

Religious and ethno-national identification and political violence.

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## **Religious and ethno-national identification and political violence.**

Religious and national identification are often elided when describing the Troubles in Northern Ireland: Catholicism with Irishness and Protestantism with Britishness. However these categories do not coincide completely, and a third national identity label “Northern Irish” has recently be seen to emerge with some respondents from both major religious groupings claiming this identity. A survey study of residents in Northern Ireland (n=359) examined religious and national identification using a scale of collective self-esteem (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). This measure could be described as evaluating the relative strength or thickness of the identities across the various expected (British Protestant; Catholic Irish), unexpected (Protestant Irish; Catholic British) and emerging (Protestant and Catholic Northern Irish) national and religious combinations. Alongside these measures, respondents were sampled in wards that had historically high levels of political violence and in wards matched for socio-economic status and urbanisation but with historically low levels of violence. Our findings suggest that the relationship between national and religious identification in Northern Ireland is influenced by the sampling based on geographical experience of violence and that unexpected identity combinations and weaker patterns of identification are evident amongst participants in those areas with the least experience of violence.

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IPSOS-Mori for the piloting and survey fieldwork. The authors would also like to thank Jennifer Todd (University College Cork) for her comments on this paper.

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## **Religious and ethno-national identification and experience of the Troubles.**

There is considerable support for the supposition that in situations of intractable political conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the conflict in the Basque region and that in Northern Ireland, social categorisation and social identification are of pivotal importance (Bar-Tal, 2007; Coleman, 2003; Livingstone & Haslam, 2008; Kelman, 1999). Identities that underlie conflict are perceived as both oppositional (e.g. Catholic and Protestant or Arab and Jew) and negatively interdependent (Kelman, 1999). However, even in situations of violent intergroup conflict, these oppositional identities are but one dimension of the conflict. Other identities and categories co-exist even with highly pervasive social divisions. Indeed the literature can be criticised for overemphasising unitary social categorisations. Practically, academics and commentators alike have been criticised for their emphasis on singular category differences particularly in conflict situations where such emphases serve to reify and embed these group distinctions.

The current paper therefore aims to embrace greater complexity in the analysis of the categorisation processes that underlie intergroup conflict and to consider the consequences that patterns of dual identification may have. The pervasive tendency to categorise others is viewed as a central prerequisite to both intergroup discrimination and prejudice. For many social psychologists, the theoretical basis for conflicts is indeed this process of social categorisation (see McGarty, 1999 for a review). However, as theoretical and empirical work into the categorisation process has developed, it has become evident that multiplicity of identification and its potential consequences as both positive and negative force should be considered. For instance, in Northern Ireland where this study was conducted, it has been evident that identity is much more complex than a simple but highly popularised Catholic-Protestant dichotomy (Gallagher, 1989). An array of social identities is meaningful in adolescence (Cassidy & Trew, 1998) and

blurring of national and religious categorisations appears to be prevalent in adults (Muldoon et al, 2007).

In the wider social psychological literature there is also an acknowledgement of the importance of multiple dimensions of social categorisation. For instance, Crisp, Hewstone & Cairns (2001) used a cross-categorisation paradigm to explore the combined effects of religion and gender. The concept of crossed categorisation refers to crossing two dichotomised and orthogonal identity categories specifying a clear ingroup-outgroup dimension to form a set of four new composite identity dimensions (Deschamps & Doise, 1978; Crisp, Hewstone & Rubin, 2001). For example, when employing the dichotomised identity category gender (male-female) and religion (Protestant-Catholic), these can be crossed to form four new identity categories: male-Protestant, male-Catholic, female-Protestant, and female-Catholic (Crisp et al., 2001). As such, these new composite identity categories can be organised into four specific groups, namely a double ingroup membership group (both criteria for membership in ingroup fulfilled), two crossed groups (one ingroup-outgroup and one outgroup-ingroup dimension whereby only one criterion for ingroup membership is fulfilled) and a double-outgroup membership group (no criterion for ingroup membership fulfilled) (Hewstone, Islam & Judd, 1993). Experimental research employing this crossed-categorisation paradigm to investigate specific ingroup-outgroup phenomena indicate information can be processed so as to accommodate these crossed dimensions (Crisp & Hewstone, 1999; Crisp, Hewstone and Cairns, 2001) and experimental studies have shown that this processing subsequently affects participants' outgroup evaluations (Deschamps & Doise, 1978; Migdal, Hewstone & Mullen, 1998; Vanbeselaere, 1987, 1991). However as Eurich-Fulcher and Schofield (1995) point out, many social categories such as race, ethnicity and nationality are highly correlated. Clearly this may affect the cross-categorisation as the crossed category groups are no longer orthogonal. As such the exploration of the effects

