The Media And Memories Of Conflict In Northern Ireland


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THE MEDIA AND MEMORIES OF
CONFLICT IN NORTHERN IRELAND
The views of Protestant and Catholic adolescents in the border counties

Karen Trew, Orla Muldoon, Gary McKeown and Katrina McLaughlin

As part of a larger analysis of the transmission of ethno-national identity across generations, some 800 adolescents from the border areas of Ireland recalled events related to the troubles in Northern Ireland and the source of their knowledge. They also completed a scale that measured the extent of their interest in current events. Substantial agreement in the memories of the conflict recorded by adolescents from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland accompanied differences in the historical events recalled by Catholic and Protestant respondents. The news media were seen as important sources of knowledge for historical events as well as those that occurred in the adolescents' lifetimes. Catholics living in Northern Ireland were most interested in the news and more frequently referenced family and school as sources of knowledge about recalled events than Protestants. The possible implications of observed group and individual differences in memories and their sources are discussed.

KEYWORDS conflict; family; media; Northern Ireland; social memories; youth

As local and Irish-British media intermingle, you can move, mentally at least, to another public domain when a particular set of voices becomes too annoying. This is what it means to inhabit a European borderland, even if not every citizen reads every newspaper or has the inclination or freedom to culture-surf. The downside is that you can be politically depressed in three places at once. (Longley, 2005, pp. 123–124)

In 1999, leading researchers on media and youth were invited to a workshop to reflect on the available evidence and to devise an agenda for future research (Brown & Cantor, 2000). The experts agreed that systematic multidisciplinary research was needed that took account of the influential impact of the media in the development of young people but they also acknowledged that the media were not a more powerful source of influence than parents, friends and schools. In devising a new research agenda, these researchers assumed that the agents of socialization interact as young people actively negotiate their environments and that a full understanding of the impact of the media on young people must acknowledge individual differences and group characteristics.

According to a recent review (Smetana, Campione-Barr, & Metzger, 2006), much of the psychological research on adolescent development has moved in the direction outlined by the media experts. It is looking beyond the trajectory of individual development and the proximal influence of the family to take account of contextual
and societal variations in adolescent development as well as interactions between different contexts. Research has become more inclusive with an awareness of heterogeneity within, as well as between, ethnic and national groups. This accompanies an emphasis on research, which aims to establish the processes that account for the impact of sociopolitical factors such as ethnicity and race on adolescents’ beliefs and behaviours.

Until relatively recently there was little research or theory that reflected the changing media and youth research agenda in relation to the development of ethnic awareness or young people’s intergroup attitudes and beliefs. Research on the development of ethnic understanding, prejudice and stereotypes has been mainly concerned with immediate contextual effects such as intergroup contact rather than more global societal or community influences (e.g. Paolini, Hewstone, Cairns, & Voci, 2004; Wagner, van Dick, Pettigrew, & Christ, 2003). Media research, which has tended to ignore issues associated with intergroup conflict, has mainly focused on patterns of usage associated with health or high-risk behaviours among young people (e.g. Strasburger & Wilson, 2002; Villani, 2001). However, at least two recent integrative theoretical models (Barrett, 2006, 2007; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005) have included communication and dissemination as central features of their dynamic accounts of the development of intergroup attitudes in children and adolescents.

Barrett’s (2006) model, which focuses on the development of children’s knowledge, beliefs and feelings about nations and nationality reflects a wider social–developmental approach to identity development (Barrett, 2002). It assumes that children’s and young people’s identification and understanding cannot be understood without taking account of cognitive and motivational processes as well as sociocultural influences experienced at school and home, including school practices and materials, family discourse and media representation. Barrett (2007) notes that parents do not only influence their children directly but also indirectly through the many choices they make that determine the child’s daily experience. For example, access to mass media is controlled, to some extent by parents, through their choice of newspapers and the television stations they prefer.

Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) have recently outlined a very comprehensive theoretical account of the acquisition and development of stereotypes and prejudices which is firmly based on their empirical analysis of the intractable conflict in the Middle East and current psychological understanding of intergroup relations and social development (e.g. Teichman, Bar-Tal, & Abdolrazeq, 2007; Teichman & Zafrir, 2003). Their integrative developmental-contextual approach takes a societal perspective in which shared stereotypes, emotions and prejudice form a psychological intergroup repertoire. Bar-Tal and Teichman suggest that group members acquire a shared repertoire of intergroup attitudes in their social environment from multiple sources including family, schools and media, which transmit and disseminate the contents of stereotypes, as well as attitudes, affect and emotions towards societal groups.

