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Violent Youth Culture in Northern Ireland: Young Men, Violence, and the Challenges of Peacebuilding

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Abstract

This article discusses violent male youth culture in Northern Ireland within the context of a society emerging from a prolonged period of political violence toward peacebuilding. Specifically, the article focuses on the findings from a qualitative study carried out by the Centre for Young Men's Studies with 130 marginalized young men aged 13 to 16 from 20 different communities across Northern Ireland addressing themes of violence, conflict, and safety. Despite a changing context of peacebuilding, findings reveal that violence and paramilitary influence continue to perpetuate a male youth subculture epitomized by sectarianism and increasing racist attitudes. Underpinning this is an enduring cycle of suspicion, fear, and distrust of others and a confused state of mind that leaves these young men "stuck" somewhere between the ceasefire mentality of paramilitaries and the ambiguous messages of peacebuilding. This article concludes by stating the need for more realistic ways to engage and integrate marginalized young men into their communities.

Keywords

marginalized young men, violence and paramilitaries, peacebuilding and youth work

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Across the world Northern Ireland is perceived as a transitional and forward moving society emerging from 40 years of violent political conflict. The breakthrough towards peace occurred when the Republican Army (IRA) announced a ceasefire in 1994. On the 10th April 1998, Irish and British governments and local political parties reached consensus with a political deal called the 'Good Friday Agreement.' The Agreement included plans for a Northern Ireland assembly with a power-sharing executive, new cross-border institutions and controversial proposals on the decommissioning of paramilitary weapons, prisoner release and the withdrawal of army troops. Following the St. Andrew's Agreement in 2006, elections were held in 2007 and a local government was formed by the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin in May 2007. Two months later the British Army ended its campaign in Northern Ireland which had begun 40 years previously.

Peacebuilding

The Government states that its vision for the future of Northern Ireland is "a peaceful, inclusive, prosperous, stable and fair society firmly grounded on the achievement of reconciliation, tolerance, and mutual trust and the protection and vindication of human rights for all" (Office of First and Deputy First Minister, 2005, p. 3). Peacebuilding processes encompass security, demilitarization, humanitarian assistance, power sharing governance and elections, human rights, minority protection, and reconstruction aid (Wallensteen, 2002).

In 2005, world leaders at the World Summit agreed to establish a Peacebuilding Commission as it was deemed that countries emerging from conflict face a unique set of challenges that unless identified and addressed face a high risk of relapsing into violence. The Commission aimed to help lay the foundations for countries emerging from conflict toward sustainable peace and development acknowledging that the transition from conflict toward peace is likely to be a precarious and difficult journey.

A crucial challenge of peacebuilding is confronting the legacy of the past. In Northern Ireland this has necessitated engaging in postconflict transformation work to ensure lasting peace. This process has included addressing complex issues such as reconciliation, reintegration, decommissioning, police reform, prisoner release, security, the end of paramilitarism, the transferring of police and justice, economic investment, and the administration of a new Local Assembly.

In Northern Ireland there is also the issue of segregation. Data from the 2001 census revealed that two thirds of the population in Northern Ireland live in areas that are either 90% or more Catholic or 90% or more Protestant. The impact of such polarization has been most acute in working class areas

where Catholics and Protestants have lived in close proximity. These flash-points became known as "interface areas" that often witnessed the most brutal instances of sectarian division. Towering peace walls built to keep Catholics and Protestants apart remain in these areas as a cold reminder of the necessary physical barriers in a deeply divided and contested society. Peace walls restrict the way in which people move and interact and directly affect on daily activities such as going to work, meeting friends and relatives, and getting access to health and recreation services (Murtagh, 2003). More than 40 of these were erected in Northern Ireland during the troubles. Like in other parts of the world such as China, Israel and Palestine, and East and West Berlin, these structures were erected to keep people and communities apart. A recent study with long-term residents living in interface areas (Vargo, 2008) found that 81% of people said they would like to see peace walls demolished (although 60% stated it was not safe enough at present); 17% felt the walls should stay as they feared removal of the walls would lead to "problems of a serious nature" if removed. This data highlights that despite the optimism of the peace process, old fears and distrust still exist amongst people living in areas most affected during the troubles. As this article demonstrates, this is particularly true for many young men who are on the margins of society and disconnected from adults and community life.