of real correlated categorisations in such context has been highlighted as a gap in the current literature (Crisp et al, 2001).

Given that intergroup conflicts often arise where factors such as religion, nationality, race and ethnicity overlap to a high degree, this latter point has particular resonance. For instance it is common to hear reference to Israeli-Jews, Palestinian-Arabs and Irish-Catholics, British-Protestants despite the fact for example that not all Irish are Catholics or all Israelis Jewish. Whilst there is a high degree of overlap between religious and national identification in Northern Ireland, research has shown that a minority of people cross-categorise, endorsing an unexpected combination of national and religious identities such as Catholic-British or Protestant-Irish identity (Fahey, Hayes & Sinnott, 2005; Muldoon et al, 2007).

The national identities traditionally perceived as both oppositional and negatively interdependent in Northern Ireland have more recently been joined by a third national label, namely 'Northern Irish', which is preferred by some Catholics *and* Protestants (Trew, 1998; Muldoon et al., 2007). This national identity label has been offered as a choice in surveys since 1986 and is arguably a common ingroup identity which transcends the extant ethno-religious social divisions (Trew, 1998 p.62). Others suggest that this label means different things to the Protestant and Catholic communities of Northern Ireland, with it being a legitimate category for the nation of Northern Ireland for Protestants and an expression of northern *Irishness* for Catholics (Waddell & Cairns, 1991). A further possible identity choice was not offered explicitly: where it appears in surveys 'Ulster' is selected by a small minority of Protestant participants, however its low selection rate in recent NILTs (3% in 2007; ARK 2007) meant that it was not offered as a label on the questionnaire (though could have been completed under the category 'Other', which no participants chose to do).

The increase in identification with the Northern Irish label is relatively recent and has appeared in the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey since 1988. It can be argued that the Belfast Good Friday agreement provided a degree of structural support to this fledgling identity. On the other hand others argue that the Belfast Good Friday Agreement served to formalise religious-political divisions in Northern Ireland by requiring elected representatives to identify as unionist or nationalist in the Assembly. Irrespective, it is interesting to consider characteristics associated with this emergent identity.

Experience of political violence in any given conflict or context is not distributed evenly across affected populations. Available data suggest that those who are from more socially disadvantaged areas and those with memberships of minority groups are those most likely to be adversely affected by conflict experiences (Cairns, 1996; Muldoon, 2004). Because of these patterns of experience and the group based nature of the phenomena, the impact of violence-related experiences can be considered as having some resonance with the literature examining the impact of discrimination on minority ethnic groups. A wealth of research has demonstrated discrimination increases identification with the group which in turn buffers the impact of the perceived discrimination on well-being (Crocker, Major & Steele, 1998; Branscombe, Schmitt & Harvey, 1999). In Northern Ireland it has been demonstrated empirically that experience of violence is related to support and sympathy for political violence (Hayes & McAllister, 2001). Similarly Muldoon, Schmid and Downes (2009) found that reported experience of violence in a large scale survey was significantly related to strength of identification irrespective of preferred nationality.

### **The present research**

Given the existing literature a number of predictions can therefore be developed:

1. Those with expected and mutually reinforcing combinations of national and religious identities are likely to have stronger group identification. On the other hand those with an unexpected (or uncorrelated) combination of identities are likely to show weaker group identification due to the non-mutually reinforcing nature of their national and religious identities.
2. Those who self-assign their nationality as Northern Irish are showing a preference for this emerging national identity and it is interesting to consider whether this identity is indeed a common group identity attracting respondents from both religious backgrounds. If this is indeed the case, this group should show lower levels of identification due to the non-reinforcing nature of the identities of the Northern Irish Protestant and Northern Irish Catholic combinations
3. The relationship between political violence and these patterns of identification is worthy of consideration. Given the group based nature of political violence in Northern Ireland, stronger group identification is likely in those residing in areas that have experienced the most violence.

