

Who is Brianna Ghey?

A Case Study of the Divergent Discursive Constructions of Trans Identity in the Local, National and LGBTQ+ Press

Louise Elizabeth Hallman

Supervisor: Prof. João Florêncio, Gender Studies, LiU

Master's Programme
Gender Studies – Intersectionality and Change

Master's thesis 15 ECTS credits
ISRN: LIU-TEMA G/GSIC3-A-24/020-SE

Acknowledgements

This thesis owes its existence to several people, to whom I am extremely grateful.

Firstly, thank you to the more than 400 journalists in the local, national and LGBTQ+ press who believed Brianna's story was newsworthy. By providing me with this rich corpus, they made visible not only the horrific attack Brianna Ghey suffered and the violence faced by trans women and youth, but more importantly, many of them presented a young trans woman who was deeply loved by her family and community. We need more positive trans visibility, especially in the face of tragedy. Collectively, we must strive to report on trans lives respectfully and holistically, presenting people as whole human beings, not just as tragic headlines.

I am also grateful to my unofficial sources: my still-resident Warringtonians—Simon Hallman, Helen Rigby and Izzie Preston—who were always willing to answer my group chat messages and provide additional local context to this story not always readily available in the press; my late-night translators, Claudia Duczowska, Max Niedl and Katharina Schwarz; and my willing but ultimately unsuccessful provider of LexisNexus access, Rachel Marsh (thanks for trying!).

This thesis has been written during a period of personal difficulty and upheaval. I am especially thankful to those who provided me with the emotional support I so greatly needed—particularly my “coven”, Faye Hobson and Jennifer Dunn and parents, Phil and Bernie Hallman—as well as those who generously opened their home to provide me with a stable space to stay and write. To Mum and David, Faye, Livia Mikulec, Christine Peintner, and the many others who extended offers, even if ultimately unneeded: thank you, herzlichen Dank and arigatō.

Thank you to my Salzburg writing group for your early input, which helped me clarify exactly what this thesis aimed to achieve, especially Devon Anderson, who has been a constant—and much-needed *local*—source of support not only with this thesis but throughout my grad school journey. I hope that continues long after I leave Austria to continue my grad school journey elsewhere. Thank you also to the Baladria Summer School in Digital Humanities, especially Daniel Ocic Ihrmark. Without your encouragement, I would have surrendered to my coding frustrations long before discovering the delightful dopamine rush that comes with every successfully executed run. And thank you to Lucia Ricci (and Tita) for sharing the drive down to Zadar and back.

Finally, thank you to Linköping. To my classmates: I will dearly miss our semesterly nerdfests but long live the Slack channel and WhatsApp group. To my professors, especially Edyta Just, Marietta Radomska and Madina Tlostanova: thank you for providing a model of queer, feminist, decolonial academia I did not know possible from my earlier studies and to which I now aspire.

And last but by no means least: thank you to João Florêncio. I asked for you to be my thesis supervisor because I wanted to be challenged; thank you for not only doing that (kindly) but also dispelling my imposter syndrome and convincing me I can do “real” research. I will be reaching out for those PhD references and I hope our paths cross in-person again sometime soon.

In memory of Brianna Ghey (2006-2023):

“beautiful, witty and hilarious...strong, fearless and one of a kind”

Abstract

On February 11, 2023, 16-year-old Brianna Ghey was stabbed in a park in broad daylight in an affluent village on the outskirts of Warrington, northwest England. The local, national and transnational niche LGBTQ+ press all covered Brianna's death—but who was she? And to whom?

Rooted in gender and news discourse studies, underpinned by queer, trans and assemblage theories and previous research on trans media representation, crime reporting, news values, and (counter)publics, and through the application of queer corpus linguistics and feminist critical discourse analyses, this thesis examines how Brianna Ghey was discursively constructed—from a female dead body to a schoolgirl to a trans teenager, as well as a murder case and supposed hate-crime victim—in different publications, for different publics.

The manually compiled corpus—the Brianna Ghey Corpus, a.k.a. BGCOR—comprises 1253 news articles related to Brianna Ghey published online in the two local Warrington newspapers, 11 UK national papers and 20 LGBTQ+ news sites over the year from her murder to the first anniversary of her death, covering the arrest, trial and sentencing of her teenaged murderers, as well as her funeral, vigils and entry into the wider public discourse.

The study reveals three distinct discursive constructions of Brianna's identity: to the local press, she is a local schoolgirl; to the national press, she is a transgender teenager; and to the niche transnational LGBTQ+ press, Brianna is a trans teenage girl. These results contribute to a growing understanding of the nuance of language used in the British and LGBTQ+ press to construct trans identities.

Keywords

queer theory, feminist critical discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, trans studies, news discourse, LGBTQ+ representation

Contents

1. Introduction	1
1.1. Rationale for this research project	2
1.2. Aims for this thesis	3
1.3. Research questions	5
2. Brianna is... an object of reporting and research	6
2.1. Brianna Ghey: A timeline	6
2.2. Literature review	9
2.3. Methodology	10
2.4. Ethical considerations: Research and journalistic ethics of care	11
3. Brianna was... a local schoolgirl, brutally murdered	13
3.1. The role of the local press and its geosocial public	13
3.2. Materials: The <i>Warrington Guardian</i> and <i>Warrington Worldwide</i>	13
3.3. Findings	14
3.4. Discussion	17
4. Brianna is... a transgender teenager, part of national discourse(s)	21
4.1. The role of the national press and its diverse publics	21
4.2. Materials: 11 UK national newspapers from across the political spectrum	21
4.3. Findings	22
4.4. Discussion	27
5. Brianna is... a trans teenage girl, mourned by a transnational community	32
5.1. The role of the niche LGBTQ+ press and its counterpublic	32
5.2. Materials: 20 publications from three continents	32
5.3. Findings	34
5.4. Discussion	37
6. Conclusion: Brianna was ...?	42
6.1. Addressing the research questions	42
6.2. Limitations	45
6.3. Further research	46
6.4. Final thoughts	46
7. Bibliography	48
8. Appendices	56
A. Brianna Ghey Corpus (BGCOR)	56
B. Python-led process	60

Tables and Images

Image 1.1: First headline published in <i>The Sun</i> to include Brianna’s trans identity	1
Table 2.1: Number of articles per period, by level	8
Table 3.1: Number of articles related to Brianna Ghey published in the local press across periods 1 to 10	14
Table 3.2: Percentages and percentage-point comparisons for the local press across periods 1 to 10	14
Table 3.3: Use of Brianna vs. Brianna Ghey in the local subcorpus	14
Table 3.4: Terms from Baker and Zottola’s studies present in the local subcorpus	15
Table 3.5: Terms absent from articles published after Brianna’s identification in the local subcorpus	15
Table 3.6: Predicative and attributive adjectives relating to Brianna’s gender and age in the local subcorpus	15
Table 3.7: Terms relating to Brianna’s family relations, deadname and transition in the local subcorpus	16
Table 3.8: Top 50 collocates (nouns, verbs and adjectives) in the local subcorpus	16
Table 3.9: Top 50 adjective collocates with Brianna in the local subcorpus	17
Table 4.1: List of publications included in the national subcorpus, their total number of articles, additional metadata tags and readership demographics	22
Table 4.2: Number of articles related to Brianna Ghey published in the national press across periods 1 to 10	22
Table 4.3: Percentages and percentage-point comparisons for the national press across periods 1 to 10	23
Table 4.4: Percentage breakdown of national coverage by political leanings across periods 1 to 10	23
Table 4.5: Use of Brianna vs. Brianna Ghey in the national subcorpora	23
Table 4.6: Terms from Baker and Zottola’s studies present in the national subcorpora	24
Table 4.7: Terms absent from articles published after Brianna’s identification in the national subcorpora	24
Table 4.8: Predicative and attributive adjectives relating to Brianna’s gender and age in the national subcorpora	24
Table 4.9: Terms relating to Brianna’s family relations, deadname and transition in the national subcorpora	25
Table 4.10: Top 50 collocates (nouns, verbs and adjectives) with Brianna in the national subcorpora	25
Table 4.11: Top 50 adjective collocates with Brianna in the national subcorpora	26
Table 5.1: List of publications included in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus and their additional metadata tags and the communities they serve according to their websites	33
Table 5.2: Number of articles related to Brianna Ghey published in the LGBTQ+ press across periods 1 to 10	34
Table 5.3: Percentages and percentage-point comparisons for the LGBTQ+ press across periods 1 to 10	34
Table 5.4: Use of Brianna vs. Brianna Ghey in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora	35
Table 5.5: Terms from Baker and Zottola’s studies present in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora	35
Table 5.6: Terms absent from articles published after Brianna’s identification in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus	35
Table 5.7: Predicative and attributive adjectives relating to Brianna’s gender and age in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora	36
Table 5.8: Terms relating to Brianna’s family relations, deadname and transition in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora	36
Table 5.9: Top 50 collocates (nouns, verbs and adjectives) with Brianna in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus	37
Table 5.10: Top 50 adjective collocates with Brianna in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus	37
Table 8.1: Publications included in the study and their websites	56
Table 8.2: List of all publications and metadata tags	58
Table 8.3: List of period metadata tags and relevant dates	59

1. Introduction

On February 11, 2023, the independent local news site *Warrington Worldwide* broke the news:

Police confirm death of female found with serious injuries at Culcheth Linear Park
[...]

A Cheshire Police spokesperson said: “At 3.13pm today, Saturday 11 February, police were called to Culcheth Linear Park, Warrington, following reports of a female with serious injuries.

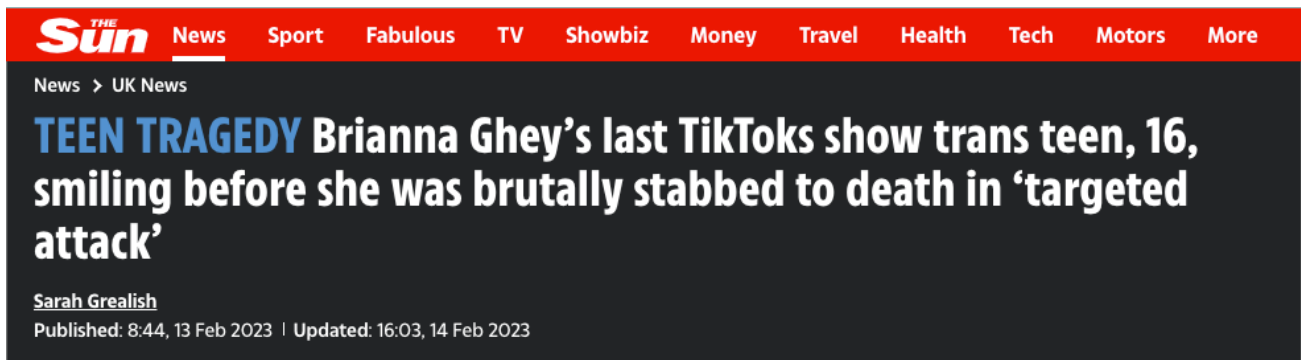
“Sadly, the female was pronounced dead at the scene. A scene is currently in place and enquiries are continuing to establish the circumstances surrounding her death.”

(Skentelbery, 2023)

Later that night, the national press picked up the story and identified the victim as a teenage girl—“Teenage girl dies after being found badly injured in Cheshire parkland” (Haf & Haigh, 2023)—and, by the following day, the victim was named as 16-year-old Brianna Ghey. By the time her 15-year-old murderers were sentenced less than one year later, Brianna—the mononym by which she was almost exclusively called—had become a fixture not only in the local and national British press but also internationally, featuring in the *New York Times* and the *Sydney Morning Herald*, as well as in numerous transnational news sites serving the LGBTQ+ community.¹

News stories from Warrington, my hometown in northwest England, do not usually generate such widespread coverage.² Brianna’s case could be deemed newsworthy due to the violent nature of the crime (she was stabbed 28 times), its time (mid-afternoon), and its location (a park in an affluent suburb), as well as her young age—but it was her gender that garnered the most attention:

Image 1.1: First headline published in *The Sun* to include Brianna’s trans identity



Brianna went from being reported as an unidentified dead “female” to a named “schoolgirl” and deadnamed “trans teen” in a matter of days.³ How her trans identity was reported varied significantly between newspapers and at different stages of the investigation, with its prioritisation within the news

¹ LGBTQ+ is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer/questioning, with the “+” indicating this is a term inclusive of all non-cisheteronormative sexual/romantic orientations and gender identities. The “+” is dropped in this thesis when hyphenated for ease of reading.

² Warrington is home to c.211,000 people; Culcheth has a population of c.11,500 and is one of the wealthiest suburbs of Warrington (Ward Profile 2022: Culcheth, Glazebury and Croft, 2022).

³ Deadnaming is the practice of using a trans person’s previous name; it is widely considered disrespectful by the trans community.

story shifting throughout. Speculation of the cisgender killers' motives and the early reporting of the murder as a possible hate crime led to vigils for Brianna across the globe and heartfelt and fearful comment pieces and blogs in the LGBTQ+ online space about the upward trend of transphobic violence in the UK. Meanwhile, elsewhere in the press, Brianna's case became a means of political points scoring and an indication of where the publication stands in the ongoing "culture war" in the country.

Reporting on "trans issues" in the British national press increased by over 400% between 2009 and 2019 (IPSO, 2020). That period included news stories on the introduction of the UK's Equality Act (2010); the suicide of schoolteacher Lucy Meadows; the stag-gorging of scientist Kate Stone; the murder of Naomi Hersi; the comings-out of whistleblower Chelsea Manning and former decathlete Caitlin Jenner; the rise to prominence of actress Laverne Cox; the conviction of sex offender Karen White; and the leak of a report into treatment offered to teenagers at the Tavistock Centre's gender identity development service.⁴ Since the IPSO report was published, reporting on trans issues has continued apace, including the abandoned 2020 update of the Gender Recognition Act (2004); the 2021 Employment Appeal Tribunal decision to protect "gender critical beliefs" under the Equality Act (2010); the 2022 decisions to close Tavistock and exclude trans people from protection under the Conversion Therapy (Prohibition) Bill; the 2023 block by the UK government of the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill; and the 2024 Cass Review.⁵ As Capuzza (2019) makes clear in her review of US news coverage of trans lives, the news media plays a crucial role in shaping dominant social narratives about identity and how news audiences process these narratives; the same is true for the UK media. Similarly to the cases of Gwen Araujo and Matt Shepard in the US (Barker-Plummer, 2013) and Lucy Meadows in the UK (Gupta, 2019), the extensive media coverage of Brianna's case offers a critical insight into the changing news narratives surrounding trans women (and children in particular) in the UK—and how audiences are making sense of these narratives.

1.1. Rationale for this research project

This story broke for me not via the local, national or LGBTQ+ press but via the teenage daughter of a childhood friend; growing up as a closeted queer teenager in Warrington, this news story thus immediately felt close to home, despite not living in the town for over 20 years. Although I now live in Austria and study in Sweden, I am still a regular reader of the *Warrington Guardian*; my journalistic training and professional communications work also keep me engaged with a broad selection of British newspapers. My personal and professional interests lead me to consume several US and UK-based LGBTQ+ news sites regularly. Thus, through my wide contemporaneous reading, I quickly recognised the

⁴ Lucy Meadows was a schoolteacher whose coming out as trans in a school newsletter garnered national coverage; the coroner's report into her death by suicide in 2013 condemned the intrusive and transphobic press coverage, especially from the *Daily Mail*. Kate Stone is a scientist who was gored by a stag on a hike; the national press highlighted her trans identity in their coverage of the goring, which was deemed in contravention of the Press Complaints Committee's Editors Code in 2014. Naomi Hersi was a trans woman murdered in 2018; she was repeatedly misgendered by her murderer in his trial and by the right-wing popular press throughout. Karen White is a violent sex offender who was incarcerated in a women's prison, later convicted for assaulting a cis female prisoner and accused by both the judiciary and press of exploiting her trans identity to gain access to vulnerable women.

⁵ Commissioned by the UK's National Health Service, the Cass Review investigated the provision of gender-affirming health care for children and young people in the UK, resulting in the ban on puberty blockers. It faced a wide variety of praise and criticism for its methodology, findings and weaponisation.

divergence in how these three different “levels” of reporting—the local, Warrington-based press, the national (and politically diverse) UK-wide press, and the transnational LGBTQ-focused niche press—were presenting Brianna’s gender identity, sparking my interest in the case as a research project.

Just as Baker (2014) and Mills (1998) note that sexist language has now become much more “complex, sophisticated and ambiguous and thus more difficult to identify”, so too has overtly transphobic language in the UK press. The press coverage of Brianna’s story was not as openly transphobic as cases such as Lucy Meadows, Kate Stone or Naomi Hersi, partly due to the revision of editorial standards following these cases and others.⁶ Instead, there are more subtle nuances in how the various publications varyingly reaffirmed, delegitimised or ignored Brianna’s gender identity. Efforts have been made to track the changes in language used to discuss trans identities—particularly of trans women—but these studies are either now outdated (e.g., Baker, 2014a; Gupta, 2019; Zottola, 2021), limited in sample size (e.g., Bolzern et al., 2019; Montiel-McCann, 2023), or not concerned with the UK (e.g., Åkerlund, 2019; Barker-Plummer, 2013; Billard, 2016; Capuzza, 2015, 2019; Schotel, 2023).

Identity—trans or otherwise—is not innate, inherent or inert. Identities are constructed—socially and discursively, i.e., by people and through language—and so reflect and reinforce social power structures (Butler, 1990, 1993). Identities can be applied—implicitly and explicitly—to a minority population by a majority as means of othering and marginalisation; they can also be adopted by a marginalised minority as a means of mobilising resistance to power (Foucault, 1982). These identities, through the language used to construct them, can shift overtime—shifting too, the understanding of the majority and social acceptability of a minority (Foucault, 1966, 1979).

Thus, examining how Brianna’s gender identity was presented and discussed in these three levels of reporting provides a valuable case study to understand how trans identity can be discursively constructed by different actors with varying positionalities to power for different audiences—minority and majoritarian—and for differing purposes, and how this discourse changes over time.

1.2. Aims for this thesis

To conduct a comparative study of how Brianna’s identity is discursively constructed—by the officially apolitical local press for its geographically and socially connected readers; by the politically diverse national UK press for their assumed politically aligned (and implied cisheteronormative) readership; and by a niche online transnational press for its geographically dispersed and presumed LGBTQ+ (or allied) audience—this thesis combines the methods of queer corpus linguistics (CL) and feminist critical discourse analysis (F/CDA), informed by a theoretical framework of news discourse, values and publics, queer theory and trans studies.

The language used through the grammatical and lexical choices made by news reporters, columnists and their editors constructs and reflects values and ideologies that are shared to (and by) the

⁶ The PCC was replaced with IPSO after the wide-ranging Leveson Report into press standards in general, but included input from trans advocacy groups and produced recommendations on the treatment of trans people, in addition to wider issues. IPSO now regulates most of the UK national press (excluding *The Guardian* and *The Independent*) and many local papers (including the *Warrington Guardian*). It offers guidance on reporting on sex and gender identity, the first line of which states “The press should not make pejorative or prejudicial reference to an individual’s sex or gender identity” (IPSO, 2023). However, IPSO’s Editors’ Code, to which all regulated press is expected to adhere, does not offer guidance on specific terminology to be used or avoided.

publics—or counterpublics—the newspapers constitute through their interpellation (Litosseliti, 2014; van Dijk, 1988; Warner, 2002), e.g., the conservative (and gender-critical) use of “transgender *teenager*” versus the more progressive (and gender-affirming) use of “transgender *girl*”, versus the inclusive (and gender-queer) use “*trans girl*”, versus the indifferent (and potentially transgender-invisibilising) use of just “schoolgirl”.

Which stories are published and enter the news discourse is determined in part by the publications’ *news values*, e.g., Brianna’s *proximity* to her fellow Warringtonians makes her newsworthy to the local press (Bednarek & Caple, 2017); the *novelty* of a trans schoolgirl’s murder by two other (implied cisgender) teenagers and the *newspapers’ agenda* makes Brianna worthy of extensive news coverage in various national publications (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O’Neill, 2001); and the *impact* of her possibly transphobic murder on the LGBTQ+ community drives the coverage in the niche transnational LGBTQ+ press (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). The local, national and niche news media also serve different *purposes* for their differing (counter)publics, whether that is serving a specific “geosocial” community in a manner that projects legitimacy and retains trust (Gulyas & Hess, 2024; Kim et al., 2024; R. Matthews & Hodgson, 2023), “providing knowledge and understanding of public issues” and shaping public opinion as a “means to feed this back to the political establishment” (Ward & Anderson, 2016), or countering the “othering” that happens elsewhere in the press and telling stories otherwise un-, under- or mis-reported (Douglas & Phillips, 2022). Comparing the news discourse in the three different levels of press thus exposes the divergence in their values and their (counter)publics—and offers insights into how these factors influence that discourse.

The manually curated corpus comprises 1253 articles on the case in a 12-month period: from Brianna’s murder in February 2023 to the anniversary vigils held in February 2024 and encompassing the trial, conviction and sentencing of her murderers. Compiling a corpus of this size for *quantitative* analysis of the language use through CL expands the evidence base to reach more robust conclusions than those afforded by smaller samples, albeit the data analysis remains subjective to the researcher (Baker, 2014c; Zottola, 2021). As a queer-identifying feminist researcher with journalistic training decoding this corpus from an often oppositional position to many of these publications, I am likely to interpret the data differently to a more heteronormative researcher who shares the publications’ dominant positions (S. Hall, 1980) (though as a cisgender researcher, perhaps not with the level of nuance as possessed by a trans linguist (Zimman, 2020; Zottola, 2021)). Applying queer theory to CL destabilises and enables the deconstruction of Brianna’s trans identity, rather than assuming Brianna’s trans identity to be a stable category for inquiry (Leap, 2015; Yep, 2014).

F/CDA provides a *qualitative* analysis of my corpus, supplementing the quantitative CL results by examining the dialectal relationship between discourse and society, and the power relations at play therein (Fairclough, 1993, 1995; Lazar, 2005). With its focus on deconstructing social norms and privileging of antinormativity, queer theory can be contentious when discussing trans identities (Konnelly, 2021). This thesis thus combines the discursive underpinnings of queer theory with a transing approach to communications studies (Yep et al., 2020). Rooted in the work of trans scholars Stryker et al. (2008), transing this study applies not only the lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991) to

examine how other aspects of Brianna's identity (such as her race (white), class (middle), geographic location (UK), and most crucially, her age (16 years old)) are represented in relation to her gender identity, but also Deleuze & Guattari's (1987) theory of assemblage to consider the power relations that determine how these various aspects of her identity are constructed by different publications for their differing and overlapping audiences (Hipfl, 2018; Nail, 2017).

