

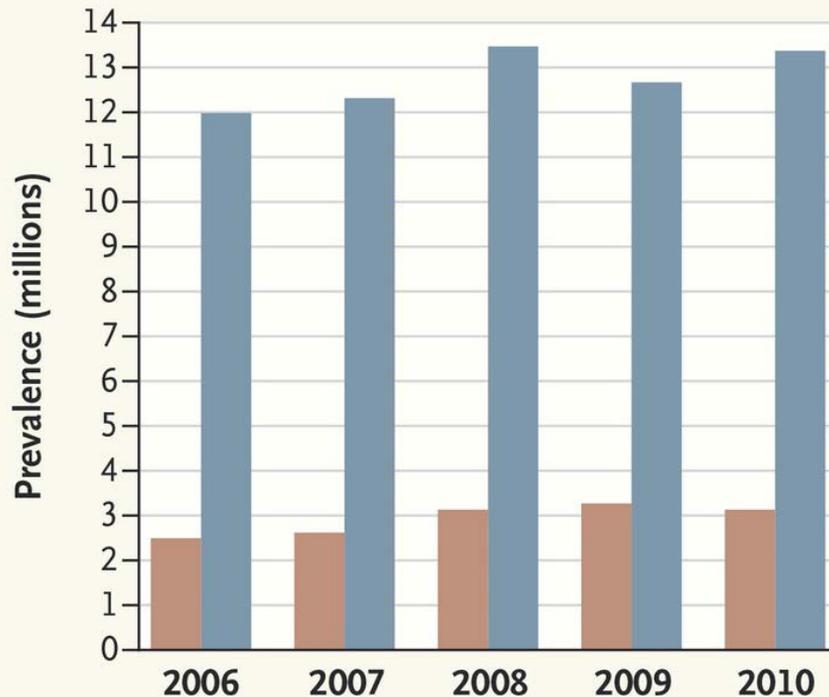
Rosenbaum L. “Misfearing”— Culture, Identity, and Our Perceptions of Health Risks. NEJM 370:595-7, February 13, 2014.

Many think breast cancer is the #1 killer of women and yet truth is that heart disease accounts for 10 times as many deaths and is 4 times more prevalent (Figure).

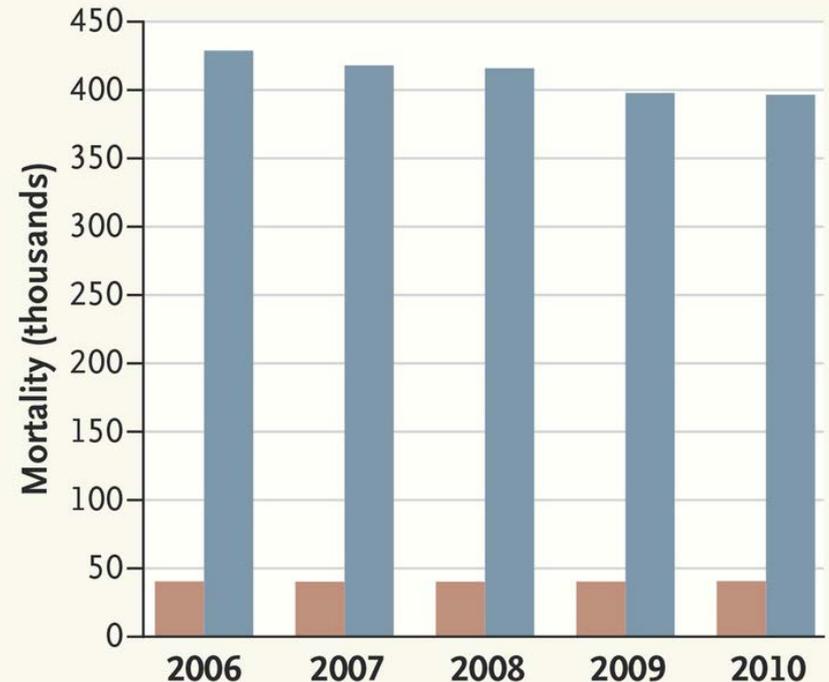
“... we pick and choose evidence that reinforces our sense of who we are or our allegiances to our ‘tribes.’”

■ Breast cancer ■ Heart disease

A Prevalence among American Females (≥ 18 yr of age)



B Mortality among American Females (all ages)



Rosenbaum L. “Misfearing” — Culture, Identity, and Our Perceptions of Health Risks. NEJM 370:595-7, February 13, 2014.

Although the [USPSTF] recommendations were based on an unbiased review of decades’ worth of data, a public outcry ensued. The recommendations were criticized as an assault on women’s health, and a 2009 *USA Today* poll found that **84% of women 35 to 49 years of age planned to ignore them.**

So intense was the outrage over these evidence-based recommendations that a provision was added to the Affordable Care Act specifying that insurers were to base coverage decisions on the previous screening guidelines. Rather than acknowledge this blatant dismissal of new guidelines, many political leaders, physicians, and advocacy organizations argued that we simply didn’t have enough data to justify the new recommendations. But data have shown for years that early mammography screening doesn’t save lives, So why do we resist these data?

Have pink ribbons and Races for the Cure so permeated our culture that the resulting female solidarity lends mammography a sacred status? Is the issue that breast cancer attacks a body part that is so fundamental to female identity that, to be a woman, one must join the war on this disease?

In an era when women’s reproductive rights remain under assault, **is reduced screening inevitably viewed as an attempt to take something away?** Or is the issue one of a tragic story we have all heard — a young woman’s life destroyed, the children who watch her suffer and are then left behind?

Causes of Death in Females, All Ages, U.S., 2010

Deaths per 100,000 (Age Adjusted), % of Total Deaths

