

## Abstract

The Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM: Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000) holds that viewing former outgroup members as part of a larger shared ingroup can allow social categorisation to be harnessed for social cohesion. Alternatively the Ingroup Projection Model (IPM: Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999) suggests that even where shared identification occurs, social divisions are sometimes transposed into common superordinate groups. Here we explore the potentially inclusive national identity in a region (Northern Ireland) which has historically seen a high degree of polarisation of identities. Using 3 data sets ( $N=2000$ ;  $N=359$ ;  $N=1179$ ), we examine the extent to which a potential superordinate religiously inclusive national identity, 'Northern Irish', co-occurs with conciliatory attitudes towards the traditional outgroup. Findings reveal that the relationship between the common identity of 'Northern Irish' and the exclusive religious categories of Protestant and Catholic is not straightforward. Individuals claiming a common ingroup identity display more positive social attitudes towards former outgroups, but their political preferences continue to reflect traditional divisions. We suggest that our data are more consistent with the IPM than the CIIM. We conclude by considering the complexities of applying psychological models in the real world where structural and historical social divisions and vexing oppositional political questions can be transposed into new social and political orders.

# Shared National Identification in Northern Ireland: the Veracity of Psychological Models of Group Inclusion Post Conflict

## **Context of the studies**

Over the last decade in Northern Ireland, there has been an increase in the usage of the national identity label 'Northern Irish'. This presents an opportune chance to examine theoretical models which articulate a role for shared identity in improving intergroup relations. This national identity label has been linked to post-1998 Belfast Good Friday landscape in this formerly violent region (Muldoon, Schmid & Downes, 2009; Hayes & McAllister, 2009). National identity labels in Northern Ireland had previously been polarized around 2 national identities over the course of the conflict: Protestants who identify as British and wish to remain part of the United Kingdom (UK), and Catholics who identify as Irish and wish to unify the island of Ireland. In the 1968 Loyalty Survey (Rose, 1971), three quarters of Catholic respondents identified as being Irish, whilst responses among Protestant respondents were more diverse (British 39%, Ulster 32% and Irish 20%). By the 1978 Northern Ireland Attitudes Survey (Moxon-Browne, 1983) however, the proportion of Protestant respondents claiming to be British rose from 39% in 1968 to 67%, reinforcing the religious/national dyads of Catholic/Irish and Protestant/British. These national identity choices can therefore be perceived as underpinning the opposing political positions held by the 2 main traditions in Northern Ireland.

Intergroup conflicts most often arise where factors such as religion, nationality, race and ethnicity overlap to a high degree. For instance it is common to hear reference to Israeli-Jews, Palestinian-Arabs, Irish-Catholics, and British-

Protestants despite the fact that, for example, not all Israelis are Jewish or all Irish are Catholic. Whilst a small minority cross-categorise, endorsing an unexpected combination of national and religious identities such as British-Catholic or Irish-Protestant (Fahey, Hayes & Sinnott, 2005; Hayes & McAllister, 2009; Muldoon, Trew, Todd, McLaughlin, & Rougier, 2007), the perceived correlation and interchangeability of the Catholic/Irish and British/Protestant identities has been widely demonstrated (Muldoon, McLaughlin & Trew, 2007; Lowe & Muldoon, 2010).

This use of the Northern Irish national label and in particular its rise in popularity is therefore the subject of serious media and academic interest (Devenport, 2012; Hayes & McAllister, 2009). *Northern Irish* can be considered a common national identity for a significant proportion of Catholics *and* Protestants in Northern Ireland. Though its adoption has been thought to be concentrated amongst the better educated and the young (Trew, 1998; Fahey et al., 2005), figures indicating the use of the label amongst approximately 1 in 4 adults (Hayes & McAllister, 2009; Muldoon, Trew, et al., 2007). One way of thinking about this national identity is that it provides a common ingroup identity which transcends the extant ethno-religious social divisions (Trew, 1998). The value of such shared identification for developing good relations between groups is widely accepted (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Equally the converse is often seen to be true: in situations of political violence, the struggle over territory, power and resources is often symbolised and represented in collective identities and these identities are seen to play a pivotal role in the conflict. These identities are most often characterised as oppositional and negatively interdependent rather than being shared. Indeed shared identification across traditionally opposing factions or superordinate identification with the Northern Irish group by both

Catholics and Protestants may be an important vehicle for improving intergroup relations and promoting peace and reconciliation.

On the other hand, questions remain as to whether this identity is a harbinger of peace and reconciliation. Recent analyses of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement and its associated legislative Assembly structures in Stormont have suggested that these power structures have served to formalise religious-political divisions in Northern Ireland (McAuley & Tonge, 2007). Furthermore, the Agreement itself is seen as driven by the elite and political classes rather than one resulting from a groundswell of public opinion forcing social change (MacGinty, Muldoon & Ferguson, 2007). A recent study by Hayes and McAllister (2009) examining national identity and social attitudes speaks directly to this issue. Overall their analysis finds no evidence of a change in attitudes to mixed religion marriage, integrated schooling and residential segregation in Northern Ireland, although the increasing use of the Northern Irish label is associated with more positive views towards social integration.

Similarly religious and national affiliations are perceived as being related to power and privilege. Subsequent to the partition of Ireland in 1922 (into what is now Northern Ireland -a part of the United Kingdom- and the Irish Republic -an independent nation), those loyal to the British crown, largely Protestants, comprised the majority of the population. Catholics, who at this stage largely viewed themselves as Irish, were frequently disadvantaged in terms of voting, housing, education and governance of the new Northern Ireland. Whilst legislative reform has been introduced to good effect, this historical disadvantage lingers stubbornly and is reflected in (for example) higher levels of socio-economic disadvantage and unemployment amongst the Catholic population even though the Protestant population is no longer the substantive majority that it was (Hayes & McAllister,

2001, 2009). On the other hand, those of Protestant background view the Agreement, the increasing Catholic population together and some legislative reforms as both problematic and threatening (MacGinty & DuToit, 2007). Their concern is that the pendulum may swing too far and instead of correcting an imbalance, these political and policy changes will marginalise Protestant interests.

