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**Using survey data to explore  
preschool children's  
ethnic awareness and attitudes**

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## Starting point ...

“An ethnic group is not one because of the degree of measurable or observable difference from other groups; it is an ethnic group, on the contrary, because the people in it and the people out of it know that it is one; because both the ins and the outs talk, feel, and act as if it were a separate group. This is possible only if there are ways of telling who belongs to the group and who does not, and if a person learns early, deeply, and usually irrevocably to what group he [or she] belongs. If it is easy to resign from the group, it is not truly an ethnic group.”

Everett Hughes (1994: 91)

# Research approaches

- Early quantitative research: importance of contribution but limitations:
  - Constructing racism as fixed set of attitudes
  - No sense of contingent, context specific and contradictory nature
- Role played over last couple of decades by qualitative, and particularly, ethnographic methods:
  - Insights into processes and practices that give rise to racism
  - Often routine, taken-for-granted nature of practices that racialise and exclude
- And yet, still missing something ...

# Bourdieu's notion of habitus

“The habitus, as the word implies, is that which one has acquired, but which has become durably incorporated in the body in the form of permanent dispositions. So the term constantly reminds us that it refers to something historical, linked to individual history, and that it belongs to a genetic mode of thought, as opposed to essentialist modes of thought.”

(Bourdieu, 1993: 86)

... relationship between the concepts of ‘habitus’ and ‘fields’ [of relations]

# The ethnic habitus

- Ethnic habitus can be seen as the way in which racial/ethnic divisions come to be internalised by young children as a set of durable and taken-for-granted ways of thinking and behaving.
- The concept encourages us to see these “habits” or “dispositions” as rooted in, and reflective of, wider social contexts and relations.
- And, research-wise, if children tend to learn and internalise common ways of thinking and behaving then these should be discernible, at least to a certain degree, as tendencies and patterns.
- ... and hence back to quantitative methods ...

# The importance and limitations of quantitative methods

“Statistical enquiry is indispensable in order to establish beyond dispute the social conditions of possibility (which will have to be made more explicit) of the “pure” disposition. However, because it inevitably looks like a scholastic test intended to measure the respondents against a norm tacitly regarded as absolute, it may fail to capture the meanings which this disposition and the whole attitude to the world expressed in it have for the different social classes.”

Bourdieu (1984: 40)\*

\*Reflecting upon his large-scale quantitative survey that formed the basis of his book “Distinction”

# “Too Young to Notice?” study

Distinction made in Connolly *et al.* (2002) between:

- Ethnic Preferences
- Ethnic Awareness
- Ethnic Identity
- Ethnic Prejudice

Connolly, P., Smith, A. & Kelly, B. (2002) *Too Young to Notice?* (Belfast: Community Relations Council).

Can be downloaded from: <http://www.paulconnolly.net>

# “Too Young to Notice?” study

## Ethnic preferences:

Percentage of 3 Year Olds Who:	Catholics	Protestants
Do not like Orange Marchers	18%	3%
Do not like the Police	34%	15%
Prefer the British Union Flag	36%	60%
Prefer the Irish Tricolour Flag	64%	40%



# “Too Young to Notice?” study

## Ethnic awareness:

- 51% of 3-year-olds could demonstrate awareness of at least one cultural item
- 90% of 6-year-olds could demonstrate awareness of at least one cultural item
- On average, the number of items a child could demonstrate awareness of rose from 0.82 (sd=1.09) for 3-year-olds to 2.65 (sd=1.83) for 6-year-olds.

# “Too Young to Notice?” study

## Ethnic identities:

- Responses to question "why do you like that flag the best?":
  - "That's our flag" (Catholic Girl, Aged 4)
  - "It's the one of our country" (Protestant Boy, Aged 4)
- Responses to question: "do you like/not like these [Orange] marchers?":
  - "They're not my land ... they've got all the colours that I hate" (Catholic Boy, Aged 5)
  - "Cos they're also Protestants as well. That's all I know about them" (Protestant Girl, Aged 6)