Young Men in Northern Ireland

During the troubles, many young men in Northern Ireland experienced a sense of place and significance as defenders and protectors of their community. Their aggression as defenders afforded young men status amongst their peers and other community members. Within a postconflict society, the need for defender and protector has become increasingly redundant and subsequently the behavior of young men, once lauded and feted, has now become a focus for criticism, violent assault, and/or expulsion from that community (Harland & McCready, 2007).

Throughout "the troubles" it was predominantly young men who were the primary victims and perpetrators of sectarian violence. For example, from 1969 there were more than 3,700 deaths, 34,000 shootings, 35,000 injuries, 14,000 bombings, more than 3,000 punishment shootings and 2,500 punishment beatings by paramilitary organizations; 91% of these deaths were male with 32% of deaths amongst young males aged 17 to 24 (Kennedy, 2004; Muldoon, Schmid, Downes, Kremerr, & Trew, 2008; Smyth & Hamilton, 2003). Confounding this further is the fact that in many communities throughout Northern Ireland the police are not formally recognized as a

legitimate authority and paramilitaries have become the "informal police" enforcing their own brutal forms of justice (Feenan, 2002).

In Northern Ireland, 40 years of prolonged sectarian violence and ongoing paramilitary activity has meant that young males have faced particular circumstances that have affected on their lives and development. For example, the polarization of communities has made it difficult for many young males to build friendships with people from other cultural backgrounds and traditions. Harland's (2000) inner city Belfast study with Catholic and Protestant adolescent males aged 14 to 16 was a striking example of how marginalized young men increasingly felt alienated, powerless, and disconnected from mainstream society. These adolescent males were fearful and suspicious of people from other communities and wary of other young men within their own community. Fear of sectarian violence meant that few ventured outside of their own area. Paramilitary influence was a constant threat that resulted in these young men feeling vulnerable and confused regarding issues surrounding law and order. Despite these pressures and threats, these young men reported that they rarely spoke to adults about their experiences. They found it difficult to ask for emotional support and feared being "shamed" amongst their peers if they sought help. They believed men showing vulnerability was a sign of weakness. By withholding certain feelings and emotions, these young males believed they were expressing an important aspect of what it means to be a man—the need to be tough. This often led to them resorting to violence to sort out issues that separated them from their internal world of feelings and emotions—often to the extent that they appeared "unemotional" and intimidating to others.

Method

A recent study by the Centre for Young Men's Studies with 130 adolescent males from 20 disadvantaged communities across Northern Ireland revealed that the relationship between violence, conflict, and safety continues to emerge as critical to young men's everyday lives. This qualitative study aimed to provide a voice for young men to talk honestly and openly about what Silverman (2008, p. 168) calls the "gritty" reality of their lives. In particular the study asked "How do young men describe their experiences in regard to violence, conflict and safety in post-conflict Northern Ireland?" and "How do young men define peacebuilding?"

The research questions were identified from the first 3 years of data emerging from the Centre for Young Men's Studies 5-year longitudinal study (2006-2011) with 11- to 16-year-old males in nine schools across Northern

Ireland exploring male academic underachievement, violence, and male transitions. Interview questions that guided this qualitative study included asking young men about "What are the dangers in their areas?" "Who has authority/control where they live?" "Who do they avoid?" "Are they drawn to certain types of violence?" "Are there areas they would not go?" "Would they be interested in learning skills that would help them avoid unwanted trouble?" "What is their understanding of peacebuilding?" The interview questions were a logical and coherent extension of the issues associated with young men emanating from the longitudinal study and based on the need for information on the chosen issues.

Being aware from previous experience that young men may be reluctant to talk about certain potentially controversial issues, the Centre for Young Men's Studies invited nine youth workers with substantial experience of working with marginalized boys and young men to help carry out the interviews. All of these youth workers were employed by youth agencies currently working with marginalized young men in each of the 20 communities. In most cases, youth workers selected study participants given their familiarity with the young men. In addition, some participants were selected through teachers and project workers where small groups of young men already existed. These young men were brought together for the purpose of the focus group with the youth worker meeting young men for the first time.

Using this process, the sample consisted of 75 Catholic, 45 Protestant, and 10 foreign nationals aged 13 to 16, living in urban and rural areas with low academic achievement and other deprivation indicators. Twenty focus groups were carried out in groups of between 3 and 10. (The average group size was 6). Age, location, gender, and ethnicity were the central components of the choice of sample.

