Irish News Media's Preferential Treatment of Religious Actors in Relation to Crime and Harm

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Abstract

News media plays a dual role in society of both informant and influence, with a shifting overlap based upon internal and external factors. Simultaneously, powerful parties within society can often exert influence over media, news inclusive - raising a question of how this relationship may in turn affect news portrayals of actors within these parties. This research project set out to examine Irish newspaper articles to deduce whether a primary 'powerful party' throughout Ireland's history, the Christian order, and its branches, held sway over the portrayals of order members accused or charged of committing harm.

Through a content analysis of one hundred news articles over a sixty-year period, with an even focus split between members of a Christian order and non-members, it was determined that Irish news media did show bias in favour of order members through several means such as inclusion of information, tone and language, amongst others. the significance of this finding is discussed within its own context and in the wider contexts of media and power within society, with considerations of cyclical inequality, labelling, norms, and wider social structures, alongside the plausibility of change in society's approach to news media, as this study's results highlight an issue which is only exacerbated by the modern-day relationship between powerful actors and media.

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Thank you more than anything to my mam, who not only inspired my pursuance of a master's degree from the outset, but also for being a continual inspiration of drive, dedication, and intellect.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Contextual Information and Focus

Media can be a key tool in the portrayals of various acts, ideas, and beliefs available to us as a society (Carrabine, 2008; Donges, 2016), with the expansion of media in the past century increasing the hold these have on the average consumer and society (Greer, 2019). These media outlets and their products are influenced by a broad range of factors, inclusive of the individuals running them, wider societal beliefs, powerful parties within their society, consumer ideals and profit (Curran, 2011; Scammell & Semetko, 2018). However, media also asserts an influence over its consumers (ibid), resulting in a cyclical relationship through which the ideals and opinions of those with explicit power over media outlets can be spread through wider society through reflective echoing.

In the context of news media, these effects can be heightened due to common promotions of news media as relatively unbiased (Eveland Jr. & Shah, 2003) and with the trust placed in news media by the general public (Donges, 2016; Greer, 2019), resulting in a more reliant relationship by perceived necessity. Looking to news media reporting on crime, alongside a heightened emotional response often being elicited, the media plays a heavy role in the construction of crime itself and the way it is perceived by the public (Jewkes, 2015). As such, those with direct or indirect power over news media outlets can utilise the public's relationship with crime reporting media to promote their own ideals or beliefs, with these 'powerful parties' often also holding a high role within their own society (Lichter, 2017).

Stemming from this basis of media, society and powerful parties therein, the focus of this specific study will be the presentation of crime and harm-centred news within the Irish context from 1925-1975 through newspapers, and how the representation of the 'average' person

committing harm differed from depictions of powerful party members – with the key 'powerful parties' being the Catholic Church within the Republic and Christian orders within Belfast. With there already being divergences within news media reporting on harm where it was by a powerful actor party in society compared to a non-powerful actor or party (Curran, 2002), it was initially plausible that there would be a discernible difference in the two forms of news coverage due to the control the organisations had over their respective communities during this period (Mac Curtain, 1993; Mitchell, 2016). After the initial consideration of the differences in news media representations, attention will be shifted to what may be inferred from the results with considerations of media, power, society, biases, norms and social roles, crime, and harm, acknowledging both this study's contextual setting and broader-scale impacts.

Rationale and Benefits

Whilst this research will be of value in its immediate context – criminology as it relates to Irish media and their portrayals of harm, its value is extendable due to its more subjective nature. the research question and its results provide ample exploration of the media-religion relationship as an example of the relationship between media and society's powerful parties, as it occurred in the Irish historical context, an environment which featured an overall strong religious majority (Ó Corráin, 2018). This provided both a criminological and historical lens to the research, resulting in a more well-rounded piece than one with solely one point of view and allowed for the multiple angles by the news media to be considered. Moreover, this focus supplied an insight into the effects on the media of not only a powerful group within society, but a group which at that time was also followed by most of said society – heightening its influence and intensifying the impact of these media portrayals (Miller, 2015).

Within the context of this research – this also provided a uniquely concentrated approach to the topic of media influence and harm portrayals. As an additional result of the focused context, it is plausible that these effects may be exaggerated in their occurrence in Ireland when placed on an international or global scale, with religious groups having less of an impact internationally than was found in this piece (Knill et al., 2014; Ó Corráin, 2018), as a consequence of Ireland's relationship with religion; though the inclusion of Belfast allows for a wider sample size as well as an additional lens of the actors' impact. As such, this research project both investigated this phenomenon as it occurred locally whilst also giving consideration of the prospect of further research, particularly in other states or modern-day Ireland with more religious diversity.

Research Question Objectives and Information Direction

With this context in mind, the basis for a multi-faceted research question was constructed: historically, was there discrepancies in the treatment of Catholic order members by media in the Republic of Ireland and Christian order members in Belfast in comparison to non-order members in both, where the harms themselves were similar enough to warrant comparability? Furthermore, where comparability arose, to what extent does it occur; is there a notable difference for any particular form of harm or crime, and how might it arise – in the language used itself, in implications and assumptions made, in the specific details included or excluded, through other means again or through some amalgamation of these various measures of difference?

Finally, what value might the results of this be able to impart to the sphere relating to harm, media representation and powerful groups – these being the focus of the penultimate chapter. the ensuing research objective was to conduct an empirical content analysis one hundred news

articles over a sixty-year period using various criteria, with fifty articles involving Christian order members or notably religious individuals and fifty involving non-order members and notably non-religious individuals throughout the island of Ireland, in order to provide a sufficient sample size for the project at hand.

The subsequent chapter will consist of a literature review laying out the criminological and historical basis which the dissertation is based upon – inclusive of the connections between the media and power, religious majorities and wider social impacts, and the resulting influences on media coverage with consideration of Ireland's unique past and present. In doing this, the review will also explore harm and victimisation which can occur in situations such as Ireland's (McGraw et al., 2019). Chapter three will provide details of the methodology used in the collection, analysis of the project's dataset, and how this method may have impacted the received results whilst providing explanation for the inclusion of Belfast in this study.

Chapter four will delve into the detailed findings of the study, highlighting where differences in media presence arose, how so, and the impact of this on the news articles themselves; it is split into three larger segments correlated to each of the areas' comparability was found. Chapter five will explore the wider implications of the aforementioned findings and discuss their significance to media, harm, society's power relations, and their inherent interrelation. Chapter six will provide a summarisation of the previous aspects of the dissertation with a reflection upon its implications in the sphere and what may be done going forward.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Neither news media nor powerful parties in society are new phenomena, and often a relationship can be found therebetween (Curran, 2002; Miller, 2015). As a nation with a strongly religious associations, Ireland has seen religious institutions and their members as powerful actors with ability to influence the state, society, and media (Long, 1986; Ó Corráin, 2018) whilst having committed numerous harms and abuses of power (ibid). Ireland's relationship with religion raises questions on the extent to which news media may have been influenced in their portrayals of crime or harm committed by members of the institution, such as priests, nuns or ministers, compared to portrayals of 'ordinary' citizens having committed comparable acts. Prior to the empirical examination, this chapter will provide a contextualised understanding of the theories and themes underpinning the research project.

First will be a theoretical base on the construction of media, news media, depictions of groups and actors in society, and the influencing factors of these with attention paid to power within society and its effects. Following, dominant religious institutions as powerful parties, their relationship with state and society, and effects thereupon will be considered, with a note on Ireland's contextual history. Continuing, concepts of harm and victimisation will be focused upon in the context of the above relationship alongside effects on societal perceptions, news media and those involved. Finally, the culmination of the above on media behaviours, society, both religious and non-religious perpetrators and victims will be discussed.

Media – Biases, Power, and Portrayals

Theoretical Underpinnings

The concept of media and its underpinnings vary dependent on the lens of its approach. Beyond biases in media and their creation, theoretic bases account for media's organisation, priorities, functions within society, approaches towards given topics and more (Scammell & Semetko, 2018). These theoretical structures apply to both fictional and non-fictional media, more often seen in the latter such as news media. a common thematic overlap is the concept that media is utilised to exert control or influence over the public by those with power in society – such as the state, elite actors or powerful groups (Curran, 2002)through the information made available through media and its presentation, including portrayals of individuals therein (Carrabine, 2008). As news portrayals of crime and harm are this study's focus, the applicable theories are an overlap of the criminological, sociological and media based. Neo-Marxism perceives media as reflective of the ruling class's aims and desires – through either direct control with media outlets supervised by the state or indirect control due to journalists' socialisation into dominant ideologies already promoted by society's elite (Adorno & Horkheimer, 2020).

Hegemony considers the promotion of the powerful's beliefs and ideologies through media as a method through which they are accepted and implemented within society. Though this requires society to consensually accept these viewpoints, their promotion through media influences the contentment therein (Bates, 1975; Coban, 2018). Critical criminological and media theories centre upon the social construction of crime, harm and social orders and how these this construction is facilitated by media (Newburn, 2017; Presser and Sandberg, 2019), as rendering crime in a particular manner can distract from wider social issues and once again promote the desires of those in power. Often this also overlaps with the neo-Marxist due to the considerations of how portrayals are controlled and the emphasis on structural inequalities

(Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010). Foucault's governmentality asserts that the many formal and informal controls within society are expansions of the state's power (Foucault, 1977; Newburn, 2017), media inclusive,.

With society's powerful in turn influencing the state, as will be discussed, it is again inferred that the influence of the ruling class on media exists to govern wider society. Through these theories, the role of the state and ruling classes in media is highlighted – a role exacerbated in relation to news media as it is usually under state guardianship or ownership of powerful corporations with ideologies, aims, and perspectives influencing content and portrayals therein (Miller, 2015), with these in turn being instilled into the consumer and wider society (Zucker, 1978). News media particularly impacts consumers as it is held as relatively objective (Eveland Jr. & Shah, 2003), and though this is declining in the modern-day (Fenton, 2018), in the historical context of this dissertation, the perceived objectivity of news journalism resulted in the ideology perpetuation of the state and powerful groups being particularly persuasive. This works alongside cultivation theory which suggests that long-term consumption of media results in the absorption of its messages, values and beliefs (Potter, 1993) even with awareness that information or portrayals are inaccurate – resulting in an influence over society regardless of the full truth in a news piece.

Public Influence

Through public consumption, media representation such as news portrayals of crime feed into its social construction via its influential nature (Greer, 2019), and as society's powerful groups influence these portrayals – their interpretation and desired public perception of crime is presented as the reality (Coban, 2018). Media shapes societal views both implicitly and explicitly (Zucker, 1978), with the former being more difficult to detect, through not only

language and information used but further measures such as tone and inferences about other groups or actions. Implicit influence is often paired with a lack of public understanding or unbiased information on individuals being depicted, facilitating the ruling groups of society in promoting their beliefs and ideologies through inaccurate or biased depictions (Garnham, 2004; Sternbeck, 2024), constructing harm and individuals as 'threats' as need be whilst promoting themselves as neutral or beneficial to society (ibid). With these constructions built upon the concerns of society's powerful (Jewkes, 2015; Miller, 2015), it is rarely difficult to gain public agreement through a combination of repeated biased portrayals and dominant societal reactions to deviance (Potter, 1993) exacerbated by negative characterisations of non-powerful parties.

The ingraining of these beliefs can then filter from majority news broadcasters to less powerful actors and wider society (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002), resulting in cyclical reinforcement. the effects of these beliefs and attitudes upon broader society over time can lead to increased biases as the opinions of the powerful become increasingly prevalent throughout the public, resulting in their increased inflation through news representation (Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007; Hamborg et al., 2019), influencing the public and so forth. Fear of crime may also be utilised in news media this way, as a tool through which the ruling class can reinforce their attitudes towards particular groups, actions and themselves (Williams & Dickinson, 1993); with secondary effects of increasing attention placed on threats or perceptions of crime leading to public awareness and understanding of harm and structural inequalities becoming secondary to the concerns of the powerful (Miller, 2015). the promotion of trust in society's powerful and mistrust of particular societal groups, further result in increased reliance on news media in lieu of genuine engagement with those deemed 'threats' (Feintuck, 2006), again amplifying the situation's cyclicality.