1.3. Research questions

Through this thesis, I seek to understand how Brianna Ghey is constructed in the news discourse produced through the press coverage of her murder and the subsequent trial and sentencing of her murderers, to assess the importance of her trans identity in the case's reporting in relation to her other intersecting identities and how this varies between publications. Specifically, I will seek to answer:

- 1) How is Brianna textually described by various types of press?
 - a. And how does this differ between the local, national and transnational niche LGBTQ+ press?
 - b. And what role do the presumed publics have in creating this difference?
- 2) How does the discursive construction of Brianna's identity change through the course of the news events, i.e., from the discovery of her body to the sentencing of her killers and her anniversary?

2. Brianna is... an object of reporting and research

2.1. Brianna Ghey: A timeline

For the diachronic aspect of this study, I identified 10 distinct periods in the reporting of Brianna Ghey's murder over the one-year timeframe:

Period 1: Discovery of victim

On Saturday, February 11, 2023, at approximately 3pm, dogwalkers found someone bleeding heavily in Linear Park, in Culcheth, a quiet village on the outskirts of Warrington. Shortly before 7pm, independent local magazine and news site, *Warrington Worldwide*, broke the story on its website with the headline: "Police confirm death of female found with serious injuries at Culcheth Linear Park"; the more widely read local paper, the *Warrington Guardian*, published their story half an hour later: "Woman found dead after police called to Culcheth Linear Park". Stories in the national press followed later that night with the popular tabloid newspapers *The Sun* and the *Daily Mail* publishing articles headlined: "Teenage girl found dead from serious injuries in Culcheth Linear Park in Warrington as police launch urgent appeal" and "Teenage girl dies after being found badly injured in Cheshire parkland" respectively.

Period 2: Identification of Brianna Ghey and arrests of suspects

On Sunday, February 12, the police released the victim's identity: Brianna Ghey, "a 16-year-old girl". They also issued an appeal for information about her suspected killers and a request for "people not to speculate". Later that same day, two teenagers were arrested on suspicion of murder and by late evening, both popular and quality (right-leaning) newspapers were including Brianna's trans identity in their news stories. Due to their age, the two suspects were identified only as a boy and girl, both 15 years old. Their cisgender identity was not included in any reports in any of the three levels. The police called the stabbing "a targeted attack against Brianna" but also added: "At this time, there is no evidence to suggest that the circumstances surrounding Brianna's death are hate related."

By Monday, February 13, news of Brianna's death—and her transgender identity—was being carried in both local newspapers, every UK-wide national newspaper (bar the *Daily Star*), as well as LGBTQ-focused websites in the UK and beyond. Statements from her family, coupled with the publications' own reporting—speaking to her friends, teachers and others in the community, as well as searching her social media accounts, particularly TikTok—resulted in news reports describing Brianna in more detail; this included some outlets publishing her deadname. Meanwhile, candlelit vigils were held in cities in the UK and beyond.

Period 3: Charging of suspects

On Wednesday, February 15, the two teenage suspects were formally charged with Brianna's murder. Unlike other countries such as the US, once charged, UK law limits the reporting that can be published about the suspects while they are awaiting trial (Contempt of Court Act, 1981). Thus the reporting from British press—both local and national—between February 16 and November 27 (the first day of the trial) shifted away from details about the crime so as not to prejudice or impede the upcoming trial, lest they be held in contempt of court, and simply outlined the charges brought against the two teenaged suspects.

Period 4: Pre-trial investigations

However, Brianna remained in the press; stories about her funeral, the various vigils and remembrance events held relating to her death, dates for the upcoming trial and inquest, and a fundraising campaign launched by the Ghey family for a youth mindfulness charity all garnered coverage. As she had not been issued a gender recognition certificate before her death, there was also press and parliamentary debate about how Brianna should and would be gendered on her death certificate. Brianna also became part of the wider discourse about the rights and treatment of trans women and youth in the UK during this period.

Period 5: Trial of Girl X and Boy Y

On Monday, November 27, the two defendants—now identified as “Girl X” and “Boy Y”—went on trial for the murder of Brianna Ghey. Both local papers, all national newspapers (bar the *Daily Star* and *Morning Star*), and several LGBTQ-focused newspapers from the UK, USA, Germany and Ireland all reported on the three-week trial, with the *Warrington Guardian*, the *Daily Mail*, *The Independent* and the *Daily Mirror* all reporting daily from Manchester Crown Court. Reporting from the trial revealed details about the stabbing as well as the behaviour and actions of Girl X and Boy Y leading up to the murder and since their arrest. The jury were instructed on Brianna’s gender, Girl X’s ADHD and autism, and Boy Y’s autism and selective mutism that he had developed since his arrest.⁷

Girl X was revealed to have befriended Brianna through a special teaching unit at their high school.⁸ Girl X was described as having been “obsessed” with Brianna as well as fascinated with murder and torture. Boy Y meanwhile did not know Brianna prior to the attack, only Girl X, sharing her interest in murdering someone. In their various text messages presented as evidence in court, Girl X and Boy Y discussed Brianna’s genitals and Girl X’s possible infatuation with Brianna, with Boy Y calling Brianna “it” and a “tranny” and expressing interest in seeing “if it will scream like a man or a girl”. Girl X lured Brianna to Culcheth Linear Park to meet her and Boy Y.⁹ Brianna was stabbed 28 times. She was found by dog walkers and Girl X and Boy Y were seen fleeing the scene. They were quickly identified having been captured on CCTV footage arriving at the park with Brianna and leaving without her.

Period 6: Verdict in murder of Brianna Ghey

Both Girl X and Boy Y pleaded innocent and accused the other of stabbing Brianna. The weapon was identified as belonging to Boy Y but the text messages showed Girl X had initiated the plan. On Wednesday, December 20 both were found guilty of the murder of Brianna Ghey.

⁷ Deanna Heer KC for the prosecution: “By the time of these events, although [Brianna’s deadname] had not undergone gender reassignment surgery, she was living, dressing and referring to herself as a female. During the course of this trial, we will refer to her using the female pronoun.”

⁸ Brianna was later reported in the unit due to her anxiety while Girl X was following an individualised curriculum as part of her managed transfer from another high school following a drug spiking incident.

⁹ They had previously aborted an attempt to lynch another classmate and unsuccessfully attempted to poison Brianna with an overdose of ibuprofen designed to make it look like Brianna had died by suicide.

Period 7: Pre-sentencing

After the guilty verdicts, reporting shifted to the Ghey family’s response and debate about whether Girl X and Boy Y should be identified at their upcoming sentencing.

Period 8: Sentencing and identification Scarlett Jenkinson and Eddie Ratcliffe

On February 2, 2024, Girl X and Boy Y were sentenced to life and reporting restrictions on their identities were lifted by the judge, revealing their names: Scarlett Jenkinson and Eddie Ratcliffe. National reporting focused on their backgrounds and their families, particularly Jenkinson’s, while commentary from opinion columnists drew parallels between this case and that of other notorious “child killers”. Brianna’s long-estranged parents issued independent statements, which were widely covered by the local, national and LGBTQ-focused press.

Period 9: Post-sentencing

On February 7, 2024, while the story was still prominent in the national press, then-prime minister, Rishi Sunak, made a joke in the House of Commons about the then-leader of the opposition Keir Starmer’s political U-turns such as changing his position on “defining a woman”. Starmer responded by pointing out the poor taste and timing of the joke, especially in the presence of Esther Ghey who was visiting the Houses of Parliament that day. The resulting political outcry—the Conservatives accusing Starmer of political points scoring and Labour deriding Sunak’s remarks as transphobic—was reported and commented on in the local, national and LGBTQ-focused press across the political spectrum.

Period 10: Anniversary of Brianna Ghey’s murder

On February 11, 2024, an anniversary vigil was held in Warrington and attended by Esther Ghey, who gave an emotional tribute to her daughter. The local press liveblogged the event, with the nationals *Daily Mail*, *i*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph* also reporting on the anniversary vigil. LGBTQ-focused outlet *PinkNews* did not report on the anniversary until February 12, with some other LGBTQ+ outlets following later in the week.

Table 2.1: Number of articles per period, by level

Period	Dates	Local	National	LGBTQ+	Total
1 Discovery of the body	Feb 11, 2023	5	6	0	11
2 Identification / Arrests (incl. Vigils)	Feb 12 to Feb 14, 2023 (Feb 14, 2023)	24 (9)	56 (26)	26 (14)	106 (49)
3 Charges	Feb 15, 2023	9	22	9	40
4 Pre-trial investigations (incl. Brianna’s funeral)	Feb 16 to Nov 26, 2023 (Mar 15, 2023)	81 (5)	93 (9)	95 (4)	269 (18)
5 Trial	Nov 27 to Dec 19, 2023	63	170	21	254
6 Verdict	Dec 20, 2023	18	53	8	78
7 Pre-sentencing	Dec 21, 2023 to Feb 1, 2024	19	63	12	95
8 Sentencing	Feb 2, 2024	27	117	9	153
9 Post-sentencing (incl. Sunak’s comments)	Feb 3 to Feb 10, 2024 (Feb 7, 2024)	10 (2)	183 (40)	26 (3)	219 (45)
10 Anniversary	Feb 11, 2024	5	22	1	28
Total		261	785	207	1253

2.2. Literature review

There is a growing body of scholarship concerned with trans identities, especially regarding the framing of LGBTQ+ people and marginalised “others” for different audiences (Douglas & Phillips, 2022; S. Hall, 1996; Jacobs & Meeusen, 2021; Schotel, 2023; Verhoeven et al., 2024); and changing media ethics (Akrivos, 2022; Mathewson, 2021), both within LGBTQ+ and trans studies and broader communications studies scholarship on media discourse and representations of queer identities in the news media—addressing a historic invisibilisation of trans lives in this field (Namaste, 2000). This scholarship has addressed an array of national contexts, including the US (Billard, 2016, 2023; Capuzza, 2014, 2019), across Europe (Åkerlund, 2019; Bracco et al., 2024; Oliveira-Araujo, 2023), and the UK (Baker, 2014a; Bolzern et al., 2019; Montiel-McCann, 2023; Zottola, 2018, 2021); and responded to various news stories, either pertaining to individuals, e.g., Brandon Teena (Sloop, 2000), Chelsea Manning (Capuzza, 2015; Hackl et al., 2016), Caitlyn Jenner (Li, 2018; O’Shea, 2019), Gwen Araujo (Barker-Plummer, 2013), and Lucy Meadows (Gupta, 2019); or issues, e.g., legal rights and access to public bathrooms and sports (Fischer, 2023; Graber, 2018; Spencer, 2019; Thorpe et al., 2023), trans children and youth (Bailey & Mackenzie, 2023; Dyer et al., 2023; McIntyre et al., 2023; Riggs & McIntyre, 2022) and most notably, crime, especially murder (Avalos et al., 2023; DeJong et al., 2021; Osborn, 2022). Importantly, there is also a growing body of work that centres trans researchers and trans people’s experiences of this changing representation (Billard, 2022; Billard & Zhang, 2022; Humphrey, 2016).

Increasingly in the UK, corpus linguistics is being applied in the study of news discourses surrounding various marginalised groups, e.g., refugees (Baker et al., 2008) and Muslims (Baker et al., 2013), as well as gender (Baker & Levon, 2016; Jaworska & Hunt, 2017) and sexuality (Paterson & Coffey-Glover, 2018), and minorities therein, most notably gay men (Baker, 2006a) and now trans people (Baker, 2014a, 2019; Gupta, 2019; Zottola, 2018, 2021). Large CL studies by Baker (2019), Bradley et al. (2023), and Zottola (2021) have shown shifts in terminology used to describe trans people, from *transsexual* to *transgender* and now increasingly towards *trans*. In his analysis of a broad sample of the British press from 2012, Baker found that these lexical choices often reflect political leanings, with right-leaning newspapers more likely to use less respectful language, especially in comment pieces—which conservative newspapers use to justify their transphobic stances without it being the newspaper’s own editorial line (Baker, 2014a). Similarly, in their analysis of the UK press’ coverage of Lucy Meadows, Gupta found misgendering to be widespread in tabloid newspapers, primarily through the practice of “selective quoting”, whereby newspapers repeatedly published quotes from interviews and statements that used the incorrect pronouns (Gupta, 2019). Meanwhile, in her comparative analysis of news discourses in the UK and Canadian press, Zottola found that reporting on trans individuals not only frequently carried individualising and intersectional personal details, such as the race and age of the person as well as their trans identity, but also terms that indicate their association with a wider LGBTQ+ community (Zottola, 2021).

2.3. Methodology

Overview of materials

To remain within the scope of this master's thesis, I chose to focus on news coverage already available as text rather than collate and transcribe the extensive broadcast and video-based coverage. As access to a full reference corpus such as TransCor or a database such as LexisNexus was not possible for this thesis,¹⁰ a specialised corpus was manually built: the Brianna Ghey Corpus (hereafter known as BGCOR) (Hallman, 2024) comprises 1253 articles published on the case, from the date of the murder (February 11, 2023) to the anniversary vigil held 12 months later (February 11, 2024), on the websites of 11 British national newspapers, the two local Warrington publications, 19 publications included in Muck Rack's "top 50 LGBTQ publications in the world", and the blog *QueerAF*, which provides meta-reporting on the British media's coverage of LGBTQIA+ issues. (For a detailed breakdown of the publications included for each level, please see Chapters 3, 4 and 5. For a detailed explanation of the collection process, please see Appendix A.)

Queer corpus linguistics and feminist critical discourse analysis

This thesis applies a combination of queer corpus linguistics (CL) and feminist critical discourse analysis (F/CDA). F/CDA provides a qualitative analysis of my corpus, supplementing the quantitative CL results by examining the dialectal relationship between discourse and society, and the power relations at play therein (Baker, 2023; Zottola, 2021).

To reveal the underlying discourses and ideologies present in the corpus, I applied CL methods in a blended corpus-driven—i.e., using the texts and keywords found therein starting point of the analysis—and corpus-based—i.e., using the corpus to prove a hypothesis by seeking out patterns of keywords in the texts—approach to identify pre-selected gendered keywords, examine lexical and grammatical concordances with those keywords as well as their collocations to identify prosodies and their resultant discourses, and compare these outputs across levels and periods.

This part of the study also constitutes the first stage of Fairclough's three-dimensional model for CDA, which examines the text, as well as the discursive and social practices of my corpus (1993). This Faircloughian model is enhanced by the application of Lazar's principles of *feminist* CDA including the understanding of gender as ideological (not only discursive) structure (2005).

Process

News articles for BGCOR were collected and reviewed manually. The compiled sources were then imported into Google Colab for processing with various Python-based tools and libraries including the news crawler, newsplease (Hamborg et al., 2017) to extract key information from each individual article's webpage; Pandas (Mattingly, 2022) to tabulate and enrich the data with additional metadata, such as the level of the press and period in which the article was published; and string (Walsh & Dombrowski, 2021),

¹⁰ Zottola built TransCor for her 2013–15 study published in 2018 and 2021. Linköping University does not provide access to Nexis UK (a database of British national newspapers) and this study includes publications beyond that database. Compiling the corpus via the publications' websites also removed the issues faced by Zottola (2021) and the repetition of articles in the LexisNexus database due to differing regional editions.

Natural Language Toolkit (nltk) (Bird et al., 2009), and re (Regular Expressions) (Friedl, 2006) to search the main body texts of my subcorpora for specific queries and count their frequencies.¹¹ (For a detailed explanation of my process, please see Appendix B.)

The query terms were initially based on earlier studies conducted by Baker (2014a) and Zottola (2021), i.e., *trans*, *transgender*, *transsexual*, *tranny*, *cross-dresser*, *sex change*, *transvestite* and *genderbender*, however as only four of these terms (*trans*, *transgender*, *tranny* and *sex change*) returned results, and I thought them too limited to fully assess the intersections of Brianna's gender with other identity markers, I expanded my query to include keywords and pre-determined collocations to address how Brianna was named (*Brianna* vs. *Brianna Ghey* vs. her deadname, as well as the term *deadname*), her gender (*female*, *trans girl*, *trans teenager*, *trans child*, *trans female*), her age (*trans schoolgirl*), her transition (*mtf*, *transition*, *born a boy*, *living/lived as a girl*), and her family relationship (*daughter*, *son*). As means of comparison, I also queried *cisgender* and *Scarlett*, *Scarlett Jenkinson*, *Jenkinson* (the 15-year-old girl convicted of Brianna's murder).¹² Counting frequencies in this manner provides an overview of the terminology used by each publication and subcorpus, displaying their preferred language, which when combined with the F/CDA can unveil their deeper semantics.

However, counting the queries' frequencies offers only limited insights when analysing the discourse around Brianna's identity beyond her gender. I thus used nltk to also conduct concordance and collocational analyses of words related to the keyword *Brianna*. Collocational patterns can reveal semantic preferences (e.g., if Brianna's gender is frequently mentioned in combination with her age) or discourse prosodies whereby specific terms appearing in frequent proximity convey "attitudes" about the object (e.g., if the adjectives used to describe Brianna reinforce the view that she was inherently vulnerable because of her gender) (Baker, 2006b, 2014a, 2014c).¹³ To keep within the thesis' scope, I sought only the nouns, adjectives and verbs that collocated within -/+5 words of the keyword *Brianna*; the top 50 words of BGCOR and each subcorpora were compiled and compared to reveal their prevailing semantic prosodies for Brianna and her identity.¹⁴

2.4. Ethical considerations: Research and journalistic ethics of care

This thesis requires the application of two different—and somewhat conflicting—ethical lenses: those of research and journalism. Following the Leveson Report (2012), which examined the impact of negative, invasive and misgendering reporting on trans people, guidance regarding ethical journalistic reporting of trans people, especially trans victims of crime, was revised—but this still faces calls for further revision

¹¹ This analysis could have been conducted using CL software such as AntConc, Lancs Box X or Wmatrix, however, these programmes were not compatible with my MacBook.

¹² Plus *Briannas*, to capture where the text had originally said "Brianna's"; *Brianna Gheys*, to capture where the text had originally said "Brianna Ghey's"; *deadnamed* and *deadnaming*; *transgender girl*, *transgender teenager*, *transgender child*, and *transgender female*; *male to female* and *male-to-female*; *transitioning* and *transitioned*; and *cis*, *cis-gender* and *cisgendered*

¹³ The concept of semantic/discourse prosodies is not fixed within corpus linguistics (Zottola, 2021), but given his extensive use of this method to research news discourses on the topics of sexuality and gender, I am applying Baker's definition.

¹⁴ This span would allow for constructions such as "Brianna was [adjective]...", "Brianna, who was described as [adjective]...", "[adjective] [noun] Brianna..." (e.g., "transgender schoolgirl Brianna..."), etc. Conjunctions, determiners, digits (except for 16 and 15), interjections, modal verbs, particles, pronouns, and the most common verbs (e.g., have, be), adjectives (e.g., last, much) and adverbs (e.g., soon, later) were all filtered out.

(Akrivos, 2022, 2024). IPSO, the biggest independent media regulator established in Leveson's wake does not fully implement the report's recommendations; it does not include guidance on specific language and instead requires only that journalists be accurate in their reporting and avoid discriminatory language (IPSO, 2023). Impress, another independent regulator expands on this guidance, advising its journalists that there must be a "compelling public interest" to include trans identity—someone being trans is not newsworthy enough in and of itself and this fact (even if accurate) should be omitted unless it is truly pertinent to the story (Impress, 2024). This raises questions about how compelling Brianna's trans identity is to this news story, as well as what duty of care journalists have to their readers when covering such harrowing news stories. Content warnings are frequently used in broadcast journalism (e.g., "Warning, some viewers may find the following images upsetting"), however this is much less common in print (Kyrölä, 2018). Several news articles in the LGBTQ+ press acknowledged that Brianna's murder might be traumatic for their young queer target audience and thus included content warnings at the top of the main body text—but still recognised their role as a niche press to serve their communities and not risk censorship and re-invisibilising trans lives (McKinnon et al., 2017).

As a cisgender researcher, I acknowledge that I might not be best to adequately assess the impact my research might have on a trans reader. As a queerfeminist researcher, I do believe in the role of research in addressing social justice issues; research on media representation of marginalised communities can help support positive change in that media representation and we should not shy away from researching potentially traumatising topics (Bell & Keer, 2021; Brannelly et al., 2022). I have thus made some ethical choices out of respect for both my potential trans readers and Brianna herself. For example, I will not use her deadname, misgender her nor speculate about her lived experience of her gender; this thesis applies queer theory to examine the discursive construction of her identity by the press, not establish some unknowable essence of Brianna or discuss the queerness of Brianna herself (Yep et al., 2020).

3. Brianna was... a local schoolgirl, brutally murdered

3.1. The role of the local press and its geosocial public

Traditionally local newspapers served a specific geography, from where their staff and readers (and related advertising revenue) were also drawn (Franklin, 2006), fulfilling a crucial role as a provider of information, civic and social engagement, and democratic oversight, as well as providing a sense of belonging and community—while remaining a viable commercial business (Gulyas & Baines, 2020; R. Matthews & Hodgson, 2023). However, like much of the newspaper industry, since the 2007 financial crash, local newspapers have seen a collapse in this advertising-based business model as revenues have plunged from £2.4bn to £590m, forcing local and regional news publishers to merge titles and newsrooms, dramatically cutting staff—and losing its place in holding “a degree of symbolic power in constructing the idea of ‘community’ and the ‘local’” (Harte & Matthews, 2021; Hess & Waller, 2012).¹⁵

Local journalism’s audiences have also shifted—from geo-specific to “geosocial” (Baines, 2023; Hess & Waller, 2015). With ties to the original geography, these online readers still constitute a public with a presumed shared understanding (Warner, 2002), e.g., which demographics typically live in which neighbourhoods, but are no longer all physically based there (like myself and the *Warrington Guardian*).

This much-reduced local press retains its decreased and dispersed audience by providing “community, commitment and continuity”, competing with new news sources like local Facebook groups by grounding its authority and legitimacy through its reporters’ proven local knowledge and visible local presence, and a care for its public greater than that usually afforded to a less proximate readership (Gulyas & Hess, 2024; Harte & Matthews, 2021; Kim et al., 2024). That *proximity* remains the core news value of the local press, as well as *impact* on its local/geosocial public (Bednarek & Caple, 2017).

