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## Intimate mixing - bridging the gap? Catholic-Protestant relationships in Northern Ireland

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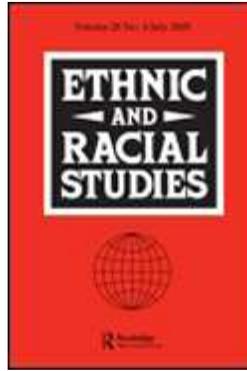
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**Intimate mixing – bridging the gap? Catholic-Protestant relationships in Northern Ireland**

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Keywords:	Intermarriage, Conflict, Religion, survey data, politics of identity, Northern Ireland

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3 Intimate mixing – bridging the gap? Catholic-Protestant relationships in Northern  
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10 **Abstract**

11  
12 For many years Northern Ireland has been a divided society where members of the two  
13 main religious groups, Catholics and Protestants, have limited opportunities to interact  
14 due to segregation in their social lives. Attempts have been made to encourage religious  
15 mixing through integration in schools, housing and workplaces predicated on the theory  
16 that bringing people together can improve community relations and remove prejudices –  
17 known as the ‘contact hypothesis’. However, little is known about those who enter into  
18 mixed-religion partnerships often against the wishes of their families and communities.  
19 This paper examines the characteristics and attitudes of mixed-religion couples and  
20 suggests that they differ in their socio-demographic characteristics and in their attitudes  
21 from those who marry within their own religion. These findings add to the weight of  
22 evidence from other countries in conflict suggesting that intermarriage has a role to play  
23 in contributing to less sectarian views and improved community relations.  
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Keywords: Intermarriage, conflict, religion, survey data, politics of identity, Northern  
Ireland

Word count: 7,260

## Introduction

It is well documented in the research literature that Northern Ireland is a divided society where members of the two main religious groups, Catholics and Protestants, often have limited opportunities to meet and interact with each other due to segregation at work and leisure, in housing, education and personal relationships (Niens et al 2003; Hughes et al 2007). While Northern Ireland, like other countries within the United Kingdom, has experienced changes in the diversity of its population (McGrellis 2010; ONS 2003), the region continues to be a society deeply divided along ethno-religious lines. Indeed, although the conflict is often perceived as a religious one, theology plays an insignificant role and researchers such as Doherty and Poole (2002) have suggested that the divide within Northern Ireland 'is essentially ethnic notwithstanding the fact that it is denoted by the religious labels 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' (page 75). More recently, McGrellis (2010) has noted that the onset of the conflict has preserved and entrenched 'the ethno-religious-political divide characterized as sectarian, Catholic and Protestant' (page 762).

However it is conceptualized, it is clear that segregation occurs between the two communities in Northern Ireland and attempts have been made throughout the years of what are euphemistically termed 'the Troubles' to encourage religious mixing through integrated schools, mixed-religion housing estates and cross-community schemes to encourage children from across the divide to meet and form friendships. Such efforts are predicated on the theory that bringing people together to interact in social situations can improve intergroup relations and remove prejudices – reported in the research literature

