Political Conflict:

How Social Identity Processes Influence Individuals’ Experience of Political Violence

Geoff McCombe BSc.

This thesis is submitted to University of Limerick in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in the Department of Psychology

University of Limerick

Principal Supervisor: Professor Orla T. Muldoon

December 2012
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I would like to thank my supervisor Professor Orla Muldoon for her valuable guidance, support, and patience throughout the process of completing this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr Clifford Stevenson for his input into the early stages of the research. I would also like to acknowledge the EU Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation via Borderaction which funded my PhD research. Thanks are also due to Allison Jeffrey from the Department of Psychology in Queens University Belfast for helping in the arrangement of the interviews, and her help with transcribing the interview transcripts. I would also like to thank the various ‘gatekeepers’ of victim support groups who encouraged their members to partake in the research.

Many thanks also to the numerous fellow PhD students who have shared the ups and downs of doing a PhD. Together with my other friends they have provided support, encouragement and advice throughout the research process. I am also grateful to my parents who have continually supported my education in all sorts of ways throughout my life. Sadly my father lost his battle with cancer during my PhD, but I’m sure he would view the completion of my thesis with considerable pride. Many thanks must go to my mother for her continued support in what has been a difficult time. Finally I don’t believe I would have completed this thesis without the help and support from Annemarie Dineen who has put up with me as I whinged and stressed my way towards completing this thesis.
Abstract

The thesis examines how social identity processes influence individuals’ experience of political violence. It argues that individual experience is shaped by the groups the individual belongs to. In particular it examines the importance of social identity to understanding prejudice and conflict. The thesis explores extant experimental research which illustrates the importance of social settings in mediating attitudes and behaviour. This includes empirical evidence of the relationships between social identity and social influence, social identity and social support, and the importance of experience of political violence in shaping social identity. The thesis then outlines a brief history of the conflict in Northern Ireland and reviews extant social identity research specific to Northern Ireland.

A qualitative methodology was used to extend the literature of quantitative studies carried out within psychology on the conflict in Northern Ireland. In effect, the predominant use of student and random population samples has ignored the broader social context within which participants are located, and has often failed to examine the experiences of those most affected by the conflict. As such the thesis highlights how the positivist scientific method as the sole basis for understanding human behaviour is severely limited.

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with 32 individuals, across three studies, from diverse backgrounds, who have lived in Northern Ireland before, during, and after the conflict. The data was analysed using a thematic analysis which offered an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data.
The findings provide support for social identity processes in informing attitudes to living in Northern Ireland. From the data it was apparent that in terms of engagement with others that the traditional fault line between Catholic and Protestant is clearly evident with religious categorisation being continually used by participants as a way of organising their social worlds. This allows for the sectarian divide to be maintained and to exclude and denigrate outgroup members. The most prominent theme identified across all three studies was that of social division. However social division was portrayed in different ways across the three studies, highlighting that political conflict in Northern Ireland did/does not affect everyone equally.
# Table of Contents

## Chapter One: Social Identity

1.1 Chapter Overview .................................................. 1
1.2 Preface ........................................................................ 1
1.3 The Social Identity Approach ...................................... 7
   1.3.1 Social Identity Theory ....................................... 7
   1.3.2 Self-Categorisation Theory ................................. 12
1.4 The importance of Social Identity to understanding prejudice and conflict ........................................................................ 16
1.5 Social Identity and Social Influence ............................. 23
   1.5.1 Empirical Evidence – Influence based on Social Identity ........................................................................ 25
1.6 Social Identity and Social Support ............................... 27
1.7 The Importance of Experience in Shaping Social Identity ........................................................................ 33

## Chapter Two: Social Identity and the Conflict in Northern Ireland

2.1 A Brief History of the Conflict in Northern Ireland ....... 38
2.2 A Review of the Social Identity Research in Northern Ireland ........................................................................ 44
Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Chapter Overview 60
3.2 Qualitative Methodology 60
3.3 Choosing the Appropriate Means of Analysis 63
3.4 Epistemology and Ontology of Thematic Analysis Employed 68
3.5 Description of the Thematic Analysis Employed 71
3.6 The Interview Process 73
   3.6.1a Initial Sampling 73
   3.6.1b Theoretical Sampling 78
3.7 The Interview Schedule 80
3.8 The Interview 81
3.9 The Relationship of the Researcher to the Research 83
3.10 Ethics 84
3.11 Procedure for the Thematic Analysis of Interviews 84

Chapter Four: Study One: Participants with Low Experience of the Conflict 90

4.1 Chapter Overview 90
4.2 The Conflict as Normal/Banal 90
4.3 Social Division 95
4.4 Summary 102
Chapter Five: Study 2: Participants who had relatives/colleagues killed as a result of Political Violence 104

5.1 Chapter Overview 104
5.2 Social Division 104
5.3 Negotiating Post Agreement Northern Ireland 109
5.4 Summary 114

Chapter Six: Study 3: Accounts of Former Members of Paramilitary Organisations 116

6.1 Chapter Overview 116
6.2 Social Division 116
6.3 Social Support 121
6.4 Shifts in Social Identity 124
6.5 Summary 126
Chapter Seven: General Discussion 128

7.1 Main Findings 128

7.1.1 Social Division 128

7.1.2 Minimising the Conflict 132

7.1.3 Negotiating Post Agreement Northern Ireland 133

7.1.4 Social Support 135

7.1.5 Shifts in Social Identity 137

7.2 Implications for Theory 139

Chapter Eight: Methodological Issues and Future Research 144

8.1 Methodological issues 144

8.2 Recommendations for future research 147

8.3 Conclusion 148

References and Appendices 151
Chapter One

Social Identity

1.1 Overview

This opening chapter will begin with a preface, giving an overview of the theoretical, methodological, and research questions which will be addressed in this thesis. The chapter will then provide an overview of the literature from the social identity paradigm, including social identity theory (SIT) and self-categorisation theory (SCT). This will then be followed by how social identity theories can provide an explanation of prejudice and conflict. Following this, the relationship between social identity and social influence will be examined, including empirical evidence that a shared social identity underlies the potential for social influence. The association between social identity and social support will also be explored, highlighting the key role of social identity in protecting group members from adverse reaction to stress and trauma. The final section of the chapter will examine the importance of experience in shaping social identity. The aim of the chapter is not to present all social identity research (comprising a body of more than 40 years of work), but to give a flavour, which allows an understanding of those aspects of theories that relate to this particular thesis. For a more detailed review of the theories discussed see Haslam (2001), Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje (1999).

1.2 Preface

The conflict in Northern Ireland (colloquially known as ‘the troubles’) is viewed as the period between 1969 and the signing of the Belfast Good Friday Agreement of 1998 (henceforth the
Agreement). During this period there were almost 3,500 deaths, 16,000 individuals charged with terrorist related offences, 34,000 shootings and 14,000 bombings (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008). Therefore few people in Northern Ireland’s small population of 1.7 million people have not been affected by the conflict. However previous research (Muldoon et al, 2007) indicates that not everyone was equally affected by political violence, with political violence being more prominent in areas such as North and West Belfast, and South Armagh, than in the areas of South Belfast and North Down. As such, a key aim of the current research was to investigate individuals’ lived experiences from these areas knowing this shared and varied experience may lead to important similarity and difference.

Research using the social identity paradigm has been prominent within social psychology since Tajfel’s seminal minimal group studies of the early 1970s. The social identity approach argues that the individual lives in society as part of social groups that influence the way they think, feel and behave. While in recent years research within social psychology on Northern Ireland has addressed the conflict in group terms (Cairns, 1982; Muldoon & Downes, 2007; Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010), previous research (especially in the early years of the conflict) tended to analyse behaviour at an individual level, viewing people as isolated entities, uninfluenced by the culture and the groups they are part of. Political commentators, and victims of paramilitary violence have tended to pathologise members of paramilitary organisations at an individual level, labeling them as ‘terrorists’ and their behaviour often identified as indicative of some form of psychopathology (Silke, 2004). This analysis of terrorist or paramilitary activity prohibits a deeper analysis of those factors that may encourage or facilitate membership of such movements, and may also restrict and confine explanations (Ottosen, 1995). Conflicts, such as that in
Northern Ireland are essentially inter-group phenomena and therefore the role of social identity processes in influencing peoples’ experience of political violence merits investigation. This thesis will illustrate the benefit of a group level analysis in understanding the conflict in Northern Ireland, and subsequent peace process, arguing that individuals are strongly influenced by the culture, communities and the groups they belong to. As such, the current research will focus on the cultural and societal factors that influence behaviour. Furthermore, the research will look at the importance of norms and values of the group and how this influences individual behaviour. In line with self-categorization theory it is envisaged that individuals will have multiple group identities and hence many ways of relating to their experiences and events. Therefore it is expected individuals may use different discourses about similar experiences and events as their different identities become salient. This line of enquiry will also focus on shifts in identity that may have occurred since the commencement of the peace process. The thesis will also explore how social identity processes influence support and coping strategies for those most affected by the conflict, how the chances to be perceived as a group member increase when the individual is prototypical, embodying values and behaviours associated with the ingroup, thus affirming the group and their values. The current research will therefore contribute to the social identity literature in general, as well as the literature on the conflict on Northern Ireland.

The opening chapter will review the existing social identity literature and evaluate its contribution to explanations of prejudice and conflict, outlining how in the face of conflict ingroup preference strengthens and becomes associated with outgroup hostility, even to the point of hatred and violence. It will also examine the importance of social influence in guiding individuals to behave based on group norms and values, highlighting the importance of social influence as a motivation to engage in political violence. The chapter will then examine the role
of social support in influencing individuals’ reactions to stress and adversity. In doing so it will highlight recent research by Haslam et al (2005) which suggests that the relationship between social identity and well-being is mediated by group support. The chapter will then conclude by looking at the importance of lived experience in shaping social identities.

Chapter 2 begins by outlining a brief history of the conflict in Northern Ireland including the respective ideological positions of republicanism and loyalism. It also summarizes the terms of the Agreement and charts the political landscape since the signing of the Agreement in 1998. The chapter then continues by reviewing social identity research in Northern Ireland which spans the three decades of the conflict and the subsequent peace process. This chapter also questions the overuse of university samples in academic research of the conflict. A convergence of economic factors means that university students are less likely to come from the working-class backgrounds in which political extremism is so prominent. Furthermore researchers using university samples are often targeting a group which is mixing with the other community on a daily basis rather than those who are prohibited from interactions with outgroup members due to the social structures imposed by segregated housing and a segregated education system.

Chapter 3 provides a rationale for the methodology used in this research. Due to the multitude of survey samples using university students, as well as the interest in the nuanced views that may be associated with interpretation of events associated with different identity positions, it was decided that a qualitative approach would complement and add to the extant social identity research in Northern Ireland. A qualitative methodology using semi structured interviews allows participants to articulate their own experiences and interpretations of living in Northern Ireland before, during and after the conflict. Furthermore, by sampling from a diversity of backgrounds a qualitative analysis can examine how social identity processes are linked to perceptions of lived
experience in Northern Ireland. The chapter outlines the history of using qualitative methodologies within psychology and the social sciences, and through critique articulates the rationale for qualitative methods used here, namely thematic analysis. A detailed account of how the thematic analysis was carried out along with an outline of the interview process is then offered. This chapter also explores the epistemology and ontology behind the methodology. The use of a qualitative methodology allows the thesis to address the following research questions

- What are the lived experiences of the conflict in Northern Ireland?
- Are the lived experiences of participants related to their exposure to political violence?
- How might these lived experiences be related to social and political identities associated with the conflict?

Chapter 4 outlines Study 1, which recruited 12 participants who had low experience of the conflict. Two key themes emerged from the analysis of the data; the first theme saw participants articulating their experience of political violence as normal/banal. They continually minimised the impact of violence as normal, and ‘just part of everyday life...something you got used to and just got on with it’. The second theme that was identified in this study was participant’s experience of social division. Participants in this study denied the impact of social division in their lives. However the analysis of the data indicated an abundance of talk that recreated mutually exclusive religious identities. Furthermore it was evident that there are many widespread social practices that underpin religious distinctiveness.

Chapter 5 outlines Study 2 which recruited 10 participants who had relatives/colleagues killed as a result of political violence. Participants in this study included Protestant participants who had lost relatives or work colleagues as a result of violence by republican paramilitaries. It also
included Catholic participants who stated they had relatives killed by the British Army. In contrast to Study 1, religious division for these participants was very much to the fore. Due to feelings of anger, fear, and threat interactions with outgroup members were minimal. For these participants post agreement Northern Ireland was seen as a betrayal of their unionist/nationalist identities and feelings that it was outgroup members who were benefiting from the peace process rather than themselves.

Chapter 6 outlines Study 3 which analyses accounts from former members of paramilitary organisations. Participants were recruited from loyalist and republican former prisoner support groups and comprised five former IRA prisoners, and five former UVF prisoners. A key finding from this set of interviews was that while participants claimed social division was imposed upon them as a result of the conflict, the peace process has offered the opportunity for prolonged and regular engagement with outgroup members. This has resulted in participants revising their attitudes towards outgroup members and indicates a shift in identity to view themselves as a homogeneous former prisoner group with shared prison and post-prison experiences.

Chapter 7 discusses the main findings of the analysis and their implications for psychological theory outlined in the earlier chapters. The discussion offers a theoretical explanation of individuals’ experience of living in Northern Ireland that illustrates the importance of context and group processes in influences people’s attitudes and behaviour.

The final chapter examines methodological issues with the current research and offers recommendations for future research. This is followed by a conclusion that gives an overall summary of the thesis and how well the aims and objectives were achieved.
1.3 The Social Identity Approach

The social identity approach comprises social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979) and self-categorisation theory (SCT; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Together these two theories counter the individualistic approach to behaviour that has been (e.g. Allport, 1924, 1962; Lott & Lott, 1965), and to a great extent still is (Pfeffer & Fong, 2005) the basis of explaining social behaviour. Collectively, SIT and SCT aim to explain how our group memberships, how we define ourselves as group members, and the degree to which we identify, shape our attitudes and behaviours.

“The psychology of the individual is a product of group life and its distinct psychological and social realities” (Haslam, 2001, p.26)

So the social identity approach advocates that the individual lives in society as part of social groups that inevitably influence not only what they know about the world, but also the way they think, feel and behave. Furthermore, the groups themselves develop, function, and are shaped by the particular contexts in which they belong; hence the context needs to be explored together with the group. Reicher (2004) explains that the social identity approach helped acknowledge the importance of social context in understanding human action.

“Above all else, the social identity tradition is based upon an insistence that human social action needs to be understood in its social context” (Reicher, 2004, p.921)

1.3.1 Social Identity Theory

Social identity theory (Tajfel 1978) arose as a theory of inter-group discrimination. As such, it seeks to explain how relations between individuals may at times be defined more by the groups to which they belong than their personal characteristics. Tajfel proposed three central tenets of
SIT; categorisation, identification, and comparison. Categorization involves assigning people (including ourselves) to a category in order to help understand the social environment by knowing which categories ourselves and others belong to. This enables people to define appropriate behaviour by reference to the norms of groups we belong to. Identification allows people to think of themselves as either unique individuals (personal identity) or as group members (social identity). The comparison element involves members comparing their groups with others in order to define their group as positive and therefore by implication see themselves in a positive way. Therefore people choose to compare their groups with other groups in ways that reflect positively on themselves. Tajfel’s social identity model was the natural conclusion of years of experimentation, especially his seminal minimal group studies of the early 1970s. The minimal group studies aimed to explore the conditions under which individual’s discriminate against members of other groups and in favour of their own groups. Sherif’s realistic conflict theory (Sheriff, 1966) based on his ‘summer camp studies’ had suggested that intergroup discrimination is experienced only in situations where there is actual or anticipated competitiveness between groups. However Tajfel and his colleagues envisaged that intergroup discrimination could exist even in the absence of competition. This formed the basis for the minimal group studies in which schoolboys were divided into two groups and asked to allocate rewards or penalties (in monetary form) to a member of each group (ingroup and outgroup). In the first set of studies (Tajfel, 1970; Billig, Bundy & Flament, 1971), the boys were led to believe they were assigned to different groups according to some trivial criterion like preference for abstract painters, or guessing the number of random dot patterns. In the second set of studies (Billig & Tajfel, 1973) the boys were assigned explicitly randomly into groups, although the allocation in both sets of studies was random. Since the interest was in identifying the minimal
conditions of discrimination, additional procedures were undertaken to assure these conditions. The participants were given no instruction on how to allocate the points, they did not know the identity of the person to whom they were allocating the money, they did not know who was in each group, they did not interact with each other before or while distributing the points, and they neither gained nor lost personally from their distribution (Tajfel, 1978). The participants were also given the opportunity to choose from a number of strategies in the allocation of points comprised of: fairness, maximum joint profit (greatest possible benefit for both groups), maximum ingroup profit (maxim profit for ingroup members), and maximum differentiation (maximum differentiation in points awarded between the two groups in favour of the ingroup).

The results of the minimal studies showed that participants had a slight tendency to favour maximum differentiation as allocation strategy at the expense of maximum profit for their ingroup, or even the fairness strategy. It appeared that the mere classification of individuals into groups (even on the basis of irrelevant criteria) led participants to sacrifice fairness in favour of maximum gain for the ingroup, so that their group could do better than the other group. Tajfel (1981) formulated the concept of ‘social identity’ to account for this behaviour which would later be defined as:

“...that part of an individual’s self-concept, which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group(s) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel, 1981, p. 255)

So why were the participants motivated for their ingroup to do better than the other group? Some attempts at explaining the results of the minimal group studies have focussed on the positive self-esteem that derives from such differentiation. By giving more to the ingroup than the outgroup, the former compares positively to the latter and provides a positive group self-esteem (Tajfel,
It is only when an individual defines themselves in group terms, and where there is the possibility of comparing ingroup with an outgroup that their collective self-esteem can be enhanced by positive intergroup differentiation. Establishing positive identity is not absolute though. In some contexts (e.g. amongst minority groups who are more concerned with establishing a distinctive identity), individuals can be more concerned with establishing a distinct social identity, rather than positively differentiating their ingroup from an outgroup (Branscombe, Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1999). Furthermore, some groups might embody norms that encourage helping and prosocial behaviour, therefore their members might not be driven by the tendency to negatively discriminate the outgroup.

Tajfel (1978; 1981) provides another explanation for the results of the minimal group studies and the presence of intergroup discrimination; as the need to provide social meaning to an otherwise empty situation. Therefore in a context such as the minimal group paradigm, where there are no guidelines for the participants’ behaviour concerning choice of reward, the individuals were guided by the desire for their ingroup to compare more positively (receive more points) with the outgroup. However this intergroup discrimination is not an automatic process. Tajfel developed SIT to explain the process of intergroup discrimination. According to SIT, the self-concept can be defined as a continuum ranging from personal identity to social identity. The personal identity end of the continuum represents unique, personal characteristics that define people and distinguish them from other individuals. Conversely, the social identity end represents aspects of a person that are associated with group memberships. As any one person belongs to a multitude of groups, there are multiple social identities, at various different levels of abstraction. As proposed by Tajfel & Turner (1979), it is unlikely that self-definition ever occurs at either extreme end of the continuum; rather, at any one time, we may simply be closer toward one end...
than the other. An interaction between two people who know each other very well on a personal
level, such as a pair of friends, may be seen as almost purely inter-personal; whereas an
interaction between two people from opposing sports teams may be seen as almost entirely inter-
group (for some classic examples, see Sherif, 1956; Tajfel, 1978).

What is key to the current research is SIT’s notion that individuals’ interpretations, attitudes, and
behaviours may, depending on the particular social context, be affected or even defined by social
identities associated with their group memberships. For example, we can easily understand how
a person’s attitude towards his or her friend, and the behaviour they engage in with relation to
that person, are likely to be affected by their knowledge of that person as an individual, and the
inter-personal relationship that exists between the two of them. However, when a person has self-
defined as a member of another group, attitudes are likely to be defined by the nature of inter-
group relations (power relations, status relations, etc.).

Although intergroup discrimination is a potential psychological consequence of social
identification, it is not an automatic and straightforward process. In real life individuals are part
of more than one social category, have multiple social identities (i.e. national, professional,
gender, ethnic, or religious groups), and there are a number of outgroups to compare the ingroup
with. As Reicher (2004) explains, the social context defines which social category the
individuals identify with (whether being English or British for example), the comparison
outgroup, and the dimension(s) of comparison. The role of the context is not only present in the
choice of categories to identify with, but also in the way intergroup differentiation exists. In
other words, differentiation is a process that operates in the structural context in which the
groups operate.
There are a number of aspects of SIT which are crucial in terms of this thesis: Groups are a very important aspect of everyday life, and group identities give meaning to reality and guide the way we operate in the world. Furthermore, social identities are an important source of collective self-esteem, and guide group members towards achieving a positive evaluation in a number of ways. While there is extensive literature supporting social identity theory, and its explanation of the underlying processes that allow interactions to travel along the interpersonal-intergroup continuum (McGuire et al, 1978, Hogg & Turner, 1985) it has also attracted criticism. Huddy (2004) argues that social identity theory has devoted little or no attention to the origins of individual differences in intergroup behaviour; that social identity researchers have essentially ignored the role played by individual differences in the process of identity acquisition and the development of outgroup antipathy. Brown (1996) questions whether the boundary lines between social and personal identity can be so neatly separated in real life as social identity theory would propose. Reicher (2004) is critical of studies based on the minimal-intergroup situation with their findings that in-group loyalties and outgroup antipathies are readily aroused. Reicher argues that this is an overly simplistic interpretation of the theory and does not allow for change which might come about simply through exposure to new arguments and new positions. This question of the rigidity of group membership, and also the contextual nature of social identity is addressed by self-categorization theory.

1.3.2 Self-Categorisation Theory

Although SIT illuminates how inter-group relations affect group members’ attitudes and behaviour, the theory does not directly address the notion of relations within groups. For this reason, self-categorisation theory was developed as an extension of SIT, explicitly addressing
intra-group processes and the relationship between the self and the group (i.e. self-categorisation) in particular. As such, the two theories can be seen as complementary and intertwined. Hence Turner (1987c) noted that SCT could also be referred to as “the social identity theory of the group” (p. 42). While SIT saw personal and social identities as part of a continuum, SCT views the two as representing different levels of inclusiveness/abstraction of self-categorisation (Turner, 1999). SCT perceives the self to exist at three different levels of abstraction: the superordinate (where the self is categorised as a human being as supposed to other living beings), the intermediate level (where the self is categorised in terms of ingroup-outgroup) and the subordinate level (where the self is categorised in personal terms/identities which are different from other ingroup members) (Oakes, Haslam, & Turner, 1994). For example, certain categories (e.g. European) are seen as more abstract and inclusive then others (e.g. Irish). Thus, the more abstract categories include less abstract ones (Irish are Europeans), but more abstract categories are not included in the less abstract (not all Europeans are Irish). The same principle applies to social and personal identities, where social identity is a more abstract category and includes personal identity. In this way, the personal and social identities are not separate constructs, and inversely related, but rather a more complex one, which operates at different levels of abstraction, each equally important for the self-concept. However as one identity becomes more salient, the other becomes less salient, and at any given time and context one of them is central to the self. It is the intermediate level (where self is defined in terms of ‘we’ as ingroup versus ‘they’ as outgroup), which has been the focus of the Social Identity Approach (Haslam, 2001). According to SCT, the act of defining oneself as a member of a particular group (self-categorisation) entails a process of depersonalisation and self-stereotyping. Depersonalisation increases the perception of the self as interchangeable and more similar to other group members,
and the perception of ingroup members as exemplars, representatives of the attributes of the ingroup (Haslam, 2001; Tajfel, 1981). In addition, the individuals will embrace the characteristics of the group (attributes and values), and act upon them (Brown & Turner, 1981). In other words, the self and others will be defined in terms of group membership.

Depersonalisation can also be seen as the process that transforms behaviour from interpersonal to intergroup (Turner, 1999), where the views of the world and individuals’ actions are guided by the particular social category they belong to.

Individuals have multiple identities, and it is the contextual situation we find ourselves in that defines which identity is salient at any given time. Research suggests that salience has a multiple impact, leading to depersonalisation and group behaviour (Turner, 1999). More specifically, salience guides various social perceptions and behaviours (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 1997), “it guides individuals to behave based on group norms and values” (Turner, 1981, p.39), it guides individuals into seeing other ingroup members as similar and prototypical of their ingroup (Haslam, 2001; Turner, 1999). Furthermore, it defines stereotypes that individuals have about the self and ingroup members (Turner, 1999), and it increases ingroup consensus and favouritism (Haslam, Oakes, Reynolds, & Turner, 1999). Although an individual can be part of different social groups at the same time, it is the salient identity (with its particular norms and values), which will guide the individual’s behaviour and thoughts at any particular time. Thus, salient identities can regulate behaviour by making members act in terms of group needs, goals and norms (Haslam, 2001).

SCT developed the concept of salience further, by elaborating the two aspects that produce salience: accessibility and fit (Haslam, Oakes, Turner, & McGarity, 1995; Oakes et al, 1994). What makes individuals act on the basis of a particular identity is the interaction between
accessibility (the readiness to use a particular identity) and fit (the degree of match between category and reality) (Oakes, 1987). There are two types of fit, comparative and normative. The comparative fit assumes a person will choose a particular category, and for self-definition if differences between members of that category are smaller than differences between that category and other categories on relevant dimensions. Normative fit assumes that differences within the chosen category not only need to be smaller, but should be consistent with expectations that individuals have of that particular category (Haslam, 2001). Thus if the goals and values of an individual coincide with those of a particular category, there are higher chances that that category will be chosen for self-reference. Furthermore, the level of centrality and the importance of a particular membership for self-definition will define the accessibility of a particular category for self-reference (Oakes, 1987).

The concept of the fit is relative and varies with the context, as does the category chosen for self-reference. In addition, the level of fit can define prototypicality (the extent to which the individual characteristics match the group characteristics) of particular members for that particular group. SCT highlights the importance of social categories for the individual, which is reflected in the expectations that group members will agree with and follow or act in terms of the stereotypical norms, values and beliefs of that particular social category (Brown & Turner, 1981). These expectations are the bedrock of social influence, cooperation, solidarity and helping behaviours amongst group members.