3.2. Materials: The *Warrington Guardian* and *Warrington Worldwide*

Two local publications were included in this study: newspaper the *Warrington Guardian* and magazine *Warrington Worldwide*. Owned by Newsquest, the UK’s second largest regional and local news publisher, the *Warrington Guardian*, with a newsroom of 12 editorial staff, is the publisher’s largest newspaper in Cheshire and Merseyside. Established 170 years ago, the town’s now-lone newspaper publishes weekly in print and multiple times a day online and on social media. The newspaper’s senior reporters were assigned to cover the Brianna Ghey story, indicating its high priority for the paper.

Despite having a much smaller circulation and staff than the *Warrington Guardian* and usually carrying lighter news and feature stories, the independently-owned monthly magazine *Warrington Worldwide* was included in the study because it was the first news outlet to break the story. It proceeded to follow the case closely, often publishing daily and with most original non-newswire content written by its editor, again showing the story’s high prioritisation. Founded in 1999 by the former editor of now-defunct *Warrington Mercury*, its print-first format, sister titles for the wealthiest Warrington suburbs and lifestyle-led focus would indicate *Warrington Worldwide* is targeted at a middle-class readership.

¹⁵ Editorial staff has fallen from 8,800 in 2007 to fewer than 3000 by 2022 (Ponsford, 2024a).

3.3. Findings

Frequency of publication

Table 3.1: Number of articles related to Brianna Ghey published in the local press across periods 1 to 10¹⁶

Publication	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Warrington Guardian	214	3	19	7	71	45	15	18	23	9	4
Warrington Worldwide	47	2	5	2	10	18	3	1	4	1	1
Total	261	5	24	9	81	63	18	19	27	10	5

Table 3.2: Percentages and percentage-point comparisons for the local press across periods 1 to 10

Local subcorpus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
percentage of total coverage	2%	9%	3%	31%	24%	7%	7%	10%	4%	2%
compared to national press	+1%	+2%	+1%	+19%	+3%	0%	-1%	-5%	-19%	-1%
compared to LGBTQ+ press	+2%	-3%	-1%	-15%	+14%	+3%	+1%	+6%	-9%	+1%

Both local papers published consistently throughout the year on the Brianna Ghey story. In contrast to the national press—which prioritised the legal proceedings and post-sentencing—almost one-third of the local coverage was published pre-trial, reporting on Brianna’s funeral, birthday, schoolteachers’ and classmates’ reflections, and local community fundraising efforts. This continued publication during period 4 demonstrates the local press’s commitment to the story—providing information to their public not otherwise available in the national press—and its participation in that public, as fellow witnesses to this story (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2024).

The local press also invested significant resources into covering the trial, with *Warrington Worldwide* publishing daily and the *Warrington Guardian* live-blogging court proceedings, accounting for almost one-quarter of their combined total coverage. Unlike the national and LGBTQ+ press, most coverage remained focused on Brianna and the impact on the local community rather than engaging in wider discourses, as is reflected in its lower rate of coverage during period 9 when much of the national coverage reported on Sunak’s comments in parliament.

Frequency of query terms

Table 3.3: Use of Brianna vs. Brianna Ghey in the local subcorpus

Name	BGCor total	Local subcorpus	Warrington Guardian	Warrington Worldwide
Brianna	11844	2901	2411	490
Brianna Ghey	1873	300	217	83
% of references excl. Ghey		84%	90%	83%

¹⁶ (1) Discovery of the body, (2) Identification / Arrests, (3) Charges, (4) Pre-trial investigations, (5) Trial, (6) Verdict, (7) Pre-sentencing, (8) Sentencing, (9) Post-sentencing, (10) Anniversary

The local press uses Brianna's first name by the highest rate across the corpus; at 91% the *Warrington Guardian* has the second highest rate for using just her first name (behind *The Times*).

Table 3.4: Terms from Baker and Zottola's studies present in the local subcorpus¹⁷

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	Local subcorpus	Warrington Guardian	Warrington Worldwide
trans	2311	141	118	23
transgender	1276	144	99	45
tranny/ies	25	6	3	3

Table 3.5: Terms absent from articles published after Brianna's identification in the local subcorpus

Query term	BGCor total	Local subcorpus	Warrington Guardian	Warrington Worldwide
Total no. of articles	1253	261	214	47
Brianna	26	0	0	0
% of articles	2%	0%	0%	0%
trans AND transgender	269	132	114	18
% of articles	20%	51%	53%	38%

Brianna's trans identity featured in fewer than half of the articles published by the local press; in some periods, the words *trans* and *transgender* were absent from over three-quarters of local reporting. The pejorative term *tranny* is found in both local publications; this is in reference to evidence given in court from the text messages sent by Eddie Ratcliffe, a.k.a. Boy Y.

Table 3.6: Predicative and attributive adjectives relating to Brianna's gender and age in the local subcorpus¹⁸

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	Local subcorpus	Warrington Guardian	Warrington Worldwide
was trans(gender)	298	48	37	11
trans(gender) girl	224	19	17	2
trans(gender) schoolgirl	76	18	16	2
trans(gender) teen/ager	408	32	13	19
trans(gender) child	28	0	1	0
16*year*old* ¹⁹	774	151	129	22
trans(gender) 16yearold	15	1	1	0
16yearold trans(gender)	115	14	13	1
16yearold girl	72	15	14	1
16yearold schoolgirl	23	10	9	1

¹⁷ The terms *transsexual*, *transgendered*, *cross-dresser*, *transvestite*, *shemale* and *gender bender* were not present in BGCor. The terms *intersex* and *nonbinary* were not sought as they are not relevant to Brianna's gender.

¹⁸ It was not possible to do an accurate count of the words *girl*, *schoolgirl*, *teen*, *teenager* or *child* without the preceding words *trans* or *transgender* as they only pertained to Brianna due to the frequency of these terms to refer to her murderers.

¹⁹ Includes *16yearold*, *16yearolds*, *16 year old*, *16 year olds*, *sixteenyearold*, *sixteenyearolds*, *sixteen year old*, *sixteen year olds*

While Brianna’s trans identity was frequently absent in the local press coverage, when her trans identity was featured, the *Warrington Guardian* demonstrates a preference for female-gendered nouns *trans(gender) (school)girl* over the gender-neutral nouns *trans(gender) teen(ager)* or *trans(gender) child*. Unlike the terms *girl*, *boy* and *teen(ager)*, which were also used frequently to refer to Jenkinson and Ratcliffe, as Brianna’s murderers were 15 years old, it is possible to isolate the use of 16-year-old in reference primarily to Brianna; *the Warrington Guardian* makes extensive use of her age as a means of describing Brianna, but it is rarely immediately combined with her gender.

Table 3.7: Terms relating to Brianna’s family relations, deadname and transition in the local subcorpus

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	Local subcorpus	Warrington Guardian	Warrington Worldwide
daughter('s)	820	94	77	17
son('s)	76	1	1	0
[deadname] ²⁰	12	0	0	0
deadname/ed/ing	74	1	0	1
changed gender	2	1	1	0
transition/ed/ing	76	3	2	1
at birth	15	0	0	0
born a boy	14	0	0	0
born male	7	0	0	0
as male	4	1	1	0
living as	22	1	1	0
as female	8	0	0	0
as a girl	29	4	3	1

The terms *sex change*, *changed sex*, and *male-to-female* were not present in the local subcorpus.²¹

Brianna’s mother, Esther Ghey is mentioned over 220 times in local coverage, with 200 mentions in the *Warrington Guardian* alone; *daughter* is thus also a common term to describe Brianna. There are fewer mentions of her father, Peter Spooner, but the *Warrington Guardian* does choose to publish his post-sentencing statement where he calls Brianna his *son*—it does not, however, publish her deadname nor engage in any discussion on that topic. Similarly, neither local paper mentions Brianna’s gender she was assigned *at birth*, but do mention that she had *transitioned*.²²

Collocates +/-5 with Brianna

Table 3.8: Top 50 collocates (nouns, verbs and adjectives) in the local subcorpus

(Sub)corpus	Nouns, verbs and adjectives
BGCor	ghey, girl, x, murder, y, stabbed, kill, transgender, park, found, trans, gheys, told, teenager, death, plan, killing, 16yearold, murdered, killed, stabbing, stab, february, mother, met, jenkinson, heard,

²⁰ Out of respect for Brianna, I will not publish her deadname in this study.

²¹ Includes *mtf*, *male-to-female* and *male to female*. *Female-to-male*-related terms were not sought as they are not relevant to Brianna’s gender identity.

²² Uses of *as a girl* in this subcorpus are in reference to Jenkinson’s gendering of Brianna in her text messages to Ratcliffe (compared to his references to her as “it”); *as male* refers to Ratcliffe when the police issued descriptions of their suspects.

	boy, court, witty, bus, beautiful, times, hilarious, day, victim, police, culcheth, messages, boy, tribute, family, ratcliffe, birchwood, saturday, meet, knife, saw, linear, accused
Local	x, ghey, y, murder, kill, death, family, park, stabbed, found, girl, culcheth, killing, stab, told, stabbing, february, blood, plan, transgender, birchwood, body, day, killed, phone, linear, messages, heard, rl, died, police, esther, knife, 16yearold, accused, saw, friends, met, murdered, teenager, court, schoolgirl, time, mother, boy, meet, rp, trans, memory, warrington

Compared to BGCOR, Brianna’s trans identity features less prominently in the local press. Verbs and nouns related to either the act (e.g., *stab*, *stabbed*, *stabbing*) or location (*park*, *culcheth*) of her murder, both appear more frequently than *transgender*, with *trans* barely featuring in the top 50 collocates. Other specific local terms include *birchwood*, the neighbourhood Brianna lived in and the name of her high school.²³ As in BGCOR, almost all verbs are in the past participle.

Table 3.9: Top 50 adjective collocates with Brianna in the local subcorpus

(Sub)corpus	Nouns, verbs and adjectives
BGCOR	transgender, trans, 16yearold, witty, beautiful, hilarious, obsessed, fearless, strong, frenzied, dead, best, young, guilty, teenage, vulnerable, tragic, online, high, loved, alive, sick, bullied, ill, many, wrong, multiple, amazing, brutal, accepted, disturbing, old, horrific, same, unsurvivable, evil, present, social, such, able, gruesome, lasting, mental, anxious, continued, good, larger, most, scared, next, unsuspecting
Local	transgender, 16yearold, trans, obsessed, dead, high, young, beautiful, witty, guilty, alive, tragic, hilarious, multiple, responsible, frenzied, accepted, many, sick, pink, vulnerable, loved, mental, much, next, old, more, second, able, best, bullied, fearless, present, hurt, online, same, short, strong, full, least, real, wrong, brave, brutal, clear, continued, due, ill, important, injured, lasting, low, outgoing, own, sad, social

Although *transgender* is the most used adjective in proximity to *Brianna* in the local coverage, her age is featured more than the term *trans*. *High* relates to her high school, again tying Brianna to the local area. *Beautiful*, *witty* and *hilarious* were the words used by Brianna’s family to describe her in their original statement released when she was identified by the police; these adjectives were frequently requoted.

3.4. Discussion

Through its coverage of Brianna’s murder, we can see both the *Warrington Guardian* and *Warrington Worldwide* meeting their local press obligations of “community, commitment and continuity” to serve its geosocial—and presumed cisheteronormative—public (Gulyas & Hess, 2024).

In the local press, Brianna Ghey is first and foremost ***Brianna***. More than any other corpus, the local press calls her by the mononym *Brianna* without her surname *Ghey*. The use of given names when reporting on murder victims is a widespread practice in the UK press (Jančaříková, 2018). How news objects, especially people, are named has significant impact on how they are perceived by readers (Richardson, 2007). This is especially true for victims of crime, who are referred to by their given names at a higher rate than perpetrators of crime (who are typically named by their surnames), personalising

²³ The terms *rl* and *rp* are the defending counsels’ initials from the *Warrington Guardian*’s liveblog of the trial; this liveblog might also be why *x* and *y* appear higher than in BGCOR despite the lower rankings of *boy* and *girl* due to the notation used.

the victims and evoking greater empathy with them from the reader (Anastasio & Costa, 2004).²⁴

Warner's construction of publics is based in a shared sense of values and textual understandings as well as geography (2002); the extensive coverage of this story in the local press and consistent mononym use of Brianna's given name both generates the public's sense of familiarity with Brianna's story and assumes that this familiarity is shared by its public.

The overarching discursive prosody in the local press is of Brianna as a **murder victim**: of the top 50 collocates with *Brianna*, 17 pertain directly to the murder (e.g., terms: *murder, kill, death, stabbed/stab/stabbing*), and seven refer to the trial (e.g., terms: *accused, told, court, heard, RL, RP*) in addition to her murderers. With one notable exception—*died*—most collocational verbs describe actions done *to* Brianna, rather than *by* her (e.g., *stabbed, found, killed*) making her a passive victim with no agency in her story. Combined these words account for over half of the collocates, dominating the local news discourse. Also, a key feature of the local news discourse, as seen through the *Brianna* collocates, is the construction of Brianna's identity as **local teenager and schoolgirl**, with her school (i.e., *birchwood, high*) and the specific location of her murder (i.e., *culcheth, linear, park*) featuring much more frequently than in any other subcorpus. Neither of these prosodies are surprising for the local press: the *proximity* of the murder combined with the *negative* and *novel* newsworthiness of her death—public, violent and in broad daylight at the hands of two other teenagers—would likely have garnered local press coverage regardless of Brianna's age or gender (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Galtung & Ruge, 1965). Her adolescence and femininity contribute to her portrayal as an “ideal victim” (Christie, 1986; Gekoski et al., 2012; Greer, 2007), further enhancing the newsworthiness of her murder—even before her trans identity is made public, as illustrated by the high number of articles the two outlets published in period 1 as Brianna's body was discovered but not yet identified. While second in the list of Brianna collocates, the term *16yearold* appears more frequently in the Local subcorpus, suggesting that this term is also used as noun in place of Brianna's name, again underscoring the local press's perceived importance of this attribute for their public.²⁵

Unlike in the national press, Brianna's discursive construction as a murder victim in the local press is not limited to their coverage of the legal proceedings. The restrictions placed on all crime reporting in the UK (regardless of level of operation, professionalism of the publication or size of audience) strictly limits the type of information that can be published between suspects being charged and sentenced, however, the two local publications' commitment to covering Brianna's story extends beyond the crime itself to also cover her funeral (which was previewed to announce local road closures and then liveblogged), first missed birthday (and related tributes), and a fundraising campaign launched by her family to raise funds for teenagers struggling with mental health issues.²⁶ Besides informing their public of these events, both publications invite their readers to participate in them, either directly (e.g.,

²⁴ After the naming restrictions were lifted at their sentencing, Scarlett Jenkinson and Eddie Ratcliffe (previously known as Girl X and Boy Y) are predominantly referred to by their surnames, following this convention for reporting the names of perpetrators of crimes.

²⁵ The Colab/python-based nltk was not able to consistently distinguish between the use of *16yearold* as an adjective or noun, resulting in the manual classification of the word as an adjective to better reflect its prosodic relevance.

²⁶ Although outside of the top 50, the local collocates feature terms relating to the various local fundraising campaigns with a higher relative frequency than the national subcorpus.

by sharing the link to the fundraising page) or indirectly (e.g., by publishing the exact time, place, and non-standard dress code for the funeral). Such “connectivity, reciprocity and participation” helps to generate a sense of a community—to which both the public and publication belong (Kim et al., 2024). Brianna is in turn also presented as **belonging to the local community**—through the frequent mentions of her school and interviews with teachers, classmates and other local people—as well as very clearly **belonging to a family**, who also belong to this community.²⁷ Brianna remains a murder victim throughout this reporting, but she is presented as being *more* than just a murder victim.

Both newspapers affirm Brianna’s **identity as a girl**, through persistent inclusion of female-coded adjectives such as *beautiful* and *pink*, and the nouns *daughter*, *granddaughter* and *sister* rather than *(grand)child* or *son* to indicate her family relationships.²⁸ The frequency with which people close to Brianna, such as her mother and headteacher, appear in the local press as direct sources demonstrates the access the local press was afforded by the family; positively managing relations to retain such access is vital to a local press. Reporting on Brianna’s identity in a manner contradictory to that presented by her family could jeopardise access and potentially generate backlash against a reporter and their publication, jeopardising in turn the publication’s co-dependent relationship with its public (Firmstone et al., 2022). The adjectives used to describe Brianna change during the press’s year-long reporting, particularly during the trial, but the local press’s use of adjectives to directly describe Brianna—*beautiful*, *witty*, *hilarious*—remain primarily drawn from quotes given by her family and headteacher, presenting Brianna as a lively character who left a *lasting* impression. This demonstrates the power Brianna’s family thus retains in their relationship with the local press compared to that they have with national or transnational niche LGBTQ+ press; by establishing themselves as primary sources of information for the local press they can craft narratives—and *counternarratives*—about Brianna, such as rebutting reports that Brianna had been *bullied* at school.²⁹

News discourse is not only produced in what language is present but also through what is absent (Schröter et al., 2017). In stark contrast to the national and LGBTQ+ press, Brianna’s **trans identity** does not appear to be a primary news angle for the local press, as demonstrated by the number of articles published by both publications that make no explicit mention of her trans identity. When her gender is included in the local news discourse, there is a divergence in the two papers’ terminology. The

²⁷ This familiarity and empathy are also generated for Brianna’s mother, Esther, who is also frequently named in the local press by just her given name, though usually with the clear indication of her direct parental relationship to Brianna. Her father, Peter Spooner, is not named in the same way: he is not only mentioned with much less frequency than Esther Ghey but also always with his full name. This could be due to the difference in surname between father and daughter; it could also be explained by his apparent lesser engagement with the small cadre of local journalists who covered this case and thus lower presumed familiarity to readers. Peter Spooner also appears to have had a less close relationship with his daughter, as he noted in his statement after the sentencing.

²⁸ Pink was reportedly Brianna’s favourite colour, and used for her coffin, funeral dress code and later memorial and fundraising events. The term *child* is primarily used in relation to Jenkinson and Ratcliffe and an unidentified earlier victim, or in generic phrasing such as “no one should have to bury their child”.

²⁹ *Bullied* is the 30th top adjectival collocate for *Brianna* in the local press, compared to 23rd in the national press, and it almost exclusively appears in the local subcorpus to counter reports that this was the reason for Brianna’s presence in the special “inclusion” unit where she met Jenkinson, with Brianna’s mother given as the source of this counternarrative. The only other use of *bullied* in the local press comes from an article written by a trainee reporter, quoting another freelance reporter, based on hearing evidence shared at the trial that Brianna had been bullied at school.

Warrington Guardian demonstrates a preference for the adjective *trans* with female nouns such as *girl* or *schoolgirl*. By contrast, *Warrington Worldwide* shows a preference for the longer-established adjective *transgender* with gender-neutral nouns such as *teenager*. The consistency in the use of *transgender teen(ager)* by *Warrington Worldwide* can be attributed to its smaller operation: the articles are mostly written and always edited by the same veteran editor/lead reporter. The *Warrington Guardian*, by contrast has a larger newsroom made up of notably younger journalists, with several different reporters covering the story at different stages across the year.

This choice to omit Brianna’s trans identity could be to its perceived irrelevance—Brianna’s story is already newsworthy for the local press regardless of her being trans—or its controversy—Brianna’s trans identity is a distraction from an important community news story. Given the officially apolitical nature of the local press, the broad age, class and education-level demographic of its geosocial public, and the recent sharp decline in trans-supportive attitudes in the UK, Brianna’s trans identity might be omitted in a desire to make Brianna more relatable—and thus her story more widely read and monetisable. These goals might be hindered by a perceived overemphasis on her trans identity.³⁰ This could amount to a form of **trans invisibilisation** of Brianna’s identity by a predominantly cisheteronormative press for its cisheteronormative public (Zottola, 2021)—or an effort to not “other” Brianna (DeJong et al., 2021; Montiel-McCann, 2023) and to be in compliance with trans advocate-promoted guidance to only include an individual’s trans identity when there is “compelling public interest” to do so (Akrivos, 2022, 2024).

Ultimately, Brianna’s story received—and continues to receive—extensive coverage in the local press; the continued newsworthiness of her story, as well as the inclusion of details such as her funeral being held in Warrington’s largest church and anniversary memorial held in a town centre location known for large events and festivals—and liveblogging from those events—constructs her as a **figure of local importance**.³¹ However, it is not only the local press’s commitment to its community that drives this continued coverage but also its economic reality: the continued coverage helps retain the publication’s legitimacy and authority in reporting both this story and local news in general, and thus also retains their public’s trust—which is needed in turn to retain their public’s readership and thus their advertising revenue to secure the publications’ business sustainability (Olsen, 2021; Wahl-Jorgensen, 2024).

³⁰ Newsquest states all its titles are “not affiliated with a particular political party or movement” (Newsquest Media Group, 2024). The UK National Centre for Social Research’s *British Social Attitudes 2023* report found that positive attitudes towards trans people have fallen 18 percentage points to 64% since 2019. Women, younger people and higher educated people express more liberal views, but the rates within these demographic groups have also fallen (Cleary, 2023).

³¹ The *Warrington Guardian* and *Warrington Worldwide* published a further 53 and 16 articles each about Brianna since her anniversary (the end date of BGCOR) and the conclusion of the coroners’ inquest on October 25, 2024.

4. Brianna is... a transgender teenager, part of national discourse(s)

4.1. The role of the national press and its diverse publics

A key purpose of the national press is to provide knowledge and understanding to the public and in doing so, shape public opinion as a “means to feed this back to the political establishment” with which the publication may or may not be currently aligned (Ward & Anderson, 2016). The UK has a diverse and vibrant national press, with distinct target audiences with different political leanings and socioeconomic backgrounds. Their readers thus comprise not one monolithic public but several distinct self-selecting publics, either consciously or subconsciously reading the newspaper(s) that best align with their own values (Warner, 2002).

For this study, I have used the *Press Gazette*'s political categorisations, i.e. left-leaning, neutral or right-leaning. Previous research has shown the left-leaning press to be more respectful in their framing of trans people compared to the right-leaning press (Baker, 2014a; Montiel-McCann, 2023). However, while the right-leaning Conservative-led UK government at the time of Brianna's murder were openly gender-critical, the left-leaning opposition Labour Party had also faced criticism for its “mixed bag” of support for trans rights (Hansford, 2024), suggesting that the left/right divide on trans rights may no longer be as clear as it once was.