The research team was aware of the limitations of this nonprobability purposive sampling technique using youth workers to identify participants. However, as these youth workers already had a working relationship with most of the young men, they were considered the most effective way to engage meaningfully with marginalized young men.

Data Collection and Analysis

The study was led by research staff within the Centre for Young men's Studies, including the author of this article, who provided training for the youth workers on how to conduct the focus groups and follow the semistructured interview questions. This process built on each youth worker's

facilitative group work skills and encouraged them to probe and tease out conversations with the young men.

The selection of the interviewees and the choice of the site for collecting data involved choices that would assist in the generation or relevant information that calibrated with the purpose of the study. The material was then categorized (Flick, 2009) through recordings that were collected using appropriate data collecting methods, that is, digital recording of interviews using trained interviewers and a set of semistructured questions. All of the interviews lasted between 40 and 55 minutes.

After each interview, youth workers completed a proforma sheet highlighting what they considered the main issues that emerged from the interview. Analysis of the findings from all interviews, using content analysis, was carried out by the Centre for Young Men's Studies research team and was shaped and guided by the key themes of violence, conflict, and safety. These were then returned to each youth worker to double check findings to ensure validity and reliability.

In summarizing content analysis, the research used techniques outlined by Flick (2009, p. 325) who writes about "paraphrasing" the material meaning that less relevant passages and paraphrases with the same meaning are skipped (first reduction) and similar paraphrases are bundled and summarized (second reduction). This process of distillation was done manually using the main themes of violence, conflict, and safety as first stage analysis followed by more subdivisions of the areas as material was analyzed and interpreted.

Although study did not aim to reflect the views of all young men in Northern Ireland, or within these specific communities, it does nevertheless represent a significant group.

Results

Experiences and Normality of Violence

Despite their different backgrounds, violence was perceived by all young men as an accepted and normal part of their everyday lives. In the words of one young man "violence is just the way it is—you gotta be able to handle it."

Participants reported dramatically different experiences of violence and conflict. At one extreme were those young men who were generally frightened and looked to avoid conflict as much as possible (80%), whereas at the other extreme were those who were drawn to violence and were actively involved in rioting and various forms of antisocial behavior (20%). Whether Catholic, Protestant, or foreign national, participants placed themselves

somewhere between these extremes, sometimes drawn by the excitement of violence but usually knowing when they should stop.

Ten percent of the sample intentionally sought out conflict and violence. This typically involved "going into another community looking for trouble and robbing people" or being in situations where violence was more likely. The buzz from violence was a key factor in why young men said they got involved in violence.

> I like fighting, it's good craic (fun). I don't know why. It gets the adrenaline going and you try and build a reputation. Starting fights is just something I do when I'm bored. I like to talk about fights I've been in—it gets me excited and I go looking for a fight.

Others were more inclined to avoid the more dangerous forms of violence. However if other young men came into their areas or estates they would resist these attacks and get excitement from this:

> I don't run away from trouble. If someone comes looking for a fight I don't walk away unless there is too many of them. It depends what mood you're in whether you get involved or not.

These young men were more likely to describe a mixture of excitement and fear, knowing that they could get hurt, but getting a thrill from the fact that they didn't, or even if they did, that those they were fighting came off worse. There was evidence of organized rioting between communities. Mobile phones were often mentioned as ways of quickly getting young men together to riot. Web sites such as MSN and Bebo were also used to organize fights and threaten others while YouTube was used to post footage of fights and conflicts. Organized violence and mobile intimidation would appear to be an increasing form of intimidation and bullying.

As one young man commented,

> Some people get your phone numbers on the internet and try to set you up. The other night I got a text saying I was a drug dealer and was going to get a beating. This happens a lot. You swap numbers with people you get to know on Bebo and you get threats. You think you're gonna meet girls and fellas turn up for a fight or start a riot.

Sectarianism continued to emerge as an important factor in regard to young men's experience of violence. The common view was that sectarian

divisions were still as strong between Catholics and Protestants in both rural and urban areas, but particularly where two communities from different traditional backgrounds come together such as "interface areas." Reflecting on this one young man said,

> Where I live is a peace wall to keep Catholics and Protestants apart. There's always rioting and bricks and golf balls coming over the walls. It holds everything back in my area and no one wants to live here. It's not a bad area, but people think it is.