What we take from SCT is the importance of context in causing people to perceive themselves as group members and therefore as interchangeable with fellow in-group members. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of identification in influencing our understanding of the social world and our behaviour, and the importance of context in understanding behaviour. What is important
to draw from SCT in terms of this thesis is that it is through the group that we define what is important for us in terms of social reality. Also intra and interpersonal processes and the quality of relations with others are a function of social identification. Furthermore, social identification leads to respect and following of group norms, which in turn leads to greater solidarity amongst group members.

1.4 The importance of social identity to understanding prejudice and conflict

Central to this thesis is problematic intergroup relations that result in prejudice, and in turn conflict. The study of intergroup relations has played a central role within political behaviour research over the past 50 years (Huddy, 2004). The mass extermination of Jews and other groups in Nazi Germany pushed interest in group phenomenon beyond ingroup solidarity to encompass the study of prejudice and intergroup conflict (Allport, 1954). As outlined earlier according to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) individuals categorise the social world in terms of groups. A key tenet of social identity theory is that people derive a part of their self-concept from their membership in particular groups. Identifying with one particular group (i.e. ingroup) psychologically minimises differences between ingroup members and maximises differences between ingroup and relevant outgroups (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell 1987). Identifying the self as an ingroup member can lead to ingroup favouritism and outgroup derogation, especially when such behaviours and attitudes are supported by ingroup norms (e.g. Terry & Hogg, 2001). In the face of conflict, ingroup preference strengthens and becomes associated with outgroup hostility even to the point of hatred and violence. However, while SIT explains how discrimination occurs, it would be a mistake to characterise SIT as a theory of prejudice. This is because of the range of behaviours that can result from social identity
processes, and because early accounts focus mainly on the reactions of low status groups to their domination by others, making it in large a theory of resistance (Reicher, 2004). Although the processes described by SIT, especially categorisation, may be necessary for prejudice to arise, they are not sufficient.

The insufficiency of SIT as a theory of prejudice can be approached through a consideration of work on the relationship between the strength of ingroup identification and ingroup bias. Ingroup bias is the evaluation of one’s ingroup as being superior in some way to an outgroup. Because prejudice typically involves seeing outgroups as inferior, it might be suggested that an understanding of ingroup bias might lead us toward an understanding of prejudice.

Research on ingroup bias has constituted a point of contention in the field. In brief, it has involved some social identity researchers, deriving from SIT the hypothesis, that the strength of identification with the ingroup should be positively correlated with the ingroup bias (identification-bias hypothesis). A number of studies have found that the correlation is often not observed, and this has led to a review claiming that it constitutes a major problem for the theory (Hinkle & Brown, 1990). This ‘failing’ was attacked, notably by Turner (1999) who argued that the hypothesis was based on a simplistic reading of SIT research. While the evidence reviewed by Hinkle & Brown is not as problematic for SIT as those authors claimed, there are also some shortcomings in Brown’s critique, and there are some important points to be taken from Hinkle & Brown’s contribution.

SIT does not claim that the motive for positive distinctiveness leads to any single intergroup outcome, because the way in which it operates depends on various contextual factors. This point is at the heart of Turner’s (1999) critique. He argues that ingroup bias is expected only when group members engage in social competition, whereby a superior position is sought on the
salient dimension of comparison, and that this is only one of several means to achieve positive social identity. The identification-bias hypothesis, he argues, overlooks the other strategies described by SIT: social creativity (whereby the meaning or relevance of the dimensions is changed) and individual mobility (which entails leaving the group and seeking an alternative source of positive distinctiveness).

It is important to clarify what is and what is not assumed about SIT in drawing the identification-bias hypothesis from it. It is *not* necessary to reduce SIT to the claim that ingroup bias is inevitable, or that it is a direct consequence of categorisation, in order to derive the hypothesis that identification and bias are correlated. Nor is it necessary to see bias itself as necessarily conflictual or leading to hostility. Rather, what is at stake is SIT’s insistence that positive social identity is inherently competitive, i.e. that is can only be achieved by judging one’s group to be *superior in some way to some outgroup*. This does not apply only to the social competition strategy: both social competition and social creativity involve comparisons favouring the ingroup. These strategies differ in the choice of comparison outgroup and evaluative dimension, but both involve pro-ingroup bias. The only strategy that does not is the individual mobility strategy, because it does not involve seeking positive distinctiveness for the ingroup at all. Instead, the individual leaves the group, psychologically or otherwise: “*individual mobility implies a disidentification with the ingroup*” (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, p.43). Therefore, to the extent that a person is committed to the group, for whatever reason, we can expect them not to pursue individual mobility, but to seek positive distinctiveness through the ingroup, and hence to engage in ingroup favouring comparisons of some sort. Similarly, to the extent that a person is able to derive a satisfactory social identity through such comparisons (whether this involves competition or creativity), we can expect group membership to remain an important part of that
person’s social identity, corresponding to higher identification. It is on these grounds that the identification-bias hypothesis can be derived from SIT.

As well as disputing that claim that the identification-bias hypothesis is based on a correct reading of SIT, Turner (1999) criticises the empirical work itself. He contends that where the identification-bias relationship is not observed, this may be because irrelevant groups or dimensions of comparison are involved. Hinkle and Brown (1990) acknowledge this in their review. However, they point out that without any way to predict which dimensions and groups will be relevant, the claim that positive social identity rests on ingroup favouring comparisons is un-testable. The social creativity strategy, which is crucial to the theory, does indeed make it very difficult to conceive of falsifying evidence, at least in naturalistic settings, because it can always be claimed that positive distinctiveness was derived from some other dimension or comparison group.

Turner (1999) also argues that the contextual dependency of the identification construct invalidates research on the identification-bias hypothesis, though it is not clear why the hypothesis depends on identification being stable. Furthermore, Turner’s own conceptualisation of identification is inconsistent. At some points, identification is equated with the notion of perceiver readiness from SCT, or else as “one important factor affecting [perceiver readiness]” (p. 13), and as such is understood as something “that a person will tend to bring to the task of [categorisation]” (p. 23). Elsewhere, identification is “a variable outcome of self-categorisation” (p. 23) leading to the conclusion that analysing individual variance is inappropriate. In a broad sense, it may be possible for identification to be both an antecedent and an outcome of categorisation, although Turner does not elaborate how this is so. In any case, it is unclear why Turner rejects work examining the correlation between identification and bias as
invalid, while praising other work that shows high and low identifiers responding differently to the same contexts.

In spite of this inconsistency, Turner’s suggestion that identification is context dependent raises the possibility that the problem could be addressed by changing the level of analysis. As discussed above, the identification-bias hypothesis essentially rests on the difference between individual and collective means of achieving positive social identity. The tests of the hypothesis reviewed by Hinkle and Brown (1990) and Brown (2000) all involve computing the correlation between individual differences in identification and bias within a given context. However, Tajfel (1978b) makes it clear that the choice between individual and collective strategies of achieving positive social identity depend on social structures that favour either mobility or change. Rather than assuming that individuals within a context differ in their choice of strategy, it would be more appropriate to examine variance across contexts. Contexts of social change are contexts of high identification and ingroup bias (either social creativity or competition), whereas in contexts of individual mobility we would expect to find low identification and less ingroup favouritism.

Some potentially useful insights of the Hinkle and Brown (1990) review are neglected by Turner’s (1999) critique. For example, they suggest that positive social identities can sometimes be derived without the need for ingroup favouring comparisons with other groups, and that the content of particular identities is relevant to whether such comparisons are involved. It is quite plausible that the satisfaction that one derives from being a member of a family, for example, does not rest exclusively on one’s family being superior in some way to other relevant families, and it might instead be compared to some abstract notion of ‘the good family’. Mummendey, Klink and Brown (2001) demonstrate that in a national context comparisons with one’s own group in the past can also serve as a source of positive social identity. Of course, these abstract
and temporal comparisons are as dependent on the broader context as intergroup comparisons. There is nothing reductionist or simplistic about the suggestions, and they are faithful to the meta-theoretical concerns of the social identity approach. Their only point of departure from earlier versions of SIT is they do not require all social comparisons leading to satisfactory social identity to explicitly favour the ingroup in relation to an outgroup.

However, even if SIT did offer a full account of when ingroup bias does and does not occur, it would still be insufficient as a theory of prejudice. Ingroup bias is not the same as prejudice, because it involves a relatively positive evaluation of the ingroup compared to the outgroup, rather than actual outgroup derogation (Brewer, 1999; Brown, 2000). Billig (2002) expresses somewhat similar concerns when he argues that the social identity tradition has not adequately explained ‘bigotry’, as opposed to mere intergroup bias, though unlike Brewer and Brown, he calls for these phenomena to be reconceptualised in discursive terms.

This observation that ingroup bias is not the same as overt hostility and conflict does not actually depart from early formulations of SIT. Tajfel and Turner (1979) point out that social competition is not inherently conflictual, and may only become so when “... the salient dimensions of intergroup differentiation are those involving scarce resources” (p. 46). Research, (Muldoon et al, 2007, Kelman 2001) also highlight the importance of context when studying conflict situations. Therefore, contrary to what is often assumed (e.g. Sniderman & Hagendoorn, 2007), SIT is like Sherif’s (1966) realistic conflict theory (RCT) in that direct competition over resources is implicated in intergroup conflict. The difference between the theories is not that RCT requires direct competition for intergroup relations to be conflictual while SIT does not. Although social competition and other processes described in SIT can occur in the absence of realistic competition (as they do in the minimal group studies; Tajfel, 1981), these processes are
only conflictual to the extent that one group obstructs the other’s efforts to achieve positive distinctiveness (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The contribution of SIT is to account for how identities are involved in people’s evaluations of their interests and possibilities in various circumstances, as well as describing alternatives to social competition and the conditions under which these alternatives might be pursued. In other words, SIT should not be regarded as the introduction of a set of autonomous ‘identity issues’, separate from ‘interests’ that lead to prejudice and conflict. Based on what has been explained about the social identity tradition, we can ask a very basic question: why might having a certain social identity lead a person to derogate others? The way in which we answer this question depends very much on what ‘having an identity’ means. In SIT, it means to define oneself in terms of some group membership and to seek positive distinctiveness for the group. The pressure for positive distinctiveness can lead in various different directions, as we have seen, and this may or may not involve conflict and prejudice. The SIT answer, then, is based on a generic meaning of social identity, which would apply to any group, whether a knitting circle, a firing squad or the European Union. Thus, if we ask what it means to have a national identity (or a religious identity, or a gender identity) the answer remains the same: one defines oneself as a member of a national/religious/gender group and seeks positive distinctiveness in relation to comparable outgroups.

According to Billig (1995), this is a serious problem. In its emphasis on generic processes, the social identity approach neglects the particular meanings of particular identities. In other words, it ignores the fact that social categories are associated with particular ‘ideological traditions’ (Reicher, 2001), and that these determine what it means to have a certain kind of identity. For example, although religious identity does indeed involve categorising oneself as a member of a certain religious group, it also involves representing the world in a particular way such that
religious categories matter. Furthermore, beyond categorising oneself as a member of a religion, being a high or a low identifier also has specific meaning. For example, more than knowing what is means to be Catholic, there may also be a notion of what it means to be a ‘practicing Catholic’ or, conversely, what it means to be a Catholic person who downplays the importance of religion. Thus, social categories are built into broader systems of meaning, and cannot be studied in isolation from these.

In order to understand prejudice therefore, it is necessary not only to understand categorisation processes, but also the meanings that stem from the processes of category construction. However, this does not involve a turn away from the idea of social identity in favour of an emphasis on particular ideological beliefs about how the world is and should be. On the contrary, it is because ideological systems are inhabited, rather than just believed in, that they are powerful. As noted earlier, social identity links the social to the personal. Therefore, it is through social identity that a system such as nationalism or religion can be more than a set of beliefs, and inseparable from one’s conception of who one is and how one is positioned in relation to others. Although we cannot be confined to the processes described in SIT and SCT, the meta-theory behind the notion of social identity is indispensable to a fuller understanding of prejudice.

### 1.5 Social Identity and Social Influence

Social influence is an important concept in this thesis, because it seeks to explain how various factors in our social world, be they other people or aspects of the broader context, affect individuals’ experience of the conflict in Northern Ireland. A traditional view of social influence, which grew out of an individualistic interpretation of ‘group’ behaviour, is that it involves conformity to the mean of the individual group members’ opinions (Allport, 1924).
However, at the time when SIT and SCT were being developed, the more dominant, dual-process theory of social influence was that influence could have either a normative or an informational basis (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Deutsch and Gerard defined normative influence as “an influence to conform with the positive expectations of another” (p. 629). That is, it was seen as involving no genuine conversion of opinion, merely as behaviour that is in line with what others expect or what others are doing (this can also be seen as related to Le Bon’s view that group behaviour is unrelated to meaningful intentions or thoughts). Informational influence, however, was defined as “influence to accept information obtained from another as evidence about reality” (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955, p. 629). This type of influence was said to involve the internalisation of information that was judged to be valid and reliable.

The social identity paradigm offers an alternative explanation for social influence, based particularly on the reasoning of SCT, which proposed a single process of conforming to relevant, self-defining in-group norms. This process is termed referent informational influence (RII; Turner, Wetherell, & Hogg, 1989). The core idea is that when a given group membership becomes salient, individuals categorise themselves at a level inclusive of other group members, and hence their behaviour will be in line with the norms of that group. In conditions of uncertainty, fellow ingroup members are seen as a valid source of information for the group norm, and for appropriate behaviour in general. Thus, influence can neither be defined as entirely normative nor entirely informational – for it is a combination of the two. As an example, take Sherif’s (1936) autokinetic paradigm. Here, individuals were asked to judge the distance travelled by a light in a darkened room, and their estimates seemed to converge towards a group mean. However, as noted by Turner (1985), although there was no correct answer in this case (as the light was not moving) participants were not aware of this fact. We can therefore interpret the
findings as indicating that participants converged towards an emerging group norm because they found the task difficult and sought input from fellow group members, an apparently valid source of information. In line with this reasoning, Abrams and colleagues (1990) report empirical evidence to support the notion that individuals do not internalise or reproduce normative information which comes from those categorised as out-group members. The central prediction of RII, that shared identification with a group is a precondition of mutual intra-group influence (Turner et al., 1989), is key to the current research. Correspondingly, behaviour that is not consistent with the group identity or with what is best for the group is unlikely to be seen as prototypical or normative for the group, and is therefore unlikely to be influential (Turner, 1987a, 1991). In this thesis we will argue that group memberships’ influence attitudes and behaviour and a particular behaviour is most likely to be accepted when it is in line with group norms (see Alder, 2001; but see Stahelski & Paynton, 1995, for an alternative account). Before examining this in more detail, however, it is pertinent to provide some empirical evidence for this theoretical account of how social identity allows others to influence how we see the world and interact with it.

1.5.1 Empirical Evidence: Influence Based on Social Identity

During the 20 or so years since the social identity account of social influence was first posited, many studies have provided empirical evidence for the idea that shared social identity underlies the potential for social influence. Social influence can produce changes in individuals’ appraisals, attitudes, and behaviours. For instance, Platow and colleagues (2005) provided evidence for identity based influence on measures of both personal attitudes and behavioural outcomes. Participants listened to a comedy routine which either did or did not include ‘canned
laughter’. Furthermore, the tapes were labelled to indicate that the audience were either members of the participants’ university (i.e., in-group) or members of an outgroup. Platow and colleagues demonstrated that participants laughed more times, and for a longer amount of time, when they heard in-group laughter on the tape. What is more, they also privately rated the routine as more amusing, suggesting that the impression of the material as humorous had been internalised. This demonstrates that rather than adhering to in-group norms merely to please fellow group members, individuals’ also adhere to group norms because we interpret them as valid and meaningful information about the world. Further evidence from Platow and colleagues (2007) demonstrated that participants experienced lower levels of physiological arousal associated with pain when they had been reassured by an ingroup member, rather than receiving no reassurance, or that of an out-group member. Again, this suggests that group membership leads to social influence which has a powerful effect on our interpretation of the world.

Additional support for identity-based social influence has been obtained in research showing that participants gravitated towards fellow in-group members or an in-group norm, on moral beliefs (Halloran, 2007), attitudes (Postmes, Spears, Lee, & Novak, 2005), political opinions (Morales-Toranzo, Canto-Ortiz, & Gómez-Jacinto, 2007), choice dilemmas (Postmes, Spears, Sakhel, & de Groot, 2001; Sassenberg & Boos, 2003), and responses to a word task (Kalkhoff & Barnum, 2000). Furthermore, this influence extends to behavioural intentions, which have been shown to be affected by relevant in-group norms (Bagozzi & Lee, 2002) and persuasion attempts from in-group members (Falomir & Invernizzi, 1999).

Particularly relevant to the current research is previous work that has shown social identity can influence how acceptable we consider other people’s behaviour to be. This is particularly pertinent in Northern Ireland in relation to individuals’ attitudes towards militant behaviour.
Hornsey and colleagues have amassed compelling evidence for the importance of group membership and identification in reactions to criticism of the in-group. For example, Hornsey and Imani (2004) found that criticism of the in-group was responded to in a less defensive manner if it came from within the in-group than if the same criticism was voiced by an out-group member. This was mediated by the perception that criticism from in-group members was perceived as more constructive than similar criticisms voiced by an out-group member (see also Hornsey, Oppes, & Svensson, 2002). Hornsey, Trembath, and Gunthorpe (2004) extended this evidence by showing that in-group members’ criticism was only received more positively to the extent that they appeared invested in the in-group – that is, they seemed to care about the fate of the group. In complement to these findings, Hornsey and colleagues (2005) showed that criticism of the in-group that was voiced to the out-group was viewed more negatively than if an in-group audience had been chosen; and this was particularly the case for high identifiers (see also Ariyanto, Hornsey, & Gallois, 2006). As above, the implication of these studies is that criticism voiced to the in-group is probably meant constructively whereas criticism voiced to the out-group is appraised as more malicious.

1.6 Social Identity and Social Support

Central to the current thesis is how social identity processes influence individuals’ experience of political violence. Recent research indicates that social identity can play a key role in protecting group members from adverse reaction to stress and trauma because it provides a basis from which group members can access and benefit from social support (Haslam et al, 2005). Early research of this phenomenon tended to focus on the nature of the stressor and the personality or circumstances of the person subjected to stress (Holmes & Rake, 1967; Rosenman et al 1964).
The assertion was that certain types of event (e.g. serious illness) are more likely to cause stress than others, and certain personality types (e.g. low hardiness, high neuroticism) or occupational groups (miners, police) are more likely to experience the adverse effects of stress. An alternative to these approaches which predict stress on the basis of specific risk factors was provided by Lazarus & Folkman (1984). They conceptualized stress as a process that is psychologically mediated so that the impact of any given stressor depends on the way that it is construed by the person who is exposed to it. Lazarus & Folkman argued that stress is the outcome of a two-phase process of appraisal. Primary appraisal involves the perceiver assessing the degree to which a particular stressor poses a threat to self, and secondary appraisal involves the perceiver’s assessment of their ability to cope with the threat. In addition to the research by Lazarus & Folkman previous research has also shown that social support is helpful in reducing the harmful effects of stress (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Underwood, 2000). While much of this research on stress accepts that social context exerts influence over response to stressful situations it is often argued that appraisal is dictated simply by the sources of information to which a person is exposed (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

Haslam, O’Brien, Jetten, Vormedal, & Penna (2005) provide a model of stress that suggests that the relationship between social identity and well-being is mediated by group support. They suggest a more complex model of stress in which appraisal processes and stress outcomes are structured by group membership. Haslam and his colleagues carried out two studies indicating that the relationship between social identity and psychological well-being is mediated by group support. Their first study was conducted with patients recovering from heart surgery, examining the stress experiences which accompany this. Participants completed questionnaires measuring social identification levels, social support, self-esteem, depressed mood, and satisfaction with the
environment. The findings indicated that the stronger the identification levels with friends and family the less stress, lower depressive mood, higher self-esteem, and higher life satisfaction were reported by the participants. These results suggested that it was social support, which mediated the impact of social identification on stress and life satisfaction.

The second study investigated bomb disposal officers and bar workers. The participants in this study were given the same questionnaires as in study one, adapted to the particular occupation of participants. The findings revealed that social identification was associated with lower levels of stress and higher levels of job satisfaction. As in study one, social support from ingroup members mediated the relationship between social identification and work stress. In the first study support was given by family and friends and in the second by work colleagues, and in both cases was found to be effective in reducing stress. The three groups investigated in these two studies faced different types of real life stress, thus extending the ecological validity of the findings. The findings provide the basis for the social identity model of stress (Haslam et al, 2005) which goes beyond previous research based on the informational model to argue that it is not enough to simply belong (or be seen by others to belong) to a particular group, it is essential that a person identifies with the group if it is to have a positive impact on stress. Thus it is argued that a person’s social identity salience will determine whether a given stressor is seen as self-threatening, and social identity salience will also serve as a basis for active coping processes. In fact Haslam et al (2009) concludes that social support is most likely to be given, received, and interpreted in the spirit in which it is intended, where providers and recipients share a sense of social identity. Research (Muldoon & Lowe, 2010) has illustrated the centrality of stigmatization in impeding access to identity based support. Therefore while social identities can be powerful psychological resources in the face of adversity, the adoption of a stigmatized identity may also
work as a self-fulfilling prophesy (Major & O’Brien, 2005) thus having a negative impact on psychological well-being.

Three studies conducted by Levine & Reicher (1996), and Levine (1999), investigated the role of salient identity in the evaluation of symptoms and scenarios related to the participants themselves. In the first study (Levine & Reicher, 1996), the researchers investigated the role of identity salience on evaluation of illness and injury scenarios amongst students who were training to become physical education teachers (PE). Participants (all females) were divided into two groups and asked to evaluate the severity of certain scenarios related to physical appearance or physical ability. In the first group gender identity was made salient and in the second, PE identity. The researchers found that when gender identity was salient, appearance threatening scenarios were seen as more serious. In other words, when the women were thinking of themselves as women rather than PE teachers they perceived scenarios that threaten their attractiveness as more serious. Thus, the scenarios were rated as more serious when seen to threaten some valued dimension of the salient identity, than when they were not perceived as threatening.

The second study conducted by Levine (1999), confirmed the finding of the first study. This study was conducted with secretaries where gender or secretary identity was made salient. Participants were asked to evaluate certain scenarios describing different illnesses or injuries. Researchers found that when gender identity was made salient physical attractiveness were seen as more serious, while when secretary identity was made salient, scenarios that threaten their ability to fulfill that role (e.g. back pain) were seen as more serious. Levine concluded that the evaluation of symptoms depended on the meaning that they had for the salient identity, where such meanings are guided by the norms and values of that particular identity.
The third study conducted by Levine (1999) investigated whether a change of comparison group (context) would influence the evaluation of illness scenarios. This study was conducted with rugby players where the salient identity (male gender) was kept constant but the comparison group (with whom the participants were told their responses would be compared with) was manipulated into either females or other males who were not part of their rugby group. The results showed that the comparison context influenced the way the participants evaluated scenarios, even when the same identity (male) was used to make the evaluations. More specifically, when women were the frame of reference, scenarios that threaten the participants’ attractiveness were seen as more serious than when other men were the frame of reference. Scenarios related to emotionality (where expression of emotions outside of the rugby pitch was seen as non-normative in this group) were seen as less important when the men were the frame of reference. Thus in this study, the importance and severity of symptoms were shown to be a function of their meaning in terms of the salient identity. Levine concluded that these findings provide evidence that social identities are generated by the particular social context and are not static in every intergroup situation.

There is also evidence that social identity plays a role in determining the likelihood of who we help. Two experiments were conducted by Levine, Cassidy, Brazier, & Reicher (2002), and two by Levine, Prosner, Evans, & Reicher (2005) using the social identity approach to investigate the importance of group behaviour for bystander intervention.

In the first experiment the participants watched a video involving three individuals (actors) depicting street violence. The participants were asked to rate the severity of the event, whether they would intervene or not, and the emotional response to the event. A confederate introduced as either from the same university (ingroup member), or a different university (outgroup
member), stated his intention to intervene or not before the participants. The result showed that the intention to intervene or not of other bystanders (believed to be group members), would influence the answers of the participants towards higher levels of interventions. Thus, in ambiguous situations, the chances for the individuals to receive help from their group members increased when other group members show an intention of doing the same.

The second experiment (Levine et al, 2002) manipulated the relationship between the bystanders and victims. The participants of this study also watched a video, where the victim of the attack was presented as either a student or not. As in study one, the participants were asked to rate the perceived severity of the situation, emotional response, and likelihood to intervene. The results indicate that bystander behaviour was affected by the categorical membership of the victim. The findings suggest that bystanders were more likely to help victims who were described as ingroup rather than those who are described as outgroup. The researchers acknowledged that the mechanisms under which social categories influence helping behaviour needed further investigation and using a more realistic paradigm rather than hypothetical situations. These concerns were addressed in the following two studies.

In the third experiment (Levine et al., 2005), football fans (Manchester United) faced a realistic dilemma of helping an unknown person who fell on the floor and hurt himself. The unknown person was wearing a shirt from (a) the same club (ingroup member), (b) of the rival club, Liverpool (outgroup member), or (c) and unknown sport shirt (undefined group membership). The results showed that levels of help offered were higher when the victim was identified as group member than when identified as outgroup or from the undefined group.

The fourth experiment (Levine et al., 2005) aimed at investigating whether it is the particular category or the process of social categorization itself, which provoked the difference in helping
behaviour. In this study a more inclusive category was made salient, that of football fan (as supposed to Manchester United fan). Similarly the participants (Manchester United fans) faced the same realistic situation as in study 3. The findings revealed that there were differences in helping behaviour offered to victims wearing a Manchester United or Liverpool shirt, and in both cases help offered to the victim was higher than help given to those not wearing a football shirt. Thus, when the boundaries of the category were defined at a higher level of abstraction, the help was offered to all those included in this new category; i.e. all football fans. These studies confirm that group membership is a basis of helping behaviour where ingroup members are more likely to receive help, especially if other group members show an intention of doing the same.

