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Reducing Antisemitism and Other Prejudices: Can Biographical Intergroup Contact Help to Prevent Radicalization?¹

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Abstract

Biographical intergroup contact, through which participants learn about the life and perspective of a real outgroup member, is potentially a powerful new prejudice reduction tool which challenges antisemitism as a means of reducing extremism initially against Jewish people, and by extension to other stigmatized groups. Impact evaluation of two field studies tested the effects of biographical contact on children and adolescents' willingness to have intergroup contact with Jewish people and six other groups that are commonly the target of extremism. Biographical contact was implemented through an anti-prejudice education program led by the charity the Anne Frank Trust UK and was based on the life and diary of the Jewish teenager Anne Frank. In Study 1, with young people between the ages of 12 and 15 years ($N = 122$), pre- and post-measures showed that the program significantly improved young people's willingness for contact with Jewish people, and that change predicted 43% of the variance in improvement in attitudes towards the six other groups. Study 2, with children aged 8 to 12 years ($N = 330$) confirmed significant improvements in three hypothesized mechanisms: knowledge, intergroup empathy and confidence in intergroup communication. Theoretical and practical implications for preventing extremism and radicalization are discussed.

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Introduction

Concern about rising antisemitism in Europe and the U.S has grown in recent years following record numbers of antisemitic incidents across countries including the UK (Community Security Trust CST, 2024), Germany (RIAS, 2024) and the U.S. (Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, 2025). Fuelled by the ongoing conflict in the Middle East, anti-Jewish hate incidents reached their highest levels in 2024 with a record 4,296 recorded incidents in the

¹ Data collection was conducted by the Anne Frank Trust UK, of which the second author is a former Trustee.

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UK (CST, 2024), and 9,354 in the U.S. In the US this represents an 893% increase in prevalence over the last 10 years (Audit of Antisemitic Incidents, 2025). Anti-Jewish views are most common in young people (Hersh & Royden, 2022) and despite the variety of prejudice reduction programs evaluated in psychological research, relatively few start with a focus on early adolescents' attitudes towards Jewish people and fewer still attempt to address the more general mechanisms through which radicalized prejudices can be countered. The present work examines the impact of a biographical contact intervention as one means of addressing these challenges. Study 1 establishes evidence consistent with a large impact on willingness for contact with Jewish people and consistent with secondary transfer that diminishes other prejudices. Study 2 tests three potential underlying mechanisms hypothesized to be influenced by the intervention that have previously been shown to lead to prejudice reduction.

Prejudice and Radicalization

According to the Doosje et al. (2016) model, radicalization 'is a process through which people become increasingly motivated to use violent means against members of an out-group or symbolic targets to achieve behavioral change and political goals' (p.79). Doosje et al., identify four characteristics of radical groups, the fourth of which is that violence is generally directed towards an outgroup perceived as responsible for causing grievance. This is particularly pertinent to work on intergroup dynamics and the current study with clear theoretical bases in social identity theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 1979), integrated threat theory (Stephan & Stephan, 1996), and relative deprivation theory (Crosby, 1976; Gurr, 1970). According to Doosje et al., (2016) an important driving factor of sensitivity to radicalization is personal uncertainty which finds resolution through identifying with a group that offers clear norms and values, a function often provided by extremist groups (Hogg et al., 2013).

Whilst the relationship between prejudice and radicalisation is well established in theory, many people hold prejudices but do not go on to become violent extremists. Nonetheless, once basic ingroup and outgroup divisions are imbued with subjective value, as proposed by SIT, these divisions become associated with perceived threat and injustice, as well as prejudice to outgroups, all of which create openness to extremist and radicalised

ideologies. Prejudice functions as a cognitive and moral enabler of radicalisation, rather than a primary driver. It facilitates the construction of out-groups as threatening, inferior, or blameworthy, thereby lowering psychological barriers to extremist belief.

In the current study prejudice, operationalized as the degree of willingness for contact with outgroup members, is analytically significant as an early indicator of radicalisation because it reflects initial processes of social categorisation, perceived threat, and out-group derogation that have been theorized as likely enablers of ideological commitment.

Anti-Jewish Attitudes in Young People

Research suggests that negative intergroup attitudes and behaviors emerge as early as preschool age (e.g., Aboud, 1988). And, whilst it is widely accepted that intergroup biases become more deeply entrenched during the progression to adulthood, recent evidence indicates that prejudice does arise amongst younger generations even if their prejudiced attitudes may focus on different groups or domains (e.g., Hersh & Royden, 2022; Janmaat & Keating, 2019).

Accordingly, it has been theorised that antisemitism may be increasing among younger adults for two main reasons: i) the declining salience of the Holocaust and ii) increasingly negative attitudes towards Israel and its involvement in the War on Gaza (e.g., Ozer et al., 2025). A case in point is Holocaust education, which in the UK has been a compulsory element of the national curriculum for adolescents since 1991 (Foster et al., 2016). To date there is mixed evidence for its impact in terms of young people's learning about the Holocaust. National survey data revealed that after receiving such educational information students had limited knowledge about the Holocaust as well as holding many misconceptions, including overestimating the size of the Jewish population in Germany at the start of World War II, underestimating the number of Jews killed during the war, and a misunderstanding around why Hitler targeted the Jewish people (Foster et al, 2016; Gray 2013). Knowledge of the Holocaust amongst adolescents and adults in the U.S. (Pew Research Centre, 2020) and young people in Germany (Hübscher & Pfaff, 2023) is similarly lacking.

