"I think journalists sometimes forget that we're just people": Analysing the Effects of UK Trans Media Representation on Trans Audiences

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Abstract:

The increased focus on trans lives across a variety of media has brought to light the difficult relationship between trans audiences of this media and the content produced about trans people. The print and digital content of newspapers is an important site for investigation because it can be readily accessed and shared quickly across a variety of platforms and there is a significant volume of content produced about trans people. In order to critically engage with the content produced about trans people in UK newspapers the views of trans audiences are important to assess the impact this media has on their daily lives. Academic work addressing trans lived experiences has been invaluable in understanding healthcare and relationships (Girshick, 2008; Hines, 2007) but there has been comparatively little specific work on trans media representation. The work that has been done found patterns of misrepresentation of trans identities (Kermode and TMW, 2010). This notable absence presents a potential barrier to understanding the ways in which trans media coverage impacts trans lives. With qualitative interviews at the centre of this research methodology, this paper considers trans representation in UK newspapers and analyses the effects on trans audiences. Interviews and focus groups were conducted online with self-defining trans people as experts on the ways newspaper reporting affects their lives. Online methods are useful for media reception research because of the amount of media consumption that occurs online. In the specific case of trans audiences online methods become necessary as a means to work with harder-to-reach communities with concerns about participating in research. The questions asked of trans audiences were influenced by a critical discourse analysis of trans coverage in UK newspapers over the period of one year to provide a snapshot of content. This initial search also provided example articles. During this period the newspaper complaints body issued guidelines on trans reporting so questions on the effectiveness of these were also asked. Participants were interviewed online across online focus group and instant message software. The findings that emerged from interviews revealed newspapers repeatedly influenced daily lives especially in relation to transphobia, misgendering and misrepresentation which were highlighted frequently. Some participants focused on the sensationalist nature of reporting which led to feelings of othering, whereas others were more focused on opportunities for resistance to the tropes about trans people produced. This paper considers these interviews in the current context in which they are produced and the wider discourse of trans media representation to address the impact this media has on trans audiences. By critically reflecting on the ways trans newspaper coverage affects trans audiences, this paper offers a unique and community influenced perspective that seeks different trans media representation that does not cause harm for trans readers.

1   Local and national newspapers in the UK frequently produce content considering trans subjects. The aim of this paper is to analyse the effects that trans representation in UK newspapers has on trans audiences. The impact of this coverage on trans audiences is sought from interviews with self-defining trans people because they are the experts on the ways newspaper reporting affects their lives. The data comes from online interviews and online

focus groups. The questions and prompts for these interviews were influenced by a preliminary analysis of trans newspaper coverage over one year to consider emerging patterns. The time frame also allowed for articles to be in the recent memory of participants. These interviews are considered in the context of literature on trans studies, the media and gender theory.

2   The UK newspaper industry operates in a news environment increasingly located on digital platforms. Additionally, this industry has been subject to scrutiny in recent years over journalistic practice and methods of holding newspapers to account such as the Editors Code of Practice and the Press Complaint Commission (PCC), now the Independent Press Standards Organisation (IPSO). Trans media representation was considered within the Leveson Inquiry into the culture, practice and ethics of the press but academic scholarship on trans media representation remains lacking. In a post-Leveson environment one year after the launch of IPSO it is an opportune moment to consider trans media representation and its relationship with trans audiences. Trans community organisations have produced important work in this area which will be considered - for instance the work of Trans Media Watch (TMW) documented the treatment of trans lives in UK newspapers and submitted evidence to the Leveson Inquiry. TMW and All About Trans work with the newspaper industry to address the problematic coverage of trans subjects. Academic research in this area will allow these important experiences to be considered from a sociological standpoint.

Literature

3   Work has been done on trans lives but experiences of healthcare dominate. There is some notable research outside of health experiences but little focus on the media (Beemyn and Rankin; Girshick; Hines, *TransForming*). Girshick suggests the media "establish[es] acceptable gender behaviours and exaggerate[s] gender roles" (38) which suggests the media has a policing role whilst simultaneously exaggerating gender practices so genders presented as ideals are removed from real experiences. However, not all media representations of trans people have negative consequences. Beemyn and Rankin suggest social media and increased news coverage can benefit young people questioning their gender (Beemyn and Rankin). The increasing representation of trans lives in the media can lead to increased participation in academic research. Hines analysis of research participation found a desire to increase awareness of trans lives and hypothesises this is because "representation of transgender people – especially in popular media and journalism – was associated with misconceptions of 'who' transgender people 'were' and, in turn, to discrimination" (Hines, *TransForming* 200).

