A Crisis of Identity?

The national, religious and political identifications of young Protestant women in Northern Ireland

by Helén Rummelhoff

A Thesis Presented to the Department of Literature, Area Studies and European Languages, Faculty of Humanities

University of Oslo

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the MA Degree in English

Spring 2017
A Crisis of Identity?

The national, religious and political identifications of young Protestant women in Northern Ireland

By Helén Rummelhoff

Supervisor: Atle L. Wold
© Helén Rummelhoff

2017

A Crisis of Identity? – The national, religious and political identifications of young Protestant women in Northern Ireland

http://www.duo.uio.no

Print: Reprosentralen, University of Oslo
Abstract

This thesis explores whether young Protestant women in Northern Ireland are facing a crisis of identity. The personal perceptions of identity for young female Protestants in Belfast, born immediately before or after the 1998 peace accord, are examined, in relation to both national, religious and political identity. Furthermore, the study aims to investigate whether the women’s identity preferences influence their attitudes toward the other main community in Northern Ireland. The thesis argues that the women show evidence of having progressed significantly, and albeit the traditional attitudes remain, they seem to be breaking away from these. Northern Ireland is still segregated, but despite this, society seemed to have progressed significantly. The majority of the women identified along the traditional divide in terms of national identity, but these seemingly traditional labels masked progressive attitudes. Moreover, the women were inclined to transcend the communal divide politically, as they would vote for Sinn Féin. In terms of religion, the label of Protestantism has arguably diversified to such an extent that it cannot provide an overarching identification for these women, and they were confused regarding the different interpretations of Protestantism available. Furthermore, identity labels did not affect attitudes towards the other side, and they were all positive towards integrated housing and education, and had friends across the divide. The thesis thus argue that these women show great propensity towards transcending the divide, and that seemingly traditional labels mask new and progressive attitudes.
Acknowledgements

Although the thesis is my product, it could not have happened without considerable help from others. I would like to express my gratitude to the following people, who have helped me in my work with this thesis.

Firstly, I need to thank my supervisor, Atle L. Wold for believing in my project, for giving me constructive feedback, for always being available, and for giving me invaluable support when things did not look too bright.

Secondly, I must give a very special thanks to the respondents, who generously gave of their time, and shared their thoughts, perceptions and attitudes with me. If they had not been so generous, open and willing to share, this thesis would not be half as good.

Thirdly, I must also thank Jan Erik Mustad, whose insights, tips and comforting words sparked renewed interest and motivation for my thesis, and made me believe I could manage to produce something as daunting as a master thesis based on qualitative interviews.

Furthermore, my friend Sunniva receives an extra thank you, for taking the time to proof read my thesis in the final stages, and for giving valuable feedback.

I must also thank my fellow students whom I have spent hours talking to during coffee breaks and lunches, and which gave me some much-needed different focus. Particular thanks must be given to Regine, Maren and Jorid.

Lastly, I must thank my parents for the support they give me in everything I do, and for always believing in me.

Helén Rummelhoff,
Oslo, May 2017
Content

Introduction .................................................................................................................. 1
1.1 Central questions ................................................................................................. 2
1.2 Purpose and delimitation ...................................................................................... 3
1.3 Historiography ...................................................................................................... 5
   Identity ................................................................................................................... 5
   Sectarianism .......................................................................................................... 7
   Women .................................................................................................................... 8
1.4 Method and Sources ............................................................................................. 10
1.5 Structure .............................................................................................................. 14

Identity ...................................................................................................................... 17
2. 1: The importance of identity in Northern Ireland .............................................. 18
2.2: National Identity .................................................................................................. 21
   2.2.1: The logic of national identity ....................................................................... 22
   2.2.2: Situational national identity ......................................................................... 24
   2.2.3 Northern Irishness .......................................................................................... 26
2.3: Political Identity ................................................................................................... 31
   2.3.1: Socio-economic issues undermine the old divide ........................................ 32
   2.3.2: Traditional voting in decline? ...................................................................... 34
2.4: Religious identity ................................................................................................ 37
   2.4.1: The contents of the label Protestantism ......................................................... 38
   2.4.2: Interchangeability of national and religious identity .................................... 40
   2.4.3: Low levels of identification with Protestantism ............................................ 43

Summary .................................................................................................................... 46

Community relations ................................................................................................. 49
3.1: Segregation in everyday life ................................................................................ 52
3.2: The reasons for continued segregation ............................................................. 57
   3.2.1: Boundary maintenance as natural ................................................................. 57
   3.2.2: “Certain types of people” ............................................................................. 62
   3.2.2.1: Young men ............................................................................................ 62
   3.2.2.2: Paramilitaries ........................................................................................ 66
   3.2.2.3: Trans-generational values ...................................................................... 69
3.3: A society in transition? ...................................................................................... 73
   3.3.1: Effect of cross community work .................................................................... 73
3.4: Protestant alienation ........................................................................................... 80

Summary .................................................................................................................... 85

Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 86

Bibliography .............................................................................................................. 93

Appendix .................................................................................................................... 102
   Interview guide ..................................................................................................... 102
Introduction

2016 marked a historical year for Northern Ireland: Nationalists could celebrate the Easter Rising centennial, while Unionists could commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Somme. When it comes to cross-community relations, this year also marked the 10th anniversary of the St. Andrews Agreement. Moreover, the Northern Ireland Assembly elections in May last year was the first election in which the generation who do not have first-hand experience of the Troubles, was eligible to vote. These are young people born in 1998, after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), and they have been given a number of names, such as “millennials”, “peace babies” and “the Good Friday Generation”.

The expectations and prospects of what this new generation could bring to the table in Northern Ireland, sparked the interest and premise for this thesis. A whole new generation untouched by the violence of the Troubles, and with the benefit of the possibilities of a range of state-led and grassroots initiatives to improve community relations, can perhaps transcend the traditional dichotomous community divide. Consequently, they could possibly alter Northern Irish society considerably. The importance of this emerging post-conflict generation has been noted by McEvoy, who argue that it is this generation which (at the time of writing) cannot vote, who will determine the outcome of the peace process. She states that understanding their attitudes to the conflict is vital.1

This thesis explores whether young Protestant women in Northern Ireland are facing a crisis of identity. This is done by investigating how they relate to their national, personal and religious identifications. Additionally, the thesis explores whether there is a correlation between strength of traditional national and religious identification, and negative attitudes towards the other main community. The focus is on the young women’s personal experiences of national and religious identity.

This introductory chapter begins by outlining the central questions which informed and guided the research. The purpose and delimitation of the study is also discussed. As Northern Ireland has been deemed the most over-researched area in the world relative to its population size, a review of existing literature which provided the starting point for this thesis will be undertaken.2 In addition, the choice of method and sources will be discussed, reviewing the

---

1 McEvoy: Communities and Peace, 87-88
2 Whyte: Interpreting Northern Ireland, viii
choice of interviews, and the choice and utilisation of primary and secondary sources. This first chapter ends with an outline of the structure of the thesis.

1.1 Central questions

The aim of this research is thus to explore the religious, political and national self-identifications of young Protestant women in Northern Ireland, born around the 1998 peace accord. Moreover, I aim to investigate whether there is a correlation between strength of national, religious and/or political identification, and strength of negative perceptions of the other main community in Northern Ireland.

In relation to identity, a central question is how young Protestant women perceive their national, religious and political identities. Do these young women attach great importance to their identification? Are they reluctant to identify as Protestants? Do they identify as something else than along the traditional divide? Are their national and religious identification interchangeable? When it comes to community relations, I was interested in whether the community divide affected my respondents in their everyday life. Do they feel limitations due to the community divide? Do they have friends across the boundary? What are their attitudes towards Catholics? What are their attitudes towards mixed marriages, education and workplaces? Has participation in cross-community work affected their perceptions? Are these women more prone to transcend the communal divide? If that is the case, how do they transcend it? Why do they do it? Can something be learned from these women, so that other members of society can also transcend the divide?

In addition to the main focus on the correlation between self-identification and community relations, two hypotheses will be tested on the basis of existing research. The first hypothesis is that these young women will be more prone to identify as Northern Irish, as existing research indicate that being young and being Protestant facilitates identification with the Northern Irish label. The second hypothesis is that the young women will feel a sense of alienation and uncertainty concerning their identity as Protestant, and that they might experience a sense of loss of identity and culture in post-accord Northern Ireland.

3 Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland, 389; Goeke-Morey et al.: Predictors of Strength in in-group identity, p. 292
4 Halliday & Ferguson: When Peace is Not Enough, 530
1.2 Purpose and delimitation

The purpose of this thesis is to give voice to a group of people in Northern Ireland which have been under-researched, and their views and perceptions need to be addressed. There is a disproportionate focus on males in existing research on Northern Ireland. This is unsurprisingly, as young males aged 18-24 were the biggest perpetrators and victims of violence, and continue to be gravely affected in the post-conflict society.\(^5\) I therefore decided that I wanted to focus on young women, a group which has tended to be neglected in Northern Ireland. I did not want a feminist approach, nor a gendered approach. I wanted to focus on these women as individuals, and as members of a marginalised group that tend to be overlooked in research. An explanation for this is just because they are women, as Northern Ireland is a country dominated by men in the public domain, and in social and political institutions.\(^6\) Moreover, young women tend to be written off as peace loving, and as a negation of their male counterparts, and consequently I wanted to investigate whether it is true that they indeed are more positive towards the other community.

The initial reason to focus on Northern Ireland comes from the conflict’s combination of two of my greatest interest. Firstly, I have always had a keen interest in the United Kingdom, and almost every aspect of the country’s culture, history and politics. Secondly, another main interest is conflict and conflict management, and especially conflicts which evolve around religious and/or ethnic differences. The Northern Ireland conflict, and the post-conflict society, thus combines two of my greatest academic interests. Consequently, the Northern Ireland post-conflict society was a natural starting point for my thesis. As mentioned, Northern Ireland has been labelled the most overly researched field in the world, relative to its size, so finding a new and interesting topic could prove challenging.

Nevertheless, 2016 provided new topics of interest in Northern Ireland, and the starting point for the thesis, was the May 2016 Assembly Elections. As this was the first election were the millennials could vote, this led to a renewed interest and focus on young people in Northern Irish media. It also led to expectations to what this generation’s perceptions and attitudes could possibly contribute with in the election, and society at large.

The election showed a small shift in voting patterns. Was this the effect of the new generation which was born after 1998 and was now eligible to vote? When looking at voter turnout, the number of young people voting was marginal, which could entail that if the voter

---

\(^5\) Harland, K.: *Violent Youth Culture in Northern Ireland*, 416

\(^6\) Dobrowolsky: *Crossing Boundaries*, 312
turnout had been higher, their impact could have been even bigger. As religious and national identity is closely tied to political affiliation in Northern Ireland, I wanted to investigate whether this small shift in voting pattern could also mean a change in the national and religious identification for young people, and whether this in turn could imply a change in attitudes towards the other community.

Consequently, I wanted to explore the young generation’s attitudes and perceptions of own identity and the other community. Young women were chosen due to their history of being under-researched, and my focus is on the 1998 generation; those that was born in the year of the peace accord, who could vote for the first time in 2016 and who had never experienced the violent conflict. Moreover, my focus is on Protestants. This is because considerable amount of research the last two decades have focused on the alienation and insecurity Protestants in Northern Ireland allegedly experience. As a result, I was interested in exploring whether young women are more positive towards the other community, and if this is affected by their identity as Protestants.

The question is important to investigate, as the opposition to the GFA comes mostly from Protestants. They have expressed dismay with their position in post-conflict Northern Ireland and uncertainty regarding their own identity. Women, on the other hand, has been written off as peace loving and less prone to support extremist parties and express extremist views. I wanted to investigate whether young women are indeed more prone to transcend the divide and vote for more moderate parties. It is important to understand the potential there is in these young women to be active in the local community in changing attitudes.

Finally, the study does not aim to offer generalizable or scientific claims to the national and personal identity of the 1998 Protestant female generation in Northern Ireland as a whole, but rather seeks to give voice to the six young Protestant females I interviewed. It offers a contribution to the field of identity in Northern Ireland, as it examines the subjective experiences of a doubly marginalized and under-researched group, as research into Protestant women are underrepresented relative to both male loyalist and nationalists, as well as female nationalists.

---

7 McLaughlin, P.: *Northern Ireland in 2016*, 4
8 Hayes, McAlister & Dowds: *The Erosion of Consent*, 116
9 Bell: *Acts of Union*, 179
10 Stapleton & Wilson: *Conflicting Categories?*, 2072
1.3 Historiography

Young people and identity in the context of Northern Ireland have been extensively researched, both separately and in combination. A review of the most important existing findings which provided the starting point for the thesis and my research will now follow.

Identity

Identity is at the core of the Northern Ireland conflict, and as a result, the topic has been explored from different vantage points. The first extensive survey into national identification was undertaken by Richard Rose in 1968, just before the outbreak of the Troubles, and consequently, it lends an invaluable insight into preferred national identities even before increased segregation and open warfare affected the country. In his survey, Rose found that 36% of Protestants identified as British. With the onset of the Troubles with increased segregation and identity preferences polarized, British identifiers rose to 67%, according to a survey by Edward Moxon-Browne in 1978. This survey utilised almost identical questions to Rose. Consecutive surveys mapping the national identification of the inhabitants of Northern Ireland have been surprisingly stable, with Whyte (1989), the 2011 Census, and the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT) and the Young Life and Time Survey (YLT) as notable examples.11

Despite offering a general idea of identification preferences of people in Northern Ireland, the limitations of survey data in assessing the complex nature of national and religious identification are noticeable, according to Coakley. Firstly, people tend to express less extremist views in questionnaires than in person. Secondly, identity and identification processes are much more complex than what questions in survey data can capture.12 My research thus focus on exploring the details behind the survey data, and to find the processes behind the choice of labelling. Nevertheless, the survey data offer important starting points for analysis, and give a general view on what the current situation is, and the general trend of identification over the last decades.

Recently, the identification label of Northern Irish has gained attention in research. Whyte’s 1989 survey was the first to introduce Northern Irishness as an option, and the label

12 Coakley: National Identity in Northern Ireland, 574-575
has been increasingly popular in recent years, and particularly so among young people and Protestants.\footnote{Tonge & Gomez: Shared Identity and the End of Conflict?, 284-85} Tonge and Gomez argue that young Protestants have been consistently more likely than older Protestants to declare themselves as Northern Irish, and less likely British, during the last decade.\footnote{Ibid. 285} This indicates that young people growing up more or less unaware of the Troubles have developed different identities.\footnote{Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland, 387}

Tonge and Gomez utilised survey data, however, and, as accounted for above, it cannot give the nuances which a thorough understanding of identification processes requires. I will agree that it could indicate that young people in Northern Ireland have started to identify contrary to the two traditional communal identities. The problem, however, is the lack of focus on the content of these labels – what does it mean for a Protestant today to be a Protestant, to be British or to be Northern Irish? If labelling oneself with a traditional identity is synonymous with sectarian attitudes, and being Northern Irish correlates with less sectarian attitudes, these findings do indeed offer important insight into the reality of identification in Northern Ireland. If the content of these identifications is not known, however, it is impossible to know what they entail and what this means to identity in Northern Ireland. As a result, the findings from Tonge and Gomez do not offer any meaningful insight into the possible diversification and nuances within these identification labels. In my research, I thus wanted to investigate the contents of these labels, and to see if there were signs of diversification. I challenge the assumptions by Tonge and Gomez, and argue that among the young women I interviewed, choice of national identification was not something that influenced their tolerance towards Catholics. On the contrary, the young women were more open towards Catholics, and showed no sectarian attitudes, regardless of national and/or religious identification.

Moreover, it has also been argued that albeit more people embrace the alternative Northern Irish identification, it has not changed the main identification: The majority still readily self-categorize as Protestant and Catholic. They still believe in the same constitutional solution as their Protestant and Catholic counterparts, meaning that the Northern Irish label is as far as each side can go without crossing the political divide.\footnote{Ibid. 386} This indicates that the Northern Irish label represents the middle ground in Northern Ireland politics.\footnote{Ibid. 387} Moreover,
young people who identify as Northern Irish tend not to view this as an important identification. Nevertheless, this research also utilised data from NILT and YLT, and the limitations of this approach for the topic at hand has been accounted for above. My research therefore investigates if the young women showed inclination towards identifying as Northern Irish, and if that was the case, if the identification was important, and whether it also reflected a less sectarian attitude. Based on the findings from the interviews, I argue that these women do not need a Northern Irish identity label, as there already exists a number of other possible identifications Northern Ireland, and adding yet another label made the young women unnecessarily confused. Moreover, to the young women interviewed, identification is down to citizenship and place of residence, not tied to any ideological connection to Britain, to Ireland or to Northern Ireland. As a result, the Northern Irish label does not seem important in improving community relations.

**Sectarianism**

Sectarianism continues to be a severe issue in Northern Ireland. Devine and Schubotz argue, using NIL and YLT, that young people in Northern Ireland are less supportive of integrated housing, workplaces and education.\(^{18}\) Again, the use of quantitative surveys cannot give adequate answers to what lies behind their opposition to integration in these areas, and I wanted to explore the more nuanced attitudes and perceptions for young women. The findings from my research challenge the findings from Devine and Schubotz, as they find that the women interviewed are not remotely sectarian, as they have friends across the divide.

Research into sectarian actions such as the flag protests of 2012/2013\(^{19}\) have showed that these seemingly sectarian actions mask greater and wider societal issues. Young Protestants express disillusionment with politicians and the political process, but also view it as an attack on their cultural identity.\(^{20}\) Halliday and Ferguson argue that many within the Protestant community have felt increasingly isolated and marginalised politically, socially and economically.\(^{21}\) This is, however, in contrast with the findings by Tonge and Gomez who argue that young Protestants now feel more secure within their state due to the St. Andrews Agreement and (until recently) stable devolved government which place Northern Ireland

---

\(^{18}\) Devine & Schubotz: *Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland*, p. 292

\(^{19}\) In December 2012, the Belfast City Council voted in favour of limiting the number of days the Union Jack would be flown from Belfast City Hall. It would be reduced from every single day, to only 18 designated days, and would bring the City Hall in line with the custom in the rest of the United Kingdom. (Halliday & Ferguson: *When Peace is Not Enough*, 526 )

\(^{20}\) Halliday & Ferguson: *When Peace is Not Enough*, 530

\(^{21}\) Ibid.
firmly within the boundaries of the UK. This is one of the explanations they offer for the increase in young Protestants identifying as Northern Irish. As a result of these different perspectives, I investigate how young women relate to their position as Protestants in Northern Ireland today. My thesis and research will challenge both these arguments. I argue that for the young women interviewed, Protestant alienation is not something they experience or identify with. On the contrary, these young women feel increasingly closer to their Catholic counterpart, and care as much about them and their culture, as they do about their own. The notion of a culture war is erroneous in relation to the young women I interviewed.

**Women**

Research on women in Northern Ireland usually focus on them in stereotypical female roles, such as mothers or homebound housewives.\(^{22}\) As women during the Troubles usually had these roles, it is a natural consequence. Furthermore, much of research into women are often also with a feminist perspective or a gendered perspective.\(^{23}\) Northern Irish culture in general, and Protestant culture in particular, is male dominated, and as males were the biggest perpetrators and victims of violence during the Troubles, the majority of research has been on men. As many young men are still today involved in paramilitaries and unwanted activates, research into young people often focus on men. Research on young women, on the other hand, are usually as a part of the larger group “youth”, and usually not focused on within these groups either. Usually, the women are often mentioned in comparative studies as a negation of what the men are, and they are seldom focused on as individuals. As a result of the lack of research into women as individuals, a new perspective seemed appropriate.

Despite the limited focus on women, some important research has been carried out, and the findings from the last three decades have been quite consistent. As early as 1987, Bell reported that his findings suggest that girls were more mobile across perceived territorial boundaries, that they more frequently visited the other side of town, and that their lives in general were less determined by sectarian categorisations of everyday life.\(^{24}\) Bell also found that girls are less attracted to “extreme” parties than boys.\(^{25}\)

\(^{22}\) Merrilees, C et al.: *Associations Between Mothers’ Experience with the Troubles in Northern Ireland and Mothers’ and Children’s Psychological Functioning*


\(^{24}\) Bell: *Acts of Union*, 172

\(^{25}\) Ibid. 179
More recent research also find that young women more easily transcend the divide than their male counterparts, and that being female provides the greatest inclination towards peacebuilding.\textsuperscript{26} The reasons for this, however, and the potential implications, are not further explored. The same is the case with research by Devine and Schubotz, who find that being female is associated with lower levels of support for segregation.\textsuperscript{27} They do acknowledge that the varying experiences of men and women have tended to be ignored, but do not expand upon this.\textsuperscript{28}

Moreover, I want to expand on the knowledge provided by existing research which focuses on women 15 years after the peace-accord. Goeke-Morey et al.’s research compares three areas of social identity between Protestants and Catholics to measure their identity. Their respondents, however, were women who had experienced the Troubles themselves, or growing up during the Troubles. I want to expand on this knowledge, and investigate the attitudes of younger women who have not experienced the Troubles. Additionally, instead of comparing across the divide, I go into the depths of the self-identifications of Protestants to better understand them and their uncertain position today, especially the young generation so many has high hopes for.

Additionally, I focus on young women as individuals, and refrain from applying a gendered perspective, such as Gray and Neill’s study. They offer valuable insight into how young women experience growing up in a segregated society, and they argue that these young women are affected by sectarianism in every aspect of their everyday life.\textsuperscript{29} Nevertheless, the research also focus on the importance of gender equality, as a result, it represents research which tend to focus on a gendered perspective.\textsuperscript{30} Moreover, the cohort was older than those born in 1998, and thus, I wanted to expand on this research to focus on those born around 1998, and consequently have not experienced the Troubles.

As a result, my thesis focus on women outside the constraints of the stereotypical roles they have had. It is important to focus on these young people, and especially young women, not because they are female, but because they have not been heard before, and as every other group in society, they can contribute in the post-conflict peace-making in a society they also are a part of. As Protestants women are doubly marginalised, their personal narratives can offer important and new insights. Moreover, Protestant women are especially

\textsuperscript{26} McGrellis: \textit{Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland}, 99
\textsuperscript{27} Devine & Schubotz: \textit{Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland}, 284
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid. 294
\textsuperscript{29} Gray & Neill : \textit{Creating a Shared Society in Northern Ireland}, 473
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid. 483-485
interesting, as they represent a gender (female) who is believed to have more accommodating views on community relations, but also part of a religious group (Protestant), who is considered to be uncertain about its own identity. It is therefore vital that these young women are included and taken seriously, so that they will not become disillusioned with the peace process.