## **Method**

### **The Sample**

The selection of geographical areas for sampling considered the levels of violence experienced during the Troubles, levels of urbanisation and levels of deprivation.

Selection was based on electoral ward, of which there are currently 582 in Northern Ireland. 539 current wards matched the 1969-1998 dataset of Troubles-related deaths in Northern Ireland collated by Fay, Morrissey and Smyth (1999). Using Fay et al's original data (Smyth, personal communication) geographical experience of violence was determined through calculations of deaths per 1000 population in Northern Irish electoral wards. The top 15% (85 wards) were marked as "High experience". The 122



wards where "Deaths per 1000" was zero were classified the "Low experience" wards to maximise the difference between the two groups.

Urbanisation was defined by using the number of persons per hectare (npph), based on the 2001 census statistics. When npph was below 1 the ward was defined as "rural", if not it was defined as "urban." The wards were divided into rural and urban districts and 5 high-experience rural and 5 high-experience urban wards were selected using the random sampling function in SPSS. These were matched against low-experience wards using the rural/urban index and deprivation scores determined from Robson et al (1994), as used in the original Fay et al (1999) dataset. A total of 334 respondents were sampled across these areas.

There are acknowledged limitations of this approach. The geographically-based sampling does not necessarily mean that all participants within the high wards will have equivalent experience of Troubles-related violence, and the changing patterns of violence in Northern Ireland may have lead to altering ward-level experience of violence. In general there has been an overall decline in severity of violence, though not necessarily in the number of individual incidents (Jarman, 2004). There has also been a proportional increase in the number of Loyalist activities relative to Republican violence (Poole, 2004, Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006; Steenkamp, 2008), although all forms still exist (e.g. Jarman, 2004).

The overall levels of experience was measured by a series of 40 items related to individual direct and indirect experience of the Troubles (e.g. 'During the Troubles were you ever caught in a riot' and 'As a result of the Troubles was a member of your family or a close friend ever injured as a result of any incident'). Consistent with our supposition that those resident in high experience wards differed in terms of experience from those resident in low experience wards, participants from high-experience areas reported a

higher mean number of Troubles related experiences (3.97) than from low-experience areas (2.77). This difference is significant ( $t(330.39) = 2.332, p < 0.05$ ).

### **Procedures**

IPSOS-Mori samplers conducted a door-to-door survey of the identified locales. This was considered to be more inclusive than a telephone survey because it does not exclude the high-proportion of ex-directory households in Northern Ireland. Surveyors used the 'last-birthday' technique to select individual participants from households.

### **Ethical issues**

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Limerick and Queen's University Belfast ethics committees before conducting the study. Participants were presented with a letter describing the study, assuring the anonymity of responses, and providing contact details for the project researchers and for victim support.

### **Measures**

The survey items were presented within a wider survey examining identity and experience of political violence in Northern Ireland and the Border Counties of the Republic of Ireland.

#### *Experience of violence*

This was determined at ward level, as outlined above.

#### *Self-assigned national and religious identity*

Participants were asked to select their preferred nationality from a list of 'British', 'Irish', 'Northern Irish', 'Other', 'Don't know' and 'Refuse'. Religious background was probed with the question 'What is your community background?' and the options 'Catholic', 'Protestant', 'Muslim', 'Jewish', 'Don't know' and 'Refuse'.

#### *Esteem for Preferred National Identity*

Esteem for national identity was calculated using the 'private' and 'importance' subscales of Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale<sup>1</sup>. The subscales each contain four items, with the national category added according to the participant's prior response to a probe question (e.g.: 'You often feel regret that you are British'; 'In general, being Irish is an important part of your self image'). Scores were recorded on a five-part scale from 'strongly-disagree' to 'strongly disagree' with a separate 'Don't know/Not stated' option. A single mean score was calculated from each participant across these two subscales. This was appropriate as the 8 individual items had a Cronbach's  $\alpha$  of 0.862 (cases excluded listwise, n=308). Any participant who had responded 'Don't know/Not stated' for two or more items in each subscale was excluded from analysis. Three participants were excluded on this criterion: a Low-experience/British/Catholic, a Low-experience/Irish/Catholic and one Low-experience/N-Irish/Catholic. The sample size was therefore 327.