4   Despite considerations of some research of the importance of trans media, there has been little specific work on trans media representation or trans audiences' reception. Work that has been done repeatedly found patterns of misrepresentation of trans identities. Oram's book on early twentieth century newspaper coverage of trans people in the UK finds use of shock and the "sensation factor" (Oram 13). In Oram's research to be trans is to be newsworthy but the news sought is evidence of sex assigned at birth. Oram notes significant use of "masquerade" as a descriptor for those that pass in everyday life which is contrasted with the use of "impersonator" for stage performers' crossdressing (4). Later work on trans representation in the media continues to find frequent sensationalism and othering. Raun finds media coverage of trans subjects to be "a tabloidization of transsexuality, often focusing on the artificiality of their gender" (Raun 118). Westbrook's analysis of articles they term "teaching transgender", due to definitions of transgender within them, in America from 1990 to 2005 finds examples of the media suggesting to be a trans man or woman is not to be a real man or woman although this is premised on the notion of gender as a binary with no consideration of other genders (Westbrook 55). This suggests the media represents binary trans people in ways that undermine their gender. Serano's work on trans women in the media suggests these identities are reduced to "two main archetypes: the 'deceptive transsexual' [and] the 'pathetic transsexual'" (Serano, "Skirt" 227). According to Serano, the deceptive transsexual archetype is predominantly reported on as a shock revelation because their "ability to 'pass' is a serious threat to our culture's ideas about gender and sexuality" whereas the pathetic transsexual archetype is presented as "harmless" but "barely a woman" (228). Serano's work finds a focus on trans women and an underrepresentation of trans men in the media that does not reflect population demographics and hypothesises that this misrepresentation is part of the media's sexism. Serano's work includes fictional depictions of trans women and broadcast media but does not consider newspaper representation.

5   These texts do not consider trans audiences so it is necessary for a more sociological analysis of the effects of the presentation of trans identities on trans audiences. Kermode and TMW found the majority of their participants "consider[ed] newspapers to be the biggest source of problematic material" (Kermode and TMW 8). Their 2009-2010 UK survey of transgender people asked "about representations of trans people in the media" (2). Significant numbers focused on inaccuracies [78%] and expressed that the media did not value the thoughts of trans audiences [95%] (5). This research is unique in its consideration of the opinions of trans audiences and finds concerns about "inaccuracy, poor research and inappropriate use of language" (8). This research also links trans media coverage to daily

lives with respondents expressing feeling "frightened, intimidated and unsafe as a result of seeing negative items in the media" (10). This research also offers detailed examples of the ways trans audiences feel "misrepresented" (10) by the media and its use of stereotypes that "exclude people with more complex gender identities" (11) especially those that are nonbinary.

6   This pattern of media misrepresentation is part of a wider social issue of the misrepresentation and misrecognition of trans identities in daily lives. Halberstam offers a discussion of the dangers of misrecognition. Halberstam gives the example of a "trans male" that "lives as a male mostly" who is "recogni[s]ed by his community as a transgendered man in particular" (Halberstam 53). The community offers recognition as a man and recognition as trans but it implies the recognition as a man is conditional upon simultaneous recognition as trans.

7   Conditional recognition can cause further problems for multigendered, genderfluid and nonbinary individuals. Hines's discussion of the *Gender Recognition Act* 2004 (GRA) in the UK highlights that "the medical model of transgender, which influences access to the new framework of rights, remains tied to a gender binary" (Hines, *TransForming* 65) which positions failure to recognise and misrepresentation of nonbinary people at the centre of the UK law that currently offers the most recognition to trans people. While the GRA brings forms of recognition it also articulates further non-recognition and misrecognition for nonbinary identified trans people creating "new patterns of misrecognition" (Hines, *Gender* 67). The shift in types of misrecognition at sites of recognition in trans spaces is noted in relation to trans media representation by TMW's Leveson Inquiry submissions. This specifically defines misgendering in the media as a form of misrepresentation offering an example in which an article on a trans individual "is misgendered throughout" (TMW, "Additional" 17). TMW offers a media specific definition of this: "misgendering – using inappropriate pronouns or placing the person's identity in quotation marks to dismiss the veracity of the subject's identity. This approach, along with repeated references to the transgender person's past, serves to invalidate the individual's experience" (TMW, "British" 11).

