

Changing Times - or are they?

Deirdre Fullerton



Over the last three decades a number of researchers have explored the effects of the conflict and sectarianism on children and young people growing up in Northern Ireland, for example, Cairns (1987) and Trew (1992). A small number of studies have asked young people about their views of community relations, for example, Smyth et al. (2000). However, none of these have compared the views of young people with adults.

The 2003 **Young Life and Times (YLT) survey** explored young people's attitudes to the conflict in Northern Ireland by asking a series of questions about religious affiliation, national identity and experiences of community relations. The questionnaire also included a series of questions that had been asked of adult respondents to the 2002 **Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey**, thus allowing comparisons across the two surveys. A summary of young people's views on

identity, religion and conflict is provided in Research Update 28 (Devine and Schubotz, 2004). However, this Research Update explores whether the responses of young people aged 16 years differ from those of adults aged 18 years or over.

Religion and national identity

Devine and Schubotz (2004) have shown the distribution of religious and national identities among young people living in Northern Ireland, but are these the same for adults?

As one might expect, the majority of Protestants identified with a British nationality, and the majority of Catholics identified with an Irish nationality. However, Figure 1 shows that within the two groups, some differences emerge. Among Protestant respondents, the younger age group were less likely to describe themselves as British than the adult population (51% and 75% respectively). Among Catholic respondents, a greater proportion of the younger group described themselves as Irish than the adult group (77% compared with 62%). Interestingly, both adult Catholics and young Protestants were the two groups



most likely to identify with a Northern Irish nationality (25% and 33% respectively).

Mixed-race marriage

Respondents were asked a series of questions on the topic of mixed marriages. In both the adult and young person surveys, respondents were first asked about their perceptions of the attitudes of other people before being asked about their own views on the subject.

To gauge attitudes to mixed-race marriages, respondents were asked how they thought that most people in Northern Ireland would react if a close relative were to marry someone from the Chinese community. Respondents to both surveys were broadly similar in their perceptions of most people's attitudes to mixed-race marriages. While over one third of all respondents believed that most people would not mind if a relative were to marry a person of Chinese origin, a similar proportion felt that people would mind a little, and approximately one in six believed that most people would mind a lot.

When asked about their own reactions, the majority of respondents from both surveys were accepting of mixed-race marriages. However, while a minority stated they would mind if a close relative were to marry someone from the Chinese community, Protestants emerged as less tolerant than Catholics in this regard: approximately one in three Protestants said that they would mind a lot or a little (31% of NILT respondents and 27% of YLT respondents) compared with one in five Catholics (21% NILT and YLT respondents).

Mixed-religion marriage

Reactions to mixed-religion marriages were more diverse. The majority of adults and young people perceived society to be unaccepting of mixed-religion marriages. Over one fifth of respondents believed that most people would mind a lot (20% of adults and 27% of young people), and over one third (34%) of NILT respondents and one half (48%) of respondents to YLT believed that most people would mind a

Figure 1: National identity

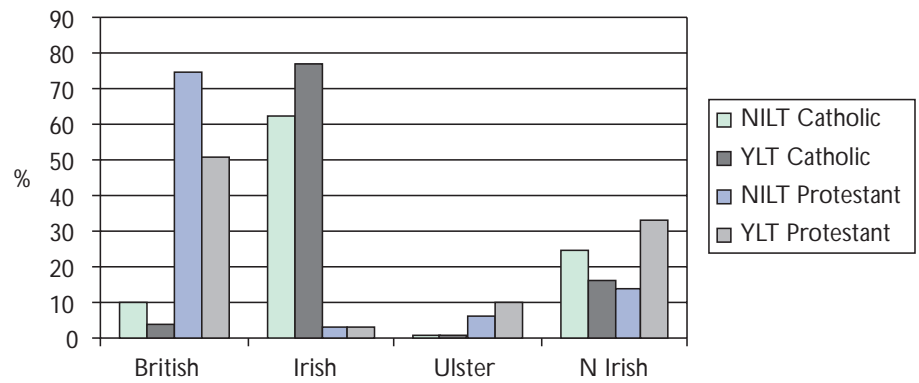


Figure 2: Would you mind if one of your close relatives were to marry someone of a different religion?