1.4 Method and Sources

In order to capture the complexity and diversity of the young women’s identity preferences, a qualitative approach was adopted. Albeit a number of surveys have been undertaken, quantification alone is not adequate to capture the identification of individuals, as has been noted elsewhere.\(^{31}\) Identification in Northern Ireland is much more complex than the traditional dichotomous Protestant Catholic divide. Qualitative methods are invaluable in producing rich culturally specific data, and thus highly suited to research on identity and associated processes.\(^{32}\)

This thesis thus utilises a qualitative approach, combining close reading of written primary and secondary sources, and in-depth interviews. I have chosen this method, as one of the aims of interviewing is to give voice, and I aim to give voice to a group of people seldom given attention, both in research and by politicians. As there is a limited amount of research into young women, these interviews can complement the existing narratives on young people in Northern Ireland, and can correct or supply additional information to the written material. According to Kvale, a research interview is a professional conversation with a purpose and structure, where the main purpose is to obtain knowledge through interaction, and understand an issue from the respondent’s point of view.\(^{33}\)

The thesis interviews a total number of 6 young Protestant women living in Belfast and born in 1997 and 1998. The young women were chosen due to their year of birth as the research aims to give voice to the generation of young women who have no recollection of Northern Ireland in conflict. Originally, the aim was to interview women born exclusively in 1998, but during the recruitment process, it became necessary to extend the year of birth to those born immediately before and after 1998, in order to find the appropriate number of respondents. It will not, however, affect the research, as those born in 1999 or 1997 will not have any recollections of wartime.

\(^{31}\) McLaughlin et al.: Religion, Ethnicity and Group Identity, 602
\(^{32}\) Furey et al.: Interpretations of National Identity in Post-Conflict Northern Ireland, 5
\(^{33}\) Kvale & Brinkmann: Det Kvalitative Forskningsintervju, 22
The sample was further narrowed as I wanted to interview women with divergent backgrounds, in line with Rubin and Rubin’s claim that the credibility of the research is enhanced if individuals with a variety of perspectives are interviewed.\textsuperscript{34} The respondents were identified through cross community groups and through Queen’s University, Belfast. People who attend cross community groups will regularly meet people of the other denomination, and can thus give valuable insight to how this affect their attitudes towards them. The women from Queen’s University were originally from rural areas, and it was of interest if they had had meaningful cross community contact without facilitation from cross community groups.

The choice of respondents in Belfast was determined by people who live in interface areas. Interface areas are communities which separate Catholic and Protestant populations by means of physical and metal boundaries. The areas are predominantly socially and economically deprived, and were the location of the highest levels of violence both during and after the conflict.\textsuperscript{35} According to Shirlow, a third of the victims of politically motivated violence during the Troubles were killed within 250 metres of an interface, while 85\% of deaths occurred within 1 km.\textsuperscript{36} In Belfast is the city in Northern Ireland with the highest concentration of interface areas, and therefore Belfast was chosen as the city to research. As I aim to interview Protestant women, the research sites were further determined by being self-defined Protestant. Four of the women interviewed lived in or nearby interface areas in East Belfast, Shankill, the most notorious Protestant area in Belfast. In addition, two of the girls were from the countryside, from two different rural towns of medium size.

My sampling method was therefore purposeful sampling, which is commonly used in qualitative research, as the recruitment of respondents in interviews has a purpose and aim. The aim is not representativeness, but convenience, choosing respondents that are rich on information and therefore can give the desired depth to the information obtained.\textsuperscript{37}

The number of respondents was limited to 6, as the time and resources available necessitated relatively few respondents. There is no standard or procedure on how to decide the required number of respondents in a study. Some scholars, such as Kvale, claim that the interviewer should undertake interviews until there is not any more information in order to obtain saturation. Nevertheless, there has, in practice, developed an unwritten rule that the scope of the study should guide the sample size, and there is a rule of thumb of about 10-15

\textsuperscript{34}Rubin & Rubin: \textit{Qualitative Interviewing}, 68
\textsuperscript{35}Shirlow: \textit{Ethno-Sectarianism and the Reproduction of Fear in Belfast}, 82
\textsuperscript{36}Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37}Johannessen et al.: \textit{Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode}, 106-107
respondents in small scale studies, depending on the scope. As a result, my initial number of desired respondents was 10, but the final thesis only includes interviews with six respondents.\(^{38}\)

I chose a semi-structured interview method, as it can create a good balance between standardisation and flexibility.\(^ {39}\) Unstructured interviews are too time-consuming within the study’s limits of time and resources. With unstructured interviews, it may be necessary to conduct several interviews to be able to pose the same questions to all respondents, and this would also complicate the process of analysis. Structured interviews, on the other hand, are less time consuming, as I can ask the same questions to all respondents, and compare their replies to each question. However, these types of interviews are less flexible and do not take into consideration the individual and situational differences as the more open-ended variation.\(^ {40}\) Therefore, a certain level of standardization in the shape of semi-structured interviews was deemed necessary in order to facilitate analysis within the limits posed by time and resources, and to avoid the rigidity of structured interviews.

The respondents were informed about the aim of the research, and the main parameters of the research design. They were informed about the time frame, and the issues that would be discussed. They signed a consent form, and I made sure that the respondents knew they could leave the interview at any time.\(^ {41}\) Confidentiality was ensured through informing the respondents about how the data was going to be analysed, used and reported, and it was informed on how I would ensure that it is not possible to reveal the respondent’s identity. The young women were given different names, but their place of residence is given, as it is of importance to the research.

The risks associated with participating were assessed. In Northern Ireland, there is a risk of pressure from peers and inter-communal violence, if you do not act accordingly to the communities’ expectations. The respondents were aware of this, and decided to participate regardless of this risk.

Each interview lasted for approximately 1 hour. I utilised an interview guide with 6 introductory questions and 13 main questions, which guided my interview, but I was open for additional comments and adaptable to the situation. The questions were formed based on the questions in Barrett’s Strength of Identification Scale, as well as questions asked in different

\(^{38}\) Initially, I aimed to interview 10 respondents. However, the recruitment process proved challenging, and the total number of respondents was 6. Nevertheless, the findings from the 6 interviewed, proved to be rich, and they were deemed sufficient to provide a good discussion.

\(^{39}\) Johannessen et al.: *Introduksjon til samfunnsvitenskapelig metode*, 139

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) The consent form can be presented if needed
surveys in NILT and YLT. The questions were adapted to fit a qualitative approach, and the aim of the research questions. The young women proved to be talkative, and they opened up, spoke freely, and they discussed every topic without any reservations, as well as introduced new topics to discuss. I acted as a facilitator, making sure I let the respondents speak their mind, and that I did not ask any leading questions. I kept in the background and let the respondent lead the conversation.

I recorded the interviews, with the respondents’ consent, and made additional notes on gestures and emotions expressed, as well as noted down key expressions and points. To ensure a good transcription, I transcribed shortly after the interviews, reaping the benefits of remembering aspects of the interview situation that will not be available through the recordings. I included gestures and expression that add meaning to the spoken word.

During the transcription, I noted down notable expressions and viewpoints, and themes which occurred. Afterwards, I analysed all the interviews, and sorted the responses into themes. These themes were both according to the research questions guiding the interviews, as well as themes that occurred during the interview situation.

There are both challenges and advantages with the use of interviews. Notable advantages are that one can obtain detailed information and nuances which will not emerge in other research methods. This could provide new insight and correct possible mistakes in existing research. Qualitative interviews are also especially advantageous when investigating identity processes, as they provide the possibility to thoroughly explore complex phenomena such as identity. From the interviews, it emerged that identification is a very complex phenomenon, and that identification with a British label do not entail sectarian attitudes or constitutional preference, at least for the women interviewed, in contrast to the predominant and traditional view on identification in Northern Ireland.

A challenge with qualitative interviews, is the research subjects themselves. People may lie in the interviews, or not express as strong views as they would privately. Respondents could also reply to questions in a manner they think that the interviewer would expect. Nevertheless, qualitative interviewing was deemed the appropriate method for my research, as I wanted to explore the complexity and diversifications within identity preferences, and the motivations behind them. As my aim was to obtain rich culturally specific data, qualitative interviewing was the method which could provide this information.

---

In addition to the interviews, I have utilised a number of written primary and secondary sources. Survey data and official documents were used as a starting point for analysis, to give an overall insight into identification preferences in Northern Ireland. This information was also vital in deciding research areas and respondents. Some online newspaper articles are also included, as they provide insight into the current political crisis, which may be of importance to the political views of these young women.

The secondary sources consist of books and articles. These sources provide the starting point for this thesis. They provided the necessary information on what has been conducted in the field of research before, as well as material which I could position my thesis and research in relation to. These sources provided insight into the field of study, and offered critical perspectives on the topic at hand. It worked both as a supplement, a challenge and confirmation of the findings from my interviews. As a result, the combination of qualitative, in-depth interviews with written secondary sources, provided a thorough examination of the topic of young women, identity and community relations.

1.5 Structure

The thesis consists of four chapters, and the structure of the thesis is informed by the research design and structure. The first chapter is introductory, the second chapter explores identity, the third chapter community relations, while the fourth and last chapter summarises the most important findings, and discusses the implications of these findings.

As the thesis aims to investigate whether there is a connection between strength of national, religious and/or political identification, it is natural to first explore the identification of the young women interviewed. The second chapter will thus focus on the young women’s relationship to, and perceptions of, their national, political and religious identity, respectively. The strength of, and importance attached to, the different identifications will be discussed, and it will be argued that for these young women, national, religious and political identifications do no longer overlap, although simultaneously acknowledging the complexity of identification processes present for these young women.

The third chapter will explore community relations. It will discuss how segregation affects the young women in their everyday life, and what contributes, in the young women’s perception, to upholding the divide. Moreover, the chapter will discuss the indications for the interviews of a change in Northern Irish society, and how this gives rise to hope for the future of community relations in Northern Ireland.
The fourth and final chapter is the concluding chapter, and it will thus summarise the main findings from my research, and identify findings which require further research.
Identity

Identification can be seen as the basis of the Northern Ireland conflict. The conflict finds its origins in the diametrically opposed identities of Protestant and Catholic, labels sometimes used interchangeably with Unionist and Nationalist, or Loyalist and Republican. The conflict arose from the competing positions between two ethno-national groups, with religion acting as a socially determined boundary. The central tenets of the conflict are national and religious identity, and these give rise to other important elements, such as group status, political aspirations and affiliations, preferred constitutional status, as well as economic issues. As identity is at the core of the conflict, exploring self-identification in Northern Ireland is of importance and interest.

This chapter explores the national, political and religious identification of young Protestant women in Northern Ireland. It beings by providing an explanation to why identity is contentious in Northern Ireland, as well as an overview of the distinct challenges those who identify as Protestants face today. The chapter then moves on to the findings from the interviews, where young Protestant women’s self-identification in terms of national, political and religious identity are explored. In terms of national identification, this chapter argues that for these women, their nationality is a natural consequence of matters of fact, and that they do not attach great importance to this. Their national identification will change depending on circumstances, and as a result, I argue that national identification is not as cemented as before. Furthermore, I argue that the label of Northern Irishness, which has been suggested as an alternative, mediating identity to the two existing, diametrically opposed ones, is superfluous. The traditional identification of Protestant has diversified, and as a result, it does not automatically entail negative attitudes towards Catholics. Consequently, I argue that it is the contents of the labels, and not their titles, which is important, and that for the young women interviewed, it was more confusing to have yet another label to relate to.

A striking find in relation to political identity, was the women’s inclination to transcend the divide, and vote for the opposite party of what was expected. As religious and political identifications tend to overlap in Northern Ireland, it was expected that the women would vote for a Protestant party, such as the Democratic Ulster Party (DUP). On the contrary, the women preferred Sinn Féin, the diametrically opposed party to the DUP. The

---

43 Tonge: Northern Ireland, p. xix
44 Muldoon et al.: Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, 90
45 Ibid.
politicians were viewed as contributing to upholding the divide, and as the women had Catholic friends, they could not support parties which were perceived to not aiming to mitigate the differences between the two communities. Consequently, I argue that socio-economic issues have become of greater importance, and this in turn has changed the women’s voting preferences.

Regarding religious identity, I argue that the label of Protestantism has diversified significantly, and that this has left the women confused, conflating the different interpretations of the label. Furthermore, this chapter argue that national and religious identity is not interchangeable for these women. Lastly, the chapter discusses why the women do not identify strongly with the traditional contents of the label Protestantism. Firstly, however, this chapter will provide a brief account of the importance of identity in Northern Ireland.

2.1: The importance of identity in Northern Ireland

Identity is crucial to the origins and the continuation of the Northern Ireland conflict. When the Troubles began in 1968, the localized violence contributed to the minimization of intergroup diversity, a rise in identity politics, the need to make the divisions clearer, and the creation of a wider psychological community moving beyond the groups of actual participants in the violence.\(^{46}\) The conflict therefore intensified the already existing community divide. Due to the legacy of the conflict, constitutional preference, national identity, religious affiliation and thus also political identity, has become more or less interchangeable. The allegiances to Irishness and Britishness became dichotomous after thirty years of conflict. As a result, identity preferences indicate a number of other dividing issues.

Self-identification has been thoroughly documented in the case of Northern Ireland from the pioneering work of Rose (1971), through Moxon-Browne (1983), Whyte (1990), and a number of annual population surveys, both focusing on the entire population; the Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey (NILT), and specifically on young people; the Young Life and Times Survey (YLT).\(^{47}\) The identification patterns have been surprisingly stable from the first survey by Rose up until recent surveys in the last few years. Research has found, however, that identity in Northern Ireland is more complex that simply a

---

\(^{46}\) McEvoy: *Communities and Peace: Catholic Youth in Northern Ireland*, 89

\(^{47}\) Moxon-Browne, Edward: *National Identity in Northern Ireland*; Rose: *Governing Without Consensus*; J. Whyte.: *Interpreting Northern Ireland*; The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey Homepage; The Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey Homepage
Protestant versus Catholic dichotomous relationship, and they usually, but not always, overlap. Nevertheless, the inhabitants do very easily self-categories as one of the two, and despite the change in the political landscape, the old identity categorizations still hold, and it has been argued that religious background is still one of the most significant factors in deciding political affiliation and opinion, although religious, national and political affiliations do not always overlap.

Regarding the Protestant identity, it has arguably changed and diversified over the last few decades. The main national identity for Protestants has been British even before the Troubles began, but the generational effect wrought by the Troubles diminished a sense of Irish identity held by some Protestants. Rose’s survey noted 20% of Protestants identifying as Irish in 1968, but by the time of Moxon-Browne’s survey a decade later, it had plummeted to 8%. In addition, the lack of institutional recognition of an Ulster identity also caused the diminution of regional associations. Consequently, Britishness became the dominant Protestant identity. Moreover, the Protestant and Catholic identities became diametrically opposed and negatively interdependent, where any progress for the Catholic community, is viewed as a setback for the Protestant community. Their political and constitutional aspirations are diametrically opposed, meaning that they cannot coexist, as a fulfillment of the aspirations of the Catholic community is a destruction of the Protestant identity, and its political and constitutional aspirations. The Protestant identity is negatively interdependent on Catholic identity to the extent that it has been argued that Protestants are more aware of what they are not, i.e. Irish and Catholic, than what they are.

It has been suggested, however, that the identity process for a Protestant is more complex than for a Catholic, and there is also evidence of diversification within Unionism. Protestants are more likely than Catholics to choose a range of identities such as Loyalist, Nationalist, British or Northern Irish. Following the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), changes are occurring within the Protestant community, and the post-agreement shift in power and status have impacted on the Protestant feeling of identity. Protestants report that

---

48 Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland, 386; Devine & Robinson: No more 'us and them' for 16 year olds, 4
49 McAuley: Peace and Progress? 548; Whyte: Interpreting Northern Ireland, 18
50 Rose: Governing Without Consensus, 208; Moxon-Browne: National Identity in Northern Ireland
51 Tonge & Gomez: Shared Identity and the End of Conflict? 278
52 Kelman: The Independence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities, 588
53 Ibid. 589
54 Moxon-Browne: National Identity in Northern Ireland
55 Goeke-Morey et al.: Predictors of Strength in in-group identity, 292
56 Ibid. 286
they feel increasingly isolated and marginalised politically, socially and economically.\textsuperscript{57} Following the GFA, the Protestant community perceived themselves to be losing ground to the Catholic community relative to their historically dominant position. By 2003, 29% of Protestants felt their own cultural tradition undermined, in comparison to 18% of Catholics.\textsuperscript{58}

In the zero-sum game of Northern Ireland, where the success of one group is considered to come at the expense of the other, post-accord shifts in power and status may be particularly salient for the strength of identity for Protestants, some of whom consider their community to be losing their privileged status.\textsuperscript{59}

The diversification within Protestantism is apparent through surveys which show a significant increase in Protestants who identify as Northern Irish, although the British identity is still the most prominent.\textsuperscript{60} 50% of young Protestants chose the Northern Irish label instead of the British label, and younger Protestants are consistently more likely than older counterparts to declare themselves Northern Irish, and less likely as British.\textsuperscript{61}

They focal point of this chapter is thus how young Protestant women relate to their identities – national, political and religious. They are members of the religious group in Northern Ireland which is arguably suffering a crisis of identity, but also members of the gender which research finds is the least prone to negative attitudes towards the other community. Where do these women find their place in a changing Northern Ireland?

The young women’s self-identification was explored in relation to three areas. National identity was explored in relation to attachment to their country and their sense of pride in their country. In addition, an attachment to a Protestant identity was investigated through the importance they put on traditional Protestant activities and traditions. Their political identity was discussed in relation to party political affiliation, and their views on the different parties. Lastly, religious identity was examined in relation the women’s attachment to religious beliefs and attendance in church. Furthermore, based on existing research, it was assumed that the respondents would be more prone to identify as Northern Irish. This was for two reasons: As Protestants, they are more liable to choose different identity labels, and as females they are arguably more prone to transcend the communal divide, to hold less sectarian values, and be more open towards people of other religious denominations. These

\textsuperscript{57} Halliday & Ferguson: \textit{When Peace is Not Enough}, 530
\textsuperscript{58} Goeke-Morey et al.: \textit{Predictors of Strength of In-Group Identity in Northern Ireland}, 286
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Tonge & Gomez: \textit{Shared Identity and the End of Conflict?} 286
\textsuperscript{61} Hayes & McAllister: \textit{Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland}, 389
traits are also associated with the Northern Irish label, and consequently, they might be more prone to identify as Northern Irish. 62

The young women interviewed were thus questioned on national, political and religious issues, as political identity, national identity and religious identity are linked in Northern Ireland. This chapter will move on to explore firstly national identification, then political identification, and lastly religious identification.

2.2: National Identity

National identity is usually conceived as an active and territorial sense of historic community, associated with a distinct public culture and common rights and duties.63 Moreover, national identity is often an important component in citizenship, in addition to civil, political and social rights.64 Citizenship in Northern Ireland, however, is very complex, as it is affected by the conflict. Protestants traditionally feel connected to Britain, while Catholics want to be united with the Republic of Ireland. Inhabitants in Northern Ireland can have either an Irish passport or UK passport, based on their preferences. As a result, citizenship and national identity in Northern Ireland is complex, and often masks competing constitutional aspirations, as well as national identifications.

The young women’s national identification was surprisingly traditional, at least on the surface. Four of the women readily identified as British, one as Northern Irish, and the last one refrained from identifying herself. The women’s readiness to label themselves as British, and their disinterest in the Northern Irish label, was somewhat unexpected, as being young, being Protestant as well as a woman, are all separately associated with a greater inclination of identifying contrary to the traditional identities. Furthermore, all of the respondents considered Northern Ireland to be their country, but for the majority, their country of residence was not corresponding to their national identification. Consequently, I argue, that for these young women, religious, political and national identity was no longer intertwined, and traditional labels mask new and progressive attitudes and perceptions.

In response to the questions regarding national identification, two main themes emerged, and that was the logic of their national identification and the situational nature of national identifications.

63 Todd: Symbolic Complexity and Political Division, 86
64 Greenwood & Robins: Citizenship Tests and Education, 511
identification. In addition, the willingness of the young women to identify as Northern Irish will be discussed, in response to the research question.

2.2.1: The logic of national identity

What emerged from the interviews was that the young women’s national identification was natural- it was a matter of fact, as was their views on what they considered to be their country. All six women considered Northern Ireland to be their country, simply because it was their country of residence. There was no controversy tied to this, and all of the women spoke freely and without reservations about their country of residence and national identity. I argue that for these women, their national identity was a logical consequence of matters of facts, and not tied to a wider ideological conviction, nor constitutional preference.

Firstly, the young women did not attach any significant importance to their choice of national identity. This was the case both for the women who identified as British, as well as the two who did not identify as such. For the women identifying as British, their national identification was considered a natural consequence of matters of fact, as they had British passports. To them, there was no difference between national identity and citizenship. When asked why she identifies as British, Sophie stated: “Ehm…It’s just a part of me, because that’s where I was born and stuff”, and “I have a British passport. (Laughs) That’s how I know.” This finding resonates with existing research which has shown that the meaning of British identification for Protestants is linked to the state, and many of the Protestants link their Britishness with passport ownership.65

Furthermore, the respondents expressed no ideological conviction or constitutional preference tied to their identification as British. “You know the arguments about like staying with Britain or choosing to be single country, I wouldn’t feel as strongly as others would. Like, I have a preference, but I wouldn’t like…so I wouldn’t be as strong about it, if you get me. Like I wouldn’t…I wouldn’t make a big a deal as other people would, because like, I’m proud of where I’m from, and I identify here, and I’m close to this place, but…as far as national identity goes, I wouldn’t….It’s not something I’d fight for, put it that way.”, Sarah stated. This view was echoed by the other women. They felt close to their country and cared about their nationality, but only to a certain extent. Their national identity was thus not viewed as very important to these women.

65 Muldoon et al.: Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, 100
Moreover, two of the women did not identify as British, and thus national identity and citizenship was not considered identical to them. Both Emily and Lucy had British passports, but did not identify as British. Lucy did not want to be associated with one or the other label, as she did not understand the need to put labels on people. Emily, on the other hand, would classify as Northern Irish, as it was a matter of fact, and her country of residence. To her, as to the rest of the women who ascribed themselves a national identity, it was a consequence of matter of facts. Consequently, I will argue that for these women, national identity is not tied up to constitutional preference or a strong ideological conviction, but to factual circumstances.

It has been argued, however, that citizenship in Northern Ireland is not a matter of involuntary affiliation based on territory; it is a matter of choice, making citizenship selection an indicator of identity. This is implied by Olivia, who, although stating that her British nationality is a natural fact because of her British passport, stated, when asked if she would ever consider herself Irish: “No, never, so other people would have Irish passport, but I have British”. This indicates that it is not only a matter of fact, and that she could have chosen to have an Irish passport. It has been argued that survey data on citizenship thus probably include not only identity preferences, but also recognition of legal and geopolitical realities, as well as practical priorities. National identification in Northern Ireland is not uncomplicated, and regardless of what these women claim, it seems to give rise to uncertainty, as illustrated by Emily. She made a point out of the fact that her national identity had nothing to do with her personal identity. When asked whether her country or her local area is most important to whom she is as a person, she replied: “Ehm… just… well… nothing really makes me…well, everything that I do makes me me. Like, my country doesn’t like take part in it or nothing. Just. Like, I could be brung up in China, and I would still be the same person. It’s just people who you surround yourself and stuff with. It’s just nothing to do with the country.” This implies that there is a sense of insecurity tied to her nationality.

This finding resonates with Rose’s assertion that national identity in Northern Ireland is much more complex than which passport to travel on. Rose stated that national identity is very important in Northern Ireland, because not only do you have to choose which government to abide, but one much also figure out with which nation you identify with in a multitude of ways. It is not just whether you want to travel on British or Irish passports, but also about personal identity. In a country where everyone has the same nationality, there is

---

66 Coakley: National Identity in Northern Ireland, 580
67 Ibid.
certainty and security in such an identity. In Northern Ireland, choice of national identity will create discord, regardless of whether one conforms to stereotypes or not.\textsuperscript{68}

Nevertheless, despite the women showed some insecurity regarding their nationality, I will argue that these young women attached no deep felt meaning to their national identity. Olivia’s example show that some may be affected and influenced by the stereotypical and traditional views on nationality in Northern Ireland, but that they personally do not held these views. Emily indicated insecurity attached to her identification, but it did not, however, create any discord in her. These findings indicate that the young women are to some extent affected by the traditional attitudes in the country, but that they are distancing themselves from these, consciously or not.