In the Context of News Media

Additional influences specific to news media impacting portrayals, framing and presence of a story in the mainstream include the interlinked newsworthiness and news values (Harcup, 2008). News values such as proximity, conflict, human interest, risk-level, and timeliness influence the likelihood of a story being newsworthy in the public eye (ibid), impacting a story's coverage and publishing. Newsworthiness extends beyond the journalist to news organisations' agenda and is affected by organisation-level factors such as owner ideologies, costs, schedules, and use of particular sources (Scammell & Semetko, 2018) alongside the literal 'newsworthiness' of the piece. Whilst these are in part driven by the public's existing concerns, perceptions and beliefs (Garnham, 2004), impacting the events featured in news pieces; the framing, information and portrayals therein are determined by those writing and publishing the pieces (Scammell & Semetko, 2018)– with a significant influence of society's powerful.

Ireland's news scene has historically seen a high concentration of news media ownership or explicit guidance a small number of parties ranging from the state itself to political parties to religious institutions (Breen et al., 2019), impacting news variety, freedom and ideological standing. Not a traditional news value, morality still affects the perceived desirability of news (An & Gower, 2009) – as breaches of social norms or a society's moral values can be utilised to heighten emotional responses and promote news consumption (Carrabine, 2008; Nabi & Wirth, 2008), thereby increasing the piece's reach and influence of its depictions. Morality is particularly influential in the current research project due to its ties with religion and utilisation by powerful religious actors to enhance their own characterisation or negate that of others in (An & Gower, 2009; Sumter et al., 2018) in news media.

Moreover, Cohen's denial (Newburn, 2017) can be utilised by news media to deny that an event has occurred to some extent. This can be fully literal, interpretive – where the denial lies in the exact nature of the event, or implicatory – where it lies in the event's severity (ibid); each with its own functions and, in the context of news, implications for both those with sway over the media and the consumer (Jewkes, 2015), primarily through allowing for the framing or portrayals of events and individuals in a manner relatively factual whilst also being suited to the beliefs of the publishers and groups with power over them. Whilst current-day levels of informational availability permits for multitudes of opinions and portrayals in media with general allowance of dissent and questioning of authority (DiMaggio et al., 2001; Feintuck, 2006), Ireland's historical context within this study featured limited informational availability, heightened belief in news objectivity, the Churches being a powerful party in relation to both state and media, and social or legal repercussions for disobeying the establishment (Mac Curtain, 1993), belief and reliance on media was significant (ibid); with the cumulative effects of everything aforementioned resulting in increased influence of society's powerful over news media content and exacerbated effects thereof.

Religion's Influence and the Irish Context

Religious Majorities – Power and Influence

A close religion-state-society relationship is seen through many states worldwide, with impacts spanning cultural, social, governmental, media and even legislative spheres (Moyser, 1991; Turner, 2011), particularly as the relationship is often connected to states' history. As a powerful party, religion's effects on a population can appear through influence over time, where beliefs and norms of a religion merge with society (ibid); alternately it can occur through control-oriented measures, wherein high-status religious actors desire for a religion's values or

norms to be more mainstream within society and act in a way to deliberately bring this about (ibid; McMahon, 2007), such as a deliberate influence on media. Rather than affecting written rules, effects of religion on society arise as individual shifts occur in behaviours and, resultingly, mentalities and values due to actions and ideologies of the powerful (McDonald & Crandall, 2015), including through media, community participation, promotion of religion values and more (ibid; Sternbeck, 2024).

As these changes become dominant culture, the sway of religion as a powerful party grows, over spheres such as education, legislation, social services, and media (Curran, 2002; McDonald & Crandall, 2015); through formal and informal measures providing both direct and indirect power access. Additional authority being provided to religious groups or individuals can lead to an overly intertwined relationship of more benefit to the ruling class than wider society (Newburn, 2017; Ó Corráin, 2018). a heavily intertwined relationship may allow for religious institutions to assert their own beliefs and values, rather than those explicitly laid down by religious texts (Mac Curtain, 1993; Knill et al., 2014) over the population, whilst diverging from these rules themselves. Simultaneously, utilisation of power to maintain control can occur both actively via media or political sway, and inactively via influence though social integration (Carrabine, 2008; Sternbeck, 2024). Resultingly, a religious organisation's power in this position could grow to staggering significance, as was the case in the Irish historical context (McMahon, 2007)– promoting their ideology and members whilst repressing individuals who do not agree with them.

Ireland's History

Since the conversion to Christianity in the fifth century, Catholicism has been the primary religion within the Republic of Ireland (Ó Corráin, 2018). Through the centuries but prior to

Irish independence, religion and religious actors played a pivotal role within state and society, and whilst Northern Ireland saw more of a split between different factions of Christian followings – an overall Christian majority remained with comparable influences (ibid; Mitchell, 2016). However, with Irish independence in the early 1920s, the deepened again. This was partially due to the strong religious beliefs within the population but also the monetary and stability constraints of the new state (Mac Curtain, 1993), something the Catholic Church was happy to help with; whilst Christian orders in Northen Ireland were of both community and state-level assistance. the Churches and their actors undertook various state responsibilities (ibid), with further control over other services alongside the pre-existing societal influence of the religion itself – extending as far as impacting the legislation enacted over the next number of decades (ibid)).

As is becoming apparent, there was a significant amount of power in the hands of this group. the significant respect placed on members of the religious orders during this time further impacted their sway and as few people desired to stand against an organisation so embedded within state and society, the Church's influence only grew; whilst the affiliation with religion in Northern Ireland was strongly intertwined with further social, political and nationalistic associations (Mitchell, 2016). Positive public perceptions of the institutions and their values were promoted throughout society, particularly in comparison to laypeople on grounds of morality and reputation, with influence over the media being no exception to these perceptions and powers (Walsh, 2016; Ó Corráin, 2018), and as Ireland's primary media outlets were internal, politically or religiously associated, or nationalised (ibid), the influence was exacerbated. This influence is the focus of this dissertation – as to how it affected media portrayals of both religious actors and laypeople who committed comparable harms.

Media Impacts

This closely intertwined relationship between state, society and religion in the Irish context, wherein the latter has significant power over both others, in turn impacts news media as has been introduced. With influence over media spanning over various aspects of the piece, and a positive correlation between proximity of the media producer to a powerful party and their positive portrayal thereof (Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007), media outlets with a strong state, political or religious link were more likely to be strongly influenced by the latter group (Coban, 2018; Scammell & Semetko, 2018) to depict them in a superior manner to the average citizen, with this influence extending to the permission of topics, information released, portrayals of events and more (ibid). These influences both promoted the beliefs and ideals of the institutions alongside their members whilst laypeople acting in a deviant manner or 'going against' the religious values within society are held to be breaching social norms, state rules, *and* public moral values (Feintuck, 2006; Salter, 2016).

However, due to the social standing of order members, often they are not held to these same standards but rather as behaving consistently with the dominant ideology if minorly straying at times (Donges, 2016). Affected portrayals for both groups may arise in the manner someone is described or characterised, comparisons made, or their conceptual separation from the 'other' members of society (Jewkes, 2015; Adorno & Horkheimer, 2020). This stands to increase the religious organisation's control over society by legitimising its own members whilst reinforcing its values and delegitimising those deemed a threat and decreasing their social capital (Huggins, 2018)– ensuring that both state and society remain loyal to the organisation's desired social structures. the blend of positive and negative reinforcement allows for the majority-religious organisation to maintain power over the general public and state more broadly, particularly as a close state-religion relationship does not prevent state figures being subject to these same depictions (ibid; Zucker, 1978) .

Harm and Victimisation in Relation to Religious Majorities

Crime and Harm in Religious Societies

Strongly religious societies, such as Ireland historically, can also see some differentiation in crime and harm due to differences in laws, beliefs, and conceptual understanding (Moyser, 1991; Sumter et al., 2018); differentiations which can impact media depictions thereof. As the presence of a religious hierarchy both within and beyond religious organisations create additional inequalities to those within society (ibid), the way is paved for abuse of new powers granted by said hierarchies. Power abuse is possible in any society, though they can occur at higher rates in religious contexts due to the often closed-off nature of these organisations and their strong associations with morality (ibid; Knill et al., 2014). Consequently, increased victimisation occurs, particularly of vulnerable groups who are less likely to be labelled as such (Hope, 2001), due to further issues wherein perpetrators with high social standings are less likely to be labelled as deviant particularly where a victim is less trusted or vulnerable (ibid; Walklate, 2017) as occurred many times in religious contexts and is often exacerbated by media (Greer, 2007).

Where there are low levels of religious affiliation in a society, harms by religious and non-religious actors are treated in a more equivalent manner by state functions, news media and the public than in a highly religious society (Turner, 2011). Though some biases will always exist in any given state or society, particularly related to deviance (Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010), this is far more pronounced in societies with high levels of religious affiliation – with higher levels of bias in favour of majority religious actors even when accused of committing harm, and with simultaneous bias against minority or non-religious actors and those victimised by majority actors (Healy et al., 2015; McGraw et al., 2019). This in turn influences much of their

interactions with any state function, society, and the way they are approached and treated by news media (ibid; Carrabine, 2008)wherein the portrayal of both the harm and response changes via the influence of these factors and the status of those involved.

Public Beliefs and Their Impacts

The differences in harms and reactions thereto can be further explored via society's' underlying assumptions around crime and harm. Beliefs that those deemed moral or holy are less or incapable of harming others arise dependant on the influence of religious organisations in society (Winston, 2007; Kane & Jacobs, 2013), and significantly sway societal opinions on possibilities of harm being committed by religious actors versus an average person (ibid). Coincidingly, perceptions that crime can only be committed by inherently immoral individuals can often shift blame and a perpetrator or criminal label to those with a low social standing (Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010; Mitchell, 2016). These impacts and their occurrences in news media are heightened by the standing of the perpetrator and victim within society (Healy et al., 2015; Syed & Ali, 2021), influenced by power imbalances, ideological factors, and high social standing of majority religious actors.

Public perceptions of religious figures as virtuous or more righteous than laypeople, and the public trust usually placed therein, exacerbates this (ibid) and solidifies an idealised version of these individuals in society's mind, which can then be contrasted with those who pose a threat to the religion's values and the 'ordinary' population to maintain the status quo (Huggins, 2018). Increased ingraining of these perceptions within society and their benefits to the dominant religion result in higher likelihoods that they will be utilised in news media portrayals. As media depictions are largely manifestations of underlying public beliefs around crime and harm (Carrabine, 2008), and with news values as additional influences, news media

can be swayed immensely by perceptions of the public and the powerful (ibid) with produced content changing accordingly – an amalgamation of societal beliefs and information that the powerful desire the public to consume.

Victimisation Therein

With factors such as situational context, societal beliefs and values, structural inequalities and public perceptions affecting victimisation (Walklate, 2017), these factors are impacted themselves by religious association of a perpetrator and victim, states' relationship with religion and more nuanced social responses (ibid; Healy et al., 2015). Affected victimisation experiences may not always be outwardly visible, as where a power imbalance or bias lies, there is a greater chance that any increased victimisation will be kept under veils both to media and communities (Miller, 2015) to protect the image of a powerful perpetrator or institution. the role of the harm's perpetrator in relation to religion further impacts victimisation and revictimisation (McGraw et al., 2019). Where perpetrators are minority religious, in most any society, victims are less likely to be brushed aside or designated a substantial amount of blame, with it instead more likely to be placed on the perpetrator and their less powerful group (Syed & Ali, 2021), due to biases or the desires of an existing religious majority.