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2  
3 as the 'contact hypothesis' (Hewstone et al 2005; Hughes et al 2007). On this pretext,  
4  
5 successive governments have implemented a number of initiatives and spent millions of  
6  
7 pounds to encourage contact between Catholics and Protestants and improve community  
8  
9 relations in Northern Ireland (Knox and Hughes 1996).  
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13 Despite continued efforts, Catholics and Protestants still tend to live apart and  
14  
15 this is most notable within disadvantaged working class neighbourhoods (Hughes et al  
16  
17 2007). It has been estimated that public housing is 93% segregated (McKittrick 2004)  
18  
19 and, while middle class residential areas may be more mixed, nonetheless,  
20  
21 approximately 30-40 per cent of the Northern Irish population live in completely  
22  
23 segregated areas (Hughes 2007). Segregation is also apparent in the education system;  
24  
25 over 90% of children attend either a Catholic or a Protestant school at both the primary  
26  
27 and secondary level (Cairns and Hewstone 2002) and only 5% of children in Northern  
28  
29 Ireland attend formally integrated schools (Hewstone et al 2005).  
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35 Similarly, mixed-religion marriages or partnerships, defined in this paper as  
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37 those between Catholics and Protestants, still represent only a small proportion of the  
38  
39 total number of marriages within Northern Ireland. While there are no official statistics  
40  
41 on the number of such partnerships in Northern Ireland, figures from the latest Census  
42  
43 (2001) and from social attitudes surveys estimate that it is somewhere between 5% and  
44  
45 12% (ARK, Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT) 2005) across the region as  
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47 a whole. Some of the figures reported in research papers have been obtained from the  
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49 churches, particularly the Catholic Church as a priest must first obtain dispensation from  
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51 his bishop to marry a Catholic and non-Catholic in a Catholic ceremony, but none are  
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53 available from the civil authorities since the religion of the marrying partners is not  
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3 recorded on the marriage registration form (Robinson 1992). One difficulty in  
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5 determining the true figure is that, in line with trends across the rest of the United  
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7 Kingdom and elsewhere, an increasing number of couples are choosing to marry in civil  
8  
9 ceremonies and to live together without marrying (Morgan et al 1996).  
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12 Throughout 'the Troubles', mixed-religion partnerships in Northern Ireland have  
13  
14 been problematic for many of those who have entered into them. In some cases they  
15  
16 have brought threats, intimidation and death (Wigfall-Williams 2007). Even recently,  
17  
18 during what has become known as the 'peace process' in Northern Ireland, McGrellis  
19  
20 (2010) found that one young Protestant respondent taking part in her research who told  
21  
22 her friends that she had dated a Catholic reported that '...they did give me a hard time.'  
23  
24 (McGrellis page 773). This suggests that the increasing diversity and the undoubted  
25  
26 secularisation and declining church attendance that is taking place within Northern  
27  
28 Ireland and elsewhere (Aarts et al 2008; Bruce and Glendinning 2010; Crouch 2008;  
29  
30 Hayes and Dowds 2010) may not be enough to overcome the difficulties perceived by  
31  
32 many people to accompany intermarriage (Leonard 2009).  
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39 According to the Northern Ireland Mixed Marriage Association (NIMMA)  
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41 mixed marriages, by the fact that they happen at all, can be seen as a start of a  
42  
43 reconciliation process which is crucial in Northern Ireland. Similarly, research carried  
44  
45 out elsewhere in regions that have experienced conflict has suggested that  
46  
47 intermarriages, whether based on religion or race, can have a positive impact on  
48  
49 tolerance within communities (Hodson et al 1994). Smits (2010) points out that  
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51 intermarriages are 'an important indicator of the quality of the relationships among  
52  
53 groups in a society' (page 417) and reported findings from research in the former  
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3 Yugoslavia that showed that intermarriage reduces the probability of violent conflict  
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5 among social groups. Leonard (2009) also points to international research that supports  
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7 the potential for mixed partnerships to act as a catalyst for social change while Holligan  
8  
9 and Raab (2010) suggest that mixed marriages ‘can be viewed through the prism of the  
10  
11 Contact Hypothesis meaning that mixing of separated groups may cause greater mutual  
12  
13 understanding and societal harmony’ (page 5). However, quoting from Buckley and  
14  
15 Kenney (1996) Hamilton et al (2008) note the limited impact that mixed marriages can  
16  
17 have while Song (2009) suggests that the link between intermarriage and integration is  
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19 complex and that intermarriage is not necessarily a good indicator of social integration.  
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27 While there is a lack of tangible evidence on the number, and possible impact, of  
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29 mixed- religion partnerships in Northern Ireland – and elsewhere – recent research has  
30  
31 begun to address this deficit by providing data on the extent of mixed partnerships in  
32  
33 England and Wales (Voas 2009) and Scotland (Holligan and Raab 2010). Voas (2009)  
34  
35 used Census data to examine the extent of religious mixing among married and  
36  
37 cohabiting couples in England and Wales. He found that cohabitation was more  
38  
39 common among younger people and that those who were cohabiting were more likely to  
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41 be in mixed-religion relationships than their married counterparts. Holligan and Raab  
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43 (2010) examined the relationship between intermarriage and age, education and social  
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45 class. They note a rise in the number of mixed marriages particularly among younger  
46  
47 age groups and suggest that changing societal factors such as increasing secularisation  
48  
49 may have contributed to a breakdown in sectarianism in Scotland. Their findings  
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51 contribute to the ongoing debate on the extent to which sectarianism exists in Scotland  
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3 (Bruce et al. 2005; Walls et al. 2003; Walls et al 2005) and, while parallels have been  
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5 drawn between sectarianism in Scotland and Northern Ireland (see for example Kelly  
6  
7 2003) it is acknowledged that within Northern Ireland, ‘sectarian segregation and  
8  
9 conflict remains powerfully present’ (Holligan and Raab 2010, page 4).  
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13 Given the amount of research that has been carried out on the effects that contact  
14  
15 with the ‘other’ community has on people in Northern Ireland and the perceived positive  
16  
17 outcomes it engenders, such as the promotion of positive outgroup attitudes and trust  
18  
19 (Hewstone et al 2006), it is perhaps surprising that very little information is available on  
20  
21 the characteristics and attitudes of people who live with a partner who is not the same  
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23 religion as they are, often, it has been argued, against a tide of negative attitudes from  
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25 family, friends and the wider population (MacFarlane 1979; Donnan and McFarlane  
26  
27 1983; Whyte 1990). What research evidence there is on mixed-religion partnerships in  
28  
29 Northern Ireland has generally been based on small samples of married couples using  
30  
31 qualitative data collection methods that are difficult to generalise to the population as a  
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33 whole (Robinson 1992; Lee 1994; Morgan et al 1996; Wigfall-Williams 2007).  
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39 In addition, while data are available on the attitudes of society as a whole in  
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41 Northern Ireland towards mixed marriages and the concept of mixing within  
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43 neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools (Hughes and Carmichael 1998; Wigfall-  
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45 Williams and Robinson 2001; Hughes 2003) there is little information on the attitudes of  
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47 those living in mixed relationships towards these issues. This is partly due to the small  
48  
49 number of respondents living in mixed-religion partnerships picked up in surveys of  
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51 random samples of the population in any one year. The purpose of this paper, therefore,  
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53 is to use data from a pooled dataset which has been collected from a random sample of  
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3 adults in Northern Ireland to examine the characteristics of people who have chosen to  
4 enter into mixed-religion relationships and to compare their attitudes towards mixing  
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6 with those reported for the rest of the population. This will enable researchers to  
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8 establish baseline figures for comparison in future years as Northern Ireland emerges  
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10 from conflict into a new era of peace in which such marriages may become an accepted  
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12 and normal part of society. The findings can also be compared and contrasted with those  
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14 reported from other countries which are emerging from conflict.  
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## 20 21 **Method**