#### *Esteem for Preferred Religious identity*

Esteem for religious identity scores were calculated using the same principles as national self-esteem. In this case the 'private' and 'importance' subscales used the phrase 'your religion' immediately following a question on religious background (e.g. private subscale: 'You often regret that you belong to your religion'; importance subscale: Your religion is an important reflection of who you are). As before the 8 individual items had a high Cronbach's  $\alpha = 0.862$ , (n= 308 cases excluded listwise). The same exclusion

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<sup>1</sup> Luhtanen and Crocker's (1992) collective self-esteem scale was developed to assess individual differences in collective self-esteem. This contrasts to the traditional psychological concentration focus personal self-esteem. The full scale consists of four subscales: membership esteem, public collective self-esteem, private collective self-esteem, and importance to identity and has been widely employed in social psychological research. The scale has been shown to be a valid and reliable measure of underlying constructs (Crocker et al., 1994) and has been used in the context of Northern Ireland (Leach & Williams, 1999; Muldoon et al., in press). The current research uses two subscales of the full-scale: private collective self-esteem and importance to identity.

criterion was applied to the religious self-esteem scores and four participants were excluded on this criterion: one High-experience/British/Protestant, two Low-experience/British/Protestant, and one Low-experience/N-Irish/Catholic. The sample size was therefore 326.

## **Results**

### *Profile of Respondents*

There were 359 participants in the Northern Ireland survey sample. Only participants who identified with the national groupings and religious community backgrounds of interest to the current study were included in further analysis. 29 participants were excluded from the current study either because they claimed another national identity than 'British', 'Irish' or 'Northern Irish', and/or another religious community background than 'Catholic' or 'Protestant', or refused to answer these questions. 330 participants were therefore included in the following analysis.

Table 1 illustrates profile of respondents. 156 participants came from areas that had experienced a high level of violence during the troubles, 174 from areas of low-experience. In total 121 participants stated their national identity as 'British', 139 as 'Irish' and 70 as 'Northern Irish'. 189 participants stated that they were from a Catholic community background, 141 from a Protestant community background.

Table 1: Profile of respondents by area level of violence, preferred national and religious identity.

Level of experience	National Identity	Catholic	Protestant	Total
High	British	11	41	52
	Irish	75	3	78
	Northern Irish	15	11	26
<b>Total high exp</b>		<b>101</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>156</b>
Low	British	11	58	69
	Irish	57	4	61
	Northern Irish	20	24	44
<b>Total low exp</b>		<b>88</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>174</b>
<b>Grand total</b>		<b>189</b>	<b>141</b>	<b>330</b>

*Esteem for national identity*

A three-way independent ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of area level of violence, national identity, and religious community background on National Self-Esteem. The interaction effect between the three factors was significant  $F(2, 315) = 7.337, p = .001$ . Whilst the Irish/Protestant groups provide both the highest and lowest mean scores ( $M = 4.333, s.d. = 0.629$  in the high and  $M = 3.063, s.d. = 0.564$  in the low experience groups respectively) they are taken from very small group sizes and therefore this interaction should be interpreted with caution (see table 2).