Moreover, harm perpetrated by a non-religious actor in either a religious or more secular society tends to lack the aggravating victimising elements seen when compared to harm by a religiously affiliated actor (Turner, 2011), resulting in less revictimisation and more focus on the perpetrator by society and media (Davies et al., 2017). In a moderately or highly religious society where a victim suffers religious harm, however, the negative consequences of their victimisation soars (Turner, 2011; McGraw et al., 2019) through revictimisation via state and societal responses which may disregard the harm, sympathise with the more powerful religious

organisation, berate them publicly through media, and beyond; occurring in conjunction with support of the religious perpetrator, due to the power imbalance within these societies.

Ireland's Position

Ireland's history with the Catholic and Christian Churches considered, there must be consideration of how this has shaped harm and victimisation for further context. Due to the power of Churches and their role in many aspects of everyday Irish life, members of the organisation had ample opportunity to take advantage of or abuse individuals in society or their care (Mac Curtain, 1993), and numerous members took it. Often these were vulnerable individuals and children (Christie, 1986; Fohring, 2018) who would not come forward until decades later, or who came forward and suffered revictimisation (Dinisman & Moroz, 2017). Abuses suffered included physical, verbal, sexual and mental, often with overlap and it being related back to the holiness of the perpetrator and lack thereof in the victim (ibid; Sumter et al., 2018). Additional abuses of power and assaults were also not uncommon (ibid). Religion's role and status in society ensured that the orders' word was held above all else; minimising mentions of abuse or harms committed by them or their members whilst simultaneously condemning non-members who did the same or who went against their notions of morality (Syed & Ali, 2021).

Ireland's treatment of religious harm until recent decades and even in current day has been held as lacking (Ó Corráin, 2018), with many victims dissatisfied with responses due to injuries sustained and response thereto at the time, including the state and its actors maintaining a strong relationship with the Churches (ibid). There has not been equal treatment to victims nor perpetrators of religious harm compared to non-religious harm throughout Irish history, with the former harms being largely ignored or played by state, media and society down in favour

of continued financial, governmental and social support as well as the support of the strongly religious society of the time (Mac Curtain, 1993; Breen et al., 2019)– a devotion in the Republic whilst also playing a strong role in the Ethno-Nationalist troubles in Northern Ireland. As such, disparities in media treatment of religious and non-religious actors would cohere with both the theory and context of this piece.

Impacts on Media and Journalism

Conformity and Information Availability

With the establishment of a media-state-society relationship with influence over media, as was the case in Ireland's historical context, specific effects upon all parties stand to be explored. As media typically promotes conformity to dominant norms and values (Garnham, 2004; Carrabine, 2008), news pieces can be utilised to gain support and compliance with the dominant religious ideology, its powerful actors, and their desires (ibid) through showcasing these actors and values as superior to the non-religious. Alongside promoting obedience and deference to those more powerful in society, dissent and its appearance can be minimised (Boykoff, 2007; Proffitt, 2007). Individuals opposing the majority religious group or who pose a threat by action or as a victim may be portrayed in a manner that delegitimises and destabilises their position in society and as a perceived threat (Huggins, 2018). Simultaneously, this limits the information available to the public on these perceived threats, decreasing the public's consideration of independent threats, structural inequalities, and religious harm as a true issue.

Information availability, both quantity and quality, is another key role of news media (Patterson, 1997; McCombs & Reynolds, 2002), which was of more importance historically due to the lack of current-day media diversity. As such, any choices made to limit availability or hinder objectivity of information was one with wide-spread consequences, and the

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information media shared or withheld could greatly influence the public's thoughts on any given matter and thereby influence the likelihood of their conformity to the ideas pushed by powerful parties in society (Scammell & Semetko, 2018). Withholding information on dissent works similarly, constructing the narrative that any individual disagreeing with the state, majority religion or those in power is alone in their thoughts and actions (Proffitt, 2007). Attention is also given to the desires and values of major religious actors as powerful parties, adding to the cycle of influence.

Censorship with Effects on Public Beliefs

Full or partial censorship of non-approved topics and depictions may also arise from this influence on media (Pearson, 2013), often seen in Ireland's historical context in relation to topics such as contraception or divorce due to their transgression of religious and social values (Long, 1986; Walsh, 2016). This censorship extends to portrayals in news media through sanitised, depictions of groups and individuals favoured by those in power or events which benefit them (Carrabine, 2008; Huggins, 2018), whilst the same is not afforded to the average citizen or their behaviour – highlighting their distinction. Akin to information availability, this encourages conformity to desires of powerful groups and discourages dissent (ibid; Proffitt, 2007) but also aids in maintaining an unassuming and trusting society (Boykoff, 2007; Healy *et al.*, 2015); with reliance and trust in the powerful religious institutions and their perceived behaviours making it difficult for society members to fathom the organisation or a member thereof as a perpetrator of harm.

Consequently, the moral public image of the institutions and its actors is exemplified and spread through both society and media portrayals, decreasing risks of power loss or dissent. Furthermore, censorship of ideologies, non-dominant understandings of harm, and the full truth

of an occurrence allows for promotion of the values and beliefs of the powerful through presenting them as the standard (Miller, 2015), providing circumstances for religious institution's perpetuation of its own perceptions and teachings both through and beyond media outlets – maintaining its status. Regardless of whether it may be in society's better interests to receive the full truth of an event, influence of powerful actors may affect the amount and quality of information available, descriptions and characterisations, the extent of publishing and more (Cummins-Gauthier, 1999; Pearson, 2013), with the interests of the ruling class and the powerful in mind.

Perceptions and Portrayals of Society's Groups

Inevitably, groups within society will desire positive public perceptions of themselves, particularly those wishing to increase or maintain power and sway (Curran, 2002). With media portrayals as a method for circulation of negative, positive, and neutral depictions, society's powerful groups can utilise news media to gain and sustain support (ibid; Zucker, 1978) through depictions of their group and others. Direct and indirect influence of those with power in the relevant religious institution's structure, and thereby heightened status within religious societies (Moyser, 1991), is instrumental in swaying news depictions of other groups and individuals to mould wider society's opinion thereupon (Winston, 2007).

News portrayals of these powerful groups, those deemed as threats, laypeople, and acts perceived as norm transgressions can be adapted to suit the interest of the powerful and warp public perception, such as through capitalisation of public opinion on certain topics – for example highlighting moral associations of acts or actors in religious contexts, accentuating and contrasting the merit of one group or actor and faults of another (Knill et al., 2014), and additional direct and indirect influence. Even regarding victimisation, attempts are made to

portray them negatively where they are perceived as opposing powerful actors or breaching norms and values of powerful groups (Walklate, 2017). the stronger the news media-religion-society relationship, the more impactful these depictions are on public perceptions (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002), with negative portrayals of others benefitting powerful parties just as much as positive portrayals of themselves (ibid).

Coverage of Victims and Perpetrators

In religious societies, such as Ireland's historical basis, the existing difficulties faced by victims in harm's aftermath is aggravated due to many 'traditional' religious values, across varying religions, stacked against victims' needs (Dinisman & Moroz, 2017; Sumter et al., 2018), which is exacerbated again where the harm's perpetrator is religiously affiliated (ibid). Perceptions of blame and morality, and their application by both society and news media impact those immediately involved with harm whilst also perpetuating the beliefs of those with high social standing and influence over media (ibid; Curran, 2002) with personal, societal, legal and further news-coverage consequences. Through the examined presence of institutional, societal, and structural influences, there is little doubt that biases here lie against the victim and in favour of the perpetrator when the latter is affiliated with the majority religion institution.

Where neither party is closely affiliated with religion, additional biases are lost but others remain nonetheless (Carrabine, 2008). With a religiously associated perpetrator however, the cycle of influence between society's elites, media, those involved in harm, and society itself is notably more detrimental to victims whilst benefitting or not significantly affecting perpetrators (ibid). Though some news media may attempt to split neutral coverage between perpetrators and victims (Garnham, 2004; an & Gower, 2009), a perpetrator held highly in society maintains a shield constructed of the religious institution's status and moral-associations, whilst the less

powerful victim standing opposite is often additionally a member of a vulnerable group (Hope, 2001; Tapley & Davies, 2020), resulting in portrayals more likely to take a non-neutral stance on the parties (Lichter, 2017).

Alongside a lack of neutrality, news pieces may take alternative approaches in relation to majority religious offenders, purposively or without direct intent (Miller, 2015; Syed & Ali, 2021), through actions mentioned in above sections. Beyond this, news pieces centring on victims are crucial in portrayals of both parties – as a victim focus can place the perpetrator on the sidelines and construct a blameworthy persona for the victim (Wyatt, 2012), or may highlight the harm done and actions taken against the victim, (Greer, 2007; Dinisman and Moroz, 2017), with the former occurring more regularly with powerful perpetrators (Greer, 2007). From this, public perceptions around both perpetrators and victims aligning with interests of the powerful, such as the Churches in this research, are encouraged. the stance of the religious organisation is strengthened, and victims' accounts delegitimised – no longer posing a threat, through media's aid.

Conclusion

Overall, this review has explored the relationship between religion as a powerful actor, society, state, harm and news media, and how this affects victims, perpetrators, religious institutions and, primarily, their portrayals within news media, with additional examination of the Irish context. It was found that the influence of dominant religious organisations over news media can be significant in how individuals, acts, values, and groups are portrayed due to the power held by the organisations. Even where harms are committed, those who align with the ideologies or desires of the powerful group appear more likely to be portrayed in a positive manner due to the benefits to the group, whilst laypeople receive uninfluenced to negative

portrayals; with victims to religious perpetrators receiving more negative news treatment than victims of non-religious perpetrators. the differentiation of these depictions in relation to comparable crime and harms is the focus of this study, which will examine news media over a set period in Irish history to explore whether the depictions of perpetrators, victims, and actions varied alongside the religious status of the perpetrator – with consideration of the effects of this.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter will provide a structed account of the way in which the research project was carried out through the design and background research performed, the methods of data collection and non-probability sampling utilised, the empirical content analysis of secondary data conducted via qualitative and thematic analyses, and the limitations related to different steps of the methodology. the grounds for the methods used and their benefits in the context of this research will be explored, alongside how well the approach taken is suited to the research task at hand.

Research Design

The research focus for this project was based upon existing news articles or secondary data, and as such called both desk-based research and empirical analysis. Rather than collection of raw data, the aim was to examine existing data and studies to provide a new perspective (Crow & Semmens, 2008), in this study on the effects of powerful parties on media. This form of research can be of benefit where there is a gap in fields featuring a historical aspect (Vaismoradi et al., 2013), as it allows for the retrieval of data from the targeted period, but is also particularly advantageous as it allows for a wider scope of data to be utilised than may be available through primary data collection (Johnston, 2014)– resulting in a more generalisable set of results in a timeframe appropriate for this project.

The approach to designing the specific research question was developed from a blend of criminological and media theories such as critical criminology, hegemony, and neo-Marxism as they relate to media portrayals of crime, alongside criminological theories of governmentality, labelling and social control more broadly as discussed in chapter one, with

overall focus on the intersection between the construction of crime by the news media and the impact of society's powerful, in the form of the Catholic Church in the Republic of Ireland or a Christian Order in Northern Ireland, on how harm is portrayed within said society. the overarching paradigm of the research was one of constructivism (Crow & Semmens, 2008), with the position that truth and reality are contextual and with additional research in this area, the truth within this context could be explored. Through this, a multi-faceted research question was developed: in the Irish historical context, to what extent was there a variation in the news media treatment of majority religious order members and non-members who were accused or convicted of comparable crime or harm? This design was composed of multiple parts and the secondary analysis of one hundred newspaper articles which met the criteria of:

- Having been published between 1925-1985,

- In an Irish broadsheet or tabloid newspaper,

- Covering a crime or harm which was either interpersonal, related to abuse of positions of power, or a wider social or political harm.

- With the perpetrator being explicitly either a member of a Catholic Church order or not in the Republic's publications and a Christian order or not within Northern Ireland's publications.