### **Contributions from the Social Identity Approach**

The stability and endurance of national allegiances in Northern Ireland and their resistance to change is unsurprising given the history of intergroup conflict (Rouhana & Bar-Tal, 1998). To an extent the struggle over identity takes on a similar meaning to the struggle over power and/or resources in conflict situations, and as such it can be argued that collective identification plays a pivotal role in political conflict (Kelman, 2001). Whilst social psychological approaches to intergroup relations have contributed much to understanding of conflict (Trew, 1996; Kelman, 1999), there is increasing acknowledgment of the need to account for more nebulous factors such as power, history and context in order to develop a full understanding of these intergroup processes (Bar-Tal, 2007; Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999).

This has led researchers in social psychology to consider the role that models of categorisation and identification may have in intergroup relations. Gaertner and Dovidio's (2000) Common Ingroup Identity Model (CIIM) recognises the central role of social categorisation in creating intergroup bias. It suggests that identification with a superordinate group (a category such as the Northern Irish) can transcend existing boundaries, and reduce prejudice and discrimination. Re-categorisation therefore allows traditionally opposing groups to adopt a superordinate identity (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Nier et al., 2001) which then acts to promote social inclusion.

Social categorisation and internal representation of groups is at the heart of the CIIM (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). Re-categorisation to include members of the former outgroup in a superordinate, more inclusive group, can be achieved by calling attention to superordinate group memberships (e.g., the Northern Irish category) or by introducing new factors such as agreed goals or common fate (e.g., as a peace agreement would). In effect, a superordinate group representation reduces bias by extending group inclusiveness to former outgroups (in this case, allowing those of both religious backgrounds in Northern Ireland to share a Northern Irish identity), rather than through a process of de-categorisation (no longer being in a particular group). This simultaneous or alternating salience of group membership that is possible within the CIIM model means that buying into a new Northern Irish identity, in the present example, does not require forsaking valued religious identities such as Catholic or Protestant. The CIIM would predict that those categorising as Northern Irish would have more inclusive and tolerant attitudes.

However, Hewstone (1996) suggests the CIIM approach may be limited in its applicability to real world contexts due to its reliance on data from primed lab settings. An alternative to the CIIM, the Ingroup Projection Model (IPM: Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999), emphasises the importance of historical, contextual and structural factors that relate to both superordinate *and* subordinate categorisations processes. The IPM argues that the power relationships between 2 subordinate identity categories are crucial to understanding superordinate collective categorisation. Mummendey, Wenzel and colleagues (e.g., Mummendey & Wenzel, 1999; Wenzel, Mummendey & Waldzus, 2007) note that unequal power relations may lead to projection of the more powerful subordinate group identity onto the superordinate category. For example, a study within post-reunification Germany of

the subordinate categories 'East German' and 'West German' showed status differences between the 2 subgroups when considered under the common 'German' superordinate category. These findings suggest that both East and West Germans agreed they were members of the superordinate category, but both rated West Germans as being more typically representative of the superordinate German category. Furthermore, West Germans' ratings of their own typicality were significantly higher than East Germans'. The level of inclusion achieved by the superordinate identity was therefore compromised by the relative status of the subordinate East and West groups (Waldzus, Mummendey, Wenzel, & Boettcher, 2004). In the current case, evidence of projection of the majority Protestant group identity onto the superordinate Northern Irish identity would be consistent with the IPM.

Wenzel, Mummendey and Waldzus (2007) point to another potential case where superordinate identification may be problematic. If 2 subordinate groups are in conflict over the potential superordinate group identity, it may be that more tolerant relationships between the subordinate groups are achieved by avoiding shared inclusion. In this case, the benefits of a shared identity are negligible: feelings of empathy towards the other group because it is fundamentally similar to oneself, or the granting of basic, equal rights no longer flow from superordinate identification (Wenzel et al., 2007). In this case, the Northern Irish identity should not be seen as a harbinger of an inclusive and shared future, but instead a new source of subordinate group conflict.

### **The Present Paper**

This paper uses the CIIM and IPM (Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Wenzel et al., 2007, respectively) to try and understand the nature of the Northern Irish identity, a national identity increasingly evident in Northern Ireland subsequent to the Peace

Agreement. Our first aim then is to consider whether the Northern Irish identity is a superordinate identity including those from the traditionally opposed religious groups in Northern Ireland.

CIIM and IPM articulate how shared identification can be a vehicle for social inclusion. We consider whether a shared identity that has occurred spontaneously - the Northern Irish identity- is underpinned by relationships and processes as outlined by these psychological models. This represents an important contribution to the existing literature; whilst acceptance of shared inclusion as a vehicle for reducing intergroup conflict and prejudice is commonplace in psychology, study of these processes in real world contexts is less common.

To this end, the extent to which the Northern Irish identity co-occurs with more conciliatory social attitudes is examined by contrasting participants who claim the common ingroup 'Northern Irish' identity with participants who consider themselves traditional 'British' or 'Irish' categorisers. CIIM and previous work (Hayes & McAllister, 2009) would predict more conciliatory attitudes amongst the Northern Irish identifiers. Extending this work we examine not only social attitudes but also political attitudes. If the Northern Irish identity operates as a common ingroup category it would be expected that Northern Irish participants perceive less threat from their religious outgroup and express greater support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement than respondents who prefer the Irish or British national labels.

We then go on to examine some of the predictions of the IPM (Wenzel et al., 2007). Specifically this model suggests that prototypicality for the superordinate identity (the extent to which respondents believe they are typically Northern Irish) is an important determinant of attitudes and as such if prototypicality should co-vary with these attitudes in superordinate identifiers this would suggest support for the



IPM. Further higher perceived prototypicality amongst Protestants who categorise themselves as Northern Irish, (rather than Catholics who categorise as Northern Irish) as a consequence of their majority position is consistent with the IPM. A second key prediction here is that subordinate (Catholic and Protestant) identities will relate to attitudes even in the superordinate Northern Irish group. Further, IPM (Wenzel et al., 2007) would suggest religious differences will be evident within the inclusive superordinate group, and that these differences will reflect structural and historical differentials within Northern Ireland. In this case, this might include evidence of greater perceived threat amongst Northern Irish Catholics who have had greater experience of violence during the conflict (Hayes & McAllister, 2001; Muldoon et al., 2009) and similarly greater support for the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement amongst Northern Irish Catholics than their Northern Irish Protestant counterparts, as the former have generally been viewed as having more to gain from the peace settlement (Hayes & McAllister, 2009).

