

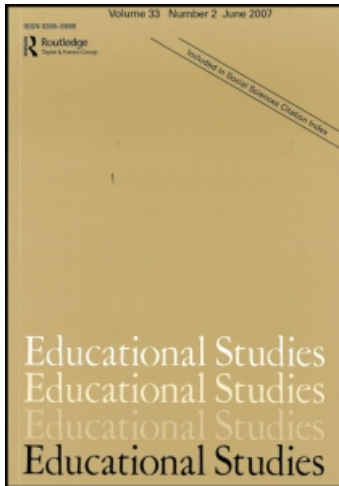
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## National pride and students' attitudes towards history: an exploratory study

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Recent debates about “Britishness” have drawn increasing attention to the inculcation of national values within the school history curriculum. To date, however, few studies have explored young people’s attitudes towards history or how these are related to their sources of national pride and shame. This paper draws on a survey of over 400 undergraduates’ experiences of secondary education, investigating their attitudes towards the history curriculum and how these relate to their feelings of national pride. Using principal components analysis we found that students’ attitudes towards history loaded on to two distinct factors: traditional/conservative and multicultural/liberal. Bivariate correlations then revealed that pride in national sporting and economic achievements and a sense of shame about immigration were positively associated with a traditional attitude towards history. Pride in British civil liberties and social diversity and a sense of shame about racism and UK foreign policy were associated with a multicultural attitude. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are discussed.

**Keywords:** history curriculum; national pride; undergraduates; empirical analysis; England

It is increasingly claimed that UK citizens no longer ascribe to a common British national identity which draws on notions of a shared past (Condor and Abell 2006). In response to this, and growing concerns about immigration, community cohesion and the future of the union, some leading UK politicians and policy-makers have argued for the promotion of “British” values (Brown 2007; Kelly and Byrne 2007), especially through history lessons in schools (Department for Education and Skills [DfES] 2007). These proposals reflect a wider debate about British citizenship and identity in recent times, highlighting that the “politics of Britishness” is now a major feature of the UK political landscape (see Andrews and Mycock 2008). Nevertheless, despite the emphasis that this discourse places on promoting national values in the history curriculum, many of its theoretical and practical implications remain unexplored. In particular, despite growing evidence on national attachment amongst young people (e.g. Carrington and Short 1995, 1998) and teachers (e.g. Pollmann 2008), little is known about the relationship between students’ sources of national pride and their attitudes towards history teaching. This is a vital question for education researchers in the UK and elsewhere, as governments across the globe increasingly seek to use the history

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curriculum to promote civic and national identity (see Stearns, Seixas, and Wineburg 2000).

Attempts to inculcate shared values within the history curriculum presuppose that students are both willing and able to ascribe to the state-authenticated version of history being promoted. Leaving aside theoretical discussion of the contested nature of the values to be inculcated (Wolton (2006) provides a thorough review of this issue), there may be a host of empirical influences that affect the prospects of successfully inculcating national values. In particular, the attachment students feel for alternative sources of national pride may play a critical role in determining their attitudes towards the curriculum (Phillips 1998). Individuals ascribing to conventional or traditional sources of national pride may be especially hostile to attempts to introduce diverse conceptions of national values within the curriculum, while those that ascribe to a more liberal or multicultural sense of national pride might be more receptive to alternative “narratives of the nation”.

Despite a growing literature analysing students’ attitudes towards history in regions struggling with a legacy of conflict, such as Northern Ireland (see e.g. Barton and McCully 2005), few empirical studies have examined their association with sources of national pride (and shame) (though see Cinnerella 1997). This paper explores the relationship between history and national pride by drawing on a survey of over 400 undergraduates’ attitudes towards history teaching in five English universities. The first part of the paper examines the promotion of national values in the history curriculum in England. Theories and evidence on students’ attitudes towards history are explored, and their potential links with various sources of national pride are discussed. Principal components analysis of students’ attitudes towards history, univariate analysis of the sources of their sense of national pride and shame, and bivariate correlations between these and attitudes towards history are then presented. Finally, we conclude by outlining a broader research agenda for the study of students’ attitudes towards national identity.