Creating a structured question allowed for the data to be collected and analysed in a manner most appropriate for the project as it ensured that they were similar enough in nature to warrant comparability (Miller & Salkind, 2002), whilst also being efficiently ascertainable though an official, objective source – the Irish Newspaper Archive (2024). It should be noted at this point that whilst the initial intention was to restrict the articles to being focused on Ireland alone and published in the Republic of Ireland, this was extended to include Irish publications with a focus on actions of international branches of the Church and inclusive of a small amount of

coverage from Northern Ireland. This was done in part due to the additional context on the religion-media relationship which could be gained alongside some limitations in data availability – which will be explored shortly.

Northern Ireland's Inclusion

The addition of several news articles for both sample groups from newspapers located in Northern Ireland, primarily through Belfast, was done in part to increase sample size but also to gain a wider photo of the island of Ireland during the examined period. As the religious orders within Christianity in the Northern Irish context were subject to extreme division and contestation due to wider-scale conflicts not present in the Republic (Mitchell, 2016); Christianity was the recognised religious majority for the articles based in Northern Ireland. This allowed for contrasts to be drawn between religious and non-religious individuals in the same manner as Catholic and non-Catholic individuals were considered due to the overall importance and value which was placed upon religion in Northern Ireland (ibid), whilst minimising the influence of political and sectarian conflicts.

Data Collection and Research Technique

The data was collected, as aforementioned, through the Irish Newspaper Archive, a digital collection of Irish newspapers from the nineteenth century onwards. As the collection is spread over a multitude of local and national papers throughout Ireland without commentary or active censorship, this allowed for as varied and non-biased sample availability as possible – both important features in data collection (Miller & Salkind, 2002) as it ensures that the data selected for the project has strengthened generalisability with limited subjectivity which may occur

where secondary data is gathered from biased or insubstantial sources (ibid). Due to the research project's aim of comparing multiple forms of harm with two sample groups over a broad timeframe, active measures taken were during the sample taken in order to ensure a valid level of representation for both timeframes and harms with a balanced number of articles chosen for both groups. As a result of this, probability sampling was unideal as whilst the selection processes therein may have provided a clearer snapshot the data available within each sample group (Maravelakis, 2019), it would not have allowed for selection of data as relevantly comparable for this project.

Rather, non-probability sampling was employed, wherein each unit of analysis in the form of news articles, do not have an equal chance of selection (Crow & Semmens, 2008). Within non-probability sampling, a mixture of purposive and quota sampling was utilised to best select articles which both featured a representation of a variety of harms and time periods whilst maintaining comparability between the two sample groups. a total sample of one hundred articles focused on various harms and crimes were selected over the 60-year period, half of which featured perpetrators who were in majority Church orders and the other half featuring non-order individuals. This was done through utilisation of key words related to the perpetrator or harms and filtering the time periods whilst aiming to select a variety of different publishers and article viewpoints to maximise the diversity of possible datasets; resulting in samples which provided a basis on which equatable information sets could be compared but at the costs of possible selection bias and representation of the target field (Lahtinen et al., 2005) as the sampling aimed to retrieve a variety of different article types rather than selecting them wholly at random.

Through the 'include' and 'exclude' search functions within the archive, both the harm and perpetrator within an article could be refined simultaneously. In relation to the perpetrator and their religious status, terms such as 'priest', 'nun', 'clergy', 'religious order', 'Catholic

Church', 'religious perpetrator', 'religious harm', 'religious abuse', and variations thereof were utilised, with either the presence or absence of a term required dependent on the sample group being collected. the criteria for the harm within an article was wider, as the aim was to compare a variety of crime and harm for a greater result set and superior analysis as a result. the criteria for the harms themselves were employed alongside the religious refinement. As the project sought to analyse media portrayals of a variety of harms, key terms such as 'abuse', 'assault', 'murder', 'rape', 'terrorism', 'crime link', 'social harm', 'negligence', 'sentence' and variations of thereof were utilised via the include search function; additional informative or descriptive criteria such as 'vulnerable', 'violence', 'threat', 'child', 'family', 'court', and 'punishment', and their variations were also employed systematically as a method of search refinement. This allowed for the sample groups to feature crime and harms of a broad scope, related to abuses of power and position, interpersonal violence and abuse, murder and manslaughter, harm against children and vulnerable individuals, and broader social or political harms with a variety of traits and individuals involved.

Analytical Techniques

As the focus of the research was primarily focused on the language and themes present within the articles, and the information this conveyed about differing media treatment, the data was analysed qualitatively – a branch of analytical methods which focus on naturalistic data in order to provide an in-depth, detailed and ideographic understanding of the samples and their wider significance (Vaismoradi, et al., 2013). As this research project was seeking to analyse news reports to gain an understanding of the impact of religion on the media, qualitative research methods were far more suitable than mixed-methods or qualitative approaches due to the latter's focus on numerical or categorically measurable data (ibid). the specific approach which

was used was thematic analysis – as through finding codes such as emotive language, informational presence, and inferences or assumptions, the themes within both sample sets could be constructed, and similarities and differences contrasted.

This was done through inductive coding (Miller & Salkind, 2002)– a 'bottom up' approach which consisted of reading and analysing the articles whilst forming patterns and allowing the codes to emerge as continuous analysis was conducted. Resultingly, the codes which emerged for both sample groups were more comprehensive and rounded (ibid; Willig et al., 2017), with the identified themes emerging through numerous codes having been revealed naturally rather than the less-detailed, focused results which would have been provided by deductive coding. Within the analysis, codes emerged both semantically and latently (Crow & Semmens, 2008) as both the explicit wording of the news pieces were examined alongside implications within the text and interpretation of both, as there is far more to media than what is explicitly stated or shown (Garnham, 2004) which ought to be taken into account in the context of this research. the theoretical framework developed throughout the literature review and in finalising the research question was referred to throughout the analysis to avoid straying from the original aim of the study, whilst maintaining an overall inductive approach.

Ethics and Limitations

As the research conducted was secondary in nature and utilised data, which was available through the public domain, no ethical approval was necessary.

This study had a number of limitations, primarily related to the research and analytical methods, but with an additional issue due to the nature of the research query itself. the latter is connected to the availability of particular articles within the time period the study was examining – due to both issues of availability within the news archive overall and as many

harms perpetrated by religious figured came to public light at a more recent time in Irish history, this resulted in the overall timeframe for the examined news articles being skewed towards recent history, with most being in the latter half of the examined period. Though use of a broader timeframe did aid in achieving a substantial amount of data to analyse (Miller & Salkind, 2002), reducing this timeframe would allow for increased in-depth analysis of a shorter period (ibid) whilst avoiding the skewing towards a particular timeframe which occurred in this study and perhaps a more straight-forward, if less comparable, choice of data– as the extensive number of articles available in the timeframe resulted in a wide berth of data availability which was time-consuming to adequately evaluate and select.

As the sampling used was non-random, impacted the study in a number of ways. Initially, whilst all research projects can harbour bias through some means (Crow & Semmens, 2008), unconscious bias may have been amplified or made its way into the selection process. Whilst no conscious prejudices played a part in the data selection, as the sampling was purposive and partially quota-based, this may have allowed for unconscious selection bias which would not pose the same risk in random sampling (Maravelakis, 2019). Though random sampling would be unideal and difficult to execute for this study, its use would also aid with generalisability and representation (ibid; Johnston, 2014) which is a limitation of the utilised sampling method. Whilst the project sought to utilise various harms in order to provide a wide-ranging exploration of the impact on news media, this does not provide a proportional portrayal of the different harms which were covered by the news media over this period. This is something which could also be aided by a restricted timeframe study or through looking at one specific form of datum such as murder, as this could facilitate a more generalisable study either over a shorter period of time or in the context of a specific harm.

To conclude, the primary aim of this study was to analyse the ways in which newspaper treatment differed between Christian order members and non-members, and what this may say about the influence of society's powerful on the media. To do this, a theoretical base was constructed from a combination of media, criminological and sociology, resulting in a multi-facet research question to be answered through secondary research. Raw data was collected non-randomly from a national newspaper archive through a mixture of purposive and quota sampling, which was a suitable method for this research project but also gave rise to limitations less present in random sampling. the analysis of the data was then conducted through thematic analysis by allowing codes to emerge inductively and developing them into a number of themes which could thereby be utilised to gain a detail-rich understanding of the research results.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

This chapter will look to the results of the news media comparison, these being the key differences and similarities in how the Irish news media treated members of the Church in comparison to non-religious individuals with relation to crime and harm, relating to the Catholic Church in the Republic and Christian orders in Northern Ireland. the central outcome of the findings is that there was a notable contrast in media treatment even where the harms or their surrounding circumstances were similar enough to merit comparability. Though not present in every article, this distinction was noticeable in a large majority through one or more feature discussed below.

These means of measurement are broadly categorised into language and tone, information and inclusion, and admission and recognition; and within them are more specific means through which media portrayals of the parties and their actions differ or coincide. As some factors, such as the naming of parties, was seen to a higher extent in specific situations or with particular actors, this will also be considered as it is closely intertwined with the nature of the religion-media relationship explored in the literature review. As a note, not all news articles which were analysed for the research project are referenced directly within this piece – the complete list is located in the bibliography.

Language and Tone

Variations of Language and Voice

The first comparison is the type of language used – whether it was emotive and expressive or more indifferent and information-based, with further consideration of the use of active and

passive voice. As emotion is often used in media to both invite consumers and influence them (Nabi & Wirth, 2008), its use here can be held as something which stands to benefit both the media outlet and impact public views on the parties. Religiously affiliated media pieces often used a more detached, formal language style when speaking of perpetrators and acts of harm, with the primary aim of articles being the imparting of information in a manner least likely to cause a public stir. Articles featuring long-term sexual abuse of multiple children (Irish Independent, 1985b) and murder accusations (Evening Echo, 1983) are produced with a focus on the occurrences without inference on the nature of these kinds of acts, descriptions are instead indifferent with some others bordering on unconcerned. This is not unfavourable in itself, however similar acts by non-religious actors are met with significantly more emotion-based responses, notable through their approach to the harms alongside use of intense and descriptive language.

Rather than passive descriptions of a victim, act or perpetrator, the majority of non-religiously affiliated articles take care to condemn the harm done and provide some extent of sympathy to the victims. Here, individuals of regular social standing who purposely harm others, particularly those more vulnerable than they, are portrayed as lacking morality at best or borderline evil at worst (Irish Examiner, 1931; Belfast News Letter, 1946). the emotive language in use here, such as recounts of a young girl crying home to her parents as was in the latter article, promotes empathy amongst readers for the victims and a disapproval of the perpetrator (Carrabine, 2008; Nabi & Wirth, 2008) which is not found in most religious-affiliated articles. Furthermore, whilst articles with religious perpetrators tended to refer to victims passively – that the harm was something that occurred to them rather than something the perpetrator committed, the non-religious articles represented the parties more actively – being more descriptive of each parties' actions and affixing a level of reader-sensation to them.

Naming of the Parties

The way in which parties were referred to, the extent to which perpetrators and victims were named or given a title within the articles appear to be affected by the presence of the Churches and its members therein. Wherein a member of a Church was a perpetrator or active participant in the harm, where their name was provided initially, their honorific or title was used thereafter far more than a repeated use of their name or at times their name was not invoked at all (Irish Press, 1971; Belfast Telegraph, 1985), with the situation being similar for others involved in the harm. Victims in this case were more likely to be named only where they were adults, as children were described by age or characteristics but were almost never named, regardless of the specific type of harm inflicted. Articles featuring non-religious perpetrators with similar harms were far more likely to feature both repeated naming of the perpetrators and identification of victims, the latter particularly relating to physical and sexual assaults and abuse (Limerick Leader, 1946; Irish Independent, 1985a) and also applies to the identification of child victims – though not named in every article, it occurred at a noticeably higher rate than in religiously associated pieces.

These differences can be linked to the previously mentioned concepts of personas, roles, and public opinions, as naming the victim of a crime consolidates them in the public eye as a real person who was harmed (Lawrence & Karim, 2007) and thereby deserves sympathy and for the named individual who injured them to face retribution; whilst not naming a religious perpetrator more than necessary ensures that their moral, socially respected status is promoted to readers. Additionally, with the decision on who is identified and how often names are used being the choice of the writer or publisher, there may be further motives behind it. the repeated naming of a perpetrator highlights their active involvement in the harm, beyond their affiliations or roles in a religion or otherwise, and provides ample opportunity for the article to shame them and their behaviours whilst encouraging the consumer to do the same.