Although some suggested Northern Ireland wasn't quite as sectarian as before, most described a "ceasefire mentality" rather than a society at peace. This ambiguity meant that whether Catholic or Protestant, these young men were unclear as to whether their society was at peace or preparing for war. Their understanding was that while there were paramilitary ceasefires, these could be broken at any moment. Tensions surrounding this dichotomy were almost palatable:

> People say the war is over. But you still see trouble all the time. Catholics and Protestants don't mix and you never feel safe in other areas. Everyone talks about peace, but people are still brought up to hate each other. It's not those my age, it's my dad and his dad, the trouble goes back too far.

The young men from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds believed that annual celebratory events such as bonfires and contentious marching parades reinforced community division and fuelled ongoing sectarian hatred. In the words of one participant, "they [Protestants] try and march through our area, but we throw stones when they walk by." For others however, despite acknowledging the dangers of sectarian conflict, these types of events were considered "fun." As one young man said, "I like bonfire night cause you can get drunk and there's always fights and riots. We go out looking for someone to give a kicking to."

Although most of these young men were born after the ceasefires, they spoke articulately of how the troubles were still remembered, and often glorified, in their communities through stories from their fathers, grandfathers, and other significant adults. These men were viewed as "heroes" who had defended, and often died, for their community and their political beliefs:

My dad tells me about the men who defended our community during the troubles. Some were killed and some went to jail. Everybody looked up to them and were scared of them. They still get a lot of respect because of things they did in the past.

Similar to Harland's (2000) study, these young men had very little contact with other communities that didn't involve actual violence or the threat of violence.

Participants were asked their views on peacebuilding. Although a minority of young men (5%) was optimistic about peacebuilding at a political level and believed things were changing for the good, the large majority believed there had been no real change in attitudes between Catholics and Protestants in their communities. The optimism and potential benefits of peacebuilding was alien to these young men. As one young man stated,

Peacebuilding, what is peacebuilding? You hear it mentioned on the television but nobody ever talks to us about that. There's no peace in this area.

Personal Safety

Strikingly, each young man thought about his personal safety on a daily basis. Although some young men (25%) said they felt safe within their own communities, the majority (75%) said they did not. This appeared to be the same whether the area was Catholic or Protestant, urban or rural. Although city centers and most rural towns were perceived as "neutral" areas, they still had to be approached with caution:

To avoid violence you have to keep yourself to yourself. If you are out of your area you don't look at anybody and make sure your mobile phone is fully charged so you can ring your mates if you get into trouble.

Weekends, alcohol, and night time were considered the most dangerous times:

Weekends are the worse. People in my area hang around on corners drinking, and they just have to say something to you when you walk past and you feel really unsafe.

Territory also determined where they felt safe and who they believed they could trust. These young men depended largely on close friends to enable them to have a social life. For example, "you can't go out of this area on your own. You can't trust people you don't know." Another young man spoke of rarely leaving the house:

> I hardly ever go out. I am afraid of going out in the street. I stay at home and play the computer most nights. My mum doesn't like me going out when it's dark.

Those who did leave their immediate area would consciously assess the risk. For example, young men spoke about having to make important decisions about whether they should go out alone or go in numbers; go out at a certain time; deciding how safe it is to go out in the dark; carry a weapon; walk or get a lift; is it safe to go on public transport, which was seen by many as high risk. As one young man said,

> No matter where you go you have to make sure you have mates with you 'cause you never know who you will meet. I don't go into town unless I'm with my mates. I wouldn't even get on a bus on my own.

This type of "complex mental processing" was a natural part of how these young men made informed decisions about their personal safety. Several young men said that they always asked a mate to go with them when they left their girlfriend home at night. This constant concern for their own safety meant that travel beyond their community was seriously inhibited and restricted where they felt they could go and who they could socialize with.

Young Men and Paramilitarism

Despite rhetoric about ceasefires and peace building processes, the young men in this study reported that paramilitaries were still active in their communities. Views of paramilitaries were mixed with some (10%) perceiving them as a positive force that protected their community. As one young man commented, "No one protects the community now. You felt safer with the paramilitaries." Others (90%) thought much more negatively about paramilitaries. For example, as one young man commented, "For our area to really change, you have to get rid of the paramilitaries and their guns, but the threat is always there." More than two thirds of young men said that paramilitaries "intimidated young men" and made the area "less fun."