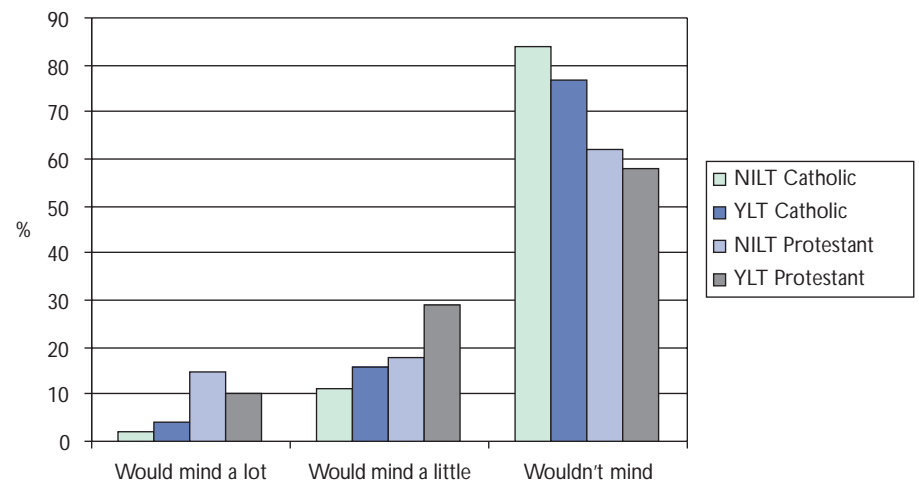


Table 1: Support for integration

	%					
	All		Catholic		Protestant	
	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT
Mixed-religion neighbourhood	74	53	82	56	67	45
Mixed-religion workplace	86	71	89	72	82	70
Mixed-religion school	60	48	64	41	52	50

little if one of their relatives were to marry someone of a different religion. YLT respondents, particularly young Protestants, appeared more pessimistic, perceiving that most people would have limited tolerance for mixed-religion marriages.

In contrast, respondents' personal attitudes to mixed-religion marriages were

much more accepting (see Figure 2). The majority of both the adult and younger respondents said they would not mind at all if one of their close relatives were to marry someone from a different religion (74% and 71% respectively). Catholic respondents to both surveys emerge as being more accepting of mixed-religion marriages (84% of NILT respondents and 77% of YLT respondents) than Protestants

(62% of adults and 58% of young people). Approximately one third of Protestants from both surveys said that they would mind a little or a lot if a close relative were to marry someone from a different religion.

Integrate or segregate?

So do the attitudes of young people reflect those of adults in relation to integration and cross-community contact? Both NILT and YLT surveys included a series of questions asking whether respondents would prefer to live in mixed-religion neighbourhoods, work with people of different religions or send their children to mixed-religion schools (see Table 1).

Overall, both sets of respondents displayed support for integration, although, as Table 1 shows, adults were generally more supportive than young people. This may reflect young people's limited experience of integration as the majority of young respondents live in predominantly segregated areas and attend segregated schools.

YLT respondents from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds were broadly similar in their views about integration, although slightly more Protestants than Catholics were in favour of integrated education (50% compared with 41%). In contrast, slightly more Catholics than Protestants were in favour of mixed-religion neighbourhoods (56% compared with 45%).

Symbols of sectarianism

Respondents were asked a series of questions examining their exposure and response to different symbols (see Table 2). Differences are evident by both religion and age. As might be expected, Protestants were more likely than Catholics to report feeling intimidated by the symbols of republicanism. In addition, young Protestants were more likely to report this than adults (35% and 27% respectively). Similarly, young Catholics were twice as likely as adult Catholics (54% and 25% respectively) to report feelings of intimidation by the symbols of loyalism. Allied to this, one in three young Catholics

Table 2: Feelings of intimidation or threat in previous year

	%					
	All		Catholic		Protestant	
	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT
Intimidated/threatened by republican murals, kerb paintings or flags	20	25	12	14	27	35
Intimidated/threatened by loyalist murals, kerb paintings or flags	22	35	25	54	19	15

Table 3: Would you say relations between Protestants and Catholics are better than they were 5 years ago, worse, or about the same now as then?

