



Conduct Unbecoming

The Institutional Church & Media Coverage of Sex Scandals

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The Historical Dimension

- The Issues
 - The Eamonn Casey Affair
 - Child sexual abuse by priests and brothers
 - Religious-run schools institutions
- The Questions
 - The beneficial effect of such revelations
 - The damaging effect of sensational or exaggerated coverage.



Irish Media Generally

- The Irish people are well served, in the main, by the high quality of journalism found in radio, television, and the broadsheet newspapers.
- These media are seen as reliable and trustworthy; their coverage of events is a measure of the significance and relative importance of those events to Irish society.
- The public, rightly, has an expectation that the media will report fairly and accurately on what is occurring that affects society.



Media Users and Consumers

- Consumers use media content to exercise a surveillance function on society, relying on the media to inform them about those issues of import, of which the public might otherwise remain ignorant. Such surveillance, however, comes at a price.
- As Cohen puts it *'the press...may not be successful in telling people what to think but it is stunningly successful in telling them what to think about.'*



The Offaly Topic

- *'For months, long-suffering Irish newspapers readers and radio and television listeners have been force-fed ... The manner in which public money, paid in license fees to RTE, has been used to attack and denigrate the majority church in this country over the past year has been nothing short of scandalous. ... The selective use of a small number of child abuse cases involving clergy has, for months provided a constant flow of headlines and opportunities for seeking to discredit anything Catholic.'*



The Gay Byrne Show

- *'I don't believe now that Brendan Commiskey has gone to America because of stress, nor do I believe he's gone because of alcohol, nor do I believe he's gone because of his alleged protection of a priest who's up on charges. ... I think there is something else, and I think it is something dreadful, and I'm almost afraid of what it might be. That's my personal reaction.'*



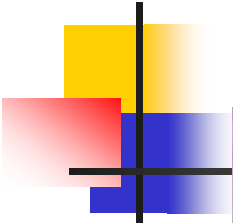
Kevin Myers

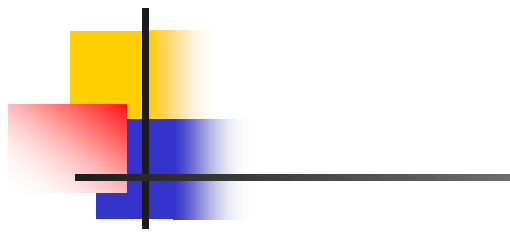
- *'I recently wrote a column in defense of Nora Wall ... My column attracted a large private correspondence, but only one letter to the Editor. I am well acquainted with the phenomenon in this country that if people want to say something vituperatively abusive and personally offensive they have no problem in doing so publicly. ... But I have never experienced such vast disparity between private and public responses as on the Nora Wall affair, which could so easily have turned into one of the greatest injustices in Irish jurisprudential history.'*

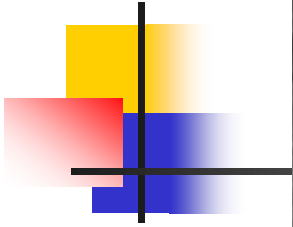
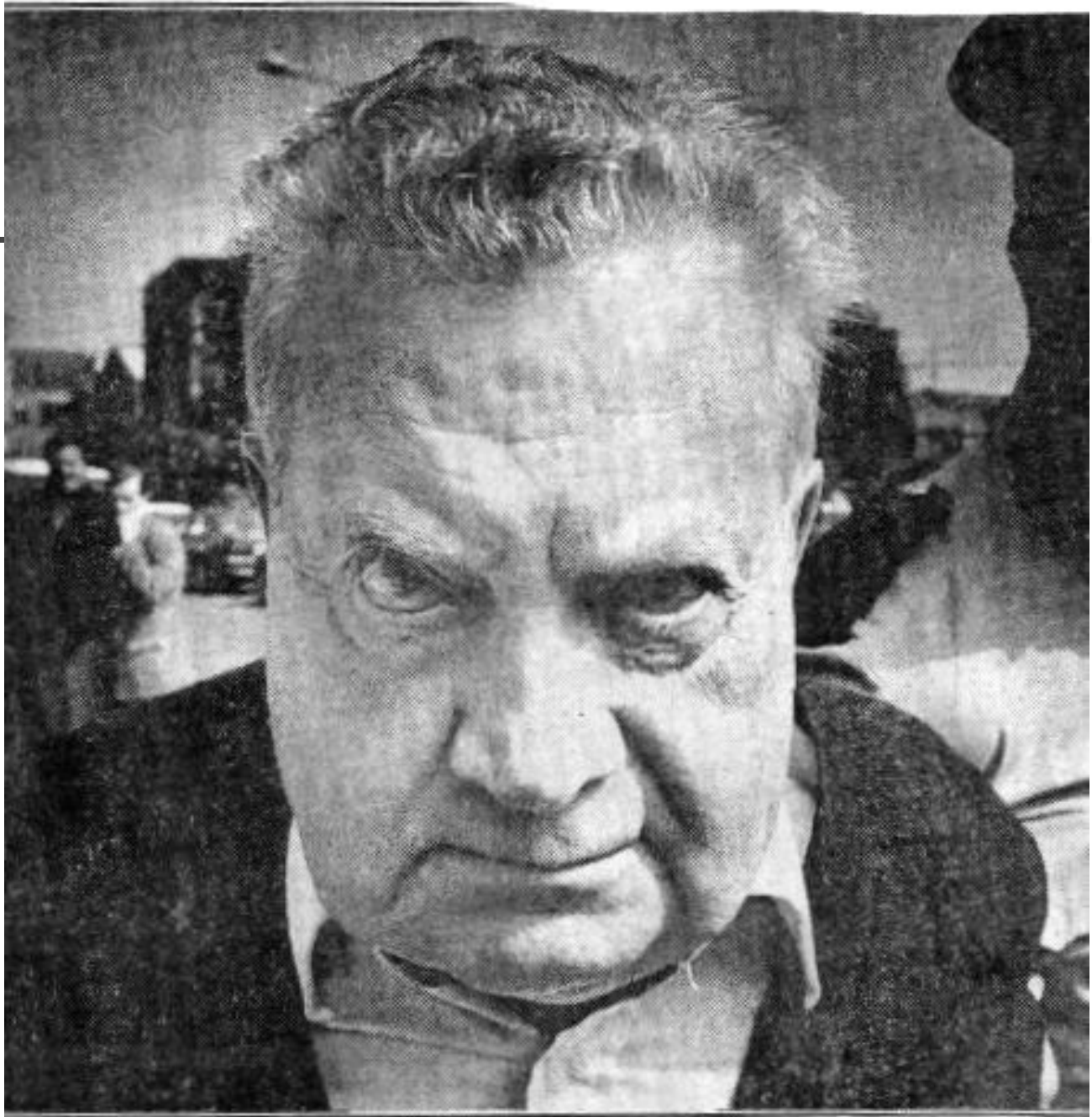


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- *... What is going on? Are we nowadays afraid to be seen defending the men and women of the cloth? Are we happy to see them corralled into the one great cattle-pen marked "abusers", and so to dismiss them from our history as no more than perverts and deviants? ... And for how much longer will tabloid headlines demonise human beings into caricatures of witchdom, the easier, no doubt, to burn them at the stake?'*









Smyth's Photo

- The photograph of this dysfunctional, sick, and criminal individual is used to illustrate stories with which he has no connection.
- His image serves to associate extreme negativity with those people of the Church about whom the story is being told, because he was a priest.
- The Sunday World took this use to new heights with two headlines after the (subsequently-false) conviction of Nora Wall, a former Mercy sister: '*Rape nun's abuse pact with Smyth*', and, '*Victims claim evil Wall provided kids to the paedo priest.*'
- It is this kind of journalism that drives some of the anger felt within the Church, a reaction to all clergy being tarred with the same brush.



The Tabloid Press

- There will always be a tabloid press, which delights in prurience and has little sensitivity for privacy or fairness.
- Typical of such coverage is an article in The Star with the headline 'Perverts swap sick tales in prison.' The article is accompanied by a named photograph of a priest serving a sentence for abuse.
- In the body of the article, 5 paragraphs in, the reader is told that the priest in question is not one of those trumpeted in the headline.



Introduction to Research

- This next section deals with the issue of media reporting of clergy misconduct in Ireland and America.
- It draws on communications theory and uses a basic content analysis to examine the reporting in the two newspapers.
- It is a work in progress and is based on previously published research.



Framing

- How stories are framed in the press is a key issue.
- Stories are often framed ideologically, whether intentionally or otherwise.
- Such framing affects audience interpretations.



Labeling

- Labeling in media reports.
- Typically used to identify minorities.
- A worldwide phenomenon.
- Different groups involved, normally ethnic minorities.