The specific characteristics of intractable conflict such as the Arab–Israeli conflict and the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland differ, nevertheless as Bar-Tal and Teichman (2005) suggest, ‘Psychological determinants contribute greatly to their evolvement, maintenance and management’ (p. 1). This paper is concerned with adolescents growing up in Ireland where the division between Catholics and Protestants has provided one of the major fault lines in the society. The high degree of overlap between religion and nationality in Northern Ireland has been associated with the development and
maintenance of oppositional ethnonational identities (Muldoon, Trew, Todd, Rougier, & McLaughlin, 2007). Personal experiences and characteristics are seen to impact on the nature and strength of ethnonational identities, but the nature of these identities also varies with changes in intergroup relations over time and locality. Long-term changes in the pattern of national identification among Protestants is shown in survey evidence (Fahey, Hayes, & Sinnott, 2005) and the geographical differences in intergroup relations and levels of violence in Northern Ireland have been associated with children’s observed levels of outgroup prejudice (Connolly & Healy, 2004).

The study described in this paper was carried out in the border region of Ireland, which has experienced intermittent sociopolitical violence and killings since 1969. It includes rural areas and two small cities with Catholics and Protestants living in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The Border Region

The state border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland is not a visible barrier, but it divides many aspects of the lives of young people who are growing up in geographical proximity. Anderson (2006b), in a report of one of the first surveys that systematically explored the attitudes and behaviour of those living in the immediate border region, identified Protestants and Catholics from Northern Ireland and Protestants and Catholics from the Republic of Ireland as distinct territorial-religious groups. According to Anderson, these groups are both united and divided by the border and religion. Protestants are the minority population in the border region of both the Republic of Ireland (the South) and Northern Ireland (the North). In the past, political and national identities in both the South and the North were defined by religion. Protestants were associated with British unionism and Catholics with Irish nationalism. Although this pairing has dissipated in the South, it remains a feature of the border regions of Northern Ireland.

Anderson’s survey evidence suggested that although the Protestant minority in the South does not form a distinct community, the political views of adults from this group are distinguishable from the Catholic majority in the region. In contrast, Catholics and Protestants form two distinct communities in the border regions of Northern Ireland with strong separate identities, which have been developed in the face of almost thirty years of sociopolitical conflict. Although the relationships between Protestant and Catholic have changed politically in the post-conflict period, young people, north and south of the border, have grown up within a region that has experienced a prolonged period of intergroup violence associated with intractable conflict. Furthermore, the long-standing divisions between national and religious groups are mirrored in their educational experience.

There is almost complete separation between the education systems north and south of the border (Murray, Smith, & Birthistle, 1997). Students in the two jurisdictions attend schools which are governed by different management systems and follow distinct programmes of study, with different transition points and different systems of public examinations. In Northern Ireland, the vast majority of Catholics and Protestants attend separate schools, but these schools share a common curriculum (Barton & McCully, 2005; Barton, McCully, & Conway, 2003). In the Republic of Ireland, the vast majority of students are Catholic and they do not encounter children from other denominations in school. The Protestant students living in the border region of the Republic of Ireland are nowadays a minority in the schools that were established to provide education for Protestant children.
Anderson (2006b) found that the border and religion also impact on the use of media in the border area. The local weekly newspapers, which are widely read, have very little cross-border penetration. Catholics and Protestants read the same weekly papers in the Republic of Ireland but Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland read separate weekly papers. The two religious groups in Northern Ireland also read different Belfast daily papers but there is considerable overlap between national and religious groups in their use of radio, television and national newspapers. Overall, Dublin, Belfast and London channels are widely used in both the South and the North.

The picture that emerges of the border region of Ireland is one in which children's lives are constrained, to some extent, by their religion and their nation. The everyday experience of growing up among co-religionists and attending segregated schools would seem to underline exclusivity and difference (Trew, 2004), but these divisions are tempered by access to common curriculum within nations and a shared exposure to television and other media. As Anderson (2006a) notes, there are variations within as well as between the four territorial-religious groups and 'attitudes and behaviour patterns are shaped by a wide variety of factors and the particular effects of the border and ethnonational identity must be seen in this context' (p. 14).

