Everyday sentiment among Unionists and Nationalists in a Northern Irish town. [1]

Stephanie Dornschneider and Jennifer Todd
Stephanie.dornschneider@ucd.ie Jennifer.todd@ucd.ie

[1] Acknowledgements to Sarah Curristan for excellent research assistance. And to DFAT Reconciliation Fund for a grant that permitted interviewing, transcription and coding.

Everyday sentiment among Unionists and Nationalists in a Northern Irish town.

Abstract

Unionists and nationalists remain polarized in their political choices, increasingly so since Brexit. The political attitudes and policies of many unionists have hardened, and in response nationalists are discussing the real prospects of a united Ireland. Does this signal increasing and dangerous division? Or have the decades of peace and agreed institutions changed the tenor of discussion in Northern Ireland? In this article, we examine the ways community relations, political division and contention are discussed by focusing on the expression of everyday sentiment among unionists and nationalists in a mixed Northern Irish town. Theoretically it has been argued that positive sentiment raises hopes for compromise and leaves room for discussion, while negative sentiment closes off deliberation and compromise. Based on interviews with 13 individuals, we first conduct a sentiment analysis that identifies positive versus negative sentiment expressed by the respondents, focusing on themes including Irish unity, unionism, Brexit, politicians, and ten other themes related to personal and community life. The analysis shows that, on average, interviewees talk more positively than negatively about each theme. We then conduct a qualitative discourse analysis to investigate how positive and negative sentiment are expressed by unionist and nationalist respondents. We find that both groups name and elaborate on the political issues in contention while lowering the emotional valence of discussion. While unionist respondents do not want Irish unity, they are well able to discuss this once-taboo subject. This suggests much more room for deliberation and compromise than is usually assumed.

Key words: sentiment analysis, unionist, nationalist, Northern Ireland, positive sentiment, compromise, avoidance, Brexit, united Ireland.

Everyday sentiment among Unionists and Nationalists in a Northern Irish town.

Introduction

How has the tenor of daily interaction and everyday political relations in Northern Ireland been affected by the socio-political transformations of the last decades? We know that some of the hopes surrounding the Good Friday Agreement have now faded, and that unionists and nationalists remain polarized in their political choices and increasingly so since Brexit. But has the experience of peace and settlement over two decades produced a popular capacity to manage divisive issues? How does political division impact at the personal level, and how does personal feeling inform political division? The questions are particularly pertinent at a period when political polarization has increased and when – whatever the outcome of Brexit – new political choices will arise for nationalists and unionists and others alike.

The survey results give a mixed answer. On the one hand, since the 1990s there has been an increase in the percentage of 'middle ground' individuals, neither Catholic nor Protestant, neither unionist nor nationalist, and often self-described as Northern Irish (see variously Garry, 2016; Hayward and McManus, 2019). There was an initial moderation of views even among once-extreme parties and their supporters (Mitchell et al, 2009) but since 2012 there has been an increase in hardline views amongst unionists.[2] There is, in short, some ground for hope that divisions are ameliorating. Just how much, and whether the recent period of more permeable boundaries and more open identities is but one phase in a 'concertina effect' of sequential opening and closure is not yet clear. Exploring the role of sentiment helps us see if there is indeed potential to sustain and expand on openness and permeability.

Our aims in this article are modest. We do not analyze continuing social and political division and its causes, but rather we explore and analyze how ordinary citizens talk about it. We do not explore issues of categorization, stigmatization and 'othering', which are directly if complexly linked to political division.[3] Rather we explore the

[2] See Todd, 2018, 59-61 and Northern Ireland Life and Times, Politics Module, FUTURE1 https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/polatt.html#conpref accessed 02/06/2019

[3] For comparative discussion of categorization and stigmatization and how cultural disrespect is expressed and is overcome, see Lamont et al, 2016; Todd, 2018; for discussion in the Northern Ireland case, see Brewer, 1998; Millar, 2006; McManus, 2017.

emotional valence (sentiment) that respondents attach to their discourse. This, as we show below, is relevant to the question how respondents manage existing divisions, whether by ameliorating or intensifying them, avoiding or reflecting on them.

In order to see how ordinary citizens experience their situation and talk about divisive issues, we conducted a set of open-ended interviews in late 2018/2019 in a town in Mid-Ulster and its hinterland of villages. This is a mixed area with a changing demography and an increasing Catholic and nationalist majority. It is polarized in voting patterns and has recently experienced local contention over flags.[4] The interviews focused on local social relations and included discussion of issues in political contention, in particular Brexit and a united Ireland. We applied sentiment analysis to examine the interview transcripts for positive versus negative affect, expressed by the interviewees when talking about these issues. We further investigated the results with qualitative analysis of the ways respondents addressed contentious issues.

While computerized methods of accessing feeling have not been used before in analyzing interviews in Northern Ireland, there is a substantive literature on feeling and political conflict, both in general and in Northern Ireland, which we discuss in the next section. In the third section we discuss data construction, in the fourth we discuss the method of sentiment analysis and in the fifth its results. In the following section, we deepen our analysis by applying discourse analysis to a subset of the interviews. We conclude by summarizing our argument and outlining the questions that it raises for future research.

Emotion, conflict and the management of social interaction

Emotions are important phenomena in protracted conflict and in episodes of violence (Petersen, 2012; Bar-Tal, 2013). Positive emotions have been associated with a willingness to undertake risky and project-oriented action (Dornschneider, forthcoming), and negative emotions, in particular ontological insecurity and anxiety, with an inability to negotiate and compromise (Abulof, 2015; Rumelili, 2015). Negative emotions might be expected to be particularly important in contemporary Northern Ireland, since demographic change and geopolitical instability with Brexit has refocused attention on key features of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998 and has reopened the question of Irish unity. In this difficult environment, whether ordinary people have positive feeling and are able to reflect upon once-taboo views, or whether their attitudes are negatively charged and defensive, is likely partially to determine their political responses.

[4] In the 2019 local elections, residents voted overwhelmingly for Sinn Féin and Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) councillors, with minority Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) representation.

Several studies have focused on the feelings of people in contemporary Northern Ireland: work on loyalism (McAuley, 2016) and on ex-paramilitaries (Mitchell, 2015) argues that negative ontological insecurity explains why these groups tend towards hard-line politics. There is evidence that some sections of the Protestant population have negative feelings towards the political culture associated with the Good Friday Agreement which they feel negates the value of their own past (Simpson, 2009; Daly, 2019). Meanwhile, research on Catholics suggests a move away from a negative 'victim' mentality since the Good Friday Agreement (Mitchell, 2006, 105-8).[5] Psychological studies in Northern Ireland suggest that exposure to violence in the past increases group identification in the present with related negative feeling towards the Other, while cross-community contact has mixed effects.[6] There is also high politicization of negative feelings especially among loyalists (see Nolan et al, 2014; and the focus group discussions in Daly, 2019). The research reported here adds to the literature on emotion in Northern Ireland and points to both parallels and differences between the communities.

There is also a very substantive sociological literature showing how people use feeling in everyday life to manage and reproduce division. One traditional repertoire, going back at least to the 1950s, is avoidance of negative contentious topics and a focus on areas of agreement and good feeling in everyday interaction (Harris,1971, 146-8). This removes political views from critical discussion, while allowing civil personal interaction together with proxy political opposition. For example, people in Northern Ireland consistently express a strong 'happiness' quotient, and this good feeling preexisted and persisted through the years of violence.[7] It is thus difficult to assess the functioning of positive sentiment in daily interaction. Does it show a disconnect between everyday interaction and political division, such that ordinary citizens are much more open to compromise and reconciliation than are politicians?[8] Or does it show that everyday sectarianism and

---

[5] Also see Northern Ireland Life and Times, CULTRAD5 and CULTRAD6 https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/results/comrel.html#rel accessed 02/06/2019

[6] On exposure to violence, see Lowe and Muldoon, 2010; for recent work on contact, trust and emotion, with specific Northern Irish references, see Hughes et al, 2011; Kenworthy et al, 2016.

[7] Rose (1971) 315-6; 'Northern Ireland scores high in life satisfaction and happiness ratings', Irish Times, 27.09.2018 https://www.irishtimes.com/life-and-style/health-family/northern-ireland-scores-high-in-life-satisfaction-and-happiness-ratings-1.3643332 accessed 02.06.2019

[8] This is the argument put forward by Robin Wilson (2010), following Brubaker (2002) and Brubaker et al (2006). It is also consistent with the views of those who see sectarianism as a product of structure not culture (Gilligan, 2017), and who emphasise the everyday capacity to compromise (Irwin, 2012)

opposition are routinely disguised by positive statements and good feeling?[9] Or are both claims true? For example, do ordinary citizens consistently try to move beyond opposition and equally consistently fail?[10]

Thus two outstanding questions are raised by the literature

(i) *How much negative or positive sentiment is shown in discussion of everyday life in Northern Ireland?* The literature on ontological insecurity discussed above would lead us to expect considerable negative sentiment particularly in times of instability and change. The literature on the political construction of group identity would suggest, on the contrary, that we would find considerably more positive feeling amongst ordinary people than we find in political discourse.