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26 The data come from NILT which is an annual survey of a random sample of adults aged  
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28 18 years and over living in Northern Ireland. The survey began in 1998 and from 1998  
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30 to 2004, 1800 respondents were interviewed each year. In 2005, 1200 respondents were  
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32 interviewed. The survey is carried out in the respondent's own home using face-to-face  
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34 interviews on CAPI; there is also a self-completion form that the respondent fills in and  
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36 returns to the interviewer either on the same day or at a later date. The information  
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38 collected by the survey changes year on year; however, some questions are asked every  
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40 year, or with a gap of a few years, to provide a time-series of information on topics that  
41  
42 are particularly pertinent in Northern Ireland.  
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47 In any one year of the NILT survey, around 10% of respondents say their partner  
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49 is a different religion to them. The question they are asked is as follows: If married or  
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51 living as married ... 'Is your husband/wife/partner the same religion as you?' <sup>1</sup> As the  
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53 annual numbers are small, it is not possible to carry out detailed analyses on the  
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55 characteristics and attitudes of those who choose to marry or live with people who are of  
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3 a different religion to them. To overcome the problem of small numbers, a dataset has  
4 been created that pools eight years (1998 to 2005) of information on respondents and  
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6 which contains questions that have been asked in each of these years. Using this method,  
7  
8 the number of respondents who say their partner is a different religion than they are is  
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10 802. This represents 10% of all respondents who had partners (8,299); 87% said their  
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12 partner was the same religion as they were and 3% said their partner had no religion at  
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14 all. The analyses presented in this paper will use only the former two groups of  
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16 respondents.  
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## 25 **Results**

### 26 27 28 29 **Characteristics of respondents living in mixed-religion partnerships**

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31 As Table 1 shows, three times as many respondents who were in mixed-religion  
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33 partnerships were not married as those who lived with a partner who was the same  
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35 religion as they were ( $\chi^2=123.24$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). They also tended to be younger than  
36  
37 their same religion counterparts with 56% being under the age of 45 years compared  
38  
39 with 39% of respondents who were the same religion as they were. In general, more  
40  
41 younger (18 to 34 years) than older respondents (35 years and over) lived together and  
42  
43 this trend was most marked among those who were in mixed-religion partnerships; 28%  
44  
45 were living together compared with 13% of respondents who were a similar age but who  
46  
47 were in same religion partnerships ( $\chi^2=144.69$ ,  $df=5$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Similar trends have been  
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49 reported for England and Wales (Voas 2009) and Scotland (Holligan and Raab 2010).  
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Almost one quarter (24%) of respondents who were in mixed-religion partnerships said they had no religion compared with only 4% of those who were in same religion partnerships ( $\chi^2=528.64$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Of the respondents who had no religion, and who lived in mixed-religion partnerships, 36% said they were brought up as Catholic, 59% as Protestant, 3% in an 'other' religion and a further 3% said they were not brought up in any religion. In comparison, of those who had no religion, and who lived in same religion partnerships, the figures were 23%, 74%, 1% and 3% respectively.