	%					
	All		Catholic		Protestant	
	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT
Better	30	41	37	48	26	34
Worse	23	17	19	13	26	21
About the same	43	37	41	34	45	40
Other/Don't know	5	5	3	5	4	5

Table 4: In 5 time do you think relations between Protestants and Catholics will be better than now, worse than now, or about the same as now?

	%					
	All		Catholic		Protestant	
	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT	NILT	YLT
Better	39	36	49	44	31	27
Worse	12	15	6	9	18	22
About the same	42	42	39	41	44	45
Other/Don't know	8	7	7	7	8	6

(32%) and one in four young Protestants (24%) reported feeling threatened because people were wearing certain football strips.

The future of community relations

Respondents were asked if they thought that relations between Protestants and

Catholics were better, worse or the same than they were five years ago? YLT respondents were more positive than NILT respondents, and Catholics were more positive than Protestants (see Table 3). In particular, among young people, nearly one half of Catholics (48%) believed that relations had improved compared with just over one third of Protestants (34%)

In contrast, when asked about their assessment for the future of community relations, most respondents from both surveys believed that relations between Protestants and Catholics will remain the same as at present (see Table 4). Young Protestants, however, were more pessimistic than young Catholics and adult Protestants in their predictions for the future: only one quarter (27%) believed that cross-community relations would be better in the future, and one in five (22%) believed relations would be worse.

Respondents were then asked if they believed that religion would always make a difference to the way people feel about each other in Northern Ireland, and the vast majority thought it would. Young Protestants were the most pessimistic, with 91% agreeing, while adult Catholics were least likely to say it would (83%).

Conclusions

So, are these changing times? Analyses of the responses to the two surveys uncover more similarities than differences in the views of the two age groups. While young people emerge as slightly more accepting of mixed-race and mixed-religion marriages, and are less enthusiastic about integration, in general their views reflect those of the adult generation. Where differences do emerge, they appear between respondents of different religions rather than of different age groups.

The **Young Life and Times (YLT) survey** and the **Northern Ireland Life and Times (NILT) survey** are carried out annually. For the 2003 YLT survey, 902 young people aged 16 completed the survey in one of three ways: online, by self-completion questionnaire or by phone. For the 2002 NILT survey, 1800 adults were interviewed in their own home. Interviews were carried out by Research and Evaluation Services.

These surveys are joint projects of the two Northern Ireland universities and provide independent sources of information on what the public think about the social issues of the day. Check the web sites for more information on the survey findings (www.ark.ac.uk/ylt and www.ark.ac.uk/nilt) or call the survey team at Queen's University (028 9097 3034) with any queries.

In collaboration with Queen's University Belfast and University of Ulster

Aberfoyle House Magee Campus University of Ulster
Northland Road Londonderry BT48 7JA

Tel: 028 7137 5513 Fax: 028 7137 5510
E-mail: info@ark.ac.uk

Institute of Governance Public Policy and Social Research
Queen's University Belfast Belfast BT7 1NN

Tel: 028 9097 3034 Fax: 028 9097 2551
E-mail: info@ark.ac.uk

Key Points

- National and religious identity are closely correlated for adults and young people.
- Respondents to both NILT and YLT were mostly accepting of mixed-race and mixed-religion marriages, with Catholics more so than Protestants. However, respondents perceived society to be less accepting of such unions.
- Both adults and young people were supportive of integration, particularly in the workforce. However, young people were less supportive of residential or educational integration.
- Young people, particularly young Catholics, reported feeling intimidated/threatened by the symbols of sectarianism than were adults.
- Young respondents were more positive than adults in their assessment of progress of community relations over the past five years but were less optimistic in their views of the future.

References

- Cairns, E. (1987) *Caught in the Crossfire: Children and the Northern Ireland Conflict*. Belfast: Appletree Press
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- Trew K. (1992) 'Social psychological research on the conflict' *The Psychologist* 5:342-344

Deirdre Fullerton is an independent research consultant.

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