(ii) *How does positive sentiment function with respect to political division?* Does it counter its negative effects, as much psychological literature suggests? Does it bypass politically contentious topics, as much sociological literature suggests, thus functioning to insulate political views from everyday dialogue and to disguise opposition?

Our analysis of the interviews allows an assessment of these conflicting claims. It allows us to:

(iii) *Assess the mix of positive and negative sentiment on different themes and the patterns of sentiment.* For example
  (a) Is positive sentiment on issues of social relations related to positive sentiment on political issues?
  (b) Are there differences in the shares of positive and negative sentiments between themes?

When positive or negative sentiment is found in everyday discourse, further questions arise as to its significance: for example, whether it functions to avoid issues in political dispute or to open up discussion of them. In late 2018, issues in political contention included Brexit; unionism (and symbolic politics of flags and recognition); and a united Ireland. We assessed the interview transcripts qualitatively to ask:

(iv) *How does positive (and/or negative) sentiment function in everyday discourse about political issues?* For example, does it
  (a) Avoid contentious issues, or open discussion of them?
  (b) Is it associated with a willingness to compromise on contentious issues, or an unwillingness to compromise?

[9] This argument is put forward in many studies of sectarianism, including Leichty and Clegg, 2001 ; Brewer et al, 1998 ; Ganiel, 2008 ; Millar, 2006 ; McKay, 2000
[10] This argument is put forward by Todd, 2018. See pp.191-193

(c) Does this differ between unionists and nationalists?

Data construction

Xtown

Xtown is a mid-Ulster market town of about 9,000 residents, an educational and business centre for a wider region of about 45,000 inhabitants. Like other areas West of the Bann, the demographic balance in the town has changed from majority Protestant to majority Catholic (in 2011, the population of the town was approximately 60% Catholic and 35% Protestant), and from a unionist-controlled council to a nationalist-controlled one. The town has long had a local reputation as a mixed town, with significant integration in the school system, while the surrounding area is a patchwork of all-Protestant and (almost) all-Catholic villages. There has been a history of violence, with strong IRA and UVF organization in the neighbouring villages and numerous murders and incidents of violence and repression, and several bombs in the town centre which killed civilians and destroyed buildings. The wider region is divided nationally: in 2011, 27% of the residents had British national identity only, whereas 39% had Irish national identity only, while 24% had Northern Irish national identity only. Politically, the dominant parties are Sinn Féin and the DUP, with minority voting for the SDLP; in the most recent local elections no councillors from the cross-community Alliance Party of Northern Ireland or from the Ulster Unionist Party were elected.

The sample and the interviews

We interviewed 13 individuals in the town and surrounding villages in December 2018, of whom 7 identified as Protestant and 6 as Catholic (see Table 1). There was a mix of nationalists and unionists, with a few respondents who identified as neither: nationalists were generally moderate, and did not include self-declared republicans; unionists included DUP voters but not DUP activists. There were 7 respondents over 60 years old, 5 respondents in their 40s or 50s, and only one in their 20s; 8 respondents were male and 5 female, with a mix of white collar working class, small business, farming and professional respondents. In spite of the small number of interviewees, our findings offer new and surprising insight about sentiment expressed in conversations about contested issues. These findings could be investigated further by other studies in related settings.

Table 1 about here

The interview schedule was open-ended, with a particular focus on the individual, and his/her social relations; the town and social relations within it; and political issues. Most interviews lasted between 1 and 3 hours, with two shorter and one longer. Both authors conducted interviews and each interview was attended by one interviewer only. One interviewer was perceived as an outsider, and the other as part-insider, part-outsider. All interviews followed Spradley's guidelines for ethnographic interviews (1979). We began interviews by introducing ourselves and our research project. Then we typically asked individuals to introduce themselves to

us. Most interviewees responded by giving detailed descriptions of their lives. We did not interrupt these descriptions, and instead nodded or repeated words whenever individuals paused. In later parts of the interviews, we asked individuals to elaborate more on life in their town at present and in the past, private issues, future prospects, as well as other political themes discussed in the analysis.

Analysis

Sentiment analysis

To analyze the interview transcripts, we first applied sentiment analysis. Sentiment analysis is a subfield of natural language processing that can be applied to extract affect from text. To date, relatively few studies have applied sentiment analysis to interview transcripts, perhaps because sentiment analysis is a relatively new method and not yet known widely among researchers conducting interviews. In contrast, various studies have applied sentiment analysis to social media text when analyzing the stock market or voting behavior (e.g. Bollen, Mao, & Zeng, 2011; Turmasjan et al., 2010). To the best of our knowledge, sentiment analysis has not yet been applied to study conflict in Northern Ireland.

Our analysis applied VADER (Valence Aware Dictionary and sEntiment Reasoner), which is publicly available through Python. VADER has been applied to identify sentiment from texts including newspaper editorials, movie reviews, social media communication, or product reviews (Hutto & Gilbert 2014, p. 216). VADER identifies sentiment by an empirically validated lexicon that contains a list of lexical features assigned to positive or negative values, and rules that capture the grammar and syntax underlying expressions of sentiment intensity (Hutto & Gilbert 2014). The lexical features contained by this lexicon include words and anything else that can be used for textual communication (e.g. LOL in social media text).

In total, VADER's dictionary includes 7,500 lexical features based on well-known validated sentiment lexicons (e.g. the Linguistic Inquiry and Word Count dictionary and the Affective Norms for English Words provide lists of words and their affect). In VADER, each lexical feature is assigned a sentiment score (positive, negative or neutral) ranging from -4 to +4. For instance, the sentiment score of the word "okay" is positive, 0.9, while the score of the word "horrible" is negative, -2.5 (Hutto & Gilbert 2014, 220). Subsequently, for each of the three sentiment polarities, the Python implementation calculates the sum of absolute sentiment scores across all words in a sentence. These polarity scores are then rescaled such that the total polarity is 1 and the scores can be interpreted as the relative proportions of the sentence that are either negative, positive, or neutral. Appendix 1 provides the scores for sentences corresponding to each theme we analyzed.

When assigning sentiment scores, VADER also evaluates the context of lexical features. The creators of VADER give the following example to illustrate this feature: "At first glance, the contract looks good, but there's a *catch*" contains a negative sentiment for the word "catch," whereas "The fisherman plans to sell his catch at the

market" has a neutral sentiment for the same word (Hutto & Gilbert 2014, 218, italics in original). To capture these differences, VADER applies a Python package that implements sentiment classification including disambiguation of word-sense. Nevertheless, VADER does not capture subtle nuances of language. The second part of this article therefore applies qualitative methods to further investigate particular excerpts from the interviews.

In the following analysis, we apply VADER's polarity score method to identify proportions of texts that are positive, negative, and neutral. We apply this method to interview segments about key themes, rather than entire interview transcripts.[11]

To prepare the transcripts for the sentiment analysis, we broke our interview transcripts into text segments about 14 key themes:

- Community relations in this town
- Community relations in other towns
- Self-other
- Brexit
- Irish unity
- Unionism
- Politicians
- Personal life at present
- Personal life in the past
- Life in this town present
- Life in this town past
- Life in other towns present
- Life in other towns past
- Future prospects

We identified these themes from our interview questions, interview notes, and preliminary examination of interview transcripts. In total, we chose 13 themes that were addressed by most of the interviews.[12]

We used VADER to identify the positive, negative, and neutral proportions of each interview segment addressing a theme. This provided insight about the sentiments expressed during our interviews.

[11] This means that comparison with other interviews, conducted at other times, according to different schedules, and for other purposes, is possible, since affect is compared across themes rather than across whole interviews.
[12] Appendix 2, in the on-line journal webpage – give webpage - provides examples of statements for each theme.

Findings

Overview

The analysis shows that, on average, the interviewees talked more positively than negatively about each theme (Figure 1). Examples of the VADER scores for particular sentences are given in Appendix 1 below.

The most positive theme identified by the analysis was "life in other towns at present," whereas the least positive theme was "life in this town in the past" (Figure 2).[13] The most negative theme was "future prospects," whereas the least negative theme was "unionism" (Figure 3). The analysis of individuals showed that, on average, for each interviewer, all except two interviewees talked more positively than negatively about the themes investigated by the analysis (Figure 4).[14]

Irish unity was the second most positively addressed theme by the interviews. When talking about Irish unity, interviewees expressed almost three times more positive than negative sentiment. Strikingly, unionists who opposed Irish unity were on average more likely to express positive than negative sentiment about it. Unionism was also addressed more positively than negatively. Interviewees expressed twice more positive than negative sentiment when talking about unionism. Strikingly nationalists in the sample were on average as positive about unionism as were unionists. Almost all of the respondents expressed more positive than negative sentiment about Brexit, including those most opposed to it politically. Politicians were also addressed more positively than negatively. Interviewees expressed twice as much positive sentiment as negative sentiment when discussing politicians (Figure 1).