### Teaching the nation(s)

Current government approaches to the teaching of school history highlight a continued belief in the power of national narratives to shape identity. In part, this reflects the intimate relationship between the nation-state and national history, especially the state’s interest in exercising its institutional or discursive ability to suppress or integrate (and subsume) rival discourses (Berger and Lorenz 2006). Thus, national histories are understood by some to have been “constructed” during the nineteenth century by states seeking to justify their territorial and political legitimacy in the face of competing and overlapping national claims (see Gellner 1983). Others such as Smith (1991) claims, “this approach ignores the primordial historical roots of nations, particularly the influence of pre-modern ethno-national communities”. However, although the relationship between primordial and modern constructions of the nation-state, and their power to shape national consciousness, remains a matter of some contention it is broadly accepted that the national identities, and the narratives that support them, in most modern nation-states are a complicated interaction of the two interpretations. Moreover, it is accepted that membership of a national community is not necessarily intuitive, meaning the “people” need to learn or be taught of their membership and the key determinants of its associated national consciousness (see Weber 1976). Therefore, the institutionalisation of the nation and methodologies of representation are

significant in nation-state building and the promotion of its identity (Brubaker 1996). This is reflected in the importance of teaching of state-authenticated national history in British schools, and the attempt to promote a homogenous and consensual national culture. In England, in particular, this has become linked with the political elite's efforts to construct a British national heritage which can authenticate the present.

The so-called "history" or "culture" wars currently being fought in the UK reflect concerns over the saliency of the British nation, and its national story, and the relativity of competing sub-state national narratives. This mirrors debates about how "our history" is taught to "our children" in other states, such as the USA, Canada, Australia and Japan, and are strongly influenced by competing politically motivated ideologies of the nation-state (Clark 2006). Much of the debate in the UK has been shaped by growing recognition of the plurality and diversity of its citizenry and concerns that British national pride is in decline (Tilley and Heath 2007). Despite the increasing ethnic and cultural diversification across the UK, school history continues to be seen to contribute strongly to the shaping of a British national identity via its impact on young people's political and cultural understanding (Phillips 2000).

Since its election in 1997, the Labour government has sought to promote a progressive view of Britishness to address growing anxieties concerning the cohesion of the post-devolutionary UK state stimulated by, amongst other things, immigration and radical (Islamic) terrorism. Labour has promoted the UK as "one nation, one community", whereby British patriotism has been founded on the rediscovery of "long-standing British values", emphasising "decency", "tolerance", "liberty", "fair-play", "internationalism" and "duty" as a "golden thread which runs through British history" (Brown 2004). As such, reform of the history curriculum has been encouraged, particularly in England, as part of their broader project to refurbish and reaffirm a sense of Britishness. As Gordon Brown has asserted, "we should not recoil from our national history – rather we should make it more central to our education. I propose that British history should be given much more prominence in our curriculum" (Brown 2006).

Two major reviews were undertaken in 2006–2007 to reassess the role education can play in promoting both "Britishness" and awareness of the cultural diversity that now characterises British society. The so-called "Ajegbo Report" (DfES 2007), mirrored in the subsequent House of Commons Education and Skills Committee (Her Majesty's Stationery Office [HMSO] 2007) report on *Citizenship*, proposed that English schools should teach core British values, such as free speech, the rule of law, mutual tolerance and respect for equal rights, through the lens of history. Although the outcomes of both reviews provoked a barrage of press comment (see Brett 2007 for an excellent overview), a new strand, "Identity and cultural diversity", was introduced within the *Citizenship* curriculum to promote understanding of the diverse values of the UK (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA] 2007). Moreover, policy-makers indicated that the history curriculum should focus on delivering a broader more inclusive history of the UK that recognises the contribution of the many different ethnic, national and cultural groups to the British experience. However, unlike the Ajegbo Report, explicit reference to an overarching sense of Britishness has been avoided in the emergent history curriculum orders in favour of the "multiple identities that may be held by groups and communities in a diverse society" (QCA 2007). This would suggest that reservations persist regarding the suitability of schools as repositories and disseminators of state-defined patriotism (Hands and Pearce 2008).

Labour's attempts to promote an inclusive twenty-first century Britishness has been questioned by some, particularly in the Conservative Party and the British (right-wing) press. These critics have persistently sought to highlight the failure of the (Labour) government to teach a cohesive British historical narrative which can inculcate a common identity in state schools. Indeed, some sections of the media suggest the government is in fact "anti-British" and is deliberately undermining a cohesive framework of national self-identity (see Brocklehurst and Phillips 2003). Thus, according to some who are hostile to multicultural interpretations of history, current approaches are "deliberately unravelling old national myths" which may ultimately undermine "the survival of the British nation" (Collins 2005).