While serving diverse and distinct publics, the national press is driven by many of the same news values when deciding which events to cover in their news discourse, primarily *negativity, novelty, personalisation, consonance, drama* and *newspaper agenda*, as well as *impact, aesthetic appeal*, and *shareability* (Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017).

4.2. Materials: 11 UK national newspapers from across the political spectrum

Previous studies on trans representation in news discourse have focused primarily on the UK's national press, typically using a selection of national newspapers representing either the political left versus right-leaning or broadsheet/quality versus tabloid/popular dichotomies.³² As this study is concerned with just one news story rather than taking a wider scope or longer timeframe, I expanded this selection to include all paid-for UK national newspapers: the *Daily Express*, the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily Mirror*, the *Daily Star*, *The Guardian*, the *i*, *The Independent*, the *Morning Star*, *The Sun*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Times*.³³ The Scotland and Wales-based national newspapers, such as the *Daily Record*, *The Herald*, *The Scotsman* and the *Western Mail*, and the London-based *Evening Standard*, were not included as they do not have a UK-wide circulation. Freesheets, such as the *Metro* and *City AM*, were not included due to their print prioritisation, and *The Financial Times* was also excluded due to its focus on business and financial news. Despite their relatively small circulations, Reach plc's *Daily Star* and the collective-owned *Morning Star* were included due to the former's high-frequency use of offensive terms like “tranny” in previous studies (Baker, 2014a; Zottola, 2018, 2021) and the latter's hard-left politics.

³² Zottola (2018, 2021) compared the coverage of the popular (tabloid) and quality (broadsheet) press. The metadata tag “media type” was initially applied to the dataset, but this strand of analysis was deemed this beyond the scope of this thesis.

³³ Online subscriptions were purchased for the *i*, *The Telegraph*, and *The Times*.

Table 4.1: List of publications included in the national subcorpus, their total number of articles, additional metadata tags and readership demographics³⁴

Publication	No. articles	Level	Politics	Print (UK)	Online (Global)	% ABC ³⁵	% f/m
Daily Mail	244	National	right	672k	279m	62%	53/47
The Independent	131	National	left	n/a	106.3m	66%	51/49
Daily Mirror	125	National	left	212k	59.5m	67%	46/54
The Guardian	65	National	left	60k	303.8m	86%	46/54
The Sun	55	National	right	700k	60.2m	33%	40/60
i	48	National	neutral	124k	9.2m	72%	50/50
The Telegraph	37	National	right	190k	67.4m	81%	49/51
Daily Express	36	National	right	133k	59.4m	74%*	57/43
The Times	34	National	right	180k	23.9m	86%	46/54
Morning Star	6	National	left	--	0.25m	--	--
Daily Star	4	National	neutral	118k	11m	--	--
Total	785						

-- denotes data not available

* includes C2 readers

4.3. Findings

Frequency of publication

Table 4.2: Number of articles related to Brianna Ghey published in the national press across periods 1 to 10

National subcorpus by politics	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Left	327	2	24	6	41	75	21	24	49	76	9
Neutral	52	0	4	2	2	11	2	5	6	18	2
Right	406	4	28	14	50	84	30	34	62	89	11
Total	785	6	56	22	93	170	53	63	117	183	22

Unsurprisingly, given the size of their operations and funds available, the national press accounts for the greatest volume of articles across the year, producing almost two-thirds of all press coverage. Only four national papers (*The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Mirror*, *The Independent*, and *The Sun*) carried the story about a dead/dying woman being found in a Warrington park (period 1). The story gained much more national attention in period 2, when the victim was identified as first a 16-year-old girl and later as Brianna Ghey, a *transgender* 16-year-old girl. As found in Baker (2014a, 2019), the right-leaning press collectively wrote more about this story than their left-leaning counterparts—but much of this output is led by three papers, one right-leaning and two left-leaning, which account for almost two-thirds of all coverage. Both the *Daily Mail* and *The Independent* published a high volume of copy from PA Media, the

³⁴ Circulation and online readership sources: Press Gazette (Press Gazette, 2024; Tobitt, 2024) and Similarweb (2024). Reader demographics sources: Hurst Media Company (2020a), Independent Advertising (2024).

³⁵ ABC1 is a social grade that includes high, intermediate and junior managerial roles and professions. C2 includes skilled workers (National Readership Survey, 2016)

UK's biggest newswire service, in addition to their own reporting.³⁶ By contrast, the politically neutral press showed less interest in covering the story, with almost all coverage coming from one source: *i*.

Table 4.3: Percentages and percentage-point comparisons for the national press across periods 1 to 10

National subcorpus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
percentage of total coverage	1%	7%	3%	12%	22%	7%	8%	15%	23%	3%
compared to local press	-1%	-2%	-1%	-19%	-3%	0%	+1%	+5%	+19%	+1%
compared to LGBTQ+ press	+1%	-5%	-2%	-34%	+12%	+3%	+2%	+11%	+11%	+2%

Table 4.4: Percentage breakdown of national coverage by political leanings across periods 1 to 10

National subcorpora	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Left	1%	7%	2%	13%	23%	6%	7%	15%	23%	3%
Neutral	0%	8%	4%	4%	21%	4%	10%	12%	35%	4%
Right	1%	7%	3%	12%	21%	7%	8%	15%	22%	3%

UK reporting restrictions between the charging of the suspects and the start of their trial account for the drop in coverage from the national press during period 4. The higher output in periods 8 and 9 reflects the national press' role in driving national discourse: these were the two periods that covered the revealing of Brianna's murderers' identities—generating discourse surrounding teenage violence, and then-Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's comments in parliament—generating discourse surrounding transphobia and propriety in politics, the backlash (and backlash to the backlash) his comments generated, as well as commentary on the role of social media in influencing the murderers (and Esther Ghey's teen mental health campaign). There is minimal difference between the left and right press regarding the distribution of their coverage across the period. The politically neutral press did not pick up the story until Brianna had been identified, with most of their limited coverage published during periods 5, 8 and 9.

Frequency of query terms

Table 4.5: Use of Brianna vs. Brianna Ghey in the national subcorpora

Name	BGCor total	National subcorpus	Left	Neutral	Right
Brianna	11844	7843	3014	415	4414
Brianna Ghey	1873	1140	464	68	608
% of references excl. Ghey	84%	85%	85%	84%	86%

The national press follows the convention of reporting murder victims by using Brianna's given name, though at a lower rate than the local press, with little distinction between the different political leanings.

³⁶ At least 105 articles in the national subcorpus were identifiably by-lined to PA Media.

Table 4.6: Terms from Baker and Zottola’s studies present in the national subcorpora

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	National subcorpus	Left	Neutral	Right
trans	2311	966	409	113	444
transgender	1276	919	372	67	480
tranny/ies	25	19	7	2	10

The politically neutral press shows a clear preference for *trans* over *transgender*; however, the left-leaning press only shows a slight preference for *trans* while the right-leaning press shows a slight preference for *transgender*. As in the local press, the use of *tranny* is in reference to Ratcliffe’s evidence; the right-leaning press included this in their reporting more frequently than the left-leaning.

Table 4.7: Terms absent from articles published after Brianna’s identification in the national subcorpora

Query term	BGCor total	National subcorpus	Left	Neutral	Right
Total no. of articles	1253	785	327	52	406
Brianna	26	22	8	0	14
% of articles	2%	3%	2%	0%	3%
trans AND transgender	269	130	55	5	70
% of articles	20%	17%	17%	10%	17%

Unlike the local press, some of the articles tagged on the national newspapers’ websites as related to the Brianna Ghey story did not include explicit mention of *Brianna*. The vast majority—80%—of the national press’ articles about Brianna included the terms *trans* or *transgender*.

Table 4.8: Predicative and attributive adjectives relating to Brianna’s gender and age in the national subcorpora

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	National subcorpus	Left	Neutral	Right
was trans(gender)	298	212	72	17	123
trans(gender) girl	233	113	48	10	55
trans(gender) schoolgirl	76	50	3	6	41
trans(gender) teen/ager	408	285	125	10	150
trans(gender) child	28	23	8	4	11
16*year*old*	774	463	215	22	226
trans(gender) 16yearold	15	11	6	0	5
16yearold trans(gender)	115	42	16	1	25
16yearold girl	72	38	15	1	22
16yearold schoolgirl	23	12	4	1	7

Table 4.9: Terms relating to Brianna’s family relations, deadname and transition in the national subcorpora

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	National subcorpus	Left	Neutral	Right
daughter('s)	820	633	223	24	386
son('s)	76	74	17	1	56
[deadname]	12	12	2	0	10
deadname/ed/ing	74	0	0	0	0
sex change	2	2	0	0	2
changed gender	2	1	0	1	0
transition/ed/ing	76	38	17	3	18
at birth	15	5	1	2	2
born a boy	14	14	4	0	10
born male	7	7	2	0	5
as male	4	1	0	0	1
living as	22	12	4	1	7
as female	8	5	0	0	5
as a girl	29	21	10	4	7

The terms male-to-female, mtf, and variations thereof were not present in the national subcorpus.

Although there are clear divergences between the different political leanings in the predicative use of adjectives *trans* and *transgender*, when using the adjectives as attributive modifiers, both the right- and left-leaning press show a preference for the use of the gender-neutral noun *teenager* to describe Brianna, over the female-gendered *girl*. There are, however, clearer divergences in additional terms used to construct Brianna’s gender identity, with the right-leaning press making more references to Brianna’s gender assigned *at birth*, her *deadname* and her father’s reference to her as his *son*. Despite several newspapers deadnaming her, there is no discussion of the practice, either as a noun or verb, in any of the national press. Both the left- and right-leaning press make mention of Brianna *as a girl* or *as female*, both in their own reporting and through reported speech and trial evidence.

Collocates +/-5 with Brianna

Table 4.10: Top 50 collocates (nouns, verbs and adjectives) with Brianna in the national subcorpora

(Sub)corpus	Nouns, verbs and adjectives
BGCor	ghey, girl, x, murder, y, stabbed, kill, transgender , park, found, trans , gheys, told, teenager, death, plan, killing, 16yearold, murdered, killed, stabbing, stab, february, mother , met, jenkinson, heard, boy, court, witty, bus, beautiful, times, hilarious, day, victim, police, culcheth, messages, boy, tribute, family, ratcliffe, birchwood, saturday, meet, knife, saw, linear, accused
National	ghey, murder, girl, stabbed, x, transgender , mother , kill, death, y, found, park, teenager, told, killing, murdered, jenkinson, plan, family, stabbing, trans , esther, killed, court, heard, met, boy, february, stab, 16yearold, victim, bus, times, police, ratcliffe, school, killers, witty, day, father , tribute, hilarious, beautiful, gheys, meet, saturday, knife, messages, boy, blood
Left	ghey, murder, girl, x, stabbed, transgender , mother , kill, y, death, teenager, found, told, killing, park, murdered, family, stabbing, plan, court, boy, heard, police, 16yearold, february, jenkinson, trans , killed, times, bus, esther, met, stab, father , victim, killers, school, day, murdering, wanted, weeks, boy, friends, last, tribute, accused, ratcliffe, saw, time, saturday, witty

Neutral	ghey, x, y, murder, kill, death, family, park, stabbed, girl, found, told, transgender , killing, stab, culcheth, blood, plan, stabbing, february, day, mother , birchwood, killed, body, heard, murdered, linear, phone, esther, messages, police, trans , court, teenager, 16yearold, met, other, saw, accused, knife, rl, schoolgirl, died, friends, time, meet, knew, boy, warrington
Right	ghey, murder, girl, stabbed, transgender , kill, mother , x, death, found, park, y, jenkinson, told, teenager, plan, killing, esther, met, murdered, killed, february, stabbing, victim, stab, trans , ratcliffe, heard, bus, gheys, court, boy, family, witty, 16yearold, school, times, meet, hilarious, beautiful, day, tribute, knife, killers, saturday, police, messages, boy, father , friend, left

Compared to the local press, Brianna’s trans identity is a key feature in the national reporting, with the adjective *transgender* appearing in the top 10 collocates for all national subcorpora but the politically neutral press. *Trans* consistently appears much lower than *transgender* in the national subcorpora’s top collocates lists despite *trans* appearing overall more frequently in the national subcorpus, indicating a clear preference for describing *Brianna* as *transgender*; concordance analysis of *trans* within the national subcorpus shows *trans* frequently appearing in front of nouns such as *community*, *people* and *rights*. The high prevalence of the noun *mother*, appearing in the top 10 for all national subcorpora (again except the neutral press), indicates the importance of Esther Ghey to the national news discourse. Brianna’s father also appears in the top 50 collocates in the national subcorpus albeit much further down.

Table 4.11: Top 50 adjective collocates with Brianna in the national subcorpora

(Sub)corpus	Adjectives
BGCor	transgender, trans, 16yearold, witty , beautiful , hilarious , obsessed , fearless , strong , frenzied, dead, best, young, guilty, teenage, vulnerable , tragic, online, high, loved, alive, sick, bullied, ill, many, wrong, multiple, amazing, brutal, accepted, disturbing, old, horrific, same, unsurvivable, evil, present, social, such, able, gruesome, lasting, mental, anxious, continued, good, larger , most, scared, next, unsuspecting
National	transgender, trans, 16yearold, witty , hilarious , beautiful , last, obsessed , fearless , other, strong , described, much, best, dead, frenzied, vulnerable , online, teenage, high, sick, tragic, brutal, bullied, guilty, alive, disturbing, loved, secondary, horrific, wrong, ill, young, present, unsurvivable, amazing, gruesome, such, evil, pink, able, final, larger , responsible, same, timid, good, lasting, social, busy, accepted, large
Left	transgender, 16yearold, trans, last, witty , obsessed , beautiful , hilarious , described, other, frenzied, fearless , much, strong , dead, online, vulnerable , teenage, guilty, high, pink, sick, responsible, best, alive, disturbing, final, ill, present, accepted, bullied, same, single, social, tragic, wrong, young, able, darker, evil, large, loved, secondary, amazing, brutal, horrific, larger , lasting, least, mental, whole
Neutral	transgender, 16yearold, other, trans, obsessed , witty , beautiful , last, dead, hilarious , young, guilty, high, tragic, vulnerable , alive, responsible, frenzied, multiple, many, accepted, fearless , old, sick, next, present, bullied, loved, mental, much, second, strong , best, described, least, more, pink, able, hurt, online, secondary, brutal, same, short, wrong, disturbing, due, full, injured, lasting, low, real, social, true
Right	transgender, trans, witty , 16yearold, hilarious , beautiful , fearless , obsessed , strong , last, much, best, other, dead, described, online, teenage, vulnerable , tragic, brutal, frenzied, high, horrific, loved, unsurvivable, gruesome, bullied, such, timid, alive, amazing, busy, wrong, good, sick, evil, ill, young, disturbing, guilty, secondary, unwitting, able, larger , anxious, present, pure, lasting, popular, catastrophic, final, handwritten, heartbreaking, kind, multiple, same, scared, social, unsuspecting

Brianna’s mother made several statements about Brianna in the year-long period of this study, the first and most reused describing Brianna as “*beautiful*, *witty* and *hilarious...strong*, *fearless* and one of a *kind*” and another, less frequently quoted, describing her as “*witty*, *funny* and *fearless*.” The first part of

the first quote was published in full 62 times across the national subcorpus, and the second quote was published just three times, all in *The Guardian*. Meanwhile, *witty* collocates with *Brianna* 128 times in the national subcorpus compared to 115 times for *beautiful*. Adjectives relating to the murder and murderers also appear higher across the national subcorpora, particularly *frenzied*, *brutal* and *horrific* as well as *sick*, *evil*, *disturbing*—and most notably *obsessed*, referring to Jenkinson as being “*obsessed with Brianna*.”

4.4. Discussion

Through its extensive coverage of Brianna’s death, we can see the continued oscillation between legitimising and othering of trans identities as found in Montiel-McCann’s 2023 study of UK broadsheets, as well as the persistence of prosody of trans people as victims as found in Zottola (2021), and clear divergences along political lines regarding the language used to subtly undermine Brianna’s identity as a girl.

As with the local press, Brianna in the national press is first and foremost *Brianna*, following the convention of calling murder victims by their given name and *personalising* the story for disparate audiences (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). While most murder victims are afforded that same naming convention, they are not all subject to the same news coverage (Greer, 2007; Jančaříková, 2018). Murders of so-called “perfect” or “ideal” victims are much more likely to receive extensive—and sympathetic—news coverage (Christie, 1986). Brianna meets the criteria of the **ideal victim** “being weak, vulnerable, innocent” as well as “white, middle class, ideally female” (Gekoski et al., 2012). Brianna’s youth and beauty are frequently evoked in both the text and images of the national press’ coverage. While the national press does not make any explicit reference to Brianna’s race or class, she (and her mother) is frequently visually depicted alongside the news stories, showing her as a conventionally pretty, white girl with strawberry blond hair often in her school uniform. The national press mentions Cheshire, the county where Warrington is located, at a higher rate than in BGCOR; the county has a more affluent and upper-middle class reputation than its largest town. Brianna’s parents’ jobs—another potential class indicator—are not frequently mentioned, however it is only in the national press where they do feature.³⁷ Combined, this constructs Brianna as **pretty, white and middle class**, as well as female and young.

A prevailing prosody in the national press is that Brianna is **weak, vulnerable and tragic**. It is in the national press that the narrative about her being *bullied* is widely presented. Contrary to the counternarrative offered by Brianna’s mother in the local press, the national press reports that Brianna “had been *bullied* for years”, citing her friends, her father and her own social media accounts as their sources.³⁸ Unlike the local press, who have more direct access to local sources close to Brianna, many reporters in the national press rely on online or secondary sources of information, owing to the need for

³⁷ Jenkinson and Ratcliffe’s parents’ occupations are more frequently included, making clear their middle-class origins and thus adding to their newsworthiness by contributing to the moral panic surrounding “children from good homes” and the corrupting force of the internet (Cromer, 2004).

³⁸ Brianna’s social media accounts were deleted shortly after her identification, making this self-told narrative hard to verify.

speed in publishing online and possible physical distance from the story.³⁹ This distance also means it is less likely that Brianna’s family are able to cultivate a relationship with the national press in the same way they can with the local press, reducing the power they have to shape Brianna’s narrative. Brianna is described somewhat contradictorily as both *timid, anxious, scared, unsuspecting* (and thus innocent) and isolated from her peers (in a special unit instead of mainstream classes, seemingly for her own wellbeing because of the unnamed bullies) as well as *larger* than life with a *large* following on TikTok and desires to be famous. Her otherness as a non-cisgender girl both renders her *vulnerable* and subsequently requires her to also be *fearless* and *strong*. She is thus constructed as both weak and full of potential, making her untimely *death* at the hands of someone she had believed to be her *friend* even more *tragic*.

Brianna’s murder was reported in the national press before her trans identity was known; being perceived as a perfect victim alongside the other novel and *negative* aspects of the crime already made her murder newsworthy for the national press. Her being trans, however, lends even greater *novelty* to the story—and provides the various newspapers with a means to **advance their own agendas** with regards to trans rights or gender criticism (Harcup & O’Neill, 2017). The terminology used to describe Brianna’s trans identity is no longer as openly transphobic as seen in Baker and Zottola’s studies, the data for both of which are now over a decade old. One of the most problematic newspapers from Baker’s study—the *Daily Star*—not only did not employ once-common terms such as *transsexual* or *transgendered* in its reporting, but it also mostly avoided reporting on the story at all, publishing just four articles across the year-long period. This choice by the *Daily Star* to not cover the story, despite its apparent newsworthiness, might reflect a wish to avoid repeating its past transgressions or be an assessment that their presumed apolitical, working class, entertainment-seeking public would not be interested in reading news reporting on the murder of a trans teenage girl, thus invisibilising Brianna.

However, that is not say that all other national publications report on Brianna’s gender in a manner considered respectful by trans advocacy groups; this is most notable in the use of Brianna’s **deadname**. Early articles from *The Times* and the *Daily Mail* included her deadname as part of their own reporting, but these mentions were edited out after outcries in the LGBTQ+ press.⁴⁰ However, the deadnaming continued, with five national newspapers—the right-leaning *Telegraph*, *Times* and *Daily Mail* and left-leaning *Independent* and *Daily Mirror*—attempting to legitimise its inclusion by attributing it to authority figures: the presiding judge, who included information about Brianna’s gender and name assigned at birth in her jury instruction, and Brianna’s father, who called Brianna his “only son” and by her deadname in his public statement, post-sentencing. This legitimisation strategy enables the publications to present a specific discourse and advance their newspaper’s agenda while distancing itself from potential criticism (Baker, 2014b): in this case, they can claim simply to be reporting the speech of others, not making their own editorial commentary on Brianna’s gender in their reporting. However, as other newspapers reported both the judge’s jury instruction and Brianna’s father’s grief

³⁹ Warrington is approximately four hours north of London where most of the national press is based.

⁴⁰ It is possible other newspapers also explicitly deadnamed Brianna at this early stage, however, it is not possible confirm if it appeared elsewhere because of lack of indexing of website updates and the absence of corrections notices at the end of articles.

without deadnaming or misgendering her, it is clear an editorial choice was made by these newspapers to keep this information in their articles. There is alignment between the target audiences of the right-leaning press (older and more socially conservative) and the left-leaning tabloid press (majority male) and the decreasing support for trans rights within the British public (Cleary, 2023; C. McLean, 2021), which reflects the shared values between these national papers and their publics. The inclusion of *The Independent* in the list of deadnaming newspapers is an outlier as a left-leaning broadsheet, however the one article in which the deadname appears is from PA Media newswire, unlike the three right-leaning newspapers, whose own reporting repeatedly deadnames Brianna. This highlights the tension between the need for speedy content—which PA Media readily supplies—and a newspaper’s consistent editorial stance on sensitive issues.