US Experience

- A contentious issue
- Different forms
 - ‘black on black’ violence
 - a link between race and crime
 - racism in social institutions
 - relationships between ethnic groups
 - sexual minorities



Deviance and Minorities

- Deviance is commonly indicated in media reports about minorities.
- It reflects the values of the power elite in a society.
- It tends to indicate which groups are regarded as legitimate.

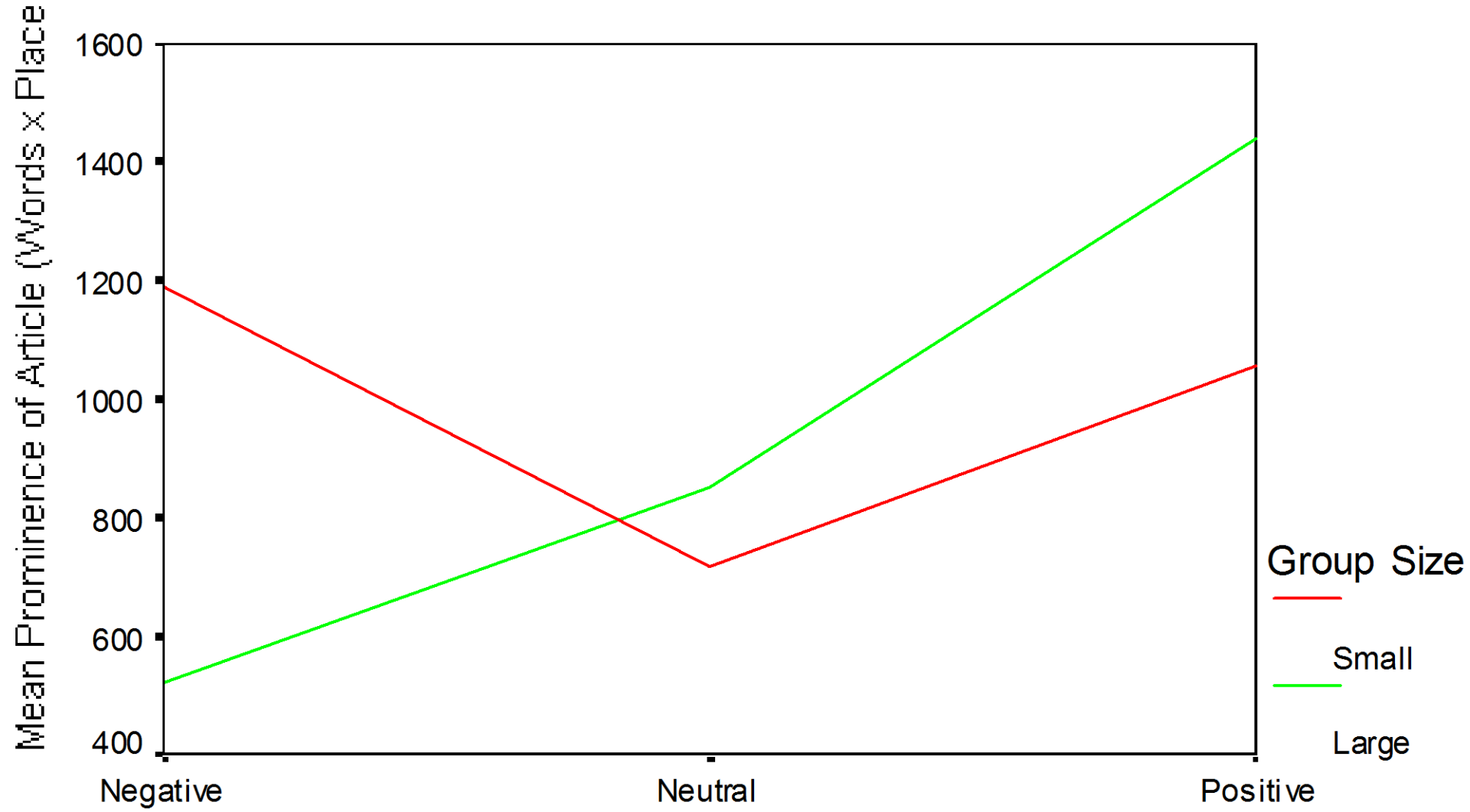


Religion & Deviance

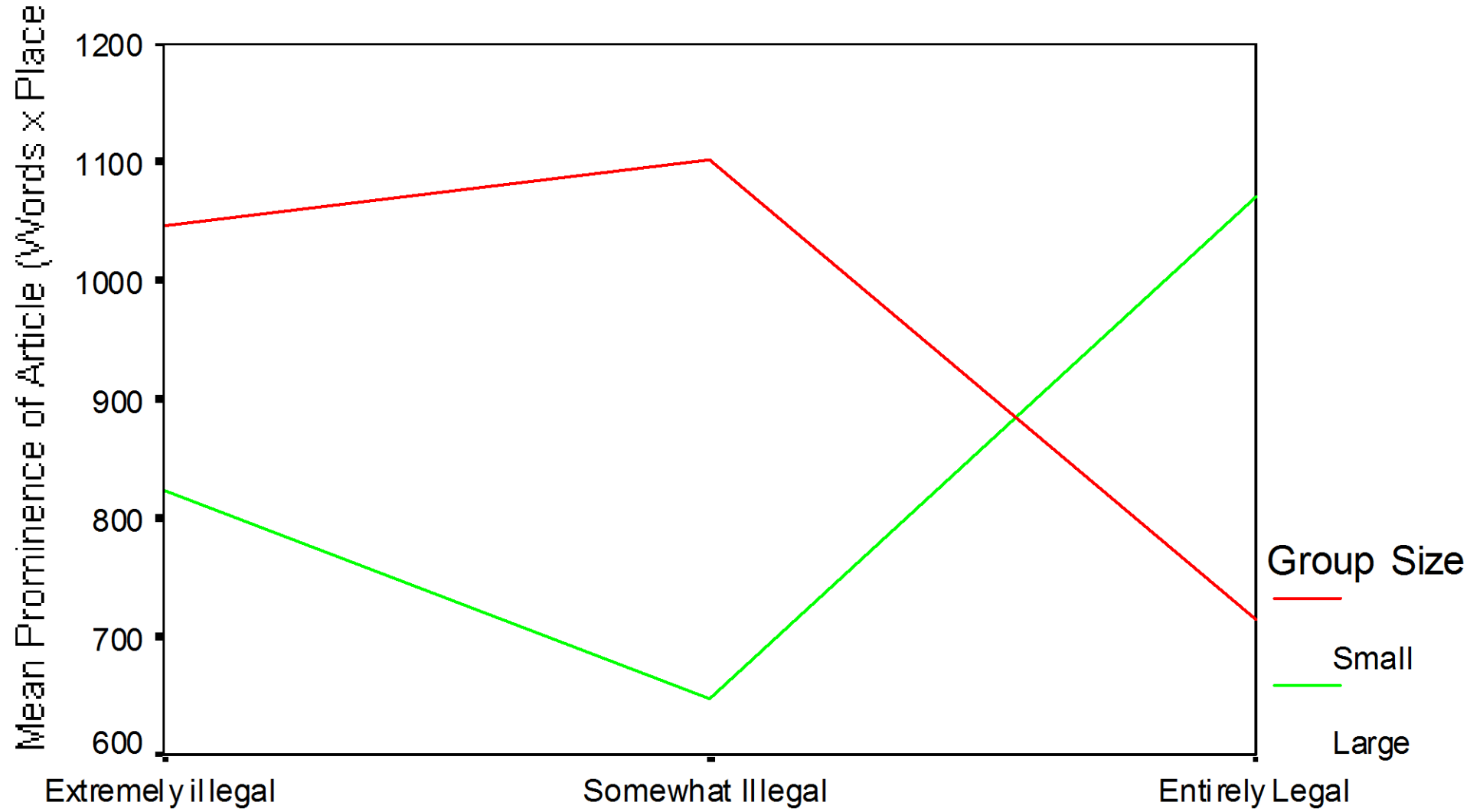
- Religious affiliation is increasingly used as an identifier in news reports.
- Such religious labeling can be pejorative
 - fundamentalist cleric,
 - right-wing Christian,
 - Moslem fanatic,
 - Jewish extremist.
- Previous study on religious groups in the US.