Lastly, it was clear that the women had no reservations about discussing their nationality, and that there was not attached any fear in associating with a different label than the traditional one. The reason for their identifications was just consequences of matters of fact, such as their country or residence, or their passport. The relationship to their national identity and the importance attached to it, was so relaxed, that the women easily changed identities depending on the circumstances. This finding will be further explored in the following section.

\subsection*{2.2.2: Situational national identity}

Findings from the interviews suggest that national identity in Northern Ireland is not as cemented as earlier, as all of the women stated that they would label themselves differently depending on circumstances or situations. Consequently, I will argue that for these women, their identity was situational and pragmatic.

Firstly, the women offered pragmatic reasons for their situational identities, as people tend not to understand where they are from. People from other countries tend to struggle to understand the difference, and relationship, between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. As a result, although none of the respondents identified as Irish, they would not react negatively if someone called them Irish when travelling abroad. Sophie admitted that she would be annoyed if it was obvious that they did it to provoke, but all the women were sympathetic towards other people not being aware of the situation, and they were now accepting of the lack of knowledge. Sarah, on her side, showed a change in attitudes, as she admitted that it had annoyed her earlier if people called her Irish, but she did not mind

\textsuperscript{68} Rose: \textit{Governing Without Consensus: An Irish Perspective}, 204-205
anymore. “It used to annoy me. Not out of like anger, just out of like...ehm...cause like technically I’m Northern Irish. Ehm...so it used to get to me, but I’ve kind of got to the point where I’m like, “Yeah, ok, I’m Irish”, just to like avoid the awkward conversation, trying to explain to them, yeah, this is the whole awkward history of, you know, Northern Ireland, so yeah.” To Sarah, it was more convenient to label herself as Irish if people did not understand immediately where she was from.

Their situational identity was thus down to pragmatic reasons, and not tied to emotions of security or insecurity regarding national identification. Cassidy and Trew, on the other hand, state that Protestants are more liable to change their identification over time, and tend to be less secure of their identity than Catholics. This could offer an explanation to why my respondents where susceptible to adapt their identification in different situations. This is arguably because of the more complex relationship which exists between national and religious identification for Protestants. It has been argued that Protestants feel less secure of their national identification, because it is partly dependent on continued support from Britain, which may not always be relied upon. According to these arguments, clinging to a religious identification may be the more stable option, as it is not dependent on any insecure, external factors. Tonge and Gomez, on the contrary, argue that Protestants feel more secure within the devolved structures which firmly embed the country within the UK, which is possibly also why young Protestants increasingly identify as Northern Irish. My research, however, indicate that neither of these interpretations adequately explain the experience of the young women interviewed. The young women I interviewed adapted their identifications depending on the circumstances due to pragmatic reasons, such as the lack of knowledge of other people, and not because of insecurity. This supports research which argue that circumstances influence the national identification preferences of young Northern Irish people. According to these respondents, shame and pride was often associated with the different identity labels, and thus also what they opted to identify as. This shame connected to national identity was also emphasised by my respondents. The women’s national identities were clearly associated with the negative aspects of the past conflict, regardless of that identification being British or Northern Irish. Sophie stated she would refrain from calling herself Irish when abroad, as it will end up in arguments about her national identity, while Lucy, on the other hand, stated that she was not proud to be Northern Irish because of the legacy of the past. Nevertheless,

69 Cassidy & Trew: Identity Change in Northern Ireland, 535
70 Ibid.
71 Tonge & Gomez: Shared Identity and the End of Conflict? 284
72 Muldoon et al.: Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, 99
although some of the women interviewed expressed a sense of shame over the Troubles as well as the current political situation, this was not the main rationale behind their decision to self-identify as Irish or British when abroad. The respondents attributed the choice to ascribe themselves different labels to other people’s limited understanding of the complex history of Northern Ireland. In addition, being Irish was viewed as more positive than being Northern Irish, as illustrated by Lucy, who felt a sense of pleasure associated with identifying as Irish in certain circumstances. “It was just a novelty over in America, I’d be like “Oh, I’m Irish”, cause like Americans love the Irish. As soon as you say you’re Irish they’re like “Oh, so am I”. So…it’s nice to have that novelty.” To these young women, it did not matter whether they called themselves Irish or British. Although none of the women identified as Irish personally, they did not mind being ascribed that label by others. The situational and opportunistic element to national identity has been noted by Ewart et al., who also report young people choosing to call themselves Irish abroad, as it has more positive connotations than being British or Northern Irish. Furthermore, this indicates that to these women, being Irish is not associated with something negative, and that being Irish and British are not two diametrical opposites. Considering that the conflict finds it origins in the historically diametrically opposed identities of these two communities, any sign of mitigation between these two identities implies hope for the future of community relations in Northern Ireland.

Nonetheless, as some of the girls expressed shame connected to their country of residence, it becomes clear that national identity and the conflict is still very closely linked. This does not, however, have a negative impact on these women. On the contrary, the women did not express any issues with being labelled Irish, indicating that the historically diametrically opposed identity is no longer viewed as such.

Another identity label has reportedly become increasingly popular among young Protestants in Northern Ireland, and in response to one of the research questions, the young women’s perceptions of Northern Irishness will be discussed.

2.2.3 Northern Irishness

As discussed above, young Protestant women inhabit several conflicting traits which may affect their identifications. Based on existing research, it was expected that Northern Irish would be a popular badge of identity for the young women interviewed. Contrary to my hypothesis, however, this was not the case, and I argue that Northern Ireland do not need
another identity marker, as the women were confusing already existing identity labels. The importance is what the labels contain, and if people can identify along the traditional divide while simultaneously have progressive and open minded attitudes, there is no need to introduce yet another badge of identification.

Firstly, the label of Northern Irishness was not a popular, nor an important label, for the respondents. Only one of the women, Emily, identified as Northern Irish. The other five women readily identified along the traditional divide, and did not view Northern Irish as an option. To Emily, being Northern Irish was not an important label to her, and she was reluctant to identify as anything. This confirms existing research, suggesting that although young people might be proud of the Northern Irish identity, it is not an important part of their self-identification. It is especially not important among Protestants, as this alternative identity cannot produce the same level of attachment as their original identification.\(^{74}\) It was only when she was asked to specify whether she would consider herself either Irish, British or Northern Irish, that she stated that she was Northern Irish. The choice to identify as Northern Irish came from the matter of fact that she resides in the country, and was not tied to a greater meaning or to underlying sectarian attitudes, as was discussed in the previous section in relation to national identification.

When Emily was asked what made her proud to be Northern Irish, she stated she felt proud that she was one of those participating in cross community work. She felt proud to be Northern Irish when she was showing that Protestants and Catholics can get along, and that not all of them are the same. She stated that being Northern Irish is associated with being either Protestant or Catholic, and it felt good to show people that not everyone thinks like that. This implies that to Emily, being Northern Irish is associated with something negative. For her, it did not stop her from identifying as such, but it might be a reason for other people to refrain from identifying as Northern Irish, as it is easier to identify as British.

My findings challenge existing research which argues that a common, natural identity, such as the Northern Irish label, is of great importance. According to Tonge and Gomez it is only when identity polarisation in Northern Ireland is eroded, that the country is “likely to develop fully as a political entity in its own right”.\(^{75}\) They further argue that single identification may be required to displace current affiliations marked by suspicion of the other, and the hope is that Northern Irish as an identity marker may be such a superordinate,

\(^{74}\) Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland,387 & 391
\(^{75}\) Tonge & Gomez: Shared Identity and the End of Conflict? 277
or overarching, identity which could possibly incorporate both of the competing group identities.\textsuperscript{76}

The importance of a superordinate identity is questioned by the findings from the young women I interviewed. All of the women express tolerant attitudes towards the other side, regardless of their identification. As previously argued in the thesis, classification of identities for these young women seems to be less tied to constitutional preference, and more to a logical sense, and consequently, the label of Northern Irishness might be superfluous. This is indicated by Olivia’s response, as she would not classify as Northern Irish. As she already identifies as Protestant and British, it would be too confusing for her to have yet another label. This indicates that she does not view the label of Northern Irish as a substitute for her Protestant or British identity, but as a potential third label of identity. This is not necessarily negative, as it has been argued that adopting a superordinate identity does not mean that the people need to move away from their particularistic identities, i.e. Protestant.\textsuperscript{77}

This could indicate that the importance of a neutral label such as Northern Irish is not pressing. As identifying as British did not correlate with strong sectarian values for these women, and do not automatically lead to a negative perception of the other side, it is not necessary with yet another label in Northern Ireland. On the contrary, the young women seemed to be overwhelmed with the number of choices regarding personal and national identification. Despite the young women showing evidence of a much more complex, and less intertwined relationship to different layers of identity, what became apparent, was that some of them had problems manoeuvring in the sea of labels which are present in Northern Ireland: “...some people would, like some Protestants would class themselves as Northern Irish, but...that’s just too confusing for me. I’m already British and Protestant, so I...I just class them two, so.”, was Olivia’s assessment of identification in Northern Ireland. Being British and being Protestant is sufficient, and yet another label would not make the country progress considerably. Furthermore, the women showed signs of conflating the already existing identity labels. This is clearly illustrated by Sophie’s response to what her national identity is. “Ehm...I...I... I... wouldn’t.... I don’t....I don’t know. I’m not a Loyalist. I’m not a Unionist. Ehm...I...I don’t, I don’t have one.” Instead of thinking in terms of nationality and citizenship, her reply mirrors the traditional divide in the country, and labels which usually indicate more extreme views.

\textsuperscript{76} Ibid. 280

\textsuperscript{77} Kelman: The Independence of Israeli and Palestinian National Identities, 586
Nevertheless, it is Olivia who struggled the most to make sense of all the labels available to her, and seemed to have the most complex relationship to her identities. She first readily identified as Protestant, but when asked what the label contained, she struggled to define it. She had a very stereotypical view on what it is to be a Protestant, and she defined herself as the opposite of what being a Catholic is. “To me, again, because I am a Protestant girl, I’ve grew up believing that I’m from Northern Ireland, where as other Catholic girls would, they feel that they’re from Ireland, but no, would believe that I’m from Northern Ireland. So, it’s pretty important to me to be from here.” Albeit being very open minded towards Catholics, having many Catholic friends and a Catholic boyfriend, and showing no sectarian attitudes throughout the interview, she pointed to the importance and the link between national identity and constitutional preference. She was very aware of the fact that she is Protestant, and the stereotypical traits this identity is perceived to have. She identified herself as the opposite of a Catholic, despite claiming that there is no difference. It seemed that the women had not reflected much about their identities, and the content of the labels they ascribed to themselves. Additionally, it was challenging for them to distinguish between the different labels. This confirms existing research which has noted a frequent conflation of religious and national identity in the minds of adolescents in Northern Ireland. 78

Furthermore, research suggests that the constitutional preference of Protestants and Catholics who identify as Northern Irish remains the same as their peers. Albeit more people embrace alternative identifications, it has not changed the main identification: The majority still readily self-categorize as Protestant and Catholic, but they do still, however, believe in the same constitutional solution as their Protestant and Catholic counterparts, meaning that the Northern Irish label is as far as each side can go without crossing the political divide. 79 Consequently, this indicates that the Northern Irish label represents the middle ground in Northern Ireland politics. 80 Arguably, this could entail that the Northern Irish label can have a positive influence on the country. Although the Northern Irish identity still means that they adhere to different views on the constitutional status of the state, it does not mean that finding the middle ground is not a mediating factor. Moreover, in addition to providing a middle ground, it could also be an identification for other groups in society who does not adhere to one of the two communities. This gives young people a choice to identify as something else.

78 Muldoon et al.: Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, 99
79 Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland, 387
80 Ibid. 386
than along the traditional divide. For young people in Northern Ireland it might be important to be able to have an identity option which is not associated with the conflict and the past.

Nevertheless, there were indications that the old divide is still very much present in the labelling. Although the women did not express sectarian attitudes, two of the women were adamant that being British is the same as being a Protestant, and being Irish is being Catholic. Arguably, by adhering to these thoughts, there will always be a divide. Nevertheless, it is not necessarily problematic, as these women’s stereotypical views did not entail negative perceptions of, and attitudes to, the other community. Emily, who was the only respondent identifying as Northern Irish, and who also did not identify as Protestant, constantly used the labels Protestants and Catholics, albeit believing that those labels should not be used on people who are not actively practicing their faith. She did not, however, attach any meaning to these labels. “…them words have been around for so many years, there’s nothing else to call it....And it doesn’t mean anything when I’m saying it, but that’s just what people know it by. It’s easier for me to say... p... it like that.” Labelling people by the traditional identifications seems to easiest manner to classify people, even though these labels do not have any significant content or meaning attached to them. Emily’s statement shows how entrenched the traditional identifications are, even though they are devoid of meaning. It is, nevertheless, a sign of hope for Northern Ireland as a post-conflict society, as the interviews with these women show that identification in Northern Ireland is very complex, and that survey data which show consistent identification with the two main traditions do not have to be interpreted as negative, and neither must the low interest in the label of Northern Irishness. The traditional identification of Britishness can mask progressive and inclusive attitudes, as these women are evidence of, and the most important factor for Northern Ireland is the attitudes and perceptions of their inhabitants, not the labels they ascribe themselves. If people can label themselves British, but still be open minded, the label of Northern Irish is not necessary, especially if it is only contributing to confusion for young people.

In addition to national identity, the young women were questioned on their political attitudes and affiliations, and these findings will now be discussed.
2.3: Political Identity

Religious background has been the most significant factor in deciding political affiliation in Northern Ireland, and in addition, political identity usually aligns with national identity. The political scene is dominated by the two main, oppositional parties, Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), favoured by Protestants, and Sinn Féin, favoured by Catholics. As it is argued that women in Northern Ireland vote for less extreme parties than men, it was expected that the young women interviewed would show a greater interest in smaller parties which do not adhere to the traditional community divide. An element of surprise was expected, as it was unknown how the diversification within Unionism, and uncertainty of the Protestants in Northern Ireland, would affect the women’s view and values regarding the political scene.

A striking find was the women’s willingness to vote for Sinn Féin, the diametrically opposed party to the DUP, and consequently they not only challenged, but transcended, the community divide politically. Overall, none of the women were remotely interested in political issues. The women’s disinterest in politics cannot necessarily be attributed to Northern Ireland and its specific issues, as young people’s lack of involvement in formal politics is apparent also in the rest of the UK. Nevertheless, it is a matter of fact that young people in Northern Ireland face yet another challenge, as their political scene is complicated by the communal divide. This was evident from the interviews, which found that the women perceived politics in Northern Ireland to be primarily focused on the divide, at the expense of finding adequate solutions to bread-and-butter issues.

Overall, the young women’s knowledge of the political scene was limited. All of them were familiar with DUP and Sinn Fein, and it was these two parties that first came to mind when the respondents were asked about politics. Some of the women also demonstrated knowledge about smaller parties, such as Alliance and the Green Party, but generally they struggled to mention alternatives to the two main parties. It became clear from the interviews that the women have no faith in their politicians, as illustrated by Lucy. “...they’ve been trying since Maggie Thatcher was in government, and that hasn’t gone well up until that point, so. I think they can try as hard as they want, but it all comes down to individuals, and there are a lot of awful people that will never see eye to eye. Just because they’re stubborn, and...I don’t know why they think...if you don’t have their opinions or their beliefs, you’re...

---

81 Rose: Governing Without Consensus, 208; McAuley: Peace and progress? 548
82 Bell: Acts of Union, 179
83 Henn & Foard: Young People, Political Participation and Trust in Britain, 2
This negative view on politics and politicians was persistent throughout all the interviews, and the women believed politicians contributed to upholding the divide. As the women have Catholic friends, they cannot support these parties. I argue that because of the women’s disinterest in upholding the divide, socio-economic issues have become more important. In addition, I further argue that because of this, traditional voting seems to on the way out, as not only did these women suggest that they would not vote for stereotypical parties, they also indicated that they would transcend the divide and move beyond traditional voting. These two main themes will now be further explored: Socio-economic issues seemingly undermining the old divide, and that traditional voting seems to be on the way out.

2.3.1: Socio-economic issues undermine the old divide

It was clear from the interviews that the six women viewed politics and politicians as negative. According to the respondents, the politicians are only interested in votes, money and to uphold the divide. Olivia stated that “…I think it’s always the same thing, it’s for money, and publicity. Like, they don’t actually wanna help the people in their communities or their youth, like they don’t care. They just want the money and stuff. So I don’t really take any interest in that…” As a result, the politicians are, according to my respondents, unable of helping where it is needed, and the people in the local communities suffer under the incapability of the politicians to deal adequately with issues in the local communities. I will argue that because of the distrust in politicians, for these women, socio-economic issues are now undermining the old divide.

There was a clear perception among the young women that the politicians are contributing to upholding the divide, and that they are sectarian. As illustrated by Alice “…it’s more seen as Protestant and Catholic, it’s not “what can we do for the people”, it’s Protestant and Catholic. That’s why I don’t like the… ‘cause I wouldn’t be.. so much.. like.. “I’m a Protestant, they’re Catholic, I don’t like them”. like.. they’re my… I have loads of friends who are Catholics, and that would be because of like.. being part of this youth club. So…” Alice attributed her disinterest in politics to the politicians’ focus on the divide. As she has many friends who are Catholics, she cannot support the DUP. This view was shared by all the women interviewed, and Sarah stated that the people in power seem to be influenced by the past, and this in turn influence the running of government. As the young women have friends across the divide, they cannot support parties which do not represent their views. None of the young women are interested in the communal divide and the distinction between
Catholics and Protestants, but the women were of the opinion that that is all the politicians care about. As a result, the politicians are not dealing with the problems that matter to the young women in their daily life in the local communities, and this leaves them disillusioned with the political situation. To some of the women, the two main parties were associated with upholding the divide, and Lucy was the most vocal opposition: “...if you voted DUP, it’s like you hate Catholics. If you voted Sinn Fein, it’s like, you’re in the IRA. Like...” The women’s criticism of the politicians and politics in Northern Ireland, has been noted as a wider trend among young people in Northern Ireland. As Ewart et al. note, politicians are viewed a negative role models with sectarian motives, and are thus restricted in their ability to resolve problems. In addition, an added unawareness of the issues of young people has been noted.

As a result of their disinterest in the communal divide, other issues were more important in guiding the women’s vote, such as the party’s values, and whether these reflected their personal values. Alice stated that DUP was not an option to her, as she did not support their pro-life position. In addition, religion was not an indicator of political affiliation for these women. The respondents stated that if they were to vote, they would not vote for a party because of its religious links. Importantly, only one of the women, Sarah, identified as a religious and practising Protestant. She stated that she will not vote for a party just because it is Protestant, but because they have good values and ideas. She will vote for what is good for the country, and not based on her religion. Religion and politics should not be mixed in her eyes, and this view was echoed by the other women interviewed. Olivia stated that “I think it’s stupid”, when asked how she feels about people voting after religious affiliation.

As a result, the women would not vote for the two main parties, as these parties do not focus on the issues that mattered to them. Olivia states that she will vote for Alliance in the upcoming elections, as they will help the communities get along. She will not vote for DUP or Sinn Féin as they do not help the country move on. Emily was also of the opinion that the politicians neglected the real problems in society, and pointed to how excessive focus on the divide removed funding from important matters which affected the community. “...there was like roads and hospitals being closed, and they...like they could have put it (funding) into hospitals, or...health services, or like fixed the roads.”

The young women believed that Northern Ireland would not move on from the past unless the two main parties were put out of office, as Olivia stated: “...the country is never

---

84 Magill & Hamber: “If They Don’t Start Listening to Us, the Future is Going to Look the Same as the Past”: 517; Sinclair et al.: The Views of Young People in Northern Ireland on Anti-Sectarianism, 161; Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 7
85 Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 18
going to be able to move on, if they’re (DUP and Sinn Féin) just going to constantly hate each other. So, I don’t understand why people continue to vote for them, if like they’re just gonna keep doing the same things over and over again”.

As a result of the women’s opposition to parties which uphold the divide and the increased importance of socio-economic issues, the women would consider voting for different parties than the Protestant alternative. As a result, for these women, traditional voting seems to be on the way out, and this will be further explored in the following section.

2.3.2: Traditional voting in decline?

A striking find from the interviews was that the young women did not adhere to the stereotypical parties associated with a Protestant identity, and based on the findings from the interviews, I argue that for the young women interviewed, traditional voting is declining.

The respondents’ political affiliations were more radical than expected. Not only did they consider voting for a more moderate party than DUP, four of the young women stated that they would consider voting for Sinn Fein in the upcoming elections based on the party’s practical policies and how they respond to local issues. Alice talked warmly about Sinn Fein, as they were deemed by her to be more sensitive of her community’s problems. A family in her neighbourhood will always go to Sinn Fein for help, as “Sinn Fein sort their problems quicker than what the DUP ever have. They don’t vote for the DUP, they vote for Sinn Fein”. Sarah, on her side, believed that Sinn Fein is becoming more popular among her friends, as students tend to be more left wing, and Sinn Fein is the more left wing alternative. This indicates a change in society at large, as Sarah notes an increase in Sinn Féin voters among her friend group, while older families in Alice’s staunchly Protestant area vote for them as well. In addition to Sinn Féin, Alliance and Green Party were mentioned as alternatives. Lucy deemed the Greens as a safer option, as they do not represent either side, indicating that politics are to her viewed as unsafe and as a source for trouble.

Another striking find was that not only did the majority of the respondents consider voting for Sinn Fein, they also felt more negatively towards the DUP than any other party. Some of the women did express dislike towards Sinn Féin, but they found the DUP to be a worse alternative than Sinn Féin. Three of the girls expressed that they would not vote for DUP, because they were perpetuating conflict, and because of their values, as illustrated by Alice: “I will not vote for them (DUP) just because they are Protestants. And I don’t vote for
them, cause I don’t agree with the things they do”. Alice mentioned issues such as abortion and their view on same-sex marriage as reasons for not voting for DUP.

My results challenge existing research which argues that that voting reflects group loyalty and group identity, and that religious background is still one of the most significant factors in deciding political opinion and affiliation in Northern Ireland. As opposed to McAuley’s findings, religious background did not influence the political opinions of the girls, and two of the girls explicitly expressed that religion and politics should not mix. Furthermore, it has been argued that new generations coming of age will reproduce long established voting patterns, as youth admitted to a strengthening of identity in times of crisis. As elections is a time to show group identity, it can be considered a time of crisis, and therefore, a change in personal perceptions often does not translate into voting results. In contrast, what emerged from the interviews is that traditional voting is not in their interest, but that their relationship to voting and politics is nevertheless complex.

