



School of  
**Business & Law**



## **Terminal illness and tourism: The journey towards peace in times of need.**

Presented by Dr. Greg Willson

Professor Alison McIntosh

Dr. Cheryl Cockburn-Wootten

Dr. Ashlee Morgan

Dr. Dale Sanders

# Travel can heal

Travel experiences can be deeply spiritual and healing:

- Answer meaningful questions.
- Transcendent experiences.
- Connectedness through shared experiences.
- Impacts physical and mental well-being.

Terminal Illness diagnosis leads to stress, trials, physical, mental, social and spiritual upheaval. **Engagement with spirituality intensifies.**



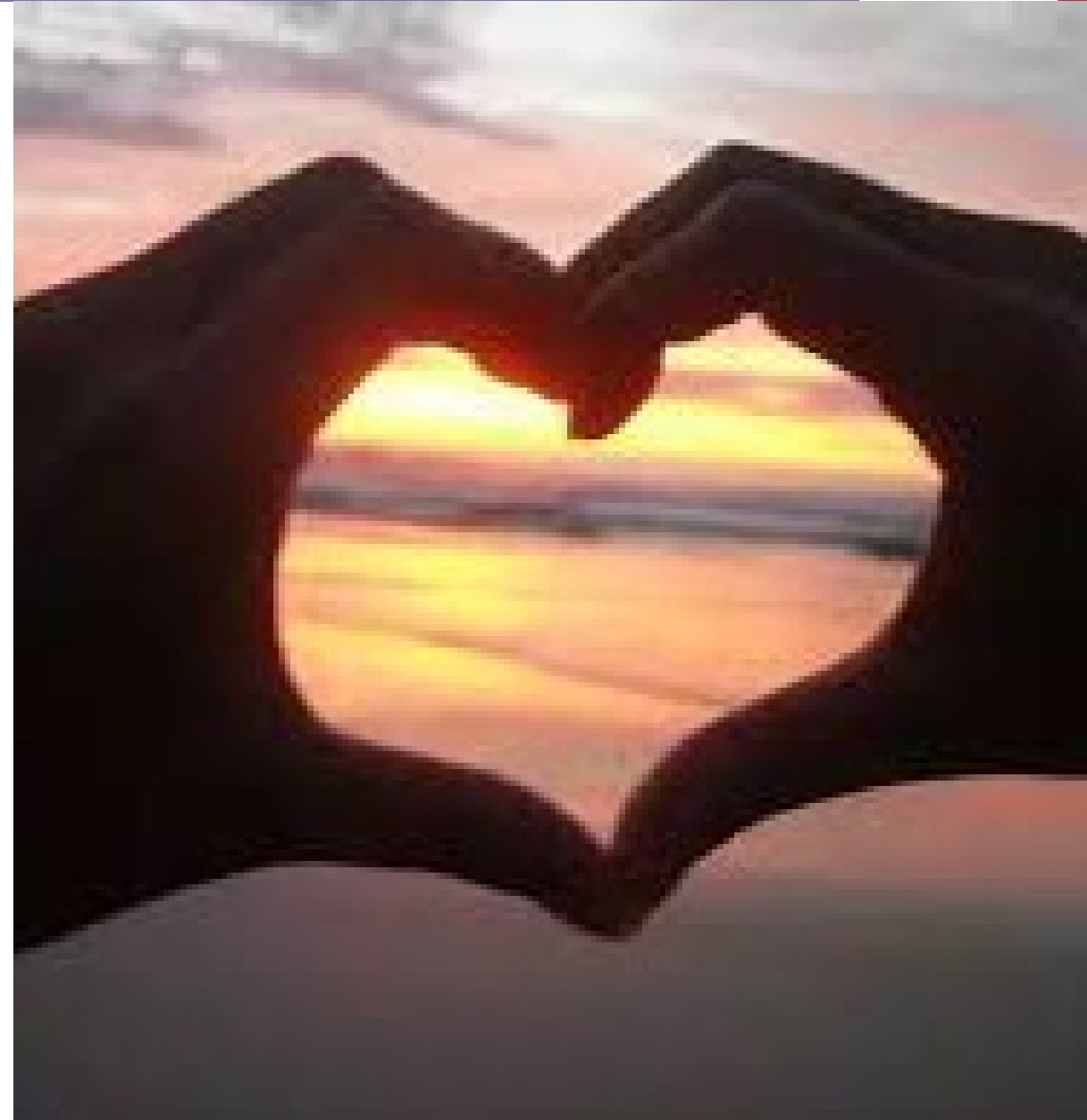
# Travel at our most vulnerable time of life:

Terminal illness is: 'An advanced stage of disease with an unfavourable prognosis and no known cure' (Harris, Nagy & Vardaxis, 2014, p.1690).

No hope for a positive prognosis (Doka, 2013).

Desire for 'a good death' – peace and acceptance.

For some, travel becomes part of this search. For others, travel is not possible.



# Empathy in Tourism is Growing



# Capalonga Campsite and The Grove, Bournemouth

Designed for people with disabilities  
and/or life-threatening illness



Cancer Hotel



# A louder voice needed in tourism research

Health tourism is:

“A commercial phenomena of industrial society which involves a person travelling overnight away from the normal home environment for the express benefit of maintaining or improving health, and the supply and promotion of facilities and destinations which seek to provide such benefits” (Hall, 2003, p.274).

A state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity (World Health Organisation, 2017).

These definitions exclude the conceptualisation of terminal illness where prognosis is death, and life-threatening illness, which may lead to a terminal condition.

If we consider only current definitions of health and their relationship to tourism, we are at risk of narrowing what we understand by health tourism and excluding a population of travellers whose voice might not otherwise be heard.



- A reconceptualisation of health tourism to include life-threatening and terminal illness which implies ill-health. What are the implications for industry? How can mainstream operators enhance the experiences of individuals with terminal illness?
- Understanding the lived experience and meaning of travel for individuals with a terminal illness.
- A qualitative approach to capture personal narratives of the tourist experience that are grounded in socio-cultural considerations.
- The relationship between travel and memory building.
- The circumstances of carers and their relationships and experiences travelling with tourists with terminal illness.

## Terminal illness and tourism: a review of current literature and directions for future research

G. Willson , A. J. McIntosh , A. Morgan & D. Sanders

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# Critical Discourse Analysis of Terminal Illness Tourism Providers

CDA seeks to establish a methodological link between the micro scale of everyday language use and the macro scale of social structure (Phillips, Sewell and Jaynes, 2008).