Some have sought to remedy the emphasis on alternative narratives of the nation by publishing (or republishing) corrective tomes which have identified the central themes of the "proper" British national story, often based on an Anglo-British historical orthodoxy founded in empire (e.g. Courtauld 2004; Marshall 2005). Concern in some quarters about Labour's perceived undermining of the national narrative has even encouraged the opening of an independent primary school in Islington, the "New Model School", in September 2004 ostensibly to counter the "gross ignorance of our history and tradition" (Hall 2004). Such developments are grounded in a perception that "politically correct" liberals are seeking to divorce the teaching of history from "historical facts", leading young people to be exposed to a "selective" and "manipulative" view of the national past which teaches "Peterloo not Waterloo" (McGovern 2007). Multicultural approaches to history teaching in the UK are therefore criticised for denying young people the opportunity to develop a national identity "based on a mere 1000 years of history" because it might "brainwash" them into "a racist cult" (Phillips 2006).

Tensions concerning the ability of the state to promote a coherent sense of Britishness within the history curriculum to an increasingly multicultural and plural citizenry are reflected in anxieties over curriculum content. In particular, concerns endure about the deliberate separation between "national" and "foreign" history (Low-Beer 2003), and the salience of the Anglo-British historical orthodoxy (particularly in England) which is overly focused on European history, and a limited number of events like the two world wars, which some argue historically disenfranchise a significant minority of pupils (see Gilroy 2004).

This is seen to have a number of outcomes. First, the manner the Second World War is taught has seen some concerns emerge regarding enduring anti-German (and broader anti-European) xenophobia (Vasager 2002). Second, the focus on British and European history is also seen to project a curriculum which is jingoistic and predominantly white. As such, Britain's historical self-image as war warrior and war victim has curtailed the scope for a critical examination of British history (see e.g. Gilroy 2005; Panayi 1995). The utility of school history for shaping "appropriate" values and identities has thus emerged as a significant feature of the ongoing "politics of Britishness". However, few studies in the UK (or elsewhere) have systematically explored the extent to which students' attitudes towards history are related to their sense of national pride (for a notable exception see Grever, Haydn, and Ribbens 2008).

### **Exploring attitudes towards history and sources of national pride**

Data on attitudes towards history teaching and national pride were derived from a survey of 413 first-year humanities or social science undergraduates in five universities

in North West England carried out in the autumn of 2006. Questionnaires were distributed in lectures to at least 50 students in each university. The survey instrument contained a statement indicating that it posed students a series of questions about the relationship between identity and history teaching based on their own experiences at secondary school (available on request). Completion of the survey was on an entirely voluntary basis with no incentives provided for participation. Students were assured that their responses to the survey would be anonymised.

The total sample consisted of 462 undergraduates, with an 89.4% informant response rate. Bivariate correlations between attitudes towards history and national pride were derived for the responses of 413 undergraduates. Because they are all British citizens, these undergraduates represent an especially suitable group for exploring attitudes towards history and national pride. The secondary schooling that these students received will have included discrete and cross-curricular elements introduced to promote national values as a vehicle for inculcating a shared sense of British national identity.

## Statistical findings

### *Attitudes towards history*

Students' attitudes towards history were estimated with a series of seven items that tapped their views on the appropriate form and content of history teaching. For each question, informants registered their response on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (disagree with the statement) to 5 (agree with the statement). The descriptive statistics and a principal components analysis of the seven items are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and factor analysis.

Attitudes towards history (five-point response scale)	Mean	SD	Factor 1	Factor 2
1. History teachers must be loyal to the state and always promote a positive view of our country	1.91	.99	<b>.69</b>	-.32
2. Some parts of my country's history should not be taught as they are offensive to some citizens on grounds of religion or ethnicity	1.62	.86	<b>.69</b>	.30
3. Religion should be the most important dimension in the teaching of my country's history and should be respected at all times	1.96	1.04	<b>.68</b>	.09
4. The state should control what is taught in school history lessons to ensure we all have a common view of national identity and loyalty to our country	2.17	1.13	<b>.72</b>	-.26
5. Ethnic minorities should be encouraged to preserve and celebrate their history and culture, and this should be reflected in history lessons	3.37	1.04	-.02	<b>.73</b>
6. Immigrants seeking citizenship must pass a test which proves they understand our national history and cultures	3.19	1.29	.28	-. <b>65</b>
7. Immigration and globalisation have strengthened my understanding of my country's history	3.01	.98	.10	<b>.52</b>
Eigenvalues			2.02	1.51
Cumulative variance			28.89	21.50

Note: Coefficients for survey items associated with each factor shown in bold.