The data in this paper is drawn from 3 surveys. The first 2 studies examine identity, experience of violence, social and political attitudes, and health in residents of Northern Ireland. The first survey was conducted in 2005 and the second in 2008. Results from a third study are also reported. This study was conducted in 2007 as part of the Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey and further examines identity and social attitudes.

## **Study 1**

### **Methods**

**Participants.** A sample of 2000 participants comparable to the census profile of the population in Northern Ireland comprised the sample for this study. In the total

sample of 2000 respondents, 1496 self-categorised their nationality as being either British ( $N=1015$ ), Irish ( $N=520$ ) or Northern Irish ( $N=190$ ), with 275 refusing or stating another identity. Female participants comprised 58% of the final sample. There was no significant association between gender and preferred national identity, however respondents who categorised themselves as British ( $M= 49.8$  years,  $SD 17.4$ ) were significantly older,  $F=(1, 1722)17.1, p<.01$ , than those reported their nationality as Irish ( $M=45.6$  years,  $SD 17.1$ ) or Northern Irish ( $M= 44.4$  years,  $SD. 17.1$ ). 1501 participants provided a self-categorisation as either Protestant or Catholic on the basis of community background (Protestant,  $N=849$ ; Catholic,  $N=652$ ; refused or stated another religious background,  $N= 499$ ).

Ethical approval was obtained from Queen's University Belfast. Participants received an invitation describing the study, assuring the anonymity of responses, and providing contact details for the project researchers and for a counselling telephone helpline.

### **Measures.**

***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 assessed with the culturally relevant and widely used question in Northern Irish surveys 'What is your community background?' Response options included 'Catholic', 'Protestant', 'Muslim', 'Jewish', 'Don't know' and 'Refuse'.

***Prototypicality.*** A single item measure of prototypicality was included because it considers the issue raised by Waldzus and colleagues (2004) that the 2 subordinate groups comprising a superordinate category may consider their relative prototypicality in relation to the superordinate groups differently. Participants were

asked subsequent to self-categorising their own national identity 'To what extent are you typically Irish/Northern Irish/British?' Responses were given on a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly untypical' to 'Strongly typical'.

**Threat.** Eight items asked about Perceived Threat in relation to community and national background, and were scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly Disagree' to 'Strongly Agree'. Sample items included measures of symbolic and realistic threat such as 'I feel threatened if the political parties mainly representing Protestants/Catholics are in power in Northern Ireland' and 'When I see an Irish Tricolour/Union Jack flown in an area, I feel as though my Protestant/Catholic identity is under threat'. Mean scores on the 8 items comprised the final scale measure. Similar to previous research in this context since symbolic threats can often take on a more realistic component (e.g., Tausch, Hewstone, Kenworthy, Cairns, & Christ, 2007), our measures of realistic and symbolic threat were highly correlated forming a reliable scale (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .70$ ). Higher scores reflect greater intergroup threat perceptions.

**Support for the peace process.** Participants were asked to what extent they supported the Belfast Good Friday agreement on a 5-point Likert scale, from 'Strongly support it' to 'Strongly oppose it'. This single item was included as an indicator of political attitudes and in particular willingness to support the peace process which remained controversial throughout the years of our data collection.

**Procedure.** The survey was carried out using computer-assisted telephone interviewing. A random sample of household telephone numbers was drawn from domestic listings. These numbers were matched with the relevant postal address and a letter was sent to selected households, explaining the nature and purpose of the study. Each household was then contacted by telephone. A quota control mechanism

controlled the number of respondents by location based on adult population statistics from the most recent Census of Population (Office for National Statistics, 2001).

Surveyors used the 'last-birthday' technique to randomise the selection of respondents included in the sample. Fieldwork was carried out during 2005.

## Results

**Analysis 1a: The Common Ingroup.** As moderate but significant correlations existed between prototypicality and perceived threat ( $r=.09, p<.01$ ) and support for the agreement ( $r=.14, p<.01$ ), prototypicality was entered as a covariate in all analyses. MANCOVAs were conducted to compare British, Irish and Northern Irish respondents on threat and support for the Agreement measures,  $F(2, 1439)=165.0, p<.001$ ) with prototypicality entered as a covariate. In all instances, given the unequal sample sizes Pillai's criterion was used to assess significance given its robustness in instances where there are unequal sample sizes in cells (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001)<sup>1</sup>. The results are presented in Table 1.

Preferred national identity related to perceived threat,  $F(1, 1442) = 17.1, p<.01$ , and support for the Agreement,  $F(1, 1442) = 132, p<.001$ . In support of IPM, prototypicality covaried with either threat  $F(1, 1442)=8.9, p<.001$  and support for the agreement,  $F(1, 1442)=14.6, p<.001$ . We used Tukey's post-hoc tests to check for significant differences between sub-groups. Though a conservative test for a priori predictions, our large sample sizes suggested caution in evaluation of significance. Tukey's HSD showed significant differences between British and Irish participants and between Irish and Northern Irish participants relative to threat and support for the Agreement. Irish respondents perceived the highest level of threat. Post-hoc tests

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<sup>1</sup> Entering age as a further covariate age into the analysis did not alter this pattern of results in study 1 or the study 2. Though not related to support for the Agreement (study 1  $r=.03, p>.05$ ; study 2  $r=.06, p>.05$ ), age was related to perceived threat (study 1  $r=-.22, p<.01$ ; study 2  $r=-.15, p<.01$ ) in both study 1 and 2.

controlling for prototypicality (Tukey's HSD) showed that Irish respondents had significantly higher support for the Agreement than both British and Northern Irish respondents and Northern Irish participants showed greater support than British respondents.

