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Refining the association between intergroup contact and intergroup forgiveness in Northern Ireland: Type of contact, prior conflict experience, and group identification

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Abstract

We conducted a secondary analysis of a general sample of the population in Northern Ireland, including a significant proportion of respondents with "personal experience" of the sectarian conflict, to provide a refined test of whether contact was associated with more forgiveness and less prejudice. We tested the association between two measures of intergroup contact (outgroup friendship and generic contact) and both intergroup forgiveness and prejudice among people who varied in their personal experience of conflict, while simultaneously considering the role of ingroup identification as an inhibitor of forgiveness, and accounting for relevant demographic variables. Contact was positively associated with forgiveness, marginally more so in the case of friendship than general outgroup contact, whereas both conflict experience and identification were negatively associated with forgiveness. While outgroup friendship robustly predicted forgiveness, generic outgroup contact was moderated by conflict experience and ingroup identification. Effects of both forms of contact on prejudice were not moderated. Results are discussed in terms of the greater impact of friendship contact, forgiveness as a more demanding criterion, and the need to pursue research on intergroup forgiveness among large samples of people directly impacted by the events for which forgiveness is relevant.

Keywords

cross-group friendships, ingroup identification, intergroup forgiveness, Northern Ireland, prejudice

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> If I knew who killed my mother I would not tell the police . . . I don't know why I feel this, but I forgive him.
>
> (Jude Whyte, whose mother, Peggy Whyte, was killed in a bomb blast in Belfast on April 12, 1984; "I forgive the bomber," 2014)

One key factor evident in most cases of intergroup conflict is that perception of the past affects lives into the present, old grievances endure within the collective memory and sometimes flare into contemporary violence. Intergroup forgiveness represents an alternative: it transcends the past, not by forgetting past hurts and pain, but by absorbing them so that they no longer fuel a continuing cycle of violence (Hewstone et al., 2013), and it is associated with improved mental health (Myers, Hewstone, & Cairns, 2009). Intergroup forgiveness has become a central focus of much research that explores ways of ameliorating hostile intergroup relationships (e.g., Nadler & Liviatan, 2006; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, Manzi, & Lewis, 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008; Staub, 2006; Tam et al., 2007; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005), and is considered by some to be an essential psychological aspect of reconciliation (Azar, Mullet, & Vinsonneau, 1999; Doosje, Branscombe, Spears, & Manstead, 1998; Halpern & Weinstein, 2004; Nadler & Saguy, 2004). It is therefore crucial to identify variables that might promote forgiveness, and to show that they could do so even under demanding conditions where identities remain strong and the wounds of conflict are still open. In this article we test the association between different kinds of intergroup contact and both forgiveness and prejudice, while simultaneously considering the role of conflict experience and group identification as factors that inhibit forgiveness.

Despite a range of definitions of intergroup forgiveness being adopted in this still-young literature (e.g., McCullough, 2008; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008), it is possible to identify several common elements. Theorists tend to agree that forgiveness is a prosocial facilitator, a *process* that involves a change in attitude or emotion toward the offender (Enright & The Human Development Study Group, 1991; Hewstone et al., 2004; McCullough, Pargament, & Thoresen, 2000). Evidence has also accrued that intergroup forgiveness, while typically positively correlated with attitudes toward the outgroup, is conceptually quite distinct from them (e.g., Cehajic, Brown, & Castano, 2008; Hewstone, Cairns, Voci, Hamberger, & Niens, 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004). Forgiveness is thought to have multiple positive consequences, including: (a) reducing the desire for revenge and retaliation and restoring damaged relationships (Cloke, 1993; Minow, 1998); (b) allowing the release of negative emotions, such as anger and fear toward the perpetrator category, and promoting mercy (Enright, Freedman, & Rique, 1998; Rye & Pargament, 2002); (c) restoring damaged relationships and providing an opportunity for the victim to give up the role of victimhood (Scobie & Scobie, 1998); and (d) leaving behind grievances and finding closure for a past characterized by hostile intergroup relationship (Cairns, Tam, Hewstone, & Niens, 2005; Nadler & Saguy, 2004; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008). In the following we first consider inhibitors and facilitators of forgiveness, and then introduce the present research.

Inhibitors of Forgiveness

Although research on intergroup forgiveness is still in its relative infancy, research has identified several key inhibitors and facilitators of forgiveness. Turning first to inhibitors, there is especially strong evidence for two factors: experience of conflict and ingroup identification.

As one would expect, direct experience of conflict is consistently negatively associated with forgiveness, as shown in several studies on the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland (e.g., Hewstone et al., 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004; Kosic, Noor, & Mannetti, 2011; McLernon, Cairns, Hewstone, & Smith, 2004). Hayes and McAllister (2002) propose that exposure to violence is one of the reasons for the intractability of the conflict in Northern Ireland, both because so many people have been victims of violence, and because among

both Catholic and Protestant communities exposure to violence is associated with public support for paramilitary groups; thus violence breeds violence. Similar challenges in promoting forgiveness amongst those with direct experience of conflict have been reported in other postconflict societies. Chapman (2007), for example, highlights the limitations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission established in South Africa in 1995 in promoting forgiveness amongst those with direct experience of conflict during apartheid (but see Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002).

A second important inhibitor of forgiveness is ingroup identification. According to social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), the extent to which individuals identify with their ingroup will affect how they react to group-based phenomena. Subsequent research has measured strength of identification as a continuous variable and shown that it is a key moderator of many intergroup effects (Jetten & Spears, 2003; Jetten, Spears, & Postmes, 2004). High ingroup identifiers tend to demonstrate stronger group-based effects than low identifiers. For example, they are more likely to experience feelings of threat with respect to outgroups (Stephan & Stephan, 1999), and to value lives of ingroup members over outgroup members (Pratto & Glasford, 2008), and they require more evidence to judge their group's actions as harmful and feel less collective guilt (Miron, Branscombe, & Biernat, 2010). As Hornsey and Wohl (2013) note, high identifiers may be more likely than low identifiers to want to retain victimhood status (see also Noor, Shnabel, Halabi, & Nadler, 2012; Wohl & Branscombe, 2008). Moreover, in their work on apologies, Philpot and Hornsey (2011) showed that high identifiers with a victim group were less likely to believe that an apology had been delivered, and Brown, Wohl, and Exline (2008) found that high identifiers were less forgiving in the face of an apology than low identifiers. Identification has consistently been found to be a negative predictor of intergroup forgiveness (Cairns et al., 2005; Hewstone et al., 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004; Myers et al., 2009; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008), and recognized as one of the strongest barriers to its promotion in a meta-analysis of 43 studies (van Tongeren, Burnette, O'Boyle, Worthington, & Forsyth, 2013). As Cehajic et al. (2008) noted, respondents may be protecting their group by not forgiving the pain and injustices experienced in the recent past. Other inhibitors identified in the literature include anger and infrahumanization (Tam et al., 2007) and "competitive victimhood" (a belief that one's own group has suffered more than the outgroup; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, & Prentice, 2008).