8   Misrecognition also constitutes groups as othered and excludes specifically in relation to those that are included. For instance, the inclusion of binary trans representation in the media can work to further exclude nonbinary representation but this representation is often in the form of stereotypes or 'sex swap shock' stories which do not allow trans voices to be heard and creates misrepresentation presented as representation. This reflects Taylor's view

that "misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted and reduced mode of being" (Taylor 75). These reflections are pertinent in relation to the variety of non-recognition, discrimination and violence experienced by trans people (Beemyn and Rankin). Accurate recognition and acknowledgement of trans lives in newspaper coverage and academic scholarship on this issue could reveal new insights into intersectional trans lived experiences. Intersectionality has been important in developing trans studies that is embedded in different lived experiences with conflicting narratives (Hines, "Queerly"). For instance, Serano writes of the experiences of trans women that are "uniquely positioned at the intersection of multiple binary gender-based forms of prejudice: transphobia, cissexism, and misogyny" (Serano, *Whipping* 16). However, this intersectionality is not always central to trans research which can create a homogenised trans subject. Roen finds "perspectives of whiteness echo, largely unacknowledged" and calls for more research (Roen 262).

9   Media reception studies have predominantly focused on audiences of film and television (Staiger) although some have considered newspaper audiences (McNair, *News*, *Sociology*). For McNair, journalists "are active agents in constructing the sociopolitical environment that frames" the news (McNair, *News* 27). Trans audiences have not featured heavily in considerations of newspaper audiences. Coleman and Ross discuss the ways in which the media "privileges the subjective feelings of 'people like us'" which marginalises others through this (Coleman and Ross 134). Staiger considers that "reception research relies on recollections" (Staiger 196). Audience reception research may depend on participants' memories of encountering media even with visual or textual stimuli. In the case of newspaper articles available online the extent to which they had been shared may have an impact on what is recalled. Kermode and TMW note that references to trans people in broadcast media "may be less readily recalled" whereas their research found several newspapers to have a "clear ongoing focus" on trans people (Kermode and TMW 8).

Methodology

10   Influenced by Kermode and TMW I used articles from 4th June 2013 to 4th June 2014 from UK national and local newspapers for an initial preliminary analysis of recent trans media representation to inform questions for interviews. Additionally, in June 2013 the PCC released new guidance on reporting on trans people. National and local newspapers were considered to include newspapers participants read regularly as well as those they may encounter due to online circulation. In order to formulate discussion points and locate

examples for interviews Newsbank and Lexis Nexis searches were conducted for every mention of the word "transgender" in UK newspapers between the timeframe. "Transgender" was chosen because trial searches revealed it to be used more frequently than "trans". All articles were read for relevance and any that did not discuss transgender issues or people were removed. An initial discourse analysis was undertaken in order to highlight patterns, for instance common words used next to or near the word transgender as well as similar stories in different newspapers. This analysis helped to produce interview questions on representation accuracy; changes in representation; the relevance of trans histories; the use of terms such as "sex swap"; misgendering; harassment and discrimination attributable to media reporting; and repeated newspaper coverage of the same individual.

11   The focus of this research is to consider the effects that trans media representation in UK newspapers have on trans people so their voices are central to this research project. Semi-structured online interviews, via instant messaging (IM) software, and online focus groups, conducted on a qualitative focus group platform (Chat Cloud), were conducted with self-identifying trans participants to investigate the effects current articles in UK newspapers about trans people are having on trans audiences. There are number of benefits to conducting research online that were of importance to this project. For instance, trans people that are not out as trans may be reluctant to attend a focus group or meet a researcher in person. Additionally, online research into UK newspaper audiences occurs in the environment in which audience numbers are increasing (Marshall; McNair, News). In the context of trans media representation online methods can increase participation from those restricted by barriers relating to geography, time commitments and those not out. Participant recruitment was achieved through contacting trans specific as well as LGBTI organisations and groups for assistance in recruiting amongst their membership and contacts. Snowball sampling was used through encouraging participants to pass information and contact details on to anyone they thought might wish to participate. Participants self-defined as trans, were over eighteen and from the UK to ensure participants were familiar with UK newspapers.

12   I offered participants options of online focus groups or online interviews to increase participation and accessibility. The solo interview can get more in depth in ways focus groups cannot whereas focus groups can approach questions as a group. This can lead to a variety of answers but if a particular view dominates those that do not share it may feel less able to comment. The online interviewees may feel they have more time to "speak" and edit comments whereas flowing conversations in focus groups may offer less editing time. The numbers included in each focus group were small in order to reduce this possibility and risks

of excluding slower communicators. The small number in each focus group was chosen on the basis of Brüggen and Willems's research comparing online and offline focus groups (Brüggen and Willems). Participants could see if others were typing which reduced the risk of typing over each other or moving too quickly. However, others have noted the lack of nonverbal cues could be problematic (Wimmer and Dominick).

