

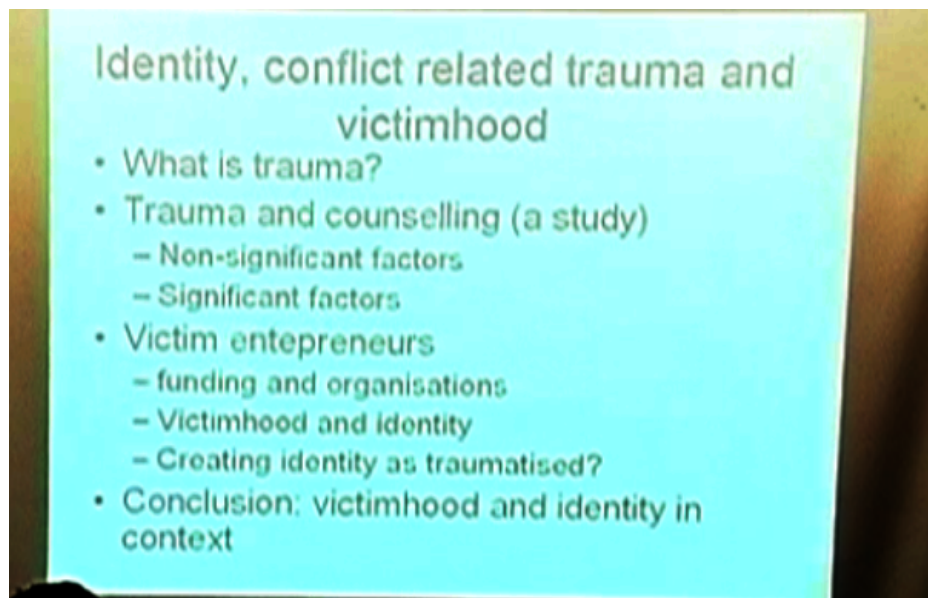
Chris Gilligan ½ 2005

(The video starts off with Chris Gilligan sitting down in front of a screen showing his presentation. He then gives his permission to be videotaped. Chris is then introduced by someone else as a Sociologist. A quick overview of one of the lecturer's papers is given and then the floor is given to Chris at 2:30)

2:40 Chris starts off by saying that he'll do something a little different than what his introduction told him he would do. He asks the audience if they have read his paper on identity. The answer back is a maybe.

3:00 Chris: "What I'm going to do is I'm going to look at the issue of trauma in the context of peace process and have some discussion about identity in the context of that. I want to keep it fairly brief, what I have to say, because I find it more useful if we have discussion." He says that if he went over a topic too quickly, than the audience should raise questions about that at the end. He then begins his presentation.

3:50 Chris flips to the next slide titled: Identity, conflict related trauma and victimhood.



"What I'm going to look at really is what is trauma, a study that I was involved in which looked at children and counseling referrals for trauma, and then look at what I refer to as victim entrepreneurs. The issue of trauma is something that has come to the fore in the context of the peace process. After the ceasefires in 1994, there was a growth in the people referred for post-traumatic stress disorder and trauma related mental health problems. Which, on the surface, is a bit odd, and I'll explain why when I just point out what trauma is." He then changes to a slide revealing the definition of trauma and PTSD.

4:55 Chris: "This is the American Psychiatric Association's diagnostic and statistical model

and the definition of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. In order for someone to be diagnosed as suffering from PTSD, they have to fulfill four criteria. The first thing is they have to have witnessed or experienced a traumatic event.

The second thing is they have to display a range of symptoms that fall within one of three groups: intrusion, constriction and avoidance, and increased arousal." Intrusions could be in the form of nightmares, constriction and avoidance would be when people did not want to go past the place where they witnessed the event, and increased arousal would include irritability, excitement, lack of concentration, and a few other things. "And all of those things are conceived as being painful memories of the traumatic event.

The third symptom is the numbing of responsiveness to the external world so dissociation or alienation from the external world.

