‘Malignant melancholia’: biomedical discourses of ‘surveillance’ and ‘responsibility’ surrounding women ‘at risk’ of developing breast cancer from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twenty-first century.

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Research Methodology

- Original plan to conduct focus groups/semi-structured interviews

- Revised methodology – a comprehensive literature review of primary/secondary sources

- Compilation of a chronological timeline of breast cancer ‘risk’
Research methodology

- Foucauldian archae-genealogical analysis to examine the social construction of breast cancer ‘risk’

- Archaeology to analyse *problematizations* within breast cancer ‘risk’ discourse; genealogy to critique the *practices* on which such problematizations are formed
Theoretical framework

- Postmodern/poststructural theoretical framework
- ‘Male feminist’ Foucauldian perspective
- Theoretical/philosophical influences on Foucault
Breast cancer trajectory: stigmatised status to public discourse

- Breast cancer discourse at the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth-century

- Breast cancer discourse in the mid-twentieth-century

- Breast cancer discourse at the end of the twentieth-century and beyond
The metaphysics of breast cancer ‘risk’ and moral responsibility

- ‘Ways of knowing’ about breast cancer ‘risk’: the unquestioned acceptance of biomedical ‘truth’

- Moral ‘guardian angels’: gendered obligation for ‘health’ within the family

- The role of the mass media in the attribution of responsibility for detecting and preventing breast cancer
The linking of breast cancer with women’s ‘emotional psyche’

- Breast cancer and the nineteenth century ‘female malady’

- The ‘Type-C cancer-prone’ personality and the repression and inhibition of emotion
Neoliberal ideology, lifestyle ‘choice’ and breast cancer ‘risk’

- Biomedical neo-liberalist ideology and ‘health promotion;

- ‘Lifestyle’ factors and the development of breast cancer
The BRCA gene – deadly inheritance or personal inadequacy?

- The social and psychological consequences of genetic testing
- ‘Choosing life over breast’: prophylactic interventions for ‘potential’ breast cancer
The recycling of breast cancer ‘risk’ ideology

- Ideology relating to breast cancer ‘risk’ is often recycled, but never returns in exactly the same way.

- Not the replacement of one discourse with another but rather the re-alignment of discourses, values, and practices.

- Some contemporary concepts may have been in existence for a long time, albeit portrayed or ‘framed’ in a different manner.
The recycling of breast cancer ‘risk’ ideology

- From ‘Melancholia’ to ‘Type C Cancer-Prone’ Personality;
- From Public Health to Health Promotion;
- From ‘Eugenics’ to ‘Genetic determinism’
Agency and resistance

- There is a real danger in simply portraying women with breast cancer as ‘victims’ of male oppression.

- To simply blame ‘male biomedicine’ ignores the agency of breast cancer patients and places women into a passive role that many feminists have been attempting to challenge.