According to Brewer (2002), 'there are more Christians in Northern Ireland per head of population compared to the rest of the United Kingdom, and they are more devout and regular in their observance' (page 28). However, previous research has shown that while a majority of respondents in mixed-religion partnerships do identify with a religious tradition, many do not carry this belief through into religious practice. In her research, using a small opportunity sample of married couples in Northern Ireland, Wigfall-Williams (2007) found that more respondents in same religion marriages than those in mixed-religion marriages went to church regularly. Conversely, and in line with research carried out by Holligan and Raab (2010) in Scotland, more of those who were in mixed-religion marriages said they 'never' went to church compared with the respondents who were married to people who were the same religion as they were. Similar results were found by this research. Just over one in five (21%) respondents who were in mixed-religion partnerships said they went to church once a week or more compared with 51% of those who lived with people who were the same religion as they were. Furthermore, three times as many respondents in mixed-religion partnerships as

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3 those in same religion partnerships said they ‘never’ or ‘practically never’ went to  
4 church ( $\chi^2=543.38$ ,  $df=5$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).  
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10 **Insert Table 1 about here**  
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### 18 **Socio-economic status**

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20 According to Ata and Morrison (2005) research reported from outside Northern Ireland  
21 has indicated that intermarried couples are more likely to be above average in  
22 educational level, to both be working and to be less likely to be unemployed. Morgan et  
23 al (1996), however, suggests that while detailed information about the socio-economic  
24 status of individuals within mixed marriages is scant, the evidence that does exist  
25 appears to be divided. Morgan advocates that there is some suggestion that mixed  
26 marriage is predominantly a middle class phenomenon but that information from mixed  
27 marriage families who send their children to integrated schools indicates that the  
28 partners in mixed marriages contracted from the mid 1980s onwards come from a very  
29 wide spread of socio-economic backgrounds (Morgan et al 1992).  
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43 Evidence from the NILT survey partly supports the former contention;  
44 respondents in mixed-religion partnerships had higher incomes and better educational  
45 qualifications than those of their counterparts living in same religion partnerships;  
46 however, there was no statistically significant difference in social class<sup>2</sup>. At the lowest  
47 end of the income scale 48% of respondents who were living in same religion  
48 partnerships had an income which was less than £10,000 per annum compared with 37%  
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3 of those who were living in mixed-religion partnerships ( $\chi^2=31.58$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).  
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5 Conversely, more of the latter than the former had annual incomes of £30,000 or more  
6  
7 (11% and 7% respectively)<sup>3</sup>. Two in five (41%) respondents living with someone who  
8  
9 was a different religion than they were had qualifications that were of A-level standard  
10  
11 or above compared with only 27% of respondents who lived with someone of the same  
12  
13 religion ( $\chi^2=91.38$ ,  $df=3$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Hewstone et al (2005) suggest that higher  
14  
15 educational levels tend to be associated with 'less virulent outgroup attitudes' (pg 22)  
16  
17 and research studies carried out in Northern Ireland have shown that contact at the  
18  
19 university level has a positive effect on attitudes towards the 'other' group (e.g. Cairns  
20  
21 et al 1993). Indeed, it has been reported that for many young people in Northern Ireland,  
22  
23 attending university has given them their first opportunity to mix with the 'other' group  
24  
25 (Robinson 1992; Hewstone et al 2005). As Table 2 shows, there were no significant  
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27 differences in relation to the respondent's social class (based on current or previous job).  
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**Insert Table 2 about here**

### **Employment**

Reflecting the age difference noted above, and as Table 3 shows, more respondents who were living in mixed-religion partnerships were employed (64%) and fewer were retired (10%) than those who were living with people who had the same religion as them (53% and 21% respectively). Taking only respondents of working age (18-64 years) and running the analysis again, 68% of respondents in mixed-religion partnerships were

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2  
3 employed compared with 63% of those in same religion partnerships ( $\chi^2=16.39$ ,  $df=4$ ,  
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5  $p<0.01$ ).  
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8 **Insert Table 3 about here**  
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### 10 11 12 **Factors related to mixed-religion partnerships**