Prominence & Group Size



Legality & Group Size





Media Focus on Deviance

- The definition of newsworthiness
- Deviant behavior *per se*
- Journalistic use of deviance in reporting



Deviance & Agenda Setting

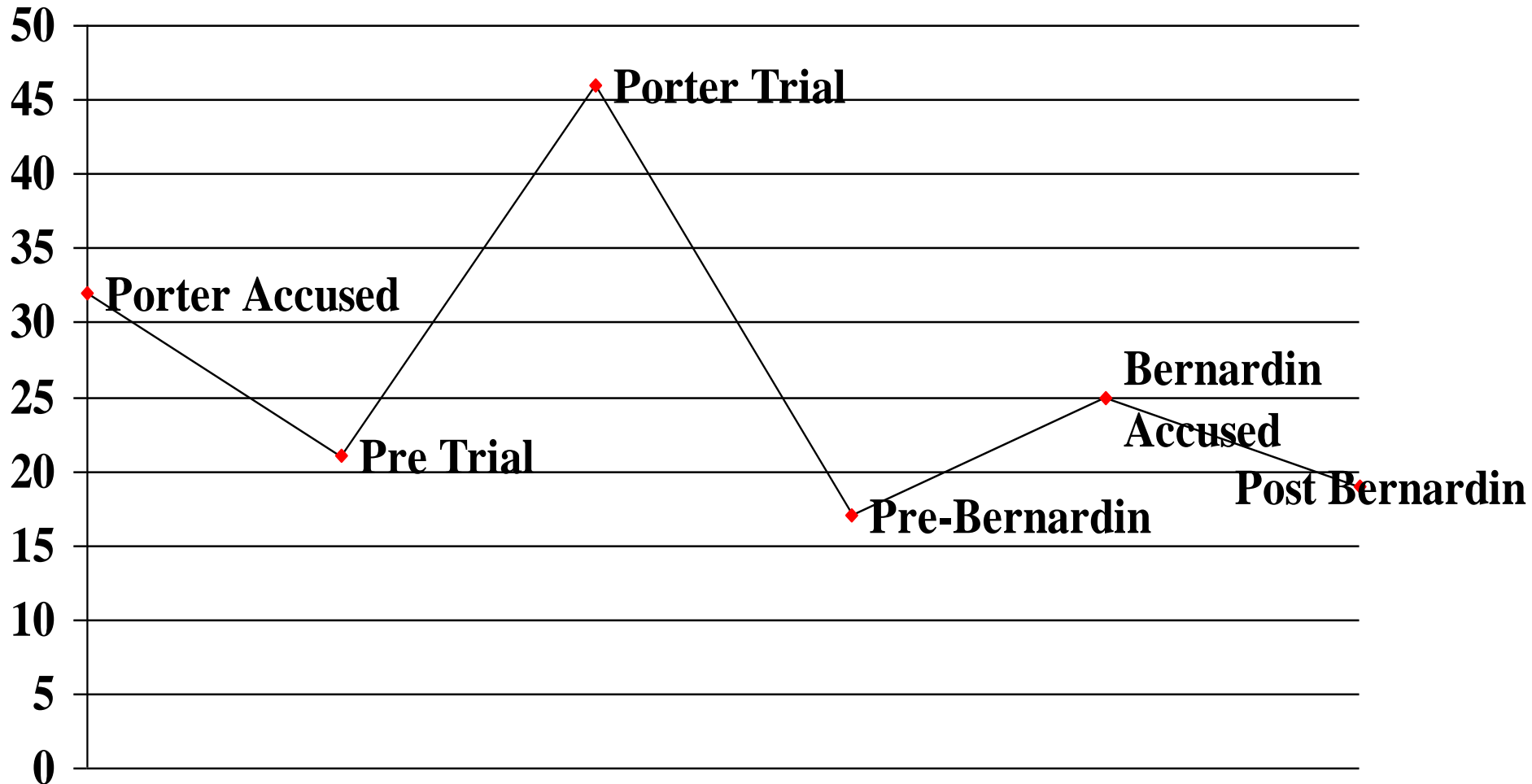
- Deviance gets repeated and amplified.
- Deviance serves as a lens for future reporting.
- Deviance applies to an entire group, not just the minority within a group engaged in deviance.



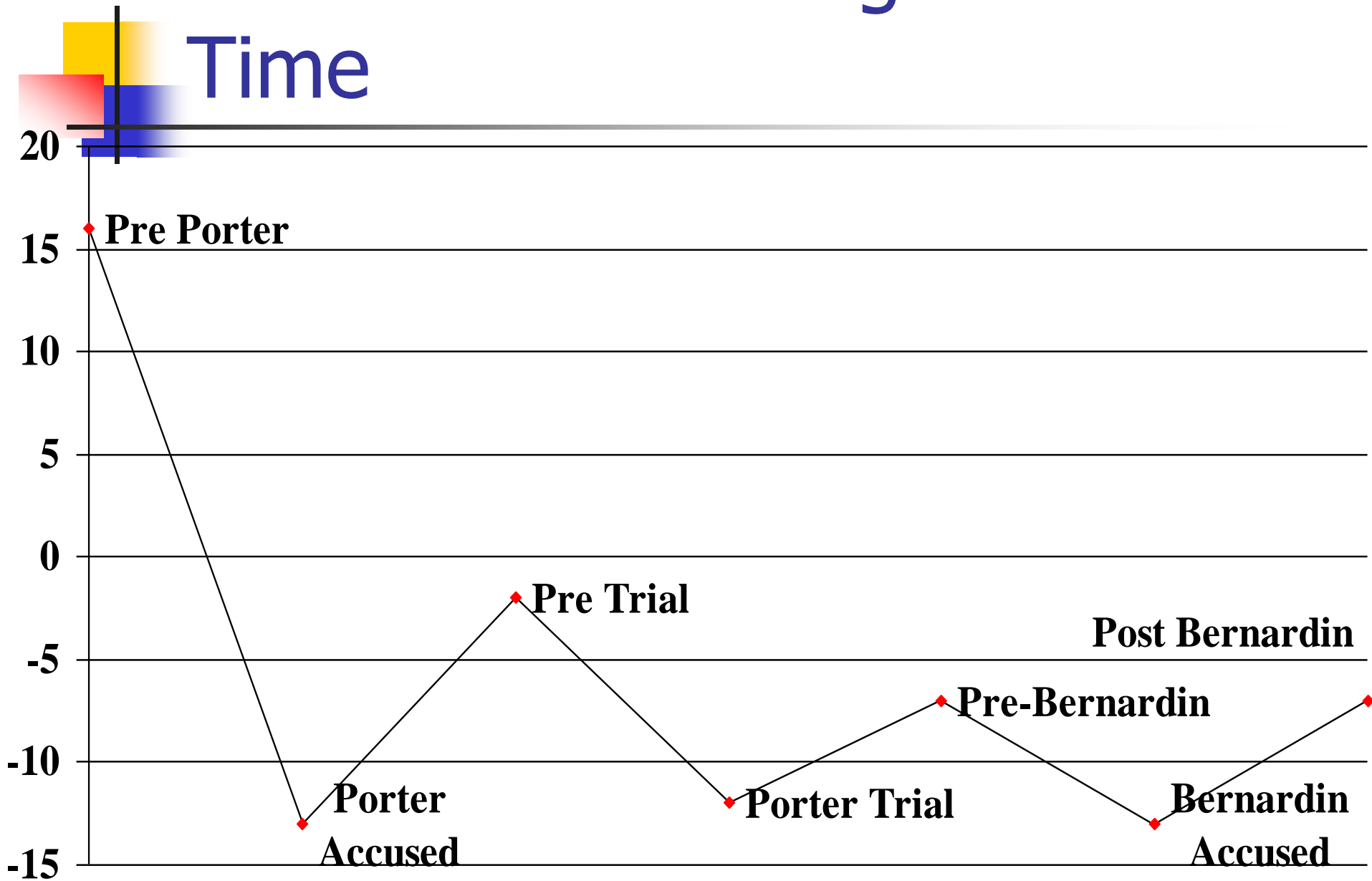
Deviance & Agenda Setting II

- Those who share an identity with those reported as deviant are particularly affected.
- The use of deviance as an historical referent is problematic.
- The Bernardin example.

Level of Coverage over time



Valence of Coverage over Time





The Present Study

- Previous research had looked at English language elite papers worldwide on the issue of clergy deviance.
- This study narrowed the focus to two newspapers, The Irish Times, and The New York Times, looked specifically at the extent and emphasis of reporting of clergy misconduct over the eight years since the previous study.



