Pastors or Predators

A case study of clergy representation in two nations

Michael J. Breen, Media & Communication Studies, Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick
Introduction

- This paper 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 ethic groups
  - sexual minorities
Deviance and Minorities

- Deviance in 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.
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

The graph shows the mean prominence of articles (in words per place) across different sentiment categories: Negative, Neutral, and Positive. The graph compares two group sizes: Small (red line) and Large (green line). The Small group size shows a decrease in prominence from Negative to Neutral and an increase from Neutral to Positive. The Large group size shows an increase in prominence from Negative to Positive.
Legality & Group Size

The graph shows the mean prominence of article (words x place) for different levels of legality and group size. The x-axis represents the levels of legality: 'Extremely illegal', 'Somewhat illegal', and 'Entirely legal'. The y-axis represents the mean prominence of article (words x place) ranging from 600 to 1200.

There are two lines indicating different group sizes: 'Small' (red line) and 'Large' (green line). The prominence of the article varies across the legality levels, with 'Small' group showing a decrease and 'Large' group showing an increase as legality increases from 'Extremely illegal' to 'Entirely legal'.
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

- Porter Accused
- Pre Trial
- Porter Trial
- Pre-Bernardin
- Bernardin Accused
- Post Bernardin
Valence of Coverage over Time

- Pre Porter
- Porter Accused
- Pre Trial
- Porter Trial
- Pre-Bernardin
- Bernardin Accused
- Post Bernardin

Valence Scale:
-15 -10 -5 0 5 10 15 20
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.
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”
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 and 70 from the New York Times.
N of stories by year of publication
N of stories by year & paper

![Graph showing the number of stories by year for Irish Times and New York Times.](image-url)
Mean word count by year

Mean Word Count

Year of Publication
Mean word count by year & paper

Newspaper
- Irish Times
- New York Times
N of page 1 stories by year

- 1993: 7
- 1994: 6
- 1995: 11
- 1996: 3
- 1998: 1
- 1999: 2
- 2000: 2

N of Word Count

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N of page 1 stories by year & paper

N of Word Count

Newspaper

Irish Times

New York Times

Mean word count of page 1 stories by year
Mean word count of page 1 stories by year and paper

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Newspaper
- Irish Times
- New York Times
# Headline Word Usage

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Between August 1993 and August 2000, the Irish Times used the phrase paedophile priest 332 times.

‘Paedophile farmer' occurred 5 times

No instance of

- 'paedophile parent',
- 'paedophile teacher',
- 'paedophile journalist'
Conclusion I

- 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.
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?