Presentations of Complex Mental Illness in the UK Press: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study

Dr. Laura A. Cariola
University of Edinburgh
November 2017
The Project

• Corpus-assisted discourse analysis to explore how Borderline Personality Disorder is presented in UK newspaper articles
• Stigma and prejudice against individuals affected by mental illness
  o Borderline Personality Disorder
Media and Mental Health

• Illegal to discriminate directly or indirectly against people with mental health issues (Equality Act 2010)
• National Union of Journalists ‘Code of Conduct’:
  o To ensure information to be honest, accurate and fair
  o To correct harmful inaccuracies
  o To produce no material leading to hatred or discrimination
Media and Mental Health

• Media exaggerates links between mental illness and violence or portrays people with mental health issues as dangerous (Mental Health Foundation, 2015)
  o Perpetuates stigma
  o Impacts help-seeking behaviour
  o Marginalises people with mental health problems
Media and Mental Health

• In a large public survey, nearly 40% of respondents agreed that mental illness was related to violence
• Media was the source of their beliefs
• TRUTH IS: People with mental illness are more likely to be victims of crime rather than perpetrators of violence
BPD in the DSM-5

1. Impairments in self functioning (a or b):
   - **a. Identity:** Markedly impoverished, poorly developed, or unstable self-image, often associated with excessive self-criticism; chronic feelings of emptiness; dissociative states under stress.
   - **b. Self-direction:** Instability in goals, aspirations, values, or career plans.

AND 2. Impairments in interpersonal functioning (a or b):
   - **a. Empathy:** Compromised ability to recognize the feelings and needs of others associated with interpersonal hypersensitivity; perceptions of others selectively biased toward negative attributes or vulnerabilities.
   - **b. Intimacy:** Intense, unstable, and conflicted close relationships, marked by mistrust, neediness, and anxious preoccupation with real or imagined abandonment; close relationships often viewed in extremes of idealization and devaluation and alternating between over involvement and withdrawal.
BPD in the ICD-10

F60.3 Emotionally unstable personality disorder

• A personality disorder in which there is a marked tendency to act impulsively without consideration of the consequences, together with affective instability.
• The ability to plan ahead may be minimal, and outbursts of intense anger may often lead to violence or “behavioural explosions”; these are easily precipitated when impulsive acts are criticised or thwarted by others.
• Two variants of this personality disorder — impulsive type and borderline type — and both share this general theme of impulsiveness and lack of self-control
Corpus Linguistics

• “Corpus” comes from the Latin word “body” – plural “corpora”
• A corpus is a collection of texts
  o Not random
  o Purposeful
  o Sampled to be representative of subject investigated
  o Machine-readable for computer analysis
  o Spoken or written data
Corpus Linguistics

- Quick computerised processing of data
- Uses reliable statistics
- Counts lexical items
- Identifies quantitatively typical and atypical semantic patterns (coarse grain analysis)
- Provides an objective and balanced picture
- Provides contextual qualitative examples (fine-grain analysis)
Corpus Linguistics

• Quantitative and qualitative analysis of semantic patterns identifies:
  o Positive and negative connotations
  o Attitudinal and evaluative meanings
  o Impact on public beliefs and stereotypes towards mental illness
Sampling of Data

• UK broadsheet, tabloid and local newspapers (1990-2016)
  o Duplicates were maintained!
  o Linguistics remove duplicates with focus on unique linguistic expressions
  o Psychological perspective: What about the mere-exposure effect and illusionary truth effect?
  o Unique editorial decision to maintain (rather than change/correct) stigmatising linguistic expressions
Data Search

- borderline personality disorder OR bpd OR emotionally unstable personality OR EUPD OR emotion regulation disorder OR emotional dysregulation disorder OR edd OR emotional instability disorder OR emotion impulse regulation disorder

- 2,725 articles with total count of 1,940,020 words
Corpus Analysis

• SketchEngine – online based corpus tool
• LogDice association measure for collocations
• Lemmatised form of words & parts-of-speech
  o be(verb) (am, are, is, was, were, been)
• Verbal collocates to subject pronouns “she” and “he”
  range of up to 5 words to the right of node
  o “she has certainly not been diagnosed”
• Noun collocates to object pronouns “her” and “his”
  range of up to 3 words to the right of the node
Chronological Development

UK Press Articles on BPD between 1996-2016

‘All’ 2,725 articles & ‘Duplicates’ removed 2,074 articles
Early Articles

Focus mainly on women believed to have BPD

• Derek Humphry Helped His First Wife To Die... (The Independent, April 1990)

• **Women:** Altered states - While **women** form four per cent of the prison population, they make up 20 per cent of patients in Special Hospitals. Ann Lloyd finds out why (The Guardian, June 1991)

• Death haunts suicide guru (The Sunday Times October 13 1991)

• The **woman** who chose to die in the wilderness; Cal McCrystal's Notebook (The Independent, October 1991)

• Life and death in a killer climate (The Time, May, 1993)
Early Articles

Princess Dianna focus in 1995

- Did Diana's Childhood Set Her Forever On The Brink?; A Top Psychiatrist Examines The Princess's Mind (Daily Mail, November 22, 1995)
- Is Diana The Mistress Of Manipulation? Mental anguish behind fall of Diana the 'saint’ (Main on Sunday, August 20, 1995)
Early Articles