Regarding themes about personal life, interviewees also expressed more positive than negative sentiment. Personal life at present was the fourth most positive theme identified by the analysis (Figure 2), and interviewees expressed more than twice as much positive as negative sentiment when talking about this theme (Figure 1). When discussing their personal life in the past, individuals expressed less positive sentiment. Nevertheless, expressions of positive sentiment were more frequent than expressions of negative sentiment when discussing this theme.

---

[13] Other towns included London, Dublin, and other Irish, European and American as well as Northern Irish towns.

[14] The two respondents who on average expressed more negative than positive emotion were both Protestant and over 60; neither was politically hardline. Qualitative assessment suggests different reasons for the scores in each case: one respondent was explicitly worried about current politics and unsure about their future choices; in the other case, age may well have been a factor because they spoke very directly without evident concern – seen in most of the other respondents - to monitor their discourse and choose their words carefully.

Regarding themes about community relations and life in their town, interviewees expressed more positive than negative sentiment. Life in this town at present was the third most positive theme identified by the analysis (Figure 2), and interviewees expressed more than twice as much positive as negative sentiment when addressing this theme (Figure 1). Life in this town in the past was discussed less positively. It had the lowest positive sentiment scores and the second highest negative sentiment scores. Nevertheless, individuals still expressed more positive than negative sentiment when discussing this theme. Moreover, the theme community relations in this town had more than twice as many expressions of positive as negative sentiment.

-Figures 1-4 about here-

Examples of comments on particular themes are given in Appendix 2.0 on the journal webpage. Many of the specific beliefs were common between Protestant and Catholic, unionist and nationalist respondents. For example, on the issue of Irish unity, almost all respondents – those who did and those who did not favour it – mentioned its potential costs. These included: loss of UK benefits, increased social divisions and civil unrest, and economic consequences. Several were concerned to know more about the South, what Southerners wanted, and one was interested in how the Protestant minority in the South had fared since independence. We interviewed neither young hard-liners nor the younger people who radically detach from traditional identities but, that apart, the respondents represented a wide range of mainstream opinion.

Preliminary conclusions

The finding that interviewees expressed more positive than negative sentiment about each theme contributes knowledge about Northern Ireland. The finding may seem paradoxical, because it does not show any change in opposed political positions and thus conflict – which appears 'negative' – remains, even while the positions are expressed with predominantly neutral or positive sentiment. But this is not a contradiction: sentiment analysis measures only sentiment expressed, not the implications of statements for conflict or peace. It is not that the respondents have resolved conflict, or become reconciled to opposing standpoints, but that they have changed the emotional valence of their discussion of contentious topics.

The literature on emotions and conflict suggests that "the presence of particular negative sentiments and/or the absence of particular positive and moral sentiments can constitute a barrier to conflict resolution and reconciliation" (Kahn et al., 2016, p. 61). In particular, negative emotions of hatred and continuing anger have been considered a barrier, whereas positive emotions of empathy or compassion have been related to reconciliation (Kahn et al., 2016, p. 61; also see Halperin & Pliskin, 2015). Both anger and empathy can play "a mediating role" in conflict, and that they can be determined by attributional thinking about the intentionality and cause of an

action (Betancourt and Blair 1992, 343). Achieving reconciliation can moreover "reduce anxiety and uncertainty in the recipient of aggression following a conflict." (Aureli, 1997, p. 315)

Although our study did not examine particular emotions, the finding that our interviewees expressed more positive than negative sentiment is significant. According to the literature, this finding suggests that some of the emotional barriers to reconciliation and conflict resolution have been lifted. The consistency of the finding between individuals from Protestant and Catholic background and of unionist and nationalist politics is surprising in light of the literature that shows that sections of unionism are particularly troubled by the new politics of Northern Ireland. It shows a different repertoire than that of the increasingly vocal hardline unionists who emphasize negative emotions; our respondents may have agreed with the political choices of their political parties, but they express them in ways that are potentially open to dialogue.

Our findings on Brexit are similarly surprising. The literature has connected Brexit to global competition (Colantone & Stanig, 2018), social division (Hobolt, 2016), and populist movements (Ingelhart & Norris, 2016), and in Northern Ireland as a threat to peace and settlement (Phinnemore & Hayward, 2017). Given the challenges that Brexit poses for intergroup interactions, these findings suggest that interviewees would express strong negative emotions about Brexit, particularly given the negative emotions surrounding public discussions of economic competition, threat by immigrants, social inequalities, or undermining of the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. However, our findings suggest that on average, individuals talked about Brexit without strong negative emotion, and indeed showing positive sentiment, including those most opposed politically to Brexit and who stand most to lose by it, and who would move South in the case a hard Brexit.[15] This seemingly paradoxical finding does not show any change in the deep opposition of some respondents to Brexit; rather it shows the capacity to speak about it without highly charged negative sentiment.

Most surprisingly of all, a united Ireland was discussed more positively than negatively, including by unionists who would 'always' be opposed to it and who would consider leaving Northern Ireland to move to Great Britain if it were to come about.[16] It is generally considered that unionists perceive a united Ireland as the greatest possible threat to their very being, one which they want to avoid at all costs, and which many would fight to prevent (see Whyte, 1991, 80 ; Shirlow et al, 2012). If they are now able to discuss it with positive emotion, this suggests that a threshold has been passed among sections of mainstream unionists, for whom the constitutional issue no longer immediately evokes zero-sum identity politics and overwhelming negative emotions. It is important to keep in mind this large segment

[15] JM2PWC13
[16] JM2PWP12

of unionist society rather than treating the rhetoric of unionist leaders and unionist extremes as representative. [17]

The functioning of sentiment

Qualitative analysis

The sentiment analysis does not tell us what kind of positive or negative sentiments were expressed, how sentiment was expressed about particular themes, and how it functioned discursively particularly amongst respondents with strong unionist or nationalist views. We therefore undertook qualitative analysis of interviews with four individuals who expressed strong political views - two unionists and two nationalists – in order to show how they conceptually framed the political issues in contention. We address the paradox in which strong oppositional political views are expressed with more positive than negative sentiment, and ask if this positive sentiment is a way of avoiding recognition of the depth of opposition, or of opening up opposing views to discussion. We ask (i) how are strong political views expressed, in what language and with what tropes? (ii) how far are the political issues in contention avoided or, alternatively, opened for discussion (iii) how far is there a symmetry in modes of expression and avoidance between unionists and nationalists? We focus particularly on issues which are in general contention: in particular Brexit; a united Ireland; and issues of symbolic politics.

Nationalist constructions of political opposition

Two moderate nationalists – Peter (in his early 70s, a small farmer in the hills outside Xtown) and Eoin (in his 40s, service sector in the Xtown region) - are strongly opposed to Brexit, and feel that DUP policy is misguided and counterproductive.[18] Despite their political views, the sentiment analysis showed that they expressed more positive than negative sentiment about Brexit; and while Eoin expresses positive and negative sentiment about unionism in equal measure, Peter expresses no negative sentiment at all about unionism.

Qualitative reading shows that each raises the issues in political dispute while voicing their criticisms gently. Peter expresses a strong wish not to appear one-sided. 'I don't like saying it but our side seems to me more openminded'. When the interviewer is critical of the unionist-dominated security forces in the past, he immediately jumps to their defence: 'But they weren't all bad'. His strongest criticism of contemporary unionists is tinged with sadness rather than anger: 'But I

[17] In 2014, the last time the question was asked in the Northern Ireland Life and Times survey, 40% of those Protestants who support the union said they would be able to live with a united Ireland even if they did not like it and a further quarter would positively welcome a united Ireland achieved democratically. https://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt/2014/Political_Attitudes/FUTURE1.html

[18] Respectively JM1FWC11 and JM2PWC13

think the DUP are living in the past and it's just the flag and that seems to be as long as they can wave it under our nose, that's all that seems to matter'.

Eoin distances himself from unionist and British symbolic politics, but expresses 'fascination' with it rather than anger or disdain: 'it's this other thing that fascinates me, you know a soldier was shot and dies a hero and somebody who is deemed as being a terrorist is not. And one of them should be recognized and the other one shouldn't. And here you can wear a poppy anywhere and if I was to go into work with an Easter Lily on me I would probably get the sack.'[19] It is not that he is neutral on the question: 'I don't see why it's okay for someone to wear a poppy and not okay for someone to wear an Easter Lily because the both of them are about memories', but he relativizes his own viewpoint 'again maybe it's where I sit …'. Brexit stands to damage his material well-being, as well as going against his political views, and a hard Brexit would lead him to consider moving away from his home-place, about which he is unconditionally positive, to the Republic of Ireland. Yet again he is 'puzzled' and 'does not understand' rather than explicitly criticizing DUP or British policy: 'Because like probably from the Good Friday Agreement up until now the average nationalist here has been quite content. You know? A hard Brexit could to me change that entirely and I don't understand if you are on the pig's back, able to play both markets and become a sort of a place that is very attractive for investment why you would be avoiding that, you know' . Older nationalist tropes of unionists acting against their own interests are used, but in gentle, detached and somewhat quizzical modes of expression rather than in direct or angry discourse.

