

**‘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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**February 2011**

# 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 archaeo-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