Facilitators of Forgiveness

Turning to facilitators of forgiveness, just as ingroup identification at the subordinate level (e.g., Catholic or Protestant in Northern Ireland) is negatively associated with forgiveness, research in a variety of settings has shown that identification at the *superordinate* level (e.g., Northern Irish) can increase victim groups' readiness to forgive their historical perpetrators (e.g., Cehajic et al., 2008; Gonzalez, Manzi, & Noor, 2011; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor, Brown, Taggart, Fernandez, & Coen, 2010; Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). However, superordinate categories do not always hold the same appeal for members of different subordinate groups, and research in Northern Ireland, for example, found that identification with a common ingroup identity was associated with forgiveness only for Catholics, but not for Protestants (Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; Noor et al., 2010).

Other facilitators of forgiveness may be positive emotions and feelings experienced toward the outgroup. Consistent with Nadler and Liviatan's (2006) highlighting of how positive emotions are central to understanding the process of socioemotional reconciliation between the Israeli and Palestinian groups in the Middle East, a series of studies have found that empathy/perspective-taking, trust, and positive emotions were positively associated with promoting forgiveness, as were positive outgroup attitudes and collective guilt (see Cehajic et al., 2008; Hewstone et al., 2006; Moeschberger, Dixon,

Niens, & Cairns, 2005; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008; for meta-analytic confirmation, see van Tongeren et al., 2013).

A key facilitator of intergroup forgiveness is positive intergroup contact. There is now extensive evidence that positive interactions between members of different groups can reduce intergroup prejudice and hostility (Allport, 1954; Brown & Hewstone, 2005; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Intergroup contact has in fact long been considered one of psychology's most effective strategies for improving intergroup relations (Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2003). Specifically, several studies have reported that contact is positively related to forgiveness (e.g., Hewstone et al., 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004; Kosic et al., 2011; Moeschberger et al., 2005), and that it has an impact via many of the factors identified before, such as increased trust, reduced anger, and reduced infrahumanization (Hewstone et al., 2006; Tam et al., 2007).

The Present Research

In the present research, we investigated the association between intergroup contact and intergroup forgiveness in the presence versus absence of relevant obstacles, such as experience of intergroup conflict and ingroup identification. Surprisingly, there has been little research to date on the effectiveness of contact in ameliorating intergroup relations under such challenging conditions. In particular, we are aware of only one study comparing the effect of contact among high versus low identifiers, which found that those who identify highly with their social group may paradoxically benefit more from contact (Mari, Capozza, Hichy, Falvo, & Volpato, 2007). This may occur both because high identifiers' attitudes are more extreme, and hence the positive contact experience is more salient to them (for a similar argument concerning those high in social dominance orientation, see Dhont & van Hiel, 2011), and because contact generalizes more strongly when group memberships are more salient, as they are for high identifiers (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005). Concerning experience of conflict, in a preliminary analysis of the data we analyse next (see Hewstone et al., 2006, Study 2), we found that the bivariate correlation between contact with outgroup friends and intergroup forgiveness was significant and positive whether respondents had high or low experience of intergroup conflict, but it is not known if more generic outgroup contact would be effective for high identifiers. In the present paper we will investigate these issues in more detail.[1]

Finally, we note that some of the studies that considered the relation between intergroup contact and intergroup forgiveness used a measure of outgroup friendship (e.g., Hewstone et al., 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004), while others used measures of quality of contact, or the product of quantity and quality measures (e.g., Cehajic et al., 2008; Tam et al., 2007). However, none of these studies compared the impact of different types of contact on forgiveness. Given that contact with outgroup friends is acknowledged to be the most effective form of intergroup contact (Davies, Tropp, Aron, Pettigrew, & Wright, 2011), we predict that it will be significantly positively associated with intergroup forgiveness in a stable and consistent way. On the contrary, generic contact, as a weaker form of outgroup experience, will be more sensitive to the influence of contextual and psychosocial inhibitors of intergroup forgiveness. Additionally, as contact with outgroup friends has been found to be more effective in ameliorating intergroup relations than contact in general (Hamberger & Hewstone, 1997; Pettigrew, 1997; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), we predict that outgroup friendship will be a stronger predictor of increased forgiveness, as well as of reduced prejudice, than generic forms of intergroup contact.

The main aim of the present research was to compare the impact of friendship and general forms of outgroup contact on forgiveness and prejudice among respondents who varied in their personal experience of conflict; we also investigated the role of ingroup identification and accounted for several relevant demographic variables. Whereas the majority of social-psychological research on intergroup conflict has been on mild forms of bias (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis,

2002), we sought to provide a stricter test of the impact of contact on forgiveness. As Hornsey and Wohl (2013) pointed out in their work on forgiveness and apologies, a limitation of much of the published work is that it typically does not investigate the effects of apologies on *direct victims* of intergroup transgressions (i.e., people who were directly injured, displaced, or left bereaved because of transgressions of the past). Instead, it typically focuses on what they call *secondary victims* (i.e., members of groups that were victims of historical transgressions, even if those members were not directly affected), who, moreover, usually comprise small student samples of convenience. We believe that it is vital that intergroup forgiveness research does not lose sight of the need, given its promise to promote reconciliation, to prioritize research on direct victims (e.g., Chapman, 2007; Gobodo-Madikizela, 2002).

We therefore chose the context of the sectarian conflict in Northern Ireland, and undertook a secondary analysis of an older data set (2000) comprising a general sample of the population, when attitudes were more hardened, and experience of conflict both higher and more recent. Hayes and McAllister (2002) stated that by 1998, just before our data were collected, a large portion of the population in Northern Ireland had been exposed to political violence either directly (e.g., being a victim of a violent event, suffering injury and intimidation) or indirectly (e.g., having had a family member, or known someone who has been killed or injured). Approximately 1 in 7 reported direct experience of violence; 1 in 5 had had a family member or close relative injured or killed; and more than half personally knew someone who had been injured or killed. In the present analysis we consider both these "direct" and "indirect" types of experience as high personal experience of the conflict.