Methodology

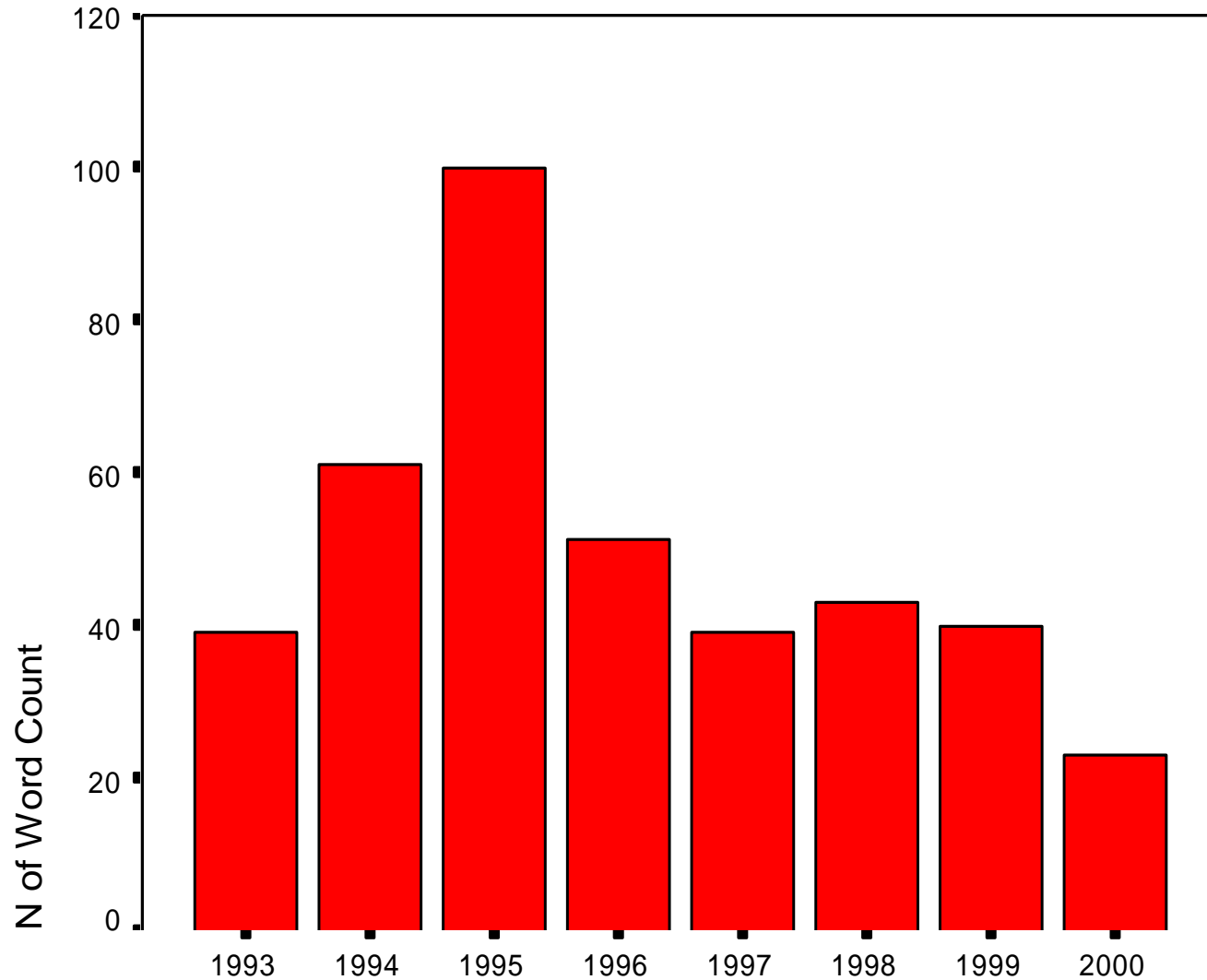
- The Nexis-Lexis database was searched using date gates and limiting the search to the two papers (ALLNWS:NYT,ITIMES).
- The search term was **“(priest* or cleric or clergy or minister* or rabbi* or brother* or monk*) w/10 ((child w/1 abuse) or (sex* w/1 abuse) or (molestation) or (rape)) and date aft 01/01/93 and date bef 01/01/2001”**



Data

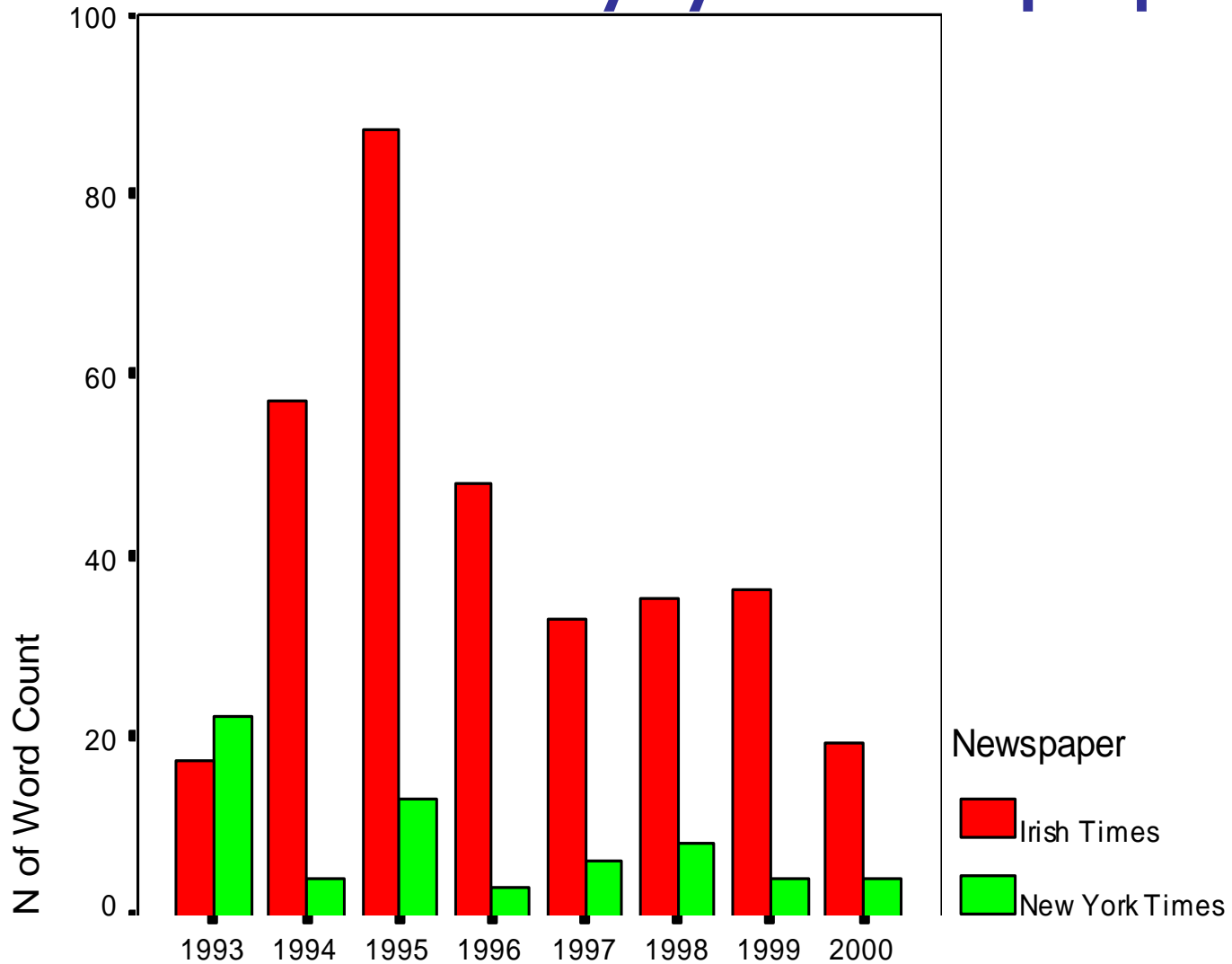
- The search yielded 781 stories.
- The story yield was then examined to exclude non-relevant stories.
- The filtering reduced the total to 413
 - 343 from The Irish Times
 - 70 from The New York Times