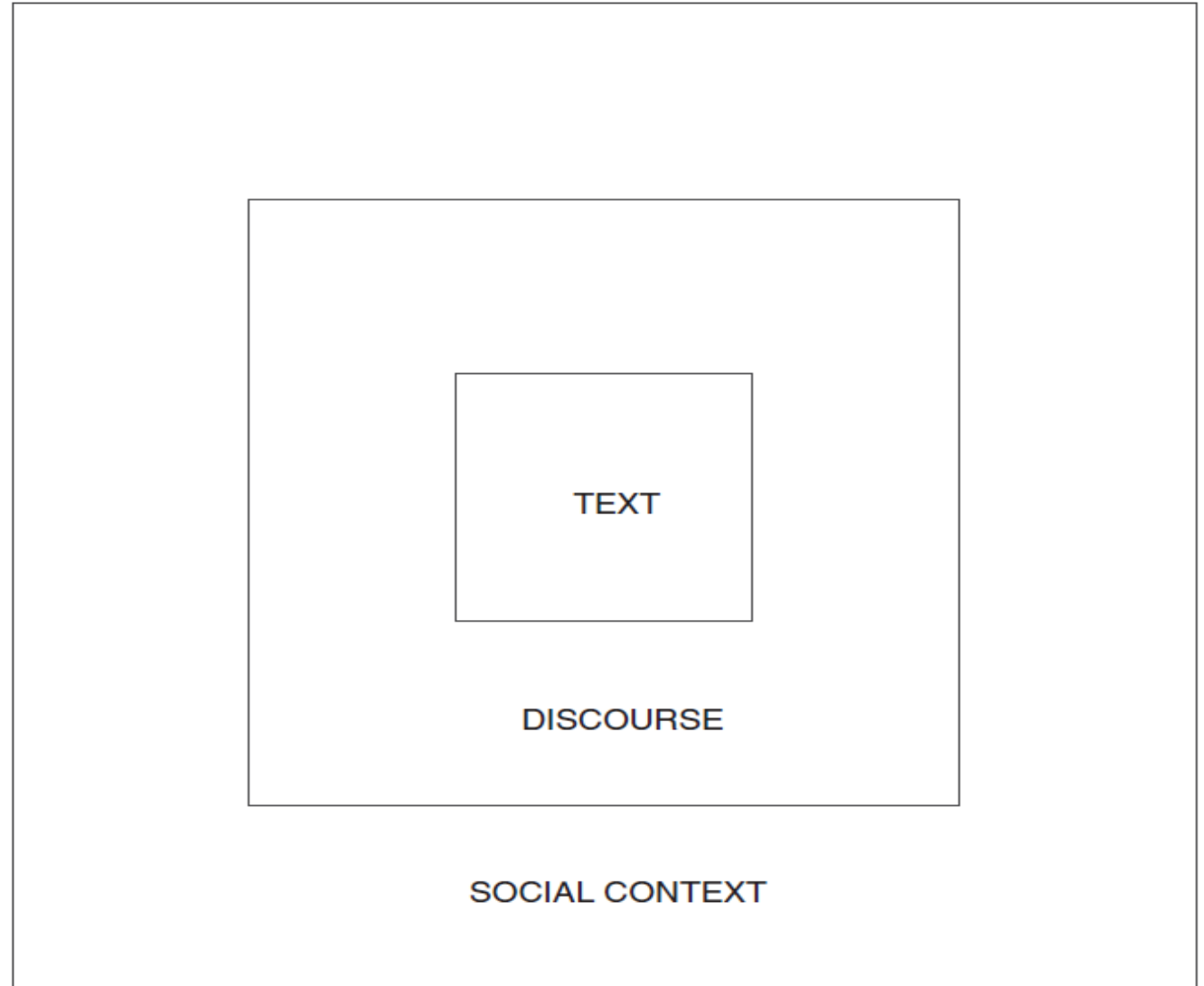
There is a complex and recursive relation between texts produced in social interaction, discourse and social structure.

Seeks to find patterns that establish hypotheses that about discourses at work or society (Janks, 1997).

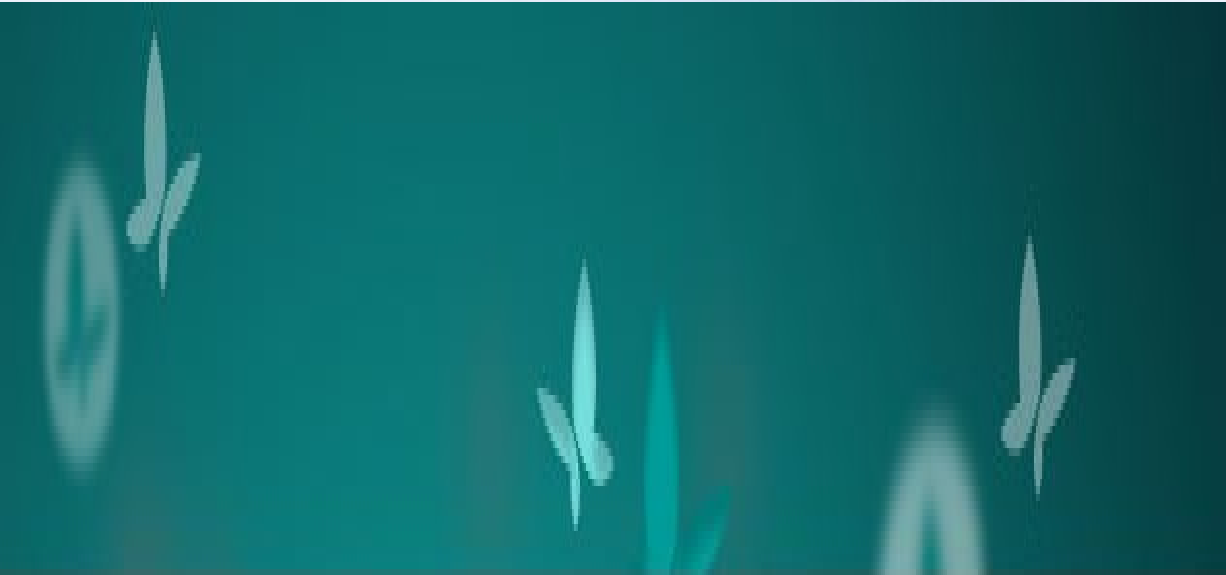
Textual and visual analysis conducted on all websites independently; looking for themes, silences, contradictions, relationships, tone, and what this may say about the positioning of tourists with a terminal illness.

