Presentations of Borderline Personality Disorder in the UK Press: A Corpus-Assisted Discourse Study

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Aim of the Project

• Corpus-assisted discourse analysis to explore how Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD) is presented in UK newspaper articles

• Focus on discursive creation of stigma against individuals affected by BPD
Borderline Personality Disorder

• Most common diagnosed personality disorder
• Estimated prevalence 0.7%-2% in the general population
• Women 0.6% twice as often diagnosed compared to men (0.3%) (NHS, 2011 factsheet) and overrepresented in the forensic population with 20%
• Most misunderstood, misdiagnosed and stigmatised of all personality disorders
Borderline Personality Disorder

DSM 5 “BPD” and ICD-10 “Emotional Unstable Personality Disorder”

• Broadly define marked behaviour tendencies indicating
  o emotional instability
  o disturbed patterns of thinking or perception
  o impulsive behaviour
  o intense but unstable interpersonal relationships
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 (1996-2016)
• 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
• 2,709 articles with total count of 1,916,325 words
Sampling of Data

• Duplicates were maintained!
• Linguistic research tends to remove duplicates with aim to focus on language patterns
• Psychological perspective:
  o What about the mere-exposure effect and illusionary truth effect?
• Focus on unique editorial decision to maintain (rather than change/correct) stigmatising linguistic expressions
Chronological Development

Articles Published between 1996-2016
Frame Analysis

Corpus-assisted qualitative frame analysis (Touri & Koteyko, 2015; see also Atanasova, Koteyko, Brown & Crawford, 2017)
Frame Analysis

Frames influence human consciousness by selecting certain aspects of information of a perceived reality and making them more salient “in such a way as to promote a particular definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993, p. 52).
Identified Frames

- ‘Legal’ frame
- ‘Mental Health services’ frame
- ‘Trauma and Abuse’ frame
- ‘Family’ frame
- ‘Stigma’ frame
- ‘Mental health literacy’ frame
- ‘Suicide and self-harm’ frame
- ‘Recovery’ frame
- ‘Bad and vulnerable women’ frame
‘Legal’ frame

Presentation of individuals as vulnerable, violent, dangerous, callous, sadistic and abusive

– In other words, his symptoms - his addictions, his selfishness, his dysfunctional personal relationships, his sadism - suggest that he suffered from a recognisable condition, borderline personality disorder

Long-term concerns of mental health problems

– Under cross-examination by Paul Greaney QC, defending Rebecca Dormer, he agreed that there had been concerns in their family "for a number of years about Becky's mental health.”

BPD for defence of diminished responsibility/capacity

– Robert Forrest, defending Young, said the teenager is very immature' and had been diagnosed with an emotionally unstable personality disorder.
‘Legal’ frame

BPD not a ‘real’ mental health disorder

- "But this is not serious enough to be a disorder," prosecution consultant forensic psychiatrist Dr John Sandford told Exeter Crown Court.

Prison or psychological treatment

- Reid will undergo mental health treatment for the next two years and must also complete 50 days of a rehabilitation activity requirement as instructed by the probation service.
- Rather than being sent to a psychiatric hospital, Petra was remanded in custody at New Hall Prison, Wakefield, West Yorkshire.
‘Mental Health Services’ frame

Hard to access

– MP Ben Bradshaw has raised his concerns about the two-year wait for treatment for some mental health sufferers in Parliament after the Echo highlighted the issue.

Little help and failing patients

– Her mother, Karen, accused the National Health Service during the trial of "completely failing" her daughter by not providing proper care.

Promise of service and treatment improvements

– "These schemes include the further development of the low secure unit within Cefn Coed Hospital, together with the development of a borderline personality disorder service."

‘Mental Health Services’ frame

Responsible for patients’ suicide and self-harm

– The 20-year-old died eight days after being found hanging in a bedroom of the East Willows ward in Cherry Knowle Hospital in Ryhope last August.

Irresponsible discharge of patients

– Paige Bell, 20, had been discharged from the psychiatric hospital just hours after she was dramatically pulled to safety by a policewoman from the wrong side of the railings of Wearmouth Bridge on August 6.
‘Trauma and Abuse’ frame

Childhood experiences of parental death or abuse

– This was amplified when her father Tom died of cancer when she was 18.
– "She had a serious psychiatric condition directly as a result of child sex abuse at age eight.
– "I'd had a really difficult childhood and turned to drink, drugs and self-harming.

Abuse by mental health practitioner or social worker

– A psychiatric nurse from Huddersfield has denied fondling a woman patient in her hospital room and asking to have sex with her after her discharge home.
‘Family’ frame

Bereaved family

– After her death, her mother and father, Anthony Kearney - who are separated - described her as "the most beautiful, intelligent and bright young girl with her whole life ahead of her”.