The descriptive statistics for the measures of attitudes towards history suggest that, on average, students responded positively to items gauging a multicultural approach to the study of history (mean score for reflecting the history and culture of ethnic minorities in history lessons = 3.37, and the mean score for students' understanding of history being strengthened by immigration = 3.19). However, respondents also positively affirmed that immigrants seeking citizenship should "pass a test which proves they understand our national history and cultures" (mean score = 3.19), indicating that students might feel some antagonism towards the increased social diversification within the UK. Nevertheless, the mean scores for items tapping a strongly authoritarian view of history are all below the median possible score, suggesting that, on average, respondents were hostile to a traditional approach to the history curriculum.

The principal components analysis of the seven survey items produced two statistically significant and clear factors that explained over 50% of the variance in the data. The relevant factor loadings are all 0.5 or more and are therefore important determinants of the variance explained by the factors (Hair et al. 1998). Students' attitudes towards history therefore appear to be loading on to two distinct factors, which we have termed: traditional/conservative and multicultural/liberal. These two approaches to the study of history broadly reflect the polarised views of education which have characterised the "culture wars" in multicultural Western societies (Evans 1997).

### *National pride and attitudes towards history*

We explored the relationship between national pride and students' attitudes towards history by asking survey respondents to name three things that made them proud of their country. Respondents were then asked to do the same for three things which made them ashamed of their country. The 10 most frequent answers given to these questions are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows that over a third of respondents were proud of the history and traditions of the UK, with approximately a quarter also expressing pride in the culture of the country, its civil liberties and sporting achievements. Other notable sources of national pride highlighted in the table include democracy (16.4%), the welfare state (15.3%) and multiculturalism (15.0%). Taken in combination, the findings for the 10 most highly cited sources of national pride therefore suggest that students may feel especially positive about the social and political accomplishments of the UK, rather than its artistic, cultural and economic (or scientific) achievements. This partly mirrors the results of other studies of national pride in Anglo-Saxon countries (see Cinnerella 1997; Evans and Kelley 2002). Future studies should investigate the potential determinants of national pride in detail to throw light on the reasons why Britain's social and political achievements are rated so highly by its citizens.

Racism is cited as a source of shame for Britain by more respondents (35.9%) than any other thing. Criminal activity (30.8%), Britain's foreign policy (26.8%) and politicians (26.2%) are other highly cited sources of shame. Overall, the statistics for the 10 most cited sources of national shame indicate that students may feel especially negative about anti-social attitudes and behaviour in the UK. The citation of "Chavs" as a source of national shame by 8.4% of respondents in part reflects this negativity, but may also be suggestive of the ongoing salience of class attitudes within the UK (see Heath, Martin, and Elgenius 2007). To explore the relationship between sources of national pride and students' attitudes towards history in more depth, we created 20 dummy variables coded 1 for respondents citing the respective sources of pride and

Table 2. Sources of national pride and shame.

	% of those responding
<i>National pride</i>	
Traditions	34.6
Culture	28.5
Civil liberties	24.8
Sport	24.5
Democracy	16.4
Welfare state	15.3
Multiculturalism	15.0
People's attitudes	12.1
Economy	11.3
World standing	9.5
<i>National shame</i>	
Racism	35.9
Crime/anti-social behaviour	30.8
Foreign policy	26.8
Politicians	26.2
Traditions	10.3
People's attitudes	9.7
Chavs	8.4
The environment	8.1
Immigration	6.5
Welfare state	5.1

shame and 0 for those not citing them. This enabled us to carry out bivariate correlation analysis. The correlations between national pride and attitudes towards history are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 presents statistically significant positive correlations between pride in Britain's sporting and economic achievements and a traditional attitude towards history, and significant negative correlations between such an attitude and pride in British civil liberties. Statistically significant positive correlations are found between a multicultural attitude towards history and multiculturalism, civil liberties and British culture, but it is negatively correlated with pride in the UK's world standing, its traditions, the economy and sporting achievements. Both sets of correlations suggest that the social and political achievements of the UK are associated with a more liberal view of the history curriculum, while pride in sporting and economic achievements is associated with a more authoritarian view. The relationship between sources of national shame and attitudes towards history provides additional insight into these findings.

Statistically significant positive correlations are found between a traditional view of the history curriculum and a sense of shame about immigration in the UK and the condition of the environment, and it is negatively correlated with shame in Britain's traditions and its foreign policy. There are statistically significant positive correlations between shame in racism in the UK, its foreign policy and traditions and a multicultural attitude towards history. There is also a positive correlation between this view of

Table 3. Correlations between attitudes towards history and sources of national pride and shame.