**Analysis 1b: Ingroup projection.** We subsequently conducted analyses attending to the religious background of each national category. This analysis therefore considers whether the religious background (i.e., the subordinate category) was still a relevant category for those identifying with the superordinate national identity of Northern Irish. Due to the low numbers of British Catholic and Irish Protestant respondents (<2%), this analysis compares 4 groups: Irish Catholics ( $N=434$ ), British Protestants ( $N=703$ ), Northern Irish Catholics ( $N=67$ ) and Northern Irish Protestants ( $N=81$ ). Given that prototypicality is seen as central to identification with the superordinate category, these analyses were undertaken using perceived national prototypicality as a covariate. No significant differences in national prototypicality between groups were apparent,  $F(2, 1263) = 2.4, ns$ . Higher support for the Agreement was associated with higher national prototypicality,  $F(1, 1443) = 14.6, p < .001$ .

The findings mirror the results in the earlier analysis. Perceived threat was significantly different across all 4 groups, with Irish Catholic scores remaining significantly higher than all other groups ( $F(3, 1256) = 14.18, p < 0.001$ ) and Northern Irish identifiers (Table 1) and Northern Irish Protestant (Table 2) identifiers in particular, showing the lowest level of perceived threat. Prototypicality covaried with perceived threat ( $F(1, 1442) = 8.9, p < .01$ ), again supporting a central tenet of IPM. However, the findings relating to support for the Agreement evidence an interesting difference. The differences between the Irish Catholic and British Protestants remain

( $F(3, 1231) = 114.48, p < 0.001$ ), and there are now differences evident within the superordinate Northern Irish group. The Northern Irish Catholic and Northern Irish Protestant groups are significantly different from one another in terms of support for the Agreement as well as significantly different from their religious outgroup with traditional national allegiances. Prototypicality did not covary with threat or support for agreement within the Northern Irish group.

### **Discussion: Study 1**

We hypothesised using CIIM that those who self-identified as Northern Irish would perceive less threat from their religious outgroup and be more supportive of the Agreement than traditional British or Irish identifiers. We did not find full support for these hypotheses. Northern Irish identifiers did not perceive less threat from their outgroup than British identifiers. And whilst the potential superordinate identifiers, the Northern Irish group are more accepting of the Agreement than the British group, the Irish group showed greatest support for the Agreement consistent with the historically high support for the Agreement in this group (Hayes & McAllister, 2001).

Our subsequent analysis sought to examine evidence in support of the IPM. We found some evidence in support of this model in that religious group differences (that is differences associated with the subordinate identity) are readily apparent and persist in those who identify as Northern Irish (i.e., the superordinate category). This persistence of difference within the potential superordinate identity resonates with the arguments put forward by proponents of the IPM (Wenzel et al., 2007) who claim that superordinate identities can have very different meanings for subordinate groups. Furthermore group prototypicality was related to threat and support for the Agreement as predicted by the IPM. Importantly however there were no differences in prototypicality scores related to subordinate categorisation, as would be predicted by

IPM, in those who identified with the Northern Irish label. Evidence in support of the IPM model can be seen as partial.

In short, our findings to this point suggest that within our common ingroup there is evidence of religious division. In line with Mummendey and Wenzel's thesis, available evidence suggests a potential conflation between the Northern Irish label and either the majority Protestant religious group, or alternatively, between 2 separate potentially contested understandings of the Northern Ireland label. A key difference between the label we are considering here, and national labels studied previously (for example 'German') is that the Northern Irish label has entered into usage more recently. This relative novelty may explain in part why there are no religious differences in the levels of perceived prototypicality; both parties feel they can legitimately project ownership over the identity.

Certainly, the higher levels of threat apparent in Irish and Northern Irish Catholics evident in this first study would seem to reflect historic differentials in Northern Ireland. Historically, Catholics have been disadvantaged in terms of political power, access to employment and fatalities over the course of the conflict (Hayes & McAllister, 2003). They remain the numerical minority and have suffered higher levels of casualties as a consequence of the violence. Catholic unemployment and social disadvantage, despite considerable legislative efforts, has persisted over the course of the Troubles (Hayes & McAllister, 2003), however that is not to say that there is not Protestant disadvantage, Protestant casualties of the conflict or a sense of threat within this group (Schmid & Muldoon, in press). The importance of controlling for power as a central aspect of intergroup relations is relevant to both the religious division and the conflict in Northern Ireland and limits our interpretation of these findings. Study 2 addresses this issue more fully.

## Study 2

Our second study aimed to replicate and extend Study 1. There is strong evidence that experience of conflict is not distributed evenly or indeed randomly across the population (Muldoon & Lowe, 2012). For example those most affected by political violence and war on a global scale tend to be the very poor (Muldoon, in press) and within nations those most likely to be exposed to conflict tend to be from the most economically deprived sections of society (Muldoon & Lowe, 2012). Equally those who assume the strongest identity positions are often those with the most experience of conflict garnering psychological strength and collective resource from their strong identities (Muldoon, Schmid & Downes, 2009).

In Northern Ireland (as elsewhere) a central component of the political conflict has been economic. It is for this reason it been argued that some have suggested that those most likely to embrace the Northern Irish label are those who have been least affected by the conflict, effectively the more affluent and powerful socio-economic groups (Trew, 1998). A central question then is the viability of the common Northern Irish label in groups that have been most affected directly by the conflict as well as the indirect economic dimensions of the conflict. The situation is further complicated by the fact that exposure to political violence has been related to religious affiliation (Hayes & McAllister, 2003). Catholics have experienced more violence as a result of the conflict, and remain economically more deprived than their Protestant counterparts (Hayes & McAllister, 2003).