In each case, a strong consciousness of group identity is expressed: 'our side'; 'our nose', 'where I sit'. Each respondent holds strong political views against Brexit, is concerned about the direction of contemporary Unionist politics, and favours a united Ireland. Each, however, is willing to compromise on political matters, and in particular on a united Ireland: Peter does not wish to force it on unionists even if nationalists were in a majority, while Eoin points out that nationalists were content within the United Kingdom until Brexit. Where compromise is more difficult is on the symbolic issues directly relating to self-esteem: the waving of flags, the equality of memories.

The quotations above express the strongest criticisms of unionists that these respondents make: they are highly qualified ('I think', 'where I sit', 'seems to me'), and emotions are constrained, for example, flags are waved 'under our nose' rather than the more emotive and invasive phrase 'up our nose'. They state views that they know unionists would disagree with and they state beliefs that are important to them: they do so in ways that open these views and beliefs to discussion. Although they are clear that conflict exists and although they believe that the other side is

[19] The poppy is a British national symbol commemorating the war dead. The Easter lily is an Irish republican symbol commemorating those who fought and died in the 1916 rebellion.

difficult, they phrase their views in emotionally-light ways that permit rather than preclude discussion.

Unionist constructions of political opposition

Two unionists - Nathan (a prosperous large farmer in his early 70s living in a predominantly republican village) and Karl (an upwardly mobile professional in his 40s, from Xtown now living 13 miles away) – differ in their political views from within the unionist political spectrum.[20] Karl is strongly against Brexit and Nathan strongly for it; Nathan does not have very strong views about a united Ireland, while Karl is strongly opposed; Karl is highly reflective on symbolic issues, while Nathan is more concerned with neighbourly interaction. Each expresses more positive than negative sentiment in their interviews.

Nathan keeps away from political activism, holding the traditionalist Protestant pietist view that one should get along with one's neighbours while respecting the laws of the state one is in (Ganiel, 2008, 72-6). He and his wife participate in local Catholic St Vincent de Paul outings, and he provides practical help to his nationalist neighbours. He does not want a united Ireland but will not oppose it: 'It's one of the things, we're to respect the rulers of your country and that there but it's going to change, I know it's going to change and there's ones that will fight and fight until the last breath, I'll not be one of those. When the time comes and it's switched over, and it will come, I have no doubt about it. But I would like it to come decently without shooting and bombings because that doesn't help anybody.' Speaking of the politics of Brexit, the backstop and a united Ireland, he says: 'I can understand these Loyalist people, it's a stepping stone to the Republic. What odds, we're going to go anyway, we may as well go tomorrow as the next day, that's the way I look at it.' He shows a capacity to understand the views of the 'other side': when asked about past violence, about which he is very conscious, he talks about the murder of a local Catholic by loyalists: 'There was that man … he was murdered, a cruel, cruel, cruel death'. He speaks of the 'awful' difficulty of going into houses in mourning to pay his respects, before talking warmly about the man who was killed and their shared interests in local affairs. Recent literature shows the importance of the concept of a 'victim' in some contemporary unionist thought and politics (Simpson, 2009 ; Nagle, 2009 ; Lawther, 2014). Nathan shares the consciousness of past violence, but it is significant that he focuses not on the killing of Protestants by the IRA but on the killing of a nationalist neighbour by loyalists.

Nathan voted for Brexit and is unrepentant, despite the economic benefits of the EU for farmers like himself: 'Well, I'll tell you why I voted to leave, the amount of money that Britain paid into Europe, we only got half of it back. And half of that money that did come back was put into things that I wouldn't put it in…. Like you take even the Gaelic pitch there, they get a subsidy of £600,000, you know? … And I can understand it because the Roman Catholic side, I have to give them their dues, they

[20] Respectively JM1FWP08 and JM2PWP12.

put it out and they can manage to get the money. Whereas the Unionist side can't get it.' Here his strong sense of group identity is to the fore as he assesses the balance of benefits for both blocs.

Karl is against Brexit, and also opposed to a united Ireland. He believes that a Northern Ireland 'backstop' stands to benefit the region significantly, while taking seriously the argument that it brings a united Ireland closer: 'Like I think there's big benefits, because you can set yourself up as like a stepping stone and everything goes through Northern Ireland and it would be brilliant for Northern Ireland. But I can see the worry that …. it's a stepping stone to Dublin so at the minute I wouldn't mind if Northern Ireland had special rights as long as it doesn't go any further than that, I don't really care how permanent, I'm not too worried.' He is against a united Ireland, emphasizing the economic rationale: 'I would probably always be against it. Not probably, I always would be against it, so I'd always want to remain part of the UK. But I would need to see how it would affect us, whether I'd move … I've always had this opinion, well we've always been told that Ireland couldn't afford us, so the UK's pumping so much money into it, Ireland can't afford to do that so we're going to be worse off, like horrendously worse off.'

Karl takes seriously the daily symbolic interactions – linguistic signs, flags, jerseys, symbolism - that are what he calls 'pain points' for unionists. He is very aware of the increasing public use of the Irish language in the area and is relaxed about it: 'Initially it would have wound me up. Not so much anymore. I've sort of calmed over the years.' He is annoyed by sports jerseys that signify nationalist group identity: 'you would see loads of guys in like GAA tops and stuff and to me that's still one of the things that niggles me because if you run around in a Rangers top everybody looks at you and judges you.'[21] He uses stronger language on the display of flags: 'it's whenever you put a Union Jack up in the middle of the town and someone complains, that pisses me off, because it's the flag of the country'.

Karl's analysis of the 'pain points' which are particularly galling to unionists is interesting. He expresses his negative sentiment in very understated terms - 'winding up' - and describes overcoming much of it. He does not avoid discussion of the political and symbolic issues in contention, but through his language he lowers the emotional valence of potentially highly problematic issues. Like Nathan, he shows clear capacity for political compromise on some issues, not on all. Nathan does not overtly discuss symbolic issues in contention, but his practice – including helping GAA neighbours and participating in St Vincent de Paul activities – shows his capacity to bypass symbolic contest for the sake of neighbourly goodwill. In each case the emotional weight of highly emotive issues is lowered, feelings are described in muted language, and there is an effort to allow reciprocity. Politically unionists

[21] It is primarily but not exclusively Catholics and nationalists who participate in the GAA (Gaelic Athletic Association), while Rangers is a Scottish soccer team supported by Protestants and strong loyalists in Northern Ireland and often associated with sectarian behaviour among supporters

became more hard-line in the 2010s, but the discourse of these two unionist respondents shows that once-taboo topics are increasingly being opened to reflexive discussion.

Here again we chose the most critical and oppositional statements from the respondents. In these statements, the respondents state their concerns clearly and express deep meaning, but there is no strong expression of negative emotion: often they use terms that have low affect ('niggles me'), thus opening the way to discussion while expressing their distinct perspectives.

Discussion

Seamus Heaney – from a 'home-place' not too far from that of the respondents – described in his poetry the ways Northern Irish discourse functioned to avoid conflict and disguise views. Like Heaney himself and his own neighbours, our respondents were 'expertly civil-tongued with civil neighbours', expressing their views gently and subtly - 'smoke signals are loud compared to us'.[22] But rather than avoiding the issues in contention ('whatever you say, say nothing'), they stated their views on contentious issues clearly and quietly. They have moved on from the dissimulation and avoidance behavior so typical of earlier decades in Northern Ireland. [23]

None of these respondents avoided key issues in contention. In all four of these interviews, respondents showed considerable willingness to compromise on political issues, including a united Ireland. Where compromise was impossible, none would fight, but the younger respondents would leave Northern Ireland. Compromise, however, was not thought appropriate on issues of culture and symbolic status. Here nationalists emphasized the need for respect, and unionists the pain of change.

Of particular interest was the unionists' direct discussion of a united Ireland and of the 'pain points' associated with political change. These issues, which for long have been thought of as impossible for unionists to consider, were thought about and discussed by these and by the other unionist respondents. Unionists spoke more directly about their feelings than did the nationalists, perhaps a product of the asymmetry of situation: unionists have lost a position of past cultural power (Ruane and Todd, 1996, 178-203). Nationalists, who have come close to achieving a position of cultural equality, were nonetheless clear that they had difficulty in understanding unionist viewpoints. Perhaps Eoin's 'fascination' with unionists' views, or Nathan's commitment to acting well for his neighbours, did not actually invite discussion with

[22] The quotes are from Seamus Heaney's 'Whatever you say, say nothing', in his 1975 volume *North*.
[23] On avoidance of contentious issues in cross-community discussion, see Harris, 1971, 146-8.

them. But there was no negative sentiment that would preclude it. If the respondents checked their emotions and held back on expressing negative feelings, they made clear their beliefs and preferences and their bottom lines. That is enough for dialogue.

