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Young Philanthropists Give Back While Cutting Back

by *Jessica Flint*

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Pink Agenda benefit-goers spruced up their outfits with costume jewelry. Can you spot which item is from Forever 21? *From Joe Craig Photography.*

The New York City spring benefit circuit certainly took a toll on bank accounts this season. Tickets to charity events ranged anywhere from the hundreds (\$100 for [Art of Elysium](#); \$500 for the [Dia](#); \$700 for the [American Museum of Natural History](#)) to the thousands (the big guns such as [MoMa's Party in the Garden](#), the [Society of Memorial Sloan Kettering's spring ball](#), [American Ballet Theater's gala](#) cost \$1,000 or more). And the [Doe Fund DJ seires](#) set party-goers back \$150, but MTV was filming *The City* at that benefit, and an appearance on a reality show is, uh, priceless.

But entry to a fund-raiser is only a fraction of the final bill. When a lady gets ready to be photographed out on the town—love it or hate it, being snapped in front of those hideous step-and-repeats screaming sponsor names is part of the price of philanthropy—there's a lot of plastic-swiping involved: Dress! Shoes! Handbag! Jewelry! Hair, eyebrows, fingers, and toes! And then there's the after-party tab; if Cinderella had squeezed herself into Spanx, we guarantee she wouldn't have gone home when the clock struck midnight.

Where can benefit-goers cut costs? They can pull a **Barbara Walters** and [wear the same outfit to multiple events](#). Or, as last week's Pink Agenda gala proved, it's easy to get creative.

The Pink Agenda, which raises money for breast cancer research, was started two years ago by a group of 12 women (myself included) in their 20s after co-founder **Marisa Lee's** mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. The organization targets young professionals, and many of the supporters come from the finance world, so it's no wonder board members were worried about selling 350 tickets at \$100 a piece in order to fill the room. There was no cause for alarm; the event sold out as a crush packed itself into 24 Fifth Avenue to hear *Today* show host and breast cancer survivor **Hoda Kotb** speak. Glancing around, however, it was clear that sacrifices—albeit minor ones—had been made.

Salon appointments are out. One woman who was complimented on her hair replied, "Thanks, I did it myself!" (D.I.Y. hair before the recession? Unheard of.) Those bright pink nails? They were probably painted at home in front of an episode of *Gossip Girl*. And then there was the matter of dresses. Most opted for plain frocks pulled not from clothing racks but out of closets; looks were jazzed up with cheap costume jewelry from spots like J. Crew, Topshop, and Forever 21.

The event raised more than \$70,000, which is enough to fund two researchers for a year, with—here's a welcome phrase in these recessionary times—change left over.

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