### Methods

**Sampling Procedures.** The current study considers the complexity of relationships in Northern Ireland in a stratified sample of matched Catholic and Protestant respondents (subordinate categories), attempting to control for the



variability in experience of the conflict and socio-economic status<sup>2</sup>. Three factors were considered in the sampling rationale: the levels of violence experienced during the Troubles, levels of urbanisation and levels of deprivation (further details of this sampling can be found in Lowe & Muldoon, 2010). Interviewers used the 'last-birthday' technique to select individual participants from households. Fieldwork was conducted in 2008.

**Participants.** In the total sample of 359 respondents, 343 (of the 359 respondents) provided a self-categorisation as either Protestant or Catholic on the basis of community background. Due to the sampling procedure targeting wards with experience of conflict and as a consequence deprived wards, this study had a higher proportion of respondents from the Catholic community than Study 1. Protestants (N=143) and Catholics (N=200) from high (Catholics 108; Protestants 57) and low experience areas (Catholics 92; Protestants 86) were represented within the sample and roughly equal proportions of men and women. 342 self-categorised their nationality as being either British (n=127), Irish (n=143) or Northern Irish (n=72), with 17 refusing or stating another identity with those who categorised themselves as British again tending to be older ( $M=49.7$  years,  $SD$  16.8) than Irish ( $M= 41.2$  years,  $SD$  16.4) or Northern Irish ( $M= 43.7$  years,  $SD$  15.1) respondents. Female participants comprised 51% of the final sample.

Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Limerick and Queen's University Belfast. Participants were presented with a letter describing the study,

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<sup>2</sup> An independent main effect for area of residence (as a proxy for experience of violence) was related to support for the agreement,  $F(1,184) = 6.3$ ,  $p < .05$ , and perceived threat from the outgroup,  $F(1, 184) = 11.9$ ,  $p < .05$ . No interaction effects were observed,  $F(2, 183) = .3$  and  $.7$  respectively,  $n. S.$  The relationship between self reported experience of violence, as well as area of residence as a proxy measure of experience, with identification and attitudes is well considered in the literature (see Fay et al., 1999; Hayes and McAllister, 2003).

assuring the anonymity of responses, and providing contact details for the project researchers and for Victim Support (a charity giving help to victims of the conflict).

**Measures.** The same measures were used as in Study 1, with the exception of support for the political process. Given the time elapsed since the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, participants were instead asked to what extent they supported the political institution arising from the Agreement namely, the Stormont Assembly, on a 5-point Likert scale from 'Strongly support it' to 'Strongly oppose it'. Cronbach's alpha for the threat measure was .74.

## **Results**

### **Analysis 2a: Common Ingroup**

To examine the contention that those with the superordinate Northern Irish identity had more inclusive attitudes, MANCOVAs were conducted to compare British, Irish and Northern Irish respondents on both measures,  $F(2, 278, 3.1, p < .05)$ . Pillai's trace criterion was used to test significance of effects given the unequal sample sizes in our sub-groups (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001). The results are presented in Table 1. No significant differences were found between groups on threat,  $F(2, 293) = .32, ns$ . Significant differences were found between groups on support for the Stormont Assembly,  $F(2, 278) = 7.2, p < .01$  and prototypicality was not a significant covariate with either threat,  $F(1, 278) = 2.4, ns$ , or support for the assembly,  $F(1, 278) = 1.9, ns$ . Post-hoc tests (Tukey's HSD) showed that Irish and Northern Irish participants had significantly higher support for the Assembly than British respondents.

**Analysis 2b: Ingroup projection.** To test the IPM, MANCOVAs were subsequently undertaken breaking down the Northern Irish group by religious background so that Northern Irish Protestants ( $N = 35$ ), Northern Irish Catholics ( $N =$

35) - along with British Protestants ( $n = 99$ ) and Irish Catholics ( $N = 132$ ) were compared. As in Study 1, prototypicality was entered as a covariate and Pillai's criterion used to test significance. 58 participants who did not self-categorise on either variable or who categorised as Irish Protestants or British Catholics were excluded from further analyses.

Differences in perceived threat across groups were again not apparent,  $F(3, 292) = 1.807, p = ns$ . However the support for the Stormont Assembly was related to subordinate religious identification and with the difference evident in the Northern Irish group,  $F(3, 277) = 4.295, p < 0.01$ . There was no evidence of religious differences in prototypicality within the Northern Irish group. This is counter to the predictions of IPM. Perceived prototypicality was a significant covariate ( $F(2, 293) = 3.56, p < 0.01$ ). The distinction seen in our first analysis between British and Northern Irish on this scale is again driven by the greater support shown for the Assembly by the Northern Irish Catholic group. The Northern Irish Protestant group does not differ in terms of level of support for the Assembly when compared to the traditional British Protestant group.

## **Discussion Study 2**

Support for the new political dispensation in Northern Ireland and the power-sharing Agreement is highest amongst the Northern Irish group which is consistent with our hypothesis that the Northern Irish label is a common ingroup. That said, religious (subordinate) differences within the potential superordinate (Northern Irish) identity are also evident which is in line with our hypothesis that religious identification continues to exert its effect with regard to political attitudes and in particular with regard to support for the Assembly (which arose from the Agreement) in the Northern Irish group. Northern Irish Catholics are more like the Irish identifiers

in terms of their support for the Assembly, than they are like Northern Irish Protestants, who have similar views to the British Protestants. This suggests the ongoing importance of the religious identification within the superordinate or common national group. Though this is consistent with the IPM, the failure to observe differences between Catholics and Protestants within the superordinate national group is not consistent with IPM. This difference remains in evidence even in this carefully matched sample that controls for experiences during the Troubles and economic power which are key determinants of these attitudes. Importantly, the evident differences are in relation to political attitudes. The findings of this study again serve to highlight the difficulties associated with applying our 2 models.