In most focus groups paramilitary violence was accepted as "just the way it is in our area." This was particularly true in loyalist and republican strongholds where paramilitary members continue to be hailed as those who enforce law and order. Fifty percent of Catholic and Protestant young men spoke informatively of paramilitaries as who you went to "get things sorted." These young men described paramilitaries as contributing positively to community safety, either in the past or the present. As one young man stated, "There's less trouble in our area 'cause everybody's afraid of the paramilitaries." For the majority however (90%), paramilitaries were a threat to be avoided at all costs. These young men recalled stories about other young men getting called to a particular venue by paramilitaries to receive a "punishment beating" usually with a gunshot to the elbows, knees, or ankles. Typically this was inflicted by young men wearing balaclava masks on the most marginalized young males in communities for antisocial and forms of deviant behavior. These young men's knowledge of paramilitary activity was striking:

> If you steal or break into houses then the paramilitaries will come knocking. The first time you get warned and they take your cash and maybe give you a slap. The second time they would break your arms or your legs and tell you to get out of the area.

Throughout Northern Ireland there are growing concerns that those who were previously involved, or on the fringes of, paramilitary activity are being targeted for membership by dissident paramilitary groups opposed to the peace process. There was clear evidence from this study that certain young men remain susceptible to this type of paramilitary influence. For example,

> We got letters through the door from the paramilitaries saying they needed the support of everyone to defend our community. The next thing was there was rioting in the streets.

A small number of Catholic young men (5%) spoke positively about recent dissident paramilitary activity and the ongoing need for paramilitaries to defend their community. Conversations with these young men were particularly concerning as they were condoning paramilitary activity and supportive of their influence in their community.

None of the Catholic or Protestant young men could envisage a time when paramilitaries would not be in control. In fact they found it almost inconceivable that paramilitaries would relinquish their grip on communities. They believed that because paramilitaries had power and status within their

communities, they were better placed than the police to deal with antisocial behavior and other forms of community violence. As one young man said, "There's no authority in my area. It's crazy, people drinking and causing damage and nobody doing anything about it. The police do nothing."

There was only one Protestant area where the young men reported the police actually patrolled regularly, and as a result believed their community was safer. These young men believed that the police were best placed to deal with violence and paramilitarism. The vast majority (95%), however, from both Catholic and Protestant communities tended to perceive the police as ineffective and "more of a problem than the solution to violence." Young men repeatedly said that the police frequently "harassed them," and like paramilitaries, prevented them from doing things they enjoyed. For example, if they were on the street in groups of three or more, they would be moved on or told to disperse. Most young men presented a picture of increasing negativity directed toward them by many adults in their community as they had got older, but particularly by the police:

> The police don't let you have fun. They want to stop you doing everything. You can't even sit in the park. They stop and ask you for your name and address.

Threats from paramilitaries and police attitudes were given as primary reasons why these young men left their own areas and went into the woods, parks, or waste ground to be with their mates.

Race-Related Violence

Ninety percent of Catholic and Protestant participants spoke of an increase in race-related violence since the paramilitary ceasefires. Typically foreign nationals were spoken of in traditional racist ways. For example, "They're taking our jobs and houses" was a common response. Some young men made a direct link between their communities becoming more multicultural and an increase in violent incidences. "The community has changed because of immigrants coming in and there is more fighting amongst locals now than ever before. Use to be you knew who the enemy was but not now." This perception was particularly true in some Protestant communities, where the young men reported a significant increase in race-related violence, often on a daily basis.

Others made a direct link between their communities becoming more multicultural and racially motivated violent incidents. The foreign national young men in this study also spoke about ongoing conflict with local young men.

They reported being "singled out" particularly in their communities at night and on the way home from school. One young Polish man said that sometimes he would "fight back" but always felt he "always had to watch his back." Another Lithuanian young man said, "They tell me to go home to 'litho' and throw things at me. I try to fight them but I feel afraid. I don't want to fight in case I get hurt."

Racist attitudes toward foreign nationals were acutely similar to the sectarian fears and distrust that was so apparent when these young men spoke about people from Catholic or Protestant backgrounds. Typically these perceptions were made about people they did not know personally. Whilst sectarianism remains apparent in the everyday lives of many young men in Northern Ireland, the influx of foreign nationals since the paramilitary ceasefires would appear to offer yet another barrier, and further resistance, to Northern Ireland moving toward a multicultural society.

