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‘Bad Wigs and Screaming Mimis’ Using Corpus-Assisted Techniques to Carry Out Critical Discourse Analysis of the Representation of Trans People in the British Press

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1 Introduction

On 21 December 2012, Richard Littlejohn, a columnist for the British middle-market conservative newspaper *The Daily Mail*, wrote an opinion piece about a school-teacher called Lucy Meadows who had transitioned from male to female. Littlejohn strongly disapproved of the teacher’s decision to remain at the same school, asking ‘has anyone stopped for a moment to think of the devastating effect all this is having on those who really matter? Children as young as seven aren’t equipped to compute this kind of information’. He went on to write ‘he is putting his own selfish needs ahead of the well-being of the children he has taught for the past few years.’

Three months later Lucy Meadows committed suicide. She was posthumously reported as being harassed by members of the press¹ and at the end of her inquest the coroner told the reporters present ‘And to the press, I say shame, shame on all of you.’² Online petitions at change.org and sumofus.org called for Littlejohn’s resignation

although at the time of writing Littlejohn had not resigned. This story serves as a stark illustration of the real-world consequences of what can happen when the media take an interest in trans people, and also highlights what some people have perceived as a general transphobic stance in the British press. Around the same time, another opinion column by Julie Burchill in the online version of *The Observer* (a liberal broadsheet Sunday newspaper) entitled 'Transsexuals should cut it out', referred to 'the very vociferous transsexual lobby' and used other pejorative phrases like 'a bunch of bed-wetters in bad wigs' and 'screaming mimis' (13 January 2013). Hundreds of readers used the Comments section to criticize Burchill and within hours an editorial decision was made to remove the article from the website. Subsequently, 800 complaints were made about the article to the Press Complaints Commission (PCC). At the time of writing, the British press is largely self-regulated by the PCC, a voluntary organization made up of representatives from publishers.³ The PCC has an Editors' Code of Practice with 16 sections. Section 12i states that: 'The press must avoid prejudicial or pejorative reference to an individual's race, colour, religion, gender, sexual orientation or to any physical or mental illness or disability.' However, section 1iii states that: 'The Press, while free to be partisan, must distinguish clearly between comment, conjecture and fact.' This perhaps helps to explain why opinion columnists are able to avoid censure by the PCC, and indeed, in March 2013, Burchill's article was found not to have breached the PCC's Code of Practice. In the case of Lucy Meadows, the PCC made the *Daily Mail* remove photographs and the Littlejohn column from its website but Littlejohn was not required to apologize or resign.

Burchill's article provoked a debate about representation of trans people and freedom of speech, with some commentators, such as Jane Fae in the *Independent*, writing that 'the trans community . . . is now a stand-in for various minorities . . . and a useful whipping girl for the national press . . . trans stories are only of interest when trans folk star as villains'.⁴ A submission to the Leveson Inquiry⁵ by the group Trans Media Watch argued that the British press had created and sustained 'a climate of ridicule and humiliation' as well as 'singling out individual transgender people and their families for sustained personal intrusion' (2011: 10).

2 Corpus approaches to critical discourse analysis

While Littlejohn and Burchill's articles clearly caused offence, I wondered whether these criticisms about the representation of trans people in the press held true *generally*. It is possible to 'cherry-pick' a few cases (see Mautner, 2007: 54), perhaps focusing on the worst representations, but in the interests of fairness and full coverage, there is wisdom in exploring a much larger set of data in order to obtain a better idea of the overall trend. For such an endeavour, techniques associated with corpus linguistics are advocated as a useful way of aiding critical discourse analysis (see Baker et al., 2008).

Corpus linguistics is a method of analysis which involves collecting large amounts of language data in computerized format, and then using computer programs which can sort, count and perform statistical tests on that data in order to quickly and accurately identify patterns that would be difficult for the human eye to spot alone (Hunston, 2002). A corpus is simply a collection of electronically encoded texts, which are sometimes annotated with additional information either at the text level (e.g. information about the sex of the author or the genre of the text is encoded) or at the linguistic level (e.g. individual words can be annotated according to their grammatical or semantic categories). Texts are collected so that they can be as representative as possible of the language variety under examination. Reference corpora, which aim to represent a particular language (usually at a particular point in time) can stretch to millions or billions of words, with thousands of text samples from many genres of speech, writing and computer-mediated communication. Specialized corpora are often smaller and aim to more fully represent all of the language produced from a certain restricted text type (such as all the published fiction of a single author or all newspaper articles about a certain topic published in a five-year period in one country).

Since becoming popular in the 1990s Corpus Linguistics was initially strongly associated with language description, grammar, lexicography and language teaching. In 1995 Hardt-Mautner published one of the first papers advocating the connection of critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics, arguing that concordance programs allow exhaustive description of key lexical items, raise new questions, allow qualitative investigation of quantitative results and give the analyst a much firmer grip on their data (1995: 23–4). Since the mid-2000s, corpus approaches have been increasingly used either alongside existing critical discourse analysis approaches as a form of triangulation or combined with CDA to form a new 'hybrid' form of analysis. For example, Baker et al. (2008) describe a nine-stage model of Corpus-Assisted Critical Discourse Analysis which combines CDA with corpus linguistics, and involves moving recursively between different levels of analysis, using frequency and concordancing information to derive and test new hypotheses. A related approach has been taken by Partington (2003) called Corpus Assisted Discourse Analysis (CADS), although the two approaches differ in that CADS aims to conduct research from a more ideologically objective stance, whereas Baker et al.'s model is influenced by Reisigl and Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) and allows research to be conducted from an explicit 'position' if researchers so desire, along with advocating examination of corpus texts within their social and historical context while considering conditions of reception and production, intertextuality and interdiscursivity.

I have argued that corpus approaches to discourse analysis help to reduce researcher bias in that human analysts will not always be able to accurately predict the frequencies of words or co-occurrences of words (known as collocates) in a corpus and so computer software will direct us to frequently-occurring phenomena which might otherwise have been overlooked (Baker, 2006: 10–14). As Fairclough (1989: 54) notes in his discussion of the media: 'A single text on its own is quite insignificant: the effects of

media power are cumulative, working through the repetition of particular ways of handling causality and agency, particular ways of positioning the reader, and so forth'. It is this incremental or cumulative effect of discourse which corpus approaches are especially able to pinpoint, by showing that words or phrases occur in particular contexts, repeatedly, priming text recipients so that certain representations or ways of looking at the world are not only automatically triggered but gradually appear to be common-sense ways of thinking (see Stubbs, 1996: 195; Hoey, 2005).