A clear difference between these first 2 studies is the finding related to threat. In our first study, which was a random sample of the population, differences in perceived threat were apparent across the national and religious groups. In our second, when contextual and historical factors such as conflict experience and deprivation are controlled, no significant differences in levels of perceived threat were apparent. These findings point to the importance of contextual factors in shaping respondents' perceptions of intergroup relations. They are also consistent with recent experimental findings which suggest power can shape understandings of commonality and intergroup relations (Saguy, Tausch, Dovidio, & Pratto, 2009). Our findings add significantly to both the CIIM and IPM literature by attending to power relations in this way. Mummendey and Wenzel (1999) argue that subordinate differences within superordinate groups are largely related to power differentials. Their absence in our matched sample that attempts to minimise these differentials between the groups in Northern Ireland supports the importance of these contextual factors and relative positions of power. The difficulty of applying universal psychological models,

whether IPM or CIIM or others to real world conflict situations that are by definition complex and highly context specific should not therefore be underestimated.

### **Study 3**

These 2 analyses now suggest that within the Northern Irish group religious background is linked to differences in political attitudes. In Studies 1 and 2, the relationship between the common national identity (Northern Irish) and social attitudes is less clear. Study 1 showed somewhat reduced perceived threat by the Northern Irish participants compared to the British and Irish participants, but this was not replicated in Study 2, where experiences during the conflict and economic contexts were taken into account via sampling. Whilst the more positive social attitudes of the superordinate Northern Irish identifiers may be taken as a positive signifier, they contrast with the persistent differences in political attitudes amongst Catholics and Protestants. We hypothesise that the target of the attitude is central to understanding this issue and it is to this issue we turn in Study 3.

Social targets are of less strategic importance than political targets which can be centrally concerned with the relative status position of the group. Political targets may be more resistant to change because of their strategic importance, particularly in conflicted societies, where intergroup relations are often constructed as a zero sum game. In this third study, we consider attitudes towards political targets separately from social targets. To unpick this issue, Study 3 uses data from a third survey to compare a wider range of social and political attitudes across traditionally oppositional British and Irish groups and the superordinate Northern Irish group.

This research was conducted as part of the 2007 Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) involving 1179 face-to-face interviews with adults aged 18 years or over. One key difference between the items in Study 3 compared to Studies 1

and 2 is that the items in the NILT involve categorical-choice responses from a series of attitude and behaviour statements, rather than the more traditional psychological scale data as used in Studies 1 and 2. As a consequence, this categorical data has been analysed using, more appropriately, non-parametric statistics.

## **Methods**

**Sampling Procedure.** The NILT uses a systematic random sample of addresses was selected from the Land and Property Services Agency list of private addresses. This is the most up-to-date listing of private households and is made available to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency for research purposes. People living in institutions (though not in private households in such institutions) are excluded.

**Participants.** In the total sample of 1179 respondents, 1033 self-categorised their nationality as being either British ( $N=460$ ), Irish ( $N=330$ ) or Northern Irish ( $N=302$ ). This survey included a fourth possible identity, Ulster, to which only a small group subscribed ( $N=41$ ) and 46 participants refused or gave an alternative national identity and so were excluded from further analyses. Of the 1179 respondents, 1009 indicated their religious affiliation as either Protestant ( $N=555$ ) or Catholic ( $N=454$ ). Female participants comprised 53% of the final sample.

Again, respondents were assigned initially to 3 groups of identity combinations for purposes of statistical analysis: Northern Irish ( $N=252$ ), British ( $N=346$ ) and Irish ( $N=276$ ). Respondents who categorised themselves as British ( $M=51.4$  years,  $SD 18.6$ ) were again significantly older than those reported their nationality as Irish ( $M=47.7$  years old,  $SD 18.9$ ) or Northern Irish ( $M=46.4$  years,  $SD 16.9$ ), there was no statistical difference between age in the Irish and Northern Irish respondents. Subsequently the Northern Irish participants were subdivided by

religious background: Protestants ( $N = 144$ ) and Catholics ( $N = 108$ ). Participants with unexpected combinations and those who did not self-categorise on either dimension were excluded from further analyses.

### **Measures**

***Self-assigned national and religious identity.*** As in Study 1, participants were asked to select their national and religious identity from a list of possible choices.

***Attitudes to social targets.*** The NILT has questions relating to practical questions of living in Northern Ireland, and questions related to the political governance. Three questions were chosen to reflect the level that participants supported integration of communities of different religious background in 3 areas of daily life: home, work and schooling. The questions were: If you had a choice, would you prefer to live in a neighbourhood with people of your own religion, or mixed religion; If you were working and had to change your job, would you prefer a workplace with people of your own religion or mixed religion; If you were deciding where to send your children to school, would you prefer a school with children of your own religion only, or a mixed religion school. Response options required indication of preference for a mixed or single religion setting for their neighbourhood, workplace and school.

***Attitudes to Political targets.*** Participants were asked about their preferred political future for Northern Ireland from the following list: remaining part of the UK under direct rule from Westminster, remaining part of the UK with devolved government in Northern Ireland, becoming part of the Republic of Ireland or an alternative solution of Northern Ireland being independent of both the UK and Republic of Ireland.

**Procedure.** The Land and Property Services Agency provides a good sampling frame of addresses, but contains no information about the number of people living at an address. Further selection stages were therefore required to convert the listing of addresses to a listing of individuals from which one person was then selected. The interviewers listed all members of the household eligible for inclusion in the sample: that is, all persons aged 18 or over living at the address. From this listing of eligible adults, the interviewer's computer randomly selected one adult. This person, the selected respondent, completed all questions using Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI™). Fieldwork was carried out between October 2007 and January 2008.

## **Results**

**Attitudes to social targets.** There was a significant association between national identity and neighbourhood preference,  $\chi^2(2, N=839) = 6.62, p < 0.05$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.09$ . The Northern Irish group (86% of all those preferring this national label) show a significantly greater preference for mixed-religion neighbourhoods than either of the British (81% of those preferring this label) or Irish (77% of those preferring this label) groups. Table 3 also shows the proportion of each group who preferred a single or mixed-religion workplace. Again there was a significant association between national identity and workplace preference, with the Northern Irish group showing significantly more preference for mixed religion workplaces (97.6% compared to 93.5% of British and 90% of Irish respondents),  $\chi^2(2, N=857) = 12.50, p < 0.01$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.12$ . Table 3 also shows the proportion of each group who stated a preference for mixed-religion schools. There was a significant association between national identity and schooling preferences,  $\chi^2(2, N=838) = 42.31, p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.23$ . Again Northern Irish respondents



showed significantly higher preference for mixed religion schools (74.5%) than Irish or British respondents (48.1% and 67.9% respectively).

