Desirable and undesirable differentness: Exploring representations of people with schizophrenia in the British tabloids and broadsheets

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Why schizophrenia?

- Schizophrenia is potentially the mental disorder that receives the most stigma (Sayce, 2000)
- Stigma as a perception of ‘undesired differentness’ (Goffman, 1963)
- People with schizophrenia display high levels of internalized stigma (Okanli and Yilmaz, 2016)
- This contributes to a poorer quality of life and poorer patient outcomes (Livingston and Boyd, 2010)
Why the British press?

• People with schizophrenia are not very visible in society
• Public beliefs and attitudes are shaped by the mass media
• Patterns in the language of the mass media tell us about dominant public beliefs and attitudes
What is schizophrenia?

• Abnormalities in the domains of delusions, hallucinations etc. (DSM 5, 2013:87)
• Delusions are ‘fixed beliefs not amenable to change in light of conflicting evidence’ (ibid.)
• Hallucinations are perception-like experiences that occur without an external stimulus (ibid.)
• Affects 1 in a 100 people (Frith and Johnstone, 2003:1)
Previous research

• Portrayals of schizophrenia in the tabloids are more negative and sensationalistic (Barnes and Earnshaw, 1993)
  – Use of more intolerant labels e.g. *madman, psycho* (Clement and Foster, 2008)
  – Reference to violence, violent implements and notorious killers (Bowen et al., 2019)
• Portrayals in the broadsheets?
The data

• A corpus of all British national news articles reporting on schizophrenia published between 2000 and 2015 (sourced from LexisNexis).
• An article qualified if it contained \textit{schiz}^* (schizophrenia, schizophrenic, schizo)
The method

• Contrastive keyword analysis between tabloid and broadsheet corpora
• Log-likelihood to test for statistical significance
• Conducted a concordance analysis of the top 100 keywords in each
• Grouped them according to emerging topics
Dominant topic in the tabloids: crime

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Keywords</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>the law</td>
<td>attorney, cops, court, crown, defense, guilty, judge, officers, pc, police, prosecutors, trial</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>violence</td>
<td>attack, attacked, blood, body, death, gun, incident, kill, killed, killing, knife, manslaughter, murder, murdered, shooting, shot, stabbed, stabbing, tried</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>murderers</td>
<td>brady, holmes, killer, mcfadden, ripper, sutcliffe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>victims</td>
<td>cerys, savident, victim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>incarceration</td>
<td>arrested, broadmoor, carstairs, freed, hospital, jail, jailed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Crime: violent acts

- **Violent acts:** attack, attacked, kill, killed, killing, manslaughter, murder
- **Violent instruments:** gun, knife
- **Aftermath of crime:** death, blood, body
Examples

Religious fanatic suffering from schizophrenia **stabbed** his retired computer analyst neighbour to death as he was doing odd jobs in his garage (*MailOnline*, 19 April 2014).

When the officer’s (sic) went inside the defendant grabbed a kitchen **knife**, like the type used to cut vegetables, and began to get very aggressive. (*MailOnline*, 11 September 2012).
Examples

When he was refused entry, he tried the nearby home of retired paediatrician Derek Robinson, 75, and his wife Jean, 60, armed with the “biggest and strongest” knife he could get from a local hardware store (The Star, 17 March 2006).

Jaggs stabbed her in the arm with a knife from the dishwasher. (The Mirror, 13 July 2007).
## Concordance for *blood*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Clusters found in concordance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Blood covering a surface (16)</td>
<td>covered with <strong>blood</strong> (9), <strong>blood</strong> everywhere (2), <strong>blood</strong> pouring (1), <strong>blood</strong>-soaked (2), <strong>blood</strong> all over my face (2), drenched in <strong>blood</strong> (1), <strong>blood</strong> leaking (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrangement of blood on a surface (8)</td>
<td>pool of <strong>blood</strong> (4), <strong>blood</strong> splatters, (1), <strong>blood</strong> splattered (1), <strong>blood</strong> running (1)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Gruesome detail

• References to weapons and injuries are over-descriptive
• Appealing to news values – ‘violence’ and ‘graphic imagery and visual spectacle’ (Jewkes, 2015)
• Cf. hallucination* (n = 336), delusion* (n = 598) and shooting (n = 1039)
Crime: problematised responsibility

• Legal roles: *defense, attorney, prosecutors, judge*
• Legal contexts: *court, crown, trial*
• Notorious criminals: *brady, holmes, killer, mcfadden, ripper, Sutcliffe*
The delay in coming to court is due to multiple psychiatric evaluations. Prosecutors are seeking the death penalty, painting him as a calculated killer, driven by a floundering academic career and a break-up with his girlfriend. Meanwhile, Holmes, now 27, is pleading not guilty by reason of insanity – his public defenders insist he suffers from schizophrenia and wasn't in control of his actions when he plotted and carried out the attack. (The Sun, 5 July 2015)
'I don't think he should be locked up in Broadmoor, it should be a normal prison.' Sutcliffe mainly killed prostitutes in the streets of northern England. (*The Mail*, 15 May 2008).
Crime: violent patients being released