Table 2: Mean National Self-Esteem by area level of violence, national identity, and religious community background

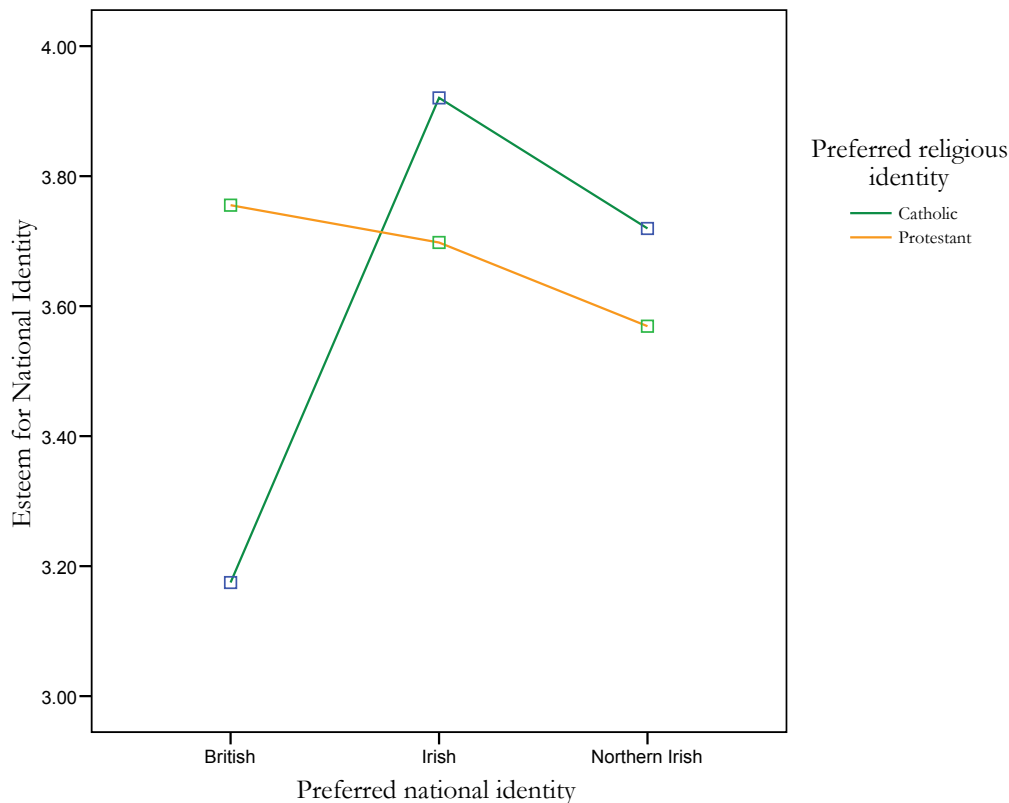
	<b>National identity</b>	<b>Religious community background</b>	<b>Mean NSE</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>High experience</b>	British	Catholic	3.254	0.892	0.269	11
		Protestant	3.806	0.546	0.085	41
	Irish	Catholic	3.969	0.546	0.631	75
		Protestant	4.333	0.629	0.363	3
	Northern Irish	Catholic	4.033	0.566	0.146	15
		Protestant	3.534	0.433	0.131	11
<b>Low experience</b>	British	Catholic	3.096	0.532	0.168	10
		Protestant	3.705	0.484	0.064	58
	Irish	Catholic	3.872	0.492	0.066	56
		Protestant	3.063	0.564	0.282	4
	Northern Irish	Catholic	3.406	0.532	0.122	19
		Protestant	3.604	0.359	0.073	24
						<b>Total: 327</b>

A two-way significant interaction was found between preferred national and religious identity,  $F(2, 315) = 9.966, p < 0.05$ . To explore this significant interaction an analysis of simple effects<sup>2</sup> was conducted. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to explore the effect of national identity and religious background on esteem for national identity.

<sup>2</sup> Field (2005 p.744) defines simple effects analysis as: 'the effect of one ... *predictor variable*... at individual levels of another (predictor variable).'

British Protestant's esteem for their British identity was significantly higher than British Catholic esteem for their British identity ( $F(1, 119) = 18.258, p < 0.001$ ; see figure 1)). The two other national identity groups did not differ across religious background: Irish ( $F(1, 137) = 2.308, p = ns$ ); Northern Irish ( $F(1, 68) = 0.656, p = ns$ ). There were also differences within the Catholic group ( $F(2, 185) = 16.550, p < 0.001$ ). Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that British Catholics had significantly lower esteem for their nationality than Irish Catholics and Northern Irish Catholics. There was no difference between Irish Catholics and Northern Irish Catholics. There was no difference within the Protestant religious background ( $F(2, 140) = 1.507, p = ns$ ).