Since 1969, over 3,600 people have been killed in sectarian violence in Northern Ireland (Fay, Morrissey, & Smyth, 1998; Smyth & Hamilton, 2003); over 40,000 were injured in communal violence (Hayes & McAllister, 2002), a legacy of suffering that belies the colloquial and euphemistic local name of the conflict, "The Troubles."[2] The conflict can be understood as a division between communities of those who would like Northern Ireland to unify with the Republic of Ireland (mainly Catholics/Nationalists/Republicans) and those who would like Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom (mainly Protestants/Unionists/Loyalists). The majority of people identify with either the Catholic or Protestant community (45.14% and 48.36% of the population, respectively; NISRA, 2011). On April 10, 1998, a peace agreement (The Good Friday/Belfast Agreement) was signed. Although this event did signify the end of most paramilitary violence, Northern Ireland has become more rather than less polarized since the agreement (Robinson, 2003) and remains a deeply segregated society, especially in terms of housing and education (see Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2003, for a review), still a long way from true reconciliation (Hewstone et al., 2008).

Within this complex and difficult context, we tested three main hypotheses:

1. Contact with friends will be more strongly positively associated with forgiveness and negatively associated with prejudice than contact in general.
2. Both conflict experience and ingroup identification will be significantly negatively associated with forgiveness, and positively associated with prejudice.
3. It will be more demanding to obtain a significant association between contact and either forgiveness or prejudice among those who have personal experience of the conflict and those who identify more strongly with their ethno-religious ingroup; we predict that conflict experience will moderate the impact of generic contact, but not the more effective measure of friendship contact.

Method

Sample

Respondents were 948 adults, randomly selected from the Northern Irish population, who

provided complete data on all the measures of interest in a face-to-face survey we commissioned from the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency in May, 2000. Among them, 409 were males and 539 females. Their mean age was 47.74 years ($SD = 18.78$; range from 16 to 92). A total of 365 respondents (152 males, 213 females; mean age = 44.98; $SD = 18.51$; range from 16 to 86) identified themselves as Catholics, and 583 (257 males, 326 females; mean age = 49.47; $SD = 18.76$; range from 16 to 92) as Protestants.[3] Of particular importance for the present study, a substantial (and almost identical) proportion of both Catholic and Protestant respondents (approximately half of all respondents from each group) reported either direct or indirect exposure to The Troubles, and hence can be considered to have had high personal experience of the conflict.[4] Only 50.1% Catholic and 49.2% Protestant respondents reported having neither direct nor indirect exposure to the conflict.

Measures

Demographic variables. We asked respondents to report their gender, age, socioeconomic status (coded as 1 = Unskilled manual; 2 = Semiskilled manual; 3 = Skilled manual; 4 = Junior nonmanual; 5 = Intermediate nonmanual; 6 = Professional managerial), and gross household income (1 = None; 2 = Less than £3,000; 3 = £3000 to £5,999; 4 = £6,000 to £9,999; 5 = £10,000 to £14,999; 6 = £15,000 to £24,999; 7 = £25,000 or more). We also coded whether respondents lived in a segregated area, considering the percentage of ingroup members living in their residential area (obtained from census data, coded 1 = 0–20%; 2 = 21–40%; 3 = 41–60%; 4 = 61–80%; 5 = 81–100%). Finally, in two items we asked participants if they had direct or indirect experience of the conflict in Northern Ireland (adapted from Hayes & McAllister, 2002): "Have you ever suffered directly as a result of 'The Troubles'?"; "Has a member of your family or a close friend in your community ever suffered as a result of 'The Troubles'?" (0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*; the scores of the two items were summed).

Intergroup contact. Contact with members of the outgroup community was measured by six items. Three items concerned contact with friends: "About how many of your friends are from the other community?" (1 = *none*; 2 = *a few*; 3 = *about half*; 4 = *most*); "How often do you visit friends who are from the other community in their home?"; "And how often do you have friends who are from the other community to your home?" (1 = *never*; 2 = *rarely*; 3 = *sometimes*; 4 = *very often*). The remaining three items tapped more general forms of contact: "Thinking of social contacts—whether at home, or at work, or somewhere else—how much contact do you have with people who are from the other community: at work or in education (including previous employment or education); at community meetings or events; just chatting to people (from 1 = *none at all*, to 4 = *a great deal*). An exploratory factor analysis (principal axis with varimax rotation) yielded two factors, explaining 69.8% of the total variance. The three items assessing contact with friends loaded on the first factor (loadings were, respectively: .62, .51, .78; $\alpha = .85$), while the three items measuring generic contact loaded on the second factor (loadings were, respectively: .45, .88, .95; $\alpha = .65$).

Ingroup identification. We measured identification with the ingroup community with three items, based on Brown, Condor, Mathews, Wade, and Williams' (1986) scale: "I identify with my community"; "My community is an important group to me"; "Being a member of my community is an important part of how I see myself" (from 1 = *not at all*, to 5 = *very much*; $\alpha = .88$). Importance of religion was measured by a single item: "How important is your religion to you?" (1 = *not at all*; 5 = *a great deal*).

Criterion variables. We measured *intergroup forgiveness* with seven items developed for this research and based on the responses of Northern Irish adults in a series of focus group interviews (McLernon, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2002): "It is important that my community never forgets the wrongs done to us by the other community" (recoded); "Only when the two communities of Northern Ireland

learn to forgive each other can we be free of political violence"; "It is important that my community never forgives the wrongs done to us by the other community" (recoded); "My community has remained strong precisely because it has never forgiven past wrongs committed by the other community" (recoded); "My community should, as a group, seek forgiveness from the other community for past paramilitary activities"; "Northern Ireland will never move from the past to the future, until the two communities learn to forget about the past"; "Northern Ireland will never move from the past to the future, until the two communities learn to draw a line under the past" (response scale from 1 = *disagree strongly*, to 5 = *agree strongly*; $\alpha = .74$); higher scores denoted higher levels of intergroup forgiveness.