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14 A number of factors could be related to whether people choose to live in mixed-religion  
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16 partnerships in divided societies. As Table 4 shows, findings from the NILT survey  
17  
18 indicated that respondents who live in mixed-religion partnerships (35%) were much  
19  
20 more likely than those who did not (21%) to have lived outside Northern Ireland for  
21  
22 more than six months ( $\chi^2=82.71$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Earlier qualitative research by  
23  
24 Robinson (1992) suggested that it was acceptable to enter into a relationship with the  
25  
26 'other' if he/she was not from Northern Ireland. Another factor is whether respondents  
27  
28 had attended mixed or segregated schools in Northern Ireland. Using a similar  
29  
30 methodology to the one adopted for this paper, Hayes et al (2007) reported that adults  
31  
32 who had attended formally integrated or mixed-religion schools in Northern Ireland  
33  
34 appeared to have less sectarian views in terms of their attitudes towards the 'other'  
35  
36 community than those who attended schools with pupils only of the same religion as  
37  
38 themselves. They were also more likely to reject traditional identities (Nationalist and  
39  
40 Unionist) and political allegiances (Nationalist and Unionist parties) than those who had  
41  
42 attended a segregated one. Similar findings emerged from this research. As Table 4  
43  
44 shows, 16% of respondents who lived in mixed-religion partnerships said they had  
45  
46 attended an integrated or mixed school compared with 11% of those whose partner was  
47  
48 the same religion as them ( $\chi^2=19.55$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). The results also showed that twice  
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3 as many respondents (32%) who were in a mixed-religion partnership as those who were  
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5 not (16%) said that a child in their care had attended a mixed-religion school in  
6  
7 Northern Ireland ( $\chi^2=92.75$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).  
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12 **Insert Table 4 about here**  
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### 20 **Party support and Identity**

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22 In line with the findings of Hayes et al (2007), Table 5 shows that adults who were in  
23  
24 mixed-religion partnerships were more likely than those who were not to reject  
25  
26 traditional identities and political allegiances. Significantly more of the former (17%)  
27  
28 than the latter (6%) said they support the Alliance party which is regarded as a moderate  
29  
30 'middle of the road' political party rather than what are traditionally perceived to be  
31  
32 more polarised Catholic (e.g. Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), Sinn Fein)  
33  
34 and Protestant (e.g. Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), Ulster Unionist Party (UUP))  
35  
36 political parties ( $\chi^2=127.62$ ,  $df=4$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). They were also much more likely than  
37  
38 their counterparts who live in same religion partnerships to say they were neither  
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40 Nationalist nor Unionist (59% and 27% respectively;  $\chi^2=340.22$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). This is  
41  
42 a major difference and one which has also been reported by researchers examining,  
43  
44 retrospectively with adults in Northern Ireland, the association between attendance at a  
45  
46 mixed school and party support and national identity (Hayes et al 2007). The findings  
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48 from both these studies merit further exploration in future research.  
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**Insert Table 5 about here****Attitudes towards mixed-religion areas, workplaces and schools**

Previous research in Northern Ireland has indicated that while large numbers of people live in segregated areas and send their children to segregated schools, support for mixing, in principle at least, is fairly high among both Catholics and Protestants but highest among people who say they have 'no religion' (Hughes and Donnelly 2002; Hughes 2003). It has been shown that at a societal level in Northern Ireland there is a gap between the attitudes of people towards mixing and their actual behaviour, particularly in relation to housing and education. While a majority of people say they prefer mixing, in reality many live in segregated neighbourhoods and send their children to segregated schools (Hughes and Donnelly 2002). This is of course influenced by a range of factors including family traditions, availability and accessibility of integrated schools and mixed neighbourhoods. For the purposes of this paper, however, it is of interest to explore a little known area i.e. the attitudes of people who live in mixed-religion partnerships towards these issues and whether those who say they prefer mixing actually carry this through in terms of their behaviour. Looking first at attitudes, as might be expected, respondents who lived in mixed-religion partnerships (91%) were significantly more likely than those who did not (75%) to say they would prefer to live in mixed-religion neighbourhoods ( $\chi^2=102.12$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). More of the former also said they would prefer mixed-religion workplaces (95%) than those who were in partnerships with people of the same religion (95% and 86% respectively;  $\chi^2=52.18$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). However, the largest difference in attitudes related to the type of school