N of stories by year of publication



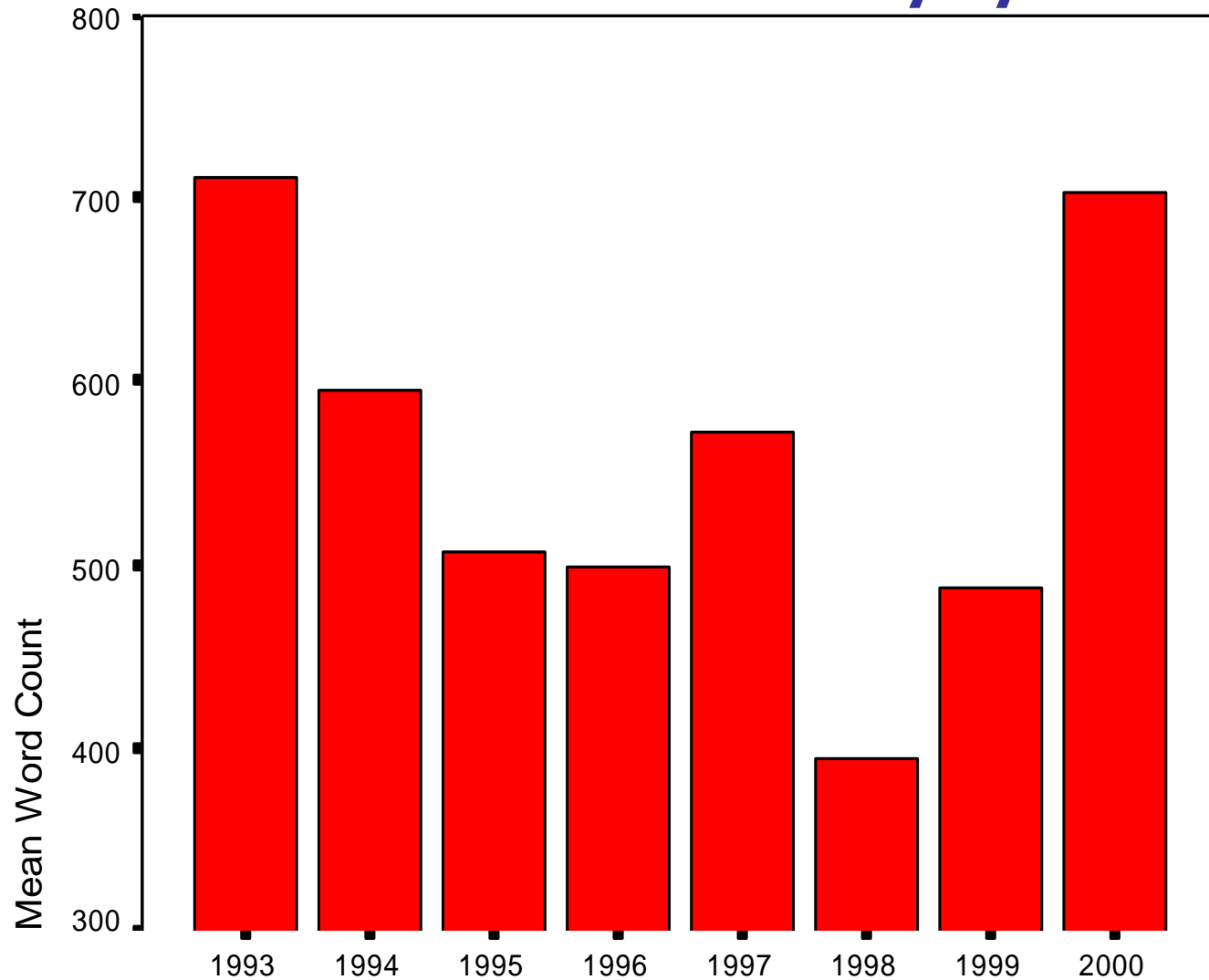


N of stories by year & paper

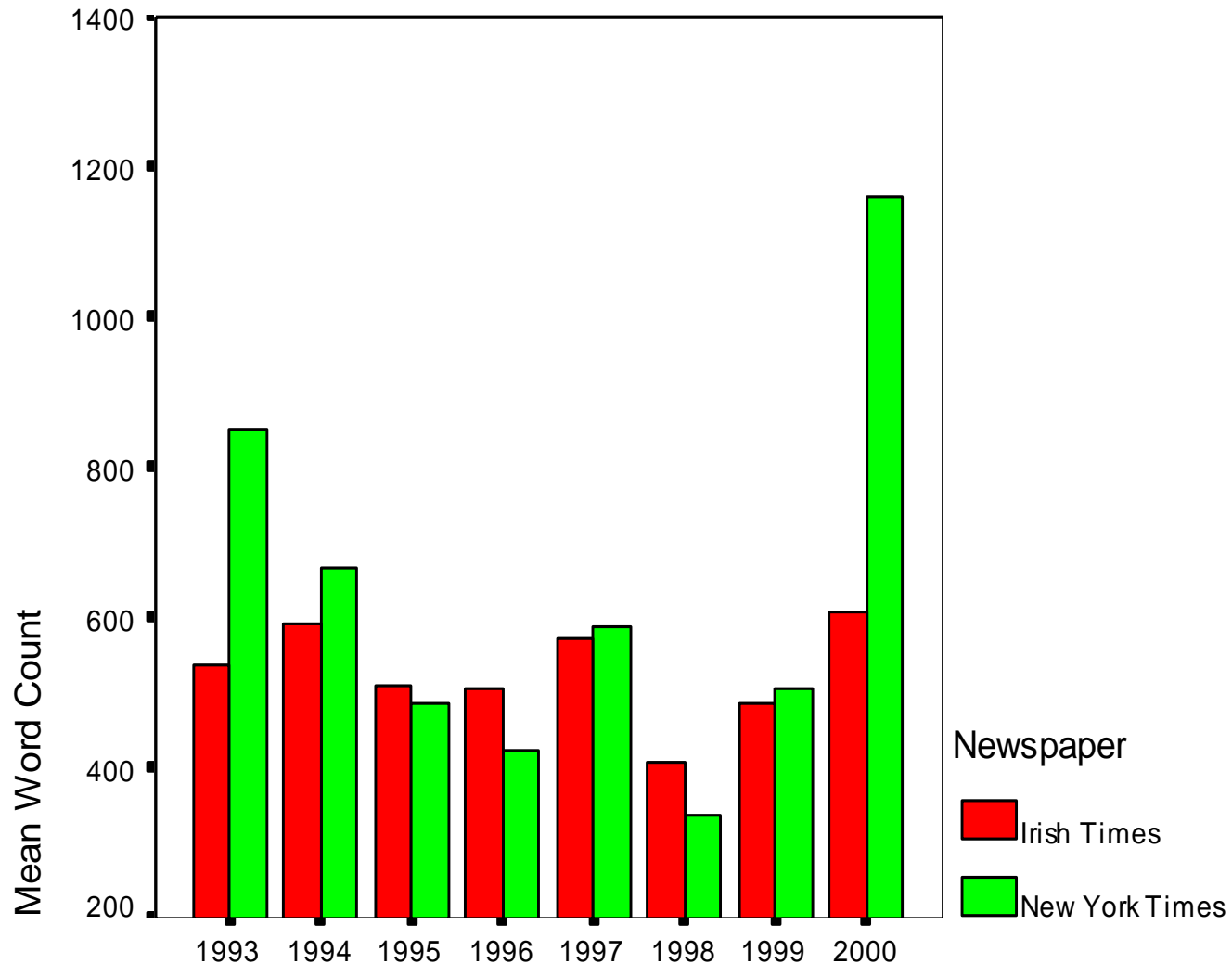