And the fourth symptom or the fourth criteria for a diagnosis is that the symptoms must not have been present before the traumatic event. So symptoms 2 and 3 must not have happened before the event. Those symptoms that are in categories 2 and 3 are symptoms of other psychiatric disorders. So someone could be diagnosed as having a nervous disorder of some kind, but not PTSD. In order for someone to be diagnosed as someone who is suffering from PTSD, they must have witnessed a traumatic event and the symptoms that they display must come after the traumatic event. So a link is made there between the traumatic event and the symptoms. Also the ideas that it is the event which creates the trauma.

7:25 Chris: "Now in the literature on trauma, it's generally acknowledged that traumatic symptoms tend to recede as people are removed from the source of stress. So you can imagine, if someone is involved in a riot, they might display symptoms of stress but if they move away from the area where the riots take place then those symptoms will recede. The notion that time is a great healer captures that when you are removed from the source of stress, then symptoms will recede. So for that reason, it's odd that you find a growth in referrals for trauma since the ceasefires. You would expect that when the conflict recedes, that you would have a decline in the number of people referred for trauma. But it seems to be the contrary then the case."

8:25 The presenter then flips to the next slide. "One of the reasons why this is the case is, I would argue, is that trauma is not a medical condition. It's not a virus that people catch, trauma is an existential illness. It's something to do with how people understand the world and the meaning they give to their experiences. So for example, there's an interesting study which looked at retired RUC officers who were in the critical range for PTSD. And the things that some of them were talking about were how in the context of the peace process, the actions which they carried out in the past didn't have any meaning. There were asking what it was all for, they were asking what they were fighting for. Their actions in the past, for them, they were defending their Queen and country or upholding the rule of law. And now the people they were defending the country against were in government." He then uses Martin McGuinness, the education minister, and Gerry Adams, another minister, as examples.

"So for them, it's not that the events in the past have created a trauma. It's a context of the peace process means that the way that they understand their experiences in the past has changed. And the meaning that they give to their experience in the past has changed. So that's

why there has been a growth in referrals for trauma or at least part of the reason there has been a growth in referrals for traumas.”

10:25 Chris: “In work that I’ve done myself, you can find evidence for saying that trauma is something which is mediated by the meaning the people give to events. Myself and a colleague from the psychology department did a study of children from primary school that lasted for an extended period of time.” These children suffered from harassment and intimidation that would not go away. Half of the children at the school received counseling while the other half didn’t. “So it was interesting to see if there was a distinction between the two groups and what that distinction could be. “We would have expected, given the definition of PTSD, we would expect that the exposure to the event , the event itself, the causal factor according to the diagnosis, would be a key factor in whether the children received counseling or not. And we would have expected that mental health would be another key factor so the child’s or parent’s state of mind is referred for counseling.

12:00 Chris: “We looked at a range of different things that might differentiate between the two groups and find, out of the range of things, the ones that were not significant at all was the child’s exposure to intimidation. Either at the school or exposure surrounding that because many people lived in interface areas. Or their experience of violence at some other time. None of those were statistically significant differentiations between two groups.

12:40 An audience member asks for something to be cleared up, but his voice is too difficult to hear. “The closer you get to one, the less significant it is. And what we were looking for, as a test of significance, is somethings that’s approaching 05 or 01.” Chris is pointing to the screen where a graph or a chart is located. Unfortunately the camera’s zoom and Chris himself are blocking the sight of the camera’s view. He then explains even more about the chart and its data, but since it is unable to be seen, any information about it would be impractical. But he finishes talking about the data on the chart and starts talking about what it means. “If someone had been exposed a lot to the intimidation, as opposed to someone who hadn’t been exposed very much to intimidation, you couldn’t tell if one had received counseling or not. A parent’s state of mind couldn’t predict whether someone had been referred for counseling or not.”

13:50 Chris: “What we did find is the three most significant factors.” The first one would be the perception of the community divide, which would be the difference the parents’ thought existed between Catholics and Protestants. “Those who had a perception about a large divide between two communities were much more likely to refer their children for counseling.”

The second significant factor would be attitudes towards counseling. “Although, we don’t know whether that’s retrospective because of studies done retrospectively. So we don’t know whether those attitudes existed before and that was why the parents referred their child for counseling. Or whether it’s based on their experience of the child receiving counseling which leads to a positive attitude towards it.”