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3 respondents would prefer to send their children to – 85% of those in mixed-religion  
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5 partnerships said they would prefer to send their children to a mixed-religion school  
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7 compared with 59% of those in same religion partnerships ( $\chi^2=207.49$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.001$ ).  
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13 **Insert Table 6 about here**  
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### 20 **Behaviours in relation to mixing in areas and schools**

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22 Using the data available, it was possible to examine whether attitudes towards mixing  
23  
24 translated into actual behaviour in relation to whether respondents had ever sent a child  
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26 in their care to a mixed-religion school. Overall, as Table 7 shows, three times as many  
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28 people who were in favour of mixing in education said a child in their care had gone to a  
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30 mixed-religion school than those who were not in favour of mixing (21% and 7%  
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32 respectively;  $\chi^2= 335.48$ ,  $df=1$ ,  $p<0.001$ ). Furthermore, the figure for those who were in  
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34 mixed-religion partnerships who favoured mixing in schools and sent their child to a  
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36 mixed-religion school rose to 35%. In addition, looking just at the 1998 NILT survey in  
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38 which a question was asked about whether respondents perceived their area to be mixed,  
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40 significantly more of those who were in mixed-religion partnerships said their area was  
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42 mixed than those who were not in same religion partnerships (42% and 32%  
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44 respectively<sup>4</sup>). This was the only NILT survey in which a question on mixed-religion  
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46 areas was asked.  
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55 **Insert Table 7 about here**  
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## Discussion

This research is the first to use a pooled dataset of a large-scale random sample survey of the population in Northern Ireland to explore the characteristics and attitudes of people who live in mixed-religion partnerships. The findings show that there are differences in the socio-demographic characteristics of people who live in mixed-religion partnerships compared with their contemporaries who live in same religion partnerships. The former tend to be younger, better educated and to have higher incomes although they do not differ in their social class, at least as assessed by the Registrar General's Social Class measure (which is the only social class measure used in NILT from 1998 to 2005). These findings offer some support for previous results based on small-scale qualitative research carried out with mixed-religion married couples which suggested that mixed marriage is predominantly a middle class phenomenon (Morgan et al 1996; Ata and Morrison 2005).

The findings also showed that respondents who lived in same-religion partnerships were three times more likely to be married than those who lived in mixed-religion partnerships although this trend was more notable among younger respondents. It may be that people with different religious beliefs find that living together is one way to avoid dissent among families and friends when it comes to choosing a place of worship or compromising by marrying in a registry office in order to avoid church disapproval. As this is a general trend in society and is coupled with increasing secularisation within Northern Ireland and elsewhere, it may be seen as an ideal solution by those wanting to enter into partnerships with people of a different religion to them, particularly since many respondents who live in mixed-religion partnerships say they do