Limiting perpetrator identification whilst showcasing their religious affiliation instead ties them to their Church, particularly as a moral and righteous body which thereby acts to highlight these traits in the individual; furthermore, less focus on the identity of the perpetrator allows for more emphasis on the act itself whilst distancing the two. Whether victims are identified by name can influence the level of privacy they receive, the likelihood that their community explores the circumstances of the harm and whether additional victims may come forward (Fohring, 2015, 2018), each being significant where the perpetrator and their Church would desire as little intrusion as possible, but would also impact victim legitimacy (ibid). As occurred in the majority of religious articles, media withholding victims' names can delegitimise their situation in the eyes of the public and possibly the state, resulting in them posing less of a threat to the religious mainstream; unakin to the non-religious articles wherein many of the articles with named victims also questioned wider social issues relating to the perpetrators or harm committed (Irish Independent, 1984).

Respect and Separation

With the consideration of social standing and social capital as impactful factors on media portrayals thus far, this can be explored further through the lens of high regard and public respect. Members of the Churches were held in high esteem within Irish society at this time (Mac-Curtain, 1993) and were seen as both individuals worthy of significant respect and somewhat 'separate' from the average citizen – holding a multitude of roles within society with influence thereupon and on public life (ibid). With this in mind, there is discernible diversity in the presentation of both perpetrator groups when looking at the level of respect the journalist provides, how this was emphasised, and additionally the extent to which the perpetrator is held as someone who is above the victim, other individuals or other groups within society. Most

news pieces which featured a religious perpetrator introduced or described them in manner emphasising their role within their Church or community (Irish Independent, 1965; Belfast Telegraph, 1984), irrespective of whether this role was related to the harm. Alongside a keen focus on the harm itself, this was the primary descriptive focus of the religious articles.

In promoting their religious personas and moral-abiding roles, an underlying current of these articles was the order's place apart from the common people. Their position as an organisation distinct from – and in some cases above – other groups within the state was accentuated by journalists through descriptors, tone, and comparisons; and the religious perpetrator's role therein was highlighted. the leniency allowed for religious actors deemed "in trouble" due to alcohol abuse compared to laypeople (Irish Press, 1982b p. 6; Western People, 1985) due to their valued role in society and sacrifices borne of their order membership, and highlighting a priests' passion and emotional involvement in his sermon topics after he was ejected from his parish due to their content (Irish Press, 1972) showcases this – as the religious characterisation of the perpetrator is ranked above the harms committed. Consequently, the perpetrator was portrayed as an individual acting at the behest of their well-respected organisation beyond the current harm and who should be seen as such based upon their roles in society, whilst also having their actions judged under different criteria by both the media and society because of their separation from the general public and impacts of this on public perceptions. Emphasis was placed on the respect of the individual through their links to their Church, previous legitimate behaviours, and at times delegitimization of victims – wherein the latter's behaviours, characteristics or lack of societal respect was utilised to increase the perceived respect owed to the perpetrator in comparison.

In the case that the perpetrator was not religious, however, the respect shown to them was significantly lower, in each noted kind of harm. Without the significance of the Churches' presence or reliance on focusing on the harmful incident, descriptors and attitudes were based

upon the individual's factual features (Irish Independent, 1936) which allowed for the journalists to utilise more personal narratives and diminished any separation that could have been present. These perpetrators lacked the positions and roles of their counterparts, leading to news media relying on their disdained and disrespected attributes and actions – something exaggerated when in relation to prejudices or wider social biases and harms. the lack of separation and deterioration of respect through news media can disadvantage these individuals by delegitimising them in the eyes of public, judiciary and state; whilst promotion of separation and respect can be mutually beneficial for both the perpetrators and their Church through legitimisation of behaviours, public roles and specific actions in the case of the latter.

Utilisation of Opinions

Whilst news media pieces are an amalgamation of many working components such as the facts of a matter, biases and writer opinions to begin with (Greer, 2019; Hamborg, et al., 2019), the active utilisation of multiple perspectives, public opinion and reaction-inspired writings were found to be components whose presence varied dependant on the article's subject. Where a news piece did feature a religious perpetrator, public opinion, and perspectives outside of that held to be objective within the article were limited, with very few of the examined articles giving reference to ideas beyond those of the reporter. the reporting was most often bound to that which the writer had to say with occasional excerpts from those directly involved or the courts as the situation called for (Belfast Telegraph, 1978; Irish Press, 1985). This allowed for a more controlled presentation of the harm at hand in the articles without sway from those beyond the writing table, as wider societal opinion on a matter could result in a news piece with a different tone than that the publishers aimed to achieve; resulting in an increase in power for the news outlets and those who sway their actions (Long, 1986; Carrabine, 2008).

In contrast, over half of the articles not featuring a religious perpetrator or harm referred to public thoughts on a matter or explored the opinions of more than one person. Some made a point to include public opinion, multiple individuals' stances or professionals' thoughts (Roscommon Herald, 1951; Irish Independent, 1985a). In addition, similarly to making use of emotive language, a large portion of the non-religious articles were reactive rather than purely objective, providing varying degrees of suggestions or opinion on the matter at hand that expanded beyond what the involved parties or courts had to say on the matter, such as exploring the opinions and reactions behind the beatings of young people and prospects for change (Irish Independent, 1930). Due to this, not only was a wider perspective of the event made available, but the often-nuanced harms and public views thereupon were also showcased. Rather than hiding their complexity to provide a polished image of certain parties as the religious articles attempted to, there was an acknowledgement of the crime and harm's complicated nature, how it influences public opinion and vice versa.

Information and Inclusion

Inclusion of the International

In conducting this research, it was noted that whilst there was a significant overlap between publications from the Republic and Northern Ireland, Belfast specifically, for both portions of the media, there was a strong presence of international religious harm in the national media. Incidents from other European countries and as far as the US (Irish Independent, 1961; Irish Press, 1971; Evening Herald, 1980) were portrayed in the same way that national religious harms were, however their presence is of particular interest as it accounts for a significant proportion of the Irish media on religious harms during this time. To maintain a similar sample between both media portrayals, a smaller number of international harms than national were

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studied in depth, however their presence relating to religious harm in the news archive accounted for an equatable share of the news pieces available.

This was not the case with non-religious harms – for which there was a higher level of national crime and harm reported on average than international. International non-religious harms were covered by the Irish media where it was of international consequence or particularly heinous (Evening Press, 1979) but with a far less balanced ratio. This can be interpreted in several ways, each of which provide an insight into Irish news media's portrayals of these harms as many of the articles were still subject to the mechanisms being discussed in this chapter. Naturally due to the strong Catholic presence within the Republic and overall Christian presence within Belfast and Northern Ireland, media outlets would be more inclined to cover stories with these themes as it could be more appealing to the local audience, even with the piece featuring religious harm.

Alternatively, as crime committed by a Church member would be a shock to most of any Irish audience compared to a regular criminal, its coverage would be of great interest. Portrayals which presented the harm in a negative light contrasted the religious nature of the other state to Ireland as being lesser or deficient in some manner which resulted in the Republic's approach to the Catholicism being implicitly upheld as the correct way to conduct religious affairs (Evening Echo, 1950) with the same to be said for the various approaches to Christianity within Belfast (Belfast News Letter, 1971) and Northern Ireland (Mitchell, 2016). This could also function to steer the public's eyes away from religious harms being committed within the state as it instead highlights what is being done elsewhere whilst minimising Irish issues. Finally, it could simply be related to the shortage of audible Irish grievances at this point which will be further discussed but ought to be mentioned as it would provide an explanation as to why there may be exaggerated focus on the international.

Provision of Additional Information

The explicit referral to various aspects or circumstances relating to a harm can also vary with the religious alignment of the perpetrator. Inclusion of additional consequences or circumstances beyond the initial act, particularly those which may depict the perpetrator in an accusatory light such as victims needing medical treatment, the effects on those with close ties to the victim or perpetrator, or the presence of legal ramifications, were far more likely to be present in the articles without powerful perpetrators (Moriearty, 2009), in this case religious – and the presence of these factors were often described in appreciable detail, though this will be discussed more below. Only a small portion of news pieces with religious affiliation featuring physical injury mentioned the victims requiring medical or psychological treatment, even where it could be safely assumed that medical intervention was required (Irish Independent, 1926; Drogheda Independent, 1938).

This resulted in most religiously associated articles choosing to forgo any mentioning of the harm's consequences beyond the immediate, which falls in line with what has been seen so far. Any harm caused to those surrounding the parties, such as the distress of a deceased person's family, was highlighted within the non-religious articles whilst rarely being mentioned in those featuring a Church member (Leitrim Observer, 1941; Sunday Press, 1983). Moreover, articles featuring order members were less likely than their non-religious counterparts to mention whether legal proceedings were underway or planned, in the context of harm against other individuals; with most mentions of the law and judiciary being present in relation to non-personal harms or through an order member speaking to the courts as a religious personage rather than a perpetrator.

These choices made by the journalists and publishers on the portrayals stand to minimise or highlight the perceived harm caused to the primary victims, others hurt by the perpetrator's actions and to wider society; with referrals to the additional harms increasing the perceived blameworthiness of the perpetrator and, in particular cases, those they associate with. This also allows for those consuming the news media to be influenced on their perceptions of the possible harm which can be caused by both groups – wherein a constant reminder of the additional harm brought about by the non-religious individuals in comparison to those involved with the Churches creates an understanding that the religious organisation and its members are inherently less capable of causing harm than the average individual; an understanding which was advantageous for both the Churches and their members whilst also tying in with public beliefs surrounding both parties in this context (Lee, 2005; Sumter, et al., 2018).

Level of Detail and Persona Creation

A step further than influencing the explicit mentioning of particular aspects of a crime or harm, the level of detail that an article is willing to venture into on specific circumstances and details is also influenced by the perpetrator's religious standing. Details such as court proceedings, injury detail, and personal characteristics are often used by media outlets to draw in consumers whilst simultaneously swaying public opinion (Surette, 2003; Zoch, 2014)and these articles are of trivial difference. As is becoming a running theme, the religiously associated articles placed their narrow focus on the core aspects of the harmful occurrence whilst its counterpart frequently provides an abundance of additional information. News pieces not featuring perpetrators from the order were far more likely to include thorough run-throughs of the court proceedings, where applicable, down to being inclusive of quotes taken from the courtroom

and further descriptions of how the involved parties were reacted to by the judge, jury and public in these cases (Sligo Champion, 1932; Connacht Tribune, 1978).

Moreover, where a party was abused or injured, these were more likely to be covered in detail with descriptions of the injuries and how the victimised parties were faring in the moment of writing or judgement as applicable (Belfast News Letter, 1967). Personal details of the parties, such as physical and personality characteristics, alongside life and social circumstances were also more likely to be taken into account in the articles as these stood to provide the audience with a perpetrator persona for them to base their opinions upon – a persona already provided, to an extent, where a Church order member was involved (Ó Corráin, 2018). Wherein a member was associated with the crime or harm, rather than making them known to the public on an intimate scale, they were presented as their role with little attention paid to other aspects of either themselves (Connacht Sentinel, 1976; Irish Press, 1982a) or circumstances surrounding the harm beyond the immediate situation. This can function to promote views of order members as individuals wholly committed to their role and the moral rules which accompany it, and ought to be viewed as such, rather than an individual with their own personality and states of affairs for both media and society to judge as such.