Respondents' quiet and positive style in interview did not always transfer to actual debates. One (Protestant) respondent mentioned a heated argument about Brexit among his extended family, with people shouting at each other. The non-judgmental situation of the interview, insulated from everyday affairs, permits reflection and careful choice of words: it is unlike an extended family lunch where old familial resentments and attempts at influence may be common, and unlike unplanned street encounters or pub-talk. But dialogue and debate typically take place in such structured and insulated contexts: whether in small settings (the cross-community walks organized by one of our respondents, or the local history society attended by another) or in larger focus groups, ecumenical venues and citizens' assemblies. Our respondents – including the mainstream unionists and nationalists whom we interviewed – showed considerable capacity for discussion, dialogue and deliberation in such settings. It is sometimes assumed that contentious topics – including Irish unity – should not be discussed because it would only enrage unionists and incite nationalists. The respondents interviewed here were well able to discuss the issues. They were not reconciled, nor was conflict resolved, but they were sufficiently reflexive to allow discussion towards such resolution. Some of the emotional barriers to discussion, dialogue and resolution had been lifted. This is the modest but important conclusion of our study. Indeed, social, political and cultural obstacles to resolution and reconciliation remain, and our study did not investigate these, nor did it show how resolution of conflict can be found or what should be the normative parameters of discussion. These are matters beyond the scope of this article and this method of research.

Conclusion

A striking conclusion from our research is the dominance of positive over negative sentiment in the interviews. The consistency of the finding across individuals and thematic areas is important. Theoretically one might argue that this shows a much greater capacity for dialogue, discussion, and reciprocal compromise than is usually believed.

The functioning of sentiment was further analyzed through a qualitative reading of the texts to see if the discourse functioned to open up or to avoid issues of political contention. We found that contentious issues were named and discussed rather than avoided. We found significant although far from total willingness to compromise on some of these issues. Perhaps most important, we found that even on the most divisive political and symbolic issues, respondents systematically used language that lowered the emotional valence of the issue and that permitted discussion of topics that had in the past been very highly emotionally charged. As we have

emphasized, sentiment analysis does not measure opposing views, beliefs or aims, or the implications of beliefs – on all of these dimensions, opposition remains.

Was there still a level of avoidance in the language chosen? It may be that political conflict can still evoke intense negative emotions that these respondents thought inappropriate to reveal in interview. Overtime comparison of sentiment in interviews can hold steady the interview/interviewer factor and let us assess whether or not there is more positivity and willingness to compromise today than in the past. This is the topic of ongoing research by the authors.

The research reported here involved only a limited number of interviews with the more moderate members of the main political blocs, in a mixed town in which unionists were a minority. Our ongoing research aims to broaden this study, first with a comparison of interviews with respondents in majority-unionist areas, and second with an overtime analysis. Even given the limitations of the study, however, the findings are important and unexpected. The unionist views are of particular interest: the unionists we spoke to were mainstream and many of them had voted DUP. Yet they expressed positive sentiment, showed clear capacity to compromise on key issues, and were able to discuss the issues on which they were unwilling to compromise. The qualitative analysis shows that there are still many issues in contention, even between these unionists and the moderate nationalists whom we interviewed. But it also shows a much greater popular readiness for deliberation and dialogue than is often thought. Most surprising of all is the willingness of these unionists to talk about a united Ireland, once a taboo subject. This raises an important political question as to how the potential for dialogue can be engaged.

References

Abulof, U. (2015). *The Mortality and Morality of Nations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aureli, F. (1997). Post-Conflict Anxiety in Nonhuman Primates: The Mediating Role of Emotion in Conflict Resolution. *Aggressive Behavior: Official Journal of the International Society for Research on Aggression*, *23*(5), 315-328.

Bar-Tal, D. (2013). *Intractable Conflicts: Socio-Psychological Foundations and Dynamics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Betancourt, H., & Blair, I. (1992). A Cognition (Attribution)-Emotion Model of Violence in Conflict Situations. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, *18*(3), 343-350.

Bollen, J., Mao, H., & Zeng, X. (2011). Twitter Mood Predicts the Stock Market. *Journal of Computational Science*, 2(1), 1-8.

Brewer, J. (1998). *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland 1600-1998.* London: Macmillan.

Brubaker, R. (2002). Ethnicity Without Groups. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie*, xlii.2, 163-189.

Brubaker, R., Fleishschmidt, M., Fox, J. & Grancea, L. (2006). *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Colantone, I., & Stanig, P. (2018). Global Competition and Brexit. *American Political Science Review, 112*(2): 201-218.

Dornschneider, S. (2019). High-Stakes Decision-Making Within Complex Social Environments: A Computational Model of Belief Systems in the Arab Spring. *Cognitive Science*, *43*(7), e12762.

Ganiel, G. (2008). *Evangelicalism and Conflict in Northern Ireland,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Garry, J. (2016). *Consociation and Voting in Northern Ireland* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Gilligan, C (2017). *Northern Ireland and the Crisis of Anti-Racism: Rethinking Racism and Sectarianism.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Halperin, E., & Pliskin, R. (2015). Emotions and Emotion Regulation in Intractable Conflict: Studying Emotional Processes within a Unique Context. *Advances in Political Psychology*, *36*(1), 119-150.

Harris, R. (1972). *Prejudice and Tolerance in Ulster: A Study of Neighbours and 'Strangers' in a Border Community,* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Hayward, K. , & McManus, C. (2019). Neither/nor: The Rejection of Unionist and Nationalist Identities in Post-Agreement Northern Ireland. *Capital and Class*, *43*(1): 139-155.

Heaney, S. (1975). *North*. London: Faber and Faber.

Hobolt, S. B. (2016). The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, a Divided Continent. *Journal of European Public Policy*, *23*(9),1259-1277.

Hughes, J. E., Furey A., & Jenkins, R. (2011). Contact, Trust and Social Capital in Northern Ireland: A Qualitative Study of Three Mixed Communities. *Ethnic and Racial Studies, 34*(6), 967-985

Hutto, C. J., & Gilbert, E. (2014). Vader: A parsimonious rule-based model for sentiment analysis of social media text." In *Eighth international AAAI conference on weblogs and social media*, 216-225. Available at: https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM14/paper/viewPaper/8109

Inglehart, R. F., & Norris, P. (2016) Trump, Brexit, and the Rise of Populism: Economic Have-nots and Cultural Backlash. Working paper, RWP16-026. Faculty Research Working Paper Series. Harvard Kennedy School.

Irwin, C. (2002). *The People's Peace Process in Northern Ireland*. Houndsmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kahn, D. T., Liberman, V., Halperin, E., & Ross, L. (2016). Intergroup Sentiments, Political Identity, and their Influence on Responses to Potentially Ameliorative Proposals in the Context of an Intractable Conflict. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *60*(1), 61-88.

Kenworthy, J. B., Voci, A., Al Ramiah, A. , Tausch, N., Hughes, J., & Hewstone, M. (2016). Building Trust in a Post-Conflict Society: An Integrative Model of Intergroup Contact and Intergroup Emotions. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, *60*(6), 1041-1070

Lamont, M., Moraes Silva, G., Welburn, J., Guetzkow, J., Mizrachi, N., Herzog, H., & Reis, E. (2016). *Getting Respect: Responding to Stigmatization and Discrimination.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Lawther, C. (2014). *Truth, Denial and Transition: Northern Ireland and the Contested Past*. London: Routledge.

Leichty, J. , & Clegg, C. (2001). *Moving Beyond Sectarianism: Religion, Conflict and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland.* Dublin: Columbia Press.

Lowe, R. D., & Muldoon, O. (2010) Religious and Ethno-national Identification and Political Violence. *Ethnopolitics, 9*(1), 71-83.

McAuley, J. (2016) *Very British Rebels? The Culture and Politics of Ulster Loyalism,* London: Bloomsbury.

McKay, S. (2000). *Northern Protestants: An Unsettled People*. Belfast: Blackstaff.

McManus, C. P. (2017). Dealing with the Legacy of Ethnic Conflict: Confronting 'Othering' through Transformative Adult Education—A Northern Ireland Case Study. *Ethnopolitics*, *16*(4), 411-429

Millar, A. (2006). *Socio-ideological Fantasy and the Northern Ireland Conflict: The Other Side.* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Mitchell, A. (2015). Ontological (In)Security and Violent Peace in Northern Ireland. In Rumelili, B. (Ed.), *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties* (pp. 99-116). London and New York: Routledge.

Mitchell, C. (2006). *Religion, Identity and Politics in Northern Ireland: Boundaries of Belonging and Belief*. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Mitchell, P., Evans, G., & O'Leary, B. (2009). Extremist Outbidding in Ethnic Party Systems Is Not Inevitable: Tribune Parties in Northern Ireland. *Political Studies*, *57*(2), 397-421.

Morrow, D., Robinson, G., and Dowds, L. (2013) 'The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland 1989-2012' *ARK Research Report,* http://www.ofmdfmni.gov.uk/the-long-view-of-community-relations-1989-2012-dec-2013.pdf. [accessed 19 January 2014].