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3 not attend church regularly, which mirrors findings from Scotland (Holligan and Raab  
4 2010). Furthermore, while the Catholic Church used to require those who were not  
5 Catholic to sign a document promising that the children would be raised Catholic, this is  
6 no longer the case. According to McAreavey (2005) Catholic parties in a mixed  
7 marriage are now only obliged to do their best to have the children baptised and raised  
8 in the Catholic faith. This move away from compulsion in relation to children's religious  
9 upbringing, together with the growing availability of integrated schools within Northern  
10 Ireland, may alleviate at least some of the dilemmas faced by mixed-religion parents.  
11 However, despite these changes and the increasing secularization within society, young  
12 people still mention these as issues for consideration when, and if, they were  
13 contemplating a mixed-religion marriage in Northern Ireland (Leonard 2009). This may  
14 be due, at least in some part, to the ongoing politicisation of the issue of integrated  
15 schooling within Northern Ireland as identified in recent news reports (BBC, 2010).  
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34 In addition to differences in characteristics, this research also found that there  
35 was significant variation in two important areas of contact with the 'other' community  
36 between those who were in mixed-religion partnerships and those who were not; namely  
37 the former were more likely to have spent time outside Northern Ireland and to have  
38 attended mixed-religion schools. Many more of them also said that a child in their care  
39 had attended a mixed-religion school. Furthermore, respondents who were in mixed-  
40 religion partnerships tended to reject traditional identities and political allegiances  
41 compared to those who were in same religion partnerships. This was shown by the  
42 unwillingness of respondents in mixed-religion partnerships to align themselves with  
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3 what are traditionally perceived to be Catholic (e.g. Sinn Fein, SDLP) and Protestant  
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5 (e.g. DUP, UUP) political parties and to reject Unionist and Nationalist identities.  
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8           These findings add to the weight of evidence suggesting that contact with the  
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10 'other' community may change attitudes and influence behaviours in later life such as  
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12 living in mixed-religion areas, sending children to mixed-religion schools and voting  
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14 preferences (e.g. Hayes et al 2007). While a number of researchers have noted that the  
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16 nature of the contact situation and the status of the groups involved are important factors  
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18 in determining the impact of the 'contact hypothesis' (e.g. Connolly 2000; Dixon et al  
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20 2005; Hughes et al 2007) nevertheless, recent findings from longitudinal research  
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22 (Hewstone et al 2008) have suggested that contact is effective at reducing bias against  
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24 the 'other' group, particularly when it is through family members and work colleagues.  
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29           Much of the research reported in the literature on attitudes towards mixing in  
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31 housing, workplaces and schools suggests that a majority of people in Northern Ireland  
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33 are generally in favour (e.g. Hughes and Donnelly 2002; Hughes 2003). However, until  
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35 now, few attempts have been made to ascertain the views of those in mixed-religion  
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37 partnerships towards these issues, and the research that has been carried out has  
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39 generally been based on small-scale opportunity samples of married couples (see for  
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41 example Wigfall-Williams 2007). The findings of this research, based on a random  
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43 sample of adults, show that more of those in mixed-religion partnerships support mixing  
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45 in all three areas; they are also willing to turn these attitudes into behaviours by sending  
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47 their own children to mixed-religion schools and, as shown from the findings of the  
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49 1998 NILT survey as well as longitudinal research by Hewstone et al (2008), to live in  
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51 mixed-religion neighbourhoods. If, as suggested by theories of political socialisation  
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3 (McGlynn et al 2004), it is the case that parental attitudes strongly impact on children's  
4 attitudes then the offspring of people who live in mixed-religion partnerships may hold  
5 more positive attitudes towards the 'other' community than those who come from  
6 partnerships in which the parents are the same religion. However, these results are  
7 tentative; and, as advocated by Hayes et al (2009), there is a need for 'extensive, long-  
8 term panel surveys' (page 2) to disentangle the effects of the parents and the school on  
9 this issue.  
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20           Hewstone et al (2005), quoting from an early piece of research carried out by  
21 Whyte in 1990, stated that mixed marriages in Northern Ireland did not bridge any gaps  
22 because, it was claimed, one of the partners (usually the husband) cut off all ties with his  
23 own kin. The findings reported in this paper suggest that people in mixed-religion  
24 partnerships may, in fact, be making a small but significant contribution to lessening  
25 prejudice in Northern Ireland and to improving cross-community contact in relation to  
26 their attitudes towards mixing, their behaviours (sending their children to mixed-religion  
27 schools and living in mixed-religion areas) and their rejection of traditional identities  
28 and political allegiances. Also, while it was not possible to test the assumption that one  
29 of the partners cuts off contact with his/her family in this pooled dataset, evidence from  
30 the 2001 NILT survey shows that there was no significant difference in amount of  
31 contact with family members (parents, siblings, aunts, uncles and cousins) for those who  
32 were in mixed-religion partnerships and those who were not (ARK 2001). While the  
33 sample size was small (102 respondents in mixed-religion partnerships) and the  
34 questions fairly limited in scope, the findings suggest that these couples have as much  
35 family support as those in same religion partnerships. Recent research in Northern  
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3 Ireland has suggested that this type of social support – known as ‘bonding’ social capital  
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5 – is more common in religiously homogeneous areas (particularly among Catholics)  
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7 than in mixed-religion areas (Campbell et al 2008). More research is required with  
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9 bigger sample sizes and more in-depth questions to further explore the nature and  
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11 quality of family contact and relationships, along with other forms of social capital  
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13 available to people in mixed-religion partnerships, and the impact this has on their lives.  
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17 Overall, the results of this research have provided much-needed information on  
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19 the characteristics and attitudes of people who live in mixed-religion partnerships in a  
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21 region characterised by conflict. Of course marriage across cultural, religious or racial  
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23 boundaries is not a phenomenon unique to Northern Ireland, and the findings outlined in  
24  
25 this paper are relevant and applicable to many other countries with a similar history.  
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27 Particularly useful would be comparable research carried out in areas of conflict in other  
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29 parts of the world to determine the extent to which is a common occurrence or one that  
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31 is unique to Northern Ireland.  
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37 The analysis used in this paper was restricted by the number and scope of time-  
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39 series questions that are asked in the NILT survey each year. It is recommended that  
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41 more research is carried out on this small, but growing, important section of society in  
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43 Northern Ireland.  
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## Tables