Prejudice was measured by five items. Two items, based on Bogardus's (1933) scale had a response scale from 1 to 4 (from 1 = *not mind at all*, to 4 = *mind a lot*): "Would you mind or not mind if a suitably qualified person of a different religion were appointed as your boss?"; "Would you mind or not mind if one of your close relatives were to marry a person of a different religion?" Three items, derived from the threat and rejection factor of Pettigrew and Meertens's (1995) Blatant Prejudice Scale, had a 5-point response scale: "Protestants [Catholics] get jobs that Catholics [Protestants] should have"; "Most politicians in Britain care too much about Protestants [Catholics] and not enough about Catholics [Protestants]"; "Protestants and Catholics will never be really comfortable with each other, even if they are close friends" (from 1 = *disagree strongly*, to 5 = *agree strongly*). After standardization, all five items were averaged to form a reliable index ($\alpha = .69$); higher scores denoted higher prejudice.

Results

Descriptives

As reported in Table 1, the two samples of Catholics and Protestants showed comparable individual characteristics, although there were some small but significant differences between the means (see Table 1). Protestant respondents were, on average, older, with higher socioeconomic status, and higher gross household income. They also tended to live in more segregated areas compared to Catholic participants. Notably, the amount of contact, both with friends and in general, was similar for the two groups, as was past experience of conflict. Catholic respondents did, however, have higher levels of ingroup identification and attached more importance to their own religion. At the same time, they showed a greater inclination to forgive the outgroup, and lower levels of prejudice. Correlation matrices are reported in the Appendices, for: total sample; Catholic and Protestant respondents; and respondents with low versus high personal experience of the conflict.[5]

Regression Analyses

We then performed a series of regression analyses with the aim of investigating the antecedents of intergroup forgiveness and prejudice. For each dependent variable, we considered four regression models, in which groups of predictors were progressively added in subsequent steps.

In Model 1 predictors were demographic characteristics and socioeconomic variables: gender (0 = Males, 1 = Females), age, socioeconomic status, gross household income, and religious group (0 = Catholics, 1 = Protestants). In Model 2 we added the two indexes of contact: contact with friends and contact in general. Model 3 included four additional variables that represent relevant issues in the explored context: two of them, identification with the ingroup community and perceived importance of one's own religion, have a psychological nature, while the other two, past experience of The Troubles and the index of segregation, have a more contextual connotation. In the final model, which tested the moderation hypothesis, we added all the possible products between the two contact measures, on the one hand, and the four variables previously added in Model 3, on the other hand. Thus, in Model 4 we tested for the presence of eight possible moderations. Prior to multiplication, the means of the

Table 1. Means and standard deviations.

	Catholics			Protestants	
	M	*SD*		*M*	*SD*
Age (in years)	44.98	18.51	***	49.47	18.76
Socioeconomic status (1–6)	3.44	1.42	**	3.70	1.49
Gross household income (1–7)	4.74	1.43	**	5.00	1.46
Contact with outgroup friends (1–4)	2.35	.88		2.30	.83
Contact in general (1–4)	2.81	.88		2.73	.83
Ingroup identification (1–5)	3.75	1.13	***	3.46	1.18
Importance of religion (1–5)	4.03	1.24	***	3.69	1.42
Experience of The Troubles (0–2)	.70	.78		.71	.78
Segregated area (1–5)	3.89	1.32	***	4.22	1.10
Forgiveness (1–5)	4.09	.67	***	3.79	.78
Prejudice (standardized)	−.09	.55	**	.06	.73

**$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

terms were centred to zero, so as to avoid problems of multicollinearity (Cronbach, 1982). If a product had a significant effect on the criterion variable, we decomposed the interaction following the procedure proposed by Jaccard, Turrisi, and Wan (1990; see also Aiken & West, 1991).

Intergroup Forgiveness

We summarize our analyses in relation to the antecedents of intergroup forgiveness in Table 2. Model 1 revealed significant effects of gender, age, socioeconomic status, income, and religious group on intergroup forgiveness. Significantly greater amounts of forgiveness were reported by females, older respondents, and respondents with higher socioeconomic status and higher income. Moreover, Catholics reported significantly higher forgiveness than Protestants.

In Model 2, when the two contact predictors were added, the effect of socioeconomic status was no longer significant, while the other individual characteristics had similar effects as in Model 1. Moreover, both contact measures were positively related to intergroup forgiveness, with a marginally larger effect for contact with friends than for contact in general (a comparison of the *B*s in the same sample showed a marginal difference, $t = 1.76$, $p = .078$; Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

In Model 3, the effects previously observed in Model 2 were still significant. Additionally, two variables were negatively associated with intergroup forgiveness: ingroup identification and experience of The Troubles.

Finally, in Model 4, besides the effects previously described, three moderations emerged as significant: the effects of both contact with friends and contact in general were moderated by experience of The Troubles, while the effect of contact in general was also moderated by ingroup identification.

Decomposing the moderation of experience of The Troubles on the association between contact with friends and forgiveness, we observed that the effect of contact with friends was significant at both levels of the moderator, but its positive effect was larger under high experience, $b = .26$, $SE = .04$, $t = 6.54$, $p < .001$, than under low experience of The Troubles, $b = .09$, $SE = .04$, $t = 2.26$, $p = .024$ (see Figure 1, top left panel). The parallel moderation for generic contact went in the reverse direction: generic contact was associated with increased intergroup forgiveness only when experience of The Troubles was low, $b = .19$, $SE = .04$, $t = 4.73$, $p < .001$, while there was no relation when experience was high, $b = .03$, $SE = .04$, $t = 0.67$, $p = .50$ (see Figure 1, top right panel). These effects are not due to differences in the mean levels of friendship at low and high levels of experience (*M*s = 2.33 and 2.30, respectively). We also checked for

Table 2. Antecedents of forgiveness.