Nagle, J. (2009) 'The Ulster Unionist Victims' Movement: political opportunities and injustice masterframes' *Irish Journal of Sociology* 17.1 19-37

Nolan, P., Bryan, D., Dwyer, C., Hayward, K., Radford, K., and Shirlow, P. (2014) 'The Flag Dispute: Anatomy of a protest' Queen's University Belfast Institute for the Study of conflict Transformation and social Justice, http://pure.qub.ac.uk/portal/files/13748797/The_Flag_Dispute_report_PRINTED.pdf [last accessed]

Petersen, R. D. (2012) *Understanding Ethnic Violence: Fear, Hatred and Resentment in Twentieth Century Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Phinnemore, D. and Hayward, K. (2017) UK Withdrawal (Brexit) and the Good Friday Agreement. http://www.europarl.europa.eu/supporting-analyses accessed 02.06.2019

Daly, M. (2019) 'Unionist Concerns and Fears of a United Ireland', https://senatormarkdaly.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/unionist-concerns-fears-of-a-united-ireland-the-need-to-protect-the-peace-process-build-a-vision-for-a-shared-island-and-a-united-people.pdf accessed 22.09.2019.

Rose, R. (1971) *Governing without Consensus: An Irish Perspective*. London: Faber and Faber

Ruane, J. and Todd, J. (1996) *Dynamics of Conflict in Northern Ireland. Power Conflict and Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Rumelili, B. (2015) "Ontological (In)Security and Peace Anxieties: A Framework for Conflict Resolution." In Rumelili, B., ed. *Conflict Resolution and Ontological Security: Peace Anxieties*, London and New York: Routledge, 10-29.

Shirlow, P., Tonge, J., and McAuley, J. (2012) *Abandoning Historical Conflict: Former Political Prisoners and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland,* Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Simpson, K. (2009) *Unionist Voices and the Politics of Remembering the Past in Northern Ireland,* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Spradley, J. P. (1979) *The Ethnographic Interview*. Long Grove: Waveland Press.

Todd, J.(2018*) Identity Change after Conflict: Ethnicity, Boundaries and Belonging in the two Irelands*. Palgrave Macmillan/Springer.

Tumasjan, A., Sprenger, T. O., Sandner, P. G., & Welpe, I. M. (2010). Predicting Elections with Twitter: What 140 Characters Reveal about Political Sentiment. In *Fourth international AAAI conference on weblogs and social media*.

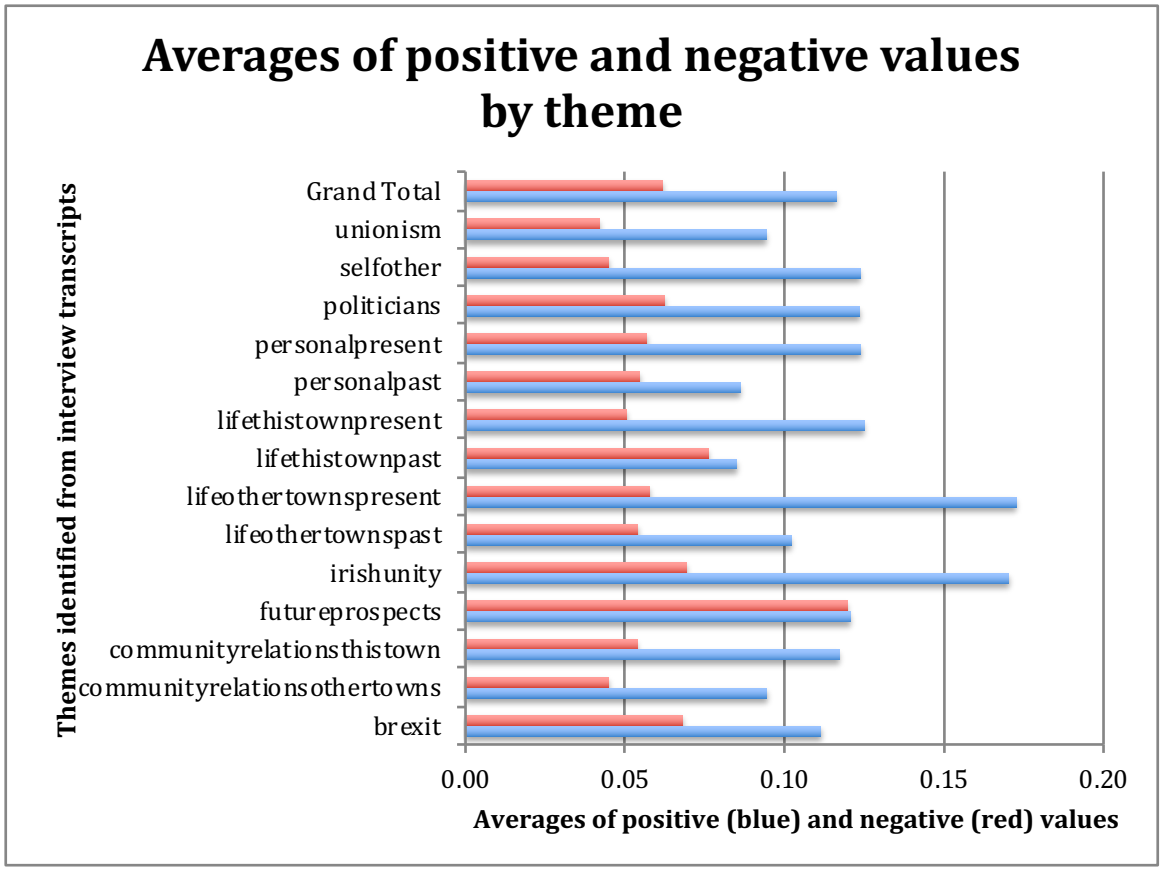
Whyte, J. (1991) *Interpreting Northern Ireland*, Oxford: Clarendon Press

Wilson, R. (2010) *The Northern Ireland Experience of Conflict and Agreement. A Model for Export?* Manchester: Manchester University Press

number	sex	age	religion	job	Code[24]
1	Male	47	Protestant	Professional, financial services	SM2PWP01
2	Female	26	Catholic	Professional, culture and the arts	SF3PWC02
3	Male	67	Catholic	Small businessman	SM1BWC03
4	Female	79	Catholic	Retired lower white-collar worker	SF1WWC04
5	Male	Early 50s	Protestant	Service sector, middle class	JM2SWP05
6	Female	Early 50s	Catholic	Public service sector, middle class	JF2SWC06
7	Female	66	Protestant	Retired white collar working class, service sector	JF1WWP07
8	Male	Early 70s	Protestant	Large farmer	JM1FWP08
9	Male	89	Protestant	Retired small businessman	JM1BWP09
10	female	80	Protestant	Retired small businesswoman	JF1BWP10
11	Male	Early 70s	Catholic	Small farmer	JM1FWC11
12	Male	45	Protestant	Professional, business	JM2PWP12
13	Male	Late 40s	Catholic	Service sector, middle class	JM2PWC13

Table 1. Interviewees

[24] A code was given to each, for example SF1WWC04, to ensure easy identification of the interviewer (Stephanie), gender (F), generation (1 or eldest), locality (West of the Bann), economic sector (Working class) religion (Catholic) of the respondent, and a number representing each of this set of respondents (also used in Figure 4).


Averages of positive and negative values by theme
Themes identified from interview transcripts
Grand Total
unionism
selfother
politicians
personalpresent
personalpast
lifethistownpresent
lifethistownpast
lifeothertownspresent
lifeothertownspast
irishunity
futureprospects
communityrelationsthistown
communityrelationsothertowns
brexit
0.00
0.05
0.10
0.15
0.20
Averages of positive (blue) and negative (red) values
Figure 1.