1.7 The importance of lived experience in shaping social identities

A series of studies in the emergent field of group emotions have shown that, when social identities are salient, we can have strong feelings about things our group has done or else things that have happened to our group, even if we have not personally participated in them. When defined at a categorical level, feelings are determined by collective histories rather than personal histories. This is particularly pertinent to the current research where history and commemoration are an important part of everyday life in Northern Ireland. The nature of the emotions that we feel depends upon an appraisal of the precise implications of a given circumstance for a given identity. This idea is central to the work of Eliot Smith, whose Intergroup Emotion Theory (IET: Smith, 1993) kick-started the work on group emotions. Smith, like Tajfel, was initially concerned with prejudice and discrimination between groups. He sought to show that our reactions to a given outgroup depend upon what we believe ‘they’ mean for ‘us’. This will not only depend upon what we and they are like, but also upon the status and power relations
between us. Thus groups with low power may fear powerful outgroups, whereas groups with high power will have the strength to feel anger if they are thwarted; groups with legitimate high-status may feel contempt, disdain or even disgust towards low-status groups, and under less threatening conditions perhaps more benevolent paternalistic emotions. Moreover the precise emotional reaction is likely to inform and encourage the forms of action tendency directed towards the group. Anger may encourage approach towards whereas fear and disgust promote avoidance of the outgroup. In the context of Northern Ireland where both Catholics and Protestants can be viewed as both minorities and majorities contingent on context, this has led to avoidance of outgroup members, and angry approaches leading to protracted social division.

Historically within social psychology crowd/group behaviour has been explained as the individual losing their identity and behaving in an irrational way. Deindividuation theory (Zimbardo, 1969) was developed to explain the phenomenon that in crowds, people become capable of acts that rational individuals would not normally endorse. It argues that humans become disinhibited and behave anti-normatively with reduced self-awareness and accountability. In relation to the conflict in Northern Ireland this would explain those engaging in political violence as acting in an irrational way due to being members of paramilitary organisations. However the SIDE model (social identity model of deindividuation) (Postmers & Spears 1998) argues that a meta-analysis of empirical deindividuation research confirmed there was no consistent empirical evidence for the processes it proposed. A central critique of deindividuation by the SIDE model is that it claims a unitary sense of self (self-concept) which an individual can be more or less aware of. However according to SIT there is there is no unitary sense of self, as self-concept is made up of personal identity and a multitude of social identities. As such the SIDE model provides an alternative explanation for effects of anonymity and other
deindividuation factors that classic deindividuation theory (Zimbardo, 1969) cannot explain. The model suggests that anonymity changes the relative salience of personal verses social identity and thereby can have a profound effect on group behaviour. Depersonalisation makes perceptions of the outgroup more stereotypical and transforms individuals into group members who regulate their behaviour according to ingroup norms. Identifiability within the ingroup enables group members to join and coordinate their actions to resist a powerful outgroup (Reicher, Levine & Gordijn, 1998 Study 3). In this way groups can harness the collective resource of their shared identity and numbers.

The subjective meaning and consequences of perceived discrimination against an outgroup however depends on the position of one's group in the social structure (Shmitt & Brancombe, 2002). For members of disadvantaged groups, attributions to prejudice are likely to be internal, stable, uncontrollable, and convey widespread exclusion and devaluation of one’s group. For members of privileged groups, the meaning of attributions to prejudice is more localized. Because of such meaning differences, it is argued that the attributions to prejudice are considerably more harmful for the psychological well-being of members of disadvantaged groups than they are for members of privileged groups. According to the Rejection-Identification Model (Branscombe, Schmitt, & Harvey, 1999), members of disadvantaged groups cope with the pain of attributions to prejudice by increasing identification with their disadvantaged group (Shmitt & Brancombe, 2002).

The concept of victimhood is also central in shaping and consolidating social identities. “It is probably universal that in every serious, harsh and violent intergroup conflict, at least one side, and very often both sides, believe that they are the victim in that conflict” (Bar-Tal, Chernyak-Hai, Schori, & Gundar, 2009, p229). Groups develop a collective narrative and memory of the
conflict that denotes that the rival group continuously inflicted unjust and immoral harm upon them throughout the conflict. In intractable conflict, groups believe that their goals in conflict are well justified, perceive their own group in a positive light, and delegitimise rival groups. This collective sense of victimhood has important effects on the way societies in conflict manage the course of the conflict, and approach the peace process (Bar-Tal et al, 2009). This issue is also addressed in Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood (2010)

Further research (Muldoon & Lowe, 2010) has highlighted the social and political dimensions of post-traumatic stress (PTS) by understanding a group-level analysis of PTSD informed by social identity theory. By linking group-level socio-political variables with individual traumatic experiences, Muldoon and Lowe (2012) provide evidence that demonstrates that memberships of particular social groups are intrinsically related to the likelihood of experiencing a potentially traumatic event. Furthermore they argue that this is a relationship between particular social groups and the appraisal of traumatic events. Their research also highlights the mediating role of political, military, and social identities that buffer the impact of traumatic stress and the relationship between group-level factors and available social support that can protect against PTS. This analysis no longer views PTSD as an interaction between an individual and a specific event, but instead views the individual as operating within a specific social context and attempting (or not attempting) to reintegrate into the social context subsequent to the traumatising event.

This chapter has reviewed the main tenets of the social identity paradigm, and explored its important role in the development of understandings related to prejudice and conflict. It has explored the particular impact of social influence and social support on development and maintenance of social identities. This is particularly important to an individual’s ability to
negotiate adversity and trauma. The current research examines how membership of particular groups increases the likelihood of engaging in political violence (traumatic event), but the support received as being part of such groups can buffer the individual’s appraisal of the traumatic event. The following chapter will highlight how this literature may apply in particular to Northern Ireland.
Chapter 2

Social identity and the Conflict in Northern Ireland

2.1 A brief history of the conflict in Northern Ireland

The state of Northern Ireland was formed as a result of the Government of Ireland Act 1920 which partitioned Ireland (English, 2004). The new state of Northern Ireland comprised the six northeastern counties of the island of Ireland which had a Protestant majority and wished to be governed by Britain. While this thesis will refer to the conflict as the prolonged period of political violence between 1969 and the Agreement of 1998, it must be noted that there have been periods of political violence in every decade since the formation of Northern Ireland (see English, 2004 for full discussion). This fact is often overlooked in discourses which reconstruct the period prior to the late 1960s as relatively unproblematic.

The growth of the civil rights movement of the late 1960s (see Dillon, 1991 for detailed discussion) led to growing tensions and violence and eventually the deployment of troops in Northern Ireland in August 1969. The deployment of British troops was initially welcomed by Catholics in nationalist areas and a honeymoon period transpired where British troops defended Catholic areas from loyalist attacks. This period also saw a split within the IRA and the formation of the Provisional IRA who adopted a militant republican ideology in contrast to the Marxist approach of the Official IRA. In the 1960s the IRA had been in a period of decline after their abortive ‘border campaign’ of the 1950s (Dillon, 1991). However a 34 hour curfew and search operation in the Lower Falls area of Belfast in July 1970 is generally regarded as the end of the honeymoon period for the army and the end of the Army’s initial role as a protector of Catholic areas against Protestant attacks, a task subsequently claimed to be the role of the IRA.
Between 1969 and the Agreement in 1998 the conflict (colloquially termed ‘the Troubles’) resulted in over 3,700 deaths (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008). Survey research indicates that almost half the population, almost 80% in some areas, knew someone killed or injured in the conflict (Ruane & Todd, 1996). The violence during this period resulted in normal judicial processes being suspended, repeated breaches of human rights, and collusion between members of the security forces and paramilitaries (Ruane & Todd, 1996). Furthermore paramilitaries took over the functions of policing in many areas with stores of military weapons being built up in private hands.

Republicans interpret and narrate their conflict as one against the British state, a conflict which contains elements of territorial self-determination, assertion of civil rights and reactionary violence against torture, imprisonment and the violation of human rights (Adams, 1997; Moloney, 2003; English, 2004). For republicans the British state has been engaged as an active and aggressive party at all stages in the conflict while simultaneously trying to portray itself as an unwilling but committed umpire between two warring ‘tribes’. Thus republicans recount their ‘war’ as an anti-imperialist rather than a civil conflict.

Loyalists, in contrast, construct their conflict as primarily one of defence: defence of their communities from republican violence, and defence of the constitutional Union (Bruce, 1992). Although the British state has not shown unqualified appreciation for these activities, arresting and imprisoning loyalist paramilitaries for ‘taking on’ the enemies of the state (Shirlow & McGovern, 1996, 1998; Graham & Shirlow, 2002; Gallaher & Shirlow, 2006), the loyalists’ enemy was clearly defined as republicans (who were seen as seeking to ‘bomb’ Northern
Protestants into a united Ireland) and by extension the Catholic civilian community (Shirlow, 2003a; Graham, 2004)

Under the terms of the Agreement Northern Ireland would remain part of the UK until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland wished otherwise. Cross community bodies were set up between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to develop consultation, cooperation and action. The Agreement was committed to exclusively democratic and peaceful means of resolving differences including the ‘normalisation’ of security arrangements in Northern Ireland, and the decommission of weapons held by paramilitary groups. Furthermore the Agreement proposed all qualifying paramilitary prisoners belonging to organisations on ceasefire were to be released from prison within two years. Although the number of prisoners released under the Agreement constituted only a small number of paramilitaries imprisoned as a result of the conflict, the decision was, and still is met with hostility by many unionists. Under the terms of peace 196 Loyalists and 241 Republican prisoners were released (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008).

The terms of the agreement were endorsed by the electorate via a referendum in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The agreement resulted in the formation of a Northern Ireland Assembly. However the assembly has been suspended on several occasions, mainly due to unionist demands concerning the decommissioning of weapons by the IRA. In the elections that have taken place since 1998 there has been a significant growth in the political power base of Sinn Fein, and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), who originally opposed the peace process. This has seen a decline in support for the more ‘moderate’ pro-agreement parties such as the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), and the Alliance
Party. Some commentators (Shirlow, 2006; Burgess, Ferguson & Hollywood, 2007) have argued that this shift in voting patterns points to a failure of the peace process and more extreme attitudes of the electorate. However a more positive view of the peace process is that the extreme parties have ‘moderated’ their views and have thus ‘squeezed out’ the more moderate parties and become more acceptable as a voting option to the majority of the electorate. Some rewriting of the Agreement via the 2007 St Andrews Agreement and complete IRA decommissioning has led to the improbable scenario of a DUP/Sinn Fein power sharing Executive. The subsequent image of Martin McGuinness (Sinn Fein) and Ian Paisley (DUP), men who had been at the forefront of political contestation in Northern Ireland since the 1960s, sharing power at Stormont has been widely lauded locally and internationally as confirmation par excellence of political conflict and transformation in action (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008)

As a result of decades of conflict, Northern Ireland, particularly in working class areas, identity remains vested in traditional principles and practices of the Catholic/nationalist or Protestant/unionist traditions. This results in clearly demarcated boundaries with former open communities being turned into closed ones. This has resulted in bonded communities with little contact with outgroup members (Burgess et al 2007). While this is problematic for building structures that allow for long term peace, these closed communities create solidarity and provide social support for the residents of such communities. Furthermore, although Northern Ireland is in the midst of a peace process, social relationships and politics continue to be characterised by high levels of conflict. The conflict in Northern Ireland is a meta conflict, a conflict over what the conflict is about (Mitchell, 2006). Many attempts to answer this question have been reductionist, where commentators argue that conflict is in essence about x, y, or z and that all other dimensions are secondary to this. Thus, analyses tend to simplify and reduce the causes of
conflict to certain key elements. Literature of this kind includes McGarry & O’Leary (1995) who argue that conflict is essentially ethnonational, MacDonald (1986) who argues that it is basically colonial, and Smith & Chambers (1991) who argue that the conflict is about economic inequality. These accounts cannot get to the heart of divisions on Northern Ireland, as they all simplify, exaggerate or generalize their preferred causal explanation.

A convincing analytical approach to the nature of the conflict is offered by Ruane & Todd (1996). They argue that there is a ‘system of relationships’ in Northern Ireland which interlock and mutually reinforce each other. The system of relationships has three interlocking levels: a set of differences, a structure of dominance, dependence and inequality and a tendency towards communal division. This means that people were first divided over a range of differences, such as ‘Protestant/Catholic’, ‘Irish/British’ and ‘settler/native’. Whilst these differences do not overlap exactly, over centuries of conflict two fairly divided groups have developed in opposition to one another. Thus, Northern Ireland continues to be a very religious society along almost all indicators of beliefs and practices (Mitchell, 2004a). Whilst it has experienced some secularization over the last 30 years, it still ranks amongst the most religious societies in western Europe and indeed the world (Fahey et al, 2004). However rather than religious difference being at the level of theological dispute, religion is used as a social marker, a badge of difference that is unimportant in and of itself. As such, religion provides the dominant signifier of community membership, more so than economics or nationalism. Furthermore, from a psychological viewpoint, religion provides a vehicle of support for those with religious beliefs.

Therefore historically in Northern Ireland communities have been divided along religious lines, and this has led to strong ingroup identity along with rigid social norms which are continually
reinforced through the use of history and remembrance (Gallagher, 1989). For both Protestants and Catholics history and remembrance play an extremely important part in their understandings of their social identities (Cairns, 1982). The use of memorials and monuments to commemorate the dead is extensive and has a long history in Northern Ireland. They include memorials to soldiers and police (state built), memorials for combatants (community built) and memorials to civilians (state and community built) (Hamber, 2004a). Previous research (Muldoon, Trew, Todd, Rougier & McLaughlin, 2007) indicates that there is a conflation of religious and national identity in Northern Ireland with the two often being used interchangeably leading to less favourable outgroup attitudes and intergroup tolerance. This is reflected through the use of street murals in both republican and loyalist communities to reinforce national and religious identity (Leonard, 1997). Street murals create norms by influencing who belongs and who doesn’t within the community by clearly defining the norms of the ingroup distinct from the outgroup. Many loyalist murals link paramilitary casualties with the 36th Ulster Division’s losses in World War 1 and use symbolism associated with that conflict such as ‘lest we forget’ and poppy motifs. This gives social support to those within the community by visualising the historical conflicts of the past. On the other hand republican memorials usually specify that death was for Ireland or in the cause of freedom (Leonard, 1997). Another significant difference in the type of remembrance between the two traditions is that republican paramilitaries are often buried in communal plots which also hold the casualties from earlier 19th and 20th century campaigns. These then become memorials to remembrance, whereas loyalist paramilitaries tend to be buried in individual family graves resulting in less concentration within loyalist culture on cemetery rituals (Leonard, 1997). Remembrance is thus a central part of the identity process in Northern Ireland, and the calendar is littered with commemorations of the past which strengthen ingroup and outgroup differences.
It is evident that social identification and self-categorization along national and religious lines have created strong ingroup/outgroup divisions within Northern Ireland. And despite the changes in the political landscape during the last decade, research (Muldoon et al, 2007) indicates the majority of both Catholics and Protestants continue to categorize themselves into one of the two main religious groups. Moreover Northern Ireland, like many societies in conflict has developed a range of controlling, rigid processes and structures that have become embedded over time to create strong cultural and social norms. It is common for these practices to continue long after large-scale political violence abates and communities can become dominated by social norms that come to direct and influence the ordinary lives of inhabitants in many ways (Hamber, 2004b). This may have serious psychological consequences for those that fall outside the norm in communities, not least through the loss of their social identity. It is claimed that social identity has a key role to play in the stress process and one aim of this thesis will examine whether social identity and self-categorization processes play a key role in structuring people’s experience of stress and life satisfaction. The following section will focus specifically on the social identity literature on Northern Ireland.

2.2 A Review of the Social Identity Research in Northern Ireland

The psychological literature on the conflict in Northern Ireland spans the four decades of the conflict and the subsequent peace process, and encompasses such diverse topics as the effects of violence on children’s development (eg Cairns, 1989); stress, trauma and adult mental health (eg Muldoon and Trew, 2001, Muldoon and Lowe, 2010); memory of the conflict (eg Cairns, Lewis, Mumcu and Waddell; 1998) and education (eg Gallagher, 1992). This review will be concentrating largely on the social identity tradition with a view to delineating its contribution to
the understanding of identities in Northern Ireland and examining recent reformulations and
syntheses which have expanded the scope the social identity perspective.

Psychological research conducted in Northern Ireland in the 1970s adopted a largely
individualistic approach. The earliest work conducted by Lyons (1971) Fields (1980) and Fraser
(1974) was in the psychopathology tradition, examining the adverse effects of ‘the troubles’ on
child and adult mental health. This in turn produced a model of the ‘sick society’ whereby
violence was the product and the cause of disturbed mental processes. While reflecting the
individualistic focus of the times, Gallagher (1989) argues that it also resulted in a diversion of
attention from the underlying root causes of the conflict, and thereby acted as a conservative
force. Likewise, rational cost-benefits analyses of the conflict were found to be entirely
inadequate in appreciating the scale and scope of the conflict (Laver, 1976).

However, by the early 80s, this largely pessimistic view of the conflict was replaced by more
positive understandings derived from wider ranging research into the youth of Northern Ireland
(Gallagher, 1989). Furthermore, Harbinson and colleagues, in a wide ranging investigation
(Harbinson, 1983), found that in terms of mental health and education, children in Northern
Ireland seemed to be performing better than their counterparts in the rest of the United Kingdom
and that, moreover, they were less interested in politics than their parents and more inclined to
leave Northern Ireland on account of the violence. However, as Gallagher (1989) points out, this
optimism was founded on the same basis as the previous pessimism, on the analysis of
individuals rather than groups and thus failed to explain the persistence and indeed intransigence
of the conflict.
The social identity perspective was first applied to the conflict in 1982 by Ed Cairns. Based on the work of Tajfel (1974; 1978), and as outlined earlier, the approach was predicated against individualistic or otherwise reductionist accounts of intergroup behaviour (Tajfel, 1972). It argued that as part of the process of socialisation, members of a community learned the various categories that divide the social world and their place within the respective groupings. Their group memberships form a part of their self concept and, as people will strive to achieve a positive self concept, they will be driven to positively differentiate their own groups from their respective outgroups on various valued axes of comparison. Tajfel (1978) pointed to a number of factors that are critical to the emergence of collective conflict. Two of these are "illegitimacy" (a sense that the system is unjust) and "cognitive alternatives" (a sense that an alternative form of society is possible). The greater the combination of illegitimacy and cognitive alternatives in a closed society, the more people will challenge the status quo. As for cognitive alternatives, these have as much to do with the practical ability to organize opposition as with the ability to imagine a different world. Organization is facilitated by having concrete symbols and sites to organize around and by having sacred relics, which can provide a material focus for a given movement. Historically in Northern Ireland communities have been divided along religious lines, and this has led to strong ingroup identity along with rigid social norms which are continually reinforced through the use of history and remembrance (Gallagher, 1989). Furthermore, the natural inclination to ethnocentrism will be accentuated in situations where moving between groups is impossible and where inequality between the groups is seen as a problem. (Abell & Stevenson, 2011).

Addressing the individualism of the previous research Cairns asserted that it did little to account for the extreme sacrifice occurring on an almost daily basis and posited the move to analysing
the conflict in social identity terms. Indeed he pointed out that several aspects of the situation in Northern Ireland immediately presented themselves as compatible with the social identity model of conflict. Firstly, the bulk of existing research suggests that Northern Ireland is a divided society, such that the two communities of ‘Catholic’ and ‘Protestant’ are ubiquitously recognised by people in the area and used exhaustively to categorise the population. Cairns (1982) had pointed out the process of ‘telling’ whereby people could be placed in one of the groups through the use of subtle cues. Secondly, moving between these groups is rare and when it does occur is subject to disapproval from both sides. Indeed, categories that might be supposed to cross cut the division, such as class or gender, are relatively unimportant in relation to denomination even on an interpersonal level (Rose, 1971; Harris, 1972; Easthope, 1971) and any significant subdivisions of the main categories occur on either side of the divide (Roberts, 1971; Epstein, 1978). With many areas exclusively one religion or the other it accentuates attitudes of ‘us’ and ‘them’ along religious lines.

From this basis of a total binary categorisation of Northern Ireland, Cairns went on to suggest that Tajfel’s concept of identity was a useful explanatory tool. The 1971 census in which denomination was an optional response, showed that over 90% of the population had identified themselves in religious terms with only 0.11% self-defining as atheist or agnostic. Furthermore, research on adolescents (Cairns & Mercer, 1978) had shown that only 3% failed to identify themselves as Protestant or Catholic. However, even at this early stage of his work, Cairns admits that the concept of identity is a complex one and that in particular the religious labels Catholic and Protestant are not necessarily indicative of a theological basis to the conflict. Indeed in the adolescent study almost half of the ‘Protestant’ and a third of the ‘Catholic’ respondents did not consider themselves to be religious.
Despite this, Cairns argued that the other dimensions of the social identity model had much explanatory power and in particular that much of the conflict could be interpreted as each group’s drive to establish or maintain a positive ingroup evaluation. The Catholic population, while occupying a numerically and economically inferior position, could be seen to have a positive ingroup identity, maintained by the focus on their own sports, language, music and other aspects of Irish culture. As Billig (1976) pointed out, this can work to the disadvantage of a minority group such that it facilitates the perpetuation of inequality and Cairns pointed out that this may well have been the case before the start of the present conflict. By the 1960s however, the relationship between Catholics and Protestants became to be seen by the former to be both illegitimate and unstable. As a result, Catholics can be seen to compete with Protestants in political, economic and indeed (para)military forums and the resulting gains can be seen to have reinforced the positive evaluation of the group. Likewise, the Protestant community can be seen to have a positive identity based on their relatively superior status. This however has constantly been accompanied by active commemorations of the past, reflecting the economic and military threat to this superiority. These displays have increased over the duration of the conflict as have the use of various symbols such as the Union flag and Royalty, which, Cairns argued, reflect the perpetuation of psychological distinctiveness rather than indicating any unambiguous solidarity with the rest of the United Kingdom.

This interpretation has several immediate consequences for the understanding of the conflict. As Cairns pointed out the extant literature he considers was geared towards a static notion of the divide and the questions emerging from it were usually those seeking to define the ‘essence’ of the conflict as political, economic or religious. In contrast, Tajfel’s model is primarily a dynamic one focusing on how all such elements are employed in the conflict in a network of ongoing
identity processes. This, he argued is particularly valuable in Northern Ireland where a calendar of commemorations and displays systematically alters intergroup relations. Thus the social identity approach adds a temporal awareness to the understanding of identity processes in Northern Ireland. Secondly, Cairns pointed out that for both Protestants and Catholics, history plays an extremely important part in their understandings of their own identities and the intergroup situation of the present day. While previous explanations of the conflict had treated the historical perspective as simply a background to the present conflict, Cairns pointed to the necessity of examining the role of the different understandings of the past in the present day conflict. Specifically, the romantic nationalism of the Catholic community does much to increase the positive ingroup evaluation and promote idealistic goals of Irish unification, while the Protestant history is based on commemorations of past events which serve to celebrate and justify their sense of superiority.

From this perspective, the social identity model has many advantages, being able to encompass the very many different elements of the divide in Northern Ireland within one explanatory framework and recast what have been questions of essence in terms of identity processes.

The subsequent work of Cairns and his colleagues goes some way to developing this early interpretation. In terms of categorisation, Cairns pursued his earlier work on ‘telling’, finding that children in Northern Ireland demonstrate an understanding of denominational difference in early primary school, but only learn the processes of distinguishing Catholic from Protestant at 10 or 11 years of age (Cairns 1980, 1987). Likewise the various cues for telling have been examined and found to be of functional utility to Catholics and Protestants (Stringer &
McLaughlin Cook, 1985) and that these are quickly learned by incomers to Northern Ireland (Stringer & Lavery, 1987).

In terms of ingroup favouritism and outgroup denigration, indirect measures such as the ‘lost letter’ paradigm using Catholic and Protestant name cues showed little evidence of ingroup bias in a peaceful area, but inferred discrimination on the part of Catholics in an area of high tension (Kremer, Barry & McNally 1986). In contrast, Stringer & Cairns (1983) using face photographs rated as stereotypically Catholic or Protestant found outgroup discrimination among Protestants and evidence of ingroup denigration among Catholics. This was in contrast to their measures of general group evaluation which showed no overall differences.

Some more recent contributions within the social identity tradition have aimed to establish more clearly the perceptions of intergroup relations in Northern Ireland. Irwing & Stringer (2000) set out to develop and validate measures of political attitudes, arguing for the need to develop scales that were sensitive to the particularities of the conflict. Taking a range of issues designed to elicit dissent among the two communities, they enlisted 121 undergraduate students to generate statements they thought would be representative of their denominations perspectives. On the one hand, Catholics demonstrated a ‘social change’ pattern, whereby the authority of the British state and the unionist hegemony was challenged and the ideal of a united Ireland advocated. In contrast, the Protestant respondents adopted the counter, such that their overall strategy was to defend the status quo, which, by implication they viewed as legitimate if not stable. This then would suggest a Catholic active-minority, Protestant reactive-majority model.

A more substantial account of ‘identity management strategies’, as they apply to conflict change, is provided by Niens & Cairns (2002). Taking as their rationale the impact of the cease-fires of
1994 and the Agreement of 1998, they suggest that the current phase of Northern Ireland’s history may well be characterised by a change in perception of stability and legitimacy. As a result, the ways in which people think about their identities may well have changed in tandem. Assessments of legitimacy and stability indicated that Cairn’s (1982) interpretation and that of the previous studies are largely accurate, in that Catholics identify themselves as a minority, struggling against oppression and an illegitimate government. In contrast, Protestants see themselves as living under a legitimate government, though anecdotal evidence of the perceived inequity of the Good Friday Agreement suggests that this may well change.

A strand of research that has taken a more flexible approach to understanding identities in Northern Ireland through examining the relationship between the various dimensions of identity available to people from each community. Waddell & Cairns (1986) adopted Turner’s (1982) emphasis on the context dependence of identity salience and found that when their student sample were asked to ‘imagine thinking, hearing, seeing or reading’ various identity related scenarios, the contextual factors of ‘Irishness’, ‘Britishness’, ‘Anglo-Irishness’ and ‘the Troubles’ all operated to ‘enhance attenuate or reverse feelings of ethnicity’ (Waddell & Cairns, 1986: p 25). Specifically, depending on the frame of reference, there was some evidence suggesting that Protestants reported feeling British in the context of threat and Irish in the comparative context of the United Kingdom. In contrast, Catholics only ever felt more or less Irish.