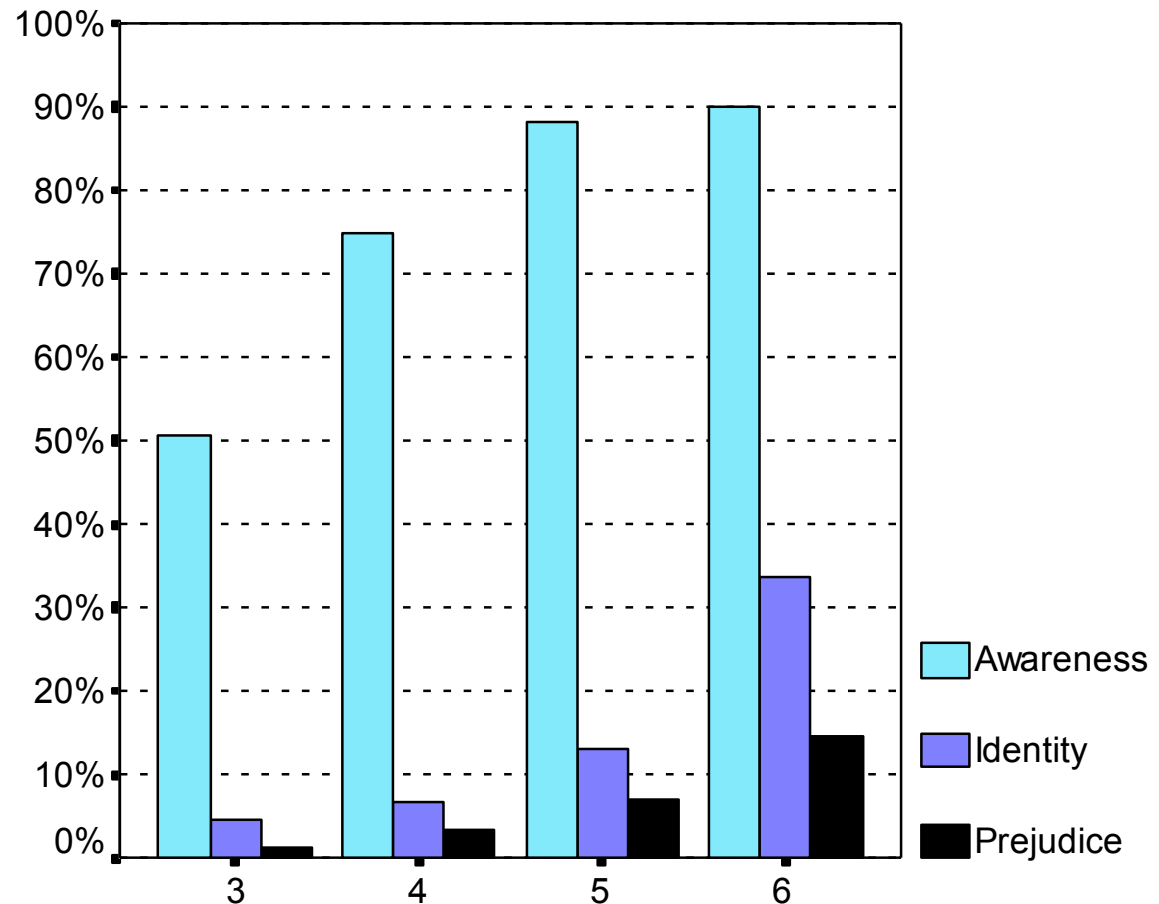
# “Too Young to Notice?” study

## Ethnic prejudices:

- ‘They [Catholics] rob’ (Protestant Girl, Aged 4)
- ‘It's a bad person [Protestants] because they want to kill all the Catholics’ (Catholic Girl, Aged 6)
- ‘Catholics are the same as masked men, they smash windows’ (Protestant Girl, Aged 4)
- ‘Catholics don't like Protestants and that's why they don't like them – they're bad’ (Catholic Boy, Aged 6)
- ‘That one's just yucky [referring to British Union flag]. I hate English and I love Irish’ (Catholic Boy, Aged 6)
- ‘It's the Fenian flag [Irish Tricolour]. It's only bad people that have that colour of flag’ (Protestant girl, Aged 6)

# “Too Young to Notice?” study

Overall levels of ethnic awareness, identity and prejudice:



# “Too Young to Notice?” study

Quantitative Research with 3-6 year olds (n=352)