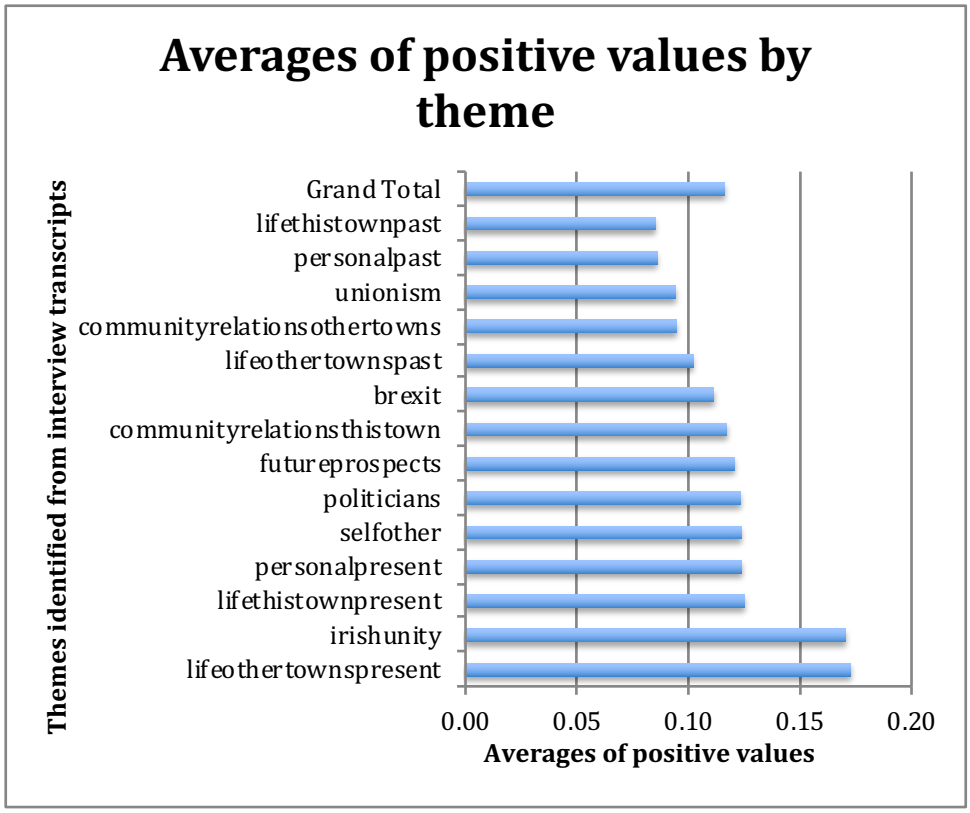


Figure 2. Averages of positive values by theme

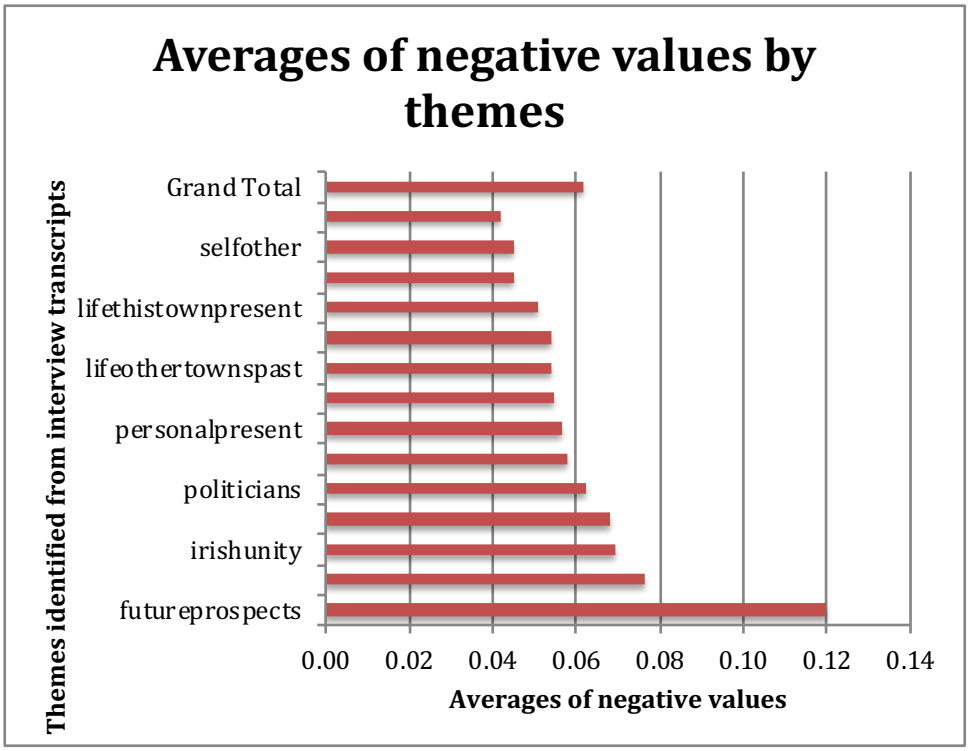


Figure 3. Averages of negative values by theme

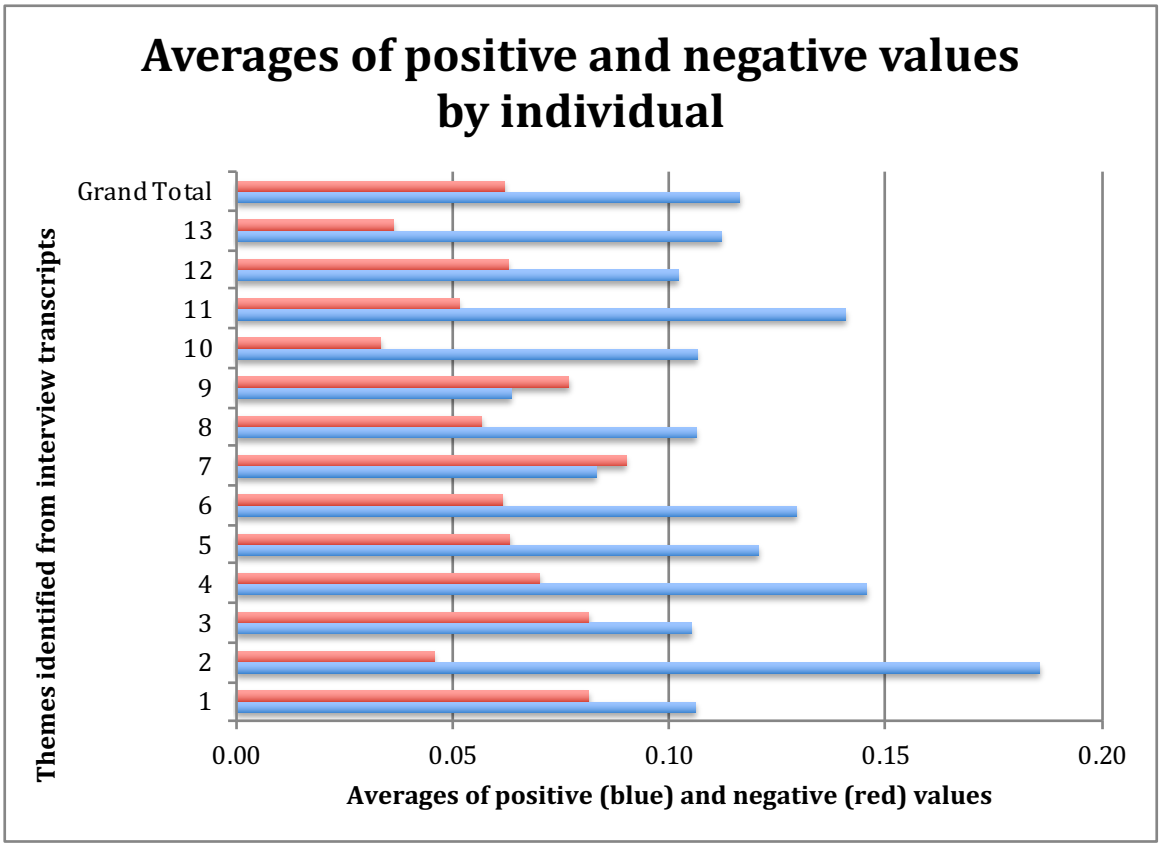


Figure 4. Averages of positive and negative value by individual

Appendix 1

Examples of sentences coded by the sentiment analysis. Polarity scores indicate negative, neutral, and positive sentiment.

Theme	**Sentence**	**Polarity score**
Brexit	However, obviously having the frictionless tariffs and borders for goods etcetera, obviously has a benefit as well.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.733 'pos': 0.267
Community relations in this town	I mean people are probably more tolerant.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.676 'pos': 0.324
Future prospects	It probably will develop, yeah, I don't think they have a handle on it at all yeah, I say it will develop worse.	'neg': 0.127 'neu': 0.694 'pos': 0.18
Life in this town in the past	It's a good point that all the troubles, we didn't have rioting here in the streets as such, in our area.	'neg': 0.126 'neu': 0.753 'pos': 0.121
Life in this town at present	It's a nice town with lots of countryside around it and I'm born and bred here.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.833 'pos': 0.167
Personal past	No nothing at all, no I'm very lucky that way, no relatives involved in the troubles, etcetera.	'neg': 0.216 'neu': 0.499 'pos': 0.285
Personal present	When it come to our children going to school, we decided that we would send them both to an integrated school because the way I see it is, the only way to improve this country is for them all to be educated.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.932 'pos': 0.068
Politicians	But the problem is, in this country, if you look at the percentage of people that vote	neg': 0.081 'neu': 0.821 'pos': 0.098

	extreme right hand, as in DUP, and then you look at the people that vote extreme the other side, Sinn Féin.	
Self-other	Oh God, yeah, I would say in my line of business Catholics, I would nearly do more business with Catholics than I do with my own side.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.837 'pos': 0.163
Community relations in other towns	I do understand that thing of people's businesses being their babies as I talk about and I mean, the first guy I went out to visit in the Armagh area he went in to just myself.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 1.0 'pos': 0.0
Irish unity	That is something I would be voting for, a United Ireland.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.741 'pos': 0.259
Life in other towns in the past	I said, 'If you're asking me if I would rather have been brought up in Ballymun in Dublin or where I was brought up at, give me where I was brought up at any day.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 1.0 'pos': 0.0
Life in other towns at present	If I was in the BBC I would be saying to some of our researchers, right, work out the difference between Northern Ireland and England.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 1.0 'pos': 0.0
Unionism	Another one I did find quite funny is seemingly there is a vast increase in the number of Unionist people getting an Irish passport.	'neg': 0.0 'neu': 0.737 'pos': 0.263