The move away from traditional voting patterns is also reflected in the wider society, as indicated by the results from the snap-election which was held in March this year. It was a watershed moment for Northern Ireland, as the Unionists lost their majority in the Northern Assembly for the first time in its history, and Sinn Féin is now only one seat from being the largest party in Stormont. However, whether this is a sign of a change in Northern Ireland can be discussed. As Fionola Meredith argues, the results are the same as every prior election: DUP is the largest party and Sinn Fein the second largest, with none of the smaller, moderate or cross community parties gaining considerable number of votes. I would argue, however, that although the same parties remain in power, the DUP has lost seats consecutively over the last ten years, and Sinn Féin has increased their share, and this is a shift one cannot dismiss as insignificant. This may indicate that it was not only among the young women interviewed that other issues than the sectarian divide is becoming important. Not only does Sinn Fein oppose Brexit and abortion, but they also support same sex marriage, reasons that were given by the women for not voting DUP. As Nicholas Whyte points out, the voters in general seems more inclined to cross the divide.

Nevertheless, regardless of the positive attitudes of the respondents there are some challenges to the less traditional voting of these young women. All of the respondents indicated that their parents held different, and sometimes influential, views on politics.

---

86 McAuley: Peace and progress? 548
87 McAuley: Peace and progress? 548
88 Meredith: Sectarianism was Big Winner in Northern Ireland Election, and That’s Nothing to Celebrate
89 Whyte: NI Assembly: Imminent Prospect of Brexit Causes Shift in Attitudes
Although they did not express sectarian values, they are disinterested in politics, and are thus easily influenced by their parents’ voting preferences. Apart from Lucy, all the women had close family members who have urged them to vote for the DUP. Emily stated that she would like to vote for Sinn Féin, as she agrees with their politics, and view them as a positive influence in the local community. However, she quickly concluded that she could not vote for them as her mother will not let her. Sarah on her side, admitted that “...I would be quite influenced by family members when it comes to voting, I would say.” Even Lucy admitted to being affected by her parents in this regard, as she would vote for the Green party, as her mother does. This confirms existing research which argues that family background is often influential in shaping young people’s political views, and that young people struggle to balance the expectations from family and community to uphold their political view and community identity, and the youth’s own aspirations for a more normal future.\(^90\) McGrellis argue that there is a sense of obligation that is linked to family, community and political values and ideals, and these are communicated between generations.\(^91\) This is confirmed by studies that have found that young people are dependent on their parents for political knowledge, and that parents’ attitudes continue to predict the child’s orientation after childhood.\(^92\) Political identities and political structures are reinforced by the transmission of a set of values from generation to generation.\(^93\) However, for many, these processes of socialization are restricted almost exclusively to a reproduction of the values of one’s own respective political community.\(^94\)

It is clear from the interviews that the women did not want to vote in the traditional way, but that that they feel the presence of sectarian values in their family. These women, however, do not let their parents dictate what to think or mean. Alice would not let her parents dictate her opinions nor who she could be friends with. In addition, she had many Catholic friends, and it would be completely wrong for her to vote for someone who would want to uphold the divisions between the two groups.

The women thus demonstrated the ability to form their own opinions on issue they perceived as important, although they admitted to being somewhat influenced by their parents. Nevertheless, the women interviewed represent an interesting development in

---

\(^90\) McGrellis: *Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland*, 7
\(^91\) Ibid. 8
\(^92\) Whyte & Schernbrucker: *Young People and Political Involvement in Northern Ireland*, p. 604
\(^93\) McAuley.: *Peace and Progress?* 542
\(^94\) Ibid. 543
Northern Ireland, as they would consider voting for the diametrical opposite alternative than their communal identity would entail.

The women have thus shown new and progressive perceptions and attitudes regarding their national and political identifications. The last topic that will be discussed, is how they relate to their religious identity.

2.4. Religious identity

Religion has been a vital part of the Northern Ireland society and to the conflict. Rose argued that Northern Ireland is probably the most religious society in the Western world, except for the Republic of Ireland. In Northern Ireland, contrary positions tend to align with religious background, and there is arguably an enduring link between religion and national identity. Except for Sarah, who is a practicing Protestant, the young women had a very limited understanding of Protestantism as a religion. It was clear that those identifying as Protestant, merely viewed it as a communal identity, and not religious, and what they connected with being Protestant was not cultural nor theological. Interestingly, Emily added another distinction. She argued that Catholics were more loyal to their religion than Protestants. She claimed that people in Protestant communities were Loyalists, and were thus loyal to the bands and the 12th of July, and the origins of the celebration, and not to a religious idea. Sarah, on her side, has never considered Protestantism to be a culture, and does not consider the 12th of July to be a part of her religious practice. She thought that this celebration was more associated with Loyalism.

Moreover, the young women seemed to draw a line between being religious and having negative attitudes towards the other group. When Sophie is asked if religion is important to her, she replies: “No. I wouldn’t say so. Like I get along with everyone. Like I don’t…well if I was having an argument, I would probably like…bring probably religion into it or something, probably…but…no like, it doesn’t mean nothing to me.” Lucy, on her side, state that the most important identification to her was religion, or more precisely: “...the fact that I don’t have a religion.”, and she further elaborates her view on religion: “... like, there’s one thing that I hate, it’s whenever there’s people that are very, very staunchly religious. Ehm, either Catholic or Protestant. And, they like shove their beliefs down your

---

95 Rose: Governing Without Consensus, 264, 427
96 McAuley: Peace and Progress? 548
throat.” Lucy’s comments indicate that even for those who do not identify as religious, religion still occupies an important and influential part of her everyday life.

Three themes will be discussed in relation to religious identity amongst the research subjects. In accordance with the research questions, the women discussed what the label of Protestantism meant to them. Secondly, indications on whether national and religious identity is interchangeable to these young women were examined. In addition, one theme emerged during the interviews, and that was the low levels of identification with Protestantism.

2.4.1: The contents of the label Protestantism

As mentioned, Protestantism as an identity is multifaceted and complex. This was evident in my research, as even among the six women I interviewed, there was great variation in what they associated with and attached to a Protestant identity. Notably, the four women who identified as Protestant, were the same who identified as British. The two women who did not want to label themselves, did not want to do so in relation to neither national nor religious identity. The women attached different meaning to Protestantism, and I will argue that being a Protestant is a complex concept, and that it cannot be defined by one single element, belief or narrative, but that these women define their own versions of Protestantism by combining those elements which matter to them. To some of the respondents, however, this seemed to give rise to some confusion, as the number of options available seemed to make them conflate the different identifications.

It became clear from the interviews that identification in Northern Ireland is very complex, especially in relation to the label Protestant. Lucy was not baptised, and as she viewed Protestantism as a religion, she did not consider herself Protestant. However, she was aware of these labels regardless of the importance people attach to them. “...if people say “Are you Protestant or Catholic”, I would say “neither”, but technically, I grew up in a Protestant area...Just because, went to a Protestant high school...” Although she did not self-identify as a Protestant, nor felt any connection to this identification, she was aware that other people could label her a Protestant due to her upbringing. She thought that years ago Protestantism was a religious label, but now it was a way for people to start arguments.

Three of my respondents were not religious, yet viewed their Protestant identity as a natural part of who they were. Their version of Protestantism was an important and natural part of their local community and their family. As illustrated by Olivia: “So yeah, I think Protestant is more closer to home, rather than British”, while Sophie stated that being
Protestant to her was not religious, but “More like who my family and stuff is”. For these women, a Protestant identity was important to them, as it was a communal identification, which offered a sense of belonging. This confirms research by Todd et. al which shows that Protestantism is to some people a more immediate identification, rooted in the family, locality and daily and weekly practices. Their version of Protestantism is thus not linked to a broader ideological conviction, but to the family and to the local community, and it matters to them socially.

Notably, the three women who viewed their Protestant identity as a natural part of who they are, their community and their family, all grew up in the Shankill area, the most notorious Protestant area in Belfast. This could indicate that these enclaved areas still reproduce strong feelings of Protestantism, albeit one which may, in the case of a younger generation, not translate into negative attitudes towards Catholics. However, Emily, who was reluctant to identify as anything, also grew up in the Shankill, but do not feel strongly about Protestantism, not even as a communal identity. She stated that she was not a Protestant as that is a religious label, and she was not religious. She claimed that her reluctance to identify as a Protestant was not an active choice, but it did seem to be, if only subconsciously. Emily’s reluctance to identify appeared to be an attempt to distance herself from the values and attitudes which is normally associated with a Protestant identity. To her, Protestantism seemed to have negative connotations, as others would look at it as being Unionist or Loyalist, or resenting Catholics, but to her it meant nothing. It seemed that Emily’s perception of what Protestantism is, did not correlate with her personal beliefs, and as a result she could not identify as such.

It is clear that the range of identities and their connotations make identification difficult in Northern Ireland, and existing research has found frequent conflation of religious and national identity in the minds of adolescents. Olivia was the clearest example of this. At the beginning of the interview, Olivia links religious and national identity. “…because I am a Protestant girl, I’ve grew up believing that I’m from Northern Ireland...” She draws further links between the 12th of July, being a Protestant and being British.” I grew up as a Protestant and people’s always been told Protestants celebrate 12th of July, so I just grew up to love it…” and “…cause I’m British I enjoy it loads...” Olivia also points to how her grandmother is a strong Protestant, as she loves the band, she loves British stuff “…everything Protestant”. It was clear that she drew a link between 12th of July, the

97 Todd et al.: Does Being Protestant matter?. 88
98 Muldoon et al.: Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, 99
marching bands, being British and being Protestant, and it became clear that Olivia’s perception of what being a Protestant is, was very stereotypical. Nevertheless, as the interview progressed, Olivia realised the complexity of her identity choices, and she found it hard to explain why she identified as a Protestant. She stated she has been brought up and told she is a Protestant, and what to believe in, but she had never thought about it herself. She came to the realisation that apart from the marching bands and the 12th of July, she does not know what being a Protestant contains. She realised that being Protestant is a religious affiliation, and she is not religious, so she would be an atheist. However, she would still identify as a Protestant, because that is what she has grown up as, and to her that particular identification has nothing to do with religion. Protestantism was to her related to the community, and she stated that she can choose not to be a Protestant if she wants to. She also claimed that she did not attach much importance to it, as if someone was to tell her that she was no longer a Protestant, she would not care.

What becomes clear from the interviews, is that Protestantism as an identity marker is diversifying, and that different interpretations of what being a Protestant exist. Of the four women who self-identified as a Protestant, only one, Sarah, was religious. Sarah did not think about Protestantism as a culture, and did not associate the 12th of July or other typically British events with being a Protestant. To her, it was only a religious affiliation. The others viewed Protestantism as a communal identity, rooted in the family and local community. This confirms existing research which argues that the majority of people in Northern Ireland will identify as either Catholic or Protestant, regardless of whether or not they attend church. Protestantism is thus not simply only a religious belief or a communal identity, nor a personal identity, it can be all three separately and combined. Some of the young women find this confusing, especially since identity in Northern Ireland is also associated with the conflict. The sometimes confused and unclear associations of identity for these women indicate that religious and national identity could be interchangeable. This was also one of the research questions, and this topic will be discussed in the following section.

2.4.2: Interchangeability of national and religious identity

Whether national and religious identity is interchangeable is important because it indicates whether Northern Ireland is progressing or not. In Northern Ireland, constitutional preference, national, religious and political identities usually overlap, and as a result, such reinforcing

---

99 McKeown: Perceptions of a Superordinate Identity in Northern Ireland, 218
cleavages tend to heighten conflict and make it more divisive. If these cleavages cease to overlap, this could possibly lead to a reduction in tension between the communities, as instead of reinforcing the community divide, this could mitigate it. Consequently, if young people move away from the traditional identifications, the conflict could arguably become less intractable. Based on the findings from my interviews, I argue that to my respondents, national and religious identities are not interchangeable. This is for two reasons.

Firstly, the majority of the respondents did not view religious and national identity as synonymous. For them, it was not necessarily a link between being a Protestant and being British. Moreover, Sarah was the only respondent who was a practicing Protestant, and she attended church regularly. She attached great significance to her Protestant identity, as it mattered to her personally. Being British was not very important; it was simply a matter of fact and her country of residence. She did not think that there is a link between being British and being Protestant, and she did not understand why people link religion to politics. “I think it’s stupid, for lack of a better word”. This means that Sarah linked a British identity to the state, and to politics, while religion was personalised and privatised. Sarah’s case is an example of what Claire Mitchell labels privatising of Protestantism. Mitchell argues that Protestantism has been transformed into a private religious identity for many, and that a strong religious identity does not make conflict inevitable. Despite Sarah’s strong personal beliefs, she is open minded and accepting of other faiths and the Catholic community. Moreover, albeit she was indeed British and a Protestant, she did not view the two identities as interchangeable: “…like, people just kind of assume that the two are interchangeable, that the two are linked. But then you do, like, you just…it’s because people don’t hear about, like, there are people who are like Protestant, but...could be Republican or Catholic…”

Secondly, only two of the young women thought religion and nationality is interchangeable. Olivia and Sophie, who both grew up in the Shankill area, stated that being British and Protestant is the same, as is being Catholic and Irish. As illustrated by Olivia: “So, Catholic people class themselves as Irish and Protestant people class themselves as British. And there’s no swapping, like you don’t swap.” As only two of my respondents viewed the labels as overlapping, this challenges existing research by Muldoon et al., who found that interchangeability of national and religious identity was a pervasive theme.

---

100 Mitchell, C.: Protestant Identification and Political Change in Northern Ireland, 626
101 Ibid. 626-627
102 Muldoon et al.: Religious and National Identity after the Belfast Good Friday Agreement, 98
As accounted for above, Olivia draws links between being British and enjoying things that are traditionally Protestant activities. This is to her natural, because as a British person, you are always Protestant. Nevertheless, even though Olivia states that being Protestant and being British is the same, it does not automatically follow that religion and nationality is interchangeable. Olivia did not believe that being a Protestant is something religious. She is not practicing the religion, and considered herself an atheist. As has been discussed above, she is uncertain of what the label of Protestantism contains. This view was shared by Sophie, who also viewed being British and Protestant as the same. She did not think of being Protestant as a religious affiliation, and would like for everyone to be atheist. “We would all be atheist to me”, as Sophie stated when talking about the future of Northern Ireland. I will therefore argue that religion and national identity is not interchangeable for these women, as to these two women Protestantism is a communal identity, not a religious one. This shows the importance of looking beyond the immediate identifications which mask more nuanced perspectives on identification in Northern Ireland. On the surface, the attitudes of Sophie and Olivia might seem like a continuation of traditional and stereotypical views on identification in Northern Ireland, but it is not tied to any negative views on Catholics.

Nevertheless, this topic proved to be challenging for the women. The complexity and multifaceted nature of identity in Northern Ireland is one of the most striking themes throughout this chapter, and it comes to the fore in every aspect of identification for these young women. Although the other women did not explicitly address the issue of interconnectedness of religious and national identity, they nevertheless showed signs of confusion related to their national and religious identities, as accounted for in the previous section. They were not of the opinion that Protestantism and Britishness is interchangeable, but they often struggled to ascribe meaning to their national identity, which was instead often imbued with religious meaning. When asked to describe their identification or their communal belonging, they often commented on religious aspects of their identity or local community. This is illustrated by Sophie’s response to what her national identity is: “Ehm...I...I...I...wouldn’t.... I don’t....I don’t know. I’m not a loyalist. I’m not a Unionist. Ehm...I...I don’t, I don’t have one.” Actively defining herself was challenging, and she showed insecurity, as she was more aware of what she was not, than what she was. Nevertheless, when asked more precisely whether she considered herself British, Irish or Northern Irish, she quickly responded British, and no doubt was attached to that reply. Consequently, there was no insecurity tied to her identity as British, but she struggled to manoeuvre among the different local manifestations of Protestantism.
The majority of the young women interviewed did not view national and religious identification as interchangeable. The two women who believed they were interconnected, were firm in their beliefs, and stated that this was a matter of fact. It did emerge, however, that their sense of Protestantism was not religious, and as a result, to them national and religious identification was not truly interchangeable; it was the communal identification of Protestantism and Britishness which to these women were viewed as the same. As a result, for these women national and religious identification is not interchangeable.

2.4.3: Low levels of identification with Protestantism

It was expected that the young women would not identify as strongly with the traditional identities, in accordance with existing research which has found that Protestants are insecure about their own identity, and that young women tend to adapt less traditional identifications. Nevertheless, their lack of strength of identification with Protestantism was unexpected. As mentioned above, those who identified as Protestant did not attach any importance to the label, and did not feel strongly about it. Protestantism was not something that was tied to any sectarian views or attitudes, and they did not attach importance to the label beyond the importance it had to a communal belonging. Olivia was the only woman who associated pride in being British and the 12th of July. She called the 12th a British festival, drawing the line between being Protestant and being British. She further stated that she will naturally enjoy the celebrations on the 12th of July, as she is British. However, after thinking about it, she concluded that it is the atmosphere that she loved about it, and the celebration in itself. Her love of the 12th was mainly as a tradition, and this was a view echoed by Emily, Alice and Sophie. Lucy, on the other hand, did not even know what the 12th is celebrating, despite having grown up as a Protestant. The women felt surprisingly little attachment to the traditional Protestant activities. Existing research has indicated that Protestants feel more strongly about their community than their Catholic counterparts, so the lack of enthusiasm tied to their identity was somewhat unanticipated. A few explanations can be suggested.

Firstly, as has been discussed, the women are not aware of what it means to be a Protestant. The women attached different meanings to label, and there is not one single Protestant identity, narrative or ideology they all feel connected to, and which can unite them. They do not feel a political sense of Protestantism due to the politicians’ inability to run government efficiently; none of them believe strongly in any communal, ideological mind-set attached to this identification, and only one of the women are religious. As a result, being a
Protestant can take many shapes, and for these women, there does not seem to exist one version which can incorporate all these different versions. As has been argued elsewhere, there is little common agreement as to what being British or Protestant means in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{103} Furthermore, as they do not agree with, or adhere to, the traditional version of Protestantism which is communicated by politicians or the overarching ideological conviction of resenting Catholics, this leads to them facilitating their own version of Protestantism.

Secondly, the low levels of identification with Protestantism could be attributed to how these women were doing Protestant without being Protestant, as coined by Todd et al.\textsuperscript{104} In this respect, three of the women could be said to be doing Protestant socio-culturally, but not being Protestant religiously. These women have grown up in a predominantly Protestant area, attended Protestant schools, and have engaged in some of the typical Protestant cultural traditions, and do enjoy these. They do not, however, attend church regularly, they do not view it as a collective category which they adhere to, nor attach any importance to the distinction between Catholics and Protestants. These women also put great value on the local community and speak of a close knitted community where everybody takes care of each other. This sense of community, however, was not tied to a notion of Protestantism as an ideological conviction, but to the local community they grew up in, which happened to be Protestant. Emily makes a point out of the fact that regardless of whether it had been a Catholic or Jewish neighbourhood, she would have felt a sense of belonging to it, just because it was where she had grown up. Thus, being a Protestant for these women was a communal identification – being Protestant matters because it involves belonging, community and ancestry. Sarah, on the other hand, could be said to be doing Protestant religiously, but not being Protestant socio-culturally. She views Protestantism as a religious faith and attends church regularly, but does not engage in traditional and cultural Protestant activities, nor attach any importance to these. Consequently, as has been argued previously in the thesis, there now exists different manners to be a Protestant, and this could be an explanation to why there is difficult to find one overarching Protestant identity to adhere to.

Thirdly, a related explanation might be found regarding the nature of the Protestant identity itself. Bell argued that Protestantism is not a form of nationalism. Protestant identity is first and foremost a negation of what being Irish, or Catholic, is. Protestants are more

\textsuperscript{103} McAuley & Tonge.: \textit{Britishness (and Irishness) in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement}, 269

\textsuperscript{104} Todd et al.: Does Being Protestant matter? 90
aware of what they are not, than what they are. Furthermore, their sense of positive identity is dependent on a symbolic form of expression, usually communicated through the marching season and the 12th of July. If these events become less important, this could indicate a decrease in importance attached to the Protestant identity, or that there are other manners in which this identity receives importance. The women did not attach any significant importance to the 12th of July culturally or ideologically, and Olivia stated that the event was becoming smaller: “The Protestant community culture would be the 12th of July and the 11th and stuff, it’s really getting smaller and smaller by the year, so it used to be this whole big, big... like two day parade type of thing.” The 12th was not important to these women, and this could serve as an explanation to why they did not attach an importance to the label of Protestantism. Moreover, the women have all grown up in a post-conflict society, with a much lower level of violence than their predecessors. Different factors have made relations to Catholics better – numerous political and grass-root initiatives have been made to reduce intercommunity strife. The young women have grown up with cross community work, have gotten to know Catholics, and may have realised that there are not many differences between Catholics and Protestants. When this sense of difference is eradicated in young people’s minds, the basic crux of the Protestant identification is arguably also slowly being torn apart. If a Protestant identity is first and foremost a negation of everything Irish, a more positive attitude towards Catholics and the Irish culture, will not make the distinction of being Protestant in the traditional manner necessary. The women did not mind being labelled Irish, and consequently, they do not view Irishness as something negative. Arguably, following Bell’s arguments, two of the basic tenets of a Protestant identity, i.e. the symbolic expressions of culture and the negation of Irishness, has lost their significance to these young women, and as a result, this could explain why they do not identify as strongly with the Protestantism.

The young women’s low levels of identification with Protestantism can thus arguably be attributed to the diversification within the identification, which has evolved to such an extent that it cannot offer an overarching identification which can incorporate all the different versions of Protestantism available. Moreover, the women do not agree with the core tenets of traditional Protestantism, such as resenting Catholics or the politics, and consequently, they must facilitate their own version. Furthermore, some of the respondents had a Protestant

---

105 Moxon-Browne: National Identity in Northern Ireland,
106 Bell: Acts of Union, 165
107 A more thorough discussion of the improved relations will be provided in the following chapter
communal identification, and not a religious one, and vice versa, further underlying the diversification which is happening, and which arguably undermines an overarching identification. Additionally, following Bell’s arguments, the diminution in importance of the 12th of July, and the women’s positive attitudes towards Catholics, can arguably have removed two of the basic cruxes of Protestantism, and could be an explanation for its lack of importance.

Summary

Overall, the women showed evidence of still being affected by the traditional community divide, but that they were moving away from it. National identification for these women were stereotypical on the surface, but they mask progressive and open minded attitudes. Even though the majority readily identified as British, they did not automatically harbour negative attitudes towards Catholics. Their national identification was a result of matters of fact, and was not tied to constitutional preference. Their identification was prone to change depending on circumstances, and they did not mind being called Irish when abroad. This indicate that being Irish is not associated with anything negative. This is important, considering that the conflict in Northern Ireland is associated with the diametrically opposed views and needs of the two identities of Catholic and Protestant, and Irish and British, respectively. Furthermore, I argued that a Northern Irish identity is superfluous. The women seemed to confuse the already exiting identity labels, and arguably, they do not need yet another identity label among those already existing. The importance is the contents of the labels, and as the women showed progressive and open minded attitudes despite mostly identifying along the traditional divide, it is insignificant what the name of the label is: It is the attitudes towards the other community which is of importance.

A striking find in relation to political identity, was the women’s reluctance to vote for traditional Protestant parties. Even more striking, was their propensity to vote for Sinn Féin, the diametrically opposed party to the DUP, and I argued that the importance of socio-economic issues took precedence over politics focused on opposing the other community, and as a result, that traditional voting may be in decline.