13   The uniqueness of online research involving images of the coverage under discussion also offered unique methods of communication through images that may not have occurred in offline research predominantly using voice. If participants are already using keys and a mouse to type responses then the move to use the same equipment to write and draw on images may feel more natural than picking up a pen to do so in an offline speech-oriented research environment. Poynter discusses the benefits of a shared image viewing and this research allowed participants to share editing too (Poynter). Many of the images of articles and headlines represented the lives of trans people in ways participants disagreed with, such as the terms "sex-swap" and "sex op" so the opportunity to edit these images allowed participants to change the text and alter the image to something they would rather see. The focus group had more instances of image annotation which may be explained by the fact all participants could see and interact with the image simultaneously within Chat Cloud. However, this was not possible with online interviews due to IM software differences.

14   Chat Cloud's text boxes revealed when participants were typing whereas the image function let all participants see lines as they were drawn and letters as they were typed giving more indication of self-censorship that occurs in online methods. This also offers opportunities to watch and read responses. One participant wrote on an image of a newspaper report of the PCC ruling that the newspapers that referred to the trans status of an individual were wrong to do so. This participant highlighted the image's text "have now admitted they were wrong" and wrote underneath "[b]ut still they keep on doing it": a sentiment made more powerful by the fact that the focus group watched the letters appear one by one and witnessed the removal and rewriting of the word "still" that could indicate hesitation or deliberate emphasis [see *Fig.1*]. The emergence of this contribution appeared in real time so it took longer to appear than the instantaneous uploading of a comment making it more noticeable. Participants commented on being able to see these words appearing and in response "thumbs up" and "smiling face" images were used in the textual area of the focus group revealing the fluidity with which textual and visual data can be used to communicate in this environment.

15   The IM interviews featured less fluidity between textual and visual communication methods. However, in contrast to the focus group the IM interviews were frequently more

detailed and lasted longer. Cook warns of rapport building during long conversations leading to "over-disclosure online" (Cook 1336). In order to mitigate this risk participants were sent a copy of the findings to review. This offered opportunities of withdrawing consent, removing disclosures participants felt uncomfortable with, and editing responses to better reflect intention. Additionally this offered validation. For Namaste, "validating the interpretation of research data remains a crucial component of any reflexive sociological practice" (Namaste 266). This also shifted the power dynamic between researcher and researched because participants were considered the experts. Namaste advocates that "transsexuals and transgendered people must be actively involved in the construction of academic knowledge about our bodies and our lives: anything less advocates a position wherein knowledge is produced, in the first and last instance, for the institution of the university" (Namaste 267). Taking this further the research was shared with trans organisations that may benefit. Many of these organisations also sought participants so anonymity was important. The validation request also asked specifically that alongside checking they did not feel misrepresented they could check they had not revealed anything that could identify them. One participant opted for an IM discussion to give feedback which offered a more in-depth consideration of their views.

Fig. 1: Focus Group edited article image

16   Alongside concerns of anonymity there were safety concerns. The internet is not always a safe space for discussing trans identities, which participants made reference to in relation to comments on online articles, and this should be considered when recruiting participants that may associate online discussions of trans media representation with discrimination and transphobia. Atkinson and DePalma's online research into gender and sexuality in young people warned of online environments reproducing inequalities (Atkinson and DePalma). I had to ensure participants could use the focus group to challenge these inequalities in a safe environment without reproducing other inequalities and the use of private messaging helped me to check participants felt included.

17   The self-disclosure by some participants of other aspects of their identity that affected their experience of trans media representation offers interesting insights into online methods for research of this type. Wilson suggests online research participants "escape their own embodied identities and accordingly escape any social inequalities and attitudes relating to various forms of embodiment. Race, gender and physical disability is indiscernible over the Internet" (Wilson 149). While online environments allow participants more control over information disclosure that may have been available in offline research it does not remove participants from their bodies, gender, classes or other identities. Wilson's vision of online environments is not particularly accurate when discussing the transphobia experienced reading articles online. It is important to remember within this research that these individuals are speaking from specific contexts, locations, genders, classes, races and other experiences even though not all of these identities are able to be considered fully in relation to their responses. Many of the participants in this research indicated that they had been featured in newspaper coverage that increased risks of revealing individuals. In order to avoid potential identification, personal details such as ethnicity, age, location, disability and other identifying factors were not taken. The active recruitment of diverse trans populations will be useful for future research and taking participant demographics in this research may have revealed a diverse participant population. Liamputtong's analysis that research on "vulnerable people" with "small numbers" or "specific groups" can risk anonymity was central to the decision not to take participant demographics (Liamputtong 36-7).