– Her mother, Eleri Linden, said after the verdict: "Losing Ceri has left a hole in our lives which can never be filled and a pain in our hearts which will never heal.

– Older brother Ketan, 38, broke down in tears as he paid tribute to his father and described the impact his death had had on their mother Mradula, 56.

– Casey's father, Anthony, said: "We think the jury has come to the correct decision in convicting Bonser with the murder of Casey."
‘Stigma’ frame

Public perception about BPD and mental illness
  – If more of us talk publicly about our experiences of psychosis, we might shift public perception enough to create a stronger social support system.

Stigma towards professionals with mental illness
  – As a service-user researcher, there's no hiding your mental-health history and that means, says Mayes, that some staff may still react to you only as a person with a mental illness when you want to be seen as a fellow professional.

Helping others
  – He has now made a film to encourage others to talk about mental health and seek help.
  – Teenagers who battled mental illness among top charity fundraisers on Justgiving website.
‘Mental Health Literacy’ frame

Educating the public

– Given the incidence of mental illness in society, it would be highly surprising if we did not meet it every day, but **how many people recognise someone** with a *mental* illness?

Specifics about BPD

– She was suffering from emotionally unstable personality disorder, a *psychiatric* condition that can cause sufferers to act impulsively, have angry or violent outbursts and self-harm.

– She was suffering from a behavioural *disorder* due to the misuse of *alcohol* and was diagnosed with a borderline personality disorder.

Suicide information

– A *person may be more likely to be suicidal* if they have a mental health condition, such as depression; eating disorder anorexia nervosa; bipolar disorder; anxiety disorder; schizophrenia and *borderline* personality disorder.
‘Suicide and Self-Harm’ frame

Insight perspective

– She had talked to her 12-year-old son about hanging herself three days before her death, the inquest heard.

Mental health services

– AN ARSONIST who endangered neighbours by torching his Edenbridge home in a failed suicide bid had been repeatedly let down by mental health services, a court has been told.

– That the treatment of bereaved relatives by the authorities is dismissive at best, and that the number of teenage "self-harmers" being sent to prison where they are more likely to injure or kill themselves instead of receiving proper psychiatric care is growing.

Drug abuse

– After their 12-year relationship came to an end, her life descended further into alcohol abuse, drug addiction and mental illness.
Community services

– She has used the community provision to treat her depression and borderline personality disorder for the past 17 years.

New treatment approaches

– A NEW treatment for suicidal people with borderline personality disorder is being tested in a top psychiatric hospital.

Writing and arts

– On her blog she explains: 'As I progressed through my recovery from Borderline Personality Disorder, I'd like to think that my blog now also provides people with hope, and determination.
– A Leyland woman who suffers from borderline personality disorder is finding ways to cope with her anxiety through her 3D artwork.

Successful recovery

– "The fact that I have a mental illness makes it more important that I work," says Alex Whitelaw, who now works at BHS in Walsall.
‘Bad and Vulnerable Women’ frame

– Why is this diagnosis given to so many women - it's mostly *women* - who are labelled as BPD because they self-mutilate?

– A woman who attacked two strangers with a knife had killed her mother six years before, the Old Bailey heard.

– Spears was sharing her son's *hospital* room and prosecutors believe the mother administered sodium through the boy's stomach tube.
Gender Differences

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Feminine pronouns = 54,658
Male pronouns = 33,470
Log-likelihood ratio = 5144.32
p < .000001
% diff 63.30%
Gender Proportions in BPD

• Historically higher prevalence of BPD in women
• Women more likely to seek treatment vs. men
• Comorbid Axis I and Axis II differences?
• Higher prevalence of self-harming, PTSD, eating disorder – mental health settings?
• Men higher prevalence of substance abuse – prison settings?
• Feminist critique: Pathologising resistance of gendered abuse and oppression through anger outside of stereotypical women’s discourse
Example 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
Example of Existential Theme in ‘her’

‘Life’ (954), ‘death’ (865) 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”
Example of Existential Theme in ‘his’

‘Life’ (358) and ‘death’ (229)

• 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 serve to reconstruct events
  o “I know I contributed to his death because I relive it every day”
Future Developments

• In-depth description of the corpus
• Detailed analysis of sampling frame
• Comparison of key words and collocations between broadsheets, tabloids and local newspapers
• Diachronic changes across newspapers
Exeter's *Language, Discourse and Mental Health* book series is a unique resource to further knowledge and understanding of mental health from a pluralistically informed linguistic perspective.

Using qualitative and quantitative approaches to language-based analysis, the empirical and theoretical contributions will provide a compelling insight on mental health from a range of perspectives and contexts, including psychotherapeutic communication, public presentations of mental health, literary accounts of lived experiences, and language features and phenomenology associated with specific mental health problems.

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Thank you