Anderson did not sample the views and behaviour of adolescents and no previous large-scale survey evidence has been located that explores the nature of socio-political attitudes and beliefs of young people growing up on both sides of the border or the factors that influence them. Recent qualitative research in this region (McLaughlin, Trew, & Muldoon, 2006) asked Protestant and Catholic young people, from north and south of the border, to provide their own accounts of the meaning of religious identification and the role of the family in the transmission of identity. These 13- to 16-year-olds tended to acknowledge the importance of religion, especially to schooling, family and choice of partner or spouse, and to assume that the influence of parents and family in the transmission of religious identity was common and inevitable (Muldoon, McLaughlin, & Trew, 2007). However, there is little direct evidence (Trew, 2004) of the role of family, neighbourhood or schooling in the socialization of young people in either Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland. There is also little research of the role of media in reinforcing or moderating the repertoire of beliefs and attitudes, which are shared by communities and groups.

Whyte (1995), in one of the earliest studies involving young people north and south of the border, found that in 1981, when violence was a feature of life in Belfast, Protestant and Catholic 12-year-olds from deprived areas in the city were more interested in the news and watched more television news than peers in London and Dublin. However, in a follow-up study of 12-year-olds in these cities in 1992, Whyte (1995) found that there was a marked decrease in the interest shown in the news by children in Belfast and this was more apparent for Protestant than Catholic children. When asked to recall something they read in the paper or watched on the news, Belfast children were more likely to mention local items than those from either Dublin or London, although regional differences were once again less noticeable in 1992 than they had been in 1981. These results suggest that media usage in Northern Ireland is related, to some extent, to the relevance of this knowledge to the everyday life of the consumer and it cannot be assumed that media reporting and news are equally salient to all young people.
The Current Study

Our research on the evaluative and cognitive content of young people’s national and religious identities (e.g. McLaughlin et al., 2006; Muldoon, McLaughlin, & Trew, 2007; Muldoon, Trew, et al., 2007) is part of an interdisciplinary study of the transmission of ethnonational identity across generations (Todd et al., 2006). The analysis in this paper focuses on the associations between young people’s background growing up as a Catholic or Protestant, north or south of the border and their memories of the troubles.

Cairns and Roe (2003) highlight the role of memory in conflict and its potential role in helping resolve conflict. According to current perspectives, partisan perceptions of the past, collective memories and historical narratives that sustain conflict between groups are the outcome of intergroup conflict as well as the basis for sustaining dissensus and distrust between groups (Bar-Tal, 2003; Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005; Walker, 2007). Although empirical research (e.g. Cairns & Lewis, 1999; Cairns, Lewis, Mumcu, & Waddell, 1998; McKeever, Joseph, & McCormack, 1993) has found that Catholics and Protestants differ, to some extent, in the historical conflict-related events that they recall and date, the mechanisms for maintaining the salience of past events and transmitting partisan information from generation to generation remain a matter for speculation (Roe & Cairns, 2003).

Research on young people’s own views indicates that they consider that the family is the most important source of influence on intergroup attitudes (Devine & Schubotz, 2004; Ewart & Schubotz, 2004; McLaughlin et al., 2006; Smyth, Fay, Brough, & Hamilton, 2004). The young people interviewed by Ewart and Schubotz (2004) also noted the detrimental impact of the media’s focus on the violent divisive aspects of life in Northern Ireland.

Research designed to examine history, education and national identity in Northern Ireland (e.g. Barton & McCully, 2003, 2005; Barton et al., 2003) indicates that young people identify with a wide range of historical topics and consider history classes are central in understanding national history. These studies also found that with increasing age, this source of information was used selectively by some students to reinforce partisan historical narratives of unionism and nationalism.

The influence of media sources, school or other experiences on the transmission of information about historical and contemporary events is not necessarily direct and may be mediated by family discussions and debate as well as the personal interests and experiences of the individual but research is required to examine these relationships. Our study seeks answers to a number of questions that derive from previous research and current theoretical perspectives on the influences encountered by young people growing up with conflict. In particular, we are interested in establishing the influences that young people, themselves, consider are important in the recall of specific events. Here we are less interested in the actual events recalled than in the group differences in memories and relative importance of family, media and school as the perceived source of these memories.

Method

Participants

In total eighteen schools participated in the study, eleven in Northern Ireland and seven in the Republic of Ireland. 1,122 young people completed the questionnaire but 87
(7.8 per cent) either failed to provide information on their religion or could not be classified as Catholic or Protestant. Despite considerable efforts to involve schools attended by Protestants, only twenty-eight Protestants from the Republic of Ireland completed our questionnaires. Overall a larger number of respondents were resident in Northern Ireland (478 Catholics, 180 Protestants) than the Republic of Ireland (349 Catholics, 28 Protestants) and more girls than boys were sampled (640 girls; 416 boys). The students ranged in age from 14 to 17 years old, with a mean of 15.15 years and a median of 15 years.