The right-leaning press also employs other, subtler ways of **undermining Brianna’s trans identity and femininity**. For example, when the adjectives *trans* and *transgender* are used in the right-leaning subcorpora, they appear more commonly in the predicative position—i.e., “Brianna *was transgender*” or “Brianna, who *was trans*”—than in BGCOR or any other subcorpora. (The adjectives remain overall more frequently used as attributive modifiers within both the national subcorpus and BGCOR—i.e., *trans girl*, *transgender teenager*, etc.) As attributive adjectives typically add previously established secondary information to a noun phrase, whereas predicative adjectives present new or primary information, one linguistic explanation for this predicative versus attributive use of *trans(gender)* could be how subjective (i.e., based on opinion or temporality) or objective (i.e., fixed) the adjective is considered in relation to its noun: e.g., Brianna’s age is indisputable and thus more frequently attributive, whereas her gender is more controversial and thus often predicative (Glass, 2024). When using *trans* and *transgender* as attributive modifiers, both the left- and right-leaning press display a preference for the gender-neutral nouns *teen(ager)* and *child* over *(school)girl*. They both also more widely use the gender-neutral adjective *witty* than the female-coded *beautiful*, despite the latter being the first adjective used in a string of descriptors given by Brianna’s family in their first statement and thus more common in both the local and LGBTQ+ subcorpora. The right-leaning press also use the phrases *born a boy* and *born male* more frequently than the other national subcorpora, reinforcing to their public the cisnormative idea that Brianna’s “real” gender is that which she was assigned at birth, and reminding their readers that Brianna has not always identified *as female* by reporting the length of time she has been *living as a girl* prior to her death. This information, combined with Brianna’s repeatedly reported young age, further constructs Brianna’s gender identity as unstable and changeable—something to be questioned, rather than accepted, by an increasingly gender critical public.

Brianna is also presented as **part of wider national discourses** around not only trans identity but also youth violence and mental health. While like much of the press worldwide, the national press in the UK might no longer have as wide a readership as it once did, it is still estimated to reach over 45 million people, 80% of the UK’s 15-year-old+ population (PAMCo, 2024), retaining a powerful position in driving conflicting and competing national public discourses about the validity of trans identities, especially as regarding trans youth. In several publications, Brianna’s story is tagged as related to other articles, even when her name does not appear in these articles, such as serious crime stories

involving other teenagers or trans people, including trans perpetrators, and her violent death draws comparisons with other gruesome murders committed by teenagers. Brianna is both integral to and independent of the wider national trans discourse, as seen for example, in the near-simultaneous publication of *Daily Mail* articles sympathetically reporting on trans schoolgirl Brianna's tragic death and positively commenting on the government's new anti-trans school guidance.

Brianna's entry into the wider national discourse is partly driven directly and indirectly by her mother, who launches a campaign to help address teenagers' *mental* health, becoming increasingly prominent herself. When Esther Ghey visits the UK parliament and Rishi Sunak makes his inappropriate comment, coverage in the national and LGBTQ+ press increases to rates higher than during the trial, with an average of 26 articles published each day compared to the eight per day during the trial. Many of these articles are commentary criticising either Sunak's comments or Starmer's response; Brianna thus becomes a means of indicating on which side of the ongoing culture war a publication stands and her story further fulfils the national press' secondary role of shaping public discourse and feeding back into the political establishment by indicating their support or opposition for the government at the time. This is also notable in how the national press engages in discussions about whether or not Brianna should be gendered as female on her death certificate as she was too young to have acquired a gender recognition certificate (GRC); this discourse appears at least 13 times in the national press—12 of which are in the right-leaning press, where it is frequently included along with commentary on the implied too-lenient process to acquire a GRC. The right-leaning press also carries a story about Brianna being included in a list of the dead read in parliament on International Women's Day (IWD), not only tying Brianna into the wider debate of who is a woman, but also invalidating Brianna's gender identity by questioning her inclusion. In both the GRC and IWD stories, the legitimisation strategy of quoting other sources is used to simultaneously validate the publication's stance and distance themselves from it.

The volume of press coverage reflects not only the newsworthiness and level of importance the national press has given Brianna's story, but also *shareability* and profitability of the story. Brianna is a **commodity publishers can market and profit from**, as seen by the *Daily Mail's* subscribers-only podcast promoted on the front page of both the website and print paper chronicling the trial.

While the possible transphobic motivations behind the murder are dismissed in the national coverage (e.g., Pidd, 2023), Brianna's murder is narratively presented by much of the national press as a result of her being trans: had she not been trans, she would not have been bullied; had she not been bullied, she would not have been in the special unit; had she not been in the special unit, she would not have met Jenkinson; had she not met Jenkinson, she would not have become **an object of obsession**; had Jenkinson not been *obsessed* with Brianna, she would not have made the *plan* with Ratcliffe to *kill* Brianna; if they had not made their *sick* plan, they would not have stabbed Brianna in a *frenzied* and *gruesome* attack, leaving her with *unsurvivable* injuries.⁴¹ Brianna's construction as the object of Jenkinson's obsession and Ratcliffe's disgust does not require her trans identity to be explicit. By the time the two of them are identified at sentencing, Brianna's trans identity has already been established in the national press; this can be seen in the increase in the number of articles post-verdict (when the press

⁴¹ All italicised terms feature in the national subcorpus top 50 collocates.

is able to publish details about the murderers hitherto restricted for contempt of court) that do not include the words *trans* or *transgender*. (See Chapter 6 for more detail on the diachronic shifts in the construction of Brianna's identity.)

A small number of comment pieces in the national subcorpora are explicitly by-lined to trans journalists, i.e., the writer makes explicit reference to their own gender identity in a reflexive and semi-autoethnographic article rooted in their positionality (e.g., McConnell, 2024; O'Thompson, 2024). An inexhaustive search found these articles primarily to be carried in the left-leaning press, enabling these publications to further signal their *newspaper's agenda* to their presumed more progressive public: they support trans people by elevating trans voices. This effort to give space for subaltern voices to speak does offer trans people the means of self-representation (Billard, 2016; Billard & Zhang, 2022; Humphrey, 2016), but in most cases these articles are commentary not reporting—the vast majority of which appears to have been **written by men**, which also reflects the gender imbalance in national newsrooms (Lago, 2024). The only three instances of *cisgender* in the national press comes from one cis journalist in *i*, a politically neutral paper, in two comment pieces supporting trans women in the current culture war. As with distinguishing Brianna as trans without ever describing her murderers as cis, this explicit (self)declaration of trans journalists' gender identity others them, making clear their deviation from the norm, i.e., that all other articles have been written by (unlabelled) cis and mostly male journalists (Foucault, 1979; S. Hall, 1996).

5. Brianna is... a trans teenage girl, mourned by a transnational community

5.1. The role of the niche LGBTQ+ press and its counterpublic

As noted earlier, coverage of trans people and trans issues has increased in the national press in the past decade. However, while there has been growing scholarly interest in the representation of LGBTQ+ people in the news media, little of this research has focused on the LGBTQ-focused/produced/owned press, and where there has been study on the LGBTQ+ press, it has mostly been of a historical rather than contemporary nature, e.g., Oram & Bengry (2020) and Streitmatter (1995). This history does show, however, how vital this niche media has been for the LGBTQ+ community as a means of forming shared identities (whether as individual communities, e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, or trans, or as a broader coalition of queer identities), developing a collective political consciousness, and mobilizing political action (Billard & Gross, 2020; McKinnon et al., 2017).

As well as long playing a role in community building, the LGBTQ+ press—much like queer media and culture in general—has also long been transnational (Bayramoğlu et al., 2024; N. McLean, 2014), enabling the connection of similarly marginalised, subaltern groups across their national borders. This community-led media also plays a role in not only increasing the representation of trans people, but also improving the sensitivity, respectfulness and nuance of that increased representation (Fink & Palmer, 2020), countering narratives in the mainstream press, and elevating trans voices to tell their own stories (Billard, 2022). In distinguishing itself apart from—and counter to—the mainstream, the LGBTQ+ press constructs and addresses a *counterpublic*; they are not addressing the “general public” but rather those who are marginalised or excluded from that wider public (Warner, 2002). However, there is also no one single counterpublic; within my transnational LGBTQ+ subcorpus, there are publications that seek to primarily address specific subsections of the LGBTQ+ community or their specific geographically local community, and those that are seeking to speak to a wider global audience are still doing so predominantly in English and through a Western/Global North lens.

The news values of the LGBTQ+ press are also distinct to the national press. Similarly to the local press, *proximity* plays an important role—not in a geographic sense, but in a communal sense; the story is *personalised* in recognition that violence is something witnessed and experienced by many in the LGBTQ+ community. The *impact* the story might have on the community is also a key driver of newsworthiness.

5.2. Materials: 20 publications from three continents

Taking a similarly broad approach to my selection of national newspapers for this corpus and in recognition that this news niche is small but not homogenous, rather than rely on my own reading preferences, I used a list of the most-visited LGBTQ+ media website compiled by Muck Rack, a database for journalists and public relations professionals (*Rankings: Top 50 Global LGBTQ Publications, 2024*).⁴² Most of the publications on the list are the websites belonging to “lifestyle” magazines (e.g., *Gay Times*),

⁴² Based on total monthly visitors; accessed in July 2024.

however, some are dedicated news sites (e.g., *PinkNews*). While all appear on a list of “LGBTQ Publications”, some are targeted at subgroups within the wider LGBTQ+ community, such as gay men (e.g., *Attitude*, *Schwulissimo*) and lesbian and bisexual women and non-binary people (e.g., *Diva*); notably, however, none on the top 50 list were specifically targeted at trans readers. The list also includes independent blogs (e.g., *An Injustice*) and sites owned by major publishers (e.g., Condé Nast’s *Them*).

The listed websites that published articles about Brianna Ghey during the 12-month study period were: *Attitude*, *Diva*, *Gay Times* and *PinkNews* based in the UK, as well as overseas websites: *Autostraddle*, *Edge Media Network*, *INTO*, *LGBTQ Nation*, the *Los Angeles Blade*, the *Philadelphia Gay News*, *The Advocate Magazine*, *Them* and the *Washington Blade* (all USA), *queer.de* and *Schwulissimo* (both Germany), *GCN/Gay Community News* (Ireland), *CromosomaX* (Spain), *Têtu* (France), *An Injustice* (global/no fixed location) and the *Star Observer* (Australia). The other 31 publications were excluded from this corpus as they did not publish any articles referencing Brianna Ghey. Despite not appearing on Muck Rack’s list, the blog *QueerAF* was included in the study as it is targeted at LGBTQ-identifying journalists and other media specialists and focuses on the UK media’s coverage of LGBTQ+ issues.

Table 5.1: List of publications included in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus and their additional metadata tags and the communities they serve according to their websites

Publication	No. articles	Level	Country	Location	Community served
PinkNews	94	LGBTQ+	UK	UK	LGBTQ+
Attitude	19	LGBTQ+	UK	UK	Gay men
Gay Times	11	LGBTQ+	UK	UK	LGBTQ+
Diva	10	LGBTQ+	UK	UK	LBT+ women
Queer AF	8	LGBTQ+	UK	UK	LGBTQ+
GCN	9	LGBTQ+	Ireland	rest of world	LGBTQ+
queer.de	7	LGBTQ+	Germany	rest of world	LGBTQ+
CromosomaX	7	LGBTQ+	Spain	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Them	7	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
The Advocate Magazine	6	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Têtu	4	LGBTQ+	France	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Schwulissimo	4	LGBTQ+	Germany	rest of world	Gay men
LGBTQ Nation	4	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
An Injustice	3	LGBTQ+	n/a	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Los Angeles Blade	3	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Philadelphia Gay News	3	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Washington Blade	3	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
INTO	2	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	Queer
Star Observer	1	LGBTQ+	Australia	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Autostraddle	1	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LBT+ women
Edge Media Network	1	LGBTQ+	USA	rest of world	LGBTQ+
Total	207				

LGBTQ+, queer and trans linguistics

In examining how the online, transnational LGBTQ+ press discursively constructs Brianna Ghey's trans identity, this thesis engages in LGBTQ+ linguistics, i.e., the use of language *by* LGBTQ+ people (Jones, 2021). I also engage in *queer* linguistics, by applying queer theory to linguistics (Motschenbacher, 2011) to examine "how language enables (and at times disguises) the intersections of sexuality, gender, race, class, and other forms of social inequality" (Leap in Tannen et al., 2015) and "how heterosexual normativity is discursively re/produced and sometimes resisted through specific linguistic practices" (K. Hall, 2014). As such, it enables the identification of the gender norms present in the various texts, but as Motschenbacher & Stegu point out, when being used in conjunction with corpus linguistic methods, "the categories used for quantification cannot be taken as self-evident and need to be critically reflected upon and challenged" (2013). With this in mind, this thesis explores the differing uses of *trans* versus *transgender* more deeply than in Baker (2014a, 2019) and Zottola (2018, 2021), to consider the ideological and ethical underpinnings of such lexical choices.

While queer linguistics is focused on the norms present and perpetuated through the use of language in discussing gender and sexuality, the emerging field of *trans* linguistics is more concerned with "grammatical gender, gender difference in the voice, and gender in discourse" (Zimman, 2020). Zimman (2021) highlights the changing norms and nomenclature used by the trans community to describe themselves versus that used by cisgender individuals and institutions (as well as the diversity of terms and identities present in non-Western cultures), while Konnelly (2021) calls for greater nuance in discussions of normativity and authenticity. A corpus of text written by trans reporters and trans-focused publications was not compiled for this study, but in examining how the LGBTQ+ press discusses Brianna and her gender, I seek to elevate non-cisheteronormative-led discourse despite not being a trans linguist.

5.3. Findings

Frequency of publication

Table 5.2: Number of articles related to Brianna Ghey published in the LGBTQ+ press across periods 1 to 10

LGBTQ+ subcorpora	Total	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
UK	142	0	15	5	71	14	4	7	4	21	1
Rest of the world	65	0	11	4	24	7	4	5	5	5	0
Total	206	0	26	9	95	21	7	12	9	26	1

Table 5.3: Percentages and percentage-point comparisons for the LGBTQ+ press across periods 1 to 10

LGBTQ+ subcorpus	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
percentage of total coverage	0%	13%	4%	46%	10%	4%	6%	4%	13%	0%
compared to local press	-2%	+3%	+1%	+15%	-14%	-3%	-1%	-6%	+9%	-1%
compared to national press	-1%	+5%	+2%	+34%	-12%	-3%	-2%	-11%	-11%	-2%

The LGBTQ+ press did not publish any stories until Brianna had been identified as trans by the local and national press. The UK-based LGBTQ+ press published over two-thirds of all stories about Brianna, with

most of the coverage produced during period 4—one of the quietest periods for the national press. Like the national press, their coverage increased during period 9 as the LGBTQ+ press also responded to Sunak’s comments in parliament and Starmer’s response.

Frequency of query terms

Table 5.4: Use of Brianna vs. Brianna Ghey in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora

Name	BGCor total	LGBTQ+ subcorpus	UK LGBTQ+	Rest of World LGBTQ+
Brianna	11844	1089	733	356
Brianna Ghey	1873	431	268	163
% given name only	84%	60%	63%	54%

The LGBTQ+ press is more likely to call Brianna by her full name compared to BGCor and the local and national subcorpora.

Table 5.5: Terms from Baker and Zottola’s studies present in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	LGBTQ+ subcorpus	UK LGBTQ+	Rest of World LGBTQ+
trans	2311	1203	842	361
transgender	1276	213	77	136
tranny/ies	25	0	0	0
transsexual	1	1	0	1

Table 5.6: Terms absent from articles published after Brianna’s identification in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus

Query term	BGCor total	LGBTQ+ subcorpus
Total no. of articles	1253	261
Brianna	26	3
% of articles	2%	1%
trans AND transgender	269	6
% of articles	20%	3%

The LGBTQ+ press, especially in the UK, shows a clear preference for the term *trans* over *transgender*. Unlike the local and national subcorpora, the word *tranny* does not appear; *QueerAF* does include *tr***y*, making it clear the word is a slur. *Brianna* and the terms *trans* and *transgender* appear in almost all articles, with a small number of unrelated articles tagged as related to Brianna, e.g., two about the singer Sam Smith, who had expressed support for Brianna at their concerts. *Transsexual* appears in an article complaining about the use of this term in a new Spanish law in a roundup article about trans-related news in Europe.

Table 5.7: Predicative and attributive adjectives relating to Brianna’s gender and age in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	LGBTQ+ subcorpus	UK LGBTQ+	Rest of World LGBTQ+
was trans(gender)	298	35	24	11
trans(gender) girl	224	101	56	45
trans(gender) schoolgirl	76	8	7	1
trans(gender) teen/ager	408	91	64	27
trans(gender) child	28	5	3	0
trans(gender) children	25	15	8	7
16*year*old*	774	160	98	62
trans(gender) 16yearold	15	3	3	0
16yearold trans(gender)	115	59	35	24
16yearold girl	72	20	7	13
16yearold schoolgirl	23	1	1	0
trans teenage girl	10	10	2	8
cis(gender)	29	17	9	8

The LGBTQ+ press shows a preference for using *trans* as an attributive adjective and a slight preference for *trans girl* over *trans teen(ager)*, however it is the only subcorpora to use the compound phrase *trans teenage girl*. It also contains the greatest number of references to *trans(gender) children*.

Table 5.8: Terms relating to Brianna’s family relations, deadname and transition in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora

Query term / pre-determined collocate	BGCor total	LGBTQ+ subcorpus	UK LGBTQ+	Rest of World LGBTQ+
daughter('s)	820	93	55	38
son('s)	76	1	0	1
[deadname]	12	0	0	0
deadname/ed/ing	74	73	55	18
transition/ed/ing	76	35	22	13
at birth	15	10	6	4
born a boy	14	0	0	0
born male	7	0	0	0
as male	4	2	1	1
male to female	2	2	0	2
living as	22	9	8	1
as female	8	3	3	0
as a girl	29	4	4	0

The terms *sex change*, *changed sex* and *changed gender* were not present in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus.

The LGBTQ+ press does not use the phrase *born a boy* or *born male*; the presence of *at birth* indicates the likely presence of phrases such as “assigned male *at birth*”. Brianna’s deadname is not present in this subcorpora, but the frequent use of words relating to the practice of deadnaming indicates there was reporting on the national press deadnaming her.

Collocates +/-5 with Brianna

Table 5.9: Top 50 collocates (nouns, verbs and adjectives) with Brianna in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus

(Sub)corpus	Nouns, verbs and adjectives
BGCor	ghey, girl, x, murder, y, stabbed, kill, transgender, park, found, trans, gheys, told, teenager, death, plan, killing, 16yearold, murdered, killed, stabbing, stab, february, mother, met, jenkinson, heard, boy, court, witty, bus, beautiful, times, hilarious, day, victim, police, culcheth, messages, boy, tribute, family, ratcliffe, birchwood, saturday, meet, knife, saw, linear, accused
LGBTQ+	ghey, trans , death, murder, girl, 16yearold, family, mother, witty, beautiful, hilarious, transgender , found, stabbed, esther, february, teenager, killing, teen, tribute , statement, met, trial, father, friends, told, remember , strong , fearless , murdered, people, uk , daughter, held , killed, memory , name , charged, park, set, killers, mum, murdering, peter, warrington , year, described, guilty, hate, spooner, teenage, vigil , vigils

The LGBTQ+ subcorpus was the only top 50 to feature *strong* and *fearless* in addition to *witty*, *beautiful* and *hilarious*. It was also the only top 50 to feature *vigil(s)*. Unlike BGCor or the other subcorpora, the LGBTQ+ subcorpus does not feature Brianna’s murderers, either by name or alias, in the top 50 collocates. As several of the LGBTQ+ publications included in this subcorpora are not based in the UK, *uk* and *warrington* feature more frequently than in the local or national press.

Table 5.10: Top 50 adjective collocates with Brianna in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus

Corpus	Adjectives
BGCor	transgender, trans, 16yearold, witty, beautiful, hilarious, obsessed, fearless, strong, frenzied, dead, best, young, guilty, teenage, vulnerable, tragic, online, high, loved, alive, sick, bullied, ill, many, wrong, multiple, amazing, brutal, accepted, disturbing, old, horrific, same, unsurvivable, evil, present, social, such, able, gruesome, lasting, mental, anxious, continued, good, larger, most, scared, next, unsuspecting
LGBTQ+	trans , 16yearold, witty, beautiful, hilarious, transgender , strong, fearless, described, guilty, teenage, young, loved, tragic, other, dead, old, many, whole, continued, most, much, clear, last, pink, british , own, violent , vulnerable, detailed, emotional , evil, online, powerful , pure, alive, best, horrific, local, lovely , mental, multiple, pervasive , popular, sad , several , specific , brave, brutal, bullied, confident, experienced , full, funny , gymnastic , high, invaluable , larger, last, lasting, lgbtq , many, more, next, proud, same, secondary, serial , social, such, sweetest , true

The last 25 adjectives had the same tally, hence why the LGBTQ+ “top 50” list of collocates includes 70+ terms.

The LGBTQ+ subcorpus had the most unique adjectival collocates, not present in any other top 50 lists. Negative adjectives are fewer and ranked lower within the subcorpus’ top 50. *Obsessed* does not appear.

5.4. Discussion

The frequencies and collocates found in this subcorpus highlight the significant divergence in the news discourse present in the LGBTQ+ press—not only in how Brianna’s trans identity is constructed but also in how else she is described and the other discourses in which she appears. This discursive divergence shows how different the (counter)public is that the LGBTQ+ press is seeking to address; it is not looking to replicate the local or national discourse but to add to it.

First and foremost, Brianna is **trans**—with a clear preference given to this term over *transgender*, distinguishing it from all other subcorpora. Across BGCor, we can see a shift in the use of the terms *trans* and *transgender*, with the more conservative (and in the case of *Warrington*

Worldwide, older) press more frequently using *transgender* compared to the more progressive (and in the case of the *Warrington Guardian*, younger) press preferring to use *trans*. This is similar to the divergence between the use of *transsexual* and *transgender* in Baker's studies a decade ago, demonstrating how the language we use to describe gender changes over time (Baker, 2014a, 2019; Bradley et al., 2023; Zottola, 2021), and is also reflected in the greater frequency of *lgbtq* and *queer* in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus versus *lgbt* and near-absence of *queer* in the right-leaning national press. These linguistic shifts also reflect changes in our conceptualisation of gender, moving away from a medicalised sex-based binary understanding and towards a more open and inclusive spectrum of gender identities. The term *trans* encapsulates not only the transition of a gender assigned at birth to the other binary gender, but also non-binary, gender-queer, agender identities and any other identity not aligned to the gender or sex assigned at birth, and even removing gender from our identity or remodelling entirely in our own personal image, un beholden to existing conventions (Stryker et al., 2008; Zimman, 2020). As she is not able to speak for herself (her TikTok account was deleted shortly after her death), we do not know exactly how Brianna identified—we are told by others (the police, her family, friends, teachers, politicians) that she is trans(gender). Without Brianna's own words, the application of *trans* rather than *transgender* is more accurate as it encompasses more possibilities. This preference for *trans* is even more stark within the UK LGBTQ+ press, which collectively uses *trans* +90% of the time, with some newer US publications using *trans* exclusively. However, this preference is not universal across the LGBTQ+ press; some of the longer-established titles in the US still show a marked preference for *transgender*. Established pre- or during the AIDS pandemic, these titles were originally targeted at cis-gay men and although they now purport to serve the wider "LGBT" or "LGBTQ" community, their media packs indicate that they still have majority male readerships.⁴³ This suggests that using the terminology for trans people currently most accepted by the trans community is not a priority for these publications—and by extension their majority cis-gay-male publics—further demonstrating the heterogenous nature of the LGBTQ+ community and its counterpublics, and exposing some of the hierarchies of power and privilege therein (McCann, 2011).