The third significant factor is the perception of political progress. So two of the three most significant factors are political or “ways in which people are interpreting our understanding the events which take place. Those were the things that were best able to predict: whether

children should receive counseling or not.” He says that neither exposure to the event nor mental health were easily able to predict.

15:30 Chris: “The parents rating of a child’s mental health was significant, but not as significant as some of these other political ones.” Chris has just changed to another slide. “So I’ve just raised that to support the point that I’ve made about mental health and peoples attitudes towards counseling and whether people receive counseling depends on the framework of meaning people gave to those events. So I’d say you can’t reduce trauma to a mental health issue. Presenting it as a mental health issue reduces the complexity of the politics of the situation and presents it as if it has something to do with the individual mind and how the individual mind responds to positive events. Rather than the way in which people interpret things in a wider socio-political context.”

16:40 Chris: “Another reason why there has been a growth in referrals for counseling is because there are more counselors.” He mentions that he knows an expert in the field who said “The best predictor of the rate of counseling in Northern Ireland is the number of counselors there are.” Chris believes that the statement is a little bit cynical, but there is something to that.

“One of the things that has happened with the peace agreement is that there has been a rapid expansion of money for victims. And a higher proportion of that money has gone for counseling and not other aspects of victims work.” He says there was a study done about the EU peace funding found that out of 55 groups that were funded under the victims category, only $\frac{1}{3}$ of the groups existed prior to the Bloomfield Report (the first report done on victims). “So once government started to look at the issue of victims, victims groups started to appear, which is why I refer to them as victim entrepreneurs.

It’s groups that are coming out and developing in response to policy. The report that only $\frac{1}{4}$ of the groups existed prior to the ceasefires and many of them weren’t necessarily working with victims.” He mentions a group that works on victims, but worked on issues such as poverty before the ceasefire. “The report found that three of the groups didn’t even exist prior to the announcement that there was going to be funding from the EU.” This suggests that the groups were set up just to gain the funding.

“This doesn’t necessarily mean a cynical motive. One of the things that happens with voluntary groups is you have to do what the funders want or you have to put up a proposal for what the funders want. It may mean that if you have a literacy program in an area where a lot of people have suffered as consequence of the Troubles, you present your literacy program as victims work. And then you get the funding and you continue to do a literacy program.”

19:55 Chris then ties this in with identity. He says that there was a British sociologist who wrote a book on the culture of fear. The author wrote “In the past, people who suffered from a particular violent incident did not identify themselves as victims. This was not because they did not suffer or because they did not carry their scars with them for the rest of their lives, but because the experience was not seen as identity defining. In contrast today, there’s a belief that victimhood affects us for life. It becomes a crucial element of our identity.” Chris says that the author is suggesting that the things that happen to us aren’t necessarily thought of as significant. “It’s in a broader, social, and cultural context we decide what things have happened

to us are significant. He suggests that there's a growth of the victim culture and an increasing proclivity for people to identify themselves as being victims."

21:35 Chris: "One of the reasons why I think there's a growth in referrals for counseling is that people are reinterpreting their experience in a way which means they're starting to adopt identities as victims." He says there are many people who do this and a number who resist this, but there is a trend. "One of the things that is happening is that victim entrepreneurs are encouraging people to reinterpret their experiences." He then reads a quote from a family that experienced a rough time dealing with the Troubles after it had happened.

One of the things that's happening with that program is that people are encouraged to reflect on their past experiences and interpret them in the contexts of victimhood and trauma. In the past, they would give a political meaning to their experiences. They're being encouraged to understand them in terms of individual and mental health and how it impacts their mental health as individuals.

23:10 Chris: "Just to conclude, one of the things I've been arguing is that while there are many things that are specific to Northern Ireland, there are many aspects of Northern Irish society that make it different from the Republic of Ireland and from the rest of the UK." Many trends seen in Northern Ireland are also being seen by the rest of the world, NI is not immune. "One of the things that is happening broadly is what is known as a therapy culture and a culture of victimhood. So that's one of the things that's happening more broadly, but it has particular manifestations in Northern Ireland. One of the things that's happening there is that people tend to become more individualized. The way that we relate to our experiences is by individuals rather than members of groups. And that is one of the reasons why the notion of victimhood has more purchase today."