While this emphasis on the ‘two communities’ approach clearly accords with the survey and anthropological evidence pertaining to the divide in Northern Ireland, it would appear to be prioritising these structural elements above the group members own identifications. Trew (1992)
takes this as a point of departure from previous social identity research, pointing out that methodologically this research has assumed relatively enduring identities and intergroup relations. In contrast, (Trew 1994) charted the changing nature of identifications as elicited by survey research. Most noticeably a survey in 1968 before the Troubles had found a fifth of Protestants in Northern Ireland self identifying as Irish, less than two fifths as British and a third as Ulster. A decade later, self-labeling as Irish had declined to under 8%, British had increased to two thirds and Ulster had declined to a fifth. Trew sees this as a fundamental shift, whereby the original emphasis among Northern Irish Protestants on distinguishing themselves from the rest of the United Kingdom, and particularly England, had been replaced by an assertion of political unity in the face of threat.

An alternative critique of research in the social identity tradition in Northern Ireland comes from the work of Gallagher (1987; 1988; 1989) who employed an ideological and rhetorical approach to the issue of identities. Taking as a starting point a series of minimal group experiments (Gallagher, 1987), in which the arbitrary divisions were replaced by self reported religious and political category labels, he demonstrated that for self-reported Catholics, the religious and political categories elicited the same high degree of ingroup favouritism. In contrast, the Protestant participants evidenced ingroup favouritism on the political, but not the religious dimension. Gallagher speculated that while for Catholics, religion and nationalism may well be considered part of the same unitary identity, Protestantism and unionism imply different frames of reference. Protestantism could be assumed to constitute a relatively secure position within Northern Ireland, but the relationship between Ulster and the rest of the United Kingdom is decidedly less stable.
While such findings are characteristic of most of the work detailed above, Gallagher went on to point out that on examining the political preferences of his participants, a strong relationship existed between their preferred party and the level of ingroup favouritism and outgroup discrimination exhibited. From this he suggested that these respondents had brought particular party-political interpretations of the conflict into the laboratory. Furthermore, he went on to conduct 16 interviews with members of all the main political parties in Northern Ireland (Gallagher, 1989), applying Billig’s rhetorical perspective to the resultant data (Billig, 1982; 1985). Two broad conclusions emerged: firstly that where a single identity label was accepted, the meaning of this could be contested and secondly that individual participants could adopt competing identities which would appear to involve contradictory elements. The former patterning was evident in the interviews with the SDLP and Sinn Fein parties, which both adopted the category label of Irish nationalism. However, each defined it differently, mobilising different national heroes and past events to support their present position. Indeed, even Sinn Fein’s more recent move to extreme left wing policy was presented as a recovery of an older tradition rather than an innovation. In contrast, the ‘Protestant’ political parties, while all adhering to the value of ‘loyalism’ evidenced two competing notions of loyalty; one to the British State and one to Ulster. While the former was more characteristic of the dominant Official Unionist Party and the latter of the paramilitary UDA, all these interviews evidenced a degree of overlap. The UDA while explicitly advocating a move to an Ulster independent from both the Republic of Ireland and the rest of the UK, still mobilised symbols of Britishness in support of their claims. Conversely, the Official Unionist Party readily admitted that there were ‘Ulster nationalists’ within his party. Gallagher takes this as evidence of the existence of this
tension throughout unionist/loyalist politics and points to the increase in fragmentation despite
the intensity of the conflict.

Furthermore, he points out that even in terms of religiosity, his respondents did not seem to take
this as the enduring bedrock of the conflict, most presenting a secular account of their identities.
Even among respondents from the Democratic Unionist Party (closely associated with
fundamentalist Protestantism and in particular Ian Paisley’s Free Presbyterian church) a diversity
of opinion concerning the importance of religion existed such that one respondent dismissed the
Bible as full of contradictions. On these bases then, Gallagher points out that the identity-as-label
approach in the social identity tradition says little about the meaning or significance attached to
the identity it denotes and ironically risks presenting a simplistic static notion of the conflict. In
particular the emphasis on the religious categories alone risks presenting the struggle as an
atavistic expression of bigotry, rather than examining the complex underlying dynamics. As an
example of the insights gained, Gallagher (1989) points out that the tensions and subtleties he
noticed in each party’s arguments were not reflected in their descriptions of the other side. In
other words, the nationalists and republicans characterised the Unionists as a homogenous whole,
dismissing the apparent divisions in terms of personality differences rather than conflicting
goals. Conversely, the unionists and loyalists refused to differentiate between the nationalist
political parties, the IRA or the Republic of Ireland, asserting that only one group may be
prepared to kill Protestants but all share the same aim. In this way Gallagher points out that not
only does the variability of identity matter, but the understanding of the outgroup and indeed the
underlying agreed rules of interaction are of utmost importance in understanding the conflict as a
whole.
A second strand of Gallagher’s research has received more attention. He pursued Cairn’s early emphasis on the role of history in peoples understanding of the conflict by examining how historical narrative was used to construct identities. In particular the rival accounts of Irish nationalism provided by the Sinn Fein and SDLP representatives depended heavily on their respective interpretations of history. This formulation of identity as mediating the groups understanding of history and projecting action into the future foreshadows more recent formulations of the relationship between history and social identity (eg Reicher and Hopkins 2001). However, it also foreshadowed a more general trend in psychological approaches to the conflict in Northern Ireland to consider the role of history in identity formation.

Some basic attempts have been made within the social identity tradition in Northern Ireland to incorporate these specific historical issues, but these have been largely concerned with the recall of specific events. For example McKeever, Joseph and McCormack (1993) examined Catholics and Protestant recall of deaths in the ‘troubles’, finding that Catholics were better at recalling Catholic deaths, while both groups performed equally on recalling Protestant deaths. They took this as evidence of the increased salience of the identity of the Catholic minority. However, Cairns, Lewis, Mumcu & Waddell (1998) examined recall of political events between the years 1969 and 1980 on cohorts of students in 1984 and again in 1995. Accuracy was found to be above average, but no identity related effects were noted. Similarly, Cairns and Lewis (1999) examined recall of the Enniskillen bomb in the town itself and in a nearby area, finding that the group who tended to spontaneously offer the event as part of an account of the ‘troubles’ were Protestants from the town. These results are once more contradictory, based on an open interpretation of whether each group sees itself in ‘minority’ or ‘majority’ terms and more
generally they indicate that more complex processes of identification are at work than straightforward ingroup favouritism and outgroup denigration.

These are to be contrasted with a more nuanced and encompassing approach to the relationship between collective remembering and social identity developed by Devine-Wright (2001; 2001a). Using a questionnaire based approach he directly assessed various factors pertaining to the perceived relations between groups and the historical frame within which respondents conceptualised the longevity of this state of intergroup relations. The dates of: last year (1997); 1985 (signing of the Anglo-Irish peace accord); 1969 (beginning of the ‘troubles’); 1921 (founding of the Northern Ireland state); 1690 (Battle of the Boyne) were offered as time frames for the current state of intergroup relations. In addition themes from history were defined from a Catholic and Protestant point of view (e.g. being under siege vs struggling for equality) as well as a theme of experiencing intolerance which was taken to be applicable to both groups. Using data from 216 Belfast students, Devine-Wright found a patterning of results which indicate a direct relationship between perceptions of intergroup relations in the present and the timeframe over which this relationship is conceptualised. Most self-defined Catholics and a majority of Protestants agreed that Catholics occupied a lower social position. These respondents did not view recent events as having substantially altered the situation and asserted that inequality had been in existence since 1690. In contrast, those Protestants who reported equality viewed this as a recent phenomenon dating from 1969 and 1985. Though this begs the question of whether these latter individuals conceptualised inequality as an historically enduring phenomenon before these dates, still the overall patterning parallels many of the findings above of a relatively homogenous Catholic worldview and Protestant division.
In terms of historical themes and present day injustice, Catholics perceived the ingroup in terms of victimisation, but denies this to the outgroup. In contrast, for those Protestants who viewed Catholics as occupying a lower status, inequality was seen as a legacy from the past, with both groups suffering equally in the present. In terms of historical themes, the only theme attributed by Protestants to the ingroup was ‘defence of tradition’. Devine-Wright concludes that an overall a consensualised notion of groups of unequal status having been embroiled in a conflict of change against status protection underlies most of the responses.

From this perspective, the aim of social identity theorists to decide which group constitutes a minority and which a majority is to a degree redundant. By placing intergroup relations in an historical timeframe we can see that victimhood is an integral part of the Catholic past and present, which in turn denies this status to Protestants. In contrast, Protestants attribute historical injustice to both sides, though claiming defense of tradition as their own. These elements of claimed injustice and defense of the status quo are in turn important in informing our understanding of what is likely to occur in the future. Devine-Wright speculates that given the subsequent Agreement, persisting notions of injustice or threat may well be counterproductive in attempts to reconcile the communities. Therefore the understanding of which group is considered to be a majority or minority in the present would seem to be a matter of dispute within as well as between groups, and rely on understandings of history for its significance.

Historically the vast bulk of research carried out in the social identity tradition has been conducted on university or school children at the expense of the broader population of Northern Ireland. Exceptions to this in recent years include the work of Muldoon & Downes (2007, Muldoon & Lowe (2012), and Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood (2010). However earlier
research using the social identity approach primarily focused on university students as illustrated in a study of 52 relevant research articles which considered four separate reviews of social identity research on the conflict (Gallagher, 1987; Trew, 1992; Cairns, Wilson, Gallagher and Trew, 1995; Cairns and Darby, 1998) only seven studies used samples outside of these areas and none considered specific groups. This may have had two effects. Firstly, a convergence of economic factors means that university students are less likely to come from the working-class backgrounds in which political extremism finds its expression. Thus the full range of political identification may be masked. Secondly against a background of research which highlights segregation as a key facilitator of intergroup conflict, researchers using university samples are often targeting a group which is mixing with the other community on a daily basis. While this in itself may form an interesting focus of study such as Cassidy and Trew’s (2001) examination of the transition from single community school to mixed university environments, there is no guarantee that this group is representative of the broader population. Even where school children are used rather than university students, this still begs the question of whether these samples reflect the full range of political and religious identifications in the adult communities.

In turn this brings into focus the possibility that there may be very different groups with particular understandings of the conflict within Northern Ireland that have not been studied in the social identity literature. Certainly Gallagher’s study of political representatives brought to light material not previously considered. Since then, even the few survey studies which do distribute postal questionnaires to non-student samples have done so on a random basis and to date no further examination of specific political, religious or cultural groups involved in the conflict has been undertaken. The importance of this oversight is reflected in a substantial body of literature in the broader social sciences which suggest that a multiplicity of group identities, especially in
the Protestant community, need to be studied in their own right. Of these the earliest was the work of Steve Bruce on the Protestant religious and paramilitary extremists (Bruce, 1986; 1994). Bruce claims that religiosity and paramilitarism are not the core defining features of the communities in Northern Ireland, but goes on to argue that the polarisation of Northern Ireland in terms of religion and politics have led to the extremities having a disproportionate influence.

Therefore an exclusive focus on the more moderate and secular views of the majority of the population belies the underlying dynamic of the conflict which is often located at the extremes. Conversely though, interpretations of the conflict which dismiss these elements as deviant risk perceiving it as solely a matter of a small minority of extremists and ignoring the shared nature of these views which lends extremism its legitimacy.

If we take Gallagher’s early work as an indicator of the understanding afforded by studying groups beyond the student population, then this is certainly an area of research to which social identity perspective should be addressed. Gallagher’s ideological and Devine-Wright’s historical perspectives have gone some way to placing this conundrum within a broader context of interpretation, such that the perceptions of stability, legitimacy and group status can be examined in their situated context rather than as abstract qualities of the conflict.

This chapter has outlined the history of Northern Ireland and explored the psychological literature in relation to the conflict. The next chapter will outline the methodology employed to gain an understanding of the issues outlined in the first two chapters.
Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Chapter Overview
This chapter begins by outlining the advantages of using a qualitative methodology to understand the meaning behind people’s recollections of the conflict. This will be followed by a rationale for choosing a thematic analysis as the preferred method of analysis. The interview process will then be outlined in detail before the chapter concludes by outlining the thematic analytical procedure followed to analyze the interview transcripts. Throughout the chapter consideration will be given to some of the issues that continually surface when researching social phenomena, and how these were addressed in the current research.

3.2 Qualitative methodology
Historically within psychology the methodological debate between qualitative and quantitative research has been anchored within the two apparently opposed epistemological positions of the experimental, hypothetico-deductive, or positivist approaches of quantitative research and the naturalistic, contextual or interpretive methods used in qualitative research (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1992). As far back as the 19th Century the German historian and philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey called for a clear distinction between the disciplines of natural science and the human sciences, arguing for research in the human sciences to be based upon the search for meaning and understanding (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1992). This view was supported by 19th Century
researchers in social psychology and sociology, such as Mayhew (1861) and LePlay (1879) who used qualitative and quantitative techniques side by side (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

Also during the 19th Century qualitative methods within psychology were viewed in many respects as a more valid way of understanding human behaviour by Wilhelm Wundt and other ‘introspectionists’ of this period (Hayes, 1997). However qualitative approaches to research became devalued as a methodology with the advent of the behaviourist revolution, with its claims that introspection was unreliable and that the subject matter of scientific psychology should be strictly operationalized in an objective and measurable way (Hayes, 1997). Throughout the 20th Century, the experimental method with its emphasis on universal laws of cause and effect, and the assumption that reality consists of a world of objectively defined facts remained as the predominant methodology within psychology (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1992). The important feature of psychological research was that theories were open to, and subjected to testing in order that they may be confirmed or falsified with certainty. With this emphasis on reliability and generalisability, qualitative research tended to be viewed with deep suspicion on the grounds that the data and findings it produces are subjective and cannot provide a solid foundation for rigorous scientific analysis (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995).

However over the course of the last thirty years there has been a further paradigm shift which has seen qualitative methods becoming increasingly accepted as a valuable part of the research process (Hayes, 1997). This paradigm shift saw the emphasis of the research process being placed upon the importance of viewing the meaning of human experience and behaviour in its context in order to understand it in its full complexity, rather than simply reducing such complex social phenomena to oversimplified variables. Furthermore it was argued that the representation
of reality should be seen through the eyes of participants along with an attitude towards
theorizing which emphasises the concepts within the data rather than their imposition in terms of
a priori theory (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1992).

This paradigm shift was aided by the enormous impact of Thomas Kuhn’s book published in
1962, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*. Kuhn’s book represented most of the influential
arguments against positivism, namely that there is no theory-neutral observational foundation
against which theories can be tested, and that judgments about the validity of theories are never
fully determined by any evidence (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Further challenges came
from the ‘deconstruction’ perspective of Derrida, along with Foucault’s argument that discourses
regulate scientific thought, and what is treated as true and false is constituted through the
exercise of power (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). More recent criticisms of the positivist
approach have come from social constructionism (Gergen, 2001) and discourse analysis (Billig
1987, Edwards & Potter 1993a,), as well as challenges from feminist researchers who see
qualitative methods as being sensitive to women’s experiences being seen in their own terms,
and thus empowering women in their efforts to work for change (Pidgeon & Henwood, 1992).

The paradigm shift has also been helped by an increase in agencies and commercial bodies
commissioning more real world research (Hayes, 1997). This has resulted in an
acknowledgement of the inadequacies of quantitative methods to investigate real world issues
and recognition that qualitative methods are the most applicable ways to investigate real world
research projects (Hayes, 1997). The central theme of all these critiques is that the experimental
scientific method as the sole basis for understanding human behaviour is severely limited.
In relation to the current research there are multiple arguments to support the use of a qualitative methodology. As outlined in the introduction chapter of this thesis, relative to its size Northern Ireland is possibly the most heavily researched area on earth (Whyte, 1990). The predominance of this research both generally and within the social identity tradition has focused on survey and experimental methods. Therefore the use of qualitative techniques which allow the researcher to explore the lived experiences of participants, and that can account for the broader social contexts within which participants are located is required to complement the abundance of quantitative research. Secondly, it is now increasingly acknowledged within the psychological literature (Ashmore, Deaux & McLaughlin, 2004), the social identity literature (Reicher & Hopkins, 2001), and literature relating to identity in Northern Ireland (Muldoon, Trew, Todd, Rougier, & McLaughlin, 2007) that quantitative methods used as the basis of self-categorization are limited in explaining the meaning, content and processes that underlie social identity self-categorization.

3.3 Choosing the appropriate means of analysis

Having decided qualitative techniques would be best suited to the current research in order to escape the constraints of the positivistic methods imposed by quantitative research, it was important to ensure standards of methodological rigour were maintained. To address this, four methodologies were reviewed which could possibly attend to, not just the problem of methodological rigour, but also offer guidance on methodological procedure.

The first method reviewed was content analysis. While it is acknowledged that this is mainly used as a quantitative analysis, its appeal was in its ability to offer a systematic objective analysis of text while being able to detect the existence of propaganda, and identify the intensions and communication trends of individuals or groups (Neuendorf, 2002; for example see Muldoon et
al, 2008). Content analysis uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text. These inferences are about the sender of the message, the message itself, or the audience of the message (Mayring, 2000), with the exact focus of a content analysis depending on the theoretical interests of the researcher. Content analysis has been used for making sense of historical documents, newspaper stories, and political speeches by reducing textural material to more relevant manageable pieces of data. Many words in the text are classified into much fewer content categories. Words or phrases of text classified in the same category are presumed to have similar meanings. The rules of coding are made explicit at the outset of the coding process, the aim being to reduce the information to be reported without losing the richness of the data. In recent years the use of content analysis has increased due to the ease of access to data and the use of computers for analysing such data. There are two main techniques of content analysis; Key-Word-in-Context (KWIC) and Word-Frequency lists (Neuendorf, 2002). KWIC draws attention to the variation or consistency of word meaning and usage by determining whether the meaning of particular words is dependent on their use in certain phrases. The aim of the researcher is to list each word together with its context. Word-Frequency Lists assume that the most frequently appearing words reflect the greatest concerns. However a critique of this is that it counts many words which are uninteresting and doesn’t take into account the context in which the word is said. The systematic nature of content analysis was appealing for the current research, however after a thorough review of the content analysis literature it was concluded that the limitations of this method would prove restrictive in addressing the research questions. The main disadvantages of this method were its inherently reductive nature and the probability of the categories providing a powerful conceptual grid, which while being helpful in organising the
data analysis, tends to ignore uncategorized activities. Furthermore content analysis tends too often to simply consist of word counts which often disregard the context that produced the text.

The second method reviewed was discourse analysis with its emphasis on how language is used to actively construct versions of the social world (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; for example see Stevenson & Muldoon, 2010). From a discursive psychological viewpoint a speaker invests a sentence with meaning in order to have an effect and perform some rhetorical action. It argues that social life does not occur inside people’s heads, rather social interaction occurs between people as a sense-making exercise. Individuals display understandings of the social world in their daily interaction and social interaction is where these accounts are constructed and contested i.e. claiming, denying, accusing, blaming, arguing etc. Discourse analysis rejects science as a model of investigation, instead looking at behaviour in context rather than out of context. It doesn’t attempt to make reductions or generalisations, but looks at how psychological phenomena are constructed in talk. The central aim of discourse analysis is to understand how people make sense of their everyday lives with an emphasis that thought and talk always depend on context. Central to the current research is the concept that social identity is fluid and contextual and that shifts in identity can take place through various discursive elements such as rhetoric and historical narrative, and these can play a central role in shaping perception and action. Furthermore, a discourse analysis could highlight the conditions in which people express prejudice and how people present themselves as non-prejudiced when expressing negative outgroup attitudes. Therefore it seemed appropriate, considering the issues under investigation to consider using discourse analysis with its ability to focus on the variability across contexts, and the action orientation of talk. However it was felt discourse analysis may not provide the systematic method of analysis or the rigour and transparency required for this thesis.
The third method reviewed was Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; for example see Muldoon et al, 2007). This combines the ability to capture rich and complex data by allowing participants to generate their own responses to open-ended interview questions in an unconstrained manner. As an aim of the current research was to counter-balance the predominance of survey research carried out in Northern Ireland, a methodology which allows participants to convey their attitudes and feelings on their own terms was appealing. GT offers a flexible set of inductive strategies for collecting and analysing qualitative data. It contains both positivistic (systematic techniques) and interpretive elements (how people construct actions, meanings and intentions) In GT, data and analysis are not separate processes, the researcher ‘flip-flops’ between data collection and analysis with each informing the other. GT begins with a topic or general research question, and then builds a theoretical analysis from what is discovered through the research process. Theory develops and evolves during the research process due to the interplay between data collection and analysis phases. It is important to gather focused data that stays close to the data while developing concepts that synthesize and explain the collected data. The use of memos (notes or ideas) that come to mind during the research process helps with the flip-flop process. Open coding allows the development of higher order categorisations and sub categorisations. After this the research engages in axial coding whereby the researcher makes inferences about codes which are influenced by the researchers existing knowledge of the topic area. The coding and collection of new data continues until theoretical saturation is reached. This is a point where no new data emerges regarding a category and the category is dense enough to cover all variations and relationships (Willig, 2001). The ultimate aim is for the researcher to be able to see things from the participants’ perspective. However it was considered that GT also had its limitations. The first of these is that there are many different versions of how grounded
theory should be carried out (Charmaz, 2002). Furthermore it is argued that grounded theory should be carried out with an open mind, without preconceived ideas. Glaser & Strauss (1967) stressed that preconceived ideas should not be forced on the data by looking for evidence to support established ideas. As the current thesis aimed to analyse the data through a social identity lens, using GT could prove problematic. Furthermore analysing data word by word, or line by line has two drawbacks (Allan, 2003). Firstly it is very time consuming, secondly, and more importantly, dividing data into individual segments can cause the analysis to sometimes become lost within the minutia of the data. So many words being picked individually can lead to confusion and loss of focus, with doubts experienced about what it was the research was looking for. There have been many variations put forward as to what constitutes a faithful grounded theory, with even Glaser and Stauss disagreeing about the most appropriate way to carry out the method (Allan, 2003). Moreover GT seems increasingly used in a way that is essentially grounded theory ‘lite’ – as a set of procedures for coding data very much akin to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). So the open nature of GT means researchers often claim to be doing GT when in fact their analysis is essentially thematic. Therefore it was decided not to use GT as a method of analysis in this thesis.

The final method reviewed was thematic analysis. While this has previously been critiqued as a poorly demarcated, rarely acknowledged, yet widely used qualitative method, a seminal paper by Braun and Clarke (2006) argue that it offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analysing qualitative data. They argue that it is the first qualitative method that researchers should learn as it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis. Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can provide a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data. Braun
and Clarke (2006) argue that thematic analysis does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and discourse analysis. Therefore it can offer a more accessible form of analysis, particularly for those early in a qualitative research career. As such it was decided that a thematic analysis was the most appropriate qualitative method to use given the research question in hand.

3.4 Epistemology and Ontology of Thematic Analysis

Earlier in this chapter a paradigm shift was outlined that highlighted the value and recognition of using a qualitative methodology to explore complex social issues in psychology. This approach contrasts with the positivist, experimental methods of exploring cause and effect that was previously seen as essential to ensure methodological rigour within psychological research. This paradigm shift emerged with a new postmodern epistemology which countered the modernist epistemology that had led the way for the preceding years of psychological enquiry. Epistemology is concerned with the nature and scope of knowledge and is referred to as "theory of knowledge". It questions what knowledge is and how it can be acquired, and the extent to which knowledge pertinent to any given subject or entity can be acquired (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Modernists argued that human behaviour should be viewed objectively, and scientific enquiry should assume that psychological processes are related in a causal manner to environmental inputs on the one hand and to behavioural consequences on the other. Modernism holds the experimental method up as superior to all others in capturing these causal relationships. For modernists language is seen as an objective tool used to communicate the nature of the world objectively. Language is viewed as the carrier of truth, and because of this position researcher
subjectivity in the research processes is not a central concern of both science and its communication.

In contrast the postmodernist perspective makes no claims for the truth, objectivity, universality, or the superiority of its own position. As such it does not deny the value of the scientific method for developing knowledge, rather it argues there is benefit to using other approaches and these approaches are methodologically better suited to particular research questions. For postmodernists language is seen as embedded in cultural processes. Thus language gains its meaning not from its mental or subjective underpinnings, but from how it is used in action. The major question that must be asked of scientific accounts is not whether they are true to nature, but what these accounts seek to achieve, how they contribute to culture more generally, and at the same time provide a window into the hidden assumptions of cultures.

In using a thematic analysis in this thesis, this research embraces a postmodern perspective by assuming that people’s talk is meaningful and that the talk represents the way in which people represent and understand their worlds, in other words this discourse allows a window into subjective views of the world and therefore individuals’ psychology. As a consequence, the position here accepts subjectivity of individuals’ experiences, acknowledges the important role for language in exposing communal and collective assumptions and understandings, and considers how these positions and narratives are political (Gergan, 2001). And this thematic analysis moves away from language as social construction (as per discourse analysis) and accepts that it can be a representation of psychological values, identities, and ideology. As such the analysis was solely performed for this thesis and could have been performed differently for different purposes. For example by using a grounded theory approach the researcher would allow
themes to emerge from the data, rather than identifying them in relation to an a priori theoretical position as with the analysis currently undertaken. If the researcher had chosen a discourse analysis the focus would have been on social construction of talk and language that is used rhetorically and looked at how psychological phenomena are constructed in talk. The analysis used in this thesis allows the research to engage and be informed by existing psychological knowledge and therefore in the current analysis themes were identified in relation to the social identity literature outlined in the opening chapters of this thesis. Furthermore, this analysis lets the researcher understand how the subjective view of the world is used by a particular individual in a particular setting to negotiate everyday life. This position has important ontological implications. Ontology deals with questions concerning what entities exist or can be said to exist, and how such entities can be grouped. From a positivist, experimental position the world is viewed as material in nature, composed of causally related entities, and available for observation by individual minds (Gergan, 2001). However from a postmodern perspective there are no grounds for such a presumption. The ontological position taken in this thesis proposes that arguments about what is ‘really real’ are futile. Arguments of what is true or moral will be embedded in particular cultural ideologies and contested by conflicting conceptions and opinions. By using a thematic analysis and the social identity perspective as a lens through which to analyze the data, the researcher is accepting that things like social identities and social support are psychological realities. These have been used to inform the analysis and as such allow the identification of themes based on the researcher’s position and knowledge. Thus here we use a range of culturally relevant discourses to describe particular phenomenon. However this is not to argue that nothing exists outside linguistic construction (though those from a discursive position
would argue that this is the case), rather once one begins to describe or explain what exists, one inevitably proceeds from a forestructure of shared intelligibility and discourse.