Additionally, if the corpora used for analysis are large enough, they are more likely to offer a fuller range of discourse positions around a particular subject, in comparison to a single text or smaller sample of texts. As well as revealing commonly accessed discourses, a large corpus might also contain resistant or minority discourses, which may only be cited once or twice. Identifying such discourses is generally not as easy as recognizing the more frequent ones, but at least researchers have a better chance of finding them if they exist in the texts under analysis.

For the purposes of this chapter, I aim to carry out such a corpus-assisted study in order to examine the representation of trans people in the British press. Due to space limitations, this cannot be an exhaustive study, but it is instead intended to illustrate some of the techniques and tools used by corpus linguists, and how they can be effectively used in critical discourse analysis. In the following sections, after describing how I built a corpus (or body of texts), I go on to detail the way that corpus methods were employed to focus in on a small number of words for close examination, and what such an examination reveals about the representation of trans people in UK newspapers.

3 Building the corpus

The online searchable database Nexis UK was used in order to collect a small corpus of articles about trans people. Only national UK newspapers were considered as in Britain such newspapers have the widest readerships and the most influence. The newspapers collected were the *Express*, *The Guardian*, *The Independent*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Mirror*, *The Observer*, the *Sunday People*, *The Star*, *The Sun*, *The Telegraph* and *The Times* (see Baker et al. 2013: 4–17 for an overview of the British press). Where available, the Sunday versions of these newspapers were also collected. It should be noted that Nexis treats *The Guardian* (a daily newspaper) and *The Observer* (a Sunday newspaper) separately although the two newspapers are both owned by The Guardian Media Group and are viewed as sister newspapers. They are treated separately here too. The *Sunday People* is published only on Sundays so did not contribute much data to the corpus.

Nexis UK returns articles that contain words specified by users, as well as allowing searches to be limited to certain time periods and newspapers. Five hundred articles at a time can be saved to a user's computer. Although archiving goes back to the late 1990s, as this was intended to be a small, illustrative study I decided to look for data across the period of a single year – 2012. In order to develop a search term I used a

mixture of introspection, trial and error (e.g. reading articles produced by an initial search term in order to identify terms I had not thought of), and consulting various guidelines on appropriate language to refer to trans people (described in more detail below). I wanted to include a set of terms ranging from those considered to be sensitive or appropriate to those seen as pejorative. The search terms eventually produced were:

transsexual OR transgender OR trans OR transgendered OR trannie OR tranny OR mtf OR ftm OR cross-dresser OR transvestite OR intersex OR intersexed OR sex change OR shemale OR genderbender

Nexis also returns articles containing the plural forms of search terms which was useful in obtaining fuller coverage. However, less helpfully, Nexis sometimes produces duplicates of articles although it enables users to check an option to reduce the probability of this happening. Even with this option turned on, the search produced duplicates, due to Irish or Scottish versions of newspapers appearing in the database. Additionally, some newspapers issued multiple editions of newspapers on the same day, also producing duplicates. A further problem involved the search term *trans* which returned a large number of irrelevant stories (e.g. about trans fats). Fortunately, Nexis allows users to specify terms which act as excluders e.g. if a word appears then the article should *not* be collected. Therefore, an additional set of terms were used to reduce the appearance of duplicates or irrelevant articles, based on reading the unwanted articles and identifying terms that would remove them. This included excluding terms like *transfat* and *trans-border*, as well as phrasing which indicated duplicate articles such as 'Edition 1; Scotland' or 'Ulster Edition'.

Table 9.1 shows the total number of articles collected for each newspaper. In total there were 902 articles in the corpus, consisting of 661,189 words. The three newspapers which had the highest number of articles all skew to the right politically, to different degrees: *The Times*, *The Telegraph* and *The Sun*.

As a way of gaining an idea about what others have said about the search terms, I referred outside the corpus to three sets of guidelines on appropriate language use. These are guidelines written by groups whose goal is support of and better representation for trans people: GLAAD (Gay & Lesbian Alliance against Defamation), the Beaumont Society and the Gender Identity Research and Education Society (GIRE). These guidelines were not used here as a blueprint for the 'correct' ways to use terminology; the guidelines did not always agree with each other and I also found reports of people criticizing them. Clearly, the writers of the guidelines cannot represent the views of every trans person in the world, but they are still useful to consider as they raise points about the choices that people make when using language to refer to trans people, helping interpretations of language use in the newspaper corpus.

As a preliminary stage in the analysis it was decided to employ the free-to-use corpus analysis software AntConc (Anthony, 2013) to investigate the frequencies of different search terms across each newspaper. This was used in order to narrow the

Table 9.1 Number of articles for each newspaper

Newspaper	Total articles
<i>Express</i>	50
<i>Guardian</i>	121
<i>Independent</i>	62
<i>Mail</i>	78
<i>Mirror</i>	44
<i>Observer</i>	44
<i>People</i>	7
<i>Star</i>	94
<i>Sun</i>	131
<i>Telegraph</i>	123
<i>Times</i>	148
Total	902

focus of the analysis to a smaller number of words which would provide the best overall coverage. After that, these words were subjected to a more detailed qualitative analysis in order to identify similar patterns of representation.

4 Finding a focus

Table 9.2 shows the overall frequencies of terminology used in the corpus for each newspaper (ordered according to overall frequency in the corpus). An asterisk at the end of a word acts as a wildcard, so *transgender** refers to *transgender*, *transgenders*, *transgendered*, etc. Due to the fact that some newspapers contain a great deal more text than others, it is misleading to note that *The Guardian* and *The Times* use the term *transgender** the most, as these broadsheet newspapers simply contain a lot of text, particularly compared to the less verbose tabloid newspapers. It is more relevant to make a comparison within a newspaper, asking which term a particular newspaper favours. Therefore, for each newspaper, the most frequently used term is in a shaded cell.