Measures

Measures were derived from existing scales and focussed on social identity. The following measures were embedded in a longer questionnaire.

Measurement of family discussions of current events and politics. Six items used by Flanagan and her colleagues in an international study of social control (Flanagan, Gallay, Gill, Gallay, & Nti, 2005) were employed in this study. Each item is rated on a five-point scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). Three items relate to discussion with parents about current events and interest in the news (‘I tell my parents my opinions about events’; ‘In my house we have many discussions about current events and politics’; ‘My parents discuss what’s happening in the world with me’). One item relates to interest in the news (‘I am interested in the news’) and two items relate to debate and disagreement (e.g. ‘Sometime I have different opinions from my parents about current events’; ‘Sometimes I argue with my parents about current events’). The reliability for the scale for this sample is high (alpha = .814). Mean scale scores ranged from 1 to 5, with higher scores indicating more involvement with the news and current affairs at home and personally.

Demographic variables. Participants reported their gender, age, religion and jurisdiction of residence (five students who attended schools across the border from their place of residence were excluded from the analysis).

Measurement of sources of specific memories. A semistructured format was used to record specific memories that respondents had of the troubles and the source for these memories. Following an approach used by McKeever et al. (1993), respondents were given the following instructions: ‘Some young people are aware of many events related to the troubles in Northern Ireland others are not. Can you list as many events as possible that you are aware of? After each event, can you tell us how you know this?’ Space was allowed for four events and after each incident they were asked ‘How do you know this?’ The questionnaire did not include any prescribed categories.

Procedure

Subsequent to piloting of the survey, post-primary schools located in the South Eastern border region of Ireland were approached and asked to participate in the research. A letter was sent to parents of the young people in the fourth year of the eighteen schools that agreed to participate inviting them to take part in the research. Parents were given
the opportunity to withdraw their son/daughter from the research; however, the majority of parents (94 per cent) gave their consent.

The study took place in the spring and autumn term of 2005. On a prearranged day during scheduled class time, each participant was asked to complete a questionnaire. The students were encouraged to provide honest and open responses and were assured that all information was strictly confidential. Two researchers supervised the administration of the questionnaires so that any difficulties that arose could be responded to quickly. Participants were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Completion of the survey questionnaire took a maximum of 20 minutes.

Results

Memories of the Troubles

The respondents had an opportunity to recall up to four memories but 28.7 per cent (n=324) of the adolescents did not complete this section of the questionnaire. This included students in a number of schools where time was limited and students were not able to start this part of the questionnaire. The 800 students who did respond produced 2,157 memories. These were recorded verbatim and categorized as far as possible.

The first stage in the analysis involved setting up the initial coding frameworks for events. As well as standardizing the various spellings of events, some specific events were brought together into more global categories. For example;

- The ‘hunger strikes’ category includes all references to events associated with the death of Bobby Sands or other hunger strikers
- ‘Parades’ included a range of parades involving the Orange order and other organizations, 12th July etc.
- ‘Other bombs’ included all references to bombs other than the Omagh bombing. There were general references such as bombs in Belfast as well as specific references to bombing events in local towns such as Newtownhamilton or Enniskillen

There were some very personal memories (e.g. ‘man over the road was shot’ ‘Granda’s friend was murdered’) and many of the specific responses could not be coded as they either did not refer to any specific event (e.g. ‘fighting in Belfast’) or did not directly relate to the Troubles (e.g. ‘war in Iraq’). Where possible, events were dated. Overall, 183 out of the 450 different events mentioned as collective memories could be dated to a specific year and these events accounted for 1,424 of the 2,157 recorded memories. The sources of the information were also categorized into broad categories.

The memories of the young people living in the border area were diverse but two events dominated their responses. The 1998 Omagh bombing, the largest single incident in the Northern Ireland, was listed by 59 per cent (n=445) of those completing this question. ‘Bloody Sunday’, which refers to the 1972 shooting dead of thirteen civilians marching against internment in Derry, was recorded by 47 per cent (n=349) of the respondents. There were 136 references to the 1981 hunger strikes, in which ten republican prisoners starved themselves to death. All other events and categories of events were mentioned less than seventy times included the 1998 Good Friday (Belfast) agreement (n=67) and the Easter rising in 1916 (n=67), as well as more recent events.
including the Northern Bank robbery in 2004 \((n=44)\) and the Holy Cross school protests \((n=39)\) in 2001.