3.5 Description of the Thematic Analysis employed

This section will provide an overview of how thematic analysis is employed, with a more detailed account of the procedure used in the current research later in this chapter. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It minimally organizes and describes the data in rich detail. However it also goes further than this, and interprets various aspects of the research topic. Traditionally thematic analysis has been seen as an ‘anything goes’ method within psychology and beyond, as it often does not appear to exist as a ‘named’ analysis in the same way as other methods do (e.g. discourse analysis, grounded theory). However often when researchers have claimed to be doing ‘named’ analysis, a lot of the analysis is essentially thematic or not identified as any particular method at all (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such it is vital to provide clarity around the process and practice of the method employed.

In previous research using thematic analysis it has been common for researchers to talk of themes ‘emerging’ or being ‘discovered’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This denies the active role the researcher plays in identifying patterns/themes within the data, selecting which are of interest, and reporting them to the readers (Taylor & Ussher, 2001). If themes emerge or are discovered from anywhere, they emerge from our thinking about our data and creating links as we understand them.

There are certain terminologies that belong to thematic analysis. Data corpus refers to all data collected for a particular research project. For example this could include interviews with
participants, media items on the topic, and/or websites on the topic. A data set refers to all the

data from the corpus that is being used for a particular analysis, so a data set could just be the

interviews, just the media items or just the websites. Data item is used to refer to each individual

piece of data collected, which together make up the data set or corpus, for example an individual

interview, a television documentary, or one particular website. Finally a data extract refers to an

individual coded chunk of data, which has been identified within, and extracted from a data item.

There will be many of these, taken from throughout the entire data set, but only a selection of

these extracts feature in the final analysis. To summarise a thematic analysis involves searching

across a data set to find repeated patterns of meaning. The process starts when the analyst begins

to notice, and look for patterns and meaning and issues of potential interest in the data. The

endpoint is the reporting of the content and meaning of patterns (themes) in the data, where

themes are abstract (and often fuzzy) constructs which the researcher identifies before, during,

and after the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis involves a constant ‘flip flopping’

between the entire data set and data being produced. Furthermore, writing is an integral part of

analysis, with the jotting down of ideas and potential themes throughout the analysis process.

Thus coding is an ongoing organic process. In regards to engaging with existing literature, some

argue that early reading can narrow a researcher’s analytic vision, resulting in potential crucial

aspects of the data being omitted. However, others argue that engagement with the literature can

enhance the analysis by sensitizing the researcher to more subtle features of the data (Tuckett,

2005). Therefore there is no one correct way to proceed with reading. So it is evident that the

exact form and product of thematic analysis is flexible, and a description of the particular

thematic analysis used in this thesis will be clearly outlined later in this chapter. Furthermore, it

is important to note that no data set is without contradiction, and a satisfactory thematic ‘map’
that is eventually produced (an overall conceptualization of the data patterns, and relationships
between them) does not have to smooth out or ignore the tensions and inconsistencies within and
across data items.

3.6 The interview process

3.6.1a Initial Sampling

Study 1

For the initial study, participants were recruited from friends and acquaintances. This resulted in
the majority of participants being postgraduate university students and having low experience of
political violence. While the current research has critiqued previous studies on the conflict in
Northern Ireland for their overuse of student samples, the first study of the current research was
comprised of a majority of postgraduate students. The reasons for this were it was a convenient
starting point for the research, and enabled the researcher to test the appropriateness of the
interview schedule with individuals for whom an interview was seen as a relatively usual event,
Also this group were more likely to feel free about giving feedback on any problems
interviewees may have had with the nature of the interview. As the central research question was
to investigate participants’ experiences of living in Northern Ireland before, during, and after the
conflict, representation of both Catholics and Protestants in the final sample informed
recruitment. Participants for this study were recruited and interviewed between May and August
2007. Apart from the ongoing disputes over contentious Orange Order parades and sporadic
dissident republican violence the peace process was relatively stable during this time.
Ten of the participants in Study 1 had lived in Belfast all of their lives. They had all grown up in
the more affluent areas of Belfast and had low experience of political violence. Also most of
these participants were young teenagers at the time of the IRA and UVF ceasefires of 1994, thus their age was a further reason for them not experiencing the worst of the troubles. Two of the participants had grown up in the border counties of Northern Ireland and moved to Belfast to attend university.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT 1</th>
<th>Catholic</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>30 yrs old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 2</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 3</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>24 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 4</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 5</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>23 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 6</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>25 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 7</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 8</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 9</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>42 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 10</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>33 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 11</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>28 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT 12</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>25 yrs old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study 2**

Study 2 involved a further ten interviews being carried out with participants who had experienced a high amount of violence during the conflict. All these participants were recruited through victim support groups, including organisations looking after the welfare of former members of the security forces, victims of republican violence, victims of loyalist violence, and also victims of state violence. Individuals who lost family members as a result of republican violence and former members of the security forces were recruited through the FAIR (Families
Acting for Innocent Relatives) organisation. Formed in 1998 the organisation is based largely in South Armagh and consists of relatives of members of the RUC, UDR and individuals who have been injured or killed by republican paramilitary groups. As such FAIR has sought to campaign for recognition and compensation for those affected by republican violence, particularly in the area of South Armagh. Victims of alleged illegal state violence, and loyalist violence were recruited through a community centre based in the New Lodge area of North Belfast. Apart from former members of the security forces, participants in this study came from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Previous research (Muldoon & Downes, 2007; Muldoon & Lowe, 2010) has indicated that individuals living in low socio-economic backgrounds experienced higher levels of political violence. Furthermore the age of the participants in this study was higher than Study 1, meaning that the majority of these participants were of adult age at the height of the conflict during the 1970s and 1980s. Participants in this study had lived for the majority of their lives either in South Armagh or North Belfast, both areas which experienced the worst violence of the conflict. Participants were recruited and interviewed between March and June of 2008. As with Study 1 the peace process was relatively stable, notwithstanding contentious Orange Order parades and sporadic dissident republican violence.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PARTICIPANT  13</th>
<th>Protestant</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>62 yrs old</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  14</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  15</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>47 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  16</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>32 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  17</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>57 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  18</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>37 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  19</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  20</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>68 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  21</td>
<td>Protestant</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>42 yrs old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPANT  22</td>
<td>Catholic</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>35 yrs old</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Study 3**

For study 3 it was decided to interview participants who had been members of paramilitary organisations. Again it was thought beneficial to start the recruitment process by approaching support groups, in this case for former IRA and UVF prisoners. The fact that of the 3500 deaths as a result of the conflict, the IRA was responsible for over 1768 deaths and the UVF for 569 (Maloney, 2010) influenced the decision to recruit former prisoners who were aligned to these two organizations. The prisoners were recruited from Coiste na n-larchimi, and EPIC support groups.

Coiste was formed in (1996). Its aims are to secure the full integration of the republican former prisoner community through recognition of the contribution they have made to the community in the past and can make in the future. Also it facilitates republican former prisoners in deepening and developing their contribution to justice and peace in Ireland, and deepens the mutually beneficial links with community organizations, employers and other groups. Coiste’s
programme has included a concerted effort to ‘outreach’ to various groups including former British Army and RUC personnel, the Orange Order, loyalist groups and unionist politicians (Gormally et al, 2007).

EPIC was formed in 1995 as a self-help centre to offer support to former prisoners, particularly those from a UVF or RHC background (Crothers, 1998). Over the years EPIC has broadened its aims to include opportunities for ex-combatants and others to engage in dialogue; using the experience of former prisoners to influence and persuade young people of the value of non-violent methods, and to share experiences of conflicts with others in conflict zones around the world in order to identify common themes and construct models of best practice in peace building (McEvoy, 2008). All of the participants in this study were former prisoners who had been sentenced to life terms of imprisonment. Three of the participants had been released early from prison under the terms of the Agreement; the other participants had all spent between 15 and 17 years in prison. All these participants grew up in working class communities in North and West Belfast which became religiously segregated at the start of the conflict in 1969. On release from prison participants returned to their communities and became actively engaged in the peace process through their engagement with the respective support groups outlined above. These participants were recruited and interviewed between June and August of 2008. As with the previous studies this was a time when the peace process was relatively stable.
PARTICIPANT  23  Catholic  Female  42 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  24  Protestant  Male  48 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  25  Protestant  Male  24 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  26  Protestant  Male  43 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  27  Catholic  Female  44 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  28  Catholic  Male  39 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  29  Protestant  Male  53 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  30  Protestant  Male  45 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  31  Catholic  Male  59 yrs old  
PARTICIPANT  32  Catholic  Male  37 yrs old

3.6.1b Theoretical Sampling

The recruitment of participants was assisted by theoretical sampling. The interview process began by interviewing friends and acquaintances. The benefits of this were twofold; firstly it allowed me to develop my interview technique with people I knew relatively well and felt comfortable with. Secondly it allowed for frank feedback on the content and process of the interview, which along with the data analysis allowed the interview schedule to be revised if necessary. This part of the data collection involved 12 participants. On analysis of the data it was revealed that all of these participants had ‘low experience’ of the conflict.

A Thematic Analysis approach stresses the importance of going back and forth between data collection and data analysis with the aim of the analysis influencing future sampling. As such it was decided to continue the data collection by sampling from a more diverse range of age and background, as well as those with higher experience of political violence. Diversity of
experience produced a greater richness in the data to be analysed, and also allowed for the
identification of new themes and resulted in a further two studies

While letters were sent to all potential participants explaining the nature of the research,
the responses were often slow. As such, I used snowballing methods and the use of
‘gatekeepers’ to aid the process of recruiting participants. For studies 2 and 3 this proved
invaluable to the overall research process. The gatekeeper tended to be someone
influential and with authority within the victim group, so was able to encourage others
within their organisation to participate in the research. Not only was this beneficial for the
recruitment process, it also reduced the intrusiveness of the research process, and helped
develop a level of trust, leading to more open and honest responses during the interview.
By continually switching between collecting data through the interviews and analysing the
transcripts, 32 participants were recruited across the 3 studies. At this stage it was
considered analytic saturation had been reached as further analysis of the data provided no
new insights. Analytical saturation was achieved through continued sampling and
simultaneous data review. As no new themes or commentary appeared subsequent to
interviewing the final participants, the themes identified were believed to be saturated. In
addition in the final interviews, concepts and linkages between the concepts that form the
theory had been verified with these interviewees. As such no aspects of the theory could
be said to remain hypothetical, rather there was evidence of substantiation of all
themes. Finally it is important to note that throughout the research process field notes were
kept which captured the many day to day practicalities and complexities of the research
process. These notes proved a valuable asset during both the analysis and the writing up of
the thesis.
3.7 The Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule (see Appendix 1) was developed covering a number of topics. The aim of this schedule was to provide a framework of topics which would allow an insight into people’s experience of living in Northern Ireland before, during and after the conflict. Questions were open ended, allowing respondents to articulate their own recollections of the conflict. In the initial set of interviews, the interview started by asking participant’s about their earliest memories of living in Northern Ireland, this included general memories as well as earliest memories of the conflict. They were also asked to recollect their memories of some of the iconic events of the conflict. These included the ‘Shankill bombing’, ‘the Greysteel massacre’, the ‘Belfast Agreement’, and the ‘Omagh bombing’. Other topics covered included ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ experience of the conflict, local community, and thoughts on the use of remembrance and commemoration within Northern Ireland. Participants were also asked their views on political, cultural and economic changes in Northern Ireland and whether they felt these were positive or negative. Furthermore, in the initial set of interviews participants were questioned about sources of social support and the mechanisms they used to cope with stress.

The order in which topics were covered was not important, the concern was that the interview was conversational in style. This required the researcher asking questions in relation to the previous answer. The interviewer’s responsibility was to keep the ‘conversation’ centred around the topics in the schedule.

After the initial set of 12 interviews, initial analysis of the transcripts was conducted, along with a review of the field notes. The feedback from the participants and the analysis of the transcripts resulted in some changes being made to the interview schedule. It was felt that questions about earliest memories were restricting participant’s ability to elaborate on their experiences of
childhood and adolescence. As such it was decided to open the interviews with the general question “can you tell me about your experience of growing up in Northern Ireland?” Apart from this change the rest of the schedule remained the same as the researcher embarked on the next set of interviews (see Appendix 2 for revised interview schedule). On completion of the next set of interviews and analysis of the data, it was felt that no changes were required to the interview schedule. Therefore for the final set of interviews the schedule remained the same.

3.8 The Interview

The use of semi-structured interviews using open ended questions allowed participants to report their experience of living in Northern Ireland in their own words and their own terms. Before commencing the interview it was important to establish a rapport with participants. This was done by engaging in general conversation which was intended to relax the participant. Participants were then informed as to the general purpose of the study, and made aware both in writing and verbally that they were under no pressure to take part and could withdraw at anytime. Participants were asked to sign a consent form if agreeing to take part in the study. When initially approached to take part in the research (either in person, by phone or by letter) the participant was asked to allocate one hour of their time for the interview, although if they wanted to talk for longer this was not discouraged. As a result the length of the interviews ranged from 40 minutes to 2 hours 15 minutes. The interviews were carried out in either an office in the School of Psychology at Queen’s University Belfast, the participant’s place of work, or the participant’s home.

During the interview participants were asked a series of open ended questions in order to elicit their experience of living in Northern Ireland. The participant’s responses were recorded on
audio tape or digital recorder and later transcribed for analysis. All participants were allocated a code number and all data could be identified only on that basis. Furthermore all identifying information in the transcripts was altered to protect confidentiality. At the end of the interview participants were fully debriefed as to the nature of the project. They were then given the opportunity to ask any questions about the study and were provided with both the researcher’s and supervisor’s contact details should they have any further questions. At this stage participants were also encouraged to give feedback as to how they felt during the interview process. Most interviewees reported feeling generally at ease during the interview, however there were some who said they felt uncomfortable talking about their experiences. On analysis of the transcripts there was evidence that the majority of participant’s appeared to relax as the interview progressed as their responses to questions became more detailed as the interview developed. However a few participants never seemed to be at ease talking about their experiences, as their answers were brief and elaboration had to be continually encouraged by the interviewer. In these instances it was important to take account of ethical considerations and not be obtrusive or threatening in trying to develop their responses. During the interview process it became evident that people with a higher level of direct experience of the conflict appeared to be more at ease talking about their experiences of living in Northern Ireland. A possible reason for this could be that they are well rehearsed in recounting their experience as they are regularly approached by researchers through the support groups to which they belong. Finally, in relation to the interviews it was apparent during the research process that my skill as an interviewer improved during the course of carrying out the interviews. Differences in the quality of the early interviews compared to those carried out later in the research process are evident from the transcripts.
3.9 Relationship of the researcher to the research

While using qualitative methods in social research allows the researcher to focus on the context and meaning of the material under investigation, the subjective nature of the methodology requires the relationship of the researcher to the research to be considered throughout the research process (Hayes, 1997). This has particular relevance to the current research as the researcher grew up and lived in Belfast during and after the conflict. However while it is important to acknowledge the influence of ‘cultural baggage’ on someone from Northern Ireland carrying out social research there, it can also be advantageous to the research process. A good understanding of the cultural background of the population is particularly helpful in the context of Northern Ireland where cultural meanings and symbols reveal much about individual and community allegiance (Whyte, 1990). Furthermore, as discussed earlier in this thesis, the terminology used to describe places and events, along with complex social cues such as a person’s name, the school they attended, the area they live in, and even how they pronounce the letter ‘h’ can all communicate a person’s religious identity.

This knowledge was an advantage during the interviews where the sensitivity of the issues being discussed demanded a non-judgmental interviewing style. As such, knowledge of the controversial terminologies outlined earlier in this thesis could be avoided so as not to offend or alienate participants. It was also important to display a disposition of impartiality and try not to convey my own opinions through my questioning, or through positive or negative facial expressions to participant’s responses.

However because of the almost automated tendency for people from Northern Ireland to use the social cues mentioned above to categorize people from Northern Ireland as either Protestant or
Catholic, I was aware when carrying out each interview that there was a likelihood that the participant was aware of my religious background. This was evident in one interview with a republican former prisoner when they actually remarked “...I’m aware you’re not from a nationalist background?” This was not said in a threatening way, and I did not confirm or deny his assumption. While I hope my impartial attitude to the research process minimised my influence in how participants responded to my questions, I fully acknowledge that I was an influential part of the research process. I accept that not only will my religious identity have had an influence on participants’ accounts of the conflict, but my ‘cultural baggage’ will also have influenced my analysis of the transcripts. What was important was that I was reflexive about my influence on the research throughout the entire process. As Ian Parker states “Research is always carried out from a particular standpoint, and the pretence to neutrality in many quantitative studies in psychology is disingenuous” (Parker, 1994, p76)

3.10 Ethics

Ethical approval to carry out the research project was granted by both Queen’s University Belfast and University of Limerick. All participants were asked to give their consent at the outset on the basis that the research may eventually be published in academic journals. They were also informed that they can withdraw from the research at anytime. All the interview material was kept strictly confidential and any anxieties raised during interviews were discussed with the participants. All participants were debriefed at the end of the research.

3.11 Procedure for the thematic analysis of interviews

At the start of the analytical procedure it was important to clarify the claims that the research wanted to make in relation to the data set. The aim of the thematic analysis used was to
complement the research questions by allowing the tenets of the social identity paradigm to be integral to the analytical process while allowing for themes to be identified direct from the data using inductive coding. A detailed exemplar of the staged process of data coding and identification of themes is outlined below and also in Appendix 3 & 4. This process demonstrates how analysis of the raw data from interview transcripts progressed toward the identification of overarching themes that captured individual’s subjective experience of living with political violence. Therefore the analytic process involved a progression from description, where the data was organized to show patterns in semantic content, and then summarized, to interpretation, where the aim was to theorise the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications, often in relation to previous literature (see Frith & Gleeson, 2004, for an example of this). Although presented as a linear, step-by-step procedure, the analysis was an iterative and reflexive process. The data collection and analysis stages in this study were undertaken concurrently, and previous stages of the process were reread before undertaking further analysis to ensure that the developing themes were grounded in the original data.

In line with the ‘flip-flopping’ between analysis and data collection the transcribing and analysis of the data began after the initial 12 interviews. As this sample was recruited through friends and acquaintances, it seemed an appropriate time to see how these individuals experienced the conflict and identify which themes were important. This was also a useful time to reflect on the effectiveness of the interview schedule and make any changes that may be necessary. Before coding began the transcripts were read and reread until the researcher was familiar with their content. Although there are no hard and fast rules as to how many times this needs to be done, the ultimate aim for the researcher was to be able to see things from the participants’ perspective. Coding at this stage involved the production of initial codes from the data (see Appendix 4 for
examples of initial codes). All coding was done manually by writing identified codes onto index cards and placing them across a large flat space. It was important to include on the card the location of the unit within the text and the identifying number of the relevant participant. Initial codes identified a feature of the data that appeared interesting to the analyst, and referred to the most basic segment or element of the raw data that could be assessed in a meaningful way in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. By working systematically through the data set, interesting aspects in the data were identified which formed the basis of repeated patterns across the data. It was important to code for as many potential themes/patterns as possible, as something may not be identified as interesting until later in the analysis or from future data. There were times when an individual extract of data may have been left uncoded, coded once, or coded as many times as was relevant to the different themes that were identified.

The next phase of the data collection was informed by the long list of different codes which were identified across the initial data set of Study 1. Initial codes were then amalgamated that looked/felt like other codes and the cards were placed together. At this stage the researcher was building up descriptive categories. This early stage of analysis was not very demanding since the researcher was simply describing each unit, thus categories gathered very quickly. However this rate began to slow down and the process took longer and became increasingly frustrating and demanding as the researcher had to inspect all the existing piles before deciding where to place the next index card. Each unit may be placed in more than one category, a process known as ‘open categorisation’ Therefore when meaning unit piles were approximately 6-8 cards the researcher generated an umbrella term for the category, which encompassed all of the meaning units within the category (see Appendix 4 for examples of umbrella terms). Each umbrella term was defined so that the initial codes could be regarded as attributes of this new category. Thus
any further units could be assigned to one or more of these bigger categories. It is important to note that if the researcher was uncertain as to where to place a meaning unit, a new category was developed. At this point, the researcher had many defined categories that described the data. By reconsidering these descriptions, the researcher then began to generate higher order categories (candidate themes) by amalgamating original categories (see Appendix 4 for examples of candidate themes). The aim was to achieve analytical saturation whereby a given number of themes were reoccurring and no new categories were being generated by the new data. The coding of Study 1 highlighted that these participants had a relatively low level of direct experience of the conflict. As such it was decided to recruit from those with a higher experience of the conflict for the next set of interviews. The analysis also indicated that the question about describing their earliest experience of living in Northern Ireland, and earliest experience of the conflict seemed to be too limiting as a question. As such it was decided to use the more open question of ‘can you tell me about your experience of growing up in Northern Ireland’, and this was used in the next set of interviews. The next stage of the data collection recruited ten participants who had lost close relatives or colleagues as a result of the conflict.

The next phase of the analytical procedure began by initially coding all the data from Study 2. Again this resulted in a long list of different codes. At this stage the codes were compared with the codes and candidate themes generated in Study 1 and differences and similarities were identified. Codes that fitted with the candidate themes in Study 1 were placed there, whereas those that didn’t were used to form new categories and candidate themes by using the same process outlined for Study 1. Again the aim was to achieve saturation whereby a given number of themes were reoccurring and no new categories were being generated by the new data. At the end of this stage of coding some new candidate themes were identified which informed the
sample for the third study. From the new candidate themes that were developed in Study 2 it was evident that participants had high experience of political violence and also claimed to be the ‘real victims’ of the conflict. As such it was decided to recruit those who many viewed as perpetrators of violence for Study 3 to see how their accounts compared to those of the first two studies.

The next phase of the analytical procedure began again by initially coding all the data from Study 3, resulting in a long list of different codes. These codes were compared to the codes and candidate themes generated in the first two studies. Codes that the researcher identified as fitting into the existing candidate themes were placed there, while other codes from this study were grouped together to form new categories and then new candidate themes. At this stage the researcher reviewed all the coded data and refined the candidate themes. As such, some candidate themes collapsed into each other to provide a single theme. (see Appendix 4 for examples of this). At this stage codes which were not identified as fitting a candidate theme were discarded. At this stage analytical saturation was considered to have been reached, were none of the data resulted in new categories or themes and the data within the candidate themes cohered together meaningfully and there was a clear and identifiable distinction between themes. At this stage each theme was given a definitive name (up to this point themes had been given only ‘working’ titles. See Appendix 4 for example of definitive names.) “Names need to be concise, punchy, and immediately give the reader a sense of what the theme is about” (Brawn & Clarke, 2006, p23).

The final phase began with a set of fully worked-out themes, and involved the final analysis and write-up of the report. The task of the write-up was to tell the complicated story of the data in a way that convinces the reader of the merit and validity of the analysis. The aim was to provide a concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive, and interesting account of the story the data tells,
within and across themes. The aim was to provide vivid examples, or extracts which capture the essence of the point being demonstrated, without unnecessary complexity. Moreover, it was important for the analytic narrative to go beyond description of the data, and make an argument in relation to the research question. Examples for the development of a theme as outlined in this section are elaborated on in Appendix 3 & 4. The following chapters will outline the analysis of each study.
Chapter Four

Study One: Participants with low experience of the conflict

4.1 Overview

For this initial study participants were recruited from friends and acquaintances, with the only caveat being to recruit equal numbers of Catholics and Protestants. In total twelve participants were recruited, and after the data was analysed, it was evident that all the participants had low experience of political violence. Two key categories were identified from the analysis of the data. The first relates to participants’ minimising of the conflict, while the second category concerns participants’ experience of social division.

4.2 The conflict as normal/banal

A key theme that was identified in study one was how participants appraised the impact of the conflict on their everyday lives. These low experience participants tended to minimise the effects of the political violence. While some participants did this by denying the conflict had affected their lives, others accepted the conflict as a social reality, but minimised the effects it had on them and the wider society. For instance one university student stated

“People turn on the news and think there are bombs being set off everywhere. People really exaggerated what was going on in our country.......There were still shootings going on, but then you look everywhere, there’s people getting killed everywhere, it’s just a case of getting used to where you are. Okay our killings might have been for different
reasons, and they were highly publicised and things like that, whereas down south there might have been people killed in robberies or burglaries.

(Participant 3, Protestant)

In this account the participant minimises the impact of political violence by arguing it was highly publicised and amplified by the media, and that is was never as bad as it was made it out to be, ‘but really exaggerated’. While she does make a distinct comparison for the reasons for killings in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, she constructs an account of life in Northern Ireland as being similar to other places, for example the Republic of Ireland where political conflict has been absent for several generations. Implicitly she draws comparison between robbery and burglary and political violence, therefore not only minimising, but normalising it by making it ordinary, as something you get used to.

On the other hand, when accepting the conflict had an impact on their lives, participants played down the influence. Take for example this excerpt from an interview with a participant talking about the day a neighbour was killed as a result of political violence.

“….and it wasn’t anything big like 9/11 or something like that, and at the time it was so common that it was just an everyday thing and nobody talked about it. That I can remember, it was just another news day, another somebody else was dead and that was that, and there wasn’t anything else really to discuss”

(Participant 1, Catholic)

In this extract, the participant uses the comparison of the 9/11 attacks on the ‘Twin Towers’ in New York to play down the political violence experienced in Northern Ireland. By using this
extraordinary ‘one off’ terrorist attack in New York, she constructs the political violence experienced for over thirty years in Northern Ireland as something which was much more banal. Also by using the phrase ‘there wasn’t anything else really to discuss’ lets her place the violence in the background. Furthermore, there is a social acceptance of the killing and the victim being unremarkable (‘just another news day, another somebody else was dead’).