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
	R^2	.10	.18	.24	.26	
	ΔR^2		.08***	.05***	.03***	
Gender		.13***	.12***	.12***	.11***	
Age		.13***	.14***	.16***	.15***	
Socioeconomic status		.11**	.06	.06	.05	
Gross household income		.16***	.09*	.10**	.09*	
Religious group		−.22***	−.20***	−.24***	−.23***	
Contact with friends			.23***	.19***	.20***	
Generic contact			.12**	.13***	.12***	
Ingroup identification				−.23***	−.23***	(a)
Importance of religion				.03	.03	
Experience of The Troubles				−.07**	−.06*	
Segregated area				.05	.04	
Contact With Friends × Ingroup Identification					.07	(b)
Contact With Friends × Importance of Religion					−.04	
Contact With Friends × Experience of The Troubles					.10**	
Contact With Friends × Segregated Area					.03	
Generic Contact × Ingroup Identification					.11**	
Generic Contact × Importance of Religion					−.07	
Generic Contact × Experience of The Troubles					−.09**	
Generic Contact × Segregated Area					−.04	

Note. (a) and (b) indicate significant differences between Catholic and Protestant respondents in Model 4, with $p < .05$; "friends" denote outgroup friends.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$

possible differences in the variance of forgiveness and both contact measures at low and high levels of experience. Only the variance of forgiveness differed between the two groups (Levene's $F = 6.43$, $p = .011$), but because the variance was *higher* for respondents with high versus low personal experience of The Troubles (SDs = 0.80 and 0.70, respectively) the obtained results cannot be attributed to compressed range in the high-experience subgroup.

Concerning the interaction between generic contact and ingroup identification, contact was positively related to intergroup forgiveness only for high levels of the moderator, $b = .20$, $SE = .05$, $t = 4.11$, $p < .001$. When identification was low, no effect of generic contact on forgiveness was found, $b = .02$, $SE = .05$, $t = 0.32$, $p = .75$ (see Figure 1, bottom panel).

Prejudice

As summarized in Table 3, Model 1 revealed significant effects of age, socioeconomic status, income, and religious group on prejudice. Prejudice was significantly lower for older respondents, for respondents with higher socioeconomic status and higher income, and for Catholics compared to Protestants.

When the two contact indexes were added, in Model 2, only the effect of socioeconomic status disappeared. Additionally, both contact measures showed a negative association with prejudice, with a substantially larger effect for contact with friends than for contact in general (a comparison of the *B*s in the same sample was significant, $t = 3.74$, $p < .001$; Cohen & Cohen, 1983).

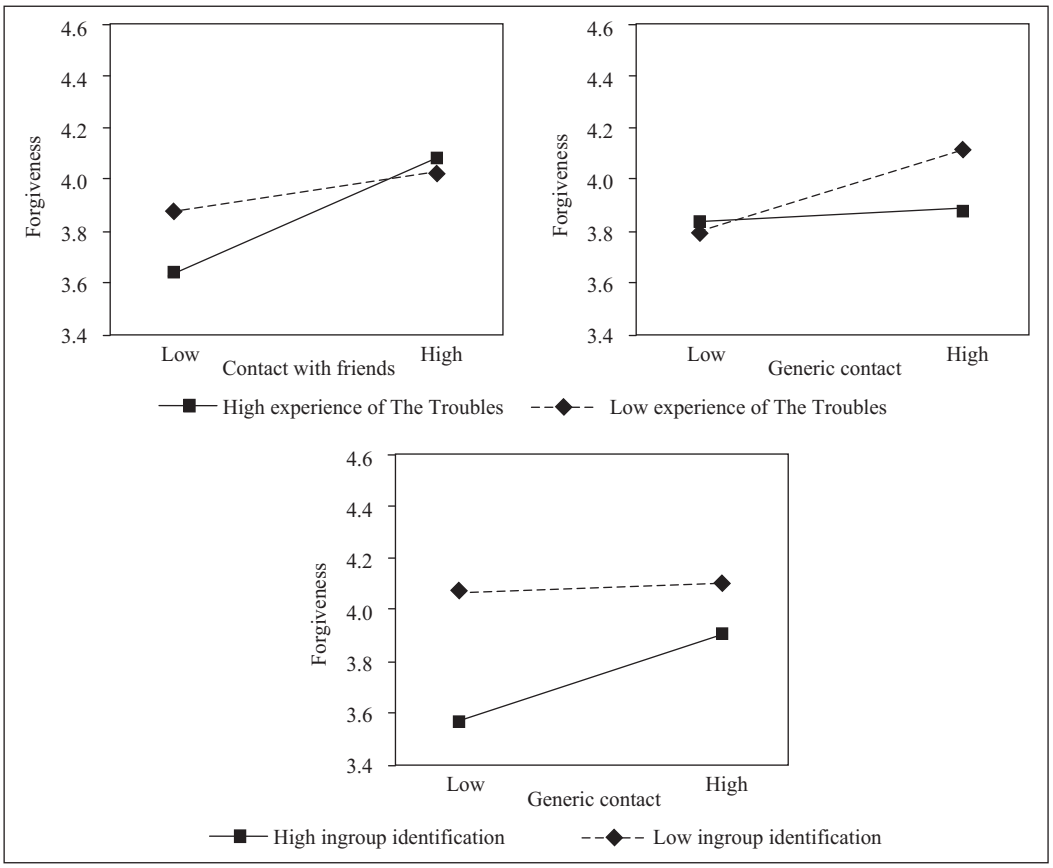

Figure 1. Moderation of the impact of intergroup contact on forgiveness for experience of The Troubles (upper part) and ingroup identification (lower part).

In Model 3, the effects previously observed in Model 2 were still significant. Moreover, we found a positive effect of ingroup identification and, although much weaker, of experience of The Troubles.

In contrast to results for intergroup forgiveness, in the case of prejudice no significant moderations emerged in Model 4.

Differences Between Catholic and Protestant Respondents

In the final step of the analysis, we looked for any significant difference between Catholic and Protestant respondents in the relations between predictors and criterion variables. To reduce the number of tests, we considered only the associations in the final models, including the moderation effects (Model 4). Thus, we repeated the regression analyses adding, among predictors, the products between all the independent variables and a contrast code reflecting respondents' religious group (−1 = Catholics; 1 = Protestants). A significant difference between religious groups in the effect of a predictor was indicated by a significant effect of the product between this predictor and the contrast code.

The two differences between Catholic and Protestant respondents reported in Table 2 concerned the effects of ingroup identification, and of the interaction between contact with friends and ingroup identification, on intergroup forgiveness. Further analyses in the two subsamples revealed that the negative relation between ingroup identification and intergroup forgiveness was significant

Table 3. Antecedents of prejudice.

		Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	
	R^2	.06	.23	.31	.32	
	ΔR^2		.17***	.08***	.01	
Gender		−.06	−.04	−.04	−.04	
Age		−.07*	−.09**	−.13***	−.13***	
Socioeconomic status		−.11**	−.04	−.04	−.04	
Gross household income		−.16***	−.07*	−.08*	−.08*	
Religious group		.14***	.11***	.16***	.16***	
Contact with friends			−.35***	−.29***	−.30***	(a)
Generic contact			−.13***	−.14***	−.13***	
Ingroup identification				.28***	.28***	(b)
Importance of religion				.03	.03	
Experience of The Troubles				.06*	.05	
Segregated area				−.04	−.05	
Contact With Friends × Ingroup Identification					−.04	
Contact With Friends × Importance of Religion					.05	
Contact With Friends × Experience of The Troubles					.01	
Contact With Friends × Segregated Area					.02	
Generic Contact × Ingroup Identification					−.07	
Generic Contact × Importance of Religion					.03	
Generic Contact × Experience of The Troubles					−.02	
Generic Contact × Segregated Area					.03	

Note. (a) and (b) indicate significant differences between Catholic and Protestant respondents in Model 4, with $p < .05$; "friends" denote outgroup friends.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

for Protestants only ($\beta = -.21, p < .001$; for Catholics: $\beta = -.06, p = .33$). Moreover, the interaction between contact with friends and ingroup identification also had a significant effect on forgiveness for Protestants only ($\beta = .16$, $p < .001$; for Catholics: $\beta = -.07$, $p = .31$). The decomposition of this moderation showed that, for Protestant respondents, outgroup friendships were positively related with forgiveness for high levels of ingroup identification, $b = .32$, $SE = .06$, $t = 5.52$, $p < .001$, while the effect of contact with friends was nonsignificant when identification was low, $b = .04$, $SE = .06$, $t = 0.66$, $p = .51$.

Finally, two differences emerged between Catholic and Protestant respondents in the analysis concerning prejudice (Table 3). The first involved ingroup identification, the second concerned contact with friends. In both cases the effects of the predictors were significant for both groups of respondents, but stronger for Protestants: contact with friends was more strongly negatively associated with prejudice for Protestants ($\beta = -.34$, $p < .001$) than for Catholics ($\beta = -.23$, $p < .001$); at the same time, ingroup identification was a stronger predictor of prejudice for Protestants ($\beta = .34$, $p < .001$) than for Catholics ($\beta = .13$, $p = .02$).

Discussion

Our aim in this article was to investigate the association between different kinds of intergroup contact (friendship and generic contact) and both intergroup forgiveness and prejudice among a

sample that included substantial numbers of respondents with personal experience of the conflict in Northern Ireland. We simultaneously considered the role of ingroup identification, as another well-established inhibitor of forgiveness, and accounted for a set of relevant demographic variables. Given the significant proportion of Catholic and Protestant respondents in our sample who reported personal experience of the conflict, we can state with confidence that these analyses provide a refined test of whether contact (and if so, which form of contact) is associated with both forgiveness and prejudice, even amongst those individuals who suffered personally from protracted intergroup conflict. Overall we found that contact was positively associated with forgiveness, marginally more so in the case of friendship than general contact, whereas both conflict experience and identification were negatively associated with forgiveness. We first explore the main findings in more detail, in relation to the three hypotheses tested, and then consider the differences that were observed as a function of religious group membership. Finally, we address some limitations of the study and make suggestions for future research.

There was overall support for Hypothesis 1, since contact with friends had a significantly more negative impact on prejudice, and a marginally more positive impact on forgiveness, than did contact in general. This confirms Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) finding that tests of the impact of contact on prejudice using some measure of friendship yielded a significantly stronger ($p < .05$) effect size (mean $r = -.25$) than tests assessing *all types* of contact (mean $r = -.212$). Davies et al. (2011), in their later meta-analysis of friendship contact, including a larger number of studies and many more longitudinal studies, confirmed the substantial effect of contact with friends in the case of positive outgroup attitudes. Although they did not compare the effects of friendship and general forms of contact on positive outgroup attitudes, they did compare the effects of the number of outgroup friendships (quantity) to various (mostly qualitative) aspects of outgroup friendships (including time spent with outgroup friends, a possible indicator of friendship strength, and self-disclosure). They found that these two indices correlated significantly more strongly with positive outgroup attitudes ($r = .271$ and .255, respectively) than either the mere number of outgroup friendships ($r = .220$) or the proportion of friendship circle comprised by outgroupers ($r = .234$; the latter two, quantitative measures being significantly weaker, $p < .01$, than the other two, qualitative measures). Neither of these meta-analyses investigated the impact of contact on forgiveness.

There was also strong support for Hypothesis 2, confirming that, as has been found in previous research, both conflict experience (Hewstone et al., 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004; Kosic et al., 2011; McLernon et al., 2004) and ingroup identification (Cairns et al., 2005; Hewstone et al., 2006; Hewstone et al., 2004; Myers et al., 2009; Noor, Brown, Gonzalez, et al., 2008) were negatively associated with forgiveness, and positively associated with prejudice.

The more interesting and novel hypothesis was Hypothesis 3. We predicted that it would be more demanding to obtain a significant association between contact and either forgiveness or prejudice among those who have personal experience of the conflict and those who identify more strongly with their ethno-religious ingroup. Specifically, we predicted that conflict experience would moderate the impact of generic contact, but not the more intimate measure of friendship contact. Support for Hypothesis 3 was mixed, and there were three interaction effects for forgiveness, but none for prejudice.

Looking first at the moderations involving conflict experience, as predicted the association between contact with friends and forgiveness was significant for respondents who reported high *or* low levels of conflict experience; in fact, contrary to our expectation, its positive effect was larger under high than low experience. Thus the impact of this strong form of positive contact, while generally present, was particularly evident under the challenging conditions of high conflict experience. The fact that friendship contact had a stronger impact on forgiveness effect when respondents had high conflict experience may at first appear odd. However, we suggest that it is a

comparable effect to the apparently paradoxical *greater* effect of contact in more prejudiced participants, such as those scoring high on right-wing authoritarianism (RWA; Dhont & van Hiel, 2009; Hodson, Harry, & Mitchell, 2009) or social dominance orientation (SDO; Dhont & van Hiel, 2009; Hodson, 2008) or Israeli "hawks" compared with "doves" (Maoz, 2003). Such respondents have substantial room to "improve" on the dependent variable, whereas those already positively inclined towards the outgroup do not. This moderation effect may also reflect the strength of outgroup friendships—forged against the odds of conflict, segregation, and proscribed outgroup contact—which stubbornly persist when challenged by external events. In contrast, generic contact was associated with increased intergroup forgiveness only when experience of The Troubles was low, and not when experience was high. This result is consistent with the idea that generic contact is weaker than friendship contact.