Much as *heterosexuality* only gained definition in opposition to the non-normative *homosexuality* (Foucault, 1966), so too has the non-normative *trans* identity spawned *cis(gender)* to identify those whose gender identity is the same as that they were given at birth (Amin, 2022). However, while this term exists, few people to whom it applies choose to use it, seeing no need to distinguish themselves from the non-normative. This is visible in the near-absence of *cis(gender)* being used to describe Jenkinson or Ratcliffe. They are once each described as *the cis girl* and *the cis boy* and collectively as *the cis teens* in the LGBTQ+ press. This briefly disrupts the notion that Girl X and Boy Y are inherently cis because of the absence of trans from their descriptions, however, most uses of *cis(gender)* in this subcorpus do not refer to any specific individuals but as a means to distinguish the

⁴³ The *Washington Blade* and *Los Angeles Blade* both provide gender breakdowns of their readership: the *Washington Blade* is 60% male, 40% female, with no data on trans readers; the *Los Angeles Blade* is 61% male, 32% female and 7% trans, implying 90% are cis. The *Philadelphia Gay News* does not provide gender demographics, only age and earnings, indicating most readers are much older than Brianna. While the *Washington Blade* uses LGBTQ consistently in the subcorpus articles, it still uses LGBT on its "About Us" and "Advertise" pages (Los Angeles Blade, 2022; Philadelphia Gay News, 2024; Washington Blade, 2023)

majority cis population from the minority trans population, e.g., when discussing the threat of random violence faced by trans women versus their cis peers. Thus it is in its absence that Jenkinson and Ratcliffe are identified as cis and thus normative in opposition to Brianna's **non-cis and non-normative** gender identity.

I was surprised to find that there was not a clearer preference within the LGBTQ+ subcorpora for *trans(gender) (school)girl* over *trans(gender) teen(ager)*, however it is the only subcorpus that uses the compound phrase ***trans teenage girl***. Other compounds also found at greater frequency than in the national or local subcorpora include *16yearold trans(gender) girl* and *young trans woman*, explicitly constructing Brianna's intersectional identity, rather than only presenting her age, gender and trans identities separately, as is common in the other subcorpora. A closer look at the concordances reveals that the use of *girl* (without *trans(gender)* as an attributive adjective) in the LGBTQ+ corpus appears to refer less frequently to "Girl X" and more to Brianna than any other subcorpora.⁴⁴ In context of the LGBTQ+ press, which is only reporting on Brianna's story because she is trans, the omission of trans as an attributive adjective presents less as trans invisibilisation or indifference but as **gender affirmation**: Brianna was a girl.

Like the local press, Brianna is presented as belonging to a community. The LGBTQ+ press only starts to cover the story once they know Brianna is trans and thus shares a communal *proximity* that makes her murder newsworthy. The prosody that Brianna is **mourned by the LGBTQ community** is indicated by the prevalence of words like *remember*, *memory*, *vigil(s)*, *tribute* and *lgbtq*. The local press also reported on the local Warrington community gathering to memorialise Brianna, however this prosody does not have the same overall prominence in the local news discourse as it does in the LGBTQ+ subcorpus. These vigils are reported as happening in cities across the world, showing the *impact* Brianna's death has had on the transnational LGBTQ+ community, reinforcing Brianna's newsworthiness. Tributes are made by various prominent LGBTQ+ celebrities, such as British singer Sam Smith; after making a tribute to Brianna at one of their concerts, Brianna is repeatedly mentioned in articles primarily about Sam Smith unrelated to their tribute, e.g., about Smith winning awards, further entrenching Brianna's relevance and thus belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Almost half of the LGBTQ+ press' coverage comes during period 4, a point at which the national press' interest fell due to reporting restrictions on the criminal proceedings and the local press shifted from the crime to memorials. This was not due to non-UK publications disregarding the reporting restrictions (as I had first suspected) but because of this community impact; there is little mention of the accused during this period—instead they focus on the vigils and reflections on the rising threat of violence faced by the LGB and especially trans community. However, the LGBTQ+ press does not cover Brianna's anniversary. This could be due to the different publication schedules and the arbitrary cut-off of this study, leading to the omission of period 10-related articles published the following day and later in the week. Or it could be a reflection of the waning interest of the non-UK LGBTQ+ press in this story once Brianna's killers had been brought to justice—and other cases of trans-targeted violence had entered the news cycle, such as

⁴⁴ A more sophisticated nltk application would need to be used to confirm this hypothesis.

the death of Nex Benedict, a American 16-year-old nonbinary highschooler who died in their school bathroom at the hands of classmates on February 8, 2024, just four days before Brianna’s anniversary.

Like the national press, Brianna is also **part of larger discourses**, e.g., worsening anti-trans political rhetoric, rising violence against trans women, and deadnaming and misgendering in the press. In the non-UK LGBTQ+ press, these discourses are frequently raised as specific to the UK. Brianna’s story thus provides *consonance* for these non-UK newspapers and their pre-conceived belief that Brianna’s is a specifically British story because of the increasing anti-trans sentiment of the British (cis/heteronormative) public (Bednarek & Caple, 2017). *Consonance* is similarly found in the UK LGBTQ+ press’ coverage of the national press’ *deadnaming* of Brianna and Sunak’s comments and the subsequent support he receives from the Conservative government. Several articles report on the national media’s reporting of Brianna’s death, with some directed *at* those journalists. This discourse sets the LGBTQ+ press as counter to the national press, further establishing their public as a *counterpublic* to the national public(s).

The violence of Brianna’s death, early police reports that she had been subjected to a “targeted attack”, and the rising attacks on trans people in the UK, led several LGBTQ+ publications to report that Brianna was the **victim of a hate crime**.⁴⁵ The compound phrase *hate crime* featured 102 times across the 206 articles in the LGBTQ+ subcorpora compared to 183 times across the 785 articles in the national subcorpora and just 27 times in the 261 local press articles. In examining the concordances of *hate crime*, it appears that the local and national press predominantly reported that there was “no evidence of a *hate crime*”.⁴⁶ By contrast, concordances in the LGBTQ+ press indicate less certainty with *possible*, *exploring* and *yet* appearing with greater frequency. There are several articles that dismiss the relevance of whether Brianna’s murder legally constitutes a hate crime—the violence she faced is reason enough for concern without examining the motives of her killers. By the time Jenkinson and Ratcliffe were sentenced, the judge ruled that Brianna’s murder was not a hate crime, instead highlighting the “enjoyment” in killing her killers were seeking and the obsession Jenkinson had had with Brianna. However, it was reported repeatedly during the trial that Ratcliffe had called Brianna “it” and Jenkinson’s obsession was said to be rooted in part because she deemed Brianna “too pretty”. This led to some articles in the LGBTQ+ press to continue to identify **transphobia** as a motivation for Brianna’s killing and to debate about what exactly constituted a transphobic hate crime if not this murder.

Despite the discussion of the possible motives of her killers, the LGBTQ+ subcorpus is the only subcorpus not to feature either Jenkinson and Ratcliffe (by name or alias) in its top 50 collocates with Brianna. Throughout their reporting, Brianna remains **the main character**: she does not shift into the background as she does in the national press once Jenkinson and Ratcliffe’s identities are revealed nor as her mother starts her teen mental health campaign. Similarly, the adjective *obsessed* does not appear, again reducing focus on Jenkinson and removing the suggestion that Brianna is somehow responsible for

⁴⁵ Trans hate crimes have increased by 11% in the last year, with the UK government’s own report recognising the role discussions led by politicians, the media and on social media over the last year “may” have contributed to this increase (UK Government, 2023).

⁴⁶ A detailed collocational analysis was not conducted on this phrase owing to the number possible of variants and the limited scope of this thesis.

her own *violent* death as a result of being the object of Jenkinson's obsession. The adjectives used to describe Brianna are predominantly more positive, with *strong*, *fearless* and *loved* as well as *witty*, *beautiful* and *hilarious* all appearing much higher than in other subcorpora. The words describing her murder are also less graphic. This reflects the LGBTQ+ press' sense of a duty of care to their readers (some articles even carry a content warning at the top), and a desire to humanise trans people, presenting Brianna as more than just her gender identity (Fink & Palmer, 2020; Humphrey, 2016; Montiel-McCann, 2023).

6. Conclusion: Brianna was ...?

From her murder in February 2023 to her anniversary 12 months later, Brianna Ghey was written about or tagged in 1253 articles by over 400 journalists for 33 different publications of three different levels, serving various distinct publics and counterpublics. Through examination of BGCOR and its various subcorpora, three distinct discursive constructions of Brianna's identity are revealed—to the local press, she is a local schoolgirl; to the national press, she is a transgender teenager; and to the niche and transnational LGBTQ+ press, Brianna is a trans teenage girl—clearly demonstrating how gender and identity are discursively constructed for different publics and purposes, by publications holding different positionalities and empowerments and responding to differing news values (Butler, 1990, 1993; Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987; Foucault, 1979, 1982; Harcup & O'Neill, 2017; Warner, 2002; Yep et al., 2020).

6.1. Addressing the research questions

1. How is Brianna textually described by various types of press?
And how does this differ between the local, national and transnational niche LGBTQ+ press?
And what role do the presumed publics have in this difference?

To the local press: a local schoolgirl

In the local press, Brianna is identified as *trans(gender)* but this is secondary to her identity as a *local schoolgirl* who has been *victim* of a shocking killing at the hands of fellow local teenagers. Her trans identity adds to the construction of Brianna as an important local news subject but it does not drive it. This is even more notable when examining the headlines of the local press: *trans* and *transgender* only appear once across all 261 articles. The prominence in the local press of her family, especially her mother, Esther Ghey and her campaign to help teens with their mental health, help construct Brianna as someone who could have been anyone's *vulnerable child*, evoking greater empathy in—and continued readership by—its adult readers, many of whom have their own (predominantly cis) children. The local press' continued commitment to Brianna's story beyond the criminal proceedings humanises Brianna, strengthening the geographic and social ties this public feels towards her. Brianna has no agency in her story or its telling, but on the local level, with their geosocial proximity to the publication, her family can exercise greater power over Brianna's narrative by leveraging the symbiotic relationship between the local press and its news subjects vital to ensuring the local press' perceived reliability and continued business viability. Given the extensive national coverage of Brianna's murder, the local press can assume a level of intertextual understanding from their **geosocial public**—i.e., their readers already know Brianna is trans and have read about this story in the national press—and instead can focus on their role of providing authoritative local information, adding further details and thus value to the story, incentivising their public to engage with this story on the local level in addition to the national coverage. In a town without high rates of such brutal murders, Brianna's murder is already newsworthy and her tragic death has a profound impact on the community—a community further constituted through the local press' interpellation in its active engagement of its readers and subscribers in memorial and

fundraising events. The lesser focus on Brianna's trans identity and the near constant reference to her by just her given name attempt to make Brianna's story more personal and relatable.

To the national press: a vulnerable transgender teen

The national press did cover Brianna's story before she was identified as a trans, but once that fact enters the news discourse, Brianna's trans identity is the primary driver of their and by extension their publics' interest in her. The novelty of her gender identity and the drama of her killing by two fellow teenagers offer additional value to this news story, which would be used to advance the newspapers' agendas. Brianna's trans identity is widely acknowledged but differently constructed between the various political and media type subcorpora, each of which addresses **distinct and politically diverse publics**, and they diverge in how they handle her female identity. The lexical and grammatical choices made to describe Brianna's trans and female identity demonstrate the nuances at play in the political diverse media now that they must uphold a standard of respect, post-Leveson.

By using gender-neutral terms such as *teen(ager)* over the explicitly female noun *girl*, preferencing the familiar but increasingly antiquated adjective *transgender* over the newer and more inclusive *trans*, perpetuating the cisnormative idea that person's gender is inextricably linked to a baby's visible sex organs through terms such as born a boy, and misgendering and deadnaming Brianna through quotes attributed to seemingly authoritative sources, the right-leaning press undermines Brianna's gender identity as a trans girl—while remaining within the current press regulations of accuracy and protections by free speech rulings on gender criticism. Through this more subtle delegitimisation, they afford both themselves and their **socially conservative public** a degree of respectability, making it harder for trans advocates and their supporters to criticise their language. However, it is not the left-leaning press that uses progressive and inclusive language to describe Brianna's gender most consistently, recognising the divergence in their **liberal and increasingly international but possibly still trans-exclusionary public**. It is the nominally politically neutral press that demonstrates the strongest preference for *trans* and *girl* within the national subcorpora. Most of this subcorpora came from one source: *i*. Officially nonpartisan, the UK's newest daily newspaper has not been as studied as many of the other titles featured here nor is its public as firmly identified and widely understood. With its political neutrality and use of progressive language (yet owned by the same group as the right-leaning *Daily Mail*), *i* could be an interesting location of future study on the use of inclusive language and representations of trans identities—as would PA Media, which serves much of the UK national and local press with its wire service.

To the LGBTQ+ press: a trans teenage girl

The LGBTQ+ press' coverage of Brianna's murder combines aspects of the local and national press' approaches. Like the local press, Brianna is presented as belonging to a community, adopted by a public that shares social and communal proximity to her if not the geographic proximity as the Warrington press and public does. Like the national press, Brianna is included in wider discourses, particularly related to the increasing threat of violence faced by trans people and the disrespect and misgendering present in the national media. In setting themselves against the prevailing national narratives about Brianna's murder and her murderers' motives, the LGBTQ+ press firmly establishes their audience as a

marginalised counterpublic. Through their adoption of Brianna and coverage of the trans community-led vigils, Brianna becomes a symbol of community unity in the face of the rising violence faced by trans youth. The LGBTQ+ press does not shy away from the violent nature of her death, but it does not engage in the further traumatising of its LGBTQ+ audience with gratuitous details or republishing the dehumanising language used by her murderers. The LGBTQ+ media understands that its *counterpublic* also overlaps with the publics addressed by the national (and local) press: if their readers want more details, they can seek them out elsewhere.

However, unlike the local press, Brianna's trans identity is integral to her newsworthiness; and unlike the national press, especially the right-leaning press, her trans identity is more consistently affirmed and inclusive. In the LGBTQ+ press, Brianna is affirmed as a *trans teenage girl*, recognising the intersections of her identities, which cannot be disassembled: Brianna's identity as both trans and a girl as well as her youth all contributed to her vulnerability to her killers. The LGBTQ+ press also makes relatively greater use of her family's descriptions of her as beautiful, witty, hilarious, strong, fearless, countering the national narrative that she is primarily a vulnerable victim of an obsessed cis girl and her disgusted cis male accomplice, and centring Brianna in her story rather than relegating her and elevating her killers (or mother).

That some of the national media removed earlier instances of Brianna's deadname and changed semantic tactics to wrap their misgendering in quotes from other authoritative sources because of pressure led by the LGBTQ+ press demonstrates the power this niche press can have over the much larger mainstream national press. As the language used by the trans and queer communities to construct their own identities shifts, so too eventually will that used by the cisheteronormative majority.

2. How does the discursive construction of Brianna's identity change through the course of the news events, i.e., from the discovery of her body to the sentencing of her killers and her anniversary?

From an unnamed dead girl to a murdered trans victim to a unique teenager

Across BGCOR, we can see clear shifts in how Brianna is described across the 10 different periods. In the first period, she had not yet been identified. Brianna's news story began with her being identified as "a teenage girl [who] was found dead." There is no mention of her being trans in this first period; there is also no explicit mention of her being cis—that is implied through its absence. She has not yet been othered. In period 2, despite now having been identified as trans, it is her family's description of her that is used most frequently. However, despite being the first adjective in the list her family uses, *beautiful*—the adjective that would most clearly gender her as a girl—does not top the list until period 3. It is during this period, when her murderers are first charged that Brianna's trans identity becomes more prominent. Its presence implies that Brianna being *transgender*—as well as a *16yearold*—is a key factor in why the so-far unnamed 15-year-old girl and boy have been charged with her murder.

As the local and LGBTQ+ press coverage outweighs that of the national press in period 4, we see the appearance of the more inclusive term *trans* rise ahead of *transgender*, with *beautiful* remaining the top non-gender/age-related adjective. As the trial begins in period 5, we see a resurgence of *transgender*

with the increased volume of coverage from the national press and a disinterest in covering the horrific details of her murder by the *trans*-preferring LGBTQ+ press. Descriptions of her killers also start to rise in the collocational ranks during coverage of the trial. Brianna is no longer the main character, just a *dead 16yearold transgender* victim of two *sick* killers. As her murderers are found *guilty* in periods 6 and 7, focus remains on them and their *frenzied* attack, while Brianna remains *trans* but moves from being *fearless* to *tragic*.

As their life sentences are delivered, her killers' identities are revealed, dominating the discourse. Brianna is presented as *trans(gender)* and *vulnerable*, the two characteristics seemingly dialectically linked. Post-sentencing, the discourse shifts to consider what impact being online had on the mental health and wellbeing of both Brianna and Jenkinson. Being *online* and being *trans* are both presented as contributors to Brianna's death. Brianna also becomes the centre of political furore—but the debate is less about her, and more about political points scoring in the ongoing culture war surrounding trans people, trans youth in particular. In the 10th and final period, we see Brianna's trans identity fall down the ranks of collocates; this attribute has by now been long established. Instead, the collocates reveal she is remembered as a *unique* and *amazing* teenager—attributes presented as more important in leaving a *lasting* impression than her gender identity.

Throughout the story, Brianna's presence within it shifted: from the murdered main character to a supporting character in her murderers' trial and sentencing, and further sidelined in the various national discourses in which she increasingly featured, not only surrounding trans issues but also youth mental health, extreme youth violence, and the role being online plays in both. The national media, interest in her killers (especially Jenkinson) and her mother's activism could result either in Brianna's continued presence in those national discourses—or she might be further marginalised, a footnote in another person's story. That prominence will most likely be determined by the national press; Brianna's family will have much less influence over her legacy at this level than they do in the local press and the niche LGBTQ+ press will likely move on to cover yet another tragic case of violence against the LGBTQ+ community.

6.2. Limitations

This thesis began as a critical discourse analysis of a small sample of articles from each of the three levels. As I expanded my digital humanities skills, so too did my corpus expand. However, as this is the first corpus linguistics study I have conducted, it was still limited in its scope and sophistication. Rather than manually compiling this corpus and writing custom Python scripts in Colab for data processing and NLP analysis, using a database like LexisNexus and CL-specific software like LanCS Box X, would have facilitated speedier results and more in-depth analysis.

For example, my limited coding skills hindered my ability to accurately analyse the use of *girl* in sole reference for Brianna as I was not able to isolate this use from Girl X or general descriptions of Jenkinson, or to analyse the use of pronouns within the corpus, both of which could have offered greater insights into how these three different levels discursively construct Brianna's gender identity and either affirm or delegitimise her trans and female identities. Also, the diachronic element of this thesis' analysis is limited as it does not intersect with the three different levels due to how I processed the data in the

early stage of this study. The national corpus was tagged with media type at the beginning of the study; with more time, the analysis could have revealed the intersections between media type (quality/broadsheet vs. popular/tabloid) and politics (left, right, neutral) and a possible matrix of discursive constructions of Brianna's identity in the national press, rather a minimal right vs. left dichotomy, lending further understanding to how the presumed socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of their publics influence the press' interpellation of trans identities.

6.3. Further research

This corpus is a rich resource, which this thesis did not exhaust. Additional and/or alternative metadata could also open other avenues for analysis. For example, news reports and commentary could also be tagged to reveal how Brianna's gender identity was being *reported* versus *commented* on. There could also be insights to be explored in the disparate publics of the LGBTQ+ press, e.g., the websites of magazines targeted at wealthy cis-gay men in major cities versus digital-only titles aimed at a geographically dispersed Gen Z audience of a similar age to Brianna.

Further LGBTQ+, queer and trans corpus linguistics studies could be conducted using this corpus, such as by identifying individual journalists' genders and/or ages. The latest British social attitudes report indicates that women and young people are more likely to hold views more supportive of trans people; is this reflected in the conservative or progressive language used by individual journalists and are there variations within newsrooms that might indicate shifts in their overall editorial policies? Identifying trends here might help to strengthen calls for greater diversity in the newsroom.

This study only examined the textual representations of Brianna; almost every news story was accompanied by a photograph of her. Some newspapers and news outlets repeatedly used the same one or two images, while others used an array of images, showing different aspects of Brianna—the schoolgirl in her uniform, the teenager photographed by her friends, the daughter posing smiling with her mother, the wannabe TikTok star posing for selfies—and obtained from various sources, including her family, friends and her own social media profiles. It could prove insightful to examine which portrayals were selected from what sources by which publications for which publics.

In addition to the corpus, an interpretative phenomenological analysis, like that conducted by Gekoski et al. (2012) on tabloid journalists' news values judgments of homicides, could be valuable to understand how individual journalists—and their editors—make their lexical choices to generate news discourse surrounding gender minorities.

There is rising vitriol online and violence in real life directed at trans people; now is the time to revisit, expand—and queer and trans—the large CL studies of trans identities in the press such as by Baker and Zottola to better understand the linguistic shifts beyond a single news case study like Brianna Ghey to examine the UK press writ-large and compare coverage over time and between cases.

6.4. Final thoughts

Brianna's trans identity was what drew me—like many others—to her story. I wanted to see how respectfully her gender identity was being constructed by different news outlets.

Unlike the local press, which would have covered Brianna's story regardless of her trans identity owing to her youth and femininity as well as her class and race, and the sensationalism of her murder, it is unlikely Brianna Ghey would have generated 785 articles in the national press in a single year were she not trans. And the LGBTQ+ press would have had no reason at all to carry her story if she had been cis. But as her killers' transphobic motives were (disputably) dismissed, I found myself asking if highlighting Brianna's trans identity was the most ethical approach to this story? If her killers truly had not murdered because she was trans, should the press be reporting on the fact that she is trans? Or is there always an element of transphobia present in transicide—just as misogyny is at the root of femicide?