Figure 1: Esteem for nationality by preferred national and religious identity.



The two-way interaction effects between the area level of violence and national identity and between area level of violence and religious identity were not significant ( $F(2, 315) = 2.618, p=ns$ ;  $F(1, 315) = 0.578, p=ns$  respectively). There were main effects<sup>3</sup> of area level violence and national identity ( $F(1, 315) = 15.668, p<0.001$ ;  $F(2, 315) = 4.529, p<0.05$  respectively). Overall, esteem for national identity was higher in wards with a history of violence (see figure 3). There was no main effect of religious identity,  $F(1, 315) = 0.566, p = ns$ .

<sup>3</sup> Field (2005 p.737) defines a main effect as: 'the unique effect of a *predictor variable* (or an *independent variable*) on an *outcome variable*'. This can be compared to the interaction effect obtained when two independent variables have a combined effect on an outcome variable.



*Esteem for Religious Identity*

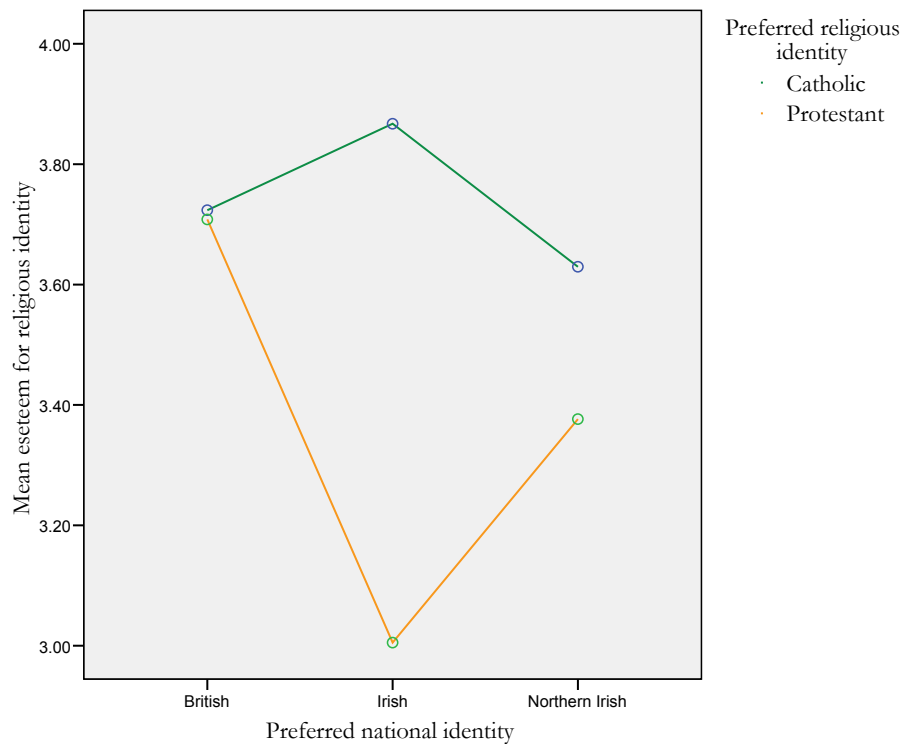
A three-way independent ANOVA was conducted to explore the impact of area level of violence, national and religious identity on esteem for religious identity. . The three-way interaction effect between the factors was significant,  $F(2, 314) = 2.635$ ,  $p=0.05$ . The highest score is seen in the High-experience/Irish/Catholic group ( $M=3.980$ ,  $s.d.= 0.638$ ,  $n= 75$ ). The lowest score is seen in the Low-experience/Irish/Protestant group ( $M= 2.344$ ,  $s.d. 0.572$ ) but again there is a very low frequency for this group ( $n= 4$ ) and these results should be interpreted with caution (see table 3).

Table 3 shows the mean religious self-esteem scores by group.