As well as using comparisons to elsewhere to minimise the consequences of the conflict in Northern Ireland, participants interpreted their own experiences with reference to what their parents reported experiencing during the 1960s and 1970s. This temporal comparison is evident in the following extracts

“*My dad’s business started off on the Whitewell Road and the UVF or UDA, I don’t know which one, on the York Road, they were always asking for protection money and stuff, and when the business didn’t pay protection money across the road it was bombed out...they have had more direct experience of what the troubles were, and I do think that my generation were just experiencing things that were really annoying, like bombscares, and attitude kind of things, tit-for-tat stuff, rather than the major stuff that my parents had to go through all the time*”

(Participant 6, Protestant)

“*My dad was nearly kidnapped by the Shankill Butcher’s gang, and my mum was held up by the IRA....my dad went to St Malachy’s and four or five of his friends in the space of time that he was at St Malachy’s were shot, killed, or had brothers and sisters who were injured or killed (pause)it seems completely foreign to me.....I remember having to stop*”
at checkpoints while the army searched our car, and having to leave shops because of bombscares in the city centre, but I don’t know anyone who was shot or killed”

(Participant 2, Catholic)

In both these statements the participants talk about their parents having direct experience of political violence. They use this to then compare their own experience as more trivial (bombscares, army checkpoints). These participants who stated they lived in socially mixed areas of South Belfast during the 1990s, present themselves as having experienced comparatively low levels of violence. In contrast they present their parents as having experienced the worst violence of the conflict during the 1970s and 1980s. As well as the temporal comparison, there is also a geographical comparison. The parental locations identified in both statements are in North Belfast, which with its patchwork of Protestant and Catholic communities experienced the most extreme sectarian violence during the conflict (Shirlow, 2004). As such the participants use time and place to distance themselves from political violence by presenting their own experiences as minimal by comparing them with the problematic political violence experienced by their parents, and by presenting living in South Belfast as normal/banal.

Further to using their parents to minimise their experience of political violence, participants also cited their parents as a source for understanding the political and ethno-religious nature of everyday life in Northern Ireland. Information was conveyed via everyday discourse between parent and child. In the following quote the participant takes great pride in discussions with her father as a form of political education.

“we would have had great chats about politics whenever I was growing up, and really in depth. He taught me a lot and I think he gave me a balanced view which I thought was
great because I would have talked to other people whose parents wouldn’t have been so balanced’’

(Participant11, Catholic)

It is interesting from the above quote that the participant believes the information she is receiving is balanced and without bias. By comparing her father’s view with other children’s parents in a positive way, allows her to position herself and her family outside of the sectarian and prejudice attitudes which are so prevalent throughout Northern Ireland.

It was also identified from the data that television news programmes acted as a primer for family discussions relating to the political situation within Northern Ireland.

Whenever I was younger I used to watch Neighbours and then it was the News and I can remember asking where’s that or what’s that and dad would be going well that’s down the road and things like that.

(Participant, 5 Catholic)

This participant talks about watching the news, and portrays it as an opportunity to talk to her father about newsworthy events in Northern Ireland. It is not surprising that both local and national television news stories during the conflict would hold such interest and prompt family discussion given the prominence and sensational nature of bombing and killing during this period in such a small geographical area. However it appears that by saying ‘well that’s down the road’ her father is avoiding any detailed discussion about the conflict. Previous research (Muldoon et al., 2007) has illustrated the significance of the parental role in shaping their children’s beliefs and opinions in which transmission of identity and associated attitudes from
parents to their children was viewed as both common and inevitable. As well as her dad influencing her opinions of the conflict, the choice of news channels watched would also have an influence as they take a political position and therefore are not without bias. Many people in Northern Ireland had access to the RTE channels in the Republic of Ireland and these would have taken a different position when reporting the conflict than BBC or UTV channels.

4.3 Social Division

Analysis of the data indicated that participants, while eschewing the impact of religious division in their lives, continually used religion as a way of categorising people. Importantly though while the respondents talk about religious friendships at an interpersonal level they continue to categorise their friends at group level.

"My friends are very evenly split, you know, being Catholic or Protestant, it’s never been an issue....I never noticed any difference between us" (Participant 6, Protestant)

"I have a Protestant boyfriend, so I take no notice of whether someone is a Catholic or Protestant" (Participant 4, Catholic)

It is interesting that despite the ability of many in Northern Ireland to see the prejudice inherent in statements such as ‘some of my best friends are black/gay or Jewish’ in other cultural contexts (van Dijk, 1992; Wetherall & Potter, 1992), similar statements vis-à-vis the other religious group in Northern Ireland are not seen as problematic.

However, while the above participants denied religious division influencing their lives, other participants highlighted how social practices can act as a distinctive religious marker within Northern Ireland. In the following account the participant highlights how recreational activities
such as attending the Boy’s Brigade act as a cue to a person’s religion. He then goes on to emphasise the prominent social practices such as the commemoration of the Battle of the Boyne on the Twelfth of July, and attending Sunday school as a way of telling someone’s religion.

“They went to Boy’s Brigade which was a Protestant thing, they went to the Twelfth of July, they went to Sunday school and we used to kind of laugh at, what you have to go to school on Sunday. We used to think this was funny. We were very aware that they were Protestant and we were Catholic.” (Participant 7, Catholic)

It is also noteworthy that this participant talks about religious division as a collective phenomenon, using ‘we’ and ‘them’ to describe religious differences between Protestants and Catholics. He then uses his ingroup identity as a social comparison to mock Protestants going to Sunday school by using the phrase ‘we used to think this was funny’. This denigration of the cultural practices of the outgroup occurs because these experiences were outside of the cultural experiences of the ingroup and were thus during childhood at least belittled by this participant.

Institutional and traditional practices around education and church attendance continually highlight the segregated nature of everyday life within Northern Ireland. The following participant talks about the segregated nature of education and church attendance which prevails in Northern Ireland.

“I remember people who lived in my neighbourhood weren’t, didn’t go to St Brides, they were at Stranmillis and from my point of view it was like they didn’t take their first communion or they didn’t have to go to mass, lucky them, you know like”

(Participant 5, Catholic)
It is interesting from this account that the participant is aware of the different social practices that are tied to being Catholic or Protestant. While the difference is initially associated with the different schools that children from the same neighbourhood were attending, this is then associated with religious practices. It is interesting that she uses the phrase ‘lucky them you know’. While this was said in a light-hearted tone, unlike the previous participant who mocked Protestants going to Sunday school, this participant appears to prefer Protestant religious practices over Catholic traditions. Though this participant lived in a mixed neighbourhood, the segregated practices surrounding education and church attendance meant that from an early age she was categorising her neighbours along religious lines. While children may not understand the ubiquity or consequences of religious division within Northern Ireland at this early age, it would appear different religious and schooling practices along with other social cues as a person’s religion become a central part of how they organize their social world.

Throughout the interviews first knowledge and awareness of religious division in Northern Ireland was often linked to the school system. A majority of children in Northern Ireland continue to attend schools which are segregated along religious lines. This segregated system with its distinctive markers (the differing names of schools and cultural practices associated with them) is used as a way of ‘telling’ religion (Cairns, 1987). This role of schools in developing perceived difference from the other is also illustrated by the following account.

“I went to an all-Catholic primary school and I remember we had a day when we mixed with another school. I can remember then maybe that was when I first realised that not everybody was like me, if you know what I mean, because we mixed; it was like a YMCA day with another Protestant school.” (Participant 11, Catholic)
For this participant, their experience of the YMCA day with a Protestant school is presented as a realisation of social division along religious lines. Their prior segregated life of Northern Ireland had prevented exposure to the other main religious group, and this encounter with the other presented this person with evidence of not only another group but that this group was different.

Interestingly, experience of attending the same school was interpreted differently depending on religion. An example of how religious identity can influence an individual’s experience of attending school can be found in the following statements made by a Protestant and a Catholic who attended the same largely traditional Protestant state Grammar School.

“The grammar school I went to had lots of Catholic pupils, we all got on really well and you wouldn’t have taken any notice of who was Catholic and who was Protestant”

( Participant 3, Protestant)

This Protestant participant claims that this ‘mixed educational’ environment was unproblematic, and that religious differences went unnoticed. However, her Catholic counterpart viewed the experience very differently.

“I went to a Protestant Grammar School and it was like, everyone would pronounce my name wrong (she had an Irish name) and we played hockey for games”

( Participant 2, Catholic)

So for this participant her Irish/Catholic identity resulted in her highlighting religious difference as something that she was very aware of. As there were a substantial majority of Protestants at this particular school, by definition, Protestant pupils were likely to interact much more of the
time with other Protestants, rather than the minority Catholic group. Therefore, for Protestant pupils interpersonal similarities and differences are more salient than intragroup differences and intergroup similarities. Furthermore, as the Protestant participant is much more knowledgeable about Protestant social practices which would be the norm at the school (games, religious services) she does not need to pay much attention to the minority, as their social practices have little impact. In contrast, the Catholic participant, as a minority group member needs to be mindful of the intergroup differences in order to overcome them individually, either by assimilation or mimicry. In contrast, majority group members can be more mindless in this respect, especially when they don’t feel threatened by an assertive minority.

The impact of geographical location on individual’s experience of everyday life in Northern Ireland was also highlighted through interviews with participants who lived in rural areas. Many rural parts of Northern Ireland are predominately comprised of one religion or the other. From the interview data, place had a different impact on ingroup/outgroup identity. The following participant presents the troubles as disembodied and certainly not sectarian.

“I think the troubles affected us in a different way. I never really knew any Protestants until I went to university in Belfast. So growing up I would see Protestants and Catholics rioting in Belfast, but down here the ‘us and them’ was very different. Where we lived there was a large British Army base close by and you would see helicopters flying in and out and you would have the army checkpoints at the border. So for people were I grew up the enemy was very much seen as the British rather than Protestants. We lived close to the border so we saw ourselves as having more in common with people from Dundalk and County Louth than we would from Belfast. So we very much saw ourselves as Irish”
So for this participant the ‘us’ and ‘them’ was very much along national lines. This was also the case in the following quote from a participant who lived outside Newry, close to the border with the Republic of Ireland.

“There wasn’t an awareness really of a Protestant community or a unionist community. The part of the world where I came from there were only Catholic nationalists, because everybody seemed to support the SDLP, and then there were other people who supported the IRA. So there was the community and then there was the British Army and the British Army went around in Saracens, trucks, or helicopters. The police were supported with the army, they had guns, so it was very much we’re Irish, they’re English, people stopping you at the side of the road with English accents, that would have been my sort of interpretation of the thing” (Participant 11, Catholic)

However this construction of a community that was exclusively Catholic, with the British Army as the outgroup was complicated later in the same interview with the following statement.

“No, no you would have maybe heard of somebody who knew one, my dad played golf with a guy who was a Protestant and I remember that sort of - God he knows a Protestant, and the irony was my mother, her side of the family, some of them were Protestant. They came from Belfast, but it wasn’t a case of there was maybe the odd connection, my dad knew a policeman and that but that was a very vague knowledge, there wasn’t any wasn’t any sense of people around the community who thought differently, there was just the Brits who were the army and they were the other side as far as the community was concerned with really. The first time I really met and had dealings...
with people from the Protestant community would have been when, just after my ‘A’ levels before I started university” (Participant 11, Catholic).

In this statement the participant constructs relationships with Protestants as something which was unusual and abnormal, ‘God he knows a Protestant’. When talking about members of his wider family who were Protestant he uses the caveat that they ‘came from Belfast’, therefore allowing him to maintain his community was exclusively Catholic and that his first meaningful contact with Protestants would have been when he went to university in Belfast. While Newry has a large minority Protestant population, he presents the only outgroup as British, thus presenting the conflict as a war of nationality rather than a sectarian conflict.

These quotes illustrate the political significance of individual’s psychological representations of space. For those who lived in rural Northern Ireland there were very clear understandings of who belonged, and who was ‘out of place’. So both these rural participants constructed outgroup relations in a very different way to participants in urban areas. Encounters with the British Army, while unwelcomed, were seen as a normal part of everyday life, thus there was the same minimising of the impact of the conflict by these participants as there was with those in urban areas. Furthermore, their psychological representation of their community led to understandings that Protestants were either ‘out of place’ here or ignored, and contact, if it did happen, had to be explained as a rare exception to normal everyday encounters. These quotes also clearly illustrate the conflation of religious and national identity which permeates social division within Northern Ireland, but it also highlights the difference in how division is experienced between urban and rural areas. It would appear that national identity is the more salient identity in rural Northern Ireland, whereas religious identity is the salient divider in Belfast. The deindividuation of
outgroup members was also evident, especially from rural participants. The greater homogeneity of outgroup members by rural participants in this study results from limited contact with the other prior to going to university/moving to Belfast, whereas their low experience counterparts from Belfast were used to regular contact with outgroup members and thus were more aware of individual variability.

4.4 Summary

Participants in this study continually minimised the conflict as something which was normal/banal, as a phenomena that was exaggerated and having little impact on their everyday lives. This was done firstly by comparing it to violence elsewhere, and secondly by using their parent’s experiences as minimising temporal or geographical comparisons. It was identified within the data that parental religious and political views were taken as appropriate and correct. However while participants talked about parental influence in terms of learning about the political situation in Northern Ireland via discursive practices, the centrality of segregated institutional structures such as the church and education was evident in maintaining division. Therefore while many of the participants lived in more affluent, ‘mixed areas’, allowing for prolonged contact with members of the ‘other’ religion, resulting in a positive appraisal of outgroup members, and minimising of the impact of religious division, widespread social practices meant that throughout the interview data there was abundant talk that evidenced both acceptance and recreation of exclusive religious identities. There also appeared to be a difference in how these low experience rural and urban participants experienced division, even for low experience rural participants there was little chance of prolonged or quality contact with the other religion.
Throughout Study 1 it appeared all participants tended to minimise the impact of conflict on their lives. As such for Study 2 it was decided to recruit participants with a higher experience of political violence as well as from a wider age group.
Chapter 5

STUDY 2 – Participants who had relatives/colleagues killed as a result of political violence

5.1 Overview

Study 2 recruited 10 participants who had high experience of political violence, including former RUC officers, individuals who stated members of their family were killed by the IRA, and those who stated relatives were killed by the security/state forces. The analysis of the data involved the same thematic approach as in study 1. This resulted in two key themes being identified from the analysis of the data. As in the previous study, social division was again a prominent theme, while the second key theme was the difficulties participants had negotiating post agreement Northern Ireland.

5.2 Social Division

In contrast to study one, participants in this study accepted that religious division was part of everyday life in Northern Ireland. As in the previous study, religious categorisation was a salient way of participants organising their social worlds. In the following extract the participant talks about the boundaries that were created due to the conflict.

“*Well you sort of knew the ones from your own area you know you didn’t really go outside that, you kept to your own side.*” (Participant 17, Catholic)
In this statement the participant uses the phrase ‘kept to your own side’ thus illustrating how religious division prevented everyday relationships developing with outgroup members. The salience of religious categorisation is also evident in the following extract.

“You always knew, you see where I lived, it was sort of surrounded by a Catholic area so you know I can remember being out playing and Catholics coming up and saying Protestant ‘B’ s and all that you know, taunting you, so you always knew, you always knew what side you were on.” (Participant 13, Protestant)

In this extract the participant stresses that religious division was something he always knew about. As in study 1, this emphasises how children in Northern Ireland use religious division as an important way of organising their social world from an early age. However unlike Study 1, this participant’s first encounter with outgroup members was hostile and abusive, making it clear that religious divisions were deep-rooted, and non-permeable.

Some participants disassociated themselves as being active agents in creating social division by arguing that religious and political division was created through structures imposed on them as a result of their roles in the conflict. Former RUC officers, as a consequence of safety concerns, lived in ‘Protestant’ neighbourhoods. In the following extract a former member of the RUC describes how attitudes towards the police changed at the start of the conflict, and how this forced him to reconsider where he lived, and who he socialised with.

“I suppose you were more at risk at home and the big fear you always had was being attacked at home in front of your family, your wife and children, you know, so that was always a fear that was uppermost on your mind. We moved to Carryduff because it felt safer and we socialised mainly with other policemen and their families”.
This participant stresses his family were uppermost in his thoughts when considering the danger associated with his job. By moving his family to a mainly Protestant area and socialising with other police officers and their families, meant that his wife and children also lead a segregated life with little engagement with outgroup members, effectively amplifying ingroup/outgroup divisions.

Participants who lost relatives as a result of political violence stated that they had little engagement with outgroup members due to feelings of anger, fear and threat. For Protestant participants who had close relatives killed by the IRA, while there was a denial of any antipathy towards Catholics per se, they explicitly stated their loathing for members of the IRA and their supporters, claiming that there was not any situation that would entice them into dialogue with these outgroup members.

“I would never talk to any IRA men. They are evil killers and should have been hanged for what they have done, but instead they get elected into parliament. I know there are some good Catholics but once my father was murdered by the IRA we moved into a Protestant estate and my association with Catholics would be very limited”

(Participant 18, Protestant)

It is interesting in the above quote that the participant claims ‘I know there are some good Catholics’ thus implying that there are also many bad Catholics. This tendency to negatively appraise the outgroup as a whole with the exception of a few individuals or situations also
occurred in the following statement from a Catholic participant who had her brother killed by the British Army.

“I worked with Protestants in town during the troubles, and you had to get on with each other, nice people the same as they thought we were nice people, but you knew when it came to the 12th they weren’t so nice after all. And it’s the same today, they cause trouble by marching through our areas, they don’t care."

(Participant 22, Catholic)

In this quote the participant talks about having to civilly engage with Protestants in the workplace. By indicating that these respectful encounters with outgroup members were the appropriate behaviour for the neutral territory of the workplace in the centre of Belfast, illustrates how individuals from segregated communities managed inherent prejudices towards outgroup members on a daily basis. However, this participant then goes on to claim her attitude towards her work colleagues changed around the 12th July and the height of the traditional Protestant marching season. It is interesting how she expands her negative appraisal of Protestants beyond those involved in marching. This indicates how ‘cultural traditions’ aligned to a particular religious group highlights religious divisions, and entrenches feeling of hostility towards all outgroup members. Throughout the interviews participants continually referred to the 12th of July as a distinctive marker which highlights religious division in Northern Ireland. In the following extract the participant argues that religious division was unproblematic apart from around the 12th of July.

“Once a year when the twelfth would have come round the Orangemen would have been walking through Newtownhamilton and sometimes you would have got some of the older
ones maybe coming with some comment like Orange bastards or something like that, but that only happened in the twelfth, in the marching season. After that it was all done and dusted, forgot about for another year and other than that we were sent off to Sunday school every Sunday morning. They went to their Catholic churches as they do. We all met up again on a Sunday, went fishing, went out on the bikes, done everything together”. (Participant 13, Protestant)

While this participant portrays religious division as unproblematic, he again highlights the distinctive markers of different religious practices as a way of ‘telling’ religion within Northern Ireland. Furthermore he states ‘they went to their Catholic churches as they do’ thus once again illustrating how institutional practices were used to accentuate social division, even here in speech.

Participants in this study accepted religious division as ubiquitous and impacting on their everyday lives, however they were also keen to point out that prior to 1969 relations between Protestants and Catholics were friendly and good natured. This is highlighted in the following three extracts in which participants talk about their lives prior to the troubles.

“I grew up on a farm during the 1950s and lived in a mixed community, Catholics and Protestants worked well together whether they were bringing the harvest or doing jobs together” (Participant 15, Catholic)

“All the Roman Catholics, all the Protestants, religion never was mentioned. We all coerced, totally normally, got on together, in and out of each other’s houses. There was never, religion never was mentioned”. (Participant 13, Protestant)
“Catholics lived facing us. Very friendly with my mother, very, very friendly and there was about six Catholic families living in the street. Never any bother. We used to collect bonfire wood for the twelfth and never any bother at all like and I served my time on the Falls Road”. (Participant 20, Protestant)

It is interesting how all three participants stress religion division was insignificant prior to 1969. However religious categorisation was still a salient way of organising their social world. In each of the extracts the participants know who is Protestant and who is Catholic. If religion really was unimportant, they would be unaware of religious difference. In fact historical evidence (English, 2004) points to the fact that there was extended periods of sectarian tension in every decade since the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921. As in Study 1 with the school examples of mindless majorities and mindful minorities, this psychological phenomenon could be occurring here whereby the majority in a community see mixing with the minority as relatively unproblematic.

5.3 Negotiating Post Agreement Northern Ireland

The peace process which has taken place since the Belfast Agreement of 1998 has been lauded by many as a success, and is currently supported by the majority of political parties, and the majority of the electorate. However for participants in this study, their appraisal of the peace process was a negative one. Central to this negativity was a sense of betrayal by politicians and a feeling of injustice at the terms of peace. For Protestant participants the changes in Unionist politicians’ attitudes (especially those of Ian Paisley and the DUP) towards Sinn Fein and power sharing have left them feeling betrayed. The following extract reveals the betrayal felt at Ian Paisley’s change of views, from someone who vehemently opposed the terms of the Belfast Agreement, to his acceptance of the terms of the St Andrew’s Agreement in 2006.
“Well we were big fans of Ian Paisley, we thought there’s a man that’s going to do, he’s going to fight for justice and the man that murdered my father would be caught because Ian Paisley’s there. He seems to be on the same wavelength, then at St Andrews he done the U turn and I felt now I can trust no one”

(Participant 18, Protestant)

For many Protestants in Northern Ireland Ian Paisley was viewed as being the person to defend Protestant traditions from the threats of republicanism. This participant saw Ian Paisley as someone in who he could place his trust. Moreover, he saw him as someone who could achieve justice for the killing of his father by the IRA. Ian Paisley’s decision to accept the terms of the St Andrew’s agreement and enter into power sharing with Sinn Fein left this participant feeling he had no longer anyone in which he could place his trust. Psychologically, this leaves the participant with a unionist identity which no longer fits with mainstream Unionism, and with the majority of people’s attitudes towards the peace process.

Amongst the terms of the Belfast Agreement was the insistence on paramilitaries decommissioning their weapons if their political representatives were to be granted seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly. However while the IRA decommissioned their weapons as per the Agreement, Protestant participants viewed this process with suspicion as highlighted in the following extract.

“Nothing has changed, the IRA cannot be trusted, they say they have decommissioned their weapons but I don’t believe them. It will be the same when the provisionals took over from the Official IRA, another group will just take over and keep murdering innocent people” (Participant 13, Protestant)
In contrast to the widely held view by many in Northern Ireland that there have been positive changes since the Belfast Agreement, this participant claims that ‘nothing has changed’. Like the participant earlier, this leaves him with views that are no longer valued by most Unionist politicians and the British state. He tries to validate his argument by using a recurring theme within Irish Republican history, whereby when a faction of the IRA decide to proceed using peaceful means, a split occurs and a new breakaway group continues using militant ways. Finally the participant uses the emotive phrase ‘keep murdering innocent people’, which emphasises his belief that the IRA were unjustified in their military campaign and that their targets were illegitimate.

Central to Protestant disapproval of the peace process is Sinn Fein’s participation in power sharing. In the following extract the Protestant participant reveals their mistrust of Sinn Fein.

“I don’t believe what is going on here is going to work, there’s no point accepting a few years peace just to go back to the way it was. Sinn Fein didn’t bring peace, they brought war, and when they don’t get their own way they’ll go back to violence”

(Participant 18, Protestant)

This participant starts by stressing that he doesn’t think the peace process will work. However, unlike other participants he appears to accept that there have been peaceful dividends from the Agreement. By using the phrase ‘there’s no point accepting a few years peace just to go back to the way it was’, he is making it clear that he doesn’t think peace will last, but he is also indicating that he does believe there is peace. He then makes an interesting attribution regarding Sinn Fein’s part in the peace process. While being adamant that they didn’t bring peace, so
placing them outside of any responsibility/credit for peace, he then claims they have the power to derail the peace process and return to violence.

As part of the Belfast Agreement, a fundamental review of policing and the role of the RUC was carried out by former Conservative Minister Chris Patten in 1999. His conclusions resulted in the RUC being renamed the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), with a new crest which included the crown, a harp, and a shamrock in an attempt to create a shared identification with both communities. It was also decided that a greater emphasis should be placed on recruiting more Catholics to the service. The data analysis indicated that former RUC officers felt betrayed by this process.

“They changed the name just like that, no consideration for all the policemen who got murdered and injured. Then they have all these inquiries, making it out like we were the bad guys”. (Participant, 13, Protestant)

This participant attaches great importance to the name of the police service. For him it is not just a name, it is connected to the memory of those colleagues who were injured or killed in defence of ‘the union’. He then views the various enquiries that have taken place as a threat to his integrity as a policeman. This view of betrayal was also shared by the following participant;

“I just felt totally let down by it. I joined the RUC to protect the community and fight terrorism, fight terrorists and now they are in government. What was the point, what did I put my life on the line for”. (Participant 20, Protestant)

Like the previous participant, this participant also feels the sacrifices he made are now worthless. For both these participants their previous RUC identity as protectors of the community, fighting
terrorists, and upstanding citizens has been challenged by the peace process. The previously well-defined identities of victim / perpetrator, and policeman/ terrorist have been challenged, with the definition of victimhood now being disputed, and terms such as ex combatants being used to include all those who were militarily active during the conflict. For the Protestant participants who had lost relatives as a result of Republican violence, these challenges to the definition of what constitutes a victim has left them with feelings that their victimhood is not being properly recognised. This is highlighted in the following quote;

“They try to claim that they are victims, but they are not, they chose to murder innocent people. Innocent people who were murdered by paramilitaries are the only victims”

(Participant 17, Protestant)

This participant is keen to distinguish between victim and perpetrator by using the comparison of murdering paramilitaries and innocent people. For this participant accepting that all those involved in the conflict were victims, and that there should be no hierarchal structure to victimhood, would mean categorising himself with those that he is so vehemently opposed to.

The data analysis also revealed that it was not only Protestant participants who were unhappy with the peace process. In the following statement a Catholic participant talks of the betrayal she feels towards Martin McGuinness and Gerry Adams;

“When I see McGuinness sitting laughing with Paisley I feel betrayed, and Paisley’s betrayed his own too. McGuinness and Adams were telling young fellas not to recognise the courts, and now they’re up there sitting in a British Government”

(Participant 22, Catholic)
It is interesting that this participant shows empathy towards the outgroup when stressing her own feelings of betrayal. She also indicates that the changes as a result of the peace process have resulted in challenges to old identities. The republican identity of not recognising British institutions has been challenged and reconfigured as Sinn Fein take up seats in the Northern Ireland Assembly, and encourage Nationalists to support the PSNI.