24:35 Chris then exclaims that he is finished with his part and is ready to open up a discussion.

24:40 Audience member: "One of the things we've run into a lot in Derry is that storytelling is very much connected to this and it's almost that people need to get their story out. There's kind of a feeling of suppressed memories and that sort of thing. But the other part of it is that there are people who have had these tremendous personal losses of loved ones. But I think the theme is, how do you get to a point where people are willing to forgive the other side?" The audience member then mentions something about people getting to see themselves as victims and wonders how that element is found in the healing process.

26:00 Chris expresses that it is difficult to know where to start. "The storytelling is another example of some of the thing I've been talking about." He then says that he has asked himself many questions about this, one of them being why there has been an increase of storytelling in the public domain. People have always been telling stories namely Ireland which has had a tradition of oral storytelling. So there is nothing new in that people have always been telling stories, but the purpose of storytelling has changed. Now the context of the stories have changed to dealing and relating with the past.

"If your family member was an active Republican who was shot by the security forces,

then there was a community of support there. But if your family member was categorized as an informer and was shot by Republicans, then that's something that was very difficult to talk about. It's only with the peace process that space has opened up for people in those circumstances to start to raise questions and to start to look for avenues to tell their stories." So now everyone is open and able to share their stories, regardless of which side they were on.

"But then there's a question about which stories are told and which stories aren't told." Chris mentions that many students from Derry are able to tell very humorous stories about their times, even if they could be considered traumatic. He feels that these stories are often kept from the public because the main focus in the new context of storytelling is to share tragic instead of enlightening or positive stories. "For some people, the purpose of storytelling is for healing, for some people the reason why they want to tell their stories is for justice. They want people prosecuted, they want the state to admit culpability." So storytelling has continued, but it has changed its context to a more healing and recovering theme which still limits many stories from being told.

31:40 Question: "What I've noticed since I've been in Derry is that there seems to be a lot of media attention or people living with the fact that they are a part of this conflict. People come here to study their conflict. If there was not so much media coverage and not so much emphasis on their conflict, do you think a resolution would be found faster?"

32:30 Chris: "I think to understand the conflict and the reason why there is conflict, you need to look at political, economical, and social issues instead of individual psychology. Lots of people are struck when they come to Northern Ireland by how friendly people are. I think in terms of interpersonal relations between people, Northern Ireland is a friendly place." He mentions a colleague of his who asked why people in Northern Ireland can be so friendly and so sectarian at the same time. Chris answers this by saying that "you can't really understand why there has been a conflict or why particular individuals have engaged in the things that they have in terms of personality." He states that there are many friendly murderers, so looking at an individual will not help one understand a conflict. "So as long as there are unresolved political issues then there will continue to be tensions." He then says that Northern Ireland is not a violent nation anymore, and that the audience member's question may be outdated.

35:15 An audience member is trying to understand the points of view between Chris and Ed Cairnes. "He (Ed Cairnes) emphasized not that these weren't important but that most of these factors had been solved." She gives an example that the problem with wages had been solved, but Ed Cairnes believed that there was still a conflict. "I agree with with you. The violence isn't that large, but the thing is the acts of violence aren't usually acts of an individual, but rather of violent acts of a group. How do you feel about that? Do you agree that most of those problems have been solved and, if so, why do you still have such an emphasis on those factors as opposed to social identity and psychology?"

36:55 Chris recognizes that it was a good question and takes a little time to answer it. "I'm not sure to what extent I disagree with Ed Cairnes now. But if you look at the work he draws on (some project that is too difficult to hear) and says 'there are these economic, political, social

factors, BUT...'. Beyond those there are the psychological and the group identity. I think that's a very big but. As a sociologist, I would ask where these ideas came from, where does group identity come from? It is those economic, social, and political factors that structure the Northern Irish society and create those groups. The thing that's more difficult is to try and understand is why there's the persistence of Nationalist and Unionist or Catholic and Protestant distinction in a context where it doesn't seem as though there's a basis for that anymore. So if you look at discrimination and housing, that's largely been dealt with."

