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End of Life Care Provision
Influences of Broader Discursive Formations

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Background

This study examines the discursive formations impacting on end of life care practice in the hospital setting. Practice is influenced by two major and sometimes conflicting issues.

Firstly, the demands of policy and practice drivers to apply tools (apparatus) across differing care settings make little reference to the broader cultural influences on delivery. Secondly, recent years have seen unprecedented media interest in end of life care, and the emergence of powerful discourses that influence health care professionals delivering care.

This work focusses on the tensions, challenges and possibilities that emerge from this intersection.

Aim

To explore the influence and impact of emerging, competing and overlapping discourses on end of life care practice in hospitals.

Methodology

Discourse analysis is a collection of methodological approaches, which attempt to link linguistic, socio-cultural and historical aspects of a field of study. Analysing discourses provides a route to better understanding the challenges and philosophy of care at the end of life.
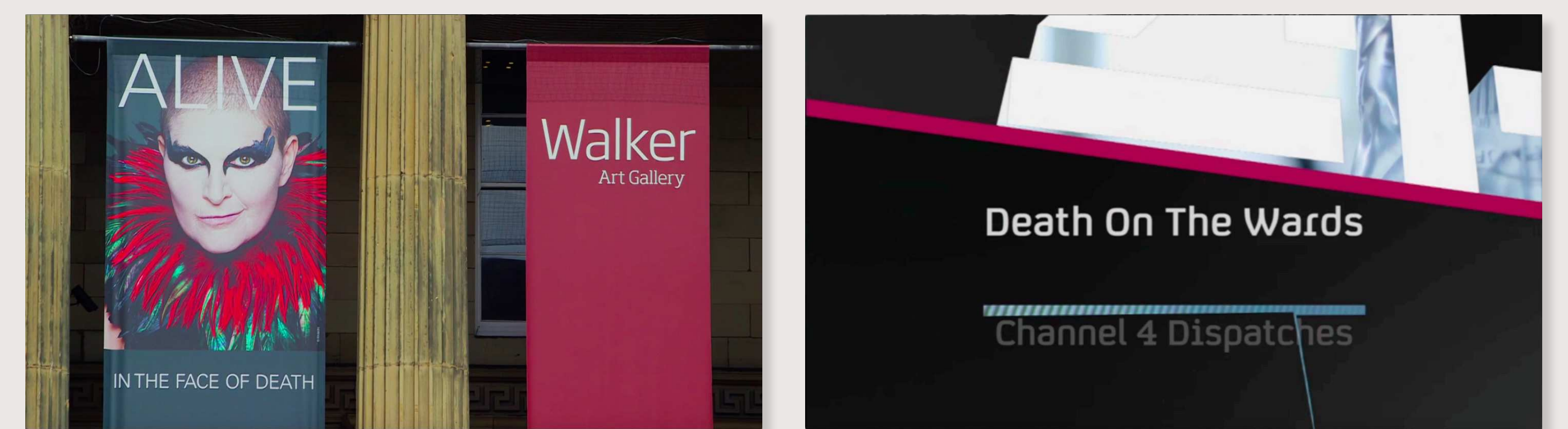
Methods

Collection and analysis of artefacts from journalistic press and terrestrial television (factual outputs) was undertaken.

Narratives from four consultants and six clinical nurse specialists working in palliative care, and a cancer centre were digitally recorded, over a two-week period. Guidance was given regarding the aim of the study and length of narratives varied from ten minutes to two hours.

Media Artefacts

Cash incentive for NHS trusts that meet targets on Liverpool Care Pathway
HOSPITALS BRIBED TO PUT PATIENTS ON PATHWAY TO DEATH
By Steve Doughty
Social Affairs Correspondent

As minister claims controversial end-of-life plan is 'fantastic', shock figures reveal …
60,000 PUT ON DEATH PATHWAY WITHOUT BEING TOLD
By Jason Groves, Daniel Martin and Steve Doughty

Daily Mail 31/12/12   *Daily Mail 25/10/12*

Illuminating the Discourses

An analytic framework was adapted from the work of Parker (1992) and utilised to analyse the recorded narratives allowing exploration of the imposition, distribution and operation of power through language and the reinforcement or undermining of institutions through discourse (Foucault, 1972).

The media artefacts were analysed utilising a three-phase approach.

- *Phase 1 was an initial detailed descriptive analysis.*

- *Phase 2 saw the emergence of broad categories allowing for textual analysis and a more detailed analysis included the use of language, tone of the article, visual imagery and its impact, how the news was represented, sources quoted and subjects captured (Van Dijk, 2009).*

- *Phase 3 in which the news articles were explored in their broader context, the landscape the media exists in, how they are read, what are the drivers, who has a voice or not, and who are worthy of reporting (Van Dijk, 2009).*

Media Artefacts

Alive in the Face of Death – Culture Show BBC2, 13/07/13   *Death on the Wards – Dispatches Channel 4, 05/03/13*

The Professional Voice

There are lots of conflicting messages coming from the media that are impacting on practice (Clinical Nurse Specialist in Palliative Care)