Mean word count by year

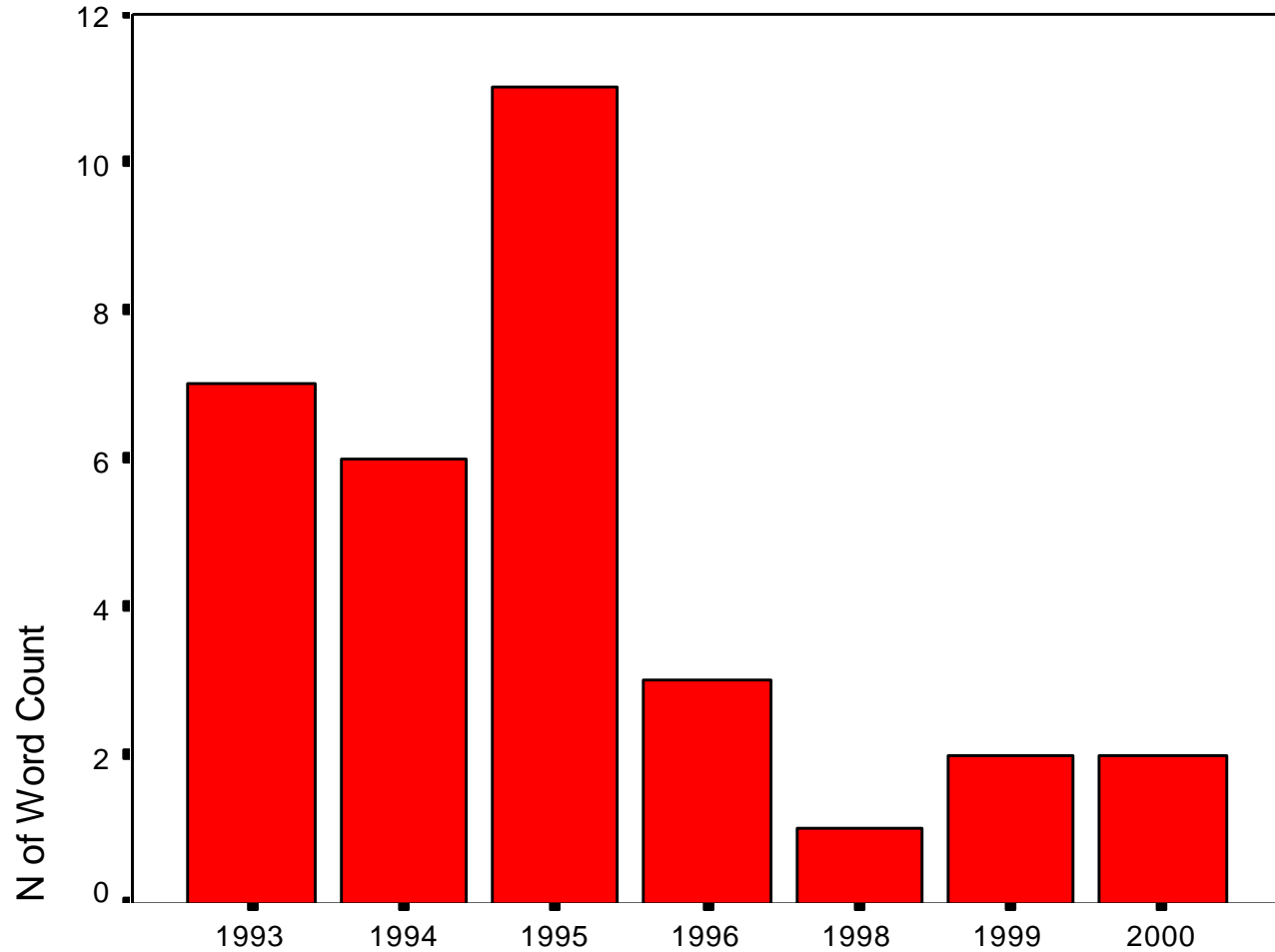


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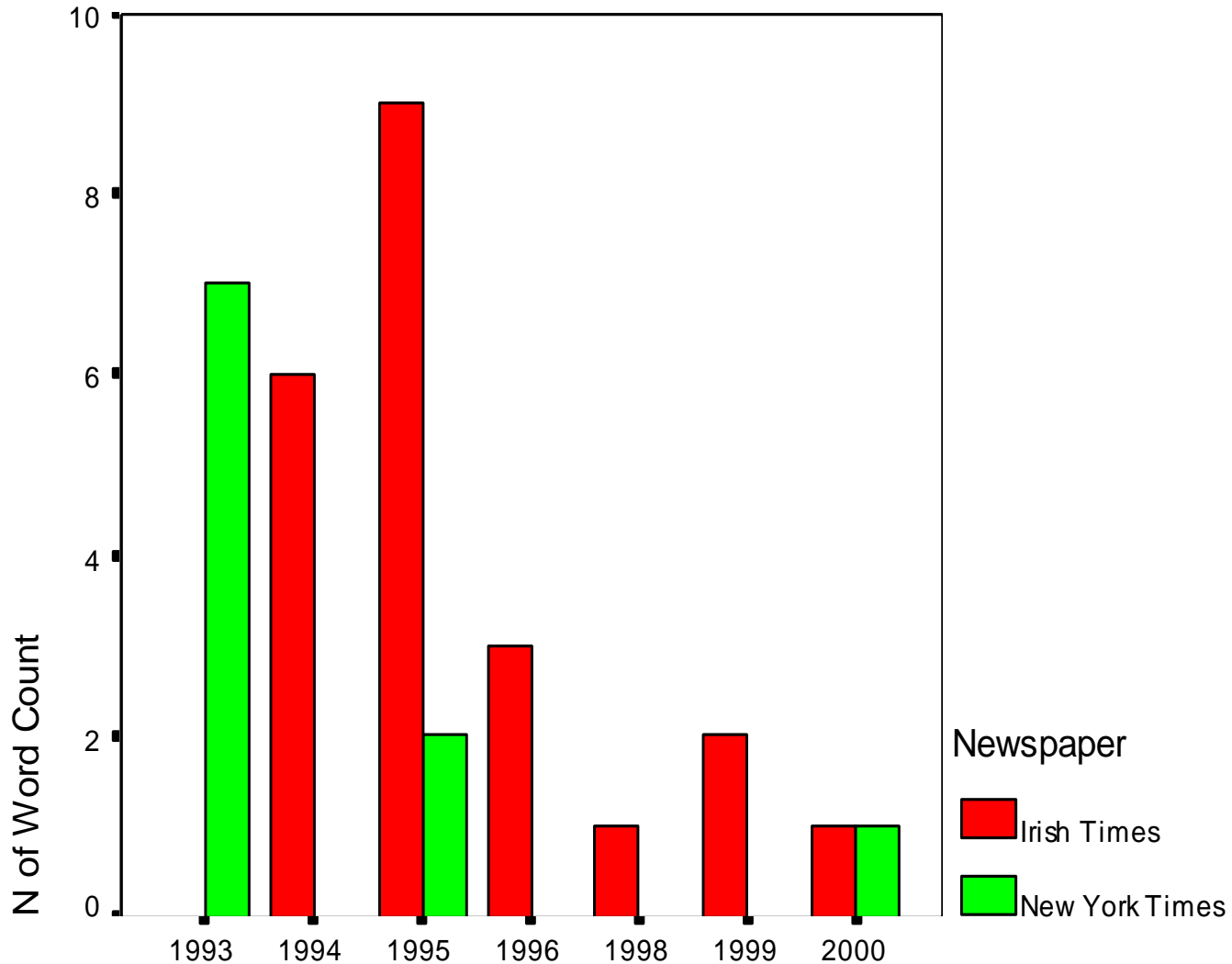