• Goran Jelisic is guilty of genocide - Yugoslav War Crimes tribunal in the Hague (Birmingham Post, December 1, 1998)
• Jonathan Crisp murdered his girlfriend (The Journal, May 15, 1998)
### Word Frequency List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>word</th>
<th>frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the</td>
<td>71,752</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to</td>
<td>55,378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and</td>
<td>51,277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>48,961</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of</td>
<td>41,613</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in</td>
<td>32,341</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>was</td>
<td>30,142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>her</td>
<td>25,849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
<td>21,603</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>she</td>
<td>19,740</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that</td>
<td>19,481</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with</td>
<td>16,844</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for</td>
<td>16,815</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had</td>
<td>15,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>is</td>
<td>15,178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>on</td>
<td>14,010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>he</td>
<td>12,381</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>said</td>
<td>11,964</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>at</td>
<td>11,607</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it</td>
<td>11,551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The</td>
<td>11,255</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>his</td>
<td>10,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>as</td>
<td>10,033</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>from</td>
<td>9,902</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>9,671</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Feminine pronouns = 55,371  
Male pronouns = 33,882  
Difference of 63.42%  
Log-likelihood Ratio = 5224.98  
p < .000001
Categories of Verbal Collocates

• Experience of mental illness
  o Suffer and diagnose
  o “She says she suffers from borderline personality disorder and was treated like a hardened criminal”
  o “He was suffering an as yet undiagnosed mental health condition”

• Treatment and support
  o Help “she felt nobody could help her”
Categories of Verbal Collocates

• Reconstruct events and provide insight into psychological states of mind:
  o Reported speech — *say, tell, add*
  o Sense making — *explain* (only to she)
  o Emotions — *feel, struggle, love*
  o Behaviour — *do, go, take, want, leave, try*
Categories of Verbal Collocates

• Arrest and sectioning
  o *admit* — 219.12% difference associated to passive in ‘she’ vs. ‘he’
  o “she was *admitted* to an inpatient facility”
  o “he *admitted* dangerous driving”

• *arrest* and *jail* — only to *he*

• Death and attacks — *die, kill, stab, attack*
  o ‘she’ can be both perpetrator and victim
Categories of Noun Collocates

• Existential — life, death
• Familial relationships — mother, father, brother
• Partner — husband, wife, girlfriend, partner
• Social relationships — friend
• Home environment — home, house, car
• Work environment — work, client, career
• Mental health — condition, health, care
• Criminal context — victim, cell, release
• Body — head, hand, arm, body
Existential Theme in ‘her’

‘Life’ (967), ‘death’ (870) and ‘story’ (114)
• Focus on suicide — ‘take’, ‘end’, ‘jump’
• Life changing moments and attempts to rebuild and save her life
  o “to turn her life around”
• “her story” is mystified
  o “what makes her story even more tragic”
  o “has shared her story in a bid to help others”
  o “some people doubted her story immediately”
Existential Theme in ‘his’

‘Life’ (365), ‘death’ (232) and ‘name’ (76)

• Marked absence of suicide
• Emphasis on saving ‘his life’ and preventing ‘his death’
  o “Paramedics tried to save his life for 35 minutes”
• Death references served to reconstruct events
  o “I know I contributed to his death because I relive it every day”
Familial and Parental Theme in “her”

Mother (702), father (345)

- **Matricide** (e.g., *stab*, *kill*, *attack*)
  - “after stabbing her mother nine times”
- Fathers get killed in fewer instances
- Mothers accused of killing someone (e.g., *accuse*, *allege*, *murder*, *jail*)
- Mothers are blamed (e.g., *abandon*, *section*, *ill*)
Familial and Parental Theme in “his”

Mother (292), father (150)

• In fewer instances men assaulted and killed their mothers (e.g., assault, attack, strangle, murder, shoot)

• To a much lesser extent mothers were blame
  o “his mother was jailed for neglecting him”
  o “his mother was an alcoholic”
  o “his mother was largely to blame”
Familial and Parental Theme

Her or his “son” and “daughter”

• Parents harmed their children (e.g., kill, die, attack, injure, assault, suffocate, choke, stab, murder, threaten, smash)
  o “Mother who killed her son”

• Children are presented as victims of men’s aggression (e.g., kill)
  o “he would kill her children”
Familial and Parental Theme

• Parents are presented as expressing sorrow
  o “devastated by the loss of her son”
  o “her daughter could have been saved”
• Parent’s perspective reconstructing the past events (e.g., describe, reveal, say, tell)
  o “But her father Matthew, said his daughter had been ‘happy’ during the Christmas period”
To Sum Up

- Verbal collocates reconstruct and narrate the reported events
- Provide insight into psychological state of mind of individuals
- Reported speech is a source of evidentiality, authenticity, truthfulness, and reliability
- Vividness and immediacy
Further Steps of the Project

• Detailed manual analysis of semantic collocates in context
• Counting collocations for exact frequencies of presentations
• Diachronic analysis on how presentations have changed over time
Thank you
Any questions?