This social creativity that has led to a sense of betrayal caused by Sinn Fein being part of a British Executive is also evident in the following statement.

“We were sold down the river, they got nothing for the ceasefire. I thought this whole campaign was about a United Ireland and all I can see at the end of it is our lot sitting in a British Government. Peace might last 30/40 years, but I think it’ll come back again, history always repeats itself” (Participant 22, Catholic)

Like earlier Protestant participants, this Catholic feels her group have not benefited from the peace process. She also portrays a sense of betrayal against her community, and does not believe peace will last. It is also interesting how she talks in the collective (we were sold down the river) thus implying a state of us and them.

5.4 Summary

In contrast to Study 1, religious division for participants in this study was very much to the fore. Due to feelings of anger, fear, and threat, interaction with outgroup members was minimal. There was a common thread running through participant’s views of post agreement Northern Ireland, with participants from both communities feeling betrayed by the conditions attached to peace. For both Protestant and Catholic participants there was a sense of betrayal by their respective
politicians, and difficulty in trying to find a voice for their attitudes and identities, which are now the minority view in Northern Ireland. The next chapter will also look at individuals who have had high experience of the conflict. However participants in the next study have accepted and benefited from the terms of the Belfast Agreement.
Chapter 6

STUDY 3: Accounts from former members of paramilitary organisations

6.1 Overview

In Study 2 the participants had high experience of political violence. All the participants were victims of the conflict, who each had a relative(s) killed by either loyalist or republican paramilitaries, or from alleged state violence. In the current study participants were recruited from loyalist and republican former prisoner support groups. In contrast to the previous study, these high experience participants would be viewed by many in Northern Ireland as perpetrators of violence. This study recruited ten participants, five former IRA prisoners, and five former UVF prisoners. The fact that of the 3500 deaths as a result of the conflict, the IRA was responsible for over 1768 deaths and the UVF for 569 (Maloney, 2010) influenced the decision to recruit former prisoners who were aligned to these two organizations. The prisoners were recruited from Coiste na n-larchimi, and EPIC (Ex prisoner Interpretative Centre) support groups. The analysis of the data involved the same thematic approach as Study 1 and 2. Three themes were identified, with social division again identified as a key theme. The other themes identified were shifts in social identity, and social support.

6.2 Social Division

As with study 2, participants in this study accepted that social division played a prominent part in their lives and reported being aware of it even at a young age. As with the previous study, participants talked about religious division being imposed on them as a result of the
conflict. This high experience participant explains how the area in which he lived became religiously segregated at the start of the conflict.

“I was born on January 20\textsuperscript{th} 1955, I was born on the New Lodge Road which is a nationalist community situated in north Belfast. At that particular time it was a mixed community, Protestants and Catholics in the same street. But during 67, 68, 69, it changed, once Protestants start to move out of the mixed streets as we called them, once they started moving out and more Catholics would move in. Once one Protestant family left, people got frightened, it’s like the white flight in America, once the white families moved out of the area, they were like am I going to be the only white person in a black neighbourhood, are more blacks going to move in, so people just moved out”

(Participant 23, Catholic)

In the above quote the participant talks about his perception of the dramatic change in his community at the start of the conflict from being a mixed community to being nationalist. When talking about the change, he attributes the cause of this to Protestants; ‘once one Protestant left, other Protestants got frightened’. So while he attributes the reason for the rest of the Protestants leaving the area as fear, he does not give a rationale for the initial Protestant families leaving. So his explanation for the area becoming segregated negates any blame towards his ingroup. It is also interesting that he compares the ethno/religious change that occurred with ‘white flight’ in America, thus portraying his small community as on a par with social change that occurred during the 1960s in the United States.
Similar to the previous study, there was abundant talk in the interviews which constructed life prior to 1969 as a peaceful mixing of religions. However there were also many statements in the data that contradicted such tales of harmony. For instance in the following quote the participant talks about his friends all being equal, but then highlights the use of slang names for ingroup and outgroup members.

“We all grew up together as equals and friends, they used the word taig, but it was in a friendly sense and I would say – come on yous prods, let’s go play football and that kind of thing”. (Participant 27, Catholic)

In this quote the participant tries to downplay religious division by talking about equality and friendship, and portraying the use of derogatory outgroup labels as something which was unimportant or jocular even. However by using such terms to categorise friends, again indicates the importance of religion to participants as a way of organising everyday social encounters. This is also evident in the following extract.

“And they kept asking each of us – Are you a taig? Are you a taig? We all said – no, I go to the Boys Model school”. (Participant 27, Catholic)

In this statement slang is once again used to label outgroup member’s religion, however in this case it is used in a more aggressive and interrogative style. It is interesting that when answering a question regarding his religion, the participant responds by saying what
school he attended. This indicates the significance placed on which school a person attends, as a particular school being evidence of religious group affiliation.

Throughout the data segregated Protestant and Catholic neighbourhoods were cited as central factors in minimising encounters with outgroup members. In the following quote the participant describes how he and a childhood friend end up in opposing paramilitary forces as a consequence of the conflict.

“I remember before the troubles started there were lots of Protestants living in our area. You would have known who was protestant and who was catholic but there was never much trouble. Then in 1969 when the troubles started all the Protestants moved out and the whole of north and west Belfast became segregated. It’s funny how things work out, a Protestant lad who lived down the street from us and I used to play with when I was young, well he ended up in the UVF and I ended up in the IRA” (Participant 31, Catholic)

In contrast to the earlier quote, this participant uses a different discourse when describing religious division prior to 1969. This participant does not use the term ‘mixed neighbourhood’, instead he talks about Protestants living in our area, and also accepts that people knew who was Protestant and who was Catholic. He also states ‘there was never much trouble’, thus indicating that there was some trouble between Protestants and Catholics prior to 1969, an account that is more congruent with historians accounts of Northern Ireland prior to 1969 (English, 2004). As with the earlier participant, this participant also attributes the reason for north and west Belfast becoming segregated as
being due to Protestants moving, and therefore portraying Catholics as passive recipients of the situation.

Study 1 illustrated how participants, while eschewing the impact of religious division in their lives, continually used religion as a way of categorising people. While participants in the current study admit to the ubiquity of religious division, they still attempt to deny outgroup antipathy in the same way as participants in study 1.

“I have never truly have never had a problem with Protestants, some of my best friends are Protestants”. (Participant 31, Catholic)

This participant places great emphasis on having unproblematic relationships with Protestants. However, he then goes on to stress his liking of Protestants only extends to certain individuals.

“I quite like some of the fellas on an individual basis. I mean the day I was arrested I should have been playing a soccer match in 1978 and two of the guys, one was an SPG (Special Patrol Group) man, Paddy, can’t remember his second name and two of them played on my soccer team, you know, I can get on with anybody on an individual level but if hearty had to come to hearty Paddy would have got the message in due course, but no, honestly, those fellas who I would interact with, I would interact with them because they’re representing trying to get better circumstances for their people, I’ll help them where I can and I’ll direct them where I can, it doesn’t change my view of what mobilised them. I mean they don’t like my view but I mean I could lie to them, Protestantism, what’s wrong with Protestantism?” (Participant 31, Catholic)

In the above quote it is interesting how the participant talks explicitly about liking Protestants but only on an individual basis. In the previous studies, participants did a
similar thing, but did not do it so unequivocally. This participant then goes on to explicitly state the boundaries of his acceptance of outgroup members. While he would accept Paddy as part of the same soccer team, if intergroup relations became intense (if hearty had come to hearty), then Paddy would have been aware of his strong views (Paddy would have got the message). In line with the more conciliatory discourses used by many former militants since the Agreement, this participant acknowledges that he would be prepared to engage with outgroup members that have positive attitudes about the terms of peace. However he then goes on to claim that his evaluation of their ideology remains the same, and his final comment is also of interest ‘Protestantism, what’s wrong with Protestantism?’ This is said with an ironic tone, indicating that in fact he finds a lot wrong with Protestantism.

6.3 Social Support

Throughout the analysis of the data in all three studies there has been evidence of the centrality of group membership in influencing participant’s appraisal of their experience of political conflict. However this was most evident in the contrast in accounts of social support given by loyalist and republican former prisoners. While there were similarities in how former prisoners talked about the significance of family tradition, the importance of political ideology, and the ubiquity of social division, there was a difference in how they perceived support from their respective communities and fellow prisoners. Former IRA prisoners talked of the camaraderie and support they received from their fellow prisoners and community throughout the conflict, whereas former UVF prisoners commented on the lack of cohesion within loyalism, both within prison and in their communities. In the
following extract a former IRA prisoner describes his time in prison, placing group support as central to his coping strategy.

“There were times in prison especially when I was alone when I thought is it really worth it? By this time I was married and had children and here I was spending 15 years in prison only getting to see them occasionally. I was lucky that my wife understood and believed the IRA military campaign was necessary, and there was great camaraderie amongst the republican prisoners in the H Blocks. So a lot of the time it just seemed like a normal way of life.”

(Participant 27, Catholic)

It is interesting how this former prisoner starts out admitting he had doubts about his active involvement in militant republicanism. However he then goes on to talk about the impact of social support in changing his attitude and influencing his psychological state. This support was forthcoming from both his wife, and his fellow republican prisoners, enabling him to view his lifestyle as normal, and thus reducing the psychological stress that would usually be associated with life as a militant and a prisoner.

Another former IRA prisoner states how support of the group has helped him cope both during and after the conflict

“The support I felt from my fellow comrades both inside and outside the prison was a great help. We all felt part of the army and knew what we were fighting for. In prison everything was shared equally and there was great camaraderie. And even now when the war is over I belong to Coiste and so I feel I am doing something positive within my community” (Participant 28, Catholic)
This participant highlights the support and comradeship available from being part of the IRA. He also uses standard military discourse (a soldier in a war) thus allowing him to present to himself and the interviewer that the violence was normative behaviour associated with his role. Also his membership of Coiste gives him a positive identity post conflict, as someone who is valued and positively active within his community. So for former republican prisoners, social support helped buffer the traumatic experience of conflict and prison.

In contrast to the positive accounts of social support given by republican prisoners, the experience of this loyalist former prisoner was quite different.

“In one way I actually admired the organisation within the republican wings in prison. We didn’t have that, they (loyalist prisoners) tried to keep the command structures that had been in place on the outside, but that meant there were too many leaders and there were always arguments about certain people getting extra privileges. In the end I re-categorised myself as a normal prisoner and moved off the loyalist wing onto the mixed wing. I still saw myself as a loyalist but there was just too much hassle” (Participant 24, Protestant)

It is evident from this account that the participant did not feel strong support from within his group. While he still saw himself as belonging to the group, his strength of identification with fellow group members had weakened, resulting in him removing himself from the group setting. His strength of ingroup identity would also have been affected by his admiration for the outgroup’s organisational abilities. In contrast to the comradeship of republican ideology, loyalism had a much more hierarchical and rigid
command structure, with those in authority receiving the most privileges (English, 2004).

In contrast to republicans, loyalists kept the rank they had before entering prison, resulting in a more chaotic regime with much intragroup conflict.

**6.4 Shifts in social identity**

A key theme which was identified from the analysis related to identity was apparent in former UVF and IRA prisoners. It was apparent from the analysis that while there are still differences in political ideology, their common prison and post prison experience has led to a shared identity. Former prisoners from both groups continually talked in terms of a mutual ex prisoner identity, with frequent references to similarity of experience.

“I still see myself as a republican, but through being a member of Coiste I now meet with loyalist ex prisoners on a regular basis and I would now regard some of them as friends. You see I have more in common with most of them than I have with a Catholic who lives in the Malone Road (an affluent area of Belfast)”

( Participant 28, Catholic)

This participant starts by insisting his political ideology is the same as during the conflict. However, in post-conflict Northern Ireland his role as a former political prisoner allows him regular engagement with outgroup members. This has resulted in him becoming aware of commonalities with outgroup members. In line with the metacontrast principle (Salzurulo, 2008) this participant, in the current context, now sees himself as being more similar to the working class Protestant prototype than the middle class Catholic prototype.

Post Agreement Northern Ireland has seen an economic boom which has mainly benefited higher socio-economic groups. This economic upturn coinciding with prolonged engagement with outgroup members has seen a shift in the participant’s view of his social
identity, from one of republican with British and loyalists as outgroup members, to an identity whereby he views social class as the ingroup identity and not religion. This identity shift is also supported by a former UVF prisoner;

“I get great support from the other ex-prisoners here in EPIC. We can do something positive in the community and hopefully stop the young ones today going down the same path as I did. I mean we meet regularly with republican ex prisoners and we give cross community talks together. It has given me a better understanding of where they were coming from. Don’t get me wrong I don’t support a united Ireland or anything like that, but I can see they were just caught up in a situation fighting for what they believed in just like we were.”

(Participant 26, Protestant)

As with the previous participant, this participants highlights how his regular engagements with outgroup members has given him a better understanding of their motives. There is an almost grudging respect expressed, underpinned by understanding similarity of motivation in the two paramilitary groups. These two extracts illustrate the power of group processes to influence attitude change and behaviour. Because of a shift in context, these two individuals have seen a shift in their group identity from being either a loyalist or republican former prisoner to being former prisoners who shared, and share, similar experience. This similarity and new socio-political context is allowing the former prisoners to see their shared group membership despite historical differences. As a consequence sometimes the ingroup/outgroup divide articulated is social class rather than religion. However, while this shift in identity can be seen as encouraging for the peace process, it must also be treated with caution. In the former loyalist’s statement he also
states ‘Don’t get me wrong I don’t support a united Ireland or anything like that’, thus making it clear that his views are still opposed to a central tenet of republicanism.

6.5 Summary

Participants in this study viewed social division as ubiquitous, and as a meaningful part of everyday life. While participants made attempts to minimise religious division prior to 1969, there was much talk that indicated that religion has always been a salient way for people in Northern Ireland to organise their social worlds. However it was also evident from the data that peace offered these participants the opportunity of prolonged and regular engagement with outgroup members. This has resulted in participants revising their attitudes towards outgroup members. However these shifts in identity must be viewed with caution. Throughout the interviews the traditional identities of loyalist and republican were continually reinforced, and with many commemorative ceremonies each calendar year to bring these identities to the fore, these shifts in identity must be viewed with caution.

Historically (especially during the 1970s & 1980s) political analysis of the conflict in Northern Ireland has tended to view loyalist and republican paramilitaries as polar opposites, pathologising them as evil individuals intent on murder and destruction. However this study has revealed that former IRA and UVF combatants have distinctly different relationships with their respective communities. Former IRA combatants viewed their communities as a source of support, feeling valued for the part they played in the conflict. For former UVF members there was less cohesion and stronger feelings of isolation because of their roles in the conflict. These differences can be accounted for through the ideological position of the respective communities. Protestants who wanted to militarily engage in the conflict could do so through the legitimate
means of joining the RUC or UDR, with both these forces being highly respected by the majority of Protestants during the conflict. For many Catholics, joining the RUC or UDR was not an option, therefore for Catholics who wanted to engage in militant activity the only option was to join a republican paramilitary group.
Chapter 7
General Discussion

7.1 Main Findings

From the analysis of the data there are five main findings worthy of discussion. This chapter will discuss the main findings in turn and then discuss how they relate to social psychological theory.

7.1.1 Social Division

The most prominent theme identified across all three studies was that of social division. It was apparent in terms of engagement with others that the traditional fault line between Catholic and Protestant is clearly evident. Previous research (Muldoon & Downes, 2007) has indicated that political violence in Northern Ireland did not affect everyone equally. The impact of the conflict in areas such as West and North Belfast, and South Armagh was much more intense than areas such as South Belfast and North Down. The manner in which social division was portrayed in different ways was readily apparent across the three studies. Participants in Study 1, who had low experience of political violence, saw social division as being in the background. As such they tended to deny the impact of religious division in their lives. However, while often refuting religious division was an issue, by avoiding differences at the level of personal relationships, there was abundant talk that recreated mutually exclusive religious identities. There was also the acknowledgement of many widespread social practices that underpinned religious distinctiveness. This discrepancy (between attitude and behaviour) can be accounted for by the social structures imposed upon people living in Northern Ireland (Burgess, Ferguson & Hollywood, 2007). Participants in Study 1 stated that they had peers and neighbours of the ‘other’ religion, and claimed mixing with members of the other religion was common and
unproblematic. However while this allowed for a positive appraisal of outgroup members, and a minimizing of the impact of religious division, the data also indicated segregated social practices such as church attendance and schooling continually highlighted and reinforced religious differences. For participants in Study1, first knowledge and awareness of religious division was linked to church attendance and to the segregated school system. Participants became aware at an early age that some of their neighbours / peers engaged in different religious rituals and went to different schools. While young children may not be aware of the problems associated with these divisions, this segregated system with its distinctive markers (the differing names of schools and cultural practices associated with them) quickly becomes a way of ‘telling’ religion (Cairns, 1987). So from an early age in Northern Ireland, religious categorisation is used by individuals as an important way of organising their social worlds because of the salience of religious division.

Research (Barratt, 2007) indicates the importance of school in relation to children’s levels of political knowledge. Further research (Berti, 2005) illustrated how particular textbooks that children use, and the contents of the curriculum can impact on children’s knowledge and understanding of the state. This is particularly pertinent in Northern Ireland where the segregated education system results in different emphasis in the teaching of subjects such as religion and history (Gallagher, 2004). Religious segregation of schooling has been a hotly debated topic in Northern Ireland over the last 35 years. While early research on the conflict (Fraser, 1974; Heskin, 1980) focused on desegregating schools, it was not until the 1980s that the first integrated (mixed religion) schools were formed (Gallagher, 2004). By the 1990s schools and teachers had committed to the Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU). However research (Gallagher, 2004) suggests that while the day-to day life of schools was affected by the divisions
in the wider society, teachers seemed reluctant to provide students with the space to engage and talk about these issues. Also research (Smith & Robinson, 1996, Donnelly, 2004) has indicated that potentially divisive issues such as religion, politics and identity were frequently avoided by teachers, who felt insufficiently trained for such work and who were already struggling with an overloaded curriculum. The consequences of avoiding conflict issues to maintain a semblance of harmony can create conditions that reinforce distrust and suspicion between the two communities. Since Lagan College became the first integrated school in 1981 there have only been a further 57 integrated schools formed, with only 5% of pupils enrolled in these schools (Hughes & Donnelly, 2001). While the academic literature has argued that integrated schools are in a powerful position to influence social values, and create an ethos of tolerance and mutual respect, and help build better community relations, recent empirical research has raised questions about the potential for integrated schools to promote better intergroup relations. Research (McGlynn, 2001) indicates that former pupils of integrated schooling considered the influence of family as a more important socialising factor than integrated education. This view was supported in research by Muldoon et al. (2007), and also in the data of the current thesis, with participants citing their parents as the primary source of knowledge of the political situation in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, over the last 15 years there has been a significant increase in the number of Catholics attending traditionally Protestant Grammar Schools. The number of Catholics attending these schools can now account for up to 35% of the pupils at a school and this has been lauded as a further step in diminishing segregation within the education system in Northern Ireland. However as highlighted in the data analysis, these schools still regard themselves as Protestant schools, and this is cemented through the compulsory playing of traditional British sports such as rugby, hockey, cricket and soccer, with no participation in Gaelic sports. Religious
practices within the school are also aligned to the Protestant faith. For many, this situation is seen as unproblematic. However here the data revealed that minority (Catholic pupil) and majority (Protestant pupil) viewed this integration in very different ways. In line with previous research on minorities and majorities (Brown & Gaertner, 2001), the Protestant pupil (majority) claimed ‘you wouldn’t have taken any notice who was Catholic and who was Protestant’ whereas the Catholic pupil (minority) was mindful of intergroup differences as she has to strive to overcome them individually, either by assimilation or mimicry. It is also from mixed neighbourhoods where integrated schools and Protestant grammar schools obtain the majority of their intake of pupils. So while there are signs of a less segregated education system than in the past, the structure of this system may not be sufficient to have a significant impact on Northern Ireland as a religiously divided society.

For participants in Study 2 mixing between religions was more problematic. Participants in this study included Protestant participants who had lost relatives or work colleagues as a result of violence by republican paramilitaries. It also included Catholic participants who stated they had relatives illegally killed by the British Army. For RUC officers safety reasons were given as a barrier to being able to engage in quality contact with Catholics. For the other participants anger, suspicion, and threat prevented them from engaging with the ‘other’ religion.

In Study 3 participants claimed division was imposed on them as a result of the history of Northern Ireland. While historical evidence (English, 2004) highlights a significant number of deaths as a result political violence in each decade since the formation of Northern Ireland in 1921, many participants in this study argued that mixing between religions was common and unproblematic prior to the start of the conflict in 1969. They argued that the start of the conflict
led to participant’s interactions with outgroup members being limited due to the increased segregation of housing in North and West Belfast. Furthermore their involvement with paramilitary organisations, and respective ideological positions, prevented contact with outgroup members both within and outside of prison. However these participants claimed the peace process has allowed more engagement with outgroup members than was possible during the conflict due to changes in political relations between unionists and nationalists, and cross community work between former combatants. As will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter, this quality contact with outgroup members has seen signs of a tentative shift in identity in which former prisoners view themselves as a homogenous ‘former prisoner group’.

7.1.2 Minimising the Conflict

‘There was a difference in how participants viewed the impact of the conflict on their everyday life. Participants in Study 1 continually minimised the impact of the conflict on their lives. They did this in several ways; firstly by claiming the violence was exaggerated by the media. Secondly they minimised their own experiences by comparing it to that of their parents. Finally they constructed political violence as being a normal way of everyday life which was relatively unproblematic. For participants in Studies 2 and 3, there was no such minimising of the conflict. For participants in Study 2 who had lost relatives or colleagues to republican violence, a narrative that minimises the violence negates their claims to be the ‘real victims’ of the conflict. For participants in Study 3, minimising the conflict would weaken the legitimacy of their engagement in political violence. These differences point to the central role of identity in assisting with negotiation of adversity, via a process of meaning making, and the individual subjectivity in how people can perceive and respond differently to similar traumatic events.
7.1.3 Negotiating Post Agreement Northern Ireland

The data collection for the current research took place ten years after the Agreement. This allows for an appraisal of how participants have and are negotiating post agreement Northern Ireland. For participants in Study 1 peace has brought economic and social dividends. For these participants who claimed that bombscarels and army checkpoints were the main impact of the conflict on their everyday lives, a new landscape in which such instances are absent is welcomed. Participants in Study 2 felt betrayed and alienated by the peace process. For these participants who had lost loved ones as a result of republican political violence claimed they felt they were the ‘real victims’ of the conflict, and felt undermined by counter challenges of victimhood from republican victims of state violence. With many legal enquiries on going in relation to illegal state killings, and continuing debate around clear definitions of victimhood, it would be inappropriate to get bogged down in exact definitions of victimhood in this thesis (see Ferguson, Burgess & Hollywood for detailed explanation of victimhood in Northern Ireland). Furthermore these participants (Study 2) belonged to support groups which were exclusively either Protestant or Catholic, thus further denying opportunity to engage with the ‘other’ religion. This provides evidence of how conflict polarizes communities and personal reactions to outgroup members. Because of personal experiences participants see no common ground with the other side and thus an unwillingness to engage with the outgroup. They construct relations between groups as problematic and therefore find it hard to move forward post agreement and see the dividends of peace.

As with participants in Study 1, participants in Study 3 also view post agreement Northern Ireland positively. For these participants peace has allowed for quality and prolonged contact
with outgroup members to the extent that they view former outgroup members as having shared prison and post prison experiences. However these claims of harmony between previously opposing groups in Study 3 must be treated tentatively. At the moment whilst peace pertains, these divisions can remain backstage. When tensions rise and national and religious allegiances become heated, these differences are easily mobilised and divisions recreated and maintained (Billig, 1995). This has been apparent in recent times as illustrated in violence breaking out over contentious parades by the Orange Order, and attacks by dissident republicans. However, while encouraging structures which enable quality and prolonged engagement with outgroup members, it is important to be sensitive towards victims who feel unable to engage with outgroup members (i.e. participants in Study 2).

Throughout the data the centrality of group membership in mediating attitudes to political violence and post Agreement Northern Ireland was evident. All the Participants in Studies 2 and 3 were recruited through social support groups, and the data indicated that these participant’s attitudes towards peace were closely aligned to the groups they belonged to. Participants in Study 2, in particular those recruited through the FAIR organisation, viewed the peace process as a betrayal of their Protestant / British identity, and injustice at the early release of political prisoners. This antipathy towards the terms of the Agreement places them outside the political process and the narrative of agreement and peace. In contrast, participants in Study 3 who were recruited through the former prisoner groups of Coiste and EPIC were actively involved in the peace process through their cross community work and viewed the peace process in a positive way. So it was evident from the data that participants belonging to groups who feel alienated from the peace process (Study 2) view post Agreement Northern Ireland very different from those who have ‘bought into’ the peace process (as in study 1 & 3).
From a theoretical viewpoint it is worth noting Sherif’s seminal studies on realistic conflict theory (Sherif, 1961). Previous research (Kelman, 1999) has highlighted the process of negative interdependence between identities in conflict situations, thus asserting one group’s identity requires negating the identity of the other. While previous research in Northern Ireland (Muldoon et al. 2007) has supported Kelman’s position by casting the conflict in zero-sum terms, such that a victory for one side was seen as necessarily implying a defeat for the other, the current research (Studies 1& 3) indicates a degree of cooperation among opposing sides. In terms of realistic conflict theory in the context of Northern Ireland, the superordinate goal is a peaceful society, and cooperative interdependence between formerly opposing groups is required to achieve this. The current data indicates evidence of former UVF and IRA prisoners engaging in cooperative interdependence in search of peace. However the data from Study 2 indicated that the participants in this study still see the conflict in zero-sum terms.