Regarding religious identification, it was notable how the women attached very little importance to heir Protestant identity, and they expressed confusion as to what this identity label contained. To most of the women it was communal, while it was only one woman who attached any religious belief to it, but some of them showed evidence of confusing religious,
communal and national identity. Moreover, their low identification with Protestantism can be due to a diversification which has occurred, where there is no longer one, single overarching Protestant identity which they can all relate to. Furthermore, the women do not attach importance nor significance to two of the core tenets of traditional Protestant identity, i.e. the negation of Irishness and the public display of cultural belonging. Consequently, this could be an explanation as to why they do not identify strongly with Protestantism.
Community relations

Nineteen years after the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland remains deeply divided and segregated. It has been argued that the segregation in Northern Ireland is both a cause and a result of the conflict, rather than the cause. Nevertheless, it plays an important role in sustaining the conflict by nurturing ignorance and suspicion, by maintaining prejudice and negative stereotypes, as well as reinforcing group boundaries. As a result, increasing cross-community contact and improving community relations are vital in keeping the peace process in Northern Ireland going.

This chapter explores whether identity preferences influence attitudes to community relations. Existing research finds correlation between strength of religious and national identity, and support of segregation in education, workplaces and housing. In addition, the type of national identity is also influential: Studies have found that those identifying as Northern Irish are often more tolerant towards people of other religions, they attend integrated schools, and they have more contact with other religious groups.

As shown in the previous chapter, the majority of the women interviewed categorised as Protestants, but the contents of these identifications were varied; the majority was communal and family-oriented, while the last woman was religious. Two of the women were not comfortable being labelled at all. As a result, one would expect these two women to be more open-minded in relation to community matters, while the other four to be less open. To investigate their attitudes towards the Catholic community, the women were thus asked questions aiming to find out whether those who adhered to a different identification than the binary categories, had a more positive view on community relations.

In accordance with the research questions, this chapter accounts for the young women’s experience of segregation in everyday life, and how it affects them. I argue that the women experience considerable segregation in their everyday lives, but as boundary maintenance has become natural, it does not affect them considerably, and it does not mask sectarian attitudes for these women. In addition, I argue that, based on the findings from the interviews, there are three important factors which contribute to the upholding the community divide, and those are young males, paramilitaries and transgenerational values. Regardless of

---

108 Gallagher & Cairns: National Identity and In-Group/Out-Group Attitudes, 59
109 Devine & Schubotz: Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 291
these negative findings, I further argue that there are evidences of a change for the better in Northern Irish society, and for these women, it is because of participation in cross community groups. Lastly, the topic of Protestant alienation is discussed, as it was assumed that these young women might experience a feeling of alienation in post-accord Northern Ireland. I argue that the women do not experience alienation culturally, but they do so politically. Before I present the findings from the interviews, this chapter provides a brief account of segregation in Northern Ireland, to give an insight into the environment that the young women interviewed are growing up in.

The violence at the start of the Troubles deepened the divisions among Catholics and Protestants. In the face of external threat, the internal safety became even more important. Residential segregation increased significantly, as intimidation and threats resulted in huge population movements, especially during the summers of 1969 and 1971, which was marked by riots, as it was considered safer to live with people from their own community. The resulting segregation affects many levels of society, including marital and personal segregation, educational segregation, and segregation in housing as well as in work, leisure and sport. There is no indication that residential segregation has diminished in peace times, and a recent report shows that 94% of social housing in Belfast is segregated. The Belfast Interface Project has noted an incremental rise in peace walls in Belfast, from 88 to 99, between 2008 and 2011. When it comes to schooling, the Northern Ireland Human Right’s Commission’s report for 2016 finds that no new integrated schools have been established since 2008, and as a result 93% of students are educated in a segregated school. The results from the Young Life and Times Surveys the last decade, indicate that young people are less supportive of integrated housing, workplaces and education, than their parents and grandparents’ generations. These findings indicate that there are factors which negatively influence young people in Northern Ireland, despite them having no personal experience of the Troubles.

As accounted for in the previous chapter, identity expression is an important aspect of Northern Irish culture. This is illustrated through the importance of visual territorial symbols,

\[\text{111 Schmid et al.: The Effects of Living in Segregated vs. Mixed Areas in Northern Ireland, 60; Whyte: Young Citizens in Changing Times, 605}\]
\[\text{112 Schmid et al.: The Effects of Living in Segregated vs. Mixed Areas in Northern Ireland, 59-60}\]
\[\text{113 Morris.: Over 90% of Social Housing in NI Still Segregated}\]
\[\text{114 Browne & Dwyer: Navigating Risk, 798}\]
\[\text{115 The 2016 Annual Statement: Human Rights in Northern Ireland, 84; Hargie, et al.: Communicating Social Identity, 798}\]
\[\text{116 Devine & Schubotz: Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 281}\]
such as painted kerbs, murals, flags and religious symbols, as well parading in commemoration of important dates. The communal identities stem from a sense of self which is closely bound up with self-expression, and to display these symbols in public, and have them accepted by everyone. In addition to these territorial symbols, there are “peace walls”; walls physically separating one community from the other. The areas around these peace walls are referred to as “interface areas”, and they have become significant physical boundaries in young people’s lives. In addition, identifying another individual as a part of a specific community can be done by names, accent, school uniform or affiliation to a specific football team. Research finds that children as young as 6 can easily identify a member of the other community, while children as young as 10 are aware of the risks associated with moving beyond their own area.

Polarization and segregation remains prominent, and there exists a pervasive “us” and “them” mentality, marked by persistent negative attitudes towards the other community. Albeit surveys show a small increase in contact across both religious and ethnic divides among young people, overall, Northern Ireland remains a deeply divided society. The effect of this segregation is that 68% of young people between 18 and 25 years old residing in Belfast have never had a meaningful conversation with a person from the other community. Some young people feel isolated and imprisoned within their own communities, and this in turn limits their opportunities. To combat this, a number of cross-community projects have been initiated, both state led and by the grassroots, but the young participating in these state that it might change their perception of the individuals they meet, but do not result in a change in attitudes towards the other community in general.

Because of this, young people do not experience the violent conflict first-hand, but they experience a greater level of segregation than the once living during the conflict. In addition to the heightened segregation, the older generations who experienced the Troubles first-hand, are transmitting their traumas of the Troubles to the younger generations. This

117 K. Schmid et al.: The Effects of Living in Segregated vs. Mixed Areas in Northern Ireland, 60
118 Halliday & Ferguson: When Peace is Not Enough, 528
119 Gray, McAnulty, & Keenan: Moving Towards Integrated Housing in Northern Ireland, 337
120 Browne & Dwyer: Navigating Risk, p. 796
121 Ibid. 797
122 Hayes & McAlister: Protestant Disillusionment with the Northern Ireland Peace Agreement, 113
123 Devine & Robinson: No More “Us and Them”, 4
124 Brown: Peace but No Love as Northern Ireland Divide Grows Ever Wider
125 McAlister, Scraton & Haydon: Childhood in Transition, 298
126 Nelson, Dickson & Hargie: Learning Together, Living Apart, 782
127 Magill & Hamber: “If They Don’t Start Listening to Us, the Future is Going to Look the Same as the Past”. 518-519; McGrellis: Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland, 8; Devine & Schubotz: Segregation
results in a generation both indirectly affected by the Troubles, while also directly affected by the negative consequences of segregation. \(^\text{128}\) It is in this uncertain environment that young people in Northern Ireland are growing up.

Now that I have provided a brief account of the segregation which exists in Northern Ireland, I will present the findings from my interviews. Firstly, I will account for how the everyday life of my respondents was affected by the community divide.

### 3.1: Segregation in everyday life

The young women described an everyday life marked by considerable segregation and social division in their own lives and their local environment. The segregated housing was a natural part of their life, however, and did not affect them considerably in their day to day life. On the contrary, the young women had a positive view on their own community, and the four women who lived in Shankill, spoke highly about their local area, as did the two women from more rural areas. They all viewed their childhood as positive, and their local areas where considered to be the most important influence on their identity and sense of self, when compared with their national, political and religious identifications.

The women growing up in Shankill were those who described the most close-knit community, where everybody stick together in troubled times. Alice reported loving growing up in the Shankill, despite being aware of the problems within the community. She grew up in an estate where she knew everybody, and she attended school with the same group of people at both primary and secondary level. Nevertheless, one of the young women growing up in a rural area reported similar experiences as the women growing up in the Shankill: When younger, she attended all social activities and local community activities with the same people, and this in turn created a strong sense of community based around the communal identity of Protestant.

All the women interviewed had attended Protestant schools, had grown up in a Protestant area, and five of the six girls had only socialised with Protestants before either starting cross community work or University. This confirms existing research, which has found that young people express that they have limited opportunities to develop cross-community friendships due to communal and educational segregation, and that this does not

---

\(^{128}\) Muldoon, Trew & Kilpatrick: The Legacy of the Troubles on the Young People’s Psychological and Social Development and Their School Life, 7

Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 282; McAlister et. al.: Childhood in transition, 96
occur outside participation in cross community groups or prior to attendance at University. The conflict has impacted significantly on young people’s ability to develop cross community friendship. Lucy is the only one who has had Catholic friends from an early age. This is because her parents had Catholic family friends when she grew up. She also attended mixed drama classes, and she believed that this helped her in her attitudes towards Catholics, even though she did not have any negative views on them originally.

Despite the positive attitudes towards their local area, the women were very aware of the segregation and the sectarian attitudes which had been prevalent, and still were present, in society. The Troubles and its legacy was a natural part of their life, and they were very aware of the division between the communities. Alice described her community as following: “It’s Protestant dominated, and there’s flags and murals that... as soon as you go into it, you know that it’s a Protestant area.” Visual symbols of identity expression are still important in her area. Sophie, on the other hand, stated that her local area was all about being loyalist, unionist, and being brought up to resent the other side, while Emily had grown up watching the older children fighting in the street, and she wanted to do that when she became older. Lucy, on her side, had to be very aware what streets and areas she was walking through when wearing her school uniform when she was growing up. It was a normal occurrence that people would be beaten up if they walked through the other community wearing their school uniform. Although it had never happened to her, it often happened to the boys in her area. This resonates with findings by McAlister et. al. who state that the respondents in their 2009 survey expressed that sectarianism still affected their lives. Their location, their school, their uniform, and their sporting activities defined them within their cultural tradition. Lucy stated that it is easy to identify people from the other side, as names are often markers of community belonging and identity. “Ehm...I have a friend, he’s name is Odhran...So, you can tell. Just with the Irish names....” Existing research confirms this, as names have been reported to be changed to appear more neutral, or surnames left unsaid in social situations, such as cross community groups, to avoid being identified as a member of a particular community. Nevertheless, none of the respondents mentioned any trouble within the cross community initiatives when it came to names or visual markers of identity such as sport

130 McAlister et. al.: Childhood in transition, 92; Sinclair et al.: The Views of Young People in Northern Ireland on Anti-Sectarianism., 168; Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 16-17; Leonard, M.: Teens and Territory in Contested Spaces: Negotiating Sectarian Interfaces in Northern Ireland. 230
131 Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 40; Lysaght & Basten: Violence, Fear and “the Everyday”, 233
clothes, apart from the fact that one could easily be identified as a member of the other community. As these cross community groups are by definition attended by people with divergent backgrounds, being from the other community is not a source of trouble in these clubs.

The community centres were thus viewed as neutral space, and this indicates that it is in public spaces and on the streets, that the sectarian attitudes have their main area of outlet. Similar to Lucy’s account, Sophie reported that she would avoid certain areas when she was younger, due to riots in the streets. Now that the frequent rioting had stopped, she was not afraid to go into these areas anymore. Despite rioting had decreased significantly in the last few years, rioting will be the last topic to be discussed in relation to segregation, as rioting among young people of the two communities has been a severe issue in Northern Ireland during and after the conflict. It is feared that youth rioting can undermine the peace process and post-conflict recovery, as rioting is vital in upholding the sectarian division, and fuelling negative attitudes.\footnote{Creary & Byrne: \textit{Youth Violence as Accidental Spoiling?} 222} Rioting has been viewed as a predominantly male activity, and as a result it was not expected that the women had been involved with this, but that it could have affected them in their everyday lives. The women who had grown up around the interfaces in Shankill, had indeed witnessed riots growing up, and it had affected them, but in different ways. Alice and Olivia reported how watching these riots fuelled their negative attitudes towards Catholics, as they had no contact with anyone from the other community. What they knew about them was from watching the riots, cheeky comments from their peers, and being told by their parents to avoid Catholic areas. Sophie, on the other hand, admitted to enjoying watching the riots, and that it made her excited. She was competitive, and wanted the Protestants to beat the Catholics, although she claimed it was not down to a resentment of Catholics. She stated that to her rioting was a normal part of life, and she indicated that the rioting was organised, and a means for young people to have fun, both for those watching and for those participating. Sheena McGrellis has also noted the organised nature and familiarity of the violence occurring.\footnote{McGrellis: \textit{Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland}, 25} Just as Sophie pointed out, one of McGrellis’ respondents stated that the riots which occurred were not as severe as the police and the media portrayed them as, because the young people did not fight with resentment towards the other community.\footnote{Ibid.} Nevertheless, Sophie also admitted that she would get scared sometimes, as the riots could turn very violent. Sophie described the fighting which occurred as: \textit{“Like, throwing stones,}
bottles, fire bombs, ehm...ehm...people actually got stabbed. Someone got knocked down. Some wo...a woman just drove clean into someone.” This shows that although the rioting was considered exciting and not sectarian to Sophie, they could cause severe damage to people, and these kinds of incidents have a detrimental effect on the relationships between the two communities.

Surprisingly, one of the women, Emily, had been actively involved in rioting. She started watching from far away when she was seven, was in the crowd by the age of eleven, and started participating shortly thereafter. She stated that she was only involved in the rioting because she was a tomboy, and had loads of mates that were boys. The rioting she was involved with was not motivated by sectarian motives or a hatred against Catholics, but was labelled as “...something to do. It was never anything to do with like culture or nothing.” At one point, when she had become friends with Catholics as well, she could be standing in between the two groups fighting, because she was friends with both sides. However, she did admit that if someone had asked her to throw a stone at the Catholics, she would have thrown one.

Remarkably, Emily was the respondent who was most reluctant to identify as Protestant, and who identified as Northern Irish. She was very open minded, she had many Catholic friends, and she did not have a strong communal or religious Protestant identity, and she did not identify as British. She was extremely negative to the divisions in her country, and was keenly invested in cross community work. Nevertheless, she was the only one of the respondents who had been involved in open fighting with the other side. This indicates that one cannot simply reduce the rioting to be either sectarian or not, as the account Emily provided suggests a very complex and sometimes contradictory relationship to rioting, both for her personally, and for different people. Moreover, Sophie’s account shows that the rioting will vary in intensity and level of seriousness: Sometimes she would laugh at it, other times people would be stabbed and knocked down by cars. The rioting was thus seen both as a fun pastime as they had nothing else to do, as well as a potential threat to health and safety. As McGrellis points out, this interaction between sectarian and recreational rioting poses further challenges for attempts to curb the violence, and may be a factor in explaining why the rioting persisted for so long after the GFA.135 Emily pointed to how some of the boys she

135 ibid.
rioted with, could never become friends with Catholic boys from Cliftonville\textsuperscript{136}, due to the severity of incidents that took place during rioting.

The varying motivations for people to get involved in rioting has been documented in existing research, and the term “recreational rioting” has been applied to the riots in the streets of Northern Ireland. As the term suggests, this type of rioting is a social activity, with no politically motivation.\textsuperscript{137} Emily’s account of her and her peers’ motivations resonates with Jarman and O’halloran, who argue that the riots occur out of boredom and that they are not politically motivated, as has also been documented by Creary and Byrne.\textsuperscript{138} Research by McAlister et. al, however, found that the rioting occurring between the young was not recreational, but was considered by both Protestants and Catholics to have a political basis.\textsuperscript{139} The women’s accounts indicate that the rioting was initially a fun pastime, but sometimes it would escalate, and create lasting damage, rendering some of the young men involved unable to become friends. This confirms Leonard’s argument that the rioting might be recreational at one level, but that the severity of the incidents which sometimes occur, cannot be reduced to merely recreational.\textsuperscript{140} Arguably, the term cannot provide a complete explanation of the dynamics underpinning street riots.\textsuperscript{141} Emily did not, however, attribute sectarianism to her own or her peers’ involvement in rioting, but the legacy of this rioting nevertheless contributes to upholding the divide, by rendering young mean incapable of becoming friends.

The young women reported that segregation was a huge part of their everyday life, but it was viewed as normal, and it did not affect them personally in their day to day life. It also seemed that segregation affects people differently, as all the women knew people who would avoid areas, and would not feel that they could move around freely, as they do. The segregation and tensions seemed to get higher around certain commemorative dates and the marching season, but during the rest of the year, it was relatively stable. The experience of these women of heightened tensions surrounding important dates is also reported by the respondents in Hamilton et al.’s study, who stated that parades and marches polarised relations.\textsuperscript{142}

Nevertheless, although the women’s narratives indicate significant changes occurring the last few years with the decrease in riots, there are still some issues that affect these young

\textsuperscript{136} Cliftonville is an interface area, and a park, where they usually met to fight
\textsuperscript{137} Jarman & O’halloran: Recreational Rioting, 3
\textsuperscript{138} Ibid.; Creary, & Byrne: Youth Violence as Accidental Spoiling? 236
\textsuperscript{139} McAlister, Scraton & Haydon: Childhood in Transition, 98
\textsuperscript{140} Leonard: What’s Recreational About ‘Recreational Rioting’? 47
\textsuperscript{141} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{142} Hamilton et al.: Segregated Lives, 145
women. From the interviews, three important factors indicating what contributes to upholding the divide emerged. They were as follows: That boundary maintenance was considered natural, that there are certain people, i.e. males and paramilitaries, creating trouble, and the existence of transgenerational attitudes. Each of these factors will be discussed in the following section.

3.2: The reasons for continued segregation

There are a number of reasons for the continued segregation which emerged from the interviews, albeit the women presented a rather positive picture of community relations, and the development in society over the last few years.

Continued residential and educational segregation is a matter of fact, and for some people within the community, there was also limitations tied to freedom of movement and areas to avoid. Three main themes were identified in the interviews in relation to the reasons for continued segregation, and those were boundary maintenance as a natural occurrence, the existence of certain people in the community, and the persistence of transgenerational values being transmitted to the younger generations. Each of these themes will be further explored.

3.2.1: Boundary maintenance as natural

It was clear from all the interviewees that the boundary maintenance and segregation still present today was not something that necessarily expressed sectarian attitudes. The women did not view segregation as a problem, as they could move freely around and visit friends in the other community. It was not an active choice for these women to uphold the segregated life style. For the young women interviewed, segregation is a matter of fact, and, as I argue in the following section, it is natural for them to continue this way of living.

All of the women had grown up in a Protestant area and attended Protestant schools. Apart from Lucy, all of the young women had only had Protestant friends growing up. Nevertheless, the women emphasised how attendance at Protestant school and their friend groups were a natural occurrence, and had nothing to do with sectarianism. Alice had even considered to attend an integrated school at secondary level, as she had many Catholic friends, but it was her own choice to attend a Protestant school at secondary level. Her reasons were purely pragmatic. “...the closest integrated school is Hazelwood, and it’s at Newtownabbey, and so what put me off going there was the travelling, and I had to get earlier (laughs), and then I didn’t want to get up earlier... ” In addition, all her friends from
when she was younger were also going to attend the Protestant school, making the choice easy for her. Even Lucy, who had grown up with Catholic family friends, had attended a Protestant school. This was purely because the Protestant school was considered better: “...it made sense to go to the school. Like it wouldn’t made sense to go to Holy Trinity. Ehm, it’s Holy Trinity College. So it’s, it sounds band, saying it’s not as good a school as Cookstown High School, it’s just...” This shows that choices which keep the segregated education going are sometimes made from pragmatic reasons, and not because of a broader ideological conviction. Lucy’s parents had never wanted to raise her separately from Catholics, but due to the quality of schools in the local area, she nevertheless attended a Protestant school, involuntarily perpetuating segregated schooling.

Furthermore, there are problems within the school system. Albeit Lucy is open minded, she was not sure whether she would want to attend a Catholic school. She stated that it would be “a big deal”, and that it is always obvious when people attend a school of the other religion or community than their personal one, as previously mentioned in relation to the distinctiveness of Irish names. This indicates that although young people wish to be more open towards integration, it is still in some contexts considered out of the ordinary to mix with the other community. Sophie, on the other hand, indicated that attending a school of another community is not necessarily a major issue. “Yeah, it’s school. Loo...it...It’s different in school than it is outside school. Everyone gets on differently. Cause there was Catholics that went to my school. It wasn’t an integrated school, but like... there was like a few Catholics that would go. Ehm, and like I didn’t mind them.” This implies that there are entirely different experiences regarding the school environment, as Sophie viewed it as natural to mix in school, while Lucy had reservations about it. This implies that Northern Ireland is still in transition, as new, progressive attitudes co-exist with reservations about changes to the old community divide. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the young people do not want to mix with the other community, it could rather be, as Lucy implies, an uncomfortable experience to be so noticeably different from other people in school.

Furthermore, integrated schools are, according to Emily, becoming more normal, and she attributed this to the increase in mixed housing. As Catholics and Protestants now increasingly live together in mixed areas, it is easier for them to attend the same schools, as the schools to attend will be closer to their homes. Emily’s observations indicate that if people have a real choice, they will choose differently. The women interviewed have suggested that practical reasons guide their choice to attend a Protestant school, indicating that if integrated schools are made more available, it would be easier for them to choose that
option. As they are not easily available, they choose to attend one-denominational schools, as that is the simplest option. This indicates that the continuation of segregation is neither an active choice, nor something they actively try to avoid. It is more convenient to choose a school in the local neighbourhood, while at the same time, the desire to integrate is not as pressing as the desire to live a carefree life. Therefore, an increase in mixed housing could arguably lead to more integrated schools, following Emil’s observation of the tendencies in her local environment. Arguably, if integrated schools and one-denominational schools are equally available, young people would have a real choice to opt for an alternative which does not promote and further segregation. Both Sophie and Emily mentioned schools previously one-denominational, which had now been made into integrated schools. Moreover, the Northern Human Rights Commission’s 2016 Annual Statement show that no new integrated schools have been set up since 2008, but that already existing schools are being turned into integrated. Nevertheless, 93% of school age children attend a one-denominational school, so the effects of these efforts are still minimal.\textsuperscript{143} Despite these limitations to integration, the women have nevertheless managed to develop more accommodating attitudes towards the other community than their previous generations, indicating that there are small, but significant changes in society.

The women’s accounts show knowledge about segregation, but almost an acceptance of the status quo. Sarah’s experience, on the other hand, shows a different side and attitude towards segregation. Sarah seemed almost oblivious to the segregation she had experienced growing up. She could not tell whether the area and her social circle had been predominantly Protestant when she was young. After some pondering, she came to the realisation that she had indeed grown up in a Protestant area, and that all her friends must have been Protestants, as all her neighbours and friends attended the same church. She had never reflected upon this, as to her, it was natural, as the church was close to her house, and everything she did and attended was in the same area. Importantly, the segregated nature of everyday life was never made a point of to Sarah. Two possible explanations present themselves: Firstly, that her parents did not want her to grow up with negative attitudes towards the other community. As they were practising Christians, their Protestant faith was important, and therefore it was natural for them to continue living in this area, and as a result they accepted that segregation was present, but did nothing to emphasise its existence. Secondly, it could also indicate how natural segregation is in Northern Ireland. Segregation has arguably become natural

\textsuperscript{143} The 2016 Annual Statement: Human Rights in Northern Ireland, 84; Hargie, et al.: Communicating Social Identity, 798
occuring phenomenon to that extent that people like Sarah are not even aware that their area and their social life are restricted to one religious affiliation. Regardless of which of these two explanations are true in the case of Sarah’s lack of knowledge, it nevertheless shows that segregation has a huge effect on society and on people, whether that is directly or indirectly, and whether or not they are unaware of the existence of this segregation.