Chris brings up someone named Bernadette McAliskey who said something like "let's look at the civil rights demands. One man one vote, we did even that because women are able to vote on an equal basis as well. We look at equal access to jobs and housing, we've done that." So, many problems appear to be solved. "So what does that leave? I think that's why psychological explanations have an appeal, because that seems to be all there is that's left. I still don't think you can understand it just by looking at psychological explanations."

"The peace process has been able to advance not by transcending the distinction between Nationalist and Unionist or Catholic and Protestant, but by preserving those. So look at the assembly. Instead of it being an assembly where parties come in and form a coalition based on whoever can work together, it is set up where all of the members of the assembly have to designate themselves as Nationalist, Unionist, or other. So they're coming in and saying 'we represent the Nationalist community.' Not 'we represent people in Northern Ireland,' but rather 'we represent the Nationalist community.' And the people who come across this represent the others. So the way in which the agreement takes place is it assumes that Northern Ireland is a polarized society where there is nothing anyone can do. A lot of things then get interpreted within that context."

He then brings up an example of unemployment. There is fair employment legislation, but Catholics are still twice as likely to be unemployed than Protestants are. Chris says that if you look at that, you would say that discrimination is present. "To some extent there is, to some extent there isn't. There isn't in a sense of direct discrimination anymore." He gives an example where an employer doesn't hire a worker on the sole reason that the worker is of a different religion than the employer. "But you do have structural discrimination in that most of the infrastructure jobs are in Belfast and the surrounding areas." Chris then talks about how other places in Northern Ireland are poor and less developed than Belfast. These places house more Catholics than Protestants, so there is a way that one group could find work over another with discrimination taking place. Chris is actually satisfied with this type of problem because since it has to do with infrastructure, it can be fixed more easily. But people don't look at the difference in the same light. People just look at the difference in unemployment for the two groups and immediately decide that discrimination is the problem.

44:20 Question: "In the generation that's growing up after the ceasefires where there has been much less violence, do you think that the victimhood that the communities have put on themselves will continue or will decrease as fewer violent acts occur? Or will it continue through storytelling and through wall murals and things like that where things that may not have occurred in the recent past are brought back to the light?"

45:00 Chris: "You would think that as people are growing up with less experience of the

Troubles and of violence that they wouldn't identify as victims because nothing traumatic has occurred in their own, personal experience that they can identify with. And I think, to some extent, that will be the case. They're all seducing to be trends towards young people actually identifying more as victims than the older generations." He mentions a study done by some psychologists on Bloody Sunday. The study looked at the stress amongst families and family members who weren't born when Bloody Sunday happened. The study found that these people displayed a much higher stress level than the broad population. "Personally I think you can explain that by the stresses of the tribunals and the circumstances of that where people have to revisit the past. The pressures of families preparing for trial and being cross-examined has an effect on them." He explains that these types of circumstances cause the high stress levels rather than the stress being passed on genetically.

"But there is also something about storytelling and passing on notions of victimhood as an identity in the way that people understand themselves. And there is a tendency towards that. There also seems to be a growth in other social ailments that individuals experience and display like self-harm, bulimia, and anorexia. There seems to be a growth amongst those things amongst young people. Some people interpret that in the context of the peace process but I think that although many of the explanations that are given for it, even people themselves, may be related to the conflict. I think if you look at it from a broader context, there's a growth in that kind of phenomenon. It is to do with broader anxieties about what it means to live in the world today or what is the purpose of society today." He says that this not just occurring in Northern Ireland, but given the history of the conflict in that nation, an increase in ailments are found there.

49:05 An audience member declares that she has a question about an article that she has read. "I know you talked about one of the problems in Derry in that the conflict is taken almost as a pre-existing condition. How would you go about changing an identity that doesn't work? Because it seems that most times identities are formed in comparing things or in opposition to another group.

49:40 Chris: "I'm not going to answer your question, but I'm going to tell you why I'm not going to answer your question. One of the things I was trying to do in that paper was to show a number of ways that the term 'identity' is understood. So there are people that understand identity as being something inherent, there are people who have a more contextual understanding of identity. There have been studies that look at things like that. Studies that have looked at national identity in Northern Ireland find fairly consistently a proportion of the population that identify themselves as Irish, a proportion of the population that identify themselves as British. You would think that that's something that's inherent where people are strongly identified in that way. There's other studies that ask people the question 'how do you think of yourself?' And when that question is asked in a more open-ended way, you find that national identities come down the list somewhere. It (primary choices) tend to be more choices like mother or something to do with locality. So the way that people identify themselves to the questions 'who are you?' and 'what are you?' depend a lot on the context."