18   During the research some participants self-disclosed class identities, disabilities and a variety of sexualities through answering questions but this information has been removed unless relevant to the analysis due to the number of participants featured in the UK media. TMW also found participants were featured as subjects in UK media and helped recruit participants. If participants had been involved in similar previous research their re-researched

status could risk anonymity increasing the need for little demographic data inclusion. When the disclosure of other information could offer opportunities for an intersectional analysis on how these experiences may differ this was undertaken but it was not possible throughout. Although this does potentially risk viewing participants as homogeneous the risks of identification were considered too great. There is scope for future research to investigate how experiences of trans media representation differ in relation to other intersecting identities. Differing experiences along intersectional lines can be useful in a project such as this because of the discourse analysis method that acknowledges competing power relations in the construction of discourse as well as what this means to individual lived realities. For Foucault, discourses "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, *Archaeology* 49) and this is important for an analysis of trans media representation and its effects. Foucault also states that "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but also undermines it and exposes it" (Foucault, *Sexuality* 2 100-1) offering opportunities for trans audiences to challenge the construction of trans identities in the media. Locke's discussion of critical discourse analysis notes "some discourses are more powerful than others and subscribers of non-powerful discourses are therefore marginalized and relatively disempowered" (Locke 37) and this is important to consider in relation to the representation of nonbinary trans identities in newspapers as well as the mode of dissemination of these less powerful discourses such as social media. This view of discourse can be seen in newspaper representations of trans identities as well as their interpretation by trans audiences because of the contexts of constructions of multiple contrasting meanings that trans audiences negotiate.

Findings

19   This section discusses the overarching themes and analysis from the online interviews and focus groups. These themes can be broadly categorised as the social impact of newspapers; transphobia, misgendering and misrepresentation; sensationalism and othering; and resistance.

20   Several respondents expressed the media's social impact was having a detrimental effect. Jake discussed "links between negative media reporting and negative backlash for trans people in the street" (*Jake, IM interview*). Jake suggests the media's negative reporting of trans people can lead to increased instances of violence or harassment. Chris shared a similar sentiment on the links with harassment but added the "media is opening some peoples' eyes and can allow them to understand" (*Chris, IM interview*). Ashley found misgendering "worse when it's done in media, because you would hope newspapers etc. would get facts

right but that very rarely happens" (*Ashley, Focus group*). There is a sense here that there is a responsibility to gender trans individuals correctly when they feature in articles as well as a wider duty to recognise trans identities. Rose states "the media's insistant[sic] use of 'sex change' 'sex swop'[sic] and focus on surgery as 'changing persons sex' means that public perception never gets [a] chance to change" (*Rose, IM interview*). Rose highlights the media's focus on surgery and use of "sex swap" and "sex change" as descriptors for trans people. The "insistent" here implies journalists are reluctant to change terms and this is preventing realistic presentations. Ashley stated they "hate the use of phrases like sex-swap" describing it as an "overly simple way to describe something much more complicated" (*Ashley, Focus group*).

21   Participants did have positive points to make about some articles. Beemyn and Rankin's conclusions on the media's capacity to help young people questioning their gender identity was confirmed by Fiona's childhood experience of newspapers but Paula's story critiques this because her childhood newspaper experiences left her hiding her identity (Beemyn and Rankin). Fiona reflects on how out trans individuals in her "local paper saved [her] life" (*Fiona, Focus group*) as a child. There are benefits for trans people, especially those that are not out or unsure of their identity, to read newspaper articles on other trans people but issues arise when real lives are not represented well. Paula's "earliest exposure to trans people was through the media, and it made [her] feel like a freak, and [she] tried to live as someone [she's] not for 10 years" (*Paula, Focus group*).

22   Even when trans people are interviewed, their voices are not always presented accurately. Participants repeatedly felt failed by trans media representation especially those that had interacted with the media directly. Several participants had featured in articles and they felt their stories had been misrepresented by newspapers to "fit their narrative" (*Paula, Focus group*). Several questioned if there would have been a story if they had not been trans. Kate found one newspaper "worded the article how they felt" (*Kate, Focus group*) ignoring her interview. However, Fiona suggests some "people have told their own stories, and then had them re-reported pretty fairly" (*Fiona, Focus group*). There is a difference between articles that focus on issues directly relating to trans people and those that sensationalise trans lives or mention trans histories unrelated to the story. For instance, an article on an Edinburgh woman's restricted access to a public bathroom that although refers to her as a "sex op" woman does deal with the issue of bathroom restriction and several participants noted this as an important issue deserving of coverage. However, participants were disappointed with coverage focusing on trans histories regardless of relevance such as the woman who was

attacked by a stag in the highlands. There is also a notable difference between those that offer their story to newspapers and those whose stories are picked up by newspapers. For instance, Fiona "lived in dread of tabloids" (*Fiona, Focus group*). Fiona lives "stealth" which presents an additional fear of media coverage. Girshick describes "stealth" as a type of "passing [that] is quite complete" (Girshick 109) and for Namaste passing usually means hiding a trans history (Namaste).