Turning to the moderation involving ingroup identification, it occurred for generic contact. Contact was positively related to intergroup forgiveness only for respondents who *highly* identified with their ethno-religious ingroup. As we noted in the first part of this article, it is well established that contact generalizes more strongly when group memberships are more salient, and this is the case for high identifiers (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005), and Mari et al. (2007) found that those who identify highly with their social group benefit more from contact. However, our results underscore that while generic contact requires this salience, friendship contact, precisely because it is so intimate, is less dependent on this additional boost.

Overall, our findings confirm that while outgroup friendship is a robust predictor of forgiveness, even in very demanding conditions, generic outgroup contact is more susceptible to adverse conditions, such as high conflict experience, and more reliant on salient group memberships within the contact situation, in order for the effect to generalize. These findings could also be taken to indicate that forgiveness is a more demanding criterion than prejudice reduction. Given what we know about forgiveness, it makes some sense to propose that it would be harder to achieve forgiveness than the reduction of prejudice, not least because of the difficulty in identifying individual offenders, and the fact that previous offenses against collectives are likely to be perceived as particularly severe and inexcusable (Exline, Worthington, Hill, & McCullough, 2003). And intuitively, "forgiving" an atrocity, or an attack on a loved one or member of one's community, involves a greater step than expressing a less negative or more positive view of that person or the group they represent. Jude Whyte's forgiveness for the killer of his mother is remarkable precisely because such reactions are so rare. However, we should be cautious in arguing that our data support the idea that forgiveness is harder to achieve than prejudice reduction: comparing such concepts as forgiveness and prejudice is fraught with difficulty. Any differences in findings could be due not (only) to forgiveness being a more demanding criterion, but could also be artifacts of measurement difficulty (e.g., prejudicial attitudes might be more accessible than a more complex construct like forgiveness); and both measures should be assessed in as comparable a manner as possible (in the present research the prejudice items were all coded in the same direction and might hence be deemed "easier" to answer, whereas the forgiveness instrument might be deemed more complex, and has some reverse-coded items).

Finally, in addition to the predicted moderations involving conflict experience and ingroup identification, there were a small number of moderations involving respondents' ethno-religious group memberships. First, the effects of ingroup identification were stronger for Protestants than for Catholics, both when identification was a predictor of intergroup forgiveness and prejudice, and when it acted as a moderator in the relation between generic outgroup contact and forgiveness. We believe that this effect may be due to the mean score of ingroup identification for Protestants than for Catholics (see Table 1). In line with what we said before about the established effect of salience moderating the impact of

contact on outcomes (see Brown & Hewstone, 2005), and high identifiers benefiting more from contact (Mari et al., 2007), Protestants' lower levels of identification may have meant that they were less likely to show generalized effects of contact, except among high identifiers. Second, and related, the interaction between contact with friends and identification on forgiveness was only significant for Protestants; for this subgroup, contact with friends was only positively associated with forgiveness when identification was high. Once again, this effect appears due to the lower level of identification among Protestants who, compared to Catholics, only showed beneficial effects of contact on the more demanding criterion of forgiveness, when group memberships during contact with outgroup members were more salient, due to heightened identification.

We argued earlier that research on intergroup forgiveness in general, and on contact as a forgiveness-promoting variable specifically, must be explored in demanding contexts, with representative samples, and "direct victims" (Hornsey & Wohl, 2013). Given that just over half of the Catholic and Protestant respondents in our sample reported personal experience of The Troubles (direct or indirect experience; and more than one fifth reported direct experience), our work is able to state, with confidence, that contact, especially with outgroup friends, is strongly associated with forgiveness, even among real victims of conflict. However, there are some limitations to this study. Notably, with its focus on external validity, it is cross-sectional and correlational; we have not been able to manipulate variables of interest. It is, of course, impossible to manipulate some variables, such as experience of the conflict, but others, such as group identification, can be manipulated (Doosje, Ellemers, & Spears, 1995; Stroebe, Lodewijkx, & Spears, 2005). We would also like to see future research on these issues carried out with longitudinal designs, to increase confidence in the causal effect of contact on forgiveness and prejudice. We acknowledge that there may also be reverse effects, from forgiveness and prejudice to contact (these have been shown in longitudinal studies of the contact–prejudice relationship, e.g., Binder et al., 2009), although it is typically found that the contact–prejudice path is stronger than the reverse path, and that contact predicts prejudice, even after controlling for the effect of prior attitudes on later intergroup contact (e.g., Swart, Hewstone, Christ, & Voci, 2011). We also acknowledge that forgiveness may promote contact; for example, the positive consequences of forgiveness include increased willingness to befriend a member of a perpetrator group and to engage in transactions with them (Wohl & Branscombe, 2005). Notwithstanding these concerns, given our focus on moderators, the present cross-sectional design is less of a limitation; and the large-sample survey does provide the necessary statistical power to detect higher order interactions in nonexperimental contexts (McClelland & Judd, 1993). Finally, future research should pursue the processes responsible for our surprising finding that the association between friendship contact and forgiveness was actually greater under high versus low personal experience of the conflict. It is possible, for example, that against the background of such negative prior experience with the outgroup the experience of positive intergroup contact in the form of friendship would be especially salient and memorable. However, we had no measures to try to tap these processes.

To conclude, our research, which included in the sample many respondents with personal experience of the conflict, can be taken as a refined test of whether contact is associated with forgiveness and prejudice, and whether it is a variable that could be used to promote forgiveness where it is most needed, under demanding conditions where identities remain strong and the conflict far from consigned to history. While contact, especially contact with outgroup friends, is strongly associated with forgiveness, conflict experience and ingroup identification inhibit forgiveness. It has been argued that engaging psychologically with past political violence may ultimately lead to the development of more positive intergroup relations and facilitate the healing of political society (Cehajic et al., 2008; Lederach, 1997; Staub, 2006). We believe that positive intergroup contact, especially in the form of outgroup

friendships, aimed at intergroup forgiveness must be a central component of such an enterprise.