For some newspapers, the frequencies are too low to draw much of a conclusion, other than the terms simply do not appear to be used very much. Seven of the newspapers have *transgender** as the most frequent term, and the guidelines I consulted tend to view *transgender* as one of the most, if not the most, appropriate

Table 9.2 Frequencies of terminology for each newspaper

Term	Exp	Guard	Ind	Mail	Mirror	Obs	People	Star	Sun	Tel	Tim	Total
transgender*	18	79	29	70	17	7	0	20	32	55	78	405
transsexual*	19	60	21	34	8	33	1	17	47	37	43	320
transvestite*	21	36	21	26	13	15	1	30	36	39	39	277
sex change*	6	8	5	26	8	2	2	24	25	19	16	141
cross(-)dress*	7	14	2	13	12	12	1	18	23	22	7	131
trans	4	22	2	13	2	0	0	3	5	14	8	73
tranny(s) trannie(s)	1	4	2	2	4	0	0	15	6	2	17	53
intersex*	1	4	5	1	0	3	0	0	4	3	4	25
shemale*	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	3
ftm	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
genderbender*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1
mtf	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	77	228	87	185	64	72	5	127	179	192	214	1430

term to use. It is perhaps then notable that *The Observer* and *The Sun* appear to prefer *transsexual** over *transgender** while *The Star* and the *Express* have more references to *transvestite**. This gives a first indication that certain newspapers may not normally use the most sensitive linguistic choices when referring to trans people.

It is also notable that *shemale*, *ftm*, *genderbender* and *mtf* are very rare across the whole corpus. An analysis of their use in context indicates that when they are used it is to generally to cite them as being abusive terms, indicating that on the measure of naming strategies, the newspapers generally adhere to a base level of sensitivity. However, while Table 9.2 tells us about preferred terminology, it does not reveal very much about representation. As a second step it is useful to take a broad-brush view by examining collocates of the terms, as shown in Table 9.3. A collocate is a word which occurs near or next to another word more often than would be expected if words just appeared in a random order. Examining collocates can help us to get an idea about the way that a word is most typically used, although care must be taken that we do not over-interpret collocational information.

There are a wide range of ways of calculating collocation (see McEnery et al., 2006: 210–20 for an overview) and a number of choices relating to cut-off points need to be made about what will actually count as a collocate for the purposes of a single piece of research. For example, we must decide on the span or number of words either side of the search term, as well as whether we stipulate a minimum overall frequency for two words to co-occur, and if so, what that minimum frequency should be. Sometimes the limitations of the corpus tool available to us will restrict our choices, while time and space considerations may mean we use settings that give us more or fewer collocates to examine. For the purposes of this research, to find collocates I used the Mutual Information (MI) technique, stipulating that collocates needed to have a MI score of 3 or above, as suggested by Hunston (2002: 71) as being evidence for collocation. Additionally, words had to occur together at least five times, and I used a fairly tight span of three words either side of the search term. As Table 9.3 suggests, the more frequent a word, generally the more collocates it will elicit.

Due to space limitations I was not able to examine every term in detail, so I decided to focus on three, using a number of criteria which were partly based on information obtained from Tables 9.2 and 9.3. I wanted to take into account at least half of the overall references to these words in the corpus, so it was decided to focus on the first two terms: *transgender** and *transsexual** which were most frequent and together encompassed 50.8 per cent of references to the search terms. Both of these words also had the most collocates, although they had quite different collocates so I felt that it would be interesting to explore some of them in more detail. Additionally, the guidelines I had examined had tended to view *transgender* as an appropriate term (although one set of guidelines gave a couple of exceptions to that, described below). On the other hand, one of the guidelines was less enthusiastic about *transsexual**, so comparing two terms (one largely accepted by groups representing trans people, the other seen as more problematic) felt like a good strategy for obtaining an overall idea

Table 9.3 Collocates of search terms

Term	Freq.	Collocates
transgender*	405	bisexual, contestants, intersex, students, lesbian, communities, issues, gay, community, people, equality, person, support, group, help, or, woman, men, women, young, children, many, being, and, were, who, are, other, first, as, rights, for, about, says, has
transsexual*	320	assassin, hitman, pre, op, soldier, dancers, youngest, female, character, wants, lesbian, male, hit, film, who, called, or, also, man, gay, even, a, as, has, their, rights, people, by, can, about, said, and, an, from, have, was, when, had, for
transvestite*	277	ego, alter, dancers, plays, playing, dress, gay, male, who, a, as, or, also, like, were, not, says, was, with, he, and, on, for, in, an, about
sex change*	141	operation, operations, having, had
cross(-)dress*	131	like, who, but, as, a
trans	73	play, people, said, t, are, for
tranny(s) trannie(s)	53	a, and, in, the
intersex*	25	transgender, are, he, and

about representation. As a third term I chose *tranny/trannie* as this term had been singled out by one of the guidelines as definitely pejorative, and I was drawn to the fact that the broadsheet newspaper *The Times* (unexpectedly) had the highest number of references to this term. In the sections below, I focus on more detailed qualitative analyses of these three terms.

4.1 Transgender (community)

The first term to be examined was *transgender**. The guidelines examined generally stated that *transgender* is an appropriate over-arching term for a range of different types of people. The GIRE guidelines note that 'transgenderism has had different meanings over time'.⁶ The GLAAD guidelines state that *transgender* is appropriate as an adjective, e.g. 'X is transgender' or 'a transgender man'. They also state that *transgender* should not be used as a noun and the term *transgendered* should not be used either. Noun uses of terms like *transgender*, *black* and *gay* can be seen as problematic as they discursively essentialize and reduce a person to a single defining characteristic.

It was decided to first examine the frequencies of these different usages in the corpus. This was done via scrutinizing a concordance of the term *transgender**. A

concordance is simply a table showing every citation of a search term in a corpus, within a few words of context either side. Concordances can be sorted alphabetically (e.g. one word to the left of the search word) in order to make patterns easier to identify, and they can be expanded so entire texts can be read.

The term *transgender** is almost always used in the corpus as an adjective with only one out of 405 cases occurring as an essentializing noun, although it refers to a non-human context:

Comprehensive research has shown that even tiny concentrations of chemicals in such things as detergents, packaging, medications and even personal care products such as shampoo, as well as powerful drugs such as steroids and oral contraceptives, can combine to form cocktails of chemicals that can turn male fish into impotent *transgenders*.