Recognition and Admission

Acknowledgement of Harm with Sympathies

With most examined articles focusing on harms against individuals or groups thereof, with a small portion looking at harms against wider society or state bodies. In reporting on harms against individuals, there were discrepancies in the acknowledgement of long-term damage caused by perpetrators' actions alongside expressions of sympathy towards those who were victimised. Within articles featuring a religious perpetrator, it was found that there was a

general lack of acknowledgement of this long-term harm for the victim after the initial incident, in comparison to non-religious perpetrators. Rather, religiously affiliated articles placed an increased amount of emphasis on the incident at hand with either little focus or active disregard of the long-term consequences of abuse, neglect and other injuries for the victims and other involved parties (Drogheda Independent, 1938; Roche, 1967). More often the attention was instead placed on long-term effects for the perpetrator, whether or not the article related to court proceedings (Irish Independent, 1965) with victims being the secondary casualty. In their tunnelled focus, this also resulted in a lack of sympathy being displayed for victims and their families in many of the articles; though acts were found to be harmful and even malicious, the news pieces did not deem it important enough to express beyond basic condolences for those who suffered.

Whilst media frequently struggles with its portrayals of victims and perpetrators (Carrabine, 2008), a lack in recognition of the damage done stands to demotivate victims to speak out or seek help whilst presenting the harm and perpetrators to society as something less significant than they were, shaping public views thereupon and reinforcing public opinion on these religious orders. Articles unrelated to religious harms were more likely to display compassion towards the victims, less likely to sympathise with the perpetrator and many acknowledged the lasting damage of physical, verbal and sexual abuse (Belfast News Letter, 1967; Evening Press, 1985), which went largely unfound in religious articles. the circumstances of perpetrators were considered but with far lower significance placed on the harm's effect thereupon, with some exceptions of articles featuring court proceedings. As a result, perpetrators were not held as casualties of harms that they committed but rather facing consequences of their own actions; with additional acknowledgement that whilst committing harm can have a detrimental effect on the perpetrator, that this does not minimise the suffering of victims (Irish Examiner, 1931; Irish Independent, 1936).

Individual Actions Versus Contributory Factors

The media's positioning of a crime or harm as something borne of individual action, or due to larger issues and systemic factors, can influence societal views thereupon (Carrabine, 2008), something impacted to a moderate extent by the presence of religion in the occurrence. Without a religious perpetrator, issues such as abuse of children and alcohol-related harms are related back to wider social issues such as socio-economic conditions, education availability and a state's responsibilities towards its citizens amongst others (Irish Press, 1973; Chapman, 1983; Irish Independent, 1985a). In acknowledgement of larger issues, news media allows the public to consider what may be causing crime or impacting its rates within their communities and decide what they desire to do about it; endeavouring to provide a more comprehensive image of the harm and its surroundings. This naturally has its own issues such as social biases or prejudices (Newburn, 2017), for example the high social standing of teachers in Ireland's history (Roscommon Herald, 1951) resulting often-favourable biases at that time.

News pieces featuring actors heavily involved with the Churches, however, tended to either disregard or minimise systemic factors and focus purely on the issue at hand (Irish Press, 1972) or place blame on the corruption of an immoral society (Irish Press, 1982b). Resultingly, the harm is separated from the religious organisation and instead being affixed to another individual who can then be dealt with as deemed fit, or with the onus and guilt of the harm being given back to society's members who are then encouraged to utilise religious teachings in order to improve the situation. Placing blame on one individual not only allows for zoning in on their flaws rather than those of the Churches or powerful groups (Greer, 2007), but also provides the latter with opportunities to present themselves as saviours by removing or relocating (Irish Examiner, 1968; Irish Press, 1971), the perpetrator, reinforcing their position

of power. Though both article groups can suggest looking beyond the harm, the implied reason for doing so is what sets them apart.

Non-Interpersonal Harms

When the crime or harm is not committed directly against another person however, news media's portrayals can follow a similar individualistic focus in relation to order members as perpetrators whilst not affording the same treatment to non-order members. In the examined articles, harms not immediately affecting individuals were related to either involvement with gang or paramilitary activities, or abuses of power in state, union or religious positions. Situations such as these can often take longer to come to light but are usually treated more seriously by the media when they do (Farnen, 1990; Knox, 2002) due to the harm caused to the wider public within a state. Where a prominent member of the Churches was involved with these harms, such as a nun smuggling information for the mafia or religious school board abusing their authority (Evening Herald, 1982; Cork Examiner, 1983), the incidents themselves were considered in depth but their further consequences were not.

The articles here dove into the explanations for involvement with the groups and harms committed and provided a fact-focused overview of the incidents, but there was little recognition of the damage that these activities had beyond the immediate. the large-scale injury and social detriments facilitated by the perpetrators' involvement was scarcely touched upon, with almost the opposite being said for non-religious news pieces. Conversely, pieces with similar situations (Irish Independent, 1941, 1981) or those with abuse of political positions (Tuam Herald, 1958) not only laid down and criticised the acts at hand, but related them to harms thereby enabled at a larger scale. This included detriments to the state and society, as well as individuals therein. Consequentially the acts were denounced to a greater extent than

those with religious affiliation as the damage they caused was more adequately explored and showcased to the public. a greater onus was also placed upon the non-religious perpetrator through these means, as one who is said to have caused more harm is then awarded more culpability and disapproval.

Biases and Blameworthiness

The prevalence of societal partialities and opinions within the articles, and the approach thereto varied between sample groups, dependent on the issue and any negative or positive associations therewith, with portrayals being impacted as a result. Negative bias against children were present to some extent in almost all articles featuring them, in the sense that children were consistently held to heightened behavioural standards and shown lower levels of respect (Roscommon Herald, 1951; Evening Herald, 1980); particularly in the context of schools, as even where teachers were faulted for physical altercation with students, comments were made on the student's blameworthiness.

This is not uncommon within the time and cultural context (Walsh, 2016; Decker & Marteache, 2017), however the blameworthiness that is placed upon here thereby affects the blame placed on the perpetrator – where one is more culpable, there is an inherent assumption that the other is less so and as such ought to be portrayed in a more forgiving manner. Whilst present in both groups, these attitudes were more overt in the religious pieces with higher levels of fault openly attributed to children and less opposition to the harm against them, opposition far more vocal in the non-religious articles. the abuse or assault of children therein was treated as something disdainful, particularly when there was a close relationship between perpetrator and victim, though numerous articles raised the possibility of the child as a simultaneous provocateur and victim.

Beyond the treatment of children, portrayals of further social beliefs varied between the groups – whilst bigamy and adultery were condemned for both (Belfast News Letter, 1925; Kilfeather, 1983) the latter was criticised far more harshly regarding alcohol abuse, and slights against or verbal abuse of those of higher social standing (Liberator, 1928; Irish Press, 1973). Consequently, despite the acts themselves being comparable, non-religious individuals as perpetrators were seen was more detrimental to society than the majority religious group members, with the articles considering greater social harm attributable to the former whilst the latter were excusable due to moral personas and high-social standing. Compassion and empathy was also more likely to appear in the religious articles in this context as the order members were recounted as individuals who were also suffering or whose actions ought to be looked past due to their pious nature or exemplary behaviours beyond the harm, portrayals not granted to laypeople who were instead blamed for not only harms they committed, but wider perceived degradation of society.

Conclusion

It has been established in the research findings that there is a number of notable differences in news media treatment of perpetrators of crime or harm when they are a member of the Catholic Church or Christian orders compared to when they are not, in the Irish context from 1925-1985. the results highlighted that religious individuals received more lenient treatment by a number of Irish newspapers over various types of harm, including abuses of power for personal gain, physical abuse and assault, manslaughter, and broader social harms. This may be due to an amalgamation of reasons allowing for religious influence over news media, such as the Churches' powerful position in relation to the state as the majority religious organisation at this

time, the societal reliance on the Churches and their sway over local communities, the benefits to be gained from having influence over the media and more.

The differences in media treatment found were most apparent in relation to the language, descriptors, tones and information made available within the articles; with the religiously affiliated articles often focusing on the incident at hand whilst portraying the Churches and their members as moral and respected, whilst the non-religious articles emphasised the damage caused by the perpetrator with increased culpability, emotive language and active condemnation. the portrayals of victims also varied dependant on the religious circumstances of the perpetrator, with higher levels of blame placed on victims, with delegitimising effects, where the perpetrator was religious, which was less common where the perpetrator was not an order member. the above detailed findings each have had their own effects on the parties involved in the harm, the news media themselves, the Churches, and the state, such as impacts on public opinions, legitimacy, media consumption, and social standing, however the comprehensive significance and impacts of the findings will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter Five: Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

With the results of the research considered, this chapter will provide an analysis thereof and discuss their significance and implications within the wider scope of news media and media more generally, society and powerful parties therein, inequalities on various grounds, and the organisation and control of societies and their members. the influence of powerful parties and actors, such as majority religious institutions as was this research's context, will be the common theme throughout the chapter and the way in which they both effect and are affected by the society around theme will be considered from various angles; with underpinning of assorted criminological theories in order to substantiate both the aforementioned findings and their value within the sphere.

Split into three sections, the subsequent topics will begin with how social inequalities, prejudices, and roles are both influencers of and influenced by powerful actors' sway over media, followed by a focus on the effects of labelling and the opinions of the involved parties by the involved parties, and closing with consideration of the overarching role played by methods of societal governance and reliance on news media, and how this could develop. These connotations are considered in relation to the powerful actors who commit harm, 'regular' individuals who commit harm, those subject to harm, parties with relation to any of the previous, the media, as well as society itself. Notably, there is almost always an overlap - very rarely does the actions of a party only affect one other. Additionally, whilst this discussion occurs in a mixture of the examined period's context and a more universal context, some references will be made to how particular points of interest may be exacerbated, limited or otherwise significantly affected by the context of the modern day.

An Overlap of Impacting and Impacted

Objectivity and Bias

A higher level of objectivity is often attributed to news media than other forms thereof (Butler, 2018; Scammell & Semetko, 2018), and whilst general media objectivity is growing increasingly contested in the modern-day (Proffitt, 2007), printed news is still held as relatively impartial in its coverage of events – primarily by majority groups within society. In the same manner that all media is subject to the biases of its creators (Lichter, 2017), the above findings suggest that there is still the capacity within news media for more explicit biases to manifest and affect the portrayals of news subjects. With the results of this study observing that the news media showcased limited objectivity and heightened subjectivity through their contrasting portrayals of the two groups, this reflects research on both powerful parties as news media influences (Huggins, 2018), the impacts of public opinion on impartiality (Barendt, 1998) and the extent to which media outlets value different segments of society (Greer, 2007; Carrabine, 2008). the perception of heightened objectivity granted to news media is a key factor in the sway it can have over a population as well as its consumption levels, as the majority of society would prefer an information source as bias-free as possible (Moriearty, 2009; Solito & Sorrentino, 2020) – though this in itself is subjective as individuals' own biases can often be held as an objective truth (Lee, 2005).

Resultingly, holding news sources as inherently objective can affect societal beliefs on any given matter that is covered, such as religious individuals being less likely to cause harm than non-religious individuals, whilst also having the ability to impact prejudices and biases within society (Giles & Shaw, 2009) due to the trust and reliance placed in news media. With the wide variety of news media with differing ideological and political underpinnings available in the modern day, the idea that there may be different 'spins' or angles taken on news stories by each

creator is more commonly acknowledged (Carrabine, 2008), however individuals tend to view *their* news source as the least biased and most objective one (ibid; Eveland Jr. & Shah, 2003). Perceptions of objectivity can also be related to the levels of trust and confidence that individuals have within their state, society and the media generally (Scammell & Semetko, 2018); wherein decreased trust will result in a decline in public belief of news media objectivity, and increased trust or assurance can increase perceptions of objectivity. Whilst widespread corruption and bias within a state does often impact media's stances and output (Proffitt, 2007; Butler, 2018), a pure reliance on news objectivity simply due to confidence in wider social and state structures can result in ignorance to biases alongside human and societal subjectivity in favour of uncritically trusting what is provided by news media.