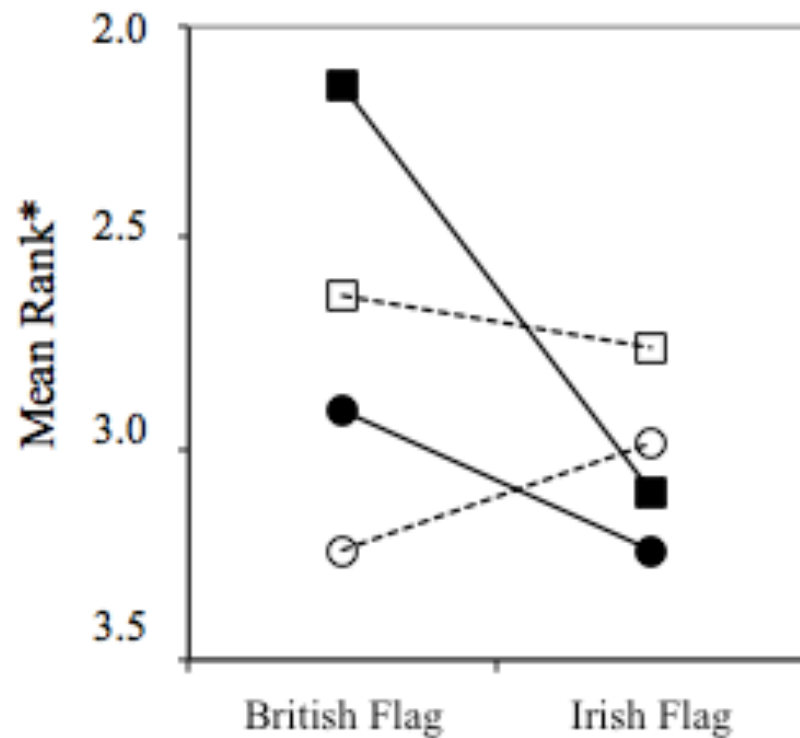
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## A second study ...

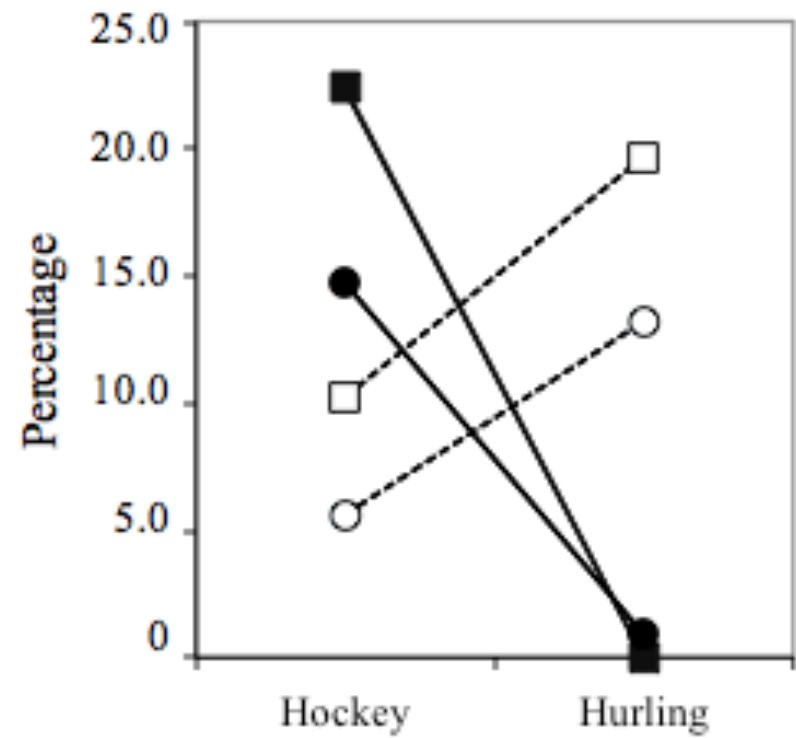
- Sample of 1,049 3-4 year olds from 56 preschool settings in Northern Ireland
- Connolly, P. (forthcoming) Using survey data to explore preschool children's ethnic awareness and attitudes, *Journal of Early Childhood Research*

## A second study ...

1a. Children's ranking of the British and Irish flags out of five they were shown in terms of which they like the best



1b. The percentage of children able to recognize the sports of hockey and hurling



--□-- Catholic Boys    —■— Protestant Boys    --○-- Catholic Girls    —●— Protestant Girls

# Conclusions

- Need for both indepth qualitative and large-scale quantitative research that complement one another
- Need for quantitative research to begin to draw upon and apply epidemiological methods to:
  - identify the nature and prevalence of racist attitudes
  - factors that tend to be associated with such attitudes (gender, neighbourhoods, SES)
  - identify trends/patterns to be explored and explained through qualitative methods
  - Assess the generalisability of findings to emerge from qualitative work