Work With Marginalized Young Men

Most of the young men in this study (75%) did not take part in organized youth activities and could not offer any alternatives to violence for dealing with conflict situations. They believed that as they grew older youth centers were less attractive to them with some impressions of them being that they were "rubbish" or "boring." Some suggested more talk based and sport-related activities and facilities should be offered in their communities. Others thought that schools should provide more after-school activities that were not part of a formal curriculum. These young men not only seemed to be asking for "safe" activities and opportunities that were organized by adults but also afforded them enough freedom to enjoy themselves.

When asked whether they were interested in learning skills in dealing with violence and conflict, the majority responded positively. However, a smaller number of young men (10%) responded to this suggestion with reluctance, either because they saw this as "avoidance tactics," which they were not so interested in, or ways to avoid the "buzz" of violence that they were so evidently drawn toward. One group of 6 young men had been involved in a conflict resolution program and felt this had been particularly useful in helping them think about violence in a different way:

> It was good looking at alternatives to violence. Like knowing you don't have to fight. You can choose not to fight or walk away . . . . I learned that it's good to relax. Like listening to music to calm me down or doing physical exercise.

These young men had also been provided with opportunities to meet "credible individuals" in their community. Typically this was with an adult with a reformed paramilitary history or an ex-prisoner who had turned away from violence. These personal life changing stories had a profound impact on the young men who participated in these initiatives:

> It was amazing listening to him [ex paramilitary] talk about how he had turned away from violence. He spoke about some of the things he had done and now regretted.

Participating on the program improved their knowledge of violent male subcultures and made them more aware of how adhering to traditional masculine stereotypes can legitimize certain forms of male violence. "You think more about what happens around you and you realize that just because you're a man doesn't mean you have to act tough all the time." The program also helped young men to develop skills in dealing with conflict through role-plays and storytelling with themes connected to the reality of their everyday lives. These young men reported strong relationships with some adults such as youth workers who were nonjudgmental of their issues and treated them with respect. In the words of one young man, "The youth workers trusted us and didn't judge us. They listened to what we had to say." This approach helped increase these young men's confidence in dealing with, and talking about, violent situations and enabled them to reflect more critically on conflict transformation.

Discussion

Recent political developments have given new hope and optimism that Northern Ireland is finally emerging from prolonged violence toward peace. The transition from conflict to peace however presents fundamental and seismic challenges to any society. At present it would appear that the peace process in Northern Ireland depends largely on paramilitaries keeping their ceasefires and political leaders agreeing on sensitive areas such as the transferring of policing and justice to the local assembly and dealing with the legacy of the past.

Lederach (2008) argues that after violent conflict has receded peacebuilding creates a platform from which it is possible to respond creatively to evolving situations. At the heart of this creativity must be strategies to address the thorny legacy of paramilitarism and in particular its negative influence on marginalized and vulnerable young men. Young men from disadvantaged

communities throughout Northern Ireland have always been a prime target for paramilitary membership. Conversely, paramilitary membership has been a potentially attractive option for marginalized young men living in areas of deprivation.

The extent of paramilitary violence has deep roots in the psyche of everyone in Northern Ireland, particularly those born before the ceasefires in 1994. This is perhaps even more deeply rooted however in the male psyche as the majority of victims and perpetrators of paramilitary violence was administered by young men on other young men.

Almost a decade after Harland's (2000) study, it would appear that little has changed for marginalized young men in regard to their attitudes and experiences of violence, conflict, and safety. The complexities and reality of prolonged violence and fear of violence in Northern Ireland continue to be an integral and complex aspect of male identity formation. It is clear from this study that there are many marginalized young men, particularly those who come from communities where political violence has been most acute, who are deeply perplexed about the role of paramilitaries, and confused about the peacebuilding process. Recent killings, shootings, and bombing by dissident paramilitaries aimed at the armed forces have coincided with an announcement in October 2009 by the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA) that its "armed struggle" is over. Similarly in June 2010, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) were blamed for the killing of a man on the Shankill Road Belfast in broad daylight despite having previously claimed to decommissioning their weapons. These "mixed messages" serve to further confuse young men's understanding of whether their society is at peace or preparing for war. Also concerning is the fact that recent escalation in dissident violence is reported to be at a very sophisticated level of expertise suggesting that former members of paramilitary groups may be actively assisting, recruiting, or joining dissident paramilitary organizations (McAleese, 2009).