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Notes

1. Our earlier paper (Hewstone et al., 2006, Study 2) reported a preliminary analysis of this data set, focused on correlates of forgiveness, for separate Catholic and Protestant subsamples, which did not include the general measure of outgroup contact, or the measure of prejudice, or the full set of demographics. Nor did we compare the impact of different types of contact on forgiveness and prejudice, or compute moderated regressions, or test the three hypotheses we test in this paper. We reported simple correlations between friendship contact and forgiveness for those with no experience (50% sample) versus those with indirect or direct experience of conflict (50%; 2006, p. 113).
2. Although this term is now widely understood to refer to contemporary problems in Northern Ireland, it has, in fact, been used to refer to unrest in Ireland since at least 1880, and James Joyce's *Ulysses* (published in 1922) refers to "Times of the troubles" (Oxford English Dictionary).
3. The discrepancy between the present sample size ($N = 948$) and that reported in the earlier paper (Hewstone et al., 2006, Study 2; $N = 1{,}038$) is due to missing data on some of the measures included in the present analysis.
4. 21.9% of the Catholic and 22.5% of the Protestant respondents reported direct exposure to conflict; 47.9% of the Catholic and 48.2% of the Protestant respondents reported indirect exposure to conflict; 20% of the Catholic and 19.7% of the Protestant respondents reported both direct and indirect exposure to conflict. Very few respondents reported only direct, but no indirect, experience (23 out of 948), thus it was not possible to conduct separate analyses among those with what we term personal experience of the conflict, comparing respondents with direct versus indirect experience.
5. Before analyzing the data, we tested the normal distribution and multivariate normality of the criterion variables: intergroup forgiveness and prejudice. For intergroup forgiveness items, absolute values of skewness ranged from .25 (Item 1) to 1.8 (Item 2), with a mean value of 1.07. For kurtosis, absolute values ranged from .17 (Item 3) to 2.72 (Item 2), with a mean value of 1.48. For prejudice items, absolute values of skewness ranged from .16 (Item 4) to 2.62 (Item 2), with a mean value of .86. For kurtosis, absolute values ranged from .72 (Item 2) to 5.46 (Item 1), with a mean value of 1.99. A Test of Univariate Normality on the mean score for forgiveness indicated a departure from normality, as suggested by *Z*-tests of univariate skewness and kurtosis scores ($z = -9.42$, $p < .001$; $z = 4.00$, $p < .001$, respectively). Finally, we performed Mardia's test (Mardia, 1970), which suggested a deviation from multivariate normality (multivariate skewness: $b_{1p} = 13.07$, $p < .001$; multivariate kurtosis: $b_{2p} = 83.45$, $p < .001$). For the mean score of prejudice the Test of Univariate Normality suggested a violation from normality, as indicated by *Z*-tests of univariate skewness and kurtosis scores ($z = 9.47$, $p < .001$; $z = 2.67$, $p = .008$, respectively). Finally, Mardia's test showed a deviation from multivariate normality (multivariate skewness: $b_{1p} = 8.36$, $p < .001$; multivariate kurtosis: $b_{2p} = 39.92$, $p < .001$). Thus the criterion variables, intergroup forgiveness and prejudice, deviate somewhat from normal distribution and from multivariate normality. As outlined by Curran, West, and Finch (1996), relevant deviations from normality emerge when univariate skewness is 2.00 and kurtosis is 7.00. As reported before, however, all the values of skewness and kurtosis in our data were far from these problematic thresholds. Most notably, small departures from normality of the criterion variable do not affect the validity of a regression test, which was shown to be robust against these deviations, particularly in large samples, as in the present research (Lumley, Diehr, Emerson, & Chen, 2002).

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Appendix A

Table A1. Correlation matrix for total sample.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Contact with outgroup friends	–							
2. Generic contact	.52***	–						
3. Ingroup identification	−.22***	−.12***	–					
4. Importance of religion	−.09**	−.05	.46***	–				
5. Experience of The Troubles	−.03	.04	.02	−.01	–			
6. Segregated area	−.30***	−.20***	.05	−.02	−.04	–		
7. Forgiveness	.32***	.25***	−.24***	−.02	−.09**	−.08**	–	
8. Prejudice	−.44***	−.33***	.35***	.14***	.08*	.12***	−.58***	–

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$; $N = 948$.

Appendix B

Table B1. Correlation matrix for Catholic and Protestant respondents.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Contact with outgroup friends	–	.56***	−.15**	−.03	−.11*	−.38***	.30***	−.39***
2. Generic contact	.49***	–	−.12*	−.07	.01	−.30***	.25***	−.35***
3. Ingroup identification	−.27***	−.14**	–	.45***	.06	.14**	−.06	.17**
4. Importance of religion	−.13**	−.04	.46***	–	−.01	.00	.07	.02
5. Experience of The Troubles	.03	.06	.00	.00	–	−.01	−.09	.09
6. Segregated area	−.22***	−.12**	.02	.00	−.06	–	−.12*	.18***
7. Forgiveness	.34***	.25***	−.38***	−.10*	−.09*	−.02	–	−.50***
8. Prejudice	−.48***	−.32***	.46***	.20***	.07	.07	−.61***	–

Note. Correlations in the upper diagonal are for Catholic respondents ($n = 365$); correlations in the lower diagonal are for Protestant respondents ($n = 583$).
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.

Appendix C

Table C1. Correlation matrix for respondents with some versus no personal experience of the conflict.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Contact with outgroup friends	–	.51***	−.19***	−.11*	−.30***	.26***	−.42***
2. Generic contact	.54***	–	−.12**	−.08	−.16***	.31***	−.33***
3. Ingroup identification	−.25***	−.13**	–	.49***	.09	−.26***	.37***
4. Importance of religion	−.08	−.01	.44***	–	.01	−.04	.17***
5. Segregated area	−.29***	−.24***	.03	−.05	–	−.03	.07
6. Forgiveness	.38***	.22***	−.22***	.00	−.13**	–	−.53***
7. Prejudice	−.47***	−.34***	.33***	.11*	.16***	−.62***	–

Note. Correlations in the upper diagonal are for respondents with no personal experience of conflict ($n = 470$); correlations in the lower diagonal are for respondents with some personal experience of conflict ($n = 478$).
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.