	<b>National identity</b>	<b>Religious community background</b>	<b>Mean RSE</b>	<b>S.D.</b>	<b>Std. Error</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>High experience</b>	British	Catholic	3.773	0.867	0.262	11
		Protestant	3.893	0.559	0.883	40
	Irish	Catholic	3.980	0.638	0.074	75
		Protestant	3.667	0.832	0.481	3
	Northern Irish	Catholic	3.867	0.878	0.227	15
		Protestant	3.451	0.742	0.224	11
<b>Low experience</b>	British	Catholic	3.674	0.687	0.207	11
		Protestant	3.524	0.547	0.073	56
	Irish	Catholic	3.754	0.629	0.083	57
		Protestant	2.344	0.572	0.286	4
	Northern Irish	Catholic	3.393	0.706	0.162	19
		Protestant	3.302	0.050	0.092	24
						<b>Total = 326</b>

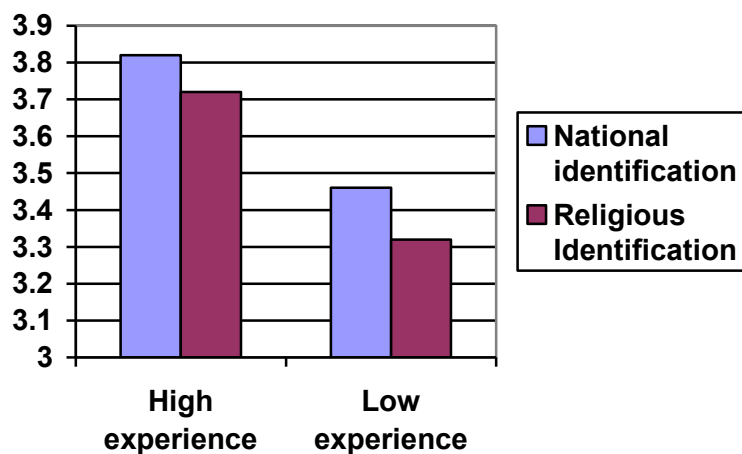
A two-way interaction effect was seen between national and religious identification,  $F(2, 314) = 4.281, p=0.015$ . To explore the significant interaction an analysis of simple effects was conducted. One-way ANOVAs were conducted to explore the effect of religious background and national identity on religious CSE. There were differences within the Protestant group ( $F(2, 137) = 8.295, p<0.001$ ). Post-hoc comparisons using the Bonferroni test indicated that British Protestants had significantly higher esteem for their religion than Irish Protestants and Northern Irish Protestants (see figure 2). There was no difference between Irish Protestants and Northern Irish Protestants. Esteem for religion was also significantly higher amongst Irish Catholics than British Catholic ( $F(1, 138) = 14.507, p<0.001$ ). Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants did not differ in relation to their esteem for religion ( $F(1, 68) = 2.311, p=ns$ ).

Figure 2: Esteem for religion by preferred national and religious identity.



The two-way interaction effects between area level of violence and religious identity and between area level of violence and national identity were not significant,  $F(1, 314) = 2.493, p=ns$  and  $F(2, 314) = 1.798, p=ns$  respectively. Two main effects were observed: in the area level of violence,  $F(1, 314) = 15.981, p<0.001$ ) and in religious identification,  $F(1, 314) = 11.731, p=0.001$ . Those residing in areas of higher levels of violence had greater esteem for religious identities (see figure 3). There was no significant main effect of national identity,  $F(2, 314) = 2.783, p= ns$ .

Figure 3: Mean national and religious identification score by ward level of violence.



## Discussion

The findings of our study are generally in line with the predictions outlined. First, those with expected and mutually reinforcing combinations of national and religious identities tended to have greater esteem for their religious and national groups. On the other hand those with unexpected combinations of identities tended to have less esteem for their national and religious groups. For instance, British Protestants had higher esteem for their British nationality than British Catholics. The corollary of this was also true: Irish Catholics had higher esteem for their nationality than British Catholics. There was also evidence that similar patterns of reinforcement of expected identity patterns in relation to esteem for religious identity. British Protestants had greater esteem for their religious identity than Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics had greater esteem for their religious identity than British Catholics.