23   Others focused on the medium of print media. "Printed media [is] also more critical and more likely to target trans peoples[sic] personal lives" (*Rose, IM interview*). This suggests newspapers construct stories out of trans identities. Newspapers are considered worse for this behaviour with Kate, Michelle and Paula and Rose all using the term "freak show" to describe this. Newspapers are competing in a news environment increasingly dominated by online media and may be seeking stories more likely to get an audience either through physical sales or website hits. The concept of "clickbait" was mentioned by Rose and Michelle. Hess's research focuses on clickbait stories that are named so because they are unusual and designed to attract attention (Hess). For Tandoc clickbait allows editors to gauge audience reaction to articles based on clicks and views rather than volume or content of comments (Tandoc). However, clicks and views offer no indication of audience opinion. In Tandoc's research into online newspaper environments, site traffic is important therefore controversial or offensive stories are used. Several participants focused on the ways trans stories were used to boost sales and readership through sensationalism. "Sex swap" in headlines and articles were highlighted as examples of this which participants found transphobic and harmful as well as an inaccurate misrepresentation.

24   Eight of nine participants directly referenced that they felt newspapers used "the word transgender/sex-change/sex-swap [because it] sells stories" (*Michelle, Focus group*). Michelle also suggests that if the media "ruin soimebody's[sic] life in the process, then [they] are merely seen as collateral damage" (*Michelle, Focus group*). Media professionals were seen as unconcerned with individuals in stories that may be hurt by inaccuracy or sensationalist reporting nor those that may experience increased transphobia in society. Those that interacted with their local press had a better experience than those that interacted with the national press. Rose, who had experienced both, found local journalists to present trans issues more accurately. Jake considers terms such as "'sex swap' etc. to be transphobic" which is partly because he only sees them "in the depths of the internet when people actually know they are being rude and transphobic" (*Jake IM interview*). This suggests newspapers are either knowingly transphobic or use these terms with little understanding. For others, articles

with comment sections have the most potential for transphobia. Paula said their "heart always sinks whenever there's an article on trans* issues that's open to comments" (*Paula, Focus group*). Several participants called for comment moderation but others focused on the harm articles do. Michelle offered that negative articles can "make somebody who is thinking about coming out and transitioning fall back into shame - which can lead to depression, self-harming, suicide ideation and even suicide itself. By continuing with this negativity it is actually harming people" (*Michelle, Focus group*) which directly links associating negativity with being trans and transphobia to harm.

25   Frequently participants felt othered by newspapers' false representation of their lives and the lives of trans people more broadly. Paula commented on "non-acceptance and othering" (*Paula, Focus group*) which is similar to the findings of Kermode and TMW's research (Kermode and TMW). This othering was located within a conceptual framework of good and bad trans people comparable to the cultural image of the good gay and bad queer that can be invoked in relation to homonormativity. Duggan links homonormativity to capitalism and productive gay members of society that contribute to it (Duggan). For Warner "the image of the good gay is never invoked without its shadow in mind – the bad queer" (Warner 131). This implies that these binary tropes sustain each other but the "good" status is not necessarily sustainable. Rose states positive media coverage is offered to those "who were doing well in society but if they didnt[sic] follow socal[sic] rules or broke the law" (*Rose, IM interview*) they received negative media coverage relating to trans status. Rose suggests in these instances journalists "stop using correct pronouns and gender terms" (*Rose, IM interview*). In this example a socially conforming trans person contributing to society would receive accurate media representation but someone accused of crimes or expressing nonconformity would not. This suggests that appropriate gendering and representation is removed from those that break rules as a form of newspaper punishment.

26   Rose suggests the media's focus on a pattern of offending or mental health issues experienced by some trans people can other trans people but they do not address the ways this pattern affecting some trans people could be exacerbated by a transphobic society and media. For many participants the extent of this othering was dehumanising. Pat expressed a concern that "I think journalists sometimes forget that we're just people" (*Pat, Focus group*). The deliberate sensationalising and othering of trans people because they are trans misrepresents trans lives and represents them as something other than 'normal' or other than human.