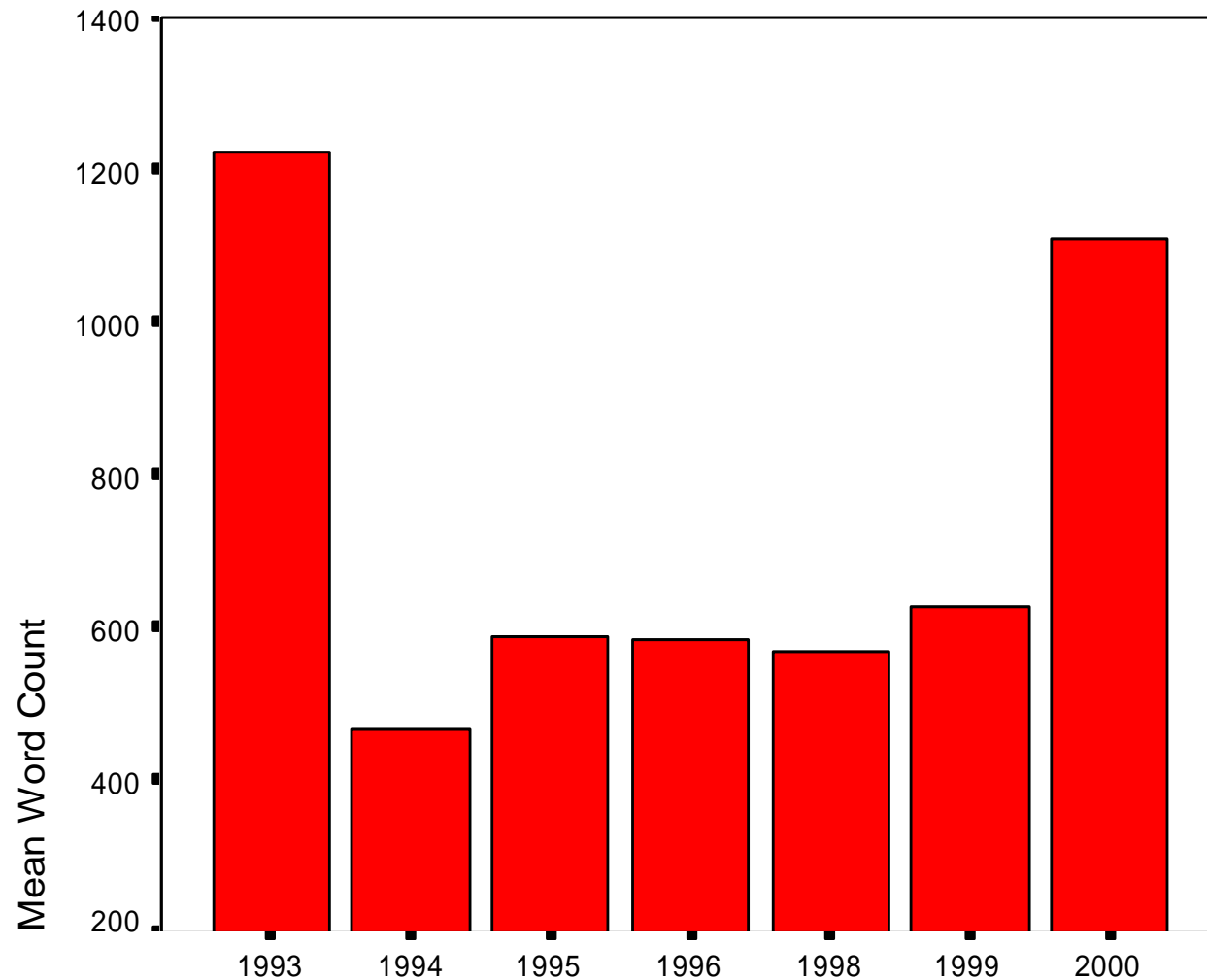
N of page 1 stories by year



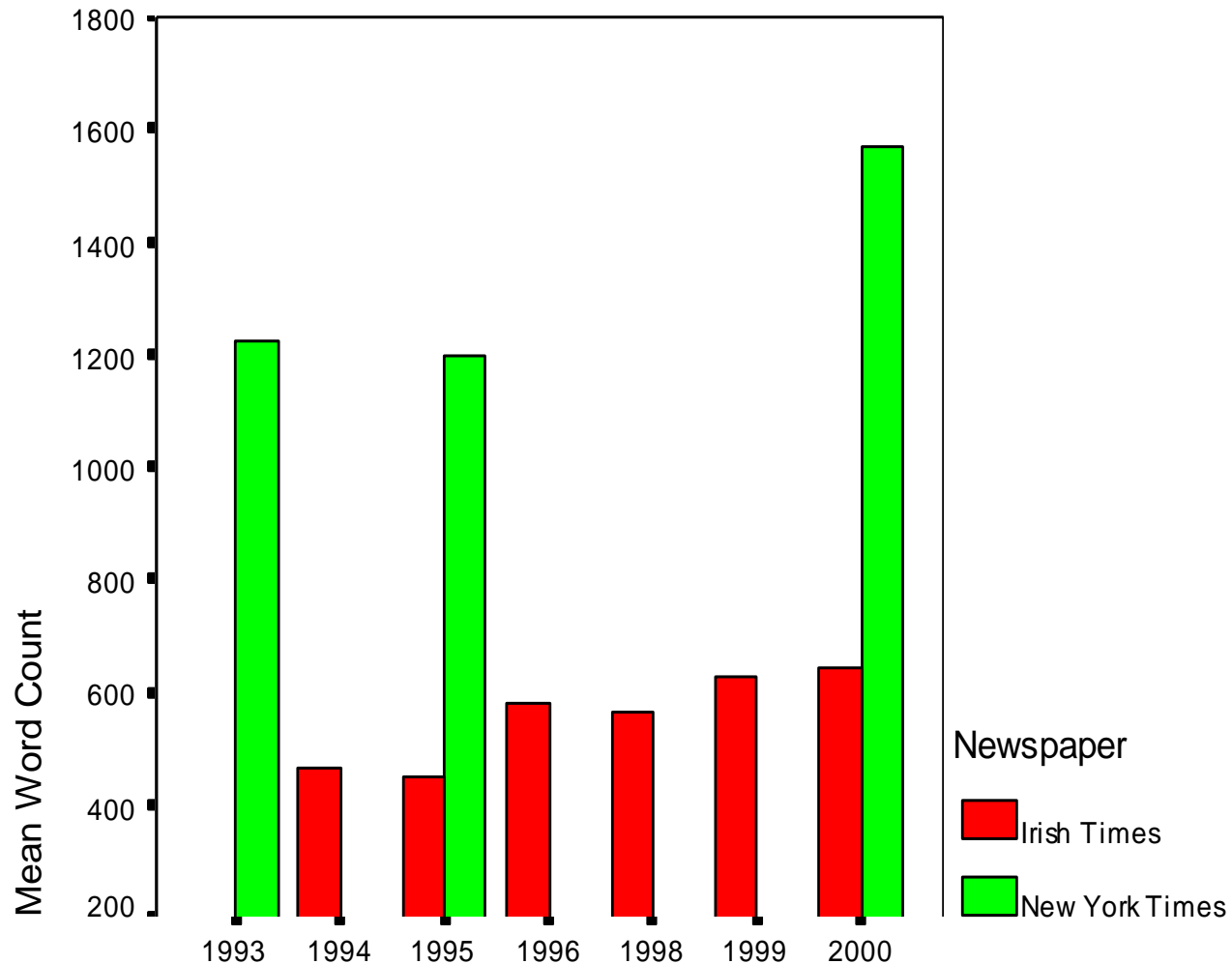
N of page 1 stories by year & paper



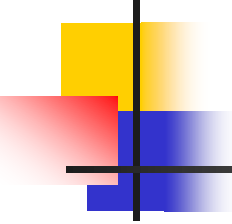
Mean word count of page 1 stories by year



Mean word count of page 1 stories by year and paper

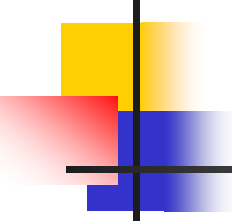


Headline Word Usage



Word	IT	IT	NYT	NYT
	N	%	N	%
Clergy	9	3%	2	3%
Priest	118	34%	28	41%
Bishop	41	12%	4	6%
Cardinal	11	3%	0	0%
Pope	6	3%	3	2%
TOTAL	176	51%	35	51%

Headline Word Usage II



Word	IT	IT	NYT	NYT
	N	%	N	%
Church	55	16%	4	6%
Paedophile	11	3%	0	0%
Allege*	19	6%	1	1%
Celibacy*	3	1%	0	0%
Belief*	2	1%	2	3%
Charge*	40	12%	7	10%



The 'Paedophile Priest'

- Between January 1993 and March 2003, the Irish Times used the phrase paedophile priest 418 times.
- 'Paedophile farmer' occurred 5 times
- 1 instance of
 - 'paedophile parent',
 - 'paedophile teacher'
- No instance of
 - 'paedophile journalist'



Outcome 1

- There are significant differences between media coverage of the Irish of serious sexual misconduct by clergy in Ireland and in the US.
- The issue tends to get longer and more prominent coverage in Ireland.
- There appears to be an element of media construction in relation to the paedophile priest concept as opposed to recognition of a society-wide phenomenon.



Outcome II

- Further research is needed.
- Ireland's historical involvement of the Church in politics clearly has an impact. How can this be measured in the context of such a study?
- Does the same issue arise in other Catholic countries, e.g., Spain, as clergy misconduct comes to light?
- What social effect does media construction have on public opinion, if any?



The Reality : CSA (Girls)

- **Girls:** One in five women (20.4 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood with a further one in ten (10.0 per cent) reporting non-contact sexual abuse. In over a quarter of cases of contact abuse (i.e. 5.6 per cent of all girls), the abuse involved penetrative sex — either vaginal, anal or oral sex.



CSA (Boys)

- **Boys:** One in six men (16.2 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual abuse in childhood with a further one in fourteen (7.4 per cent) reporting non-contact sexual abuse. In one of every six cases of contact abuse (i.e. 2.7 per cent of all boys), the abuse involved penetrative sex — either anal or oral sex.



ASA (Women)

- **Women:** One in five women (20.4 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual assault as adults with a further one in twenty (5.1 per cent) reporting unwanted non-contact sexual experiences. Over a quarter of cases of contact abuse in adulthood (i.e. 6.1 per cent of all women) involved penetrative sex.



ASA (Men)

- **Men:** One in ten men (9.7 per cent) reported experiencing contact sexual assault as adults with a further 2.7 per cent reporting unwanted non-contact sexual experiences. One in ten cases of contact abuse in adulthood (i.e. 0.9 per cent of all men) involved penetrative sex.



Perpetrators

- **Girls:** A quarter (24 per cent) of perpetrators against girls were family members, half (52 per cent) were non-family but known to the abused girl and a quarter (24 per cent) were strangers.
- **Boys:** Fewer family members were involved in child sexual abuse of boys. One in seven perpetrators (14 per cent) was a family member with two-thirds (66 per cent) non-family but known to the abused boy. One in five (20 per cent) were strangers.
- In sum, in four-fifths of cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator was known to the abused person.