(*The Times*, 24 February 2012)

A larger number of instances of *transgendered* (34) appear in the corpus, spread across all of the newspapers apart from the *Express* and *The People*. None of these cases are referred to in the articles as being problematic, and some citations appear to be used in a way which could be interpreted as well-meaning e.g.:

Start by contacting the Beaumont Society, who help transgendered people and their families.

(*The Sun*, 17 March 2012)

A notable aspect of *transgender** is that it contains a semantic prosody (Louw, 1993) for support indicated by the collocates *communities*, *community*, *issues*, *equality*, *support*, *group*, *help* and *rights* in Table 9.3. None of these words collocate with any of the other search terms (apart from *rights* which also collocates with *transsexual**). As noted above, care must be taken not to over-interpret such collocates. Words like *help* and *support* may mostly relate to transgender people helping others or they may relate to transgender people being the recipients of help, or they may be used to mean something else. There is the possibility, for example, they may be used critically or sarcastically in individual articles. Thus, concordances of these collocational pairs need to be carefully read.

In eight out of nine cases the collocate *help* referred to transgender people as receiving help, while six out of seven cases of *support* referred to support groups for transgender people or them being offered support. On the surface, these collocates appear to be suggestive of positive representations – it is good to help people. However, the lack of cases which show *transgender** people as helping and supporting others (or themselves), perhaps indicates a somewhat limiting, if again well-meaning representation.

It was decided to examine *community* and *communities* in more detail as this was the only case where both the singular and plural forms of a word appeared as collocates,

and was felt to be particularly salient. Additionally, in an earlier study I had examined the term *Muslim community* (Baker et al., 2013), and noted that some journalists used it in a critical way, so I felt it would be interesting to see if this was also the case for *transgender community*. A search of *transgender* communit** produced 34 concordance lines across eight newspapers (the *Mirror*, the *Observer* and the *People* did not use the term). Reading through the concordance lines, I began to group usages which referred to similar topics or suggested similar stances.

First, it was noted that 14 (41 per cent) of the references included the transgender community alongside other communities, usually gay, lesbian and/or bisexual:

'I don't consider civil partnerships less equal to marriage. There are other problems facing the gay, lesbian and transgender community.'

(*The Sun*, 7 April 2012)

The popularity of this practice of joining together a range of identity groups who are viewed as having minority or diverse sexualities and/or genders, is sometimes signified by the acronym *LGBT*. One interpretation of this practice is that it indicates inclusivity – rather than merely focusing on equality-based issues around, say, gay men. However, it could also be argued that the appearance of the 'T' at the end of a list could be suggestive of a hierarchy, or could be seen as paying lip-service to inclusivity (this practice is not confined to the press). All of the 14 cases in the corpus place the transgender community at the end of the list. While this term is generally used uncritically, one journalist uses it in a sarcastic way:

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, not forgetting members of the Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender community. This is Captain Cameron speaking, but you can call me Dave.

(Richard Littlejohn, 16 March 2012)

In this article, Richard Littlejohn imagines that the British Prime Minister, David Cameron, has ordered his own plane but would have to share it with his coalition partners, the Liberal Democrats. In incongruously singling out LGBT people, one interpretation is that Littlejohn wants to imply that they receive special mention or consideration by the Coalition Government. Later in the article, the flight announcer says that the terms 'husband', 'wife', 'mother' and 'father' have been banned and that honeymooning same-sex couples will receive unlimited complimentary champagne. This article, in addition to the one about Lucy Meadows which inspired this research, suggests that Littlejohn has a particular problem with trans people as well as other groups.

However, Littlejohn is not a lone voice in the media. The theme of banned words also appears in four concordance lines about Brighton council apparently trying to ban titles, e.g.:

A CITY is proposing to ban titles such as Mr, Mrs, Miss and Ms in case they offend the transgender community.

(*Daily Mail*, 26 October 2012)

The phrase 'offend the transgender community' contributes towards a construction of this community in terms of its propensity for offence. An alternative wording such as 'A city is proposing a ban on titles in order to show sensitivity towards the transgender community' would not have placed the focus on offence. It is often useful to look beyond the concordance to gain an impression of the overall stance of the article, particularly in terms of who is quoted as part of the perspectivization of an article (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001: 81). For example, the *Daily Mail* article also quotes the Conservative Party who describe the proposal as 'ludicrous'. Similarly, an article on the same story in *The Telegraph* (26 October 2012) quotes a Conservative councillor as saying that the proposal is 'political correctness gone too far'. Both articles therefore appear to serve the function of painting the council as wrongheaded and the transgender community as offended over trivialities. However, an article in *The Guardian* (26 October 2012) suggests that the above newspapers had misinterpreted the story, noting that Brighton council had not banned titles but that tick boxes in forms which ask people to choose a gender e.g. *Mr*, *Mrs* or *Miss* would not be used. The use of verbs like *ban* and *offend* therefore suggest that some newspapers have exaggerated the story.

A similar use of *transgender community* relates to Oxford University allowing male students to wear skirts in exams. The article reports from the LGBT student union officer:

She said there was an active transgender community 'in Oxford, and every member she had spoken to had found sub-fusc, under the old regulations, to be stressful'.

(*Mail on Sunday*, 29 June 2012)

This article also provides quotes from an unnamed student who describes the change as 'unnecessary', as well as seeking the opinion of an alumni student, the former Conservative MP Anne Widdicombe, who is quoted as saying it will save 'a silly row' and noting 'If men want to prance around in skirts, that is entirely up to them'. While Widdicombe is not against the decision, her use of lexis like *silly* and *prance* could be interpreted as dismissive and patronizing towards trans people.

Even in left-leaning newspapers, there are understated indications that the transgender community needs to be negotiated. For example, the actress Chloë Sevigny is reported as playing a 'transgender hitman' in a new British drama, and she is quoted as saying:

'I was afraid of the pressure from the gay community or the transgender community and how they would feel, and wanting to be respectful.'

