from Komen was $750,000

Planned Parenthood announced Feb 6, 2012 that donors “angry about the decision” have supplied the nonprofit with enough revenue to expand its breast cancer services.

Source: Chicago Tribune, August 2012
A timeline of key events in Komen Controversy

- **Nov. 30, 2011** - Mollie Williams, a senior official in charge of Komen’s community grants, resigns.

- **Dec. 16, 2011** - Komen President Elizabeth Thompson calls Planned Parenthood President Cecile Richards to inform her of the foundation’s decision.

- **Jan. 31, 2012** - The Associated Press breaks the news that Komen has adopted new grant policies that bar Planned Parenthood from receiving funding. A Komen spokesperson says the new policy bars funding to groups under government investigation, citing Rep. Stearn’s probe in Congress.

- **Feb. 3, 2012** - The Komen Foundation reverses course to say that only those under “criminal” investigation will be barred. Planned Parenthood is once again eligible to apply.
A timeline of key events in Komen Controversy


- **June 6, 2013** - The breast cancer charity announced it was ending half of the events in 14 cities it has, for the past decade, sponsored a 3-day walk, citing drops in ‘participation levels’

  “I don’t even wear pink anymore. It just turns my stomach.” – Facebook user, June 2013

“Women’s health is a pocketbook issue.”
Cecile Richards, President
Planned Parenthood Federation of America (January 2012)

http://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/timeline-of-key-events-in-komen-controversy/2012/02/07/gIQAX4EWxQ_story.html; Dailybeast (2013)
Theoretical Framework

- Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2006)
  - Goal: To match the selection of crisis response to the needs of the situation & to place responsibility of the crisis somewhere
  - Consists of three core elements: (1) the crisis situation, (2) crisis response strategies, and (3) a system for matching the crisis situations and crisis response strategies

- Social mediated Crisis Communication Theory (Jin & Liu, 2010)
  - During crises, audiences’ social media use increases (Pew Internet & American Life, 2006)
  - Describes relationship between an organization and its publics via social media
  - Creatives, followers and inactives

Research Questions

1. What response strategies did Komen employ when responding to the crisis that encountered in January/February 2012?

2. Did Komen achieve consistency, in terms of crisis communication strategy across all sources for all outgoing crisis communication strategies? Planned Parenthood?

3. To what degree did the response strategies selected by Komen match the response strategies suggested by the Situational Crisis Communication Theory?

4. What are best practices for organizations responding to pre-engineered (or manufactured) crises?
Methodology

- Historical analysis of organizational messages/crisis communication responses during January 24, 2012 (12 a.m.) and February 14, 2012 (11:59 p.m.)
  - Social media channel: Twitter
    - @komenforthecure (n = 214)*
    - @Ppact (n = 331)
  - Source(s): Topsy Analytics (San Francisco) and Twitter

- Content Analysis
  1. Intercoder Reliability - Kappa = 0.77, \( p = .00 \)
  3. Coders analyzed each message using the 10 crisis communication strategies from the three response clusters outlined in Coombs model
    - For every outgoing message, coders record the number of responses within the message

- Descriptive Analysis

*account is currently inactive/protected. Organization has created a new profile since events
@Komenforthecure - @rosemarierung
They are not a Komen partner. Official Komen partners are listed here:
http://t.co/aM9VTV4a

@Komenforthecure - @foxxnewsalart
That is incorrect. She does not make $5M a year. Our correct financial information can be found here:
http://t.co/NWfUy29U

@Komenforthecure - New grants standards strive for grants that provide direct services and outcomes.

@Komenforthecure - We want to apologize for recent decisions that cast doubt upon our commitment to our mission of saving women’s lives.

Gross media impressions - @komenforthecure
January 24, 2012 – February 14, 2012

Overall sentiment score - @komenforthecure
January 24, 2012 – February 14, 2012

Results: @komenforthecure
January 24, 2012 – February 14, 2012

Tweet Analytics – Social-mediated crisis communication base strategies

- Instructing Information
- Adaptive Information (corrective action)
- Adaptive Information (Emotion)
Results: @komenforthecure
January 24, 2012 – February 14, 2012

Tweet Analytics – SCCT Reputation Management Strategies

- Attacked the accuser
- Denied the crisis
- Placed blame outside of the organization
- Minimized organizational responsibility
Results: @komenforthecure
January 24, 2012 – February 14, 2012

Tweet Analytics – SCCT Reputation Management Strategies

- Minimized perceived damage caused by crisis
- Told stakeholders about past good works
- Praised stakeholders for their actions
- Offered money or gifts to victims
- Took full responsibility for the crisis and asked followers for forgiveness
Summary and Lessons Learned

- Komen relied on ‘instructing’ response strategies, directing to online statements.

- Komen was not prepared for crisis – needed time to develop a response strategy.

- Komen is used to being a public health “beacon” and held in positive esteem publically – the organization was caught off guard by the sudden and very public backlash - Still has not recovered.

- Komen had articulated points, which were clear, but allowed Planned Parenthood to dominate the conversation.

- Needed more aggressive and engaging response. Used typical public information model, shift to two-way interaction.

- The public has grown to hate ‘pink-washing’ and consumerism of the Komen brand.
Thank you!

Monica L. Ponder, MS, MSPH
Advanced Doctoral Student
Department of Communication
Georgia State University
Email: mlponder@cdc.gov

Natalie T.J. Tindall, Ph.D.
Department of Communication
Georgia State University
800 Twenty Five Park Place NE
Atlanta, GA 30303
Email: drnatalietjtindall@gmail.com

Former Miss Universe 1964, Corrina Tsopei Fields, left, Miss Universe 1978, Margaret Gardiner, and Miss USA 1985, Laura Harring, right, team up for "Race for the Cure" Sunday, Nov. 2, 1997, at the Rose Bowl in Pasadena, Calif., as part of the Susan G. Komen Breast Cancer Foundation's annual event (AP)