27   Misrepresentation in the media was a common theme in the literature (Hines,

TransForming; Serano, "Skirt"; Kermode and TMW; TMW, "Additional"). Serano and Kermode and TMW's research also found a greater focus on trans women and lesser focus on trans men which was considered in this research (Serano, "Skirt"; Kermode and TMW). The trans women in the research made reference to several examples of the misrepresentation and negative portrayals of trans women but did not suggest representation of trans women was more negative or more prevalent although this could be inferred from the volume of examples. Fiona noted "women get as bad comments" in discussion of comments on online articles on trans people and suggested that "both need action" (*Fiona, Focus group*). The "both" in this quotation is the sexism and transphobia found in reader comments on online articles. This linking suggests the lack of focus on negativity specifically towards trans women may be because they experience it as women and as trans women. This discrimination is experienced at the intersections of transphobia and sexism, as noted by Serano and Doan, which cannot be easily separated (Serano, *Whipping*; Doan). Jake felt the insufficient coverage of trans men meant "representation is not particularly reflective of my own experience" (*Jake, IM interview*).

28   The nonbinary research participants felt their lives were excluded completely from media coverage. Ashley stated that they "don't feel newspapers representations reflect [their] life, mainly because they tend not to focus on people who don't fall into gender binaries" (*Ashley, Focus group*) which offers an additional failure of newspaper's coverage of trans identities. There is a freedom from the associated discrimination aimed at binary trans people in newspaper coverage but the complete exclusion further erases nonbinary subjectivities in a UK context that lacks legal recognition of these identities.

29   Several participants noted misgendering in newspapers. Jake said journalists should not be "referring to someone by their birth/previous name" (*Jake, IM interview*). Misgendering was noted as inaccurate and offensive for participants whether reading misgendering of themselves or others. Participants that mentioned they had been misgendered in their personal lives may feel an affinity with those suffering public misgendering in the media. This can make the reading of the misgendering of others more personal. These personal experiences made participants more forgiving of mistakes blamed on lack of understanding but less forgiving of repeated misgendering. Education and training was advocated by many participants and the work of TMW and All About Trans were offered as organisations working well on this. Some of the worst examples of misgendering were offered in relation to the misrepresentation of children.

30   Participants were shown articles featuring the same trans boy over a nine month period. The *Sunday Mirror* wrote of his acceptance onto a puberty blocker trial in June 2013, followed by a story of his struggle for their administration by his GP in September 2013 and a final story of his joy at receiving them in December 2013. In May 2014 the *Mail on Sunday* made reference to the same boy in an article about puberty blockers suggesting they were "sex change drugs" and implying they should not be available to young people. All four articles included photos, quotations and referred to his former name. The coverage of trans young people was criticised by participants for misrepresentation, misgendering and presenting these individuals as too young to know themselves. Participants were concerned about newspapers influencing cisgender parents of questioning trans youth preventing access to treatment or encouraging negative reactions to those coming out. For Ashley much of the coverage of trans children suggests they are "'going through a phase' and imply the child doesn't understand" (*Ashley, Focus group*). Several participants were unhappy with the inaccuracies and negative implications of the 2014 article. Kate was particularly distressed by "'Sex change drugs', like you just pop some pills" (*Kate, Focus group*) because it ignored the reality of access and options. Michelle worried it might "frighten parents into rejecting a child" (*Michelle, Focus group*).

31   This failure to accurately portray trans lives has led to some trans people to tell their stories using social media but they cannot get the same audience numbers as national newspapers. The majority of participants attempted to dispute media articles in some way with most submitting complaints to the PCC. Michelle was the only person to have success. She had "one out of the 7 complaints upheld - but the apology was printed at the bottom of something like page 22 in small type - and as it took months to settle, it became almost irrelevant" (*Michelle, Focus group*). The length of time involved in settling the complaint as well as the insubstantial apology highlight some of the system's failings. Michelle states "5 of the complaints were rejected on the grounds that [she] personally wasn't the person affected by the story" (*Michelle, Focus group*) to which Paula responded "even though you are affected by the story" (*Paula, Focus group*). Here Paula and Michelle are referencing the rules about complaining to the PCC on the grounds of personal discrimination. Problems arise because this complaints body does not acknowledge discriminatory and transphobic articles impact on trans people regardless of whether they are directly mentioned.