(*The Guardian*, 19 May 2012)

One reading of the above statement is that the actress wants to be respectful. However, the suggestion that she is afraid of pressure from the transgender community contributes towards a perception of the transgender community as having the ability to cause pressure (which is something to be afraid of).

Another subtle indication of this discourse is in the following article which begins:

Here's a trenchant headline for you: 'Transgender community celebrates "great diversity of gender identity" in new book.'

(Damian Thompson, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 July 2012)

It is notable that it is the headline rather than the transgender community which is described as *trenchant*, although it is possible to interpret the word as still being associated with that community. To gain a better idea about the meanings and associations of the word *trenchant*, I explored its usage in the 100 million word British National Corpus (BNC) which contains general English. The BNC had 63 cases of *trenchant*, of which 14 have *critic(s)*, *criticism(s)* or *critique* in the L1 (one place to the left) position. Other L1 words include *opposition*, *dislike*, *dismissal* and *attack*. I would suggest then, that *trenchant* contains a semantic prosody for strong criticism and the use of this word in the *Telegraph* article helps to contribute towards a more subtle representation of the transgender community as being critical of things. A related representation is found in *The Guardian* via the use of *assertive*.

The householder who answers grins nervously at Nargis, who is a 'hijra' – a member of Pakistan's increasingly assertive transgender community.

(*The Guardian*, 9 June 2012)

These references to different transgender communities as having the capacity for offence, causing pressure, being assertive or implicitly trenchant indicates that the press collectively view such a community as a force to be reckoned with, although individual journalists place a different political slant on this. This representation of the transgender community is not unique. I found an almost identical construction when looking at the term *Muslim community* (Baker et al., 2013), while sections of the British press view gay rights groups as politically militant (Baker, 2005), and Jaworksa and Krishnamurthy (2012: 404) have noted that the terms *feminism* and *feminist(s)* collocate with *radical*, *militant* and *raging*. Within conservative discourse it is therefore a common legitimisation strategy, to paint a minority or oppressed group as (too) easily offended, over-reacting with anger and thus in receipt of undeserving special treatment, often classed as 'political correctness gone too far'. It is also notable that the more negative references to the *transgender community* do not specifically refer to people by name, making it more difficult to attribute actual offence (or denial of offence) to anybody. Let us move on to another term to see if it contains similar patterns of representation around it.

4.2 *Transsexual**

There were 320 occurrences of *transsexual** in the corpus, the second most frequent search term after *transgender**. Joanna Darrell, writing for The Beaumont Society, notes that ‘Some people consider this term derogatory because the word ‘sexual’ is part of the term’,⁷ although the GLAAD guidelines do not note the word as being problematic. Table 9.3 shows that apart from *rights*, there were no collocates which seemed to directly relate transsexuals to equality or support. Instead, the collocates *pre* and *op* (occurring together 26 times) referred to pre op transsexuals (who had not had surgery). The term *post-op transsexual* only occurred once in the corpus. In some parts of the corpus there appears to be particular fascination with the sexual organs of transsexual people, particularly people who retain sexual organs they were born with, while living as a member of the opposite sex:

I’m confronted by a transsexual with a huge penis. “Someone sent me a photo of a tranny”, he says, sheepishly. Wow! I say. Is that genuine?

(*The Guardian*, 21 April 2012)

I realise that this is the acid test of a successful transsexual, but even when Mia showed us her penis in the shower (credits for prosthetics artist and prosthetics supervisor were well earned), it was a hard one to swallow, if you’ll pardon the inescapable metaphor.

(*The Observer*, 27 May 2012)

The first example above is notable for the rewording of *tranny* as *transsexual*. The journalist distances himself from *tranny* but still prints it when quoting the interviewee, as well as using the verb *confronted* to describe the photograph, which implies that the person in the picture is intimidating (perhaps linking through to the earlier discourse around transgendered community as quick to take offence). This small excerpt also discursively exoticizes and ‘others’ trans people as a shared object of fascination for the interviewee, interviewer and presumably the audience. The second example uses a pun about oral sex: ‘hard one to swallow’ again, in focusing on the genitalia of *transsexual** people, and positioning them discursively as part of a joke.

As with *transgender**, the collocates *gay* and *lesbian* (seven and five times each as collocates) indicated the presence of *transsexual(s)* as occurring at the end of a list of other identity groups. The collocates *assassin* (12) and *hitman* (5) refer to the story mentioned above about the actress Chloë Sevigny playing a transsexual hitman in a television drama. Additionally, *character* (5) refers to either the hitman or a transsexual character in the soap opera *Coronation Street*. The collocate *soldier* (7) refers to a reality television programme called *Mother Truckers* which looks at the lives of female lorry drivers and includes ‘Vikki, a former soldier and transsexual who wants to be treated as one of the girls – or boys’ (*The Times*, 9 February 2012). Another collocate *dancers* (8),

refers to a story about opposition to a proposed lap dancing club in a town (note how the word 'even' positions transsexual dancers as particularly problematic):

He has now provoked fresh debate by putting up a notice in the proposed club advertising for male, female, homosexual, transvestite and even transsexual dancers.

(*Daily Telegraph*, 2 July 2012)

Perhaps what is notable about these collocates is that they represent *transsexual** people as either being fictional characters and/or appearing in contexts that are designed to entertain members of the public. This appears to be different to *transgender** which tends to be used on 'real' or non-entertaining people. Transsexual people thus appear to be represented as more exotic or unreal compared to transgendered people.

An important distinction with *transsexual** is that it can be used as either a noun or an adjective as shown in the following two examples:

It's estimated between 5 and 10 million women worldwide have had the surgery, many for cosmetic reasons, and a significant proportion for reconstruction following a mastectomy, or *for transsexual people* transitioning from male to female.

(*The Guardian*, 12 January 2012)

The Met now has four *transsexuals* – who have had ops – and eight hermaphrodites, born a mix of male and female.

(*The Sun*, 4 June 2012)

As with *transgender*, it could be argued that using *transsexual** as an adjective is a more sensitive strategy in that it implies that trans status is one aspect of a person's identity, whereas the noun usage reduces a person to that single trait.