The language used in this story is more nuanced than originally expected but elsewhere rhetoric around trans rights, gender-criticism, etc. is becoming more fraught—and the consequences more dire. Closer and broader analysis of how non-cisheteronormative identities are constructed, affirmed or delegitimised in the press—at all levels—can help identify how better this language could be regulated and/or media ethics guidance updated to ensure more inclusive and respectful reporting of marginalised peoples. As younger generations become more genderfluid and gender-expansive, it will be interesting to see how these non-cisheteronormative gender identities are discursively constructed in the press. Will the press adopt more progressive language—and might these non-normative gender identities eventually cease be so newsworthy?

7. Bibliography

- Åkerlund, M. (2019). Representations of Trans People in Swedish Newspapers. *Journalism Studies*, 20(9), 1319–1338. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2018.1513816>
- Akrivos, D. (2022). Transgender reporting in the British press: Editorial standards and discursive harms in the post-Leveson era. *Journal of Media Law*, 14(2), 406–441. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17577632.2022.2153216>
- Akrivos, D. (2024). Editorial Standards in Transgender Reporting: How do the UK Press Regulators Navigate Complaints and Controversies? *Communications Law*, 29(2), 38–58.
- Amin, K. (2022). We are All Nonbinary. *Representations*, 158(1), 106–119. <https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2022.158.11.106>
- Anastasio, P. A., & Costa, D. M. (2004). Twice Hurt: How Newspaper Coverage May Reduce Empathy and Engender Blame for Female Victims of Crime. *Sex Roles*, 51(9), 535–542. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-004-5463-7>
- Avalos, S., Jackey, H., & Wickel, I. (2023). A Mixed-Method Analysis of the News Media Framing of Gender Non-Conforming Victims of Homicide in the U.S. from 2012 to 2022. *Critical Criminology*, 31(4), 913–931. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-023-09744-2>
- Bailey, A., & Mackenzie, J. (2023). Support group or transgender lobby? Representing Mermaids in the British press. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 0(0), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2023.2291136>
- Baines, D. (2023). Britain's local papers: Can they switch from commodifying community to doing community? In *Local Journalism*. Routledge.
- Baker, P. (2006a). *Public Discourses of Gay Men* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Baker, P. (2006b). *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. A&C Black.
- Baker, P. (2014a). 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. In P. Cap & C. Hart, *Contemporary Critical Discourse Studies*. Bloomsbury Publishing. <https://www.torrossa.com/en/resources/an/5202523>
- Baker, P. (2014b). Considering context when analysing representations of gender and sexuality: A case study. In J. Flowerdew & L. Wei, *Discourse in Context: Contemporary Applied Linguistics Volume 3* (1st ed., pp. 37–58). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://www.perlego.com/book/809094/discourse-in-context-contemporary-applied-linguistics-volume-3>
- Baker, P. (2014c). *Using Corpora to Analyze Gender* (1st ed.). Bloomsbury Academic. <https://www.perlego.com/book/875223/using-corpora-to-analyze-gender>
- Baker, P. (2019, November 26). Representing trans people in the UK press – a follow-up study – CASS. *ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS)*. <https://cass.lancs.ac.uk/representing-trans-people-in-the-uk-press-a-follow-up-study-professor-paul-baker/>
- Baker, P. (2023). *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., KhosraviNik, M., Krzyżanowski, M., McEnery, T., & Wodak, R. (2008). A useful methodological synergy? Combining critical discourse analysis and corpus linguistics to examine discourses of refugees and asylum seekers in the UK press. *Discourse & Society*, 19(3), 273–306. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926508088962>
- Baker, P., Gabrielatos, C., & McEnery, T. (2013). Sketching Muslims: A Corpus Driven Analysis of Representations Around the Word 'Muslim' in the British Press 1998–2009. *Applied Linguistics*, 34(3), 255–278. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/ams048>
- Baker, P., & Levon, E. (2016). 'That's what I call a man': Representations of racialised and classed masculinities in the UK print media. *Gender and Language*, 10(1), 106–139. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.v10i1.25401>
- Barker-Plummer, B. (2013). Fixing Gwen: News and the mediation of (trans)gender challenges. *Feminist Media Studies*, 13(4), 710–724. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2012.679289>
- Bayramoğlu, Y., Szulc, Ł., & Gajjala, R. (2024). Transnational queer cultures and digital media: An introduction. *Communication, Culture and Critique*, 17(3), 147–151. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ccc/tcae031>

- Bednarek, M., & Caple, H. (2017). *The Discourse of News Values: How News Organizations Create Newsworthiness*. Oxford University Press.
- Bell, K. M., & Keer, G. (2021). Representing Queer Communities: News Media Stylebooks and LGBTQ Visibility. In S. J. A. Ward (Ed.), *Handbook of Global Media Ethics* (pp. 1233–1252). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-32103-5_62
- Billard, T. J. (2016). Writing in the Margins: Mainstream News Media Representations of Transgenderism. *International Journal of Communication*, 10(0), Article 0.
- Billard, T. J. (2022). Together We Rise: The Role of Communication and Community Connectedness in Transgender Citizens' Civic Engagement in the United States. *Mass Communication and Society*, 25(3), 335–360. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2021.1954197>
- Billard, T. J. (2023). “Gender-Critical” Discourse as Disinformation: Unpacking TERF Strategies of Political Communication. *Women's Studies in Communication*, 46(2), 235–243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07491409.2023.2193545>
- Billard, T. J., & Gross, L. (2020). LGBTQ Politics in Media and Culture. In *Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228637.013.1263>
- Billard, T. J., & Zhang, E. (2022). Toward a Transgender Critique of Media Representation. *JCMS: Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, 61(2), 194–199.
- Bird, S., Klein, E., & Loper, E. (2009). *Natural Language Processing with Python: Analyzing Text with the Natural Language Toolkit*. O'Reilly Media, Inc.
- Bolzern, J. E., Mnyama, N. L., & McMillan, D. (2019). Responsible journalism, imitative suicide, and transgender populations: A systematic review of UK newspapers. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health*, 23(3), 276–288. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19359705.2019.1620148>
- Bracco, S. E., Sczesny, S., & Gustafsson Sendén, M. (2024). Media Portrayals of Trans and Gender Diverse People: A Comparative Analysis of News Headlines Across Europe. *Sex Roles*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-024-01461-6>
- Bradley, S. E., Harkins, D. A., & Huynh, T. (2023). Identifying changes in popular news media articles about the transgender community from 1990 to 2023. *International Journal of Science and Technology Research Archive*, 5(2), 122–127. <https://doi.org/10.53771/ijstra.2023.5.2.0101>
- Brannelly, T., Barnes, M., & Tronto, J. C. (2022). Reflections on researching with care. In T. Brannelly & M. Barnes (Eds.), *Researching with Care: Applying Feminist Care Ethics to Research Practice* (p. 0). Policy Press. <https://doi.org/10.1332/policypress/9781447359760.003.0008>
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203824979>
- Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*. Psychology Press.
- Caple, H., & Bednarek, M. (2016). Rethinking news values: What a discursive approach can tell us about the construction of news discourse and news photography. *Journalism*, 17(4), 435–455. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1464884914568078>
- Carter, C., Steiner, L., Allan, S., Carter, C., Steiner, L., & Allan, S. (2019). *Journalism, Gender and Power* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1573350/journalism-gender-and-power>
- Capuzza, J. C. (2014). Who Defines Gender Diversity? Sourcing Routines and Representation in Mainstream U.S. News Stories About Transgenderism. *International Journal of Transgenderism*, 15(3–4), 115–128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2014.946195>
- Capuzza, J. C. (2015). News: What's in a Name? Transgender Identity, Metareporting, and the Misgendering of Chelsea Manning. In L. G. Spencer & J. C. Capuzza (Eds.), *Transgender communication studies: Histories, trends, and trajectories* (pp. 93–110). Lexington Books.
- Capuzza, J. C. (2019). US news coverage of transgender lives: A historical and critical review. In *Journalism, Gender and Power*. Routledge.
- Capuzza, J. C., & Spencer, L. G. (Eds.). (2015). *Transgender communication studies: Histories, trends, and trajectories*. Lexington Books.
- Christie, N. (1986). The Ideal Victim. In E. A. Fattah (Ed.), *From Crime Policy to Victim Policy: Reorienting the Justice System* (pp. 17–30). Palgrave Macmillan UK. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-08305-3_2
- Cleary, E. (2023). *British Social Attitudes 40: A liberalisation in attitudes?* (No. 40; British Social Attitudes). UK National Centre for Social Research. <https://natcen.ac.uk/publications/bsa-40-liberalisation-attitudes>
- Contempt of Court Act (1981). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1981/49>

- Conversion Therapy (Prohibition) Bill, 2021–22 (2022). <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/2939>
- Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics. *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989(1), 139–167.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299. <https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039>
- Cromer, G. (2004). ‘Children From Good Homes’: Moral Panics about Middle-Class Delinquency. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 44(3), 391–400. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azh021>
- DeJong, C., Holt, K., Helm, B., & Morgan, S. J. (2021). “A Human Being Like Other Victims”: The Media Framing of Trans Homicide in the United States. *Critical Criminology*, 29(1), 131–149. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-021-09559-z>
- Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F. (1987). *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press.
- Douglas, O., & Phillips, A. (2022). Representing “Others”. In *Journalism, Culture and Society*. Routledge.
- Dyer, J., Manning, K., Temple Newhook, J., Khosa, S., Salas, A., Davis, J., James, J., Pickett, S., & Pullen Sansfacon, A. (2023). Media discourse in Canada on trans youth and parent advocacy. *Feminist Media Studies*, 0(0), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2023.2279927>
- Equality Act (2010). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents>
- Fairclough, N. (1993). *Discourse and Social Change*. Wiley.
- Fairclough, N. (1995). *Media Discourse*. E. Arnold.
- Fink, K., & Palmer, R. (2020). “We Have to Stand Out to Blend In”: Ordinary Transgender People Speak About Being Subjects of News Stories. *Journalism Studies*, 21(8), 1109–1126. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2019.1699851>
- Firmstone, J., Steel, J., Conboy, M., Elliott-Harvey, C., Fox, C., Mulderrig, J., Saunders, J., & Wragg, P. (2022). Trust and Ethics in Local Journalism: A Distinctive Orientation towards Responsible Journalism and Ethical Practices. In *Responsible Journalism in Conflicted Societies*. Routledge.
- Fischer, M. (2023). Protecting women’s sports? Anti-trans youth sports bills and white supremacy. *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies*, 20(4), 397–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14791420.2023.2267646>
- Foucault, M. (1966). The human sciences. In *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of Human Sciences* (pp. 344–368). Random House.
- Foucault, M. (1979). *The History of Sexuality*. Allen Lane.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The Subject and Power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795.
- Franklin, B. (2006). *Local Journalism and Local Media* (2nd ed.). Routledge.
- Friedl, J. E. F. (2006). *Mastering Regular Expressions*. O’Reilly Media, Inc.
- Galtung, J., & Ruge, M. H. (1965). The Structure of Foreign News. *Journal of Peace Research*, 2(1), 64–91.
- Gekoski, A., Gray, J. M., & Adler, J. R. (2012). What Makes A Homicide Newsworthy?: UK National Tabloid Newspaper Journalists Tell All. *The British Journal of Criminology*, 52(6), 1212–1232. <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjc/azs047>
- Gender Recognition Act (2004). <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2004/7/contents>
- Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill (2022). <https://www.parliament.scot/bills-and-laws/bills/s6/gender-recognition-reform-scotland-bill>
- Graber, S. M. (2018). The Bathroom Boogeyman: A qualitative analysis of how the Houston Chronicle framed the Equal Rights Ordinance. *Journalism Practice*, 12(7), 870–887. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2017.1358651>
- Greer, C. (2007). News Media, Victims and Crime. In P. Davies, C. Greer, & P. Francis (Eds.), *Victims, Crime and Society*. SAGE.
- Gulyas, A., & Baines, D. (2020). Introduction: Demarcating the field of local media and journalism. In *The Routledge Companion to Local Media and Journalism*. Routledge.
- Gulyas, A., & Hess, K. (2024). The Three “Cs” of Digital Local Journalism: Community, Commitment and Continuity. *Digital Journalism*, 12(1), 6–12. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2023.2211639>
- Gupta, K. (2019). Response and responsibility: Mainstream media and Lucy Meadows in a post-Leveson context. *Sexualities*, 22(1–2), 31–47. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363460717740259>

- Hackl, A. M., Becker, A. B., & Todd, M. E. (2016). "I Am Chelsea Manning": Comparison of Gendered Representation of Private Manning in U.S. and International News Media. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 63(4), 467–486. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2015.1088316>
- Haf, F., & Haigh, E. (2023, February 11). Teenage girl dies after being found badly injured in Cheshire parkland. *Daily Mail*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-11740447/Huge-police-response-woman-dead-park-Cheshire.html>
- Hall, K. (2014). Exceptional Speakers: Contested and Problematized Gender Identities. In *The Handbook of Language, Gender, and Sexuality: Second Edition* (pp. 220–239). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118584248.ch11>
- Hall, S. (1980). Encoding/Decoding. In S. Hall, D. Hobson, A. Lowe, & P. Willis (Eds.), *Culture, Media, Language*. Routledge.
- Hall, S. (1996). Introduction: Who Needs 'Identity'? In S. Hall & P. du Gay (Eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (pp. 1–17). Sage.
- Hallman, L. (2024). *Brianna Ghey Corpus* [Custom-built corpus]. Corpus of 1253 news articles related to the case of murdered 16-year-old trans girl, Brianna Ghey. Unpublished dataset.
- Hamborg, F., Meuschke, N., Breiting, C., & Gipp, B. (2017). news-please: A Generic News Crawler and Extractor. *Proceedings of the 15th International Symposium of Information Science*, 218–223. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.4120316>
- Hansford, A. (2024, May 24). Can Keir Starmer be trusted on trans rights? *PinkNews*. <https://www.thepinknews.com/2024/05/24/can-keir-starmer-be-trusted-on-trans-rights/>
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2001). What Is News? Galtung and Ruge revisited. *Journalism Studies*, 2(2), 261–280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700118449>
- Harcup, T., & O'Neill, D. (2017). What is News? News Values Revisited (Again). *Journalism Studies*, 18(12), 1470–1488. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2016.1150193>
- Harte, D., & Matthews, R. (Eds.). (2021). *Reappraising Local and Community News in the UK: Media, Practice, and Policy*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003173144>
- Hess, K., & Waller, L. (2012). 'The Snowtown we know and love': Small newspapers and heinous crimes. *Rural Society*, 21(2), 116–125. <https://doi.org/10.5172/rsj.2012.21.2.116>
- Hess, K., & Waller, L. (2015). Geo-Social Journalism: Reorienting the study of small commercial newspapers in a digital environment. In *Community Journalism Midst Media Revolution*. Routledge.
- Hipfl, B. (2018). Affect in Media and Communication Studies: Potentials and Assemblages. *Media and Communication*, 6(3), 5–14. <https://doi.org/10.17645/mac.v6i3.1470>
- Humphrey, R. (2016). "I think journalists sometimes forget that we're just people": Analysing the Effects of UK Trans Media Representation on Trans Audiences. *Gender Forum*, 56, 23–43.
- Hurst Media Company. (2020). *National Newspapers—Profiles*. Hurst Media Company. https://www.hurstmediacompany.co.uk/publication_type/national-newspaper-content-marketing/
- Impress. (2024). *Standards Code*. <https://www.impressorg.com/standards/impress-standards-code/our-standards-code/>
- Independent Advertising. (2024, August). *UK Audience Stats*. The Independent. <https://www.independentadvertising.com/stats/>
- IPSO. (2020). *Examining trends in editorial standards in coverage of transgender issues*. IPSO. <https://www.ipso.co.uk/new-research-on-reporting-of-trans-issues-shows-400-increase-in-coverage-and-varying-perceptions-on-broader-editorial-standards/>
- IPSO. (2023). *Sex and gender identity guidance*. IPSO. <https://www.ipso.co.uk/resources/sex-and-gender-identity-guidance/>
- Jacobs, L., & Meeusen, C. (2021). Coming Out of the Closet, Also on the News? A Longitudinal Content Analysis of Patterns in Visibility, Tone and Framing of LGBTs on Television News (1986–2017). *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(13), 2144–2168. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2020.1733352>
- Jančaříková, R. (2018). Victims vs. Killers in the British Press. In *Munispace – čítárna Masarykovy univerzity*. <https://munispace.muni.cz/library/catalog/view/998/3101/761-1/#preview>
- Jaworska, S., & Hunt, S. (2017). Intersections and differentiations: A corpus-assisted discourse study of gender representations in the British press before, during and after the London Olympics 2012. *Gender and Language*, 11(3), Article 3.

- Jones, L. (2021). Queer linguistics and identity: The past decade. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 10(1), 13–24. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.00010.jon>
- Kim, Y., Chae, Y.-G., & Kim, Y.-C. (2024). “Doing Community”: Digital Hyperlocal Media as Care. *Digital Journalism*, 12(1), 13–27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2145330>
- Konnely, L. (2021). Nuance and normativity in trans linguistic research. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 10(1), 71–82. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.00016.kon>
- Kyrölä, K. (2018). *Negotiating vulnerability in the trigger warning debates*. <https://www.manchesterhive.com/display/9781526133113/9781526133113.00007.xml>
- Lago, C. (2024, March 20). Fewer than one in five media workers believe newsroom diversity is a top priority in their workplace. *NUJ - National Union of Journalists*. <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/fewer-than-one-in-five-media-workers-believe-newsroom-diversity-is-a-top-priority-in-their-workplace.html>
- Lazar, M. (2005). *Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Gender, Power and Ideology in Discourse*. Springer.
- Leap, W. L. (2015). Queer Linguistics as Critical Discourse Analysis. In *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (pp. 661–680). John Wiley & Sons, Ltd. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118584194.ch31>
- Li, M. (2018). Intermedia Attribute Agenda Setting in the Context of Issue-Focused Media Events: Caitlyn Jenner and transgender reporting. *Journalism Practice*, 12(1), 56–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17512786.2016.1273078>
- Litosseliti, L. (2014). *Gender and Language Theory and Practice* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1616284/gender-and-language-theory-and-practice>
- Los Angeles Blade. (2022). *Media Kit*. Los Angeles Blade. <https://www.losangelesblade.com/advertise/>
- Mathewson, J. (2021). Coverage of conscience coincides with journalists’ motivations. In *Ethical Journalism*. Routledge.
- Matthews, J. (2023, February 11). Teenage girl found dead from serious injuries in Culcheth Linear Park in Warrington as police launch urgent appeal. *The Sun*. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/21348525/woman-dead-park-culcheth-warrington/>
- Matthews, R., & Hodgson, G. (2023). *Local Journalism: Critical Perspectives on the Provincial Newspaper* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://www.perlego.com/book/4161729/local-journalism-critical-perspectives-on-the-provincial-newspaper>
- Mattingly, W. (2022). *Introduction to Python for Humanists*. <https://python-textbook.pythonhumanities.com/intro.html>
- McCann, B. J. (2011). Queering Expertise: Counterpublics, Social Change, and the Corporeal Dilemmas of LGBTQ Equality. *Social Epistemology*, 25(3), 249–262. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02691728.2011.578302>
- McConnell, F. (2024, February 10). I wasn’t surprised by Rishi Sunak’s cheap trans jibe—But I was confounded by the outcry. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2024/feb/10/rishi-sunak-trans-lives-outcry-esther-ghey-attacks>
- McIntyre, J., Riggs, D. W., & Bartholomaeus, C. (2023). Jazz Jennings and Evie Macdonald: Trans child celebrities, transnormativity, and childhood ‘innocence’. *Celebrity Studies*, 14(2), 214–226. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19392397.2022.2109310>
- McKinnon, S., Gorman-Murray, A., & Dominey-Howes, D. (2017). Disasters, Queer Narratives, and the News: How Are LGBTI Disaster Experiences Reported by the Mainstream and LGBTI Media? *Journal of Homosexuality*, 64(1), 122–144. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00918369.2016.1172901>
- McLean, C. (2021). The Growth of the Anti-Transgender Movement in the United Kingdom. The Silent Radicalization of the British Electorate. *International Journal of Sociology*, 51(6), 473–482. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00207659.2021.1939946>
- McLean, N. (2014). *Considering the internet as enabling queer publics/counter publics*.
- Mills, S. (1998). Post-feminist text analysis. *Language and Literature*, 7(3), 235–252. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096394709800700304>
- Montiel-McCann, C. S. (2023). “It’s like we are not human”: Discourses of humanisation and otherness in the representation of trans identity in British broadsheet newspapers. *Feminist Media Studies*, 23(6), 2962–2978. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14680777.2022.2097727>