The Impact of Societal Roles

Within society, each individual has multiple roles to which they are expected to adhere either continually or under varying circumstances (Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010). These roles may relate to profession, status, age, membership of particular groups, gender or other factors, with some being explicitly stated and others more implicit (ibid), and with the expectations, assumptions and responsibilities of the roles varying according to these factors. These roles can dictate how individuals live their lives, the opportunities attainable to them, as well as how certain actions of theirs are perceived by both their immediate community and wider society, often with other cultural factors as additional influences on both the roles and their effects (ibid; Griswold, 2012). the way in which citizens and their actions are evaluated by both society and the media, and whether evaluations are more likely to be critical, neutral, or positive, can be heavily impacted by their roles and reputation of these roles within their own society (ibid). In the context of this research project, being a member of the majority religious order resulted in

possession of a role with responsibilities, undoubtedly, but additionally with a broad scope of advantages both in relation to media portrayals and generally within society due to the high status and social power which the role conferred.

Contrastingly, non-order members were often assessed by the roles assigned to them with judgements and criticisms or praise made accordingly – children were held as being 'lesser' than their adult counterparts, whilst the actions of a police officer and former soldier were considered in tandem to the respect deemed due to him because of his role. Despite the differences in nature between entertainment and news media in their general objectives and values (Prior, 2005; Jewkes, 2015), the utilisation of these roles can overlap a significant amount due in part to more common intentions behind their use – social influence (Carrabine, 2008; McDonald & Crandall, 2015; Huggins, 2018). Often there is a utilisation of surface-level understanding of individual's roles within media productions to easily paint the situation for an audience; but consequently, a superficial understanding of both the role itself and how an audience ought to feel in relation to someone in said role is presented (Baum, 2003; Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007).

With a reliance formed on these roles, further assumptions, generalisations, and misunderstandings are constructed which then make their way into media portrayals (Dowler et al., 2006) and magnify the existing surface-level depictions, plausibly to a point where these media outlets are relying on caricatures of individuals rather than accurate descriptions of the actors themselves. In relation to crime or harm, if an individual's primary role is one held highly by society or with substantial influence over society – this will be highlighted or exaggerated with less focus on the actuality of the harm caused; whereas a primary role which is received with hostility or even borderline neutrality will see this overemphasised alongside the current harm, any past issues and even hypotheticals (Fenton, 2018). This can be actively utilised by those with existing power to increase their leverage (Huggins, 2018) however can

also simply be a result of a long cycle of misrepresentation having gone uninterrupted (Soothill, 2020)– a cycle likely to continue particularly as those with the most negative misrepresentations have the least say within society and power to change it.

Utilising Inequalities and Cyclicality

A notable characteristic of social control and power within society is that it is self-reinforcing beyond a certain point (Foucault, 1977; Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010), denoting that once a significant level of control has been gained, the powerful no longer need to exert the same directly control and influential tactics to maintain their position as the structures of society maintain it; as was the case for the Church in Ireland's context – the structural layout of society and public services such as schooling and health were in the hands of the religious majority (Mac Curtain, 1993) which perpetuated their influence and sway over the public alongside the religious aspect itself. However, sole reliance on indirect authoritative measures can lead to uncertain results as it allows for more public discretion and thereby less impact (Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010; Coban, 2018; Monterosso, 2020). Hence, it is advantageous for powerful groups to maintain a more dynamic yet steadfast form of social influence intact in order to maximise their sway over the public – such as through media (Curran, 2002; Coban, 2018) inclusive of news.

Through direct influence via human action, and indirect influence via allowing public sway to do its intended work (Sternbeck, 2024), news media portrayals of both the powerful group themselves as well as 'regular' individuals can be utilised by powerful groups to achieve their objectives in this regard; resulting in positive associations with the group and their actions developing society's trust, perceptions and reliance upon them, whilst minimising coverage of negatively associated characteristics or actions (Carrabine, 2008; Sumter et al., 2018).

Concurrently, the same actions or characteristics of the 'average' member of society is portrayed in a manner relatively neutral or negative to contrast with the depictions of the powerful groups – as was seen in the examined articles through starkly differing media characterisations wherein members of both the religious and non-religious groups had engaged in similar actions. Resultingly, the negative association of harms committed are not linked to the powerful actors but rather to the ordinary citizen – with the latter receiving condemnation whilst the former is held in the same or perhaps higher esteem than before; cementing their role and status in society afresh (Curran, 2002; Huggins, 2018).

Associations with different groups in society, inclusive of the powerful, may also be constructed and secured in this manner – wherein media depictions thereof which best suit the desires or intentions of the powerful are promoted, encouraged or even funded; whereas those which go against powerful actors are struck down or minimised (Boykoff, 2007; Healy et al., 2015), with parallel effects to portrayals of actors and harms (ibid; Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007). This can further result in common behaviours and accepted norms within society shifting towards those which best align with the values of the powerful and which are most stable for maintenance of said power (Huggins, 2018)– such as strong discouragement of speaking against those in a higher position of power. News and entertainment media depictions can encourage or discourage behaviours, ideas and even personal traits as desired to mould a public that is preferable to powerful actors and groups: one which self-reinforces the present social control, returning to the beginning of the cycle.

Judgement, Identity, and Manipulation

Labelling and its Abundant Effects

With unequal use of the labels of victim, perpetrator, criminal and other harm-related terms throughout the articles examined – implications are raised relating to labelling as it occurs within news media and broader society, with effects on both those directly and less immediately involved. Though much of labelling theory's focus is upon the effects of the state labelling an individual though the justice system and their interactions therewith, there is further possibility of this in the context of media labelling (Farrington, 1977). Though not occurring through identical processes, through news productions labelling one group of individuals as harmful or deviant at a higher rather than another, effects similar to traditional labelling theory may arise – intensified where news media and the state reach similar conclusions.

Due to perceived objectivity and moderately high trust within traditional news media (Scammell & Semetko, 2018) and state power, where both class one group of individuals as more likely to cause harm than another, in the context of religion or otherwise, this could heighten the criminogenic damage of labelling already existent for each factor individually (Farrington, 1977; Newburn, 2017). Furthermore, as those with initially higher social standing and privileges are less likely to be targeted by this form of labelling by news media (Yoder, 2011), upon grounds of exceptionalism and their influence over society (ibid; Healy et al., 2015). This allows for groups to be placed at odds against each other by media and society – resulting in divides therebetween growing; those labelled as virtuous or advantageous in society being held higher, whilst those labelled ordinary or deviant are compared thereto, needing to improve at best or being an ailment upon society at worst. These effects not only impact those targeted but are usually also applied to larger groups which they may belong

(Miller, 2015; Lichter, 2017), whether it be related to religion, ethnicity, class, gender and so forth.

Consequently, the beneficial or detrimental effects of these characterisations and labels are extended to the members of these groups within their society, with the criminogenic and further harmful effects often disproportionately impacting already disempowered groups whilst the powerful are further empowered. Within the context of victimisation and labelling, the label of victim is far less likely to be granted wherein the individual responsible for harm is powerful or well-respected within their community (Walklate, 2017), as was seen in the findings. Rather, attention may be drawn to something the harmed individual had done prior, or the merits of the powerful perpetrator highlighted (ibid). Whilst sometimes contested due to negative correlations some may have with the term itself; its use can legitimise the individuals' experience (ibid; Davies et al., 2017) whilst calling attention to the harm that was done and the person responsible. Through the discrepancies of victim acknowledgement, acceptance and blame in the examined articles, the current-day contentions over the role and portrayals of harm victims in news media (Fohring, 2018) prove to be far from a new phenomenon.

In instances that victims are publicly unaccepted, disbelieved, or disregarded, this affects both targeted individual and beyond. For victimised individuals: issues with physical or mental health, limited community support, mistrust from society (ibid; Farrington, 1977) and, where the perpetrator was close to them – possible further personal harm (Dinisman & Moroz, 2017). Those standing by a victim without media support may also face social consequences such as ostracization or marginalisation, particularly where the perpetrator was a powerful member of society as this not only affects social responses and understandings but is also inclusive of sway over reporting media (Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010; Greer, 2014). Though this can occur with non-powerful perpetrators (ibid), the dissonance of occurrences where powerful and

'ordinary' perpetrators are confirmed highlights the impact upon news media, labelling and society which this type of power and social capital possesses.

Moreover, the way in which news media can attribute labels and descriptors typically utilised by the justice system to individuals in a publishing or programme, regardless of the justice system's involvement until that point highlights their power in this regard. When speaking of court proceedings, naturally news media is expected to replicate the language used therein (Carrabine, 2008) – working in favour of their relied-upon relative objectivity. However, when not reporting explicitly on court proceedings, writers and publishers have more liberty than may be expected in their use of terms such as victim, culprit, and a wide variety of terms and phrases related to crime and harm (Greer, 2014), as was seen throughout the examined articles; albeit with some exceptions and limitations varying by jurisdiction (ibid; Chalmers and Leverick, 2008).

Due to this, public opinions on these matters may be influences possibly far before anything has been officially approached by the state or the facts given due consideration by society (Farrington, 1977). Alongside the influence on discussed parties, a final consequence of the impact of biased news media is the influence upon criminal trials. Though cases involving harm may be brought before civil courts, and those working throughout the justice system are also susceptible to biases and media influence (Healy et al., 2015), where the state pursues a criminal enquiry and it is brought before a courtroom with a jury, a public opinion swayed by outside judgements can be precarious (ibid; Breen et al., 2019). Though media characterisations or conclusions are instructed to be disregarded, it is certainly possible that the remnants if not some influence from media portrayals remain (McCombs & Reynolds, 2002; Giles & Shaw, 2009) and dependant on the jurors, the circumstances of a case, the presence of a powerful actor therein, and the way in which the case was covered by the news media may result in a

verdict less neutral than it ought to be– followed by additional news coverage with its own multitude of results.

'Popular' Opinion

Public beliefs and opinions, inclusive of societal biases, is something often repeated, utilised and capitalised upon by media outlets (Lichter, 2017; Soothill, 2020), with news media being of little exception. Simultaneously, unpopular viewpoints may be rejected or ignored in favour of the majority (ibid). In the context of this research, this resulted in news publications which favoured majority religious order members – individuals highly held within their society, in contrast to the treatment of the non-religious group for whom public opinions would be far lower. Through doing this, the publications were both agreeing with society's view on the former and promoting them, through positive action and speech regarding the positive opinions, and reinforcement of society's negative view of the latter. a key implication of this is the cyclical nature of public opinion and bias that is thereby stimulated (Lichter, 2017; Soothill, 2020), particularly as facilitation by powerful actors or parties, with a strong tendency to steer public opinion towards these parties so that power is maintained (Curran, 2002; Carrabine, 2008). Based upon this, not only will the public beliefs that are most benefit for powerful actors be promoted to the fullest extent, but public prejudices and biases which stand to serve these actors will also be maximised in order to maintain power in the upper echelons of society whilst decreasing the anything deemed a risk to said power (ibid; Proffitt, 2007).

These risks may be in the form of opinions on social or political matters but can also be particular groups or individuals (Proffitt, 2007; Newburn, 2017). Marginalised and vulnerable groups, those who oppose the powerful or their values, and individuals who violate social norms may all be viewed as threats to the status quo and the status of those with power over

society and the media (ibid). To prevent these threats gaining traction or in response thereto, news pieces can showcase the undesired groups or opinions in a manner affirming the desires of those with power over the media whilst also perpetuating existing biases (Curran, 2002; Walsh, 2016), arguably increasing their intensity in the process. This can occur with any form of media however due to the public trust placed in news media and its non-fictional nature, depictions therein are more effective (Eveland Jr. & Shah, 2003; Scammell & Semetko, 2018). As a result of these media-perpetuated beliefs and biases, groups which are already disadvantaged in society, but which pose a perceived threat to the powerful will repeatedly be treated critically by news media, whilst those in power will be at a permanent advantage – reinforcing the cycle.