Image – Phillips et al., 2008

## Three Levels of Analysis in Critical Discourse Analysis



# Visual signs – Taking flight, nature and magic



# Portrayal of People – Connections, happy or emotive, fear marketing



## Commonalities between websites:

- Emotive language – ‘what if? ‘Imagine’
- Language of service
- Positive narrative
- No explicit mention of spirituality or religion
- Exclusions difficult to find



CDA conducted by multiple scholars found five key interpretations that inform the social context in which the organisations exist:

1. Are some people more deserving of a wish?
2. Power gap created through server/receiver relationship.
3. Tension with privacy and the personal needs/wishes of individuals with terminal illness.
4. Building trust is of paramount importance.
5. Paradox of final wishes and infinite memories/relational legacies.



# Are some people more deserving of a wish?

Terminal illness does not discriminate.

Exclusively for individuals with a terminal illness that is certified by a medical professional.

Some place geographical and age restrictions on wish/dream recipients.  
(due to economic reasons)

Certain images and text contained in the websites:

- May create a feeling that the wish may not be for them
- Others are more worthy
- Most depict the wish recipients as white, heterosexual, that appear to have a Christian worldview

No website has an option of translating the text into a different language

Certain groups praised as being particularly worthy – ‘Dreams for Veterans’



# Power gap created through server/receiver relationship

Significant power gap between organisation and receiver.

Tension in communication styles – who is the website for?

Narrative style changes from page to page.



## *Giving life to final Dreams*

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Serving terminally-ill adults and their families by providing end-of-life Dreams that offer inspiration, comfort and closure.

# Tension with privacy and the personal needs/wishes of individuals with terminal illness

Tension between the need to protect privacy and to create as much connection with donors and on social media as possible.

In today's culture of over sharing and dominance of social media platforms this tension is pronounced. Privacy policies not readily disclosed.

Does the potential gap in power and vulnerability between organisations and the terminally ill create tensions here?



# Building Trust is of paramount importance

Today's society demands transparency and proof that their contribution will be used appropriately.

Organisations must build trust with multiple stakeholders.

Use of celebrity is commonly used to build trust.

A range of subjective and more concrete trust building techniques used.

Trust in charities is at an all time low (The Guardian, 2016; Charity Commission, 2016)

“This is no dress rehearsal. You've got one life so just lead it and try and be remarkable.” Anita Roddick [www.iamanactivist.org](http://www.iamanactivist.org)



# Paradox of final wishes and infinite memories/relational legacies

In all of the websites there is a paradox of fulfilling lasting dreams/wishes.

The focus is on ever-lasting infinite dream-like memories.

Either for closure for the wish recipient, or as lasting memory for those left behind.

The infinite dreams of memory creation – both symbolically through images as well as narrative.



# Conclusion

Giving a voice and support to travellers with a terminal illness and their carers is an important component for ensuring appropriate accessibility and equal participation for this market, and for the growing ageing and tourist population that will characterise and diversify the nature of tourism demand.

Tourism providers must be open to the needs of individuals at their most vulnerable times.



Thank you for listening: [g.willson@ecu.edu.au](mailto:g.willson@ecu.edu.au)