- Motschenbacher, H. (2011). *Taking Queer Linguistics further: Sociolinguistics and critical heteronormativity research*. 2011(212), 149–179. <https://doi.org/10.1515/ijsl.2011.050>
- Motschenbacher, H., & Stegu, M. (2013). Queer Linguistic approaches to discourse. *Discourse & Society*, 24(5), 519–535. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926513486069>
- Nail, T. (2017). What is an Assemblage? *SubStance*, 46(1), 21–37.
- National Readership Survey. (2016). *Social Grade*. National Readership Survey. <https://nrs.co.uk/nrs-print/lifestyle-and-classification-data/social-grade/>
- Newsquest Media Group. (2024). *About Us*. Newsquest Media Group. <https://www.newsquest.co.uk/about-us>
- Olsen, R. K. (2021). The Value of Local News in the Digital Realm – Introducing the Integrated Value Creation Model. *Digital Journalism*, 9(6), 810–834. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2021.1912623>
- Olveira-Araujo, R. (2023). The (r)evolution of transsexuality in the news media: The case of the Spanish digital press (2000-2020). *Journalism*, 24(10), 2270–2293. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849221105316>
- Oram, A., & Bengry, J. (2020). The LGBTQ Press in Twentieth-Century Britain and Ireland. In M. Conboy & A. Bingham (Eds.), *The Edinburgh History of the British and Irish Press, Volume 3: Competition and Disruption, 1900-2017* (p. o). Edinburgh University Press. <https://doi.org/10.3366/edinburgh/9781474424929.003.0025>
- Osborn, M. (2022). U.S. News Coverage of Transgender Victims of Fatal Violence: An Exploratory Content Analysis. *Violence Against Women*, 28(9), 2033–2056. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778012211025995>
- O’Shea, S. C. (2019). I am not that Caitlin: A critique of both the transphobic media reaction to Caitlyn Jenner’s Vanity Fair cover shoot and of passing. *Culture and Organization*, 25(3), 202–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14759551.2016.1230856>
- O’Thomson, J. (2024, February 8). Rishi Sunak’s Commons ‘joke’ will make life even more dangerous for trans people like me. *The Independent*. <https://www.independent.co.uk/voices/brianna-ghey-trans-teen-murdered-rishi-sunak-pmq-s-b2492903.html>
- PAMCo. (2024). *Total Market Reach of Newsbrands*. PAMCo: Audience Measurement for Publishers. <https://pamco.co.uk/market-estimates/infographics/>
- Paterson, L. L., & Coffey-Glover, L. (2018). Discourses of marriage in same-sex marriage debates in the UK press 2011-2014. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 7(2), Article 2.
- Philadelphia Gay News. (2024). *Advertise: Explore our demographics*. Philadelphia Gay News. <https://epgn.com/advertise/>
- Pidd, H. (2023, December 20). Why Brianna Ghey police quickly ruled out transphobia as motive. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2023/dec/20/why-brianna-ghey-police-quickly-ruled-out-transphobia-as-motive>
- Ponsford, D. (2024a, February 15). Colossal decline of UK regional media since 2007 revealed. *Press Gazette*. <https://pressgazette.co.uk/publishers/regional-newspapers/colossal-decline-of-uk-regional-media-since-2007-revealed/>
- Ponsford, D. (2024b, March 13). Partisan publishers: Why Keir Starmer will have an easier election than Neil Kinnock. *Press Gazette*. https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/uk-media-bias-2024/
- Rankings: Top 50 Global LGBTQ Publications*. (2024, July 1). Muck Rack. <https://muckrack.com/rankings/top-50-global-lgbtq-publications>
- Richardson, J. E. (2007). *Analysing Newspapers: An Approach from Critical Discourse Analysis*. Macmillan Education UK.
- Riggs, D. W., & McIntyre, J. (2022). Trans young people and the media: Transnormativity, agency, and social change. *Journal of Children and Media*, 16(3), 461–467. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17482798.2022.2088929>
- Schotel, A. L. (2023). Mainstream or Marginalized? How German and Dutch Newspapers Frame LGBTI. *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society*, 30(2), 444–469. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxac004>

- Schröter, M., Taylor, C., Schröter, M., & Taylor, C. (2017). *Exploring Silence and Absence in Discourse: Empirical Approaches*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://www.perlego.com/book/3493282/exploring-silence-and-absence-in-discourse-empirical-approaches>
- Similarweb. (2024, September). *Top Websites Ranking—Most Visited Websites in September 2024*. <https://www.similarweb.com/top-websites/united-kingdom/news-and-media/>
- Skentelbery, G. (2023, February 11). Police confirm death of female found with serious injuries at Culcheth Linear Park. *Warrington Worldwide*. <https://www.warrington-worldwide.co.uk/2023/02/11/police-confirm-death-of-female-found-with-serious-injuries-at-culcheth-linear-park/>
- Sloop, J. M. (2000). Disciplining the transgendered: Brandon Teena, public representation, and normativity. *Western Journal of Communication*, 64(2), 165–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570310009374670>
- Spencer, L. G. (2019). Bathroom Bills, Memes, and a Biopolitics of Trans Disposability. *Western Journal of Communication*, 83(5), 542–559. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10570314.2019.1615635>
- Streitmatter, R. (1995). *Unspeakable: The Rise of the Gay and Lesbian Press in America*. Faber & Faber.
- Stryker, S., Currah, P., & Moore, L. J. (2008). Introduction: Trans-, Trans, or Transgender? *WSQ: Women's Studies Quarterly*, 36(3), 11–22.
- Tannen, D., Hamilton, H. E., & Schiffrin, D. (2015). *The Handbook of Discourse Analysis* (2nd ed., p. 8). Wiley-Blackwell.
- The Right Honourable Lord Justice Leveson. (2012). *Report into the culture, practices and ethics of the press* (No. Part F; Leveson Inquiry). UK Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/leveson-inquiry-report-into-the-culture-practices-and-ethics-of-the-press>
- Thorpe, H., Nelson, M., Scovel, S., & Veale, J. (2023). Journalists on a Journey: Towards Responsible Media on Transgender Participation in Sport. *Journalism Studies*, 24(9), 1237–1255. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1461670X.2023.2206920>
- Tobitt, C. (2024, October 15). Newspaper ABCs: FT up month-on-month, but picture of decline continues. *Press Gazette*. https://pressgazette.co.uk/media-audience-and-business-data/media_metrics/most-popular-newspapers-uk-abc-monthly-circulation-figures-2/
- UK Government. (2023). *Hate crime, England and Wales, 2022 to 2023* (2nd ed.). <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023/hate-crime-england-and-wales-2022-to-2023>
- van Dijk, T. A. (1988). *News As Discourse*. Routledge.
- Verhoeven, E., Paulussen, S., & Dhoest, A. (2024). Covering inclusion: Frames, themes, and voice in news about LGBTI topics. *Journalism*, 25(6), 1252–1270. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14648849231175216>
- Wahl-Jorgensen, K. (2024). Local Knowledge and Epistemic Authority in Entrepreneurial Journalism. *Digital Journalism*, 12(1), 48–62. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21670811.2022.2128388>
- Walsh, M., & Dombrowski, Q. (2021). *Introduction to Cultural Analytics & Python*. Zenodo. <https://melaniewalsh.github.io/intro-Cultural-Analytics/welcome.html>
- Ward, G., & Anderson, P. J. (2016). *The Future of Journalism in the Advanced Democracies* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Ward Profile 2022: Culcheth, Glazebury and Croft*. (2022). Warrington Borough Council. <https://www.warrington.gov.uk/ward-and-borough-information>
- Warner, M. (2002). *Publics and Counterpublics*. Zone Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1qgnqj8>
- Washington Blade. (2023). *Media Kit*. Washington Blade. <https://www.washingtonblade.com/advertise>
- Yep, G. (2014). *Queer Theory and Communication: From Disciplining Queers to Queering the Discipline(s)* (2nd ed.). Routledge. <https://www.perlego.com/book/1556878/queer-theory-and-communication-from-disciplining-queers-to-queering-the-disciplines>
- Yep, G., Russo, S., & Allen, J. (2020). Pushing Boundaries: Toward the development of a model for transing communication in (inter)cultural contexts. In *The Routledge Handbook of Gender and Communication*. Routledge.
- Zimman, L. (2020). Transgender Language, Transgender Moment: Toward a Trans Linguistics. In K. Hall & R. Barrett (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Language and Sexuality*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190212926.013.45>

- Zimman, L. (2021). Beyond the cis gays' cis gaze: The need for a trans linguistics. *Gender and Language*, 15(3), 423–429. <https://doi.org/10.1558/genl.20883>
- Zottola, A. (2018). Transgender identity labels in the British press. *Journal of Language and Sexuality*, 7, 237–262. <https://doi.org/10.1075/jls.17017.zot>
- Zottola, A. (2021). *Transgender Identities in the Press: A Corpus-based Discourse Analysis*. Bloomsbury Publishing.

8. Appendices

A. Brianna Ghey Corpus (BGCOR)

The Brianna Ghey Corpus (hereafter known as BGCOR) was manually compiled by me—Louise Hallman, a master’s student in Gender Studies at Linköping University, Sweden—to examine the discursive construction of Brianna Ghey by the local (Warrington), national (UK) and transnational niche LGBTQ+ press. This appendix provides a detailed overview of the corpus’ data sources, selection criteria, data enrichment and tags, and ethical considerations.

Data Collection

Selection Criteria

Sources were selected to represent three “levels” of news reporting: local, national and LGBTQ+. The two local sources are the only two professional news outlets covering Warrington, the location of Brianna’s murder. The eleven national papers were selected as they represent a broad political spectrum and met the following criteria: they were distributed across the whole of the UK (not only London, Scotland or Wales), they were “paid-for” (not freesheets); they were not special interest (e.g., *The Financial Times*). For the LGBTQ+ press, as I wanted a transnational sample, I used a list of the most-visited LGBTQ+ media website compiled by Muck Rack, a database for journalists and public relations professionals (*Rankings: Top 50 Global LGBTQ Publications, 2024*).⁴⁷ After a search of each listed newspaper’s website, 19 were included in the study; the other 31 had not featured Brianna. Despite not appearing on Muck Rack’s list, the blog *QueerAF* was included in the study as it is targeted at LGBTQ-identifying journalists and other media specialists and focuses on the British media’s coverage of LGBTQ+ issues.

Table 8.1: Publications included in the study and their websites

Publication	Website
Warrington Guardian	www.warringtonguardian.co.uk
Warrington Worldwide	www.warrington-worldwide.co.uk
Daily Express	www.express.co.uk
Daily Mail	www.dailymail.co.uk
Daily Mirror	www.mirror.co.uk
Daily Star	www.dailystar.co.uk
i	www.inews.co.uk
Morning Star	www.morningstaronline.co.uk
The Guardian	www.theguardian.com
The Independent	www.independent.co.uk
The Sun	www.thesun.co.uk
The Telegraph	www.telegraph.co.uk
The Times	www.thetimes.com
Attitude	www.attitude.co.uk
Diva	www.diva-magazine.com
Gay Times	www.gaytimes.com
PinkNews	www.thepinknews.com

⁴⁷ Based on total monthly visitors

Queer AF	www.wearequeer.af
An Injustice	www.aninjusticemag.com
Star Observer	www.starobserver.com.au
Têtu	www.tetu.com
queer.de	www.queer.de
Schwulissimo	www.schwulissimo.de
GCN	www.gcn.ie
CromosomaX	www.cromosomax.com
Autostraddle	www.autostraddle.com
Edge Media Network	www.edgemedianetwork.com
INTO	www.intomore.com
LGBTQ Nation	www.lgbtqnation.com
Los Angeles Blade	www.losangelesblade.com
Philadelphia Gay News	www.epgn.com
The Advocate Magazine	www.advocate.com
Them	www.them.us
Washington Blade	www.washingtonblade.com

Sample Size

Every article returned in the search process (see Appendix B) was included, regardless of whether it was a news article, feature, interview, roundup, op-ed or in the frequent case of the *Daily Mail*, a short text caption under a standalone video. This diversity in format was retained (rather than favouring only news articles) to reflect the diversity of voices at a single publication: newspapers and news sites are not monolithic institutions, even if they follow a standard editorial line—they comprise of individuals.

Period Covered

The selection of the year-long timeframe—from Brianna’s murder on February 11, 2023 to her anniversary vigil on February 11, 2024—gave a clear cutoff date for the corpus collection as well as encompassing the full judicial process. (Albeit did result in the unintended omission of articles about her anniversary from the LGBTQ+ press because, where present, these were published later in the week.)

Preprocessing and Cleaning

Through the collection process (see Appendix B), the following data were collected for each article: publication, title (headline), maintext (body copy), author (byline), date published and URL. The publication’s city, country and language have been appended, along with the metadata tags (see below). The date format has been standardised (YYYY-MM-DD hh:mm), as have the bylines so that each author is delimited by commas (and thus recognisable to Zotero, my reference management software). Additional columns have been added for the English translations of the titles and maintexts where necessary. Duplicates have been removed with the exception of articles from PA Media published by different publications.

Metadata and Tagging

To enrich the data and enable comparisons between subcorpora, I applied a series of metadata tags. For all articles: **level** of the publication (local, national or LGBTQ (the + was omitted for ease of processing

with Python in Colab)) and **period** of the original publication date (1 to 10, see Table 8.3). For the national publications, two additional tags were added to reflect their **politics** (left, right or neutral) and **media type** (popular (a.k.a. tabloid) or quality (a.k.a. broadsheet)), however the latter was not included in the subsequent analysis. The political and media type designations were determined by the *Press Gazette*, the UK's leading media industry publication (Ponsford, 2024b). For the LGBTQ+ publications, a **location** tag was added (UK or rest of world).

Table 8.2: List of all publications and metadata tags

Publication	Level	Politics	Media Type	Location
Warrington Guardian	local	n/a	n/a	n/a
Warrington Worldwide	local	n/a	n/a	n/a
Daily Mirror	national	left	popular	n/a
Morning Star	national	left	popular	n/a
The Guardian	national	left	quality	n/a
The Independent	national	left	quality	n/a
Daily Star	national	neutral	popular	n/a
i	national	neutral	quality	n/a
Daily Express	national	right	popular	n/a
Daily Mail	national	right	popular	n/a
The Sun	national	right	popular	n/a
The Telegraph	national	right	quality	n/a
The Times	national	right	quality	n/a
Attitude	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	UK
Diva	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	UK
Gay Times	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	UK
PinkNews	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	UK
Queer AF	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	UK
An Injustice	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Star Observer	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Têtu	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
queer.de	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Schwulissimo	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Gay Community News	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
CromosomaX	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Autostraddle	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Edge Media Network	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
INTO	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
LGBTQ Nation	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Los Angeles Blade	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Philadelphia Gay News	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
The Advocate Magazine	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Them	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world
Washington Blade	LGBTQ	n/a	n/a	rest of world

Table 8.3: List of period metadata tags and relevant dates

Period	Dates
1 body found	February 11, 2023
2 identification and arrests	February 12 to February 14, 2023
3 charges	February 15, 2023
4 investigation	February 16 to November 26, 2023
5 trial	November 27 to December 19, 2023
6 verdict	December 20, 2023
7 pre-sentencing	December 21, 2023 to February 1, 2024
8 sentencing	February 2, 2024
9 post-sentencing	February 3 to February 10, 2024
10 anniversary	February 11, 2024

Ethical Considerations

All data was scraped from publicly available websites, with subscriptions purchased where necessary (*i, The Times* and *The Telegraph*). Beyond the name in the byline, no further personal data (e.g., email address) was collected or is stored from individual journalists.

Access

All data of BGCOR has been saved as an Excel file, available here: [BGCOR_HALLMAN_2024.xlsx](#)

The file is read-only but available for download for anyone at Linköping University.

Access outside of LiU can be granted on a case-by-case basis by contacting me via email:

louha833@student.liu.se

B. Python-led process

Without access to CL software such as Lancs Box X or AntConc, I used various custom Python scripts in Google Colab to process my data for the corpus linguistics element of this study, informed by my June 2024 participation in the Baladria Summer School on Digital Humanities led by Linnaeus University, Sweden, and hosted at the University of Zadar, Croatia.⁴⁸ Some of the code was built on examples provided in the course or found on GitHub; other parts were developed independently, using Walsh & Dombrowski (2021) and Mattingly (2022) or the Gemini AI-assistant now built into Colab.

Step 1: Collection

News articles were collected first via the website's own tagged search function, to capture all articles that the newspaper had considered connected to Brianna; this was then supplemented by using the Google "site:" search operator, which was applied to each publication's website using the search terms *Brianna Ghey* to find all news stories mentioning her, as well as *Culcheth* and *Warrington* to obtain articles published prior to her identification. This method, although laborious, returned results more reliably, timely, consistently and affordably than relying on the publications' own internal search functions, Google News search, or a news-scraping service like Octoparse.

Step 2: Scraping

Once identified, all online news articles were collated by publication, saved and exported as html files and imported into Colab for use with the BeautifulSoup-based news crawler newsplease (Hamborg et al., 2017) to extract the headline (title), author(s), body copy (maintext), newspaper (publication) and date of publication. This data was then tabulated using Pandas, a Python library for use with tabular data (Mattingly, 2022). The subheaders and photo captions were not extracted as this was not consistently coded across all sources; images were also not extracted for this study. Each publication was processed separately to ensure consistency, and exported to xlsx; the multiple resultant xlsx files were then combined in Colab using Pandas. The combined tabulated data was then re-exported to Excel for manual review and standardisation of the byline and date formats (see Appendix A).

Step 3: Pre-processing and enrichment

A manual review of the corpus was conducted before further processing to avoid duplicates or mis-tagging by the newspapers. Articles published by newswire services, such as PA Media, were retained, even when published by multiple outlets (predominantly the *Daily Mail* and *The Independent*) as these newspapers diverge in politics and as such contributed to different national subcorpora. Some articles' period tags were adjusted to reflect the period on which they were reporting rather than the timeframe in which they were published, particularly at the beginning when Brianna Ghey had not yet been identified and some smaller outlets were a day behind in reporting the story.

Articles that were originally published in German, French and Spanish were translated into English within Colab using Google Translate, reviewed by both myself and native speakers, and manually

⁴⁸ This course carried 5 ECTS and I was graded A for my active participation in the Summer School, the group project, and the independent final assignment, for which I focused on the tension between digital humanities methods and queer theory.

corrected where necessary to better reflect the original gendered language used, e.g., changing “trans Teenagerin” from the gender-neutral English translation of “trans teenager” to “trans teenage girl”.

Metadata tags (see Appendix A) were then appended, again using Pandas. For ease of further use within Colab, a copy of the full BGCOR.xlsx was made and columns that were not needed for the analysis were dropped, leaving just the publication, title, maintext (in English), date published and the metadata tags, period, level, politics and location. This ensures the original corpus remains uncorrupted and can be used for future projects.

Step 4: Frequency of publications

Excel was used to count the number of articles per publication, level, period, politics and location.

Step 5: Keyword/phrases identification

The copy of BGCOR with the reduced columns was imported as a Pandas dataframe into Colab, where I used the Python libraries `string` (Walsh & Dombrowski, 2021) to convert the maintexts into lower case, and `re` (Regular Expressions) (Friedl, 2006) to remove the punctuation; this ensured I avoided missing terms that were capitalised at the beginning of a sentence, truncated by hyphens or appended with the possessive `s`. Python’s built-in list and string operations were then used to first convert all maintexts to strings and then to join the strings into longStrings for each subcorpus (grouped by level, politics, period, location and publication). These longStrings were then tokenized using `nlTK` and `punkt` for querying (Bird et al., 2009). Python’s own core operations were then used to query each longString’s tokenlist and count the occurrences of each query term.

As the strings were tokenised but not lemmatised, the queries included a wide variety of variations: *brianna, briannas, brianna ghey, brianna gheys, trans, transgender, transgendered, transsexual, transsexuals, tranny, trannys, trannies, crossdresser, crossdressers, cross dresser, cross dressers, cross-dresser, sex change, changed sex, changed gender, transvestite, transvestites, genderbender, genderbenders, gender-bender, mtf, male to female, male-to-female, maletofemale, was trans, was transgender, trans girl, trans girls, transgender girl, transgender girls, trans schoolgirl, trans schoolgirls, transgender schoolgirl, transgender schoolgirls, trans teenager, trans teenagers, trans teen, trans teens, transgender teenager, transgender teenagers, transgender teen, transgender teens, trans child, trans childs, trans children, trans childrens, transgender child, transgender childs, transgender children, transgender childrens, 16yearold, 16yearolds, 16 year old, 16 year olds, sixteenyearold, sixteenyearolds, sixteen year old, sixteen year olds, trans female, trans females, transgender female, transgender females, cis, cisgender, cis-gender, cisgendered, cis gender, daughter, daughters, son, sons, scarlett, scarlett jenkinson, jenkinson, [deadname], deadname, deadnamed, deadnaming, transition, transitioning, transitioned, born a boy, born male, as a girl, at birth, trans 16yearold, transgender 16yearold, 16yearold trans, 16yearold transgender, 16yearold girl, 16yearold schoolgirl, identified as female, living as, as female, and as male*. The tabulated data was then again exported into Excel for further analysis.

Additionally, (inverted) search masks were applied to the BGCOR to identify articles where specific terms were present (e.g., Brianna’s deadname) or absent (e.g., the terms *trans* and *transgender*).

Step 6: Concordances

To gain a quick context or count of the queries and any other terms—such as to see the varying contexts of the term *hate crime* or to compare the use *cheshire* to *warrington*—the various subcorpora's longStrings were also converted to Text objects at the tokenisation stage for use with nltk's concordance function. Widths and results to show were altered as needed. These concordance results were not exported.

Step 7: Collocational analysis and prosody identification

The most laborious use of Colab was in the extraction of the -/+5 collocates. In the first stage, the maintexts were converted to longStrings according to groupings by their subcorpora tags to have their punctuation removed and be tokenised using nltk. Then the query was defined (i.e., *Brianna*) and a nltk ConcordanceIndex was created to compile the left and right contexts around the query based on token positions -5 to +5, producing the collocates. This process was repeated for BGCOR and each subcorpora based on level, politics and periods (locations were omitted in oversight).⁴⁹ The frequency of each collocates' use across all positions was then tallied using re, tabulated using Pandas and exported to Excel for further verification.

In the second stage, the collocates were tagged with a part of speech (POS) (i.e., noun, verb, adjective, etc.) using nltk's pos_tag function and exported for review, which revealed several POS were incorrectly applied by nltk. Notably, it did not consistently recognise *trans* as an adjective. The data was thus reimported, along with an additional dataframe of corrected POS terms, which were applied to the collocates using the Python functions zip and dict to map the corrections. The resultant dataframe was then filtered to remove conjunctions, determiners, digits (except for compounds containing *16*), interjections, modal verbs, particles, pronouns, and the most common verbs (e.g., conjugations of *have* and *be*), adjectives (e.g., *last*, *much*) and adverbs (e.g., *soon*, *later*), leaving just the nouns, proper nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs; this was then exported to Excel for the final stage.

In the third and final stage, the full (filtered) lists of nouns, proper nouns, adjectives, verbs and adverbs for each subcorpora were analysed in Excel, establishing the top 50 collocates and the top 50 adjectives and tabulating this for direct comparison across each subcorpora. The collocates were colour-coded, grouped by terms referring to Brianna's *trans* identity (i.e., *trans*, *transgender*), her gender (e.g., *girl*, *beautiful*, *pink*), her age (e.g., *16yearold*, *teen*, *teenager*, *young*), her family (e.g., *mother*, *esther*), the memorials (e.g., *vigil*, *remember*, *tribute*), the murder (e.g., *murder*, *stabbed/stabbing/stab*, *kill/killed*, *death*), its location (e.g., *park*, *birchwood*, *culcheth*, *uk*), and her murderers (e.g., *x*, *y*, *jenkinson*). The adjectives were additionally colour-coded to identify positive and negative sentiments, with unique terms for each subcorpora also highlighted. This coding enabled the identification of the discursive prosodies.

⁴⁹ Additional queries were also included—*trans*, *transgender* and *girl*—but these results were discarded in analysis for sake of the study's time and scope. The raw data has been retained for possible future use. Results for national media types (quality and popular) were also generated but not used.