I examined the 313 cases of *transsexual(s)* in the corpus and noted where they were nouns or verbs. Table 9.4 shows the frequencies across each newspaper. Collectively, well over half of the cases of *transsexual(s)* in the British press occur as essentializing nouns, and this figure is particularly high for two right-leaning tabloids, *The Star* and *The Sun*. However, it is perhaps surprising to see the left-leaning *The Guardian* as also having a relatively high proportion of such cases (2 in 3).

One way of analysing representation is to consider the verb processes which occur around the term *transsexual(s)*, either describing people as engaging in or having actions done to them. Concordance analyses were carried out of the term and verb processes are summarized in Table 9.5, which identifies processes that position transsexual people as either the agent (actor) or patient (acted upon). Similar processes have been grouped together.

Table 9.5 shows the term *transsexual(s)* as involved with a range of different types of activities, some of which can be linked together. For example, the representation of this group of people as victims, either of prejudice or of physical violence, perhaps

Table 9.4 Noun vs. adjective uses of *transsexual(s)*

Newspaper	Noun	Adjective	Total	Preference for noun
<i>Star</i>	15	2	17	88%
<i>Sun</i>	33	14	47	70%
<i>Guardian</i>	37	18	55	67%
<i>Times</i>	28	15	43	65%
<i>Express</i>	12	7	19	63%
<i>Independent</i>	11	10	21	52%
<i>Telegraph</i>	19	18	37	51%
<i>Observer</i>	16	17	33	48%
<i>Mail</i>	13	19	32	41%
<i>Mirror</i>	3	5	8	38%
<i>People</i>	0	1	1	0%
Total	187	126	313	60%

Table 9.5 Verb processes positioning transsexual people as agent or patient

Construction	As agent	As patient
As victim	told tales of rejection and sexual mortification, led a hard life, born and grow up alone, can't find work, claims male lorry drivers bully her	killed, persecuted, stir up hatred against, targeted, raped, found by the side of the road
As aggressor/ criminal	abducts his long-lost rent-boy son, works as a contract killer, used someone else's name, working for an underground gang boss, harassing her neighbour	imprisoned, arrested, jailed, having her 19th allegation of rape investigated, accused of killing, ordered to do community service, had her punishment reduced
Receiving help	get psychotherapy	treated for problems, offered understanding and support
(Struggle for) equality	held equality placards, reveals her struggle for acceptance, wants to be accepted, wants to be one of the girls, fight for official acceptance, won a campaign to enter a beauty contest, suing health bosses, gaining recognition as a protected group	allowed to choose their sex

Gaining acceptance and positive appraisal	won Eurovision	celebrated, welcomed, praised in parliament, honoured, openly accepted in Thailand, voted as a winner
Having surgery or other procedures	preparing for a sex change, transitioning from male to female, had ops, saving up for an operation, awaiting an operation, paid £60,000 to achieve the perfect look, forked out a fortune on hair transplants, undergo genital surgery	features have been surgically altered, raise funds for a sex change
Having relationships	has a fling, dated, running off with a priest	had an affair with, met online, met on holiday
Labelled or grouped		labelled, pictured by people, counting the number of
Angry	upset, offend, complaining	
Commanding attention	likes to be centre of attention, erupt in bizarre scenes, sparked controversy, command headlines, confronted	
In work	ran a club, pay taxes, took up lorry-driving, waves a hairdryer	
Is a parent	discovers she is a father, gave birth	

helps to explain the presence of other categories for receiving help, struggling for equality and gaining acceptance and approval. It is perhaps notable that in the 'struggle for equality' category, most of the verb processes position the term *transsexual(s)* as the agent, e.g. they are the ones who are struggling for equality, others are not trying to do this on their behalf. However, in terms of gaining acceptance and approval, this is mainly something which others bestow on them. Perhaps this is not surprising: transsexual people are not represented as having to accept themselves, but the overarching narrative indicates that their acceptance and equal rights are something that others can grant them, rather than them being able to take such matters for granted. It is perhaps also unsurprising to see a number of processes related to having surgery, although critically we might question whether the focus on undergoing surgery (noting also the collocate *pre-op*) detracts from other aspects of the lives of transsexual people and indicates what some people may view as intrusive curiosity about whether or not surgery has or will take place.

Alongside representations of transsexual people as victims, it is perhaps more surprising to see them represented as aggressors or criminals. Three such cases are shown below.

The pre-op transsexual, who was jailed for sex offences, wears his hair in pigtails and must be called 'Miss' by staff, who can be disciplined if they refuse.

(Mirror, 11 November 2012)

A TRANSSEXUAL who was ordered to do community service in a graveyard after harassing her neighbour has had her punishment reduced after complaining that the lawnmower she had to push was too heavy.

(Daily Telegraph, 24 May 2012)

A TRANSSEXUAL is having her NINETEENTH allegation of rape investigated by police. The woman, in her 30s, has so far cost taxpayers £200,000 over the past ten years. But Scotland Yard is refusing to say if any of her complaints have resulted in conviction.

(The Sun, 15 April 2012)

These three stories all represent individual transsexual people negatively. The first two refer to crimes committed by transsexual people, while the third one strongly implies that the transsexual person is wasting police time and taxpayers' money by making repeated false accusations of rape. It might be asked whether the fact that the accuser is 'a transsexual' is relevant to that story, although it should be noted that the Press Complaints Commission Code of Practice section 12ii cites that 'Details of an individual's race, colour, religion, sexual orientation, physical or mental illness or disability must be avoided unless genuinely relevant to the story'. This list does not explicitly include gender. All of the stories also refer back to a representation mentioned earlier, that of trans people as either complaining and/or being given special treatment that they do not deserve.

Two other categories in Table 9.5 were encountered in the earlier analysis of *transgender**: Angry and Receiving Help, and concordance analyses reveal that the verb processes associated with them contribute to previously mentioned representations relating to transgender people as needing special treatment in case they are offended and transgender people being the recipients of help and support. Two categories that have not been encountered before are 'Commanding Attention' and 'Having Relationships'. The first one represents transsexual people as either drawing attention to themselves or attracting it in other ways.

It is thought to be only the fourth case of its kind in the world, and comes four years after American transsexual Thomas Beatie, 38, sparked controversy by announcing his pregnancy.

(Mail on Sunday, 19 February 2012)

. . . transsexual Luke who 'likes to be the centre of attention' . . .