Table 1 shows the events that were recalled by at least fifty respondents and also the number of respondents who referred to events categorised as ‘other bombs’ or ‘parades’ for each of the four territorial-religious groups. As only nineteen Protestants from the South provided memories of Troubles-related events, responses from this group must be treated with some caution. The three most frequently recalled events for the four groups in terms of percentage of respondents are:

- **Northern Ireland, Catholics**: Bloody Sunday (58 per cent), Omagh bombing (56 per cent), hunger strikes (31 per cent)
- **Northern Ireland, Protestants**: Omagh bombing (54 per cent), Bloody Sunday (32 per cent), other bombs (25 per cent)
- **Republic of Ireland, Catholics**: Omagh bombing (70 per cent), Bloody Sunday (42 per cent), hunger strikes (11 per cent)
- **Republic of Ireland, Protestants**: Omagh bombing (53 per cent), Bloody Sunday (37 per cent), other bombs (35 per cent)

Although there is considerable agreement in the events recorded by Catholics and Protestants from North Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, it is notable that whereas the hunger strikes were among the most memorable events of the conflict for Catholics from the Republic of Ireland as well as Northern Ireland, only 4 of 147 Protestants chose to include the hunger strikes in their list of memorable events.

### Dating the Memorable Events

Further analysis was carried out to establish, as far as possible, when the memorable events occurred. The timelines of all events that could be dated (see Figure 1) demonstrates that the memorable events for the respondents in this study were spread over a long time period and a large number of historical events occurred before the current Troubles.
These remembered events were further divided into two groups. The first group included those events that occurred before the year of birth of the young people (1990). These events were therefore experienced indirectly through family or school sources, historical or political television documentaries or commemorations of the events such as wreath laying, parades etc. The second group included those events that occurred after the birth of the young people and could be directly influenced by media accounts at the time of the events. An argument can be made as to when the children would be of a sufficient age to be influenced by these media events; however, reported events that could be dated were rare before 1997 when the children would have been 7 years of age and the real first peak comes in 1998 when the children were 8 years of age.

The most important events of 1998 were the Omagh bombing and the Good Friday agreement, two events that received a lot of media coverage and certainly in the case of the Omagh bomb a case could be made for this being the first Troubles-related flashbulb memory in the lives of these children (Warren & Swartwood, 1992). Interestingly, few respondents referred to the Good Friday Agreement but the Omagh bombing was the most reported event in the study. The number of memories pre- and post-1990 were counted and from this a further variable was created for each young person recording the proportion of historical memories to recent memories.

A one-way ANOVA compared the proportion of pre-1990 memories recorded by young people from the four territorial-religious groups with highly significant main effects for group, $F(3, 716)=5.517, p<.01$. Follow up Bonferroni post hoc tests showed that Northern Ireland Catholics (mean=0.730) had a higher proportion of historical collective memories than either Northern Ireland Protestants (mean=0.679) or Republic of Ireland Catholics (mean=0.647) but not Republic of Ireland Protestants (mean=0.679).
Sources of Information for Memorable Events

The sources of information, which were recorded when respondents were asked to specify how they knew about the recorded events, ranged from the general (e.g. school, the news) to the more detailed (e.g. daddy told me). Only one source was recorded for each memory, but it is inevitable that knowledge about major events will be based on multiple experiences across time. For example, historical events such as the Easter rising may have been experienced through books, songs, television documentaries and plays as well as family discussions, the school curriculum and commemorative parades. It is assumed that in these circumstances, the recorded source is the one that the person views as most important. These sources were initially coded according to the specific informant (e.g. the news, television, father, mother, friend etc.). Once all the initial coding was recorded, these specific categories were combined into the five broad categories used in Table 2. The media category encompassed nonspecific references to the news as well as specific references to television, radio or newspapers as the source of knowledge about the event. Less than ten respondents mentioned the Internet as a source of information and these responses were also included within the media category. In contrast, books were cited as the source by eighty respondents and this category was retained for further analysis.

Not all of those who recorded their memories reported the source of this memory and 1994 memories produced by 748 respondents form the baseline for the information in Table 2, which shows the percentages of references to specific sources recorded for each territorial-religious group according to whether the event occurred before 1990 or after 1989.