Preferences of the 2 religious groups for mixed religion neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools were also examined within the Northern Irish group. No differences between Northern Irish Catholics and Protestants were evident in relation to preference for mixed religion workplaces and schools, Pearson  $\chi^2$  (3,  $N=839$ ) = 7.236, *ns* and Pearson  $\chi^2$  (3,  $N=857$ ) = 2.540, *ns* respectively. However, whilst the Northern Irish group show a greater preference for mixed-religion schooling generally Protestant support(83%) for mixed-schools is significantly higher than Catholic support (63%) even within the superordinate Northern Irish group,  $\chi^2$  (3,  $N=838$ ) = 53.21,  $p<0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.25$ ).

**Attitudes to political targets.** The political attitude question asked participants what the long-term policy for Northern Ireland should be, from a selection of 4 options (to remain part of the UK with direct rule from London, to remain part of the UK with devolved government, to become part of the Republic of Ireland or to become an independent state). These results are presented in Table 4. When Northern Irish is considered as a unitary group, a Chi-square test indicated that there was a significant association between national identity and future political preference,  $\chi^2$  (6,  $N=825$ ) = 3.63,  $p<0.001$ , Cramer's  $V=0.47$ .

The vast majority of British Protestants support continuing union with the UK, with only 1.2% supporting Northern Ireland to become part of the Republic of Ireland and 2.7% supporting an independent Northern Ireland. Although the Irish Catholic results are less clear cut, the majority support Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic (63.3%), with a significant minority (26.7%) supporting union with the UK under a system of devolved government. Considering the Northern Irish group, they

appear to reflect a midway point between these 2 positions with 74.7% supporting some form of continuing union with the UK and 17.2% supporting union with the Republic of Ireland.

When the Northern Irish group were separated by religious background, this pattern remained significant,  $\chi^2(9, N=825) = 4.00, p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = 0.40$ ). However the Northern Irish group differs both from those with whom they share religion (British and Irish identifiers) and from other Northern Irish identifiers with whom they do not share religious affiliation. For example 24.3% of British Protestants supported direct rule from the Westminster Parliament and 71.8% favouring devolved government, whilst the Northern Irish Protestant group shows little interest in direct rule from Westminster (7.2%) and greater support for devolved government (81.9%).

On the other hand, almost 89.1% of the Northern Irish Protestants support continued union with the UK, and only 3.6% support union with the Republic of Ireland. In comparison, the Northern Irish Catholic group show less support for options that involve remaining part of the UK than either Protestant group does, although they show greater support for this option than Irish Catholics do. However, more than 10 times the proportion of Northern Irish Catholics supports the union with the Republic (36.8%) than Northern Irish Protestants (3.6%).

### **Discussion: Study 3**

The findings of Study 3 extend the previous analyses; the moderation seen in the social attitudes of participants who identified themselves as 'Northern Irish' is seen in the greater preference for mixed settings in the neighbourhood, workplace and schooling. However these choices still show differences dependent upon religious background, as particularly seen in the question regarding schooling. This may be

further complicated because the Catholic population in Northern Ireland attributes its success and burgeoning middle class power base to the Catholic educational infrastructure which predated the post-war UK welfare state.

The preferred political future for Ireland shows that the clear majority of Protestant participants (whether citing either British or Northern Irish identity) wish to remain part of the UK, with most support for a form of devolved government. There is greater variation between the Northern Irish and the Irish participants from a Catholic background, with the majority of Irish participants supporting Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic of Ireland, and a majority of Northern Irish supporting devolved government. However, there are clear differences between the preferences of the Northern Irish participants from the 2 backgrounds. Whilst 81.9% of Northern Irish Protestants favoured devolved government within the UK, this figure was 47.4% of Northern Irish Catholics. In contrast, 36.8% of Northern Irish Catholics supported Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic of Ireland, in contrast to only 3.6% of Northern Irish Protestants. The question regarding the political future of Northern Ireland therefore generates very different response patterns from the 2 Northern Irish groups.

The 2 Protestant groups show almost zero-level support for Northern Ireland becoming part of the Republic, whilst there are high levels of support for this amongst all Catholic respondents. Whilst the common national identity response of Northern Irish indicates greater social tolerance to the traditional religious outgroup, the religious background continues to be related to political attitudes.

### **General Discussion**

Our studies attempt to examine the psychological drivers of a potential superordinate identity in post-conflict Northern Ireland. We have attempted to

understand this potential superordinate identity by applying 2 models from the psychological literature to 3 different large scale studies. Our findings are not always clean or indeed unequivocal. Indeed, our studies serve to highlight the difficulties associated with the application of these models to real world situations.

The studies taken together suggest that the Northern Irish identity, a potential common ingroup identity within Northern Ireland, *is* related to moderation in social attitudes. The category 'Northern Irish' is a shared label that potentially fulfils the requirements of the Common Ingroup Identity Model. Individuals who identify as Northern Irish reject oppositional categories (Irish/British) and prefer the shared category (Northern Irish), and that shared category is associated with more prosocial attitudes towards the previous outgroup category.

Our findings from Studies 1 and 2 examined participants' perceived typicality relative to the national identity label that they had chosen. Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi and Lewis (2008) in their study that assumed religious categorisations and assessed levels of identification with the Northern Irish label (irrespective of their national category preference) found evidence that Protestants may not sufficiently differentiate the content of the common ingroup identity from the content of their ingroup identity. In our study, participants from a Catholic background who identified as Northern Irish did not rate themselves any less typical of the Northern Irish label than Protestant participants. This suggests that the fit for Catholics and Protestants who select the Northern Irish category is equally good. This finding can be taken as a positive indicator of the Northern Irish identity being inclusive of the traditionally opposing religious groups.