Also Lucy implied that the segregation in Cookstown is natural, as people are religious, and they will attend church and the same social activities, making it natural to reside in the same areas and attend the same social events. However, she also stated that growing up like that makes it easy to pick sides. Nevertheless, Lucy’s personal story challenges the assumption that boundary maintenance is natural, as she has had Catholic friends from an early age. She had been involved with mixed community drama classes, and her family were friends with Catholics. To her family, it was not natural to only socialise with the other Protestants in the community. Although she attended Protestant school and grew up in a Protestant area, she met Catholics through a drama group and through her parents’ friends. Lucy stated that “... just a lot of people didn’t really understand why we didn’t have this hatred toward Catholics, which is just like “You’re just stupid”. (Laughs) Yeah, it was weird why they thought that.” This indicates that it is not only pragmatic reasons behind the boundary maintenance, but that many people think negatively about people from the other side, and will choose not to socialise with them. This could be due to expectations of behaviour or down to personal grudge, and a possible explanation could be the effect of values and attitudes transmitted by people who have experienced the Troubles. The effect of these transgenerational values is further discussed later in the thesis. Nevertheless, the narratives of the women interviewed show that sectarianism is a complex phenomenon, and that it is multifaceted and finds its expression in attitudes, behaviours and structures, confirming existing research by Leonard.144 For these women, the attitudes are no longer sectarian, and their behaviour is not intentionally sectarian, but the structures which still exist, inhibit them from making active, non-sectarian choices in their lives, and other people are more restricted than themselves. It is important to note that albeit the girls express that their choices in life which uphold the segregated lifestyle are voluntary, and that they can make different choices if they want to, I by no means wish to diminish the segregation which is present, and the non-voluntary nature of its origins. As argued by Gallagher & Cairns, the

144 Leonard: Teens and Territory in Contested Spaces, 226
segregation is both a cause and a result of the conflict, and it lends a hand in maintaining prejudice and religious stereotyping.\textsuperscript{145}

As the respondents imply, there are certain people who do still adhere to the territorial boundaries, and will not move freely around. For these people, boundary maintenance is not natural, but an active choice to avoid fear and intimidation. Whether this fear is legitimate, does not matter, as these boundaries nevertheless have a huge impact on their lives, and limits their freedom of movement. This is illustrated by Alice’s story about her Protestant friend who has a Catholic boyfriend. Her friend claimed that there was no problem dating someone from the other side, but they would nevertheless avoid going to the KFC on the Shankill Road. They would rather walk an additional 20 minutes to the KFC in the neutral city center, as her boyfriend would not feel safe walking down the Shankill. This clearly shows that regardless of the young women reporting that they do not feel unsafe, or feel the need to avoid areas there still exists limitations on some peoples’ freedom of movement. This resonates with research by McGrellis, who argues that the fear of being identified as belonging to the “other group” in unsafe spaces, limits young people’s movement, and as a result their opportunities and choices.\textsuperscript{146} Existing research also argues that because of fear and intimidation, there is a young generation growing up with very limited knowledge of their own city, and who are more or less confined to their own community.\textsuperscript{147} The narratives from these young women indicate that for them, segregation is not an issue, but it seems to be for other people they know.

Nevertheless, although these young women are not affected by the segregation in their everyday life anymore, it has affected them in the past. Alice had a friend from university who is a Catholic and who was her closest neighbour, but on the other side of the interface. As a result, they have not been able to get to know each other growing up, and their time together is limited by lockdown hours even today, although Alice states that it is not any fear or intimidation involved in crossing the interface to visit her friend at this point in time.

Nonetheless, the attitudes of these young women are a source of hope in a post-conflict Northern Ireland. If these girls do not take part in these segregated lives out of choice, but out of necessity, and they also reflect on the negative aspects of this segregation, this could have an important impact on attitudes and segregation levels in Northern Ireland.

\textsuperscript{145} Gallagher & Cairns: National Identity and In-Group/Out-Group Attitudes, 59
\textsuperscript{146} McGrellis: Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland, 63
\textsuperscript{147} Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland, 388
There are, however, according to the young women, certain people who contribute to the continuation of segregation. The existence and impact of these people will now be discussed.

3.2.2: “Certain types of people”

It emerged from the interviews that the young women themselves did not actively engage in any activity or attitudes that would uphold the division. They did all state, however, that they knew someone who would not go into Catholic areas, and who would join riots because they resent Catholics. It was noticeable that several of the young women used the phrase “certain types of people”, to describe those people who have a negative influence in society. The choice of wording indicates that this was not a common attitude to have among young people today. The violence and the sectarianism was not attributed to a community problem, but to a problem concerning “certain people”, more precisely young men and paramilitaries.

3.2.2.1: Young men

The interviews clearly indicated that expected stereotypical behaviour and perceptions of gender is an issue which has a tremendous effect on Northern Irish society, and on young people. I argue that the young women do indeed transcend the divide more easily than young men, and this is due to stereotypical views and expectations of gender roles. Young people in Northern Ireland are limited in their use of social spaces because of involvement in rioting, not because of sectarian attitudes towards the other community.

None of the women interviewed expressed any fears of moving through Catholic areas or near interfaces. They did, however, express problems in this respect when it came to their male counterparts. Both the young males and the young women in the community had grown up with the assumption that it is dangerous to move into Catholic areas, a notion which was predominant in the community they grew up in. For some of the respondents, these testaments did also arise from their parents and grandparents. None of the respondents held this belief now, however, and all of them wandered freely wherever they wanted. Many of the men they personally knew, however, would not feel safe walking through the other community.

Two of the young women attributed the fear these young men experience to their past involvement in rioting, and they stated that it was boys or tomboys who would engage in riots. This confirms existing research by Hamilton et al. which found that males were more
active in rioting than females. The young women ascribed differences in expected roles for the genders as the reasons for the males being involved in rioting. Emily thinks that girls did not get involved with rioting because of stereotypical views of typical boys’ and girls’ activities, and that the girls were socialised into thinking that throwing stones was not a thing for girls. Lucy stated that girls would rather talk behind backs, than engage in fighting or rioting. The fact that Lucy compares girls talking behind each other’s backs with rioting, indicate that the riots that take place are not viewed as an activity based on sectarian attitudes, but rather a means for the participants to sort out their differences. As accounted for above, the rioting does not seem to be motivated by sectarianism.

The women’s narratives confirms existing research which found that aggressive behaviour was most often associated with young men, and linked to a masculine identity. Furthermore, Devine and Schubotz found higher preferences for segregation among young males than females, and this could be attributed to the higher levels of violence experienced during the troubles by the males, as a result of the type of hegemonic masculinity constructed in Northern Ireland, prompting males to be the highest perpetrators and receivers of violence.

It emerged from the interviews that the women thought that it is harder for young men to go into the other areas and attend cross community activities because of the young men’s involvement in rioting. It could end up with fighting if someone who had been the victim of, or had administered, violence was to meet in one of the two areas. Some of the violent episodes had been quite serious, and many of the young men held grudges towards certain member of the other community. The women had not been involved in rioting or in fighting, and as a result, did not experience the consequences of this. They could move freely around across interfaces, and into Catholic areas, without being afraid of meeting someone they had wronged in the past.

Nevertheless, albeit the women stated that many young men experience this, it was not a problem which every young male experience, and Emily stated how most young men would not have any problems today associating with Catholics. Others, like some of her friends from when she was younger, cannot be friends with Catholics from Cliftonville, as they had been involved in rioting when younger. Some of the things that happened during the fighting had inflicted serious injury, and the men cannot let it go. As a result, these young

---

148 Hamilton et al.: Segregated Lives, 131
149 McAlister et. al.: Childhood in transition, 114
150 Devine &Schubotz: Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 294; Harland: Violent Youth Culture in Northern Ireland, 416
men would probably not be able to be friends. Nevertheless, she did not think any problems would arise if two Catholic boys were to meet two Protestant boys just walking down the street. The problem thus seems to be the legacy of the past violence, and not sectarian attitudes based on religious affiliation or community belonging.

The predominant roles of males involved in rioting has given rise to an expectation that young men will pose a threat. Olivia, who has a Catholic boyfriend, was never afraid to walk up to her boyfriend’s area, but he felt uncomfortable walking down the Shankill alone. He would be scared that anyone would say anything to him, or try to hit him. They would drive if they were to move around in her area. Her boyfriend had never been involved in rioting when he was younger, indicating that it is not only past involvement in fighting which gives rise to fear and intimidation, but an expectation that males will create trouble. This resonated with findings from Lysaght and Basten, who found that spatial freedom was clearly gendered, where men were perceived as a threat due to the history of males involved in riots and fighting, while women were not perceived as a threat. As a result, women could move freely without being afraid of attacks, as they are less likely to be perceived as a threat. The men, however, would stay firmly within the boundaries of their own community. The narratives of these women partly confirm this, as the young men in their lives felt more restricted in their freedom of movement. Nevertheless, despite Olivia’s boyfriend’s reservations about walking down the Shankill alone, he had participated in fundraising with her and other members of the youth club. “Like, he was happy enough to walk up and down the Shankill fundraising, like but, I think that was maybe because there was other Catholics there with him and he wasn’t on his own. Where if it was just me and him walking up and down the Shankill and so on, I don’t think he would like that. I think he would feel a bit…not safe. So he would never do it.” It is thus down to safety why this young men felt limited in his freedom of movement, although he did feel resentment towards the other community, as illustrated by the continuation of Olivia’s statement: “Like my auntie owns her own café on the Shankill Road, so he would go down in to there with me and get food and there would be other Protestants he would know sitting round him and stuff, and he would be completely fine like that.” This indicates that if he is with other people, and in a social situation, he is not viewed as a threat. This further underlines my argument that it is the legacy of the violence, and the threat that young men are perceived to be, and not sectarian attitudes which limits young men’s freedom of movement.

Lysaght & Basten Violence, Fear and “the Everyday”, 237
Moreover, it is not only the past fighting which affects cross community contact and relations, but also the stereotypical view on males and masculinity. Emily stated that there are now more women participating in her cross community group, and thought that was because some young men have an image to keep up. Furthermore, Emily’s narrative is an example of the expectations of stereotypical behaviour by the genders. Emily was involved in rioting when younger, but do not suffer the aftermath like her male friends. She would not be perceived as a threat due to her gender, and it would not be expected of her to have been involved in rioting. Emily even admitted to sometimes acting almost as a mediator between the two groups during riots, when things got out of hand. Other research has found that women residing in segregated areas tended to take the roles of reducing the impact of violence within their own community.\textsuperscript{152} Nevertheless, the actions of Emily, and her involvement in the riots cannot be reduced to stereotypical female behaviour, as she admitted that “... just like then again if they would have gotten me to throw a stone, I would have thrown one”, aiming at the Catholics. Moreover, Emily stated that engagement in violence was not a general problem for males, but for certain males in the community. This was confirmed by the other women, who attributed violence, abuse and rioting not to a male problem in general, but to a problem with certain types of people. Lucy reported incidents of intimidation which occurred in the estates in the centre of Cookstown when she was younger. Young males would shout abuse or appear threatening towards people coming into their areas. “Yeah, it’s more like the thuggy type, opposed to like “I’m a Protestant, and I think you’re a Catholic, I’m going to be mean” It’s more like “You’re in my estate, what are you doing here, I don’t know you”, that sort of thing”. Lucy also described how these young males wore hoodies, were skinheads and would be “walking around the street with their like gang”. Lucy attributed their behaviour to where they had grown up; she stated that these people had grown up in the lower social strata, and with parents transmitting their negative perceptions of Catholics onto their children. She claimed that the people who now start problems, use the Catholic Protestant divide as an excuse to be violent, as was also Olivia’s opinion.

Arguably, the women find it easier to transcend the divide because they have not engaged in violent behaviour when they were younger, as opposed to their male counterparts. The young women in this study give the impression that they are more open towards the other side than young men their age, confirming existing research which argue that women

\textsuperscript{152}Hamilton et al.: Segregated Lives, 28-29
are consistently more positive in their attitudes to religion and more open to the other side than their male counterparts.\textsuperscript{153} The reason for their ability to transcend the divide is not, however, as a result of necessarily having less sectarian attitudes than males, but because they do not suffer the consequences of having been involved in violent rioting. These findings provide answers to one of the research questions, and confirm existing research by McGrellis, who found that women have greater flexibility in their capacity to surmount the boundaries and territorial walls in everyday life.\textsuperscript{154}

Emily’s involvement in rioting, however, suggests a more complex relationship to the issue, as she does not suffer the aftermath in the same manner as her male counterparts. Stereotypical views on male and female behaviour fuels a youth culture which prohibits certain males to participate in cross community initiative. This suggests that the legacy of violence and stereotypical views on gender is affecting the community divide in Northern Ireland in a detrimental manner. It was, however, also indicated by the young women that rioting and participation of males in cross community groups have improved in recent years. The ones who are now creating trouble around the 12\textsuperscript{th} or in the estates, are deemed as certain people, with a gang mentality which is fuelled by their parents’ transmission of Troubles-related prejudice. The sectarian comments and actions are viewed as an excuse to create trouble. Therefore, the violence witnessed today is not sectarian, but associated with a certain type of people.

\subsection*{3.2.2.2: Paramilitaries}

Paramilitaries constitute an important part of sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, and as expected, the women were very aware of the presence of paramilitaries in their local communities. I argue that the young women were affected by their presence, but that their influence in society is slowly decreasing.

The attitudes towards paramilitaries were not favourable, which is line with the general trend among youth in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{155} The young women were highly critical of the influence paramilitaries had on the local community, as they were seen to be involved with drugs and alcohol, and Olivia stated how they had a negative influence on young people in the local community: “Like in the Shankill, it’s a real big issue (drugs) and I feel like

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{153} Greer: Viewing “the Other Side” in Northern Ireland, 289 \\
\textsuperscript{154} McGrellis: Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland, 62 \\
\textsuperscript{155} Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 18
\end{flushleft}
paramilitary groups have a lot to do with it...cause they would sell drugs and stuff. So, I just don’t think it’s fair on young people.”

In addition to being involved with drugs, the paramilitaries would torment and abuse people from the other community if they were to move into their areas, as illustrated by Sophie. “If I moved into a Catholic area, like the Provis would like kick my windows in”.

Alice reported that windows were smashed and houses thrown painting at by the paramilitaries, as they do not want to see Catholics and Protestants mix. In this regard, the paramilitaries were seen to have a detrimental impact on the post-conflict society, by contributing to upholding the divide, as illustrated by Olivia: “And they’re all, like Protestant paramilitary groups are all focused on hating Catholics and Catholic paramilitary groups are all focused on hating Protestants whenever everybody else is trying to move on from it, so it’s pretty stupid if you ask me”. She did not feel threatened by their existence, but felt disappointed that these kinds of people still existed in the communities, when so many good things were happening. Alice labelled the paramilitaries as those people who still live in the past. This resonates with findings from Ewart et al., who report that young people viewed the paramilitaries as detrimental to the peace process. 156

Nevertheless, paramilitaries were not only seen as detrimental to the peace process and the relationship between the two communities, as Sarah reported that she was afraid that they would take advantage of her. She knew that paramilitaries would take advantage of people who are new in town, and use their houses to store drugs. She stated that an enemy of the paramilitaries is someone who does not agree with their actions, and that could also be another Protestant. Sarah does not believe that you will run into paramilitaries daily, but it is something to be aware of. Sarah even stated that she would avoid certain areas both to feel safe and for not wanting to be associated with paramilitaries.

Regardless of the women’s negative view of the paramilitaries, they would not feel threatened by them. None of the women took them seriously, and they used words like “childish” and “stupid” to describe their views on the paramilitaries, and Alice stated that she was disappointed that people like this existed in the communities. The paramilitaries had now achieved an almost petty status to the women. The paramilitaries were involved in drugs and alcohol, and were viewed as a nuisance in the local community. This resonates with

156 Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 46
findings from Cummings et al., who report that the young people they interviewed viewed the paramilitaries as outdated and unnecessary.\textsuperscript{157}

The experiences of these women do not, however, necessarily indicate that here has been a significant drop in the efforts and influence of paramilitaries. Research by Creary and Byrne found that many young people still felt that the paramilitaries had a strong influence, that they were considered a threat, and that they tried to engage youth in rioting and violence.\textsuperscript{158} Nonetheless, the young women claimed not to be afraid of the paramilitaries, and they stated that it was because it was widely known that paramilitaries only cared for people who were not behaving desirably. Emily had once been taken by the paramilitaries when she was caught rioting, but after she ended this involvement, she did not have to fear them. All the women stated, however, that although they did not feel personally threatened by the paramilitaries, they all knew people who had been threatened and beaten by them, or had bought drugs off them.

This indicates that although these young women do not feel threatened by paramilitaries personally, they still occupy an important part of the local community, and have a huge influence in the local community. Their main areas of influence would be in having a detrimental impact on young people and drug abuse, and in contributing to upholding the divide by tormenting people to deter from moving into a neighbourhood where a majority of the other denomination resides. However, Emily does not believe that their actions will continue to have a negative effect on society for a long time in the future, as she states that: “…paramilitaries on both sides…like they probably would frown upon Protestants living in a Catholic area, or Catholics living in a Protestant area, but there’s nothing really you can do no more, cause most places are mixed now. Like at Limestone Road, there’s Protestant and Catholics living there, and years ago, you wouldn’t have th…like thought of that.”

Paramilitaries are thus viewed as detrimental to the peace process, as they live in the past, and do not want to give up the old divide. The narratives of the young women interviewed, however, indicate that they do not have much influence anymore, and Emily’s statement shows that despite the paramilitaries’ efforts, society is progressing.

\textsuperscript{157} Cummings et al.: \textit{Growing up on an Interface}, 26
\textsuperscript{158} Creary & Byrne \textit{Youth Violence as Accidental Spoiling?} 233
3.2.2.3: Trans-generational values

The majority of the young women’s parents or grandparents had expressed negative views towards the other community. Moreover, the young women indicated that family was an important influence in shaping both their own and their peers’ attitudes to politics and to the other side, and I argue that transgenerational values are important in influencing young people’s opinions. Some young people are more affected than others, however, and these women showed evidence of being able to form their own independent minds.

It was predominantly the women grandparents’ that expressed overtly negative views on Catholics, but some of the young women’s parents also expressed this view. “...she (mother) was brought up in...the Troubles and stuff, and she think...she knows stuff from there, she still hates them, cause she knows what it was like years ago. She hates me being with Catholics and stuff. Because of her experiences when she was grow...getting brought up...”. The young people were aware of why their parents and grandparents had such views and opinions, as they saw the older generations as stuck in the past, as illustrated by Alice: “I think because like some of themens would have been affected by, the Trouble and the past, they’re kinda... well my granny, mostly, is kinda stuck there a bit...she would really be like... like... I’m a Protestant, I vote for Protestants.” These findings confirm existing research which has found that many young people expressed concern over the fact the older generations will not let the past go, and that their parents and grandparents affected them with their sectarian attitudes, and this was in turn limiting their possibility to become less sectarian.159 This is a worrying factor, as the young will not be able to form independent attitudes and perceptions, and could possibly reproduce the past sectarian attitudes. These women expressed awareness of their parents’ attitudes, and did not seem affected by them, which could possibly be mitigated by the experience of cross community work. The worry is those who are exposed to these perceptions at home, and who do not get these corrected by meeting Catholics in real life. Lucy explained how some people her own age would not want to associate with Catholics, purely because of their parents’ attitudes: “...and it’s not even any opinion of theirs. It’s just the fact that they’ve grown up that way... I don’t think they really understand. Cause they obviously didn’t experience the Troubles, so they are just

---

159 Magill & Hamber: “If They Don’t Start Listening to Us, the Future is Going to Look the Same as the Past”, 518-519; McGrellis: Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland: Young People, Violence and Sectarianism, 56-57; Devine & Schubotz: Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 282; McAlister et. al.: Childhood in transition, 96; Creary & Byrne: Youth Violence as Accidental Spoiling? 233
going on what they are told.” Lucy’s account shows that young people let their parents influence their attitudes, instead of shaping their own opinions.

Moreover, a lack of contact with and knowledge of the Catholic community intensifies these misconceptions. Young people are given a certain perspective on the other community by their parents, and if these are not corrected by meeting Catholics in person, they will continue to believe these misconceptions. This confirms existing research by McAlister et. al. that found that notions of difference were perpetuated and exacerbated by lack of inter-community contact. They state that lack of contact and strong beliefs within communities which were passed down generations, consolidated negative attitudes, just as Lucy reported was the case with these “thuggish” types accounted for in the previous section. 160

In addition, Alice expressed worry about social media and media coverage fuelling negative stereotypes. Alice stated that the media and certain people on social media will share posts around the 12th of July, which will instil fear in people about violent incidents that took place when the riots were at their worst. Young people, who have been transmitted negative attitudes towards the Catholics by their parents, may be negatively affected by this: “Maybe young people who are growing up or who grew up in a family that are Protestants and don’t consider the other religion, could see it and think they actually, they are bad the way my mummy and daddy tell me, and really they’re not”, Alice said. Similar worries have been expressed by young people in other research, where respondents have stated that media coverage might fuel sectarian attitudes by stereotyping the two communities. 161 This indicates that sectarian attitudes are transmitted in multiple ways, and that lack of personal contact with the other community, coupled with erroneous media coverage is indeed a problem. The women indicated that there should be more focus on the positive developments within the communities, and not the endless transmission of Troubles-related incidents.

Nevertheless, albeit the young women were worried about some of their peers’ attitudes, they personally had no negative attitudes towards Catholics, and they implied that most people in their social circles were open minded as well. Although many of these women have grown up with both parents and grandparents with negative attitudes towards the other side, they have not been affected by this, or not let themselves been affected by this. Alice stated that her family is very important to her, but that she would not let them dictate to her

160 McAlister et. al.: *Childhood in transition*, 96
161 Ewart et al: *Voices Behind the Statistics*, 34; Sinclair et al.: *The Views of Young People in Northern Ireland on Anti-Sectarianism*, 160-161
who she could be friends with, or what she could do. Alice noted a clear difference between the young and the old generation: “Yeah, mhm, where the younger people in my family aren’t. We’re kinda see a different view to it, and do different things, and go in to different areas without feeling that we shouldn’t be there.” Alice accredited her own open mind to the cross community work she has been involved with. Emily, on her side, stated that she was not affected by her parents, but admit to not being able to vote for Sinn Fein, which is her preferred party, as her mother will not let her. As noted in the previous chapter, several of the respondents admitted to being influenced by their parents when it came to voting habits. Nevertheless, the prevalence to vote for their parents’ preferred choice was because the women had no interest in politics, and had not educated themselves on the available options. They were influenced by their parents regarding voting, but not when it came to beliefs and attitudes toward the other community.