Table 2 indicates that the media were by far the most frequently cited source for the post-1989 memories recorded by adolescents from all four territorial-religious groups. Less obviously, Protestants from Northern Ireland cited the media and especially television as the source for 44 per cent of their pre-1990 recorded memories as compared to school, which was only mentioned in relation to 10 per cent of the pre-1990 events. The media were also cited more frequently than family and friends and equally frequently as school for the pre-1990 events recorded by Catholics in the South.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Northern Ireland (North)</th>
<th>Republic of Ireland (South)</th>
<th>Overall count responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pre-1990 (%)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents/family</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>324</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Detailed analysis of the sources of memories of three of the most frequently specified events (Table 3) shows that the media were seen as the source of information on the Omagh bombing for four out of five of those who recorded it as a memory. This event occurred in the lifetime of the respondents unlike Bloody Sunday and the Hunger strikes, which occurred before the respondents were born. Nevertheless the media (33.1 per cent) were cited almost as often as school (34.8 per cent) as a source of information on Bloody Sunday, whereas family (30.4 per cent) and school (31.3 per cent) were the main sources of information about the hunger strikes.

Relationships between Scores on the Family Discussion of Current Events and Politics (FDCEP) Scale and Sources of Information about Remembered Events

The young people in the study completed the FDCEP scale (Flanagan et al., 2005), which measures the extent of adolescents’ interest in the news and willingness to discuss, or argue about, current affairs and politics with their family. Overall, this scale had a normal distribution with a majority of the sample scoring around the midpoint. The mean of the scale was 3.09 (SD=0.86). Table 4 presents the mean scores for the four territorial groups on the six items forming the scale and the overall scale scores. A series of one-way ANOVAs followed up where appropriate with Bonferroni post hoc tests were employed to compare the scores of young people from the four territorial-religious groups. These analyses produced statistically significant main effects for four of the scale items and the overall scale score.

The Catholic adolescents from Northern Ireland scored significantly higher on the overall scale than Catholic adolescents from the Republic of Ireland, F(3, 1006)=4.08, p<.01. Analysis of the individual items showed that the Catholic young people from Northern Ireland were more interested in the news than the Catholic adolescents living in the South or Protestants from both jurisdictions. The Catholic respondents from Northern Ireland were also more likely than their peers to agree that they told their parents their opinion about current events and sometimes argued with their families about these events.

In order to examine the relationship between an individual’s score on the FDCEP scale and the reported sources of their recollections of the conflict, we compared the percentage of recalled events sourced from family or friends, the media and school for those who scored above and below the group mean on the scale. In order to avoid small

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Omagh bombing (%)</th>
<th>Bloody Sunday (%)</th>
<th>Hunger strikes (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents/family/friends</td>
<td>8.1</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>31.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Media</td>
<td>79.8</td>
<td>33.1</td>
<td>14.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>10.3</td>
<td>11.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>34.8</td>
<td>31.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Count</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>302</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE 3
Sources of information for three events: percentages of respondents indicating this source was ‘how they knew about the event’.
TABLE 4
Mean territorial-religious group responses to six questionnaire items forming the Family Discussion of Current Events and Politics (FDCEP) scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Northern Ireland Catholic (n=470)</th>
<th>Northern Ireland Protestant (n=177)</th>
<th>Republic of Ireland Catholic (n=336)</th>
<th>Republic of Ireland Protestant (n=27)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am interested in the news</td>
<td>3.29a</td>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>3.04b</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.73a</td>
<td>3.42b</td>
<td>3.64</td>
<td>3.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I have different opinions from my parents about current</td>
<td>3.37a</td>
<td>3.17b</td>
<td>3.09b</td>
<td>2.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I tell my parents my opinions about events in the news</td>
<td>3.00a</td>
<td>2.72</td>
<td>2.83b</td>
<td>2.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes I argue with my parents about current events</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My parents discuss what’s happening in the world with me</td>
<td>3.01</td>
<td>2.84</td>
<td>2.86</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In my house we have many discussions about current events and</td>
<td>2.74</td>
<td>2.73</td>
<td>2.57</td>
<td>2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>politics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scale mean score</td>
<td>3.18a</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.00b</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1Numbers relate to total scale scores—those with missing data are included in the analyses of individual items.

aGroup mean is significantly different from group means for those values with a b superscript.

*p<.05, **p<.01.