Appendix 2: Identification of themes expressed in interviews.[25]

	Theme Label	Sub-Theme Description	Example
1	Community relations in this town	Instances that describe the interactions between different communities in the X-town region - whether coming together or maintaining distance.	"Yeah. But I think we're soft because it's about education but we're pandering to the needs of both. You know. You're a Protestant, okay, we'll give you football, or you're Catholic, we'll give you Gaelic, oh we need to give you rugby. But that's maybe society. We're too soft now. We're always giving… it worked in the past." (JM2SWP05) "….the way I looked at it was I'll not put up a flag if it's going to annoy my neighbour. My neighbour's more important than what a flag is. And a flag, instead of it up on a pole till it's in tatters, you should have more respect for a flag and if you put it up you should be taking it down maybe at dusk." (JM1FWC11)
2	Community relations in other towns	Instances that describe the interactions between different communities in other regions - whether coming together or maintaining distance.	"They're a minority, realistically they talk about Catholics being a minority in the North, but the Protestants were a minority in the south, so they have to have a story how they adapted. Did life dramatically change for them, because, like, realistically the south was a very … the church drove the country for years and years. It was restraint, investment and everything because of the religious beliefs. So, you wonder how they adapted and…" (JM2SWP05) "It works. They haven't made friends… well they will mix, and they know the people and they're friendly enough that way. They don't keep in touch outside of school but what I'm finding now is the wee girl goes to hockey and she's seeing a wee girl from the the other school and they're talking and it's outside of school and it's … so, no, it's good. I genuinely think that's the way to go. So, the two schools, get them together, because they won't get an integrated status because there's already an integrated in

[25] Table constructed by Sarah Curristan

			the town. But I think that's the way to go." (JM2PWP12)
3	Self-other	Implicit or explicit distinctions made on the basis of group membership between self or own group and 'others' in relation to characteristics, treatment, values, or behaviours.	"But going back to Paul comes visiting here, like, and I'm very aware of where I'm at. Paul's going you change … he says I've been listening to you. Certain shops we go into, you change your language. I says what do you mean? He says well I've known some of the shops, your language or use of words slightly different. I don't know I'm doing it. " (JM2SWP05) "No, you wouldn't know, no God no, no you would never, no definitely you wouldn't, there's no way of telling. Well if somebody's name is Cathal or Cahir, if it's very traditional Irish name well then you'll know they're definitely one side. But no, unless a name gives it away but you wouldn't be looking for it anyway, it wouldn't really matter in that sense, no." (SM2PWP01)
4	Brexit	Reference to the issue of Brexit including reflections on the referendum, own position and reactions to the issue, current debates, perceived knock-on effects, and challenges.	"What do I make of Brexit? I voted to stay. Maybe it's because the devil you know is better than the devil you don't know but the problem with the first vote was people maybe thought oh, we're going to get our hospitals sorted out with this 350 million and that really, you know…" ((JM1FWC11) "Oh I would definitely be voting to stay, definitely. Because I think it's madness. I have a feeling that most other people I think it would be a definite stay, remain now. But that could cause riots in England. It's England, right, fine, but I honestly, people were lied to. I think that to me that whole Brexit referendum should be null and void for the simple reason people were just lied to, they hadn't a clue what they were voting for." (JF2SWC06)
5	Irish unity	Views on the likelihood of Irish unity in the wake of Brexit and what this change would mean.	"It's more the economic thing, yeah. That would be the big thing to me. Everybody would be… I think we would be a hell of a lot worse off." (JM2PWP12)

			"And then I think the big fear is now that they have, because they're trying to get no deal and want to leave with no deal, that they'll end up with a United Ireland," (JF2SWC06)
6	Unionism	Views on Unionism in the wake of Brexit, and whether it is faced with challenges.	"I think it will harm the UK, it'll harm the Union." (SM1BWC03) "So, I think at times the Unionist argument is quite weak and I do think there is a severe ignorance in England as to the true nature of here." (JM2SWC13)
7	Politicians	Opinions and views on politicians, including political figures from Northern Ireland, the UK, Republic of Ireland, and further abroad – both past and present.	"And I wouldn't necessarily agree with everything the DUP say because I think they're a bit, they think they speak too much for the people as in like abortion, gay rights, all this stuff. I'd be very much for all of that" (JM2PWP12) "They've all gone to bed. And they're sleeping. For 18 months, 20 months, how long it is. They are a disgrace. They are an absolute disgrace. We used to have very good politicians but like everybody else including moi, they've grown old and died some of them." (SF1WWC04)
8	Personal life present	Description of participant's personal life in the present.	"Sometimes I think it would be lovely to move but I would never … it's not … I wouldn't leave here because I've so many friends here and in fact I realised how many I had two years ago and how good they were. So, I have, you know, I have a good enough life in that respect, I have a job that I love. I've … I know loads of people so to uproot now at this stage in my life maybe, you know, well I wouldn't want to go away, my daughter's here, she's in the town, she's no children or anything but if she had, you'd want to be around there." (JF2SWC06) "I'm sounding now like I don't like this place, it's awful. No I do love living here, but I do really enjoy it here, I do like living here." (SF3PWC02)
9	Personal life past	Description of personal life events that the participant experienced in the past.	"I absolutely enjoyed it. As I say, I'm from real staunch Loyalist villages such, and everything was

			regimental, you know, you go to church, you go to school, everybody. You're in, like as a kid I was in a marching band, done the same as the rest of them, but it was … not saying brainwashed but it just was the norm. You're a small country village, this is your tradition, this is what you follow. " (JM2SWP05) "But not, hadn't really … back then I hadn't really talked a whole lot about politics. In more recent years we have, yeah, but not back then. I suppose when things start affecting you or you see things affecting you, and then you talk about it more and so, yeah." (JM2PWP12)
10	Life in this town present	Reference to daily life in the X-town region in the present.	"Times you'd wonder are the picking, some of the young ones are nearly bitter too, you know. And it's really sad to see it. I thought with the mixing at university and all, that there'd have been more come alongs and more mixing and…" ((JM1FWC11) "I could laugh. I sometimes see, you know what children are like, maybe they're fifth year or sixth year and they've got a boyfriend and there are these two walking up the street, one in the X-school blazer and one in the convent blazer. That would never, ever have happened when I was at school. Just wouldn't. but you see it's very commonplace now. And it's good." (SF1WWC04)
11	Life in this town past	Reference to daily life and living conditions in the X-town region in the past.	"But back then they tended to put people into, they seemed to go into clumps, so there was our estate was all Protestant. The one right across the road was all Catholics. The one in behind it was all Catholics and they went in, see everybody went into little areas so back then it was like a little Protestant estate." (JM2PWP12) "Yes there was security forces were shot, you know, in the surrounding country areas and there would have been IRA bombs, stuff that as far as the town itself went you wouldn't

			have seen the on-street rioting ever in X-town, like you would see in the old footage from Belfast and from Derry and places like that there." (SM2PWP01)
12	Life in other towns present	Reference to daily life in other towns in the present, both witnessed or presumed.	"It's got really expensive now. You used to just, we'd just laugh at the house prices, and we'd go up and down … we'd still go up and down, we have a client down there and we go up and down in the train, they'd be handing out the papers and you'd be looking at the price of the houses in Dublin like and it's my God, who's ever going to, you know. And the people are nice, like." (JM2PWP12) "So… but that was… it was rare that you went out in Belfast, we didn't go out that much. That was probably early 80s, 1981, '82, maybe. You know? But no, nowadays, I wouldn't think, I would actually feel quite safe going out in Belfast, you know. It's not bad." (JF2SWC06)
13	Life in other towns past	Reference to daily life and living conditions in other towns in the past.	"But you see it did influence me an awful lot. To go to London and see integration there, I just couldn't believe. You know, that there was such interaction between Protestants and Catholics. I worked in a bank in London and I enjoyed every minute of it." (SF1WWC04) "And well I worked in East Belfast and I seen me even going in and sitting in the garage, no point, they'd be getting out in church and out in Harland and Wolff so I'd not get over the Queen's Bridge, I might as well sit here for half an hour till that rush comes out and like they were going back into those places without education because their father was in it and their uncle was in it, it was all handed down and it's the same in Esso and all them petroleum companies." ((JM1FWC11)
14	Future prospects	Description of predictions of what life will be like in Northern Ireland in the near future.	"But it's a changing world, and it'll be interesting where we're at in the next five, ten years, the fun and games will start if it comes up as a referendum for an all-Ireland. It will be fun and games and that

			could ignite the powder bomb again. That's a fear. Hopefully not in my time. Because I think we've come a long, long way, you know." (JM2SWP05) "Well, you see, they're talking about having this hard border. And you see that'll create, it will create unrest. It will create insecurity. And God knows what'll happen and I don't like to look at a dark picture, but it won't be as good as it is now. Perhaps if they keep their heads, they could have it, you know, all right. But I don't know." (SF1WWC04)