7.1.4 Social Support

While the data indicated that both loyalist and republican former prisoners viewed post Agreement Northern Ireland in a positive way, and saw themselves as having shared experiences, there were also differences in their accounts of their prison and post prison experiences and the social support they received throughout their involvement in the conflict. Former IRA prisoners continually talked about their experience in collective terms, while former UVF prisoners highlighted the lack of cohesion within loyalism, and viewed their prison experience in an individualistic way. These differences can be accounted for through the histories of the respective organisations.
While throughout the conflict there have been many groups to support the welfare of republican prisoners, support for loyalist prisoners within their community was less forthcoming. While there was support for loyalist prisoners within certain working class communities in Belfast, within the wider unionist community, including the Orange Order, there was significant disapproval (Garland, 2001) So for much of the conflict, while there were some welfare groups associated with the UVF, loyalist prisoners often had to rely on friends and family for support. Furthermore, for loyalists being imprisoned by a state for actions they perceived as being carried out in ‘defense’ of that state created identity conflict. Unlike republicanism, prison struggle was not a prominent feature of the loyalist history or psyche (Crawford, 1999). As a result of these two factors, loyalist prisoners were less inclined to engage in republican style prison protests. When UVF prisoners did engage in the ‘Loyalist Blanket’ protest in the late 1970’s to demand segregation, their protest ultimately failed because of a lack of support from other loyalist groups and the wider unionist community (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008). In contrast republicanism has had a history of imprisonment related to political struggle stretching back over a century (see Coogan, 1987). During the various IRA campaigns of the 20th Century various prisoner support groups would raise funds for prisoners and their families. There was a dramatic increase in these prisoner welfare groups in the early stages of the conflict. After internment was introduced in 1971 many groups including Irish Republican Prisoners Welfare Group materialized to campaign against the internment of nationalist citizens and the conditions in Long Kesh and Crumlin Road Prison in Belfast. And by the mid 1980s Sinn Fein’s POW department had been established to coordinate the many campaigns around prison related issues. In contrast loyalist prisoners had little support outside of certain working class areas of Belfast. So it is clear there are historical and cultural reasons for the difference in support given to loyalist and republican prisoners.
Further evidence of the collective and individual nature of the two traditions is in how remembering the past is conducted. Republican combatants are often buried in communal plots which also hold casualties from earlier 19\textsuperscript{th} & 20\textsuperscript{th} century campaigns. These then become memorials to remembrance, whereas loyalist combatants tend to be buried in individual graves resulting in less concentration within loyalist culture on cemetery rituals (Leonard, 1997). The psychological benefits of social support and the theoretical implications will be further explored later in this chapter.

7.1.5 Shifts in Social Identity

As discussed earlier social division underpins everyday life in Northern Ireland. However from the former prisoner participants there were claims that the peace process has allowed more engagement with outgroup members than was possible during the conflict due to changes in political relations between unionists and nationalists, and cross community work between former combatants. This engagement between former UVF and IRA prisoners in post Agreement Northern Ireland has led to a shift in identity to view themselves as a homogenous former prisoner group with similar conflict and post conflict experiences. While this shift in identity must be treated tentatively, it is the result of working together on conflict resolution schemes and cross community projects with the aim of bringing segregated communities together to explore their troubled past (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008). While there were many cross community projects set up throughout the conflict which allowed Protestant and Catholics from deprived areas to engage with each other, the majority of these projects only allowed for short term engagement with outgroup members (Connolly, 2001). In contrast, the contemporary community work carried out by former prisoners and others within the segregated communities of North and West
Belfast allows for quality and prolonged contact with outgroup members. This raises an important theoretical point in relation to conflict transformation. Aims to reduce segregation within Northern Ireland have primarily focused on the role and potential of the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1954; Moffat, 1993; Connolly, 2001). Although intergroup contact is one of the most prominent interventions to reduce prejudice, and has received support across a variety of settings and social groups, the generalisation of contact effects is still widely debated (Tausch et al 2010). As mentioned previously there were many schemes set up during the conflict to allow engagement between Protestants and Catholics. However a central tenet of the contact hypothesis is for quality, prolonged and meaningful contact between opposing groups. As previous research (Connolly, 2001) has shown, with only limited periods of contact with outgroup members, what is likely to happen is cross community friendships may develop, but they are usually short lived and any change in attitude is directed at the individual rather than the whole group. While there was indication within the data that this is still the case, there also appears to be a shift in identity of loyalist and republican former prisoners to see themselves as a homogenous group that have benefited, and been of benefit to the peace process, and illustrating that existing divisions along religious lines can be diminished under the correct circumstances.

Unlike participants in Study 2, these participants view the conflict as political, and the subsequent political changes since the agreement have allowed for this shift in identity.

This shared identity has been aided by the growth in support groups for former prisoners since the IRA and UVF ceasefires of 1994 (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008). Most groups have similar aims and objectives, namely to support the reintegration of politically motivated former prisoners into their families and communities. While the growth of these groups was aided by the introduction of European Peace and Reconciliation funding, there are at least two other reasons for the growth
of such groups. Firstly, because of the constant claim throughout the conflict by British authorities that there was no such thing as a ‘political prisoner’ and ‘a crime is a crime is a crime’, there was a resistance among politically motivated prisoners to access support services provided for former prisoners by statutory agencies, as this would constitute an admission of criminality. Secondly, by embracing the concept of self-help, these groups see themselves as possessing the necessary experience and empathy to deal with former prisoners, which they argue is often lacking among statutory agencies (Shirlow & McEvoy, 2008).

The benefit of the work done to maintain peace by former prisoners and others involved in cross community work has often been overshadowed by the plaudits given to politicians. They are an excellent forum for communities to explore their troubled past and key agents in conflict transformation. They also provide vehicles for quality and prolonged contact with outgroup members which were previously denied. With ‘peace walls’ of up to forty metres high still dividing these communities, these opportunities of engagement must be encouraged and built upon.

7.2 Implications for Theory

Historically, social psychology has tended to adopt an individualistic approach which regards ‘the social’ as the background against which individual behaviour plays out (Brown, 2007). In contrast to this the social identity perspective proceeds from the understanding that one must begin with a consideration of how the group influences the individual (Reicher et al., 2010), and how behaviour and identity is actively generated in contexts as an emergent property of social interaction (Levine, 1999). The findings from the current research provide support for the social identity perspective and analysing individuals’ behaviour at a group level, rather than the
individual level explanations which have been so prevalent within psychological literature in the past. Throughout the data participants attitudes were closely aligned to the social groups to which they belonged. Also in line with self-categorisation theory (Turner et al, 1987) there were shifts in identity as a result of the peace process.

In terms of violence in Northern Ireland, previous research, and many political commentators have tended to pathologise members of paramilitary organisations at an individual level. People acting in this manner are often considered ‘terrorists’ and their behaviour often identified as indicative of some form of psychopathology (e.g. see Silke, 2004, for a fuller review of these issues). This analysis of terrorist or paramilitary activity prohibits a deeper analysis of those factors that may encourage or facilitate membership of such movements and may also restrict and confine explanations (Ottosen, 1995). In contrast to this Reicher & Levine (1994) argue that violence arises as a result of a number of factors, such as violation of perceived norms, perceived aggression of the other party, and de-individuation. Furthermore, Crenshaw (2000) has argued that the group is essential to terrorist behaviour and, in some cases, the motivation to join a group is a more powerful incentive for an individual to join than the need to express political or social grievances. The current data supports this view that social influence and particularly the importance of group dynamics are a more accurate analysis of the reason why an individual engages in political violence.

It is also apparent from the data that social identification and self-categorisation along national and religious lines have created strong ingroup/outgroup divisions within Northern Ireland. This use of religious and national categorisation as a salient way of psychologically organising their social world is still apparent in all participants over a decade after the Agreement. This
categorisation is aided by a range of controlling, rigid processes and structures that have become embedded over time to create strong cultural and social norms. As in many societies in post-conflict, it is common for these practices to continue long after large-scale political violence abates and communities can become dominated by social norms that come to direct and influence the ordinary lives of inhabitants in many ways (Hamber, 2004b). However, while previous research (Shirlow, 2006) argues that Northern Ireland is now more divided than it was at the signing of the Belfast Agreement, the current research indicates a more positive picture, in which peace has allowed for more integration for those who previously were denied exchange with the traditional enemy. The previous research cites the fact that more people now vote for the two extreme parties of DUP and Sinn Fein than in 1998. However, this analysis appears to neglect the fact that the DUP and Sinn Fein have a more moderate and less divisive political agenda than even 5 years ago. Furthermore, as highlighted earlier the prolonged and quality contact amongst former combatants allows for cooperation toward a common goal (peace), institutional support (funding), and acquaintance of friendship, which are all central to the success of intergroup contact.

The influence of social support in participant’s appraisal of conflict and post conflict was evident throughout the data. There has been a relevantly long history within the psychological literature around the benefits of social support on psychological wellbeing. Early research tended to focus on the nature of the stressor and the personality or circumstances of the person subjected to stress (Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Rosenman et al 1964). An alternative to these approaches was developed (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) which conceptualized stress as a process that is psychologically mediated so that the impact of any given stressor depends on the way that it is construed by the person who is exposed to it. Further research (Aspinwall & Taylor, 1997; Underwood, 2000) has
also shown that social support is helpful in reducing the harmful effects of stress. While much of this research on stress accepts that social context exerts influence over response to stressful situations it is often argued that appraisal is dictated simply by the sources of information to which a person is exposed (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). However Haslam (2004) provides a model of stress that is based on social identity and self-categorization theories. He suggests a more complex model of stress in which appraisal processes and stress outcomes are structured by group membership. The interview data provided support for the central argument within the Social Identity Model of Stress (Reicher, 2004; Haslam et al, 2005) paradigm which argues it is not enough to just belong to a group in order to optimize the buffer against stress; the strength of identification with the particular group proves a strong mediator in dictating the amount of stress felt in a particular situation. Furthermore, research (Basoglu et, al, 1997) found that political prisoners showed lower post-traumatic stress than non-political prisoners, despite often experiencing greater levels of violence over a longer duration. There was evidence to support the social identity model of stress within the interviews with high experience participants. Republican former prisoners explicitly state that the support and unity of their IRA comrades in prison helped them cope and find positive elements during their long period of imprisonment. In contrast the more individualistic nature of imprisonment experience put forward by former UVF prisoners resulted in prison experience being more stressful. The different experience of former prisoners highlights an interesting paradox when applying the social identity model of stress in conflict situations. Strong identification with a group/ideology that believes violence is necessary and justified, is likely to lead to the individual having to cope with more stressors in their day to day life, such as risk of imprisonment and/or death. When identification is strong, and accompanied by social support, these stressors are mediated. However, as in the case of the UVF
prisoners, when identification weakens and social support is less forthcoming, psychological
wellbeing is likely to decrease. These findings highlight that communities are not passive entities
but are integral to the analysis of political violence in Northern Ireland. Previous research
(Barton, 1978) has highlighted that community support for paramilitaries is a complex entity and
not at all static, as it is sometimes thought. He argued that, aside from approximately one-third of
the community who remain steadfast, there is essentially a see-saw relationship between the
remainder of the community and the IRA. Burton suggests that this relationship is so fast-
changing that beliefs and allegiances need constant reappraisal and are very much swayed by
recent events. People in the community can view their situation militarily at one time, or
politically, or historically at another, and each, in turn, results in a different perspective. As such,
community opinion can range from viewing the paramilitaries as ‘hoods’ and ‘mad bombers’ to
the belief that they are the very backbone of a people’s liberation army. This again highlights the
necessity to view any shifts in identity tentatively. It is also necessary to recognise the difficulty
that individuals who were victims of republican violence or illegitimate state violence have
buying into the terms of peace. While social identities can act as powerful psychological
resources in the face of adversity, the adoption or imposition of a stigmatised identity (as was felt
by members of the FAIR organisation) can lead to isolation and decreased opportunities for
social support, thus exacerbating the trauma experienced (Lowe & Muldoon, 2012).

In conclusion, it is hoped this section has offered a theoretical explanation of individuals’
experience of living in Northern Ireland that illustrates the importance of context and group
processes in influencing people’s attitudes and behaviour. The following chapter will explore
some of the limitations of this thesis and direction for future research.
Chapter 8

Methodological Issues and Future Research

8.1 Methodological Issues

This chapter will provide clarity as to what claims the data and analyses presented here can and cannot sustain about the wider conflict in Northern Ireland. Firstly it is necessary to reiterate the rationale for the selection of participants and the implication this has for the results. The central aim of this thesis was to explore individual’s experience of living in Northern Ireland before, during and after the conflict. Therefore when recruiting participants, the aim was to recruit from a diversity of background and experience of political violence. To a great extent this was achieved. As such the current study has illustrated the advantage of using a qualitative analysis to investigate the complexity of real-life phenomena, by obtaining a rich data set of individual’s experiences of living in Northern Ireland. Unlike the student population that is predominately used in the extant social identity literature on Northern Ireland, it provides rich, meaningful and lived accounts of individual’s experience of living in a conflict society. As such the research methodology selected should be based on the decisions of what methods are most appropriate to address the research questions, and therefore informed by theoretical reasons. Qualitative methodologies allow greater explanation of the content and understandings which underpin social identity processes. As such I believe the selected method was the most appropriate to investigate the research questions posed. However using the current methodology is not without limitations. As with qualitative methodology in general, the findings are open to criticism concerning issues of subjectivity and small sample size. However as Burgess et al. argue “rather
than focusing on sample size and participant selection, deep qualitative methods focus on the internal coherence of the narrative” (Burgess, Ferguson & Hollywood, 2007, p73).

As such it was agreed that theoretical saturation had been reached after interviewing 32 participants, resulting in a coherent narrative across the data. As outlined in the methodological chapter theoretical saturation is the phase of qualitative data analysis in which the researcher has continued sampling and analyzing data until no new data appear and all concepts in the theory are well-developed. Concepts and linkages between the concepts that form the theory have been verified, and no additional data are needed. No aspects of the theory remain hypothetical. All of the conceptual boundaries are marked, and allied concepts have been identified and delineated. Furthermore, as addressed in the methodology chapter, it was not the aim to deny subjectivity but to be reflective regarding my role in the research process.

As with most qualitative methodologies, thematic analysis is a time consuming process. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 minutes to 2 hours 15 minutes. With one hour of interview taking about eight hours to transcribe, the transcription process took considerable time. The analysis of the data was also a lengthy process with coding starting with small extracts of meaning through to the final themes that were faithful to the data. Furthermore access to participants with varied experience of the conflict was time consuming. While gatekeepers were an aid in accessing high experience participants, they also needed to be convinced of the value of the research, and they also asked to view the interview schedule to ascertain what questions would be asked. Participants in studies 2 & 3 were recruited through support groups. While this is an identifiable way to access a very hard to reach sample and recruit those with high experience of the conflict, it also means that it is an avenue regularly used by researchers
interested in such participants. As such participants can be well rehearsed in giving their accounts of their experience of the conflict. On the downside this means their accounts may have evolved into a narrative which portrays their experiences and attitudes very much in line with the ethos of the support groups to which they belong. There is also the risk that the gatekeepers manage who the researcher gets to talk to. On the upside, these participants were comfortable talking to a researcher and their accounts provided rich data from a range of individuals across the religious divide who had high experience of the conflict.

One of the criticisms of qualitative research from those outside the field is the perception that ‘anything goes’. For instance, this sentiment is echoed in the first sentence of Laubschagne’s (2003) abstract: “For many scientists used to doing quantitative studies the whole concept of qualitative research is unclear, almost foreign, or 'airy fairy' - not 'real' research”. However, although qualitative research cannot be subjected to the same criteria as quantitative approaches, it does provide methods of analysis that should be applied rigorously to the data. Furthermore, criteria for conducting good qualitative research, both data collection and analysis, do exist (e.g., Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Parker, 2004; Seale, 1999; Silverman, 2009; Yardley, 2000)

The rationale for using a thematic analysis was outlined in the methodology chapter. However as thematic analysis is a flexible method, it was necessary to be clear and explicit about the exact approach taken. In this sense, the theory and method needed to be applied rigorously, and “rigour lies in devising a systematic method whose assumptions are congruent with the way one conceptualises the subject matter” (Reicher & Taylor, 2005: 549). It was in this case seen as particularly appropriate given the social identity
approach being taken and the need to accept that the researcher came to the analysis with this theoretical position.

### 8.2 Recommendations for future research

The fact that the interviews were conducted at one point in time means that participant’s accounts could have been influenced by the political situation at the time (orange order parades, or dissident attacks, or other events that polarize communities in Northern Ireland). A follow up set of interviews would firstly allow the researcher to check the reliability of accounts across time. Secondly it would allow the researcher to see if ingroup biases and/or outgroup derogation was influenced by the many commemorations that litter the calendar and heighten religious differences. This could be particularly interesting in a decade in which both unionism and nationalism will commemorate significant centenary celebrations. Unionism will celebrate the hundredth anniversaries of the Ulster Covenant (1912), the losses of UVF members at the Battle of the Somme (1916), and the formation of the Northern Ireland State (1921). During this time nationalists will celebrate the anniversaries of the Easter Rising (1916), the declaration of independence and formation of the first Dail Eireann (1919), and the Irish Civil War (1922-23), all of which are likely to heighten ingroup identities.

Another strand of research which would complement this thesis is to interview non-prototypical victims of loyalist and republican violence. By this I mean individuals who categorise themselves as loyalist or republican, but were victims of political violence by their ‘own side’. Iconic examples of this are Raymond McCord who had his son killed by loyalist paramilitaries and the McCartney sisters who had their brother killed by members of the republican
community. It would be interesting to see how the social identities of such individuals have been affected, and how access to their community, social support and available political identities have impacted on their adjustment to living in post-Agreement Northern Ireland.

8.3 Conclusion

This thesis has highlighted many different experiences and meanings to the conflict in Northern Ireland. Its central aim was to explore individual’s experience of living in Northern Ireland before, during and after the conflict. In study one participants claimed mixing with the other side was unproblematic, though they still used religious categorisation as a way of organising their social world. This sample of participants who claimed they had little experience of the conflict actively minimized the conflict, claiming the violence was amplified and exaggerated. Even those with direct experience in this sample viewed their experiences as normative, indicative of their times. Taken together the results of this study suggest that both the division that underpinned the conflict and political efforts to consider, analyze and review the conflict in an effort to prevent future violence arising, is likely to be problematic for those who see the conflict this way.

In study 2, those who viewed themselves as directly affected by the conflict were interviewed. These participants reported that as well as seeing the social divisions in Northern Ireland, many also inhabited these divisions. These participants felt unable to mix with the other religion due to their experiences of the conflict. This was variously attributed to fear and threat and a need for safety. Safety was generally perceived as higher in the company of one’s own religious group. For this group peace has brought no dividends and they feel alienated from a peace process which they claim has rewarded the perpetrators of the killings of their relations and colleagues.
As peace and reconciliation efforts continue it is important that this group are brought into the fold, not least to allow political integration of victims in the new Northern Ireland.

Study 3 interviewed those who were actively involved in the violence associated with the conflict. For participants in study 3, there was a feeling that the new political structures allow them to participate in the political arena at a cross-community level in ways which were previously denied as a result of their ideological views and militant activity. These political structures afford new opportunities for alliances between traditional enemies in post-Agreement Northern Ireland. Unlike those who see themselves as victims of the violence, the former prisoners interviewed all felt that they had a stake in the peace process. This is of course a reflection of the success of the process. It would be interesting to interview former prisoners who felt disfranchised by the peace process, or those that left their respective organizations during the conflict and turned their backs on militant activity. There is evidence in existing qualitative research (Burgess, Ferguson & Hollywood, 2007) that former militants in the border counties of Northern Ireland feel disenfranchised by the peace process. This could be further investigated to see if there is a distinct difference in attitudes to peace between former paramilitaries in Belfast and those in the border counties, and whether different viewpoints are mediated by individual’s participation in the new political landscape that has been created since the Agreement.

Finally, the thesis demonstrates the value of both a qualitative approach as well as the social identity paradigm to an understanding of the impact of political violence in Northern Ireland. These findings also suggest that the dominance of the religious division in Northern Ireland has obscured very real differences in the lived experience of those affected by the conflict. These three studies point not only to the heterogeneity of experiences during the troubles but also to the
consequences of the different experiences and their interpretation to adjustment to the post conflict political landscape. It is hoped that by illuminating these differences, policies that work to attend to this diversity can be developed.
References


Berelson, B. (1971). *Content analysis in communication research* (pp. 16-25). New York: Hafner


Sherif, M. (1936) *The psychology of social norms*. Oxford


Appendix 1

Interview Schedule (Study 1)

1. TELL ME A ABOUT SOME OF YOUR EARLIEST MEMORIES OF GROWING UP
   ➢ Significant Memories
   ➢ In what ways do you feel NI has changed
   ➢ Feel more secure living here
   ➢ Positive / negative
   ➢ Benefited one side more than the other
   ➢ Was/is social division

2. SIGNIFICANT MEMORIES

3. LOCAL COMMUNITY
   ➢ Feel part of the community
   ➢ Feel comfortable
   ➢ People the same religion
   ➢ Is religion important to you
   ➢ Important to people who live in community
   ➢ Religion and politics often intertwined…..
   ➢ Different to living in ROI or Britain

4. DIRECT PERSONAL OR FAMILY EXPERIENCES

5. REMEMBRANCE AND COMMEMORATION
   ➢ Used by one side more than the other
   ➢ Positive/negative
Appendix 2

Interview Schedule (Studies 2 & 3)

1. Can you tell me about growing up in Northern Ireland

2. Memories of the following significant events

3. Attitudes regarding your local community
   - Feel part of the community
   - Feel comfortable
   - People the same religion
   - Is religion important to you
   - Important to people who live in community
   - Religion and politics often intertwined…..
   - Different to living in ROI or Britain

4. Direct personal or family experience of political conflict

5. Remembrance and commemoration
   - Used by one side more than the other
   - Positive/negative
Appendix 3

Flow Diagram Illustrating Development of a Theme

- Read/reread transcripts
- Identify initial codes
  - Amalgamate similar codes to form descriptive categories of 6-8 initial codes and generate an umbrella term for the category
  - For Studies 2 & 3 identify codes that fit into existing candidate themes
- Generate candidate themes by amalgamating original categories
- Refine candidate themes to arrive at final themes
- Write up analysis to provide vivid examples from transcript that captures the essence of the theme
Appendix 4

Examples of Development of Themes

Examples of Initial Coding

1. “I still see myself as a republican, but through being a member of Coiste I now meet with loyalist ex-prisoners on a regular basis and I would now regard some of them as friends. You see I have more in common with most of them than I have with a Catholic who lives in the Malone Road (an affluent area of Belfast)” – Initial Code: use of political and religious terminology to describe friendships. Talk of class division

2. “Yes I was aware at that stage and the Twelfth Day, that was another thing that made me quite aware because again I lived in quite a Protestant area so the Twelfth Day was a big thing for everybody and I didn’t really know why because it’s not obviously if you’re a Catholic.” Initial Code: awareness of being different

3. “My friends are very evenly split, you know, being Catholic or Protestant, it’s never been an issue….I never noticed any difference between us” Initial Code: categorising friends along religious lines. Denying any difference

4. “You always knew, you see where I lived, it was sort of surrounded by a Catholic area so you know I can remember being out playing and Catholics coming up and saying Protestant ‘B’s and all that you know, taunting you, so you always knew, you always knew what side you were on.” Initial Code: acknowledgement of religious division, taunted by outgroup members

5. “I remember before the troubles started there were lots of Protestants living in our area. You would have known who was protestant and who was catholic but there was never much trouble. Then in 1969 when the troubles started all the Protestants moved out and the whole of north and west Belfast became segregated. Initial Code: Religious differences unproblematic before the troubles

** used as examples of the theme (social division) in final write-up
Examples of Development of Themes (contd)

Examples of Umbrella Term for Categories

1. Political violence impacting/not impacting on everyday life
2. Changes to everyday life as a result of peace
3. Support of family and friends
4. Prison experiences
5. Acknowledging ingroup/outgroup differences
6. Education – segregated or mixed religion, Grammar/ State Secondary
7. Local community – socio economic status, segregated or mixed religion, community support groups

Examples of Candidate Themes

1. *Religious Division (includes subordinate categories ‘acknowledging ingroup/outgroup differences’; ‘education’; ‘local community’; ‘prison experiences’)
2. *Socio-economic inequalities (includes subordinate categories ‘acknowledging ingroup/outgroup differences’; ‘education’; ‘local community’)
3. **Minimising political violence (includes subordinate categories ‘acknowledging ingroup/outgroup differences’; ‘political violence impacting/not impacting on everyday life’)
4. ***Social Support (includes subordinate categories ‘support of family and friends’; ‘prison experiences’; ‘local community’)
5. ***Shifts in Social Identity (includes subordinate categories ‘local community’; ‘changes to everyday life as a result of peace’; ‘acknowledging ingroup/outgroup differences’)
6. ****Living in post conflict Northern Ireland (includes categories; ‘support of family and friends’; ‘political violence impacting/not impacting on everyday life’; ‘local community’; ‘changes to everyday life as a result of peace’; ‘acknowledging ingroup/outgroup differences’)

Refining Themes for Final Write-up

* These 2 candidate themes merged to become a final theme titled ‘Social Division’
** The title of this candidate theme was changed to ‘The Conflict as ‘Normal/Banal’ for the final write-up
*** The title of these themes stayed the same for the final write-up
**** The title of this theme was changed to ‘Negotiating Post-Agreement Northern Ireland’ for the final write-up
Examples of Development of Themes (contd)

Example of Final Theme with Example from the Transcript that Captures the Essence of the Theme

Theme – Social Division (this was a theme that was identified across all three studies)

1. “My friends are very evenly split, you know, being Catholic or Protestant, it’s never been an issue....I never noticed any difference between us”
   (Participant 6, Protestant) Study 1 p100

2. “You always knew, you see where I lived, it was sort of surrounded by a Catholic area so you know I can remember being out playing and Catholics coming up and saying Protestant ‘B’s and all that you know, taunting you, so you always knew, you always knew what side you were on.” (Participant 13, Protestant)
   Study 2 p110

3. “I remember before the troubles started there were lots of Protestants living in our area. You would have known who was protestant and who was Catholic but there was never much trouble. Then in 1969 when the troubles started all the Protestants moved out and the whole of north and west Belfast became segregated. It’s funny how things work out, a Protestant lad who lived down the street from us, and I used to play with when I was young, well he ended up in the UVF and I ended up in the IRA” (Participant 31, Catholic) Study 3 p124