(The Sun, 12 June 2012)

It's odd that a transsexual punk can still command headlines, when Grace appears to inhabit a world more relaxed about the matter than almost any I can think of.

(*The Guardian*, 23 July 2012)

The 'Having relationships' category is interesting because the verb processes here do not seem to imply long-term or stable relationships: *has a fling, dated, running off with a priest, had an affair with, met online, met on holiday*. Instead they imply impermanence while a couple of cases suggest extra-marital relationships. Verb processes such as *married, settled down with or entered into a relationship* do not tend to appear in the immediate vicinity of *transsexual**.

4.3 Tranny

The final search term I want to explore in more detail is a more informal term: *tranny* (sometimes spelt as *trannie* – from this point I mainly use *tranny* to refer to both). In the British press this term is usually meant as a shortened version of *transvestite*, although sometimes can refer to *transsexual* or *transgender*.

This term is sometimes considered pejorative: the Gay & Lesbian Alliance against Defamation (GLAAD) write:

What words are offensive to transgender people? These words should not be used: 'transvestite,' 'she-male,' 'he-she,' 'it,' 'trannie,' 'tranny,' and 'shim.' These words are dehumanizing, and using them to refer to any person is similar to using an anti-gay epithet

<http://www.glaad.org/transgender>

GLAAD's stance on *tranny* has been criticized by a number of high-profile people, including the actress Susan Sarandon⁸ (reported in the *New York Daily News*, 9 November 2010) and the female impersonator RuPaul (reported in the *Dallas Voice*, 28 June 2009).⁹ It is possible that some people could use the term in a reclaimed way or associate it with positive traits. With those points in mind, how is *tranny* used in the British national press?

With just 53 occurrences in the corpus and only four collocates which were all high frequency grammatical words (*a, and, in, the*), a different technique needed to be used in order to identify patterns of representation around *tranny*. This was achieved by reading concordance lines and grouping those which appeared to be contributing towards similar sorts of representations (shown below). None of the groups of concordance lines were particularly frequent, but with such a small amount of data, this would perhaps be expected.

The first pattern related to a representation of *tranny* negatively, either by implying or stating that looking like a tranny is bad and associated with poor style or theatricality.

I hate that tranny look, and the programme painted Liverpool in such a bitchy, bad light.

(Sunday Times, 2 December 2012)

The cast was fine, particularly Eileen Atkins, as ever reminding us what a tranny panto turn Maggie Smith has become.

(Sunday Times, 16 September 2012, A. A. Gill)

By the way, every pair of shoes you've bought in the past year is hideous. Great, clumpy, round-toed platform things – ghastly. They look like a tranny centaur night out.

(Sunday Times, 16 September 2012, A. A. Gill)

Some of the articles referred to a female pop star called Jessie J who identified as bisexual during a radio interview in 2011¹⁰:

To combat this, next series they're going to keep Jessie J in a centrifuge machine like an inarticulate tranny kaleidoscope.

(The Sun, 21 December 2012)

Jessie J was described as wanting to dispel rumours or change her style:

POP princess Jessie J wants to change her trademark style because she looks like a tranny.

(Daily Star, 30 May 2012)

Being ages in the toilet isn't going to help Jessie dispel rumours she's a tranny.

(The Sun, 29 June 2012)

As well as a potential conflation of the pop star's bisexual identity with a trans identity (a kind of double 'othering'), these articles imply that 'trannys' are generally seen as unsuccessful at 'passing' as a member of the opposite sex, and that to look like a tranny is therefore bad. However, one article was more positive about this apparent style of clothing, describing it as 'chic' and 'bang on trend'.

TRANNY CHIC – Chiffon shirts, high-waisted jeans – Chloë Sevigny's preop transsexual wardrobe in Hit and Miss is bang on trend

(Sunday Times, 10 June 2012)

A second set of articles related to the previously discovered representation of trans people as being given unnecessary special treatment, sometimes linked to them as prone to take offence:

Fake trannies are 'offensive'. STUDENTS have been told not to cross-dress for fun on nights out.

(Daily Star, 23 February 2012)

Kids, 4 labelled trannies. BARMY watchdogs have praised school bosses who label children as young as four 'transgender'.

(Daily Star, 20 June 2012)

Watchdog slaps ban on bookie tranny ad.

(Daily Star, 24 February 2012)

A third set (comprising just two cases), positions trannies as part of somewhat outlandish social groups, and implies that they are the object of entertainment for a viewing audience. The use of 'freaks' in the first example below is notable for its association with circus entertainment.

Priceless footage depicts the wide-eyed, gurning night owls, 'tranny freaks' and trustafarians who gravitate to Shangri-La.

(The Guardian, 9 June 2012)

A series by Katy Grannan, of portraits taken on the streets of San Francisco, is absorbing – Grannan's stark light and sharp focus picks out every flaw in the sagging bodies of her old bikers, thinning trannies and over-dressed eccentrics. You want to know their stories.

(The Times, 5 May 2012)

Two other cases associate trannies with celebrity 'sex romps' as part of a tabloid discourse found only in the *Daily Star*:

X FACTOR hit a new low when wannabes went on a sex-crazed rampage. Rylan Clark romped with a tranny on a dancefloor, then ran naked through streets.

(Daily Star, 16 October 2012)

FURIOUS Chantelle Houghton last night claimed ex Alex Reid had tranny romps and a sex dungeon.

(Daily Star, 31 October 2012)

As described above, a pattern was found where the term *transsexual*¹⁶ was associated with transient or extra-marital relationships, and the references to 'romps' with trannies seems to contribute to this overall representation.

Being a tranny or being interested in them is also viewed as a source of fear and worry, particularly within the context of *The Sun's* Dear Deidre advice column:

Tranny fear – Dear Deidre I HAVE a girlfriend who I love very much but I’m fascinated by pornography involving transsexuals.

(*The Sun*, 8 November 2012)

SHOULD I ADMIT I’M TRANNY?; Dear Deidre

(*The Sun*, 16 July 2012)

Additionally, two *Daily Mirror* articles refer to biological aspects in order to make jokes:

It’s difficult to win a BAFTA for a one-off performance but Bean is so convincing as a tranny you’d swear he had both off.