Table 1: *Marital status and age group*

	Same religion	Mixed-religion	All
	%	%	%
<b>Marital Status*</b>			
Married	96	88	95
Living as married	4	12	5
Total	100	100	100
<b>Age Group*</b>			
18-24 years	2	4	2
25-34 years	13	22	14
35-44 years	24	30	24
45-54 years	24	26	24

55-64 years	21	13	20
65 years or over	17	6	16
Total	100	100	100
Religion*			
Catholic	40	31	39
Protestant	55	44	54
Other Religion	1	2	1
No Religion	4	24	6
Total	100	100	100
Church Attendance*			
Once a week or more	51	21	48
At least once in two weeks	11	7	10
At least once a month	6	6	6
At least once or twice a year	19	26	20
Less often	11	35	13
Never or practically never	2	6	2
Total	100	100	100

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\*p<0.001

*Table 2: Income, Highest Educational Qualification and Social Class*

	Same religion	Mixed-religion	All
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	%	%	%
<b>Income*</b>			
Under £10,000	48	37	47
£10,000-£19,999	31	34	31
£20,000-£29,000	14	18	14
£30,000+	7	11	8
Total	100	100	100
<b>Highest Educational Qualification*</b>			
BTEC Higher or higher	17	25	18
A Level and BTEC	10	16	11
GCSE and CSE	23	26	23
Other	41	27	40
None	9	7	9
Total	100	100	100
<b>Respondent's Social Class</b>			
Professional/ Managerial	30	33	30
Skilled non-manual	22	24	22
Skilled manual	19	17	19
Partly skilled	19	19	19
Unskilled	10	7	9

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Total	100	100	100
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\*p<0.001

*Table 3: Employment Status*

	Same religion	Mixed-religion	All
	%	%	%
Employment Status*			
Employed	53	64	54
Unemployed/Sick/Disabled	11	13	11
Retired	21	10	20
Student	<1	<1	<1
Looking after the home	14	12	14
Total	100	100	100

\*p<0.01

*Table 4: Living outside Northern Ireland and Type of School Attended*

	Same religion	Mixed-religion	All
	%	%	%
Whether lived outside Northern Ireland*			
Yes	21	35	22
No	79	65	78
Total	100	100	100

## Type of school attended\*

Integrated	1	2	1
Fairly mixed	10	14	10
Same religion	89	84	89
Total	100	100	100

## Child in your care ever attend mixed school\*

Yes	16	32	17
No	84	68	83
Total	100	100	100

\*p&lt;0.001

*Table 5: Party support and Identity*

	Same religion %	Mixed- religion %	All %
Party Support*			
Sinn Fein, SDLP etc. ('Nationalist' parties)	37	28	36
Alliance	6	17	7
DUP, UUP etc. ('Unionist' parties)	50	40	49
Other	3	8	4
None	4	7	4

Total	100	100	100
Identity*			
Unionist	44	29	43
Nationalist	28	12	27
Neither Nationalist nor Unionist	27	59	31
Total	100	100	100

\*p<0.001

*Table 6: Attitudes towards mixing in neighbourhood, workplace and school*

	Same religion	Mixed-	All
	%	religion	%
		%	
Preference for neighbourhood*			
Own religion only	21	7	18
Mixed-religion	75	91	77
Don't know	4	2	4
Total	100	100	100
Preference for workplace*			
Own religion only	11	3	10
Mixed-religion	86	95	87
Don't know	3	2	3

Total	100	100	100
Preference for school*			
Own religion only	36	13	33
Mixed-religion	59	85	61
Don't know	6	2	5
Total	100	100	100

\*p<0.001

*Table 7: Attitudes towards mixing in school and whether child went to integrated school (all respondents)*

	Prefer mixed school %	Prefer same religion school %	All %
Child in your care ever attend integrated school*			
Yes	7	21	16
No	93	79	84
Total	100	100	100

\*p<0.001

<sup>1</sup> Some respondents may be reporting mixed-religions such as Catholic/Protestant while others may be reporting mixed denominations such as Presbyterian/Church of Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> Social class was based on present or most recent occupation, formerly Registrar General's Social Class.

<sup>3</sup> This association was statistically significant even when pensioners (who had lower incomes overall) were removed from the analysis.

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<sup>4</sup> However, the number of respondents who were in mixed-religion partnerships in 1998 was only 99 and so the findings need to be treated with some caution.

For Peer Review Only

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