The sectarian attitudes, behaviour and views showcased by the older generation could also be passed on unconsciously, and parents may send mixed messages, as was also found by Ewart et al.\(^{162}\) Olivia stated that her parents did not tell her anything about the divide, and did nothing to instil her with resentment towards Catholics. She was, however, told by them not to go into the other community or to cross the interface. Her parents contributed to instil a sense of fear associated with the Catholics by warning her about the other community and the interface areas. This was done indirectly, as they did not speak negatively about the Catholic community. Her parents did this out of fear for her safety, and therefore indirectly contributed to upholding the divide. This shows that the divide is held up by many means, and many of them are not because of a persistent prejudice towards the other community. On the contrary, the young women’s testaments indicate that parents’ and grandparents’ fear for their children being with Catholics has more to do with safety than resentment, as parents who did not express resentment towards Catholics, still did not want their children to go into Catholic areas. Sophie’s grandmother was very negative to Catholics, and is always wary of her being with Catholics, as she is afraid something is going to happen to her granddaughter. Sophie said that she always asks them to be careful, and attributed it to her being “a granny”. Research by Hamilton et al. also indicate that parents were afraid to let their children into communities predominantly of the other community, not down to sectarian troubles, but down to crime rates.\(^{163}\) Other research also found that parents were worried for their children, and they imposed their mental maps of “no go” areas onto their them, and that children would

\(^{162}\) Ewart et al: *Voices Behind the Statistics*, 31

\(^{163}\) Hamilton et al.: *Segregated Lives*, 132
not use specific leisure centre partly of self-imposed restrictions and partly down to parents’ concerns that these places posed a threat to their children.\textsuperscript{164} The influence of parents in upholding the divide manifests in different manners, but there seem to be fear and suspicion tied to experience of violence, and not necessarily resentment towards Catholics that shape their opinions and attitudes. Olivia’s grandmother is staunchly Protestant, and does not like Catholics. Nevertheless: “...but like I said, my boyfriend’s a Catholic, and she (grandmother) loves him, they get along really well. So, I don’t know, it’s just, I actually don’t understand it because she says she doesn’t like Catholics, and she can’t learn to get over the Troubles and stuff, but my boyfriend’s in my house all of the time, like she makes him (inaudible) dinner, she loves him, like, and he’s a Catholic, so she can get on with him pretty fine. So I don’t understand. (Laughs). This could indicate that some people in the older generation have been positively affected by the diminution of violence. Moreover, this could also imply that young people’s involvement in cross community work has an effect beyond their own open minds: By bringing their cross community friends to their homes, the older generations can get to know the other side intimately through the young generation.

In addition to parental influence, the women indicated that their community could have a detrimental effect on their views. The four women who grew up in Shankill all reported that they grew up with comments from their local community, be it parents of their peers or their peers themselves, that were negative about Catholics. Due to their limited, or non-existent, contact with Catholics as children, they admitted to being influenced by this talk. This shows that young people are influenced in many aspects of their lives, and that the transmission of sectarian attitudes happens in many areas of society. Nevertheless, these young women have not been considerably affected by the influence of their parents and their local community. Those who had been negative towards Catholics, had changed their opinions. This is a sign of hope for Northern Ireland, as non-sectarian attitudes seem to become a more common occurrence among these young women and their peers, Catholics and Protestants alike. In addition, Olivia’s grandmother’s attitude towards her granddaughter’s boyfriend, indicate that people do change opinions, and that the contact the young people have with the other community, may also affect the older generation positively. Regardless of the presence and influence of transgenerational values, the young women indicated a change in recent years. The evidence and the possible explanations for this change will now be discussed.

\textsuperscript{164} Lysaght & Basten: Violence, Fear and “the Everyday”, 231; Leonard: Teens and Territory in Contested Spaces, 230
3.3: A society in transition?

The young women reported growing up in a society affected by transgenerational sectarian values, segregation, paramilitaries and people who have been badly affected by the violence of the past. Nevertheless, the respondents indicated that there has been a change in recent years. The changes seem to have occurred on numerous levels and in numerous areas, both in society at large, and on a personal level.

First of all, the occurrence of riots has decreased significantly, according to the respondents. The women stated that now riots take place mainly around the 12th of July and the marching season, as opposed to almost every day about a decade ago. Sophie stated that the last huge fight in the area was about nine years ago. The decrease in rioting is promising for the future of Northern Ireland, as rioting has a detrimental effect on society. It creates an atmosphere of fear, and incorporate young people into a state were violence is perceived as a fun past time.\textsuperscript{165} As accounted for above, rioting can also be tied to sectarian attitudes, indicating that a decrease in riots could represent a decrease in these attitudes as well. In addition, the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission’s annual report for 2016 state that albeit there still being a substantial number of parades in Northern Ireland, the majority of these passed peacefully in 2014 and 2015.\textsuperscript{166} In addition, 2016 marked the year when a three year long parading dispute finally was resolved, and a permanent Unionist protest camp was dissolved, as the Nationalist inhabitants in Ardoyne and the Orange Order came to an agreement on parading.\textsuperscript{167} Considering that parades historically have been a very contentious issue and source of inter-communal violence in times of insecurity in regards to Northern Ireland’s constitutional status, the peaceful solution of these disputes indicates that the Northern Irish society is progressing, as once contentious issues are being solved peacefully.\textsuperscript{168}

Perhaps because of a perceived safer environment for young women, they no longer avoided interface and Catholic areas as the majority of the respondents reported doing growing up. Considering that existing research reports that young people would not feel safe walking through a community predominantly of the other religion, and they felt that their

\textsuperscript{165} Leonard: \textit{What’s Recreational about ‘Recreational Rioting’?}, 38
\textsuperscript{166} Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission: \textit{The 2016 Annual Statement}, 55
\textsuperscript{167} Unknown Author: “Twaddell: Agreement reached over long-running parade dispute”
\textsuperscript{168} Jarman: \textit{From War to Peace?}, 424
social spaces were restricted as a result of this, this is also sign of optimism.\textsuperscript{169} If the women do not feel inhibited in their freedom of movement, this could arguably increase natural cross community contact. Sophie also indicated that something has changed for society at large: “...it’s rare to see...well, it was rare to see Catholics in our areas, but now like you see Catholics here all the time. Like Catholics come in all the time to our areas”. Sophie further stated that a few years ago it would not have been possible, as this would have led to fighting, but now it was completely different. She cannot find a cause for the change, but stated that: “It just changed itself. Like... just one day, like, Catholics and Protestants just became friends”.

In addition to a change in society, the young women indicated personal change. The majority of them admitted to have had stereotypical or prejudiced views of Catholics, but did not demonstrate this now. Alice would make fun of Catholics and call them “Fenians”, when she was younger, but now she did not even take into account whether someone was Catholic. She thought of them simply as people; religion was no longer considered. Alice indicated that this is a wider trend among her friend group, as she stated people of her age are not as caught up in the differences as before.

Albeit the women admitted to having limited understanding of the Catholic culture, tradition and religion, they had no stereotypical or negative views of the other community. When it comes to their attitudes towards their Catholic counterparts, there was no prejudice to account for. All of them had friends that were Catholic, and when asked to describe Catholics, the women responded that there are no differences. Alice stated that religion does not matter anymore, and that people are who they are as a person, and not because of their religion. When asked to describe Catholics, Olivia stated that they are people who believe in a different religion than her, and “…they’re my friends, my boyfriend, like some I would ca...class as family”. All of the respondents had Catholic friends, and two of the women even had Catholic boyfriends. Olivia claims that the fact that she has a Catholic boyfriend is not a problem, as no one cares about this any longer. Considering the reservations her boyfriend feels the need to make regarding walking in Protestant areas, some issues must still be present. Nevertheless, all of the women expressed that mixing was not a problem for them today.

In addition, none of the women expressed any issues with accepting mixed housing, relationships and workplaces, regardless of their type and strength of identification. Findings

\textsuperscript{169} Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 48; Kelly: Young People’s Views on Communities and Sectarianism in Northern Ireland, 69
by Hayes and McAllister suggest that those with a more neutral identification would be more positive towards mixing in these three areas, but in this case, all of the young women expressed the same level of acceptance, regardless of identification with the traditional identity or not.\textsuperscript{170} This could indicate that there indeed is a wider change in society. Emily even states that she thinks the conflict has been resolved. She states that Girdwood\textsuperscript{171} is a living proof of this. “Because there’s Catholic and Protestant communities living like in all them houses. And there’s Protestants and Catholics making families, and...it’s just like you wouldn’t hear of that like years ago when my mummy was younger. Or even when I was about ten, you wouldn’t have heard of it.”

Regardless of the reasons for these women developing positive attitudes towards the other community, there seems to have been a change in recent years. Many initiatives have been made from policy makers, in housing and laws, but the most immediate effect for the lives of these women, is the reduction of violence on the streets. It is indicated by the girls that cross community youth groups have been influential in this. This will be further explored in the following section.

3.3.1: Effect of cross community work

The value of cross community efforts for these young women is evident in Olivia’s reflections on her participation in her youth club. “Like, I met my boyfriend through the youth club, so I don’t think I would have ever had a Catholic boyfriend, or my best friend’s Catholic, so I don’t think I would have ever met themens if I didn’t come to the club.” It is, however, also a sad testament of how segregated Northern Ireland is. Even though these women do not consciously feel restricted in their daily lives, Olivia’s statement shows that there still are limitations in their lives, and that Catholics and Protestants have few natural occurring spaces to meet, socialise and get to know each other.

All of the respondents who had participated in cross community work shared Olivia’s positive view of their experiences of the participation, and they attributed their positive views and attitudes towards the other community to their involvement in cross community groups. They all admitted having had stereotypical and negative views of Catholics when they were younger, and they had made sectarian comments, been involved in rioting or harboured prejudice towards Catholics. However, because of their participation in cross community

\textsuperscript{170} Hayes & McAllister: Religion, Identity and Community Relations among Adults and Young Adults in Northern Ireland, 396

\textsuperscript{171} Girdwood is a cross community centre and an integrated area in West Belfast, close to an interface
groups, they met Catholics for the first time, and developed meaningful relationships with them. Consequently, they all now had many friends who were Catholics, and although their understanding of the Catholic culture, tradition and religion still was limited, they had no stereotypical or negative views of the other community. As exemplified by Alice, who stated that “we don’t generalise anymore”, meaning that one negative incident with a person who was Catholic did not entail that all Catholics were that way. This confirms existing research, as findings from the 2011 YILT survey also indicate that young people now make judgments of other people based on individual traits, rather than as a member of a group.172 Furthermore, the 2011 YLT survey, show that 36% of 16 year olds in Northern Ireland often socialise with members of the other community, an increase from the 2003 survey, indicating that cross community contact has indeed improved slightly during the last decade, and that this was not only my respondents perceptions.173

All of them accredited their open minds to the cross community work they have been involved with. Alice had grown up watching the riots at the interface, and been informed by her local community and peers that Catholics were bad. It was not until she joined the cross community group that she realised how unnatural it was that they were separated. Sophie, on her side, was involved in a cross community course at her tech, where Catholics learned about Protestant culture and vice versa. She also learned about the Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA), an Irish association promoting Irish sports, and was involved with playing a game she called Gaelic, which she loved.174 She did, however, admit to thinking that it was wrong to play an Irish game like Gaelic, until the GAA employee had informed them that there are many Protestants in the GAA. By learning about the Irish culture and traditions, seemingly wrong activities were normalised to her. These findings confirm existing research which argues that those young people who have had meaningful contact experiences, either through integrated schools or cross-community work, are more likely to support religious mixing.175 Five of the women have had meaningful cross community contact growing up, either through cross community groups or through childhood friends. These respondents expressed favourable attitudes towards the other community. Moreover, the women who had been introduced to cross community groups all admitted having felt a level of prejudice or participated in negative behaviour towards Catholics before attending

172 Devine & Robinson: No more ’us and them’ for 16 year olds, 2
173 Ibid. 3
174 Sophie called the game Gaelic, but there is no sport named that in the GAA. Based on her description of how they played the sport, however, it can be concluded that she was involved in playing hurling.
175 Devine & Schubotz: Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 292
cross community work. This suggests that the cross community groups have had a positive effect on the women’s attitudes and behaviours. It indicates that the change is permanent, and they attitude they develop become generalizable to the rest of the Catholic community, and not limited to the people involved. This challenge research by McAlister et. al, who reported varying quality and experiences with cross community work. “The other side” would not turn up, there were conflicts during activities, and they did not facilitate long-term contact, nor change attitudes. Other research points to the limitations of the contact with “the other”, but also about the lasting impact this has on community relations. McGrellis report that some young men state that cross-community contact can increase the chance of being subjected to sectarian violence. After participating in such a project, it will be easier for others to recognise them as a member of their significant community, and they can therefore become the target of sectarian assault, both from their own and from the other community. The results from the 2011 YLT survey, however, indicate that the vast majority of youths who participate in cross community work, have positive feelings about these activities.

Moreover, according to the respondents, cross community work has not only helped their attitudes, it has also had a wider effect on society, as both Sophie and Emily attributed the decrease in riots to the cross-community work, and the effects of the shared experiences. Emily had been actively involved in rioting, and stated that the rioting has decreased in intensity since she started participating at the age of 11. When asked why she thinks it has improved, she attributes it to the cross community groups. She states that she started a cross community project with people that would have been fighting at the interfaces. When they started these groups, they gradually stopped fighting, as they went on trips, did team building activities and they realised that they “…didn’t need to throw stones at each other to have a laugh”. She implied that many of her peers felt an obligation to engage in these riots, and she thought it was because they grew up watching the older people riot, and thought they had to do it as well. In Emily’s view, however, the groups ended this, as it stopped them from going out rioting every night, and it gave them the opportunity to get to know the other side properly. The young needed opportunities to engage with others, get out of their negative activities, and feel a sense of community through getting to know people from the other

176 McAlister et. al.: Childhood in transition, 100  
177 Cummings, Shirlow, Browne, Dwyer, Merrilees & Taylor: Growing up on an Interface, 23; Kelly.: Young People’s Views on Communities and Sectarianism in Northern Ireland, 68; Sinclair et al.: The Views of Young People in Northern Ireland on Anti-Sectarianism, 160; Nelson, Dickson & Hargie: Learning Together, Living Apart, 782  
178 McGrellis: Pushing the Boundaries in Northern Ireland, 65; Ewart et al.: Voices Behind the Statistics, 19  
179 Devine & Robinson.: No more ‘us and them’ for 16 year olds., 2
community thoroughly. This confirms existing research which found that some respondents thought that low self-esteem, loss of community and lack of opportunity was contributing to the violence. Nevertheless, as indicated above, the reasons for people’s involvement in sectarian riots are so multifaceted, so to provide simple solutions and explanations is fruitless. Emily’s account, however, suggests that she, and many of her friends, found both opportunity and a sense of community with other young people by participating in cross community groups, indicating that for her, participation in cross community efforts had a significant and positive effect.

Nevertheless, cross community contact will probably be challenging for a while, as exemplified by Sophie’s experience: In a cross community project, Catholics were to come and experience Protestant culture. A Loyalist band came to play for them, but they were not allowed to play the typical Loyalist songs that they play on the 12th of July, as all those songs are anti-Catholic. They had to be very careful which song they picked, and rehearse it specifically for the occasion. Sophie did not think that this was a problem, as she thought that both Catholics and Protestant must be allowed to celebrate their respective days, although much of it is based on resenting the other side. She did not feel personal about the messages in these songs, and often joked around with her Catholic friends, when they sing each community’s songs to offend the other. She did admit, however, that if it had not been her friends, but someone who did it to deliberately offend her, she would react negatively. This indicate that community relations are complex, and that having conflicting views on the same matter is possible. As with the example of Emily and her rioting, different, often conflicting emotions and attitudes come to the fore, indicating that the young women are still affected by the traditional attitudes, but that they are moving away from these, knowingly or not.

Another explanation for the women’s positive attitudes towards the other community, could be attributed to the fact that the majority of the respondents did not attach any importance to either their religious or national identification. Devine and Schubotz found that religious and national identity are the strongest predictors of segregation preferences, and that the more religious people are, and the more importance people attach to their religious and national identity, the more supportive they are of segregation in education, workplaces and housing. As a result, it would be expected that people with stronger religious views will hold more negative views towards the other community. Sarah’s case does not fit the mould, however, as she was personally religious, had grown up in a Protestant area, and had never

---

180 Creary & Byrne: Youth Violence as Accidental Spoiling? 237
181 Devine & Schubotz: Segregation Preferences of Urban and Rural 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland, 291
socialised with Catholics before starting University, as she had not participated in cross community groups. Despite all these factors, she had never felt prejudice towards Catholics. She attributed this to her parents raising her with an open mind, and that the divide has never been an issue. As discussed above, parents’ influence can be very formative on their children’s attitudes, and in the case of Sarah, it has affected her in a positive manner. This shows that having strong religious views does not necessarily entail a more negative view of the other side. In the case of Sarah, however, her religious affiliation is not associated with the traditional Protestant communal identity, as to her, her Protestantism is personal and religious, and not a communal identity marker. Sarah’s case is an example of diversification within identification in Northern Ireland, where the link between religion, communal identity and level of negative attitudes towards the other side, does not necessary exist any longer. It clearly shows that community relations, religious affiliation and the division in Northern Ireland are complex and multifaceted, and that great variations exist within the traditional community divide. It could also suggest that there is a wider change in society, which cannot only be attributed to cross community work or increased contact between the groups. Some of the older generation have already developed positive, or neutral, attitudes towards the other community, and this suggests that young people can grow up without prejudice towards the other side, even without having been involved cross community groups.

Cross community groups therefore have two important implications: It gets the young people off the streets, and it changes attitudes. The first outcome is important, as regardless of the youths’ motivation to participate in rioting, i.e. sectarian or recreational reasons, these young people will no longer feel the need, or have the time and opportunity, to take part in rioting. As rioting and violence have a potentially destabilising effect on Northern Ireland’s peace, a reduction in this would arguably have a positive effect on both the young people’s daily life, and society at large. A feeling of belonging is particularly important for young people in Northern Ireland, as “negative” communities, such as paramilitary groups, come into being where other forms of community is weak or non-existent.182 As young Protestant people are reportedly feeling a sense of loss community, it is vital that they feel a sense of belonging, which these cross community groups may go some way in providing. In addition, if the cross community groups now manage to change the young peoples’ attitudes, as they have in the case of these women, those who have been involved in rioting for sectarian reasons, will hopefully be able to change their attitudes.

182 McEvoy: Communities and Peace, 88
The young women did not express any sectarian attitudes, and expressed considerable understanding and respect for the Catholic community. These attitudes were unexpected, as a vast amount of research has emphasised the uncertainty the Protestant community is feeling about their own culture and identity, and their position in Northern Ireland relative to the Catholic community. To what extent the women felt alienated in their own home country, will be discussed in the next, and final, section of this chapter.

3.4: Protestant alienation

A central point of interest for this thesis was to explore how these young women relate to their cultural identity in a new and challenging time. Allegedly, Protestants in Northern Ireland feel a level of alienation both politically, economically and culturally. At the same time, women are reported to be much more open minded and less sectarian than their male counterparts. Due to the lack of research on Protestant women, their views and opinions regarding these two contradictory aspects have not been explored. The interviews showed that, contrary to my hypothesis, the young women did not express any feelings of alienation. I will now briefly account for the topic of Protestant alienation, before I present the findings from the interviews.

The Protestant alienation is experienced both politically and culturally. Culturally, the loss is felt in relation to parading and cultural symbols. As mentioned, identity expression is an important part of Northern Irish culture, and it takes the shape of flags, marches, murals, painted kerbs, and frequent, public commemoration of the past. The communal identities stem from a sense of self which is closely bound up with self-expression, and to display these symbols in public, and have them accepted by everyone. The parades have been the most vital issue, as Protestants view them as “innocent”, but nationalists and other critics view them as offensive. The attempts to stop these parades have been viewed by Protestants as another example of their culture being under threat. The 2012 and early 2013 flag protests are an example of the depth of their worries. The Unionists viewed the removal of the Union Jack as an attack on their cultural heritage and identity. The youth involved in these riots expressed, however, that the riots were not simply about flags, but symbolic of a wider

---

183 Halliday & Ferguson: *When Peace is Not Enough*, 530
184 Schmid et al.: *The Effects of Living in Segregated vs. Mixed Areas in Northern Ireland*, 60
185 Halliday & Ferguson: *When Peace is Not Enough*, 528
186 McAuley.: *Peace and Progress?* 552
187 Halliday & Ferguson: *When Peace is Not Enough*, 527
discontent with the political process and with socio-economic issues.\textsuperscript{188} The Protestant community’s insecurities post-accord has been the main reason for the resurgence of the issue. It has been noted that Protestants over the last decade have been more negative in their prospect on community relations than their Catholic counterparts.\textsuperscript{189}

Politically, the reforms introduced through the GFA are believed by a majority of Protestants to benefit the nationalist community at the expense of unionist community.\textsuperscript{190} To some members of the Protestant community, the British government’s decision to support the Good Friday Agreement (GFA), is viewed as a sell-out.\textsuperscript{191} This feeling of abandonment by the British has a long history, as every political settlement since 1972 – Sunningdale (1972), the Anglo-Irish Agreement (1985), the Joint Declaration (1993), the GFA (1998) - has been viewed by some Unionists as a betrayal by Britain, and as a loss for Unionism, and a gain for Nationalism.\textsuperscript{192} The resurgence of the DUP in the 2000’s, a less accommodating party than the other Protestant alternatives, have been accredited to the failure of the GFA to provide decommissioning and to reform the Royal Ulster Constabulary.\textsuperscript{193} Critics of the GFA claim that the consociational nature of the peace accord cemented the positions of the opposing groups, rather than mediating them.\textsuperscript{194} Several scholars have noted that Protestants, both old and young, believe the new political settlement had favoured Catholics disproportionately, claiming that the Protestant identity and right to express it had been subject to attack and attempts at erosion in the years after the GFA.\textsuperscript{195}

This notion of a cultural and political attack on Unionism has been repeated in a variety of forums, and has been framed by, amongst others, the Orange Order and the DUP as an attempt to eradicate Unionist culture and traditions from the public sphere.\textsuperscript{196} According to McAuley, this emphasis has been successful in arousing the masses, as traditional Unionism, represented by DUP, was on the rise in the early 2000s, noting widespread feelings amongst Protestant that they were undermined economically, politically and culturally.\textsuperscript{197} It was on the

\textsuperscript{188} Halliday & Ferguson: \textit{When Peace is Not Enough}, 538
\textsuperscript{189} Hughes & Donnelly: \textit{Community Relations in Northern Ireland}, 651
\textsuperscript{190} Hayes, McAllister & Dowds: \textit{The Erosion of Consent}, 116
\textsuperscript{191} Southern: \textit{Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland}, 163
\textsuperscript{192} McAuley: \textit{Peace and Progress?} 551; Southern: \textit{Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland}, 164-166
\textsuperscript{193} Hughes & Donnelly: \textit{Community Relations in Northern Ireland}, 651
\textsuperscript{194} Taylor: \textit{The Belfast Agreement and the Politics of Consociationalism}, 223
\textsuperscript{195} Halliday & Ferguson: \textit{When Peace is Not Enough}, 8; McAllister et. al.: \textit{Childhood in transition}, 98; Hayes, McAllister & Dowds: \textit{The Erosion of Consent}, 155; Hughes & Donnelly: \textit{Community Relations in Northern Ireland}, 656
\textsuperscript{196} McAuley: \textit{Peace and progress?}, p. 552
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.
basis of these trends within the Protestant community that the respondents were questioned about their own and the Catholic culture.