32   For others the success of complaints was linked to access to legal services which goes against the advice of the PCC/IPSO. Participants thought the academic that had reference to her trans status removed from articles about her due to a PCC ruling was due to "efficient

representation" (*Fiona, Focus group*). This individual's experiences did not match participants' experiences that failed to have complaints upheld. In June 2013 the PCC issued new editorial guidance on the reporting of transgender people. This guidance calls for consideration over language and advises "taking care to ensure that it is not pejorative or discriminatory" (PCC 1). Additionally it advises considering if the article would be newsworthy if individuals mentioned were not transgender and the relevance of trans status. This guidance specifically requests journalists "refer to an individual using the pronouns that they use to describe themselves" (PCC 1). It also promotes accuracy in relation to costs of surgery, numbers of trans people, and the dangers of inaccurate representation of treatments. Much of the advice in this guidance has not been successfully executed and several participants noted the prevalence of these failures. Furthermore, trans audiences negatively affected by failures of newspaper representation of trans people are further failed by the complaints they have submitted. The guidance contains many of the changes participants wished to see but without adequate enforcing or changes to the complaints procedure it remains ineffective.

33   Despite these failings the majority of participants expressed that media coverage is improving. For Kate "things are getting better slowly" and she thinks this is because of trans people willing to tell stories. Trans people are able to construct a "reverse discourse" on trans representation in the media (Foucault, *Sexuality* 1 101). Paris Lees and Juliet Jacques were suggested as examples of people "willing to tell the media how it is" (*Kate, Focus group*). Others such as Paula, Michelle and Rose praised the work of TMW and All About Trans in their work to challenge and improve the media.

Conclusion

34   The aims of this paper were to critically address trans media representation in the UK and its impact on trans audiences. The findings addressed the relevance of the literature to the findings of the focus groups and interviews with misrepresentation, sensationalism and othering noted by Hines, Serano, Kermode and TMW, Oram, Raun and Westbrook to be the most prevalent of the literature's findings in the participants' views (Hines, *TransForming*; Serano, "Skirt"; Kermode and TMW; TMW, "Additional"; Raun; Westbrook). Theories of misrecognition are also helpful for addressing the findings (Taylor). Participants experienced this misrecognition differently along lines of binary and nonbinary genders and nonbinary participants experienced nonrecognition rather than distorted recognition in the media.

35   For Girshick the media constructed acceptable and exaggerated gendered behaviours as a form of policing gender and the qualitative findings took this idea further suggesting the media punished gender transgressors with inaccurate reporting while invoking cultural tropes of the good trans person and the bad queer (Girshick; Warner). The most common form of misrecognition noted was misgendering. Former names and identities were repeatedly used in newspaper articles in the presentation of trans subjects and participants found no need for such revelations. Future newspaper coverage should consider the relevance of these life histories.

36   Several participants advocated improving education and understanding within the media but for others it was already provided by trans organisations, such as TMW, All About Trans, and the PCC's transgender reporting guidelines so flouting of this guidance was viewed as deliberate transphobia in instances of repeated misrepresentation (TMW, "British"; PCC). While some participants made links between media coverage and street harassment other participants focused on articles constituting harm through inaccuracy and transphobia. Negative news articles as well as articles that focused on trans histories were highlighted by several participants as particularly troubling. Participants were also disappointed by inaccurate reporting from misgendering to the use of terms like "sex change" and inaccurate information on medical costs. Inaccurate coverage of medical treatment was referred to as dangerous by participants, especially when discussed in relation to trans youth whose access to treatments may be conditional upon others' consent. When these repeated inaccuracies and harmful terms are viewed together over the span of a year a pattern emerges that shows the media continue to ignore guidelines on reporting on trans lives and this reporting is consistently damaging to trans audiences due to individual content and the wider impact this can have influencing public perceptions.

37   The majority of participants had complained about newspaper coverage and were dissatisfied with their lack of success and the inability to complain about discrimination against groups. Previous research has also noted stealth individuals outed by newspapers may be concerned complaints will prolong unwanted media attention (Kermode and TMW). A year after IPSO replaced the PCC newspapers continue to flaunt the trans reporting guidelines and complaints procedures continue to fail trans audiences. IPSO and newspapers may learn from this research that their output is harming trans audiences and the media industry is not providing adequate opportunities to challenge this.

38There is a failure of this research to adequately account for the intersecting identities that influence the experiences of trans media representation amongst participants. The reasons for

not taking demographics on participants were in the best interests of preserving anonymity but it does limit the intersectional analysis and therefore the scope of the findings. Future work must investigate experiences of class, race and sexuality in relation to trans media representation and the ways these intersecting experiences shift these experiences to avoid constructing the homogenised trans subject Roen critiques (Roen). It is an important time for work on trans media representation and future research should consider this area in the context of changing news environments and spaces for trans voices to emerge in online environments such as social media. Future research may wish to compare traditional newspaper coverage with responses and alternative coverage of the same issues in blogs and social media written by trans individuals. There is scope for further research in this area and it is hoped this research will be a useful addition to the field and helpful evidence for trans and LGBTI activists working in this area.

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