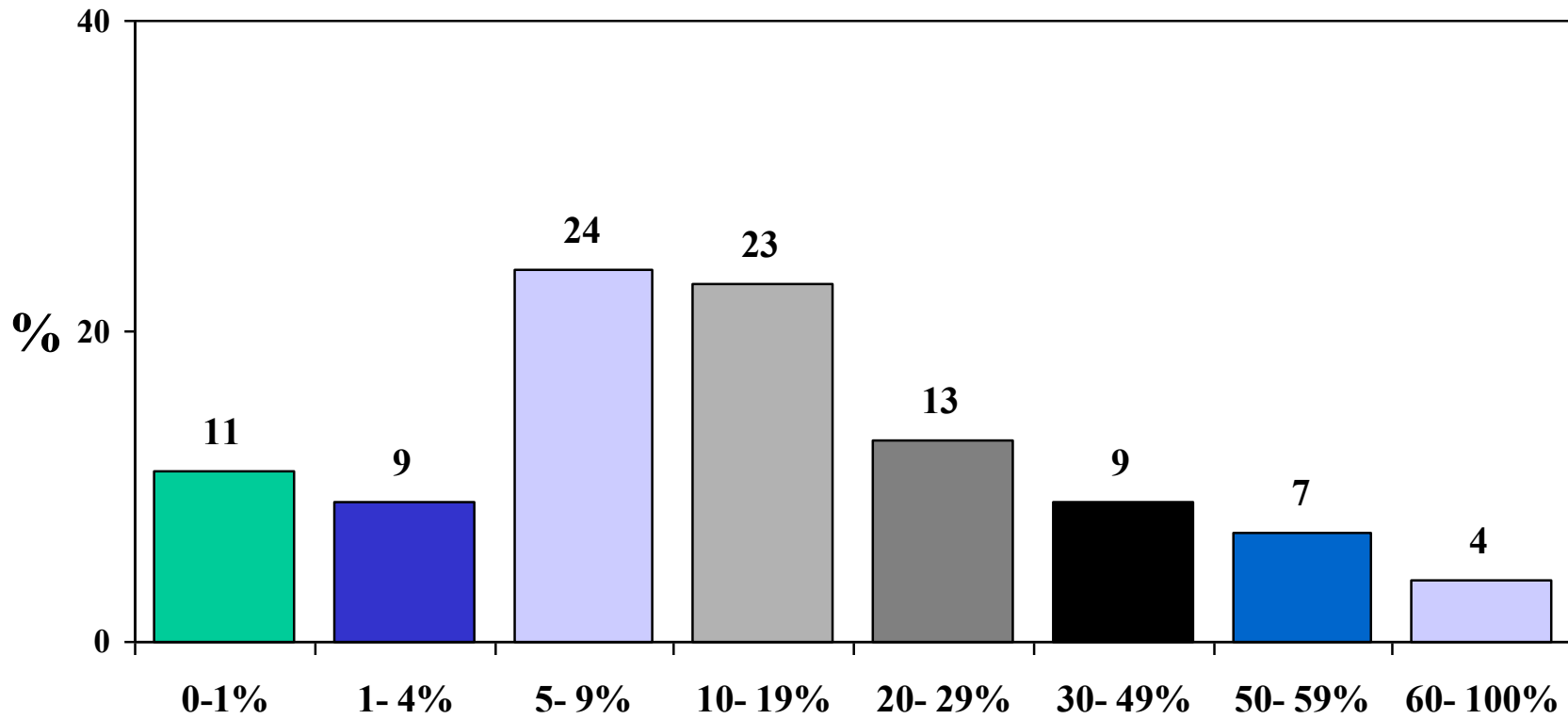
Perpetrator Stereotypes

- More than 80% of children were abused by those known to them.
- Uncles (6.2%)
- Cousins (4.4%)
- Babysitters (4.4%)
- Brothers (3.7%)
- Clerical/religious ministers or clerical/religious teachers constituting 3.2% of abusers.
- Fathers constituted 2.5% of all abusers
- Non-religious/clerical teachers (1.2%).

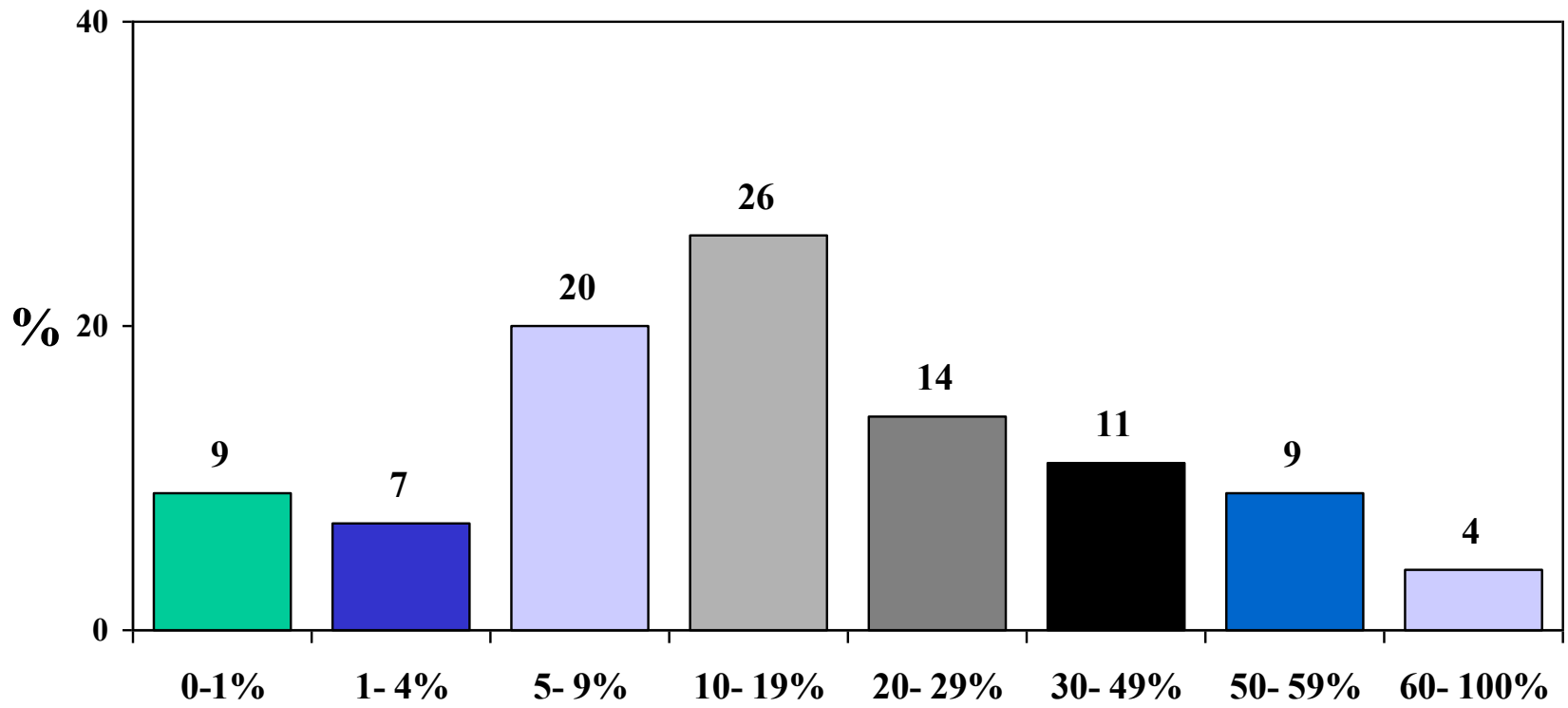
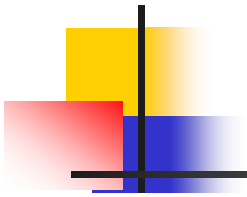


Public Beliefs

- The public overestimate the amount of abuse perpetrated by clergy & religious. SAVI reports 3.2%.
- 16% say priests less likely to abuse than others, 32% the same, 43% more likely. The average estimate is that 18% of clergy are abusers.
- The public underestimate the number of clerical/religious convicted as abusers (31 vs 49; IMS 22 in 1997).



Estimates of Catholic clergy sexually abusing children



Estimates of percentage of all child sexual abuse perpetrated by Catholic clergy



Issues

- Public focus on clerical CSA needs to be placed in context, but not as an excuse
- CSA as widespread public phenomenon must be addressed
- Complexity needs to be communicated
 - CSA itself
 - The issues involved in response
 - The ambiguity of investigation outcomes
- Greater publication of Church response required



Required Actions

- Finally, the Church must consider the damage done to parish and religious communities where abusers have served, and in the wider Church community as a whole.
- Trust has been lost, many good people are deeply disturbed by the revelations, and some have walked away.
- Recent surveys indicate that the greatest blame is being laid at the feet of those in leadership. Loss of faith in local clergy, for example, is significantly less than loss of faith in the bishops.
- The changes that are required should be made because they are right, not because the Church is forced to make them.



Summary

- In summary, Irish society has been well served by the media revelations of child sexual abuse by clergy and religious, despite the misgivings outlined above.
- Diagnosis alone is insufficient; a treatment is also required.
- The media can play a central role in the public debate on the whole issue of child sexual abuse, and can contribute richly to the public understanding of this phenomenon by reporting of the latest scholarship in this field. Such analysis must recognise that the problem is greater than the Catholic Church.
- Failure to do so only compounds the problem, helps abusers to hide, and delays the possibility of healing for all who are victims.



AMDG

- Yes, the truth will set us free, but it must be the whole truth and nothing but the truth.