Culturally, none of the young women interviewed felt alienated. On the contrary, it was a striking how none of the women felt particularly strong about the traditional Protestant culture and traditions, particularly symbolised by the celebrations on the 12th of July. Three of the women did indeed attend the 12th of July celebrations, but they attributed the day’s attractiveness to the atmosphere, and attended the events because of the people there. None of these three women thought that the event was of importance to them personally, or to their sense of identity. Nevertheless, Olivia did first state that she loved the 12th of July “...cause I’m British I enjoy it loads...”, but quickly moderated her stance by adding: “I grew up as a Protestant and people’s always been told Protestants celebrate 12th of July, so I just grew up to love it, and I don’t think it is because I’m British, I think it is just because I love the celebration, and the whole idea of...and everybody being so happy that time of the year, so I think I love it just because of the celebration, to be honest with you.” The events on the 12th are associated with Protestantism, but they are enjoyed because of the atmosphere, not the importance it has as a display of Protestantism.

Moreover, it seemed that these practices were associated with something negative for these young women. For Sarah, a practicing Protestant, the 12th of July is more closely associated with Loyalism rather than Protestantism, while Lucy does not even know what it is supposed to celebrate. She thought there was a rowdy atmosphere, and that it was negative and offensive towards Catholics. She did not understand why people would celebrate something that is against another type of person. This challenge findings by McAlister et. al, who showed that the young Protestants considered marches, flags and bonfires to be significant expressions of their culture. None of the respondents put any significance to these public displays of cultural belonging, and some of them even viewed as negative.

Nevertheless, there are certain people who will create trouble and do feel strongly about the celebrations. Alice stated, however, that these people are a minority, and that she and her Catholic friends do not create trouble. The celebrations on these occasions have nothing to do with who they are as people. “…we’ll both go out and celebrate what we wanna celebrate, and by the next day we’re still friends, and it’s kinda about respect, we still respect each other.. ehm..we can go and celebrate what we don’t, but it doesn’t it’s nothing to do with the friendship.” These celebrations did not impact on their personal relationship

198 McAlister et. al.: Childhood in transition, 99
with friends from the other community. The women expressed an understanding, and an acceptance, of that important cultural events were associated with the division, but they did not attach this meaning to these events themselves. As mentioned above, Sophie did not mind that the Catholic and Protestant community’s cultures were focused around resenting the other side. She did not feel personally about the messages in the songs played on the 12th of July or St. Patrick’s Day. “I…well it’s like our day, so I don’t mind…It’s not, I don’t…I obviously don’t want people obviously badmouthing other people for nothing, but like I don’t mind our songs playing, because like it…it’s our day, whereas like they have songs against us for St. Patrick’s day, even though St. Patrick’s day’s for everyone, like they have songs against us for St. Patrick’s day. Like I would listen to that on St. Patrick’s day, so… I don’t see why we can’t play our songs on the 12th day of July, so, I don’t mind them playing our songs.” These young women have friendships across the divide, and are accepting of their friends’ traditions to the extent that they made fun of the historical resentment their different communities have for each other. Their communal belonging did not put limitations on who they could be friends with.

A striking found was that instead of expressing worry about their own culture, the young women seemed worried and sympathetic about the Catholic culture. When Olivia was asked whether she felt the Protestant culture was taken care of, she spent most of the time expressing sadness over the Catholic’s community’s loss of funding for an Irish festival. She did also express sadness over the fact that the 12th is becoming smaller, but most the attention was given to the Catholic festival. In the end, Olivia’s comment summarises the views of the young women: “Like, other people grew up believing like Catholics get this, and Protestants get nothing or Protestants get this, and Catholics get nothing. But I don’t think it’s true, I feel like we’re all equals and we have our festivals and our days to celebrate, and they have their festivals and their days to celebrate, so I think…. I don’t see any difference in it. Like we’re just equals, we celebrate different things, and… oh… we celebrate different things and that’s literally the only difference I see…”

Furthermore, the young women expressed an understanding for the reactions of the Catholic community to the behaviour of the Loyalist bands. Emily is negative to the behaviour of the Protestant camp at Ardoyne. She thinks it is disrespectful to go past Catholic houses and play Loyalist songs, and she understands that the Catholics would react to this kind of behaviour. “Cause some of the songs and stuff they play, like it’s not very fair when they’re walking past a Catholic area, and they’re playing like a Loyalist song. Like that’s not respecting what Catholics believe in. That’s dead disrespectful. So I don’t blame the
Catholics on like getting on the way they did to lighten them up.” Lucy supported this opinion, and viewed the Protestant parades as deliberate provocation. This challenges existing research by Neil Southern who argues that cultural alienation has particularly been felt in the context of re-routing of the traditional Orange Order and Apprentice Boys parades away from Catholic areas.199 Contrary to this, the respondents did not feel strongly about the continuation of these parades, and they were sympathetic to the reaction from the Catholic community. Consequently, I will argue that the young women interviewed did not experience any sense of cultural alienation.

Politically, however, the young women did indeed feel alienated. They felt alienated due to the politicians’ inability to agree on issues and help the people in the communities. As discussed in the previous chapter, the young women did not agree with the actions and attitudes of their elected representatives, and believed that the politicians only served to maintain the divide. As the young women did not wish to maintain the divisions between the communities, they felt politically alienated. The political alienation was thus not down to a sense of a consistent attack on Protestants, or a feeling of being deprioritised. As opposed to findings which suggest that DUP is the most popular party, the women expressed a pronounced disdain towards that particular party. Their political alienation did not manifest itself in more extreme opinions, but rather in a propensity towards transcending the divide. They did not become more sectarian; they became less, as their politicians’ actions urged them to vote for more moderate parties or parties which reflected their values.

Protestant alienation is thus not something these young women experienced, either culturally or politically. They did, however, feel politically alienated because of the politicians’ inability to deal with the issues that matter in the local communities, but it was not associated with their identity as Protestants. Nevertheless, it is important to bear in mind that there is not one single Protestant community with a homogenous consciousness which this thesis reflects. The Protestant community is diverse, and there is a clear qualitative difference between the everyday life of someone growing up on an interface, and someone who grows up in the countryside.200 Therefore, the responses of Protestants to changes in society will also be diverse. Yet, the responses from these women show that they do not feel alienated as Protestants, and that they do not attach considerable significance to their cultural or political identity as Protestants.

199 Southern: Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland, 169
200 Southern: Protestant Alienation in Northern Ireland, 160
Summary

Community relations seem to be improving, as these women showed no reservations towards mixing with Catholics. This chapter explored how community relations were experienced by the young women interviewed and whether type and strength of identity influenced attitudes towards the other community. The women self-identified as British, Northern Irish and “nothing”, and as a result, their attitudes could possibly vary, as Northern Irishness is associated with higher tolerance of other religions. The findings of this chapter, however, show that the women were equally open minded and accepting of the Catholic community regardless of their national and religious identifications.

Furthermore, this chapter argue that the women experience considerable segregation in their everyday life, and that attitudes, structures and behaviours limit their everyday life. They do not, however, suffer from this. The boundary maintenance was natural to these women, but there are certain people, i.e. young men, who experience limitations to their freedom because of the legacy of the violence. These young men contribute to upholding the divide by being suspicious of the other community. I further argued that paramilitaries are viewed as detrimental to post-conflict society, along with the transmission of sectarian attitudes from the older generations to the younger. These three factors have significant impact on the young generation, and could delay society from moving on.

Regardless of the presence of these factors, I argued that a change seemed to have occurred in the last few years, and because of this, the women had a very positive view on their own community and the future of Northern Ireland. They had good relations to Catholics, and had many friends across the divide. They attributed their positive attitudes, and the wider change in society, to cross community work.

Lastly, I argued that albeit the focus which has been on Protestant alienation the last two decades, the women did not experience this. They did not feel attacked culturally; on the contrary, they were worried about the Catholic’s culture. Politically, they did indeed feel alienated, but not because they felt that their rights as Protestants were undermined, but because they viewed the politicians as incompetent.
Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore whether young Protestant women in Northern Ireland are facing a crisis of identity. I examined the personal perceptions of identity for young female Protestants in Belfast, born immediately before or after the 1998 peace accord, in relation to both national, religious and political identity. Furthermore, the study aimed to find out whether their identity preferences influence the women’s attitudes toward the other main community in Northern Ireland. The findings of my interviews both confirm, supplement and challenge existing research, and in this conclusion, my main findings are summarised.

A striking feature of the interviews was the readiness with which the young women would act contrary with what is expected by their Protestant identity. The interviews indicated that the continuing grips of traditional attitudes are present, but there were clear indications that these young women are breaking out of this, knowingly or not. Albeit their identifications were seemingly traditional, they were open minded, showed progressive attitudes, and had many friends across the divide. The young women had evolved to that extent that they would consider voting for Sinn Féin, the diametrically opposed political party to the Protestant alternative.

Chapter two explored the identity preferences of the women interviewed, and the wider implications this had. The chapter explored the national, political and religious identifications of the respondents. It became clear that the women had not reflected much about their identifications, and that confusion was often attached to the many different identifications available to these young women.

It was argued that the young women did not attach any significant importance to their national identity, as it was simply a logical consequence of their passport and their country of residence. They were also prone to change their identification depending on circumstances, and they did not mind being called Irish. Considering that one of the core tenets of the Northern Irish Protestant identity has been the negation of everything Irish, an acceptance of Irishness could arguably entail that being Irish is not associated with something negative, and that being Irish and British is no longer two diametrical opposites. As the conflict finds its origins in the oppositional constitutional aspirations tied to these two identities, any sign of mitigation of the antagonism tied to these identity options, implies hope for the future of community relations in Northern Ireland.
Despite the women were open minded and flexible in terms of their national identity, the national identification of the respondents was unexpectedly traditional, as four of the six women readily identified as British. Considering that identifying as Northern Irish is associated with being more open minded, it was unexpected that they so easily identified along the traditional divide. What became evident, however, was that despite the traditional label, the content of this label was not traditional. All of the women expressed attitudes which were progressive and diverse. Consequently, the findings from the interviews disproved my initial hypothesis that these young women would be more prone to identify as Northern Irish. On the contrary, my findings suggest that Northern Ireland do not need yet another identification label when the traditional labels can contain progressive attitudes. It is the attitudes towards the other side which is important, not the label.

A striking find was that the women considered voting for Sinn Féin. Instead of voting for the main Protestant party, the DUP, the women indicated that they would vote for Sinn Féin, a Catholic and Nationalist party, as their political principles better reflected their personal values. I argued that as the young women have friends across the divide, they cannot support political parties which only seem to support the divide. As a result, socio economic issues have become more important to these young women, and consequently their voting preferences have changed too. This did also reflect itself in other people in society, and the recent election results may be evidence of a society in transition politically. Nevertheless, reservations must be made, as some of the women expressed limitations on their freedom to vote after preference, due to their parents’ influence.

Lastly, the young women were questioned on religious identity. The women struggled with defining what Protestantism was, and what this label contained. The women attached different meanings to Protestantism, and they often conflated religious and national identity. Four of the women identified as Protestant, and they did indeed attach importance to it, but their understanding of the Protestant identity varied. One of the women was personally religious, and thus viewed herself as a Protestant because of her religious affiliation. The three remaining women were not religious, but viewed their Protestant identity as communal: It was attached to the home, the local community and their family. The interviews thus showed that there is a diversifying within Protestantism. This enabled the women to identify as Protestant without necessarily abiding to the traditional version of this traditional identity, which is closely tied to an anti-Catholic attitude. It did, however, also give rise to some confusion about the meaning of their own identities.
Furthermore, religious and national identification was not interchangeable for these women. First, it was only two of the women who claimed that being a Protestant and being British is synonymous. When exploring what these women attached to their Protestant identity, it occurred that their Protestant identity was communal, not religious, and as a result, it was argued that for these women, religious and national identity is not interchangeable.

Lastly, the second chapter discussed why the women did not identify strongly with the Protestant label. Three explanations were suggested: The identity of Protestantism has diversified, and as a result there is not one single identity they can relate to. They do not feel strongly about political Protestantism (Unionism), because the politicians do not reflect their views. The majority of the respondents were not religious, and they did not believe in the ideological conviction tied to hating Catholics. Furthermore, as the Protestant identity is a negation of what being a Catholic is, and as the women do not view Catholics as different, the basic crux of the ideological basis of Protestantism is eradicated. In addition, based on Bell’s argument that public display of cultural belonging is important, a decline in this can also lead to a decline in their strength of identification. Furthermore, it was argued that the diversification within Protestantism offers alternative identification which does not necessarily associate with the traditional divide. It was argued that this in turns opens up the possibility that identifying along the traditional divide is not necessarily negative, as the content is changed, albeit the label has not.

Furthermore, the thesis investigated how identity preferences affected attitudes towards the Catholic community. Thus, chapter three discussed community relations. As none of the women expressed extremist views, it was expected that they would be more open towards the other community. This chapter found that segregation is still very much present in Northern Ireland today, but that it did not affect these women considerably in their everyday life. There were structures, behaviours and attitudes in society which furthered segregation and sectarianism, but the women were not personally affected by this in their day-to-day life.

It was argued that boundary maintenance was natural to these women. The women grow up in a Protestant community, and attend Protestant school seemingly reflecting that they do not want to mix with the other community. It was argued, however, that they do not actively choose to continue this segregation. In any other society, children are usually educated in the closest local school, and they are usually friends with people who live in the neighbourhood and attend the local school, as is the reality in Northern Ireland as well. The women even expressed that pragmatic reasons lay behind their decisions: One of the women
had chosen not to attend an integrated school because it entailed longer travelling time to school. As a result, it was argued that the origins to the segregation came from an ideological conviction of not wanting to mix, but the continuation of this was not for these women willingly and with a conviction, but a natural result of circumstances which enabled this.

It was further argued that according to these women, there were certain types of people who contributed to upholding the divide, and that was the presence of a certain type of “thuggish” males, and paramilitaries. These findings also suggested that young women are more prone to transcend the divide because they have typically not been involved in rioting. Consequently, it was argued that it is the legacy of the past violence, and not sectarian attitudes based on religious affiliation or community belonging, which keep young men from socialising with the other side with the same frequency as young women. Despite the young men’s reservations about crossing the divide, many young men were active in cross community groups, and the women indicated that the presence of paramilitaries was diminishing. Overall, the women expressed considerable hope for the future. Furthermore, it was argued that trans-generational values are contributing to upholding the divide. Young people are affected by their parents’ and grandparents’ experiences of the Troubles, and they transmit their trauma on to their children. It was argued that for the women interviewed, they were not considerably affected, but they were aware that young people in their close circles were. Nevertheless, despite these factors, chapter three argued that there has been a change in society in recent years, and that this was attributed to cross community work. The women admitted to have had negative perceptions on Catholics prior to participation in these groups, and one of the respondents had even participated in violent rioting.

Lastly, the findings from the interviews disproved my second hypothesis. It was expected that the young women would feel a sense of alienation and uncertainty regarding their identity as Protestant because of an experience of a loss of identity and culture in post-accord Northern Ireland. The women did not feel alienated culturally, but rather showed sympathy towards the Catholic’s community’s loss of privileges. They did, however, feel politically alienated. This was not because of an experience of their own cultural group being under attack, but that Northern Irish politicians were viewed as incompetent and contributing to upholding the divide. As all the women had Catholic friends, they could not vote for parties which did not help to mitigate the differences between them, but rather gained political advantage by perpetuating the divide.

What emerged from my interviews was a much more positive view on Northern Ireland than what usually emerge from research. Some explanations as to why can be...
suggested. Firstly, I have focused on a subset of the Northern Irish populace, and my interviews suggest that young women are much more open minded than their male counterparts. Nevertheless, the women pointed to changes in society at large with a decrease in rioting and increase in mixed housing and marriages, indicating that Northern Ireland is progressing.

Secondly, the positive results could be due to the qualitative method utilised, as it provides opportunity to delve into the content of the identifications. Seemingly traditional identifications such as Protestant and British, mask non-sectarian views, open minded young people and hope for the future. Albeit there was evidence of considerable problems and challenges within Northern Ireland, it suggests an evolving younger generation, and a Northern Irish society experiencing considerable changes in terms of community relations. This indicates that nineteen years after the peace agreement, Northern Ireland is still a country in transition. As the country is currently facing its biggest political crisis in ten years, hopefully the political turmoil will not leave these young women even more disillusioned with the state of the government. Before concluding, topics for further research will be presented. Two main objectives present themselves as important to research further.

Firstly, it became clear that there is a diversification within identification for these women, and as a result, seemingly traditional and sectarian identifications mask non-sectarian attitudes. This would entail that the numerous surveys into national identifications cannot give adequate insight into the identification preferences of the Northern Irish populace. Further research should be made into the contents of the identity labels, as my findings suggest that one cannot continue to expect a British or Protestant self-identifier to be more negative towards Catholics. Consequently, this could mean that community relations and attitudes have progressed considerably, under the disguise of the traditional communal identities. If this is the case, further investigation is important, as it may be that people are not as sectarian as their identifications suggest.

Another important finding inviting to further research is the voting preferences of the young women interviewed. It is striking that none of the respondents wanted to vote for the DUP, as a Protestant identification is associated with voting for Protestant parties, such as the DUP. In addition, DUP was viewed as the worst alternative to the majority of the interviewees. They would rather vote for Sinn Féin, the diametrical opposition to DUP. More centrist and moderate political parties were also mentioned as alternatives, but Sinn Féin was the preferred option. One of the women also indicated that families in her Protestant area would vote for Sinn Féin, as they would be more accommodating to help. Those who vote
differently may be a small minority, but it is nevertheless a sign of progress for community relations that people think independently, and not in the traditional communal manner. It is important to investigate whether this is a wider trend in Northern Ireland, and assess the possible implications this would have for the country. If traditional voting is decreasing, a new and different political scene might emerge in the future, and change Northern Irish society considerably.

To conclude; Northern Ireland is arguably in transition, and it is facing its most challenging period in ten years. Considering the positive attitudes towards the future these women presented, it is vital that the current political instability do not jeopardise the progress and the ongoing peace process. During Northern Irelands nineteen years of peace time, there have been many setbacks, but these have mainly been political. On the grass root level, however, it seems like these young women are dedicated to peace and progress. Hopefully the transition will not stall with the latest trouble in the Assembly, and that Northern Ireland will continue to evolve. The testaments of these young women are indeed a sign for hope, and it is time that scholars, researchers and the media start to emphasise the progress which is being made in the country. As Alice pointed out: "...like the good work that's done is never shown in the media, it is always the past about the Troubles and about the bad things that happened in both areas." Despite the challenges the political scene offers to community relations, many young people seem to have managed to develop positive attitudes towards the other community. albeit Northern Ireland will probably face numerous challenges in the years to come, the country seems to have progressed significantly in terms of community relations in the last nineteen years which have passed after the Good Friday Agreement.


Bibliography

Primary Sources

Interviews

Alice, 19, Shankill. Interview conducted at Hammer Youth Club, Belfast, 19.01.2017

Olivia, 18, Shankill. Interview conducted at Hammer Youth Club, Belfast, 20.01.2017

Sophie, 18, Shankill. Interview conducted at Girdwood Community Hub, Belfast, 20.01.2017

Emily, 19, Shankill. Interview conducted at Girdwood Community Hub, Belfast, 20.01.2017

Sarah, 18, Bangor. Interview conducted at Queen’s University, Belfast, 20.01.2017

Lucy, 20, Cookstown/Belfast. Interview conducted at Queen’s University, Belfast, 20.17.2017

Official Documents


Secondary Sources

Books


**Articles in Books and Journals**


https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010604049522


https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00570.x


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.931213


Dowler, Lorraine: ‘*And They Think I’m Just a Nice Old Lady*”. Women and War in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Gender, Place and Culture, 5:2, (1998): 159-176. 14.07.2010. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09663699825269](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09663699825269)


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17405629.2010.533977


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14616710903138791


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07907184.2015.1084291


96


Lysaght, Karen & Basten, Anne.: *Violence, Fear and “the Everyday”: Negotiating Spatial Practice in the City of Belfast*, Queen’s University Belfast: 1-27. 05.12.2016 http://www.qub.ac.uk/c-star/pubs/Violence%20fear%20and%20the%20everyday.pdf

Magill, Clare & Hamber, Brandon: *”If They Don’t Start Listening to Us, the Future is Going to Look the Same as the Past”: Young People and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and Bosnia and Herzegovina*, Youth and Society, 43:2. (2011): 509-527. 11.10.2010. https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X10383644


[http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141987032000087334](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0141987032000087334)


[https://doi.org/10.1177/00441118X00032001002](https://doi.org/10.1177/00441118X00032001002)


News Articles

https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2002/jan/04/northernireland.paulbrown

Meredith, Fionola: Sectarianism was Big Winner in Northern Ireland Election, and That’s Nothing to Celebrate, Belfast Telegraph, 10.03.17.  
http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/fionola-meredith/sectarianism-was-big-winner-in-northern-ireland-election-and-thats-nothing-to-celebrate-35516869.html


Websites

The Northern Ireland Life and Times Survey Homepage- ARK. http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/
The Northern Ireland Young Life and Times Survey Homepage- ARK.  
http://www.ark.ac.uk/ylt/
# Appendix

## Interview guide

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction Key Components:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Thank you</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How interview will be conducted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity for questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Signature of consent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I want to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. My name is Helén Rummelhoff, and I would like to talk to you about your identity and your relations to people of other identities. This is in relation to my master thesis at the University of Oslo.

The interview should take about an hour. I will be taping the session, as I do not want to miss any of your comments. I will also take notes, but I need the recorder as I am not capable of writing that fast by hand. Because I am taping this, I need you to please make sure that you speak up, so that your comments will not be missed.

All responses will be kept confidential; in a manner we can agree on together. This means that your responses will only be shared with my research supervisor, and I will ensure that any information that will be included in the final thesis will not identify you as a respondent.

It is important that you remember that you do not have to talk about anything you do not want to, and you may end the interview at any time.

Are there any questions about what I have just explained?

Are you willing to participate in this interview?
| Introductory questions | Where do you live?  
Where have you grown up?  
Which school do/did you attend?  
What is your highest achieved education?  
Single parent or both parents home?  
Do you go to church? |
|------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|
| Identity               | How important is your local area to the sense of who you are?  
How important is your country to the sense of who you are?  
How would you describe your national identity?  
How important are your political beliefs to your sense of who you are?  
How important are your religious beliefs to the sense of who you are?  
How important are your family to the sense of who you are?  
What is most important to you – your national, political or religious beliefs? |
| Community relations    | How would you describe the community you live in?  
How would you feel about living in a mixed-religion neighbourhood?  
How would you feel about attending integrated school?  
What are your opinions about the Catholic community’s culture and traditions?  
How would you describe Catholics? |
|                        | Research questions:  
Does the community dive affect them in their everyday lives?  
Do they have friends across the boundary?  
What are their attitudes towards the Catholic community?  
What are their attitudes towards |
| mixing with Catholics – housing, education? |  |
| Has participation in cross community work affected their perceptions? |  |