Although the political context of Northern Ireland is officially portrayed as a region moving toward peace, White (2008) warns that the terrorist violence of the past is being replaced by new manifestations of violence. White (2008, p. 8) provides a catalogue of crimes between April 2006 and February 2007 that includes knives being used in six murders, 21 attempted murders, 242 assaults, and 315 robberies. There were 1,047 racist crimes and an increase in recorded rapes of 60% during the past 5 years. The Chief Constable's Annual Report 2008/2009 (Police Service of Northern Ireland, 2009) states that increases in the use of knives, race and hate crime, organized crime, and sectarianism remain particular concerns for the Police Service of Northern Ireland.

Although the number of shootings and killings has significantly reduced since the IRA ceasefires in 1994, it was very apparent from this study that the day-to-day nature of violence in Northern Ireland remains complex for young men. Violence and violence-related issues are a normal part of marginalized young men's everyday lives and experiences. Although some admitted being excited by various forms of violence, the majority of young men feared being involved in violent incidences. This made them highly suspicious and distrusting of those outside of their immediate peer group. Most young men rarely left their own communities and had few opportunities to meet with people from other areas. They were disconnected from community life, which left them highly dependent on their peers for support and susceptible to negative community influences.

There was general consensus that the increasing number of immigrants since the ceasefires was causing increased conflict in all communities. Although racist attitudes appeared to cause young men further conflict in their day-to-day lives, this did not mask the fact that sectarianism keeps the two main communities polarized and undermines peacebuilding processes.

In Northern Ireland, community relations programs have tended to concentrate on people's perceptions of each other. Opportunities to build cross community programs on the basis of geography, rather than people, would enable more targeted interventions in areas where violence and conflict are most prominent. Interventions should also incorporate more conflict-based strategies at particular periods during the year when conflict is more likely to occur such as during the summer months, when young people are more likely to be on the streets and there is an upsurge in contentious marching parades.

In addition, programs aimed at targeting recently arrived young men to Northern Ireland would ensure that they have the skills, language, and understanding to live more safely. The more that immigrant young men understand the formal and informal language and understanding of the host culture, the quicker they will settle and the safer they will feel. This type of targeted intervention would better support those young men who are more likely to be the victims of racial attacks and better equip them to deal with conflict and racially motivated violence.

It is apparent is that no one agency can claim to meet all the needs of marginalized young men. Therefore multiagency partnerships are more effective in delivering preventative strategies to address violence and violence-related

issues with marginalized young men. Some good examples of multiagency approaches to working with marginalized young men in Northern Ireland already exist. Partnerships such as youth justice, restorative practices, youth services, and the involvement of local voluntary and community groups have been effective in tackling issues such as youth crime.

The practical application of such partnerships however necessitates finding more creative ways to engage marginalized young males, particularly as they are often reluctant to seek support or access existing formal services. Historically, interventions with young men tended to focus on recreational needs and diversionary responses to aggressive and antisocial behavior with little concern for their emotional health and well-being (Harland, 2009). Such approaches however tend to focus on the more negative aspects of young male behavior and therefore may not be the most effective way to engage young men or encourage their participation on community-based programs.

A distinguishing feature of youth work is that although it engages effectively with young people labeled by society as "difficult or problematic," it does not define them in these terms (Spence, Devanney, & Noonan, 2006). A youth worker's emphasis on the importance of "relationship" and person-centered approach places him or her in a strong position to initially contact and engage marginalized young men and respond to issues that are important to them. This is not to say that youth work is a panacea for all that society perceives as "wrong with young people." Rather, youth workers have enormous potential to play a valuable role in the engagement and consultation phase of a preventative strategy toward addressing community conflict and violence in partnership with local community-led programs and peacebuilding processes.

Preventative strategies to engage marginalized young men in peacebuilding will better prepare them living in a multicultural society and help alleviate the fear, apprehension, suspicion, and distrust of others that was so apparent in this study. This is no easy task, however, as at present there is little momentum toward including the voice and views of marginalized young men in community decision-making processes. This study is one step toward redressing this imbalance.

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