The growth of a superordinate identity in post-conflict Northern Ireland at population level is a real life process; it has not appeared overnight (Muldoon, Trew,

et al., 2007) therefore its growth, whilst positive, also needs to be understood more fully. Our findings suggest its construction and meaning is different within the 2 traditionally opposing subordinate religious groups. Trew (1996) discusses the possible benefits of a Northern Irish national identity that supports positive social attitudes without having a direct consequence on the question of national determination. The shared Northern Irish identity may support the day-to-day maintenance of relationships across the traditional religious divisions of the society within Northern Ireland (Trew, 1996). Given our analysis, it is fair to say that this new identity is related to moderation of social, but not political, attitudes. In effect the Northern Irish identity may be an identity vehicle that allows people to represent themselves as socially inclusive and tolerant without moderating their political attitudes. For example our studies indicate even where the superordinate category label was applied, continuing distinctions within the group between subordinate groups reflective of historical power differentials, are evident. Our concern here is that, in line with Mummendey and colleagues' contention, superordinate identification can provide a basis for maintaining extant division.

In Studies 1 and 2 however there is no observed difference in prototypicality of the Northern Irish identity for participants from Catholic and Protestant religious backgrounds. This appears to contradict the IPM, as it predicts that majority subordinate groups will be considered as possessing greater typicality of the superordinate identity than minority groups. In this case it would predict that participants from a Protestant background would consider themselves more typically Northern Irish than those from a Catholic background, as Protestants have principally been considered as the majority from both a numerical and power position in Northern

Ireland (e.g., Waldzus et al., 2004). However, the complexities of identity in this conflict illustrate why this perspective may be overly simplistic.

Gallagher (1995) noted that the positioning of majority and minority groups in Northern Ireland depends centrally on the framing. He suggests framings of nationhood that impact upon whether Northern Ireland is considered independently, as part of the UK, or as part of the Republic of Ireland. From this perspective it is possible for both Protestant and Catholic groups to be considered a majority. And the changing demographic profile, with a sizeable increase in the Catholic population and an older Protestant population, reflected here in our relationship between age and Britishness, adds to this ambivalence around majority group position (MacGinty & DuToit, 2007). Furthermore Stevenson, Condor and Abell (2007) note the rhetorical value in claiming oneself to be in a minority position, with representatives of the Protestant community actively claiming disempowered minority status for strategic advantage (see also Gee, 1998, and Novick, 1999, for similar examples from the Arab/Israeli conflict). The absence of prototypicality differences may therefore arise from the complex dynamic and strategic nature of identity in real world conflict situations.

The political attitudes sections of each of the 3 studies point to this conundrum within the peace process of Northern Ireland. There is no space within the political landscape of Northern Ireland to support those who want to remove themselves from the bipolar political arena. If it is the case that individuals adopt a Northern Irish identity in order to distance themselves from the Irish/British dichotomy, this move is not supported by political options. This is illustrated most clearly in Study 3 - the political attitudes question considers the most commonly discussed possible futures for Northern Ireland. With the exception of independence, which has little support,

each of the options can be aligned with the traditional national split of British or Irish. Our data therefore suggest that individuals who take on the potentially shared identity of Northern Irish continue to be thrust back into a more oppositional relationship by the enduring political division (see Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006 p.47 for discussion of voting in Northern Ireland).

Our finding also runs counter to the common understandings of the category labels in Northern Ireland. The conflict in Northern Ireland is ostensibly about the national sovereignty of the 6 counties of Northern Ireland and therefore it could be expected that the best indicator of political attitudes should be a participant's chosen national label. Religious identity is more closely associated with social and cultural aspects of society and therefore should be expected to be more closely related to social attitudes. However, the reverse is seen in the 3 studies here. Of course, religion in Northern Ireland is an ascribed identity and the boundaries between groups are largely impermeable. National identity in Northern Ireland is generally constructed as assumed (Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010) making the boundaries more permeable, therefore allowing greater social and political mobility.

## **Conclusion**

Power, history and politics continue to resonate even amongst participants who select the common national ingroup category in Northern Ireland. Our findings emphasise the importance of the attitudinal target under consideration. When the questions asked are related to the bases of the conflict and social divide in Northern Ireland, then participants' religious background influences their responses. Indeed the importance of the context of the question is central in social identity research, again highlighting the strategic use of identities as political and rhetorical devices (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001). The social identities and identity combinations in Northern

Ireland, and probably in other real-life conflict situations, seem to be more complex than in 'cooler' intergroup situations. Cognitive paradigms derived from the latter do not transpose easily.

Whilst our studies have the advantage of being real world, this is also associated with a number of methodological implications. In particular we would like to draw the reader's attention to the fact that the datasets, though representative of the population in Northern Ireland, are limited by their reliance on self-report survey data.

The entrenched nature of the political dispute, which has permeated most areas of society in Northern Ireland from the political elite to housing, schooling to sporting societies (Muldoon, 2004; Shirlow & Murtagh, 2006), works against any transformational potential of a common identity. There are limited alternative directions available to take. The current data also emphasises the problem associated with consociation agreements, like the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement driven by a political elite. The question of the future sovereignty of Northern Ireland remains unresolved and whilst it can be side stepped in social interactions, it remains the divisive issue at the fore of the political life of Northern Ireland. The dualist political landscape in Northern Ireland illustrates the difficulty of applying the CIIM to existing conflicts. The apparatus of division in Northern Ireland society is not only psychological, but also structural. Individual common categorisation runs up against bureaucratic structures that reinforce the traditional identities of Northern Ireland, including the compelling of the 'Northern Irish' to recategorise as members of these older (conflictual) categories. The Northern Irish identity may well yet allow an alternative space for social interaction outside of the current dualist system of Northern Ireland politics particularly as the context changes and the salience of the older subordinate adversarial identities become reduced in everyday social and



political interactions. Its value as a vehicle for expressing inclusive political ideals though not yet to be evident is something that should be supported structurally and politically in post conflict Northern Ireland.

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