	Attitude towards history	
	Traditionalist	Multicultural
<i>National pride (N = 379)</i>		
Traditions	.018	-.159**
Culture	-.041	.081 <sup>†</sup>
Civil liberties	-.146**	.119*
Sport	.165**	-.088*
Democracy	-.064	-.012
Welfare state	-.055	.019
Multiculturalism	.005	.239**
People's attitudes	-.037	.029
Economy	.088*	-.106*
World standing	.059	-.164**
<i>National shame (N = 358)</i>		
Racism	-.059	.137**
Crime/anti-social behaviour	.066	-.024
Foreign policy	-.094*	.086 <sup>†</sup>
Politicians	-.060	-.081 <sup>†</sup>
Traditions	-.130**	.075 <sup>†</sup>
People's attitudes	-.058	.047
Chavs	.005	-.061
The environment	.084 <sup>†</sup>	.080 <sup>†</sup>
Immigration	.104*	-.300**
Welfare state	.066	.001

Significance levels: <sup>†</sup> $p \leq 0.10$ ; \* $p \leq 0.05$ ; \*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

history and shame in the condition of the environment, indicating that concern about environmental issues cuts across attitudes towards the history curriculum. Significant negative correlations are found between a multicultural attitude towards history and immigration and politicians, confirming a similar pattern of results found for the correlations between national pride and attitudes towards history: Britain's social and political achievements are negatively associated with traditional views, while nationalist sources of shame, such as immigration, are negatively associated with multicultural attitudes.

## Conclusions

This paper has explored students' attitudes towards history. The statistical results show that variations in the attitudes of undergraduates are significantly associated with a range of different sources of national pride and shame. The social and political achievements of the UK are associated with a more liberal view of the history curriculum, while pride in sporting and economic achievements is associated with a more authoritarian view. Likewise, militarist sources of national pride are correlated with a traditional view of history, while radical political sources are correlated with a

multicultural view. The analysis expands on previous work by providing quantitative evidence on attitudes towards history. Prior studies have largely comprised normative discussions of the respective merits of different interpretations of history amongst students (see Phillips 1998) or analyses of curricula or textbook evidence (e.g. Crawford and Foster 2006; Phillips et al. 1999). The findings establish statistically significant connections between national pride and students' attitudes towards history. Existing survey research on this issue has so far focused on the presentation of descriptive findings (e.g. Grever, Haydn, and Ribbens 2008).

The analysis, however, has limitations. The statistical results may be a product of where and when the research was conducted. It must be stressed that the survey was conducted only in English universities. In particular, we surveyed a sub-sample of British undergraduates in five higher educational settings, a sub-group who are not representative of young people *per se*. It is therefore important to identify whether attitudes towards history differ in other educational settings, especially primary and secondary schools, both in the UK and elsewhere, and over other time periods. Evidence on teachers' attitudes towards the content of the history curriculum could also furnish valuable information on the links between history teaching and national identity. Different measures of national pride and shame may also influence different measures of attitudes towards history, and their impact may be either stronger or weaker than the variables included in this model. In particular, future research could furnish further insights into the relationship between national pride and attitudes towards history by analysing the linkages between specific dimensions of national pride and shame, such as "political", "cultural" and "economic" (see Evans and Kelley 2002) and different views of history.

Nevertheless, despite these limitations, our findings have important theoretical and practical implications. The key dynamic of debates surrounding Britishness and how it is taught in schools has been the extent to which school history can be utilised as a tool to construct a homogenous British national patriotism. On the one hand, these debates have drawn on a traditional, and largely benign, view of the national past, while on the other, they have sought to encourage a more critical understanding of Britain's past which reflects a growing acknowledgement of the plurality of historical interpretations within a diverse multicultural society. Although, on average, students affirmed a multicultural approach to history teaching, the correlations between a traditional approach and conventional sources of national pride are redolent of the tensions in the public pronouncements made by politicians, media commentators and educationalists.

Students' attitudes towards history are likely to be only partially shaped by what is taught in school. This study has provided an outline of some of the terrain which future studies of the impact of school history on identity should seek to explore. A research agenda which sought to systematically address these issues could therefore add to the existing literature on the function and content of school history, and reveal new evidence on the resonance of history teaching for the inculcation of national pride.

### Notes on contributors

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