- **Places of incarceration**: broadmoor, carstairs, hospital, jail
- **Processes of incarceration**: arrested, jailed, freed

- Collocates of *freed*: blunder (n=4, LL = 8.22), blunders (n=3, LL=7.63), mistake (n=6, LL=7.66) and error (n=3, LL7.29)
Example

**BLUNDERS** FREED KILLER FROM MENTAL HOSPITAL. A SERIES of errors left a crazed killer at large to stab to death a hero detective. (*The Star*, 20 May 2005).

A DANGER TO THE PUBLIC FOR 20 YEARS. BUT THEY FREED MANIAC TO KILL POLICEMAN (*The Express*, 20 May 2005).
Tabloids: summary

- Distinctive aspects of the tabloids’ reporting of schizophrenia
  - People with schizophrenia as violent criminals
  - A focus on the gruesome aspects of stories
  - Problematised responsibility?
  - Anxieties around incarceration
## Keywords in the broadsheets

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>business and commerce</strong></td>
<td>billion, company, director, executive, growth, industry, market, pounds, sales, sector, works</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>culture</strong></td>
<td>art, artist, artists, book, books, cultural, education, exhibition, festival, fiction, film, films, literary, literature, music, novel, novels, play, poet, poetry, reader, readers, stories, story, theatre, work, write, writer, writers, writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research and treatment</strong></td>
<td>astrazeneca, freud, genome, human, laing, project, psychiatry, science</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Art and culture

- **Fine art:** art, artists, exhibition
- **Creative writing:** book, books, literary, fiction, literary, literature, novel, novels, play, poet, poetry, reader, readers, stories, story, theatre, writer, writers, writing
- **Cinema:** festival, film, films
- **Music:** music
Some of the genes that predispose to schizophrenia might be carried by 

artists

and in many cases play a factor in their creativity, but because the artists do not develop full-blown schizophrenia and are able to direct their creativity, they are able to pass the genes on to their children. (The Guardian, 30 November, 2005).
Psychoticism and creativity

• Psychoticism is linked with lateral thinking and intuitive thought, both traits associated with creative processes (Prentky, 2001; McConaghy, 1960)
• ‘[s]chizophrenic language has [...] an interesting resemblance to poetry’ (Eagleton, 1996)
• ‘There is no genius without a touch of madness’ (Seneca/Aristotle)
• Positive representations?
Research and treatment

- **Research**: *human, genome, project*
- **Pharmaceuticals**: *astrazeneca (+ company, executive, sales)*
- **Alternative approaches**: *freud, laing*
Examples

One of AstraZeneca's bestselling drugs, Seroquel for schizophrenia, lost US patent protection in March, while the patent on Nexium for ulcers expires in the US in 2014. The two generated $10.3bn (£6.4bn) in sales last year. (telegraph.co.uk, 25 October 2012).
Research and treatment

• **Research:** *human, genome, project*

• **Pharmaceuticals:** *astrazeneca (+ company, executive, sales)*

• **Alternative approaches:** *freud, laing*
Alternative approaches to psychiatry

**Freud** was among the first physicians to treat the mentally ill in a humane, non-surgical way.’ *(The Telegraph, 12 May 2002).*

**Laing** has become notorious as the man who blamed schizophrenia on families. But those who dismiss him on that basis have to ask if any attempt to understand a person’s mental state can be made without reference to their closest relationships. *(The Guardian, 26 August 2013).*
Broadsheets: summary

• Distinctive aspects of the broadsheets’ reportage of schizophrenia:
  – Schizophrenia in the context of art and culture
  – A relationship between psychoticism and creativity?
  – More of a focus on the science behind schizophrenia
  – An interest in both biomedical and alternative approaches to treatment
Implications for research into stigma around schizophrenia

• There are other topics salient in the tabloids and broadsheets besides crime

• Both tabloids and broadsheets represent people as being ‘different’
  – The tabloids: an ‘undesired differentness’ (violent criminals)
  – The broadsheets: ‘desired differentness’ (links with art and creativity)
Potential limitations and further research

• These keywords tell us what is distinctive about the lexis, not what is similar

• Are some keywords merely due to stylistic differences?

• Further avenues of inquiry?
  – Interdiscursivity and horror language
  – How the tabloids use language to negotiate blame
  – Links between psychoticism and creativity in the tabloids
Discussion