FIGURE 2
Percentage of recalled events the media, parents or family and school as a source recalled by Protestants and Catholics adolescents categorized according to whether they were above or below average on the Family Discussion of Current Events and Politics (FDCEP) scale.
cell sizes, students from north and south of the border were combined for this analysis. As students could record up to four memorable events, the percentages in Figure 2 relate to events rather than respondents.

Overall, Figure 2 indicates that the more interest a Catholic young person showed in the news and the more current affairs were discussed at home the less frequently they reported that the media was the source of knowledge for a memorable event and the more frequently parents and family and school were considered as primary sources for the event. Protestants tended not to view school as a source for their knowledge of events they had recalled. However, as with their Catholic counterparts those Protestant adolescents who reported most interest in the news viewed the media as less important and their family and parents as more important sources of knowledge than their counterparts who expressed less interest in the news and current events.

Discussion

Following the lead provided by Brown and Cantor (2000), this paper has approached the topic of children, media and conflict within a broad framework that includes the influences of the wider community, social group, family and schools. The media influences on intergroup attitudes are widely acknowledged (e.g. Bar-Tal & Teichman, 2005), but Roe and Cairns (2003) argue that

[While the media does act largely to reinforce existing attitudes it does have a role in cultivating basic assumptions about the nature of society. In particular the media may have an important role if not in forming, at least in triggering, collective memories. (p. 179)]

It is in this context that the paper explored the possible influence of the media on young people’s memories of the conflict in Northern Ireland. It reports one of a handful of studies that includes young Protestants and Catholics from both sides of the Irish border. These young people belong to the generation growing up in ‘a world of information excess’ (Meijer, 2006). They are exposed to universal fashions and have access to disparate forms of communication. At the same time, their experiences diverge widely as they encounter different local media, neighbourhoods, schools and families. Experience of violence was not measured in this study, but the level of violence in the region varies for families, between neighbourhoods and according to ethnonational group (Anderson, 2006a). Some of those involved in this study had sustained experience of the sociopolitical violence of the last 30 years; others had very little direct personal contact with the conflict. There were many factors that could have impinged on memories of events related to the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland, but the analysis for this paper was mainly focused on the four territorial-religious groups identified as distinct communities in the border area (Anderson, 2006a) and the reported extent of the adolescents’ interest in the news and family discussion about the news. It revealed some notable group differences and similarities in memories of the troubles and the sources of these memories.

The most frequently recalled event was the 1998 Omagh bombing, which was the largest single incident of the Northern Ireland conflict. The young people in the study would have been exposed to media reporting of this event when they were 6 or 7 years old. McDermott, Duffy and McGuinness (2004) note that a survey of the Omagh school population 15 months after the explosion found that children aged 8–13 years were more
psychologically vulnerable to trauma than adolescents aged 14–18 years. Evidence from research by Cairns and Lewis (1999) on memories of the earlier Enniskillen bomb suggests that when an event is important for a group it is better remembered. It is therefore not surprising that in this study the Omagh bomb, which had a widespread impact on young children, was salient for all groups. Four out of five respondents who reported this event indicated that they knew about the bombing from the news (most respondents did not specify if this news was accessed by reading newspapers or watching television).

There was far less consensus over the memory of other events. For example, the hunger strike was among the most frequently cited event for Catholics from Northern Ireland but did not feature among the most frequently recorded events for Protestants. These group differences are in accord with the growing body of research (e.g. Bar-Tal, 2003; Barton & McCully, 2003; Cairns & Lewis, 1999; Sahdra & Ross, 2007) that demonstrates a strong link between social identity and collective memory. Following early experimental studies that highlighted the bias in the perception of contested events such as football matches as a source of partisan collective memories, recent analyses indicate that groups and societies also engage in an active process of collective remembering and forgetting (Sahdra & Ross, 2007).

Most, but not all, of the major events of the troubles have occurred in Northern Ireland and involve people and politicians from the region but they have been widely reported in Irish and British media. Events which occurred before respondents in this study were born remain in the news as the peace process is accompanied by efforts to remember victims and account for past events. Conway (2007) employs the reenactment of the Bloody Sunday march to illustrate not only how the past is brought into the present by such rituals but also how such events are designed to attract significant media attention. Conway’s analysis indicates that Bloody Sunday is viewed as a nationalist event and this would help to explain why more Catholics than Protestants more frequently recalled it. However, 32 per cent of Protestant adolescents in this study did spontaneously recall Bloody Sunday, which would seem to reflect Conway’s assertion that Protestants’ view of the event has shifted over time indicating ‘that the Protestant community was now clearly a part of the constituency that memory entrepreneurs … sought to appeal to’ (Conway, 2007, p. 31).