I once picked up a Daily Telegraph and on one page was the LCP and how it was a tool for killing people off to shorten lives and save money for the NHS. On the very next page was an article about physician-assisted suicide – a contradiction indeed (Consultant in Palliative Medicine)

The spotlight of the media on the LCP [Liverpool Care Pathway] and some of the issues highlighted families are saying "oh yes I have read that in the paper" (Consultant)

People are obviously worried that we're using the LCP to kill off relatives and things like that (Senior Cancer Nurse)

Findings

The media artefacts and narratives have reaffirmed the metaphorical language utilised when discussing end of life care, and highlighted the impact that the sensationalisation of end of life care has on practice, instilling a moral panic that both disables and fuels the need for change.
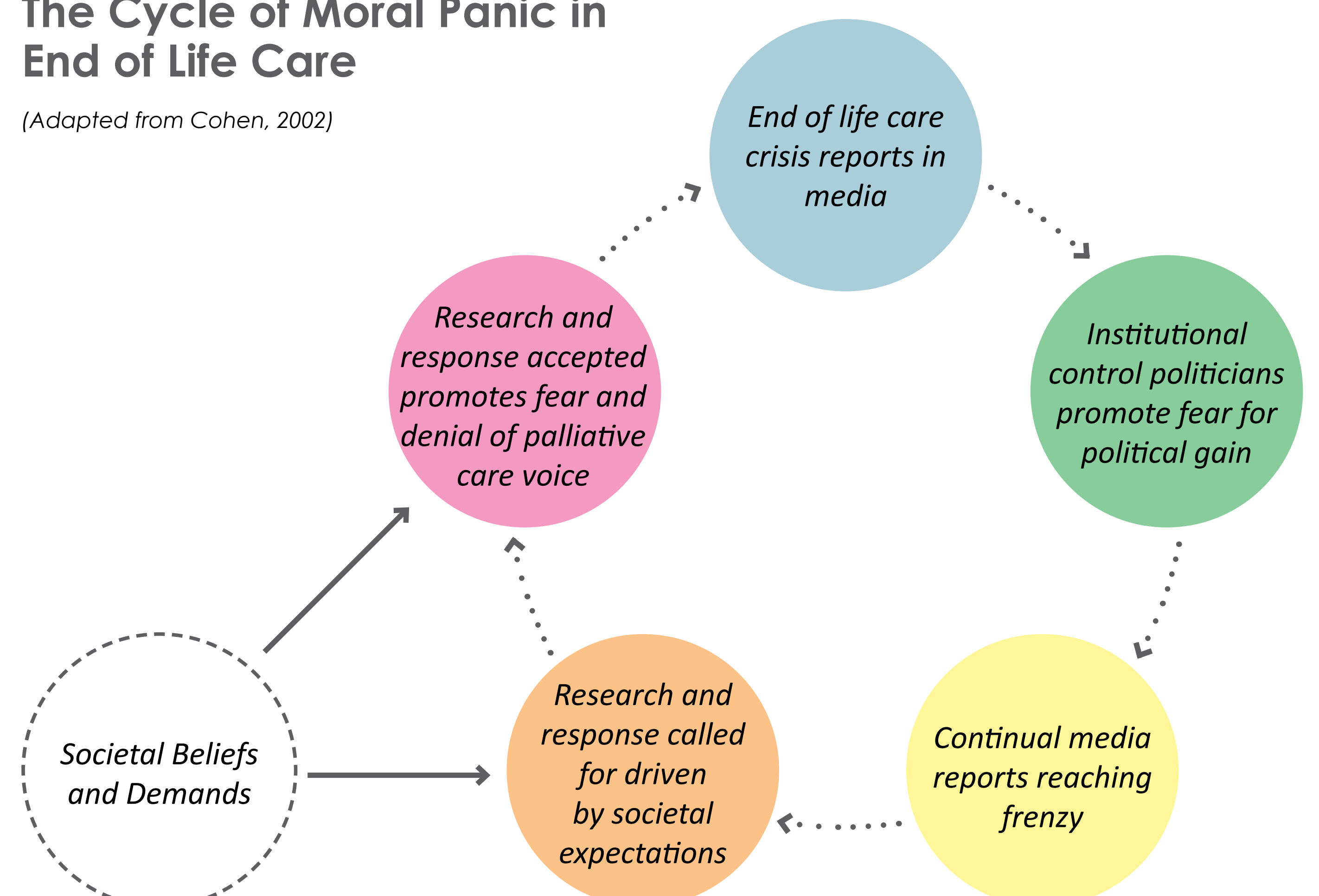
Prominent discursive formations include:

- *Professional Apparatus*
- *Technologies of Caring*
- *Technologies of Self*
- *Technologies of Power*
- *Technologies of Representation*

The tensions, challenges and possibilities that emerge from this intersection influence practice in terms of how we orchestrate and perceive end of life care, how networks of power infiltrate care delivery and finally how media influences the care we deliver at the end of life.

The Cycle of Moral Panic in End of Life Care

(Adapted from Cohen, 2002)

- End of life care crisis reports in media
- Institutional control politicians promote fear for political gain
- Continual media reports reaching frenzy
- Research and response called for driven by societal expectations
- Research and response accepted promotes fear and denial of palliative care voice
- Societal Beliefs and Demands

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