(*Daily Mirror*, 14 August 2012)

Hills laid Accused writer Jimmy McGovern’s £100 bet at 12–1 for a Bean Bafta but, after watching the rough cut – that’s tonight’s episode, not McGovern’s barnet – wanted to quickly slash those odds to evens. That was a surprise – in full tranny clobber a quick slash ain’t easy.

(*Daily Mirror*, 14 August 2012)

In the first example, a word play joke is made by linking the ‘one-off performance’ of an actor who played a tranny, with the somewhat reductive term ‘both off’ (most likely referring to the actor’s testicles). In the second article, there is word play around the word *slash*, first used to mean cutting (the odds), but then as a British slang term for urination.

Three more potentially positive representations of trannies were also found in the corpus. One was in *The Times* by the television reviewer, A. A. Gill (whose consistent use of *tranny* as noted in some of the above articles was the reason for the relatively high frequency of this word in *The Times*).

Behind the pearls and eyelashes, Perry is a cultured and clever trannie, possibly one of the most cultured and clever transvestites this country has ever produced. On camera, he is able to organise complex and abstract thoughts, and explain them with an unpatrician clarity, without art snobbery.

(*The Sunday Times*, 10 June 2012)

While this article could be interpreted as associating the artist and television presenter Grayson Perry with positive traits (*cultured, clever*), there are other structures in the sentence which are perhaps less positive. For example, Gill prefaces his praise of Grayson with the phrase ‘beneath the pearls and eyelashes’ which implies that Grayson’s appearance does not indicate that he would be cultured and clever. Grayson is thus constructed as the exceptional case, rather than being typical. Added to that is the fact that groups like GLAAD consider *trannie* to be pejorative in itself, as well as

Gill's use of terms like *tranny panto* and *tranny centaur night out* in other articles cited above, which also imply that he uses the term mockingly.

A couple of other articles are more straightforwardly positive:

I heard about a fun run involving a record-breaking number of trannies flying the flag for floral frocks, big wigs and preventing prostate cancer.

(*The Sunday Times*, 22 July 2012)

But, on Canal Street, Bean learnt the many motivations for transvestism. 'I met some trannies who were doing it for a laugh and some because they were seriously considering transexual surgery. There were others whose wives and girlfriends enjoyed it and even went shopping for clothes with them. Tracie's story is not supposed to be atypical. There is no typical story.'

(*The Times*, 11 August 2012)

The first article describes trannies as raising money for charity while the second implies that trannies are diverse: 'there is no typical story', and notes that some wives and girlfriends view trannies positively. However, these more positive representations are clearly in the minority, amid a range of more negative ones.

5 Conclusion

The analytical techniques I used did not uncover articles that matched Julie Burchill's article in terms of being so strongly derogatory towards trans people as a group, nor did they find any which made an explicitly judgemental attack on a single named trans person, as Richard Littlejohn's article did. These two articles appear to represent an extreme position on a continuum of press disapproval. However, the analysis did find a great deal of evidence to support the view that trans people are regularly represented in reasonably large sections of the press as receiving special treatment lest they be offended, as victims or villains, as involved in transient relationships or sex scandals, as the object of jokes about their appearance or sexual organs and as attention-seeking freakish objects. There were a scattering of more positive representations but they were not as easy to locate and tended to appear as isolated cases, rather than occurring repeatedly as trends. Therefore, the claims about trans people being a 'whipping girl' for the British press, cited by Jane Fae in the introduction to this chapter, appear to be borne out by the analysis. The lack of reference to trans people in the PCC Code appears to have resulted in a particularly negative set of representations overall.

As this chapter was meant to be illustrative of corpus techniques rather than comprising a full analysis, it cannot fully do justice to the question of whether the British press are institutionally transphobic. Future research would involve a more detailed examination of the other search terms and their collocates, as well as considering other

linguistic ways of representing trans people, for example, by looking at pronoun choice, the use of distancing quotes around certain terms or legitimation strategies, topoi and argumentative fallacies that repeatedly occur in the texts. Analysis of photographs used alongside articles would also add a visual dimension to complement the corpus analysis.

Despite the partial analysis shown here, I hope that this chapter has demonstrated some of the advantages of using corpus techniques from a critical discourse analysis perspective. For CDA, I would advocate that corpus analysis works best when combined with a range of approaches which consider context in various ways. This often involves interrogation of the linguistic context around particular words in a text via concordance lines or reading full articles, but it should also involve consideration of the social practices around texts – in this case, examination of the PCC Code of Practice and other guidelines written by trans-friendly organizations. Corpus approaches thus offer a good balance between quantitative and qualitative analyses, although it should be remembered that while corpus analysis involves computers doing much of the spade-work of analysis, it remains up to humans to interpret, explain and evaluate the patterns that are presented.

Notes

- 1 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/mar/22/lucy-meadows-press-harassment>
Accessed 16th July 2014
- 2 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2013/may/28/lucy-meadows-coroner-press-shame>
Accessed 16th July 2014
- 3 Due to the ineffectiveness of the PCC in responding to complaints about journalists hacking the telephone voicemails of high profile people, in December 2011 it was announced that it would be disbanded, although in early 2013 this had not yet taken place.
- 4 <http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/burchills-attack-follows-the-same-pattern-trans-stories-are-only-of-interest-if-we-star-as-villains-8449812.html>
Accessed 16th July 2014
- 5 The Leveson Inquiry was a judicial public enquiry into the ethics, culture and practice of the British press as a result of a telephone hacking scandal.
- 6 <http://www.gires.org.uk/assets/Schools/TransphobicBullying.pdf> Accessed 16th July 2014
- 7 <http://www.beaumontsociety.org.uk/Help%20&%20advice/Beaumont%20Training/Transgender%20diversity%20training%209%20-%20transphobia.pdf> Accessed 16th July 2014
- 8 <http://www.nydailynews.com/entertainment/gossip/word-susan-sarandon-doesn-problem-glee-ful-tranny-article-1.453038> Accessed 16th July 2014
- 9 <http://www.dallasvoice.com/rupaul-approves-tranny-1018688.html> Accessed 16th July 2014
- 10 <http://www.mtv.co.uk/news/jessie-j/259667-jessie-j-bisexual-dates-girls-and-boys>
Accessed 16th July 2014

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