On a Broader Scale

Norms and Values – Social and Democratic

As a mirror to the unequal distribution of power across society, the application of many social norms and the extent to which they are expected to be upheld is also not equally relevant to different members of society (Griswold, 2012; McDonald & Crandall, 2015) with it instead being linked to their role and status within society. Individuals who are esteemed within society or who hold high social capital, such as priests or other majority religious order members in this context (Mac Curtain, 1993), will receive different reactions from their society when committing a social transgression or harm than a 'regular' individual breaching the same norm. This is highlighted through news entertainment media, wherein harms and perceived extreme transgressions receive notably diverging coverage dependant on the status of the perpetrating individual (Carrabine, 2008) as was seen through this study. This can also arise in entertainment media, wherein most harms and breaches of social norms are shown in a less

threatening manner when committed by an individual of high social status than a counterpart of low social status (Kort-Butler & Hartshorn, 2011; Greer, 2019), albeit entertainment media's depictions can be of a more complicated nature due to its purpose of entertainment.

Breaches of norms resulting in harm can also be purposely portrayed as less consequential or damaging where committed by members of powerful groups (Wyatt, 2012; Sternbeck, 2024); resulting in reduced backlash and possibly less official punishment (Curran, 2011). Additionally, common transgressions or harms of those with power in society are often portrayed by media as something which simply occurs at that status level and which can be resolved through use of power, money, relationships or otherwise (Newburn & McLaughlin, 2010; Greer, 2019). Whilst these portrayals can function as explanations, it can risk going further into excusing the actions due to the perpetrator's position – highlighting further issues around status and harm which is still present in news media today (Donges, 2016; Fenton, 2018). the news values which theoretically underpin production and motivations behind news media behaviours are similarly divisible dependant on the status of those involved in the news story.

Though some forms of varying production and decision-making dependant on perceived public importance has always been present (Greer, 2019), this rationale appears to be of more value in relation to those with power over society and the media than the public themselves; in theory, historical Ireland's reliance upon religion would result in publications featuring harms committed by religious actors being large, detailed pieces of writing – which they were not, particularly in comparison to the non-religious articles examined. a question is begged – to what extent is 'public' demand truly in the hands of the public? As it appears that far more of it is in the hands of the few than the many, with the same plausibly to be said for most of what has been discussed thus far. the impact of society's powerful, such as religious actors in this

context, upon news media may also pose a threat to the democratic norms and values of their given state (Proffitt, 2007; Pearson, 2013), given it is within a democratic or adjacent state.

Deliberate actions taken to influence news media and the results of said influence, such as abstaining from the whole truth, societal polarisation, manipulation relating to portrayals and facts, and unequal treatment of the article's focuses, can all be related to neglecting on infringing upon various democratic norms and values: media freedom, equality and transparency, the manipulation of public opinion, and even influencing or undermining the rule of law, amongst others (Garnham, 2004; Curran, 2011). the non-observance of such norms and values is naturally detrimental for an ordinary citizen who thereby cannot avail of the most developed democracy theoretically available to them (Butler, 2018; Scammell & Semetko, 2018), but may also result in a democratic backslide (ibid) wherein the quality of a democracy deteriorates due to these forms of transgressions on a wider scale, resulting in injurious ramifications for all but the upper echelons of society who were powerful to begin with. Though this was not the occurrence within the context of this research piece, the results of the research suggest it as a possibility under different political and economic circumstances due to the extent of the media bias and its effects on the state and its citizens.

Changeability, Reliance, and Trust 689

As is established, the influence of the powerful in society impacts news media, including the particular news values and objectives which are prioritised by news producers and by those with power over them. However, variations in the specific priorities and influential values may occur over time due to developments and fluctuations within society (Curran, 2002; Griswold, 2012) – such as social change, shifting of power dynamics or population growth and diversification. Focusing upon this research, the strength of religion within Ireland in the

studied period impacted the portrayals of both religious and non-religious individuals in relation to harm; yet as the grip of the Church grew looser whilst the population increased and literally diversified (Ó Corráin, 2018), this influence declined whilst shifting towards more specialised media publications with a distinctly religious intended audience (ibid). These changes, alongside media protection and portrayals often shifting and changing dependent on the actors with power over it and their interests (Zucker, 1978; Curran, 2002), attention is drawn to the changeability bordering on fickleness of news media.

Whilst individuals are protected where they have relation to those in power, news and other non-fiction media can be quick to exclude or denounce them or their actions once power and influence has changed hands (ibid). This is exacerbated in modern-day media regarding those with a high social status, as any public backlash or scandal can cause a complete media turnaround (Swanson & Mancini, 2007; Miller, 2015); though its presence is still notable in this researches' context when considering the media's harsh treatment of Church harms after its power over Ireland began to falter (Ó Corráin, 2018) in comparison to the treatment in this studied period. This changeability raises concerns on the true reliability of the media, not dissimilar to issues raised surrounding trust and objectivity as news media which is quick to change its tune or focus at the inclination of society's powerful parties is likely not as concerned with the quality nor legitimacy of its product for the public (Garnham, 2004; Huggins, 2018).

Rather, a news piece which is largely accurate but also achieves the aims of those in power would be a preferred option; which can again still be said for much of today's news media, as even with greater variety, news media producers predominantly place the achievement of influential, monetary or ideological aims above the goal of informing the public accurately and without bias (Feintuck, 2006; Scammell & Semetko, 2018). With this changeability in mind, the true value of entrusting the role of 'public watchdog' to news media, as is commonly done (Butler, 2018), encounters some dubiety. the significance of this role and its benefits are not

groundless (ibid), however due to the biases in portrayals, inaccuracies, conflicting interests, and overall influence taking precedence over clear and neutral information provision, an alternative approach may be more beneficial. Through use of news media as an indicator of current affairs and occurrences and to provide a base-level understanding thereof may be of more advantage for the public both through the recognition that powerful parties in society have an influence over these publications (Miller, 2015; Huggins, 2018) whilst also increasing information intake which would provide additional perspectives and allow individuals to come to their own conclusion on matter (Cummins Gauthier, 1999).

 Even where a small group of powerful parties may influence news media and thereby the majority of society, as was the case with the religious group in this context, gaining additional pieces of intelligence from various sources provides a more well-rounded photo of the incident or harm; and in the current day this is more feasible than ever due to informational availability, though this raises its own issues (ibid; Pearson, 2013). With acknowledgments of the detriments of reliance on a sole form of public watchdog (Islam, 2002), awareness of both the advantages and disadvantages of news media in this role, and a critical consumption of news, non-fiction and fiction media, members of the public could gain a more comprehensive perspective on society and its regulation, powerful actors therein, these actors' influence on media and beyond, and the overarching effects of this for each individual and wider society; resulting in individual and community decision-making reflective of this knowledge and critical assessment.

Conclusion

In essence, this chapter explored the implications of the study's findings in relation to powerful parties within society and their influence on news media. Whilst the focuses of this piece were

the Catholic and wider Christian religious institutions as parties with substantial sway over their respective societies and thereby the media (Miller, 2015), a more extensive understanding of 'powerful parties and actors' was employed throughout the discussion in order to most thoroughly discern and analyse the significance of the findings to society and those within it. Foremost, the inherent interrelation between media, society, power, and control is something which impacts media portrayals within society, and this extends to news media - as has been emerging from the beginning of the research piece (ibid; Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007), inclusive of individuals' presence and portrayals therein.

This relationship results in a perpetuation of societal inequalities through news coverage which promotes and accepts groups with power influence over society and over thereby news media, alongside simultaneous unfavourable coverage of those without it. Several points of substance arise from this: the presence of biases, prejudices and disproportionate application of social norms frequently occurring in news media, corresponding to issues of commonly perceived objectivity and consistency, with broader effects in relation to labelling and democratic norms and values; collectively intensifying the cyclicality of social control and inequality. In the context of the same or comparable harms, contradicting news portrayals is indicative of a larger social issue and as such, perhaps the way news media is approached and understood ought to change. Rather than an assumption that news publications and broadcasts are static truth-machines, recognition that they are beneficial yet biased would allow for improved critical consumption, comprehension and thinking about the issues and individuals involved.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

This research project set out with the aim to analyse Irish news publications to analyse whether there was differential treatment of Catholic and Christian order members by news media in comparison to non-order members, as an examination of the overt and covert influences that powerful parties in society may have over media.

The literature review first laid out the foundation for the project, through examination of the various theoretical and contextual underpinnings thereof. the relationship between media, state, society, harm and religion was explored to gain an understanding of their connection and the effects of this relationship on news media - specifically its portrayals of victims, perpetrators and religious orders as a powerful group within society. Ireland's history and relationship with religion was given consideration as Christian and Catholic orders are not only powerful in relation to their substantial following but also due to the way in which they are interwoven through Ireland's history and statehood. Based upon this review, it was established that both fiction and non-fiction media portrayals of groups within society and their experiences vary dependant on their role, power and status, with journalistic portrayals also having reflective societal effects - raising queries on both how powerful religious groups may influence portrayals and how this may in turn impact the public.

With a multi-part research question, the Irish Newspaper Archive was utilised to conduct secondary research through an analysis of one hundred news articles; half featuring a member of a religious order as a perpetrator and half which did not - allowing for the comparative aspect of the research to be thoroughly applied. the analysis took into consideration any variations or patterns of substance which would later be reviewed as possible codes to be assorted into the various themes within the findings. the analyses used, alongside alterations to include Northern Ireland's news media and Irish publications with a focus on harms committed internationally

by religious order members, allowed for a greater and more diverse dataset which in turn resulted in results with greater applicability and possible re-creatability. the limitations of the study and methods used are primarily related to data availability, timing of the articles used, and the non-random sampling thereof. Whilst the former two are related to the specific nature of this project and could vary if conducted in a different timeframe or context, the latter is arguably an unfortunate necessity in order to obtain a varied dataset where both groups of articles were comparable in their contents.

The findings of the research were consistent with the foundation set out by the literature review - that powerful groups within society are portrayed differently in news media than ordinary individuals. Through the comparison of both article groups, several significant differences were found where the crime or harms were comparable. These included the language, wording and tone used, specific information and details included or excluded, and recognition or acknowledgement of the harm, biases, and blame related thereto. Within the examined articles, members of Catholic and Christian orders and their associated organisations were treated more leniently by journalists with overall more neutral to positive portrayals, whilst their civilian counterparts were subject to portrayals ranging from direct and sharp to negative and borderline-hostile. Victims, and other individuals involved, also received differing treatment by journalists, most likely affected by the status of the perpetrator given the many additional effects of a powerful perpetrator in the context of victimisation. the subsequent analysis of these findings took into consideration of their impacts for those directly involved as well as implications on a broader scale - for media, society, even democracy as a whole. With the establishment that power and social capital do affect media portrayals related to crime and harm, as occurred in the examined context, the heavily intertwined relationship of society, state, power, media and harm was once again examined but with the addition of this project's exploration.

With the research question of whether there was a disparity answered affirmatively in this context, the resulting impacts and insights highlighted the significance of this research, as the wide-spanning and consequential nature thereof is something which will likely only continue to grow. Whilst this research project considered these implications and impacts as they occurred in Ireland's context in the fifty-year examined period, the role of media is growing rapidly in society alongside increasingly disparate power dynamics and growing social and economic inequalities. Resultingly, the influence of powerful parties on the news media and beyond will grow alongside it (Duca & Saving, 2017), exacerbating existing issues attributable to this influence and likely raising new concerns too. With a better understanding of this form of influence and its effects, news media can be approached critically rather than with a presumption of objectivity; allowing for news to serve a function within society but minimising the societal effects of its public promotion of the desires of powerful groups and actors.

Additional research in this area could be of benefit in examining how this may arise differently in other cultures and contexts or if it arises at all, and look to the implications of this in the sphere of media, harm and society. Moreover, with increased research and understanding of these effects, not only could this knowledge be relayed to the public for its informative and decision-making uses, but also for its further effects of this on the democratic process and management of society - as awareness is the first step required for change and avoidance of history repetition. Proceeding into a media-filled age, the influence of powerful groups in society thereupon must be understood before it can be appropriately approached and combatted, and this research piece has sought to expand this understanding through examination of how members of Catholic and Christian orders, as powerful actors, were portrayed by news media in comparison to 'regular' individuals within society.

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