Chris says that every so often he would teach American students who never realized how American they were until they left their country. "It's true that there are lots of things that

you take for granted. Put yourself in a different context, and you realize how much you do take for granted. When you contrast yourself with other people, you realize how much of what you thought made you different from other people in the circumstances where you normally have it. You probably have a lot more in common that you actually thought.”

“The question about identity is why are people more interested in identity now? We need that notion of how you think of yourself. If you don’t have a sense of yourself, then you’re going to be a completely different person when you wake up tomorrow morning than you were today, unless you have some sense of continuity. And that is a common symptom of madness: not having a continuity of self. So that’s something that we all need, and then identity is something that locates us or enables us to locate ourselves in relation to what’s happening around us. And since that’s something that is inherent to our conscious beings, the question to me is ‘why are people talking about this?’ And if you look at it, it’s not until the middle of the 20th century that people start to ask questions about identity and what identity is. And it comes initially to discussions about identity crisis and a breakdown of continuity of personality. And I think that’s one of the reasons why people are so interested in identity today. It seems to be quite difficult to find, establish, or to hold on to an identity. And that leads to paradoxical responses.”

“One response is for people to try to hold on much more tightly to an identity. So fundamentalism, whether it’s Christian, Islamic, Irish, Unionist fundamentalism, is one way of trying to deal with that. Saying ‘there isn’t a problem because I am really sure of what I am and what I believe.’ Another way to deal with it is to go with the flow and not really care about it so much. And it relates us back to the question about trauma and victim identity. Another way people deal with this is by taking on an identity. One which is a very alienated one where I’m not really sure where I stand in the world. And I think that when you start to look at it like that, it suggests that the reason why there’s a concern about identity today, is because there is a breakdown in the sense of what humans can achieve. There’s a retreat from the sense that humans can act, impact, and change the world. And I think that’s tied up in many complex ways with the breakdown of political ideologies, the decline of collective organizations, so people do experience a world much more as individuals.”

“So I haven’t answered your question, but I think the question really is ‘why is there an interest in identity today?’ And that, I think, is something that psychologists aren’t really well placed to ask or often don’t ask. Their interest is in the content of identity or ‘what kind of identities do people have?’, not ‘why would we be interested in identity?’

55:50 Question: “I was wondering if you could talk a little bit more about the role employment opportunities plays concerning identity. And where the Troubles stay now and where you think they may be heading?” She also asked for Chris to elaborate on the employment opportunities between young and old people. She includes in this question a few conversations she had with a few people about the subject. The person asking the questions then goes back and asks overall “What do you think is going to happen in terms of employment opportunities? Is it not as big a deal as I’m worrying that it might be?”

57:05 Chris: “In terms of employment opportunities, the Northern Ireland economy is probably healthier than it has been since the mid ‘70’s. Unemployment is at about 6% which is historically low in Northern Ireland.” He mentions that the youth are more likely to be unemployed because

they are making transitions into the workforce. They're more likely to have casual, temporary, and part-time work. Chris says that in the UK, "there has been a growth in third-level education, which seems to act as a kind of buffer for the unemployed youth."

58:20 Another audience member: "But not in college?"

58:25 Chris explains that there are technology schools and universities available as well as a regular high schools. He said the British government is trying to get 50% of everyone who graduates school to pursue further education, whether that be at a university or somewhere else. "And that seems to act as a buffer for the transition into the labor market. But a lot of young people are full-time students and part-time unemployed." The youth needs some way to pay for their education.

Chris then addresses one of audience member's questions where a taxi driver told her that if young people had more work, then a bigger impact would be made. He believes that the driver is right. Chris explains that if people aren't working, then they would be doing something else like drinking, drugs, or getting involved in a paramilitary.

1:00:45 Someone in the audience suggests a quick break, and the tape ends.