These findings are in line with previous research (Trew, 1996); effectively a high degree of overlap between religious and national identities was evident. The pervasive distinction between Catholics (the relative minority at 41%) and Protestants (the relative

majority at 50%; ARK, 2007) in Northern Ireland has led to it being regarded as being both the key cultural marker and social identity and therefore in many ways a reification of a unidimensional religious division. In reality however the overlapping of identities is indicative of the many non-orthogonal identities that exist in real world situations (Eurich-Fulcher & Schofield, 1995). In many contemporary societies that have experienced political violence (e.g. Assam (India), Abkhazia (Georgia), Cyprus, Ivory Coast, Kashmir, Moldova, Sri Lanka, Mindanao (Philippines) and Northern Ireland; MacGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007) the conflict is often characterized as a clash between two opposing ethnic, religious or racial groups. However this study demonstrates that correlated or non-orthogonal identities (e.g. Irish Catholic and British Protestant) can act to enhance the strength of identification with both categories (nationality and religion in this case).

The focus on a single dimension of difference is therefore unrealistic and oversimplified. The current study suggests that such unidimensional explanations of difference will mask both the complexity and social reality of these situations. In Northern Ireland for instance, political, economic and ethnic differences all interact to create both differences and similarities within and between the two main protagonist groups to the conflict. However a substantial minority of respondents endorsed an unexpected pattern of identification; with 22/189 of respondents categorising as both Catholic and British (11% of the total Catholic sample) and a smaller proportion (5% of total) Protestant respondents categorising themselves as both Protestant and Irish. These proportions are slightly lower than those reported in previous research on a representative sample of the populations in Northern Ireland (Schmid & Muldoon, 2009) which is probably as a result of this sample being drawn from more deprived areas, but reflects some of the preferences shown in the NILT survey for a consistent minority of Catholics preferring Northern Ireland to remain constitutionally part of the United

Kingdom, and a smaller group of Protestants supporting a united Ireland (ARK, 2007). The presence of these unexpected identification patterns highlights the limitations of research employing a single identity category in fully capturing a clear representation of group identification even in situations where, *prima facie*, identity may appear to be highly polarised.

In relation to our second prediction those who self-assigned their nationality as Northern Irish were from both religious backgrounds. Given that a substantial minority of both groups (25% of all Protestants; 19% of all Catholics) assigned their nationality as Northern Irish it is arguable that this identity is indeed a common group identity. Interestingly, although Northern Irish Catholics and Irish Catholics did not differ in their esteem for their religion, Northern Irish Protestants did appear to have less esteem for their religious identity than British Protestants. Esteem for the Northern Irish national group was not significantly different from strength of esteem amongst British or Irish respondents.

Our final prediction related to associations between ward level history of political violence and patterns of identification was also borne out. Whilst temporality is an issue related to the measurement of violence (i.e. how recent or long ago did the events occur), we argue that our findings suggest that perceiving violence as being ambient – which has both a historical as well as contemporary component has consequence for identity. Stronger esteem for both national and religious groups was found in residents of areas of higher violence. This finding extends previous research in Northern Ireland. Whilst previous research had provided some evidence of experience consolidating national group identification (Muldoon, Schmid & Downes, 2009; Smyth, Fay, Morrissey & Smyth, 1999), evidence of this effect in relation to religious group identification had not been demonstrated. At a more theoretical level this finding demonstrates that experience of violence in real-world contexts is related to extant

groups, identities and divisions. This pattern of findings is also largely consistent with previous research which suggests that adversity and discrimination, in this case via experience of violence, tends to lead to have higher levels of identification (Branscombe et al, 2002; Cassidy et al., 2004).

In conclusion it would appear that esteem for religious and national identity is weakened in those who report unexpected identity combinations. However the Northern Irish identity label appears to be endorsed by both Protestants and Catholics and we found no evidence it detracts from allegiance to religious group. Experiential factors, namely exposure to political violence also appears to be related to esteem or strength of identification. Given the association between identification and attitudes, this research emphasises the importance of the removal of violence to the development of peace and reconciliation. However it is also important that development of strong patterns of identification can be adaptive in situations of conflict as it represents a resource for coping with the stress of the situation (Muldoon, Schmid & Downes, in press). Future research could usefully examine ways in which identity can be harnessed to promote pro-social engagement with other groups without interfering with its value as a psychological resource.

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