Although the media were seen as an important source for historical events as well as those that have occurred within the adolescent’s own lifetime, the results could be distorted by the coding of only one source for each memorable event. This does not mean that it was the only source for this knowledge. While acknowledging this potential distortion in the findings, it does seem that there was a relationship between the recorded sources and scores on the scale measuring adolescents’ interest in the news and willingness to discuss, or argue about, current affairs and politics with their family. For example, although the media were most frequently referenced as the sources for past events relating to the trouble, both Protestants and Catholics who had below average scores on the family discussion (FDCEP) scale were more likely to have referenced a media source for their memory than those with above average FDCEP scale scores. Conversely, family and school sources were reported more frequently as the basis for recalled events by those who were interested in the news.

Parents are generally acknowledged to be the most influential source of information for children and adolescents. Recently, there has been increasing emphasis on the role of discussion in the development of attitudes and political beliefs in adolescents (Flanagan...
et al., 2005; McIntosh, Hart, & Youniss, 2007). Following previous research by Whyte (1995, 1998), we predicted that there would be group differences in the interest shown in the news by young Catholics and Protestants, north and south of the border and that these groups would differ in the frequency with which they discussed politics and current affairs. Catholics from Northern Ireland were found to have significantly higher scores on the measure of family discussion than other groups.

Overall, Protestants less frequently referred to family and friends as the source of information for events they recalled than Catholics. The difference in the type of event recalled by Protestant and Catholic adolescents could provide one explanation for this religious group difference. However, a further explanation can be found in Donnan and Simpson’s (2007) recent ethnographic studies of Irish border Protestants, which sensitively track the historical and cultural roots of the Protestants’ lack of public voice before the recent emergence of accounts of their suffering in the 1970s and 1980s. From this perspective it was normative for Protestant families to remain silent in the face of suffering and not discuss their experiences with anyone.

Donnan and Simpson, in common with Barrett (2007) and Bar-Tal and Teichmann (2005), link the transmission of personal information with communal identity and wider political processes. It is now widely accepted that young people are actively managing the diverse sources of information they encounter (Meijer, 2006). The findings of this research, in common with current theoretical perspectives, indicate that it is equally important to accept the social determinants of the information that is, or is not, communicated to them.

Northern Ireland has had a common national history curriculum but in this study Protestants from Northern Ireland referred to their school as a source of knowledge for memorable events far less frequently than Catholics. Barton and McCully’s (2005) detailed analysis of secondary students’ conceptions of history and identity showed that students from diverse backgrounds interact differently with the same curriculum. They also began to untangle the complex relationship that secondary school students make between history and identity in which students draw selectively from the school curriculum (and other sources) to support a range of developing identities. Barton and McCully’s (2005) analysis lead them to see the potential for schools to play a critical role in developing informed citizens who share a critical stance to past events whatever the perceptions of these events within their own communities. Roe and Cairns (2003) see a similar role for the media for societies torn apart by ethnic conflict. The research in this paper adds weight to their conclusion that:

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\text{[t]he media can fill a role in constructing a more peaceful society. In particular they can act as a challenge to certain constructions of the past and, because of their role in determining both what groups remember and how they remember, the media can help trigger memories of more peaceful times and/or times of shared identity for groups in conflict. (p. 179)}
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Conclusions

The research reported in this paper focused on the impact of media for specific groups of young people living in the border region of Ireland. At the time of testing the overt conflict and violence which had been a feature of life in Northern Ireland for 35 years...
had been replaced by an ongoing peace process that had been the backdrop to the daily life of the young people from both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The research employed a very open-ended approach in order to sample young people’s own memories of the conflict and the source for these memories. Although this approach has the advantage of not constraining the responses provided by the young people, it did mean that specific sources for the recollections were not forthcoming and the relative importance of different media sources could not be established. Nevertheless the research does suggest some general implications for our understanding of children and media. First, the media are seen as important sources for historical events as well as current affairs especially when the events are commemorated and reenacted within the community. Second, the media can provide a direct source of information about events that occurred within the child’s relatively early years as long as they are of intense emotional significance (e.g. the Omagh bomb) rather than politically significant (e.g. Good Friday agreement). Finally, the research confirmed the view that media influences on young people cannot be understood without taking account of the influences of the wider community, social group, family and schools.

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REFERENCES


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