Longitudinal research with primary aged children in Scotland (Cowan & Maitles, 2005; Cowan & Maitles, 2007) suggests that delivery of Holocaust education (versus its

absence) leads to positive citizenship values in young people, including improved attitudes to minority groups, but the impact is short-lived, with positive attitudes declining over time. Furthermore, despite self-reported knowledge having increased there remained a lack of understanding of terms such as ‘antisemitism’ and ‘genocide’. Research from the United States also provides a mixed picture; adults self-reported knowledge of antisemitism is associated with higher awareness of antisemitism as a societal issue (Jedwab, 2015), whilst Holocaust education increases school students’ support for civil liberties but decreases religious tolerance in middle school students from less educated households (Bowen & Kisida, 2020).

It is important therefore to consider alternative approaches for improving attitudes toward Jewish people (e.g., Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2016; Turkoglu et al., 2023). One such approach, relevant to the present study, involves engagement with a multicultural past as a means of enhancing historical knowledge and fostering more positive outgroup attitudes. In one notable study, 427 non-Jewish Polish high school students participated in a community-based Jewish heritage programme consisting of four workshops delivered over the course of a month. Pre–post assessments indicated that the intervention was highly effective in increasing students’ knowledge of and interest in local history. These gains, in turn, were associated with a greater inclusion of Jewish people within the students’ sense of self and more positive attitudes toward this group (Stefaniak & Bilewicz, 2016).

Reducing Anti-Jewish Prejudice in Children/Adolescents

It is often argued that childhood and adolescence represent an optimal period in which to deliver anti-prejudice interventions before attitudes and implicit biases are entrenched (Rutland & Killen, 2015), and during a phase of social development when young people’s understanding of group dynamics is becoming more sophisticated (Abrams, 2011; Abrams et al, 2008). Reviews in this area outline the need for interventions to be grounded in theory (e.g., Paluck & Green, 2009), and that positive changes to anti-Jewish attitudes and behaviors can be achieved through well designed, theory-driven programs (Sigelman et al., 2025). Many interventions tend to be based around intergroup contact; a powerful prejudice reduction tool effective for both adults (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006) and younger age groups (e.g., Beelmann & Heinemann, 2014; Sigelman et al., 2025). Whilst direct contact that closely adheres to

Allport's (1954) original conditions is often cited as leading to greater prejudice reduction, meta-analytic findings indicate that other types of contact can also be sufficient for prejudice reduction (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006). Indirect contact methods include extended contact, (Wright et al., 1997), vicarious contact (Mazziotta et al., 2011), and imagined contact (Crisp & Turner, 2009, 2012) each of which can reduce prejudice and increase willingness for contact with outgroup members.

Biographical Contact

A more recently investigated form of indirect contact is biographical contact (Goodbun & Abrams, 2025). Biographical contact has been implemented over several years by the anti-prejudice educational charity the Anne Frank Trust UK (AFT). Biographical contact engages participants with the personal history and perspective of a real outgroup member, including their experiences in intergroup contexts. This both introduces an element of learning about the life of an outgroup member, and can induce narrative transportation (Green & Brock 2000, 2002), increasing perspective taking and reducing negative attitudes (e.g., Bruneau & Saxe 2012; Herrera et al. 2018; Vescio et al., 2003).

For biographical material to contribute to prejudice reduction, it should foreground the subject's experiences of prejudice and discrimination, as well as their repudiation of biased attitudes toward outgroups. In doing so, it enables readers, viewers, or audiences to acquire a deeper appreciation of the lived realities of discrimination and the ways individuals respond to it (e.g., Iverson, 2016). This enhanced understanding can, in turn, promote more favorable intergroup attitudes and greater willingness to engage in contact with outgroup members, as demonstrated in research employing first-person narratives as a mechanism for attitudinal change (e.g., Kim & Lim, 2022). These elements are embedded in the Diary of Anne Frank (Frank, 1989) and her story, making it an ideal vehicle for contact-based prejudice reduction.

Empirical evidence supports the proposition that biographical contact can be a powerful prejudice reduction tool with young people (Goodbun & Abrams, 2025). Following biographical contact with the Jewish teenager Anne Frank, participants (ages 9-17 years, N=1413), showed significantly improved willingness for contact with Jewish people as well as with 11 other social groups. Furthermore, increased willingness for contact with Jewish

people was strongly predictive of their willingness for contact with other groups, consistent with a ‘secondary transfer effect’ of attitude change (see Pettigrew, 2009).

Implementation of Biographical Contact

The AFT, is an educational charity founded in 1991. It is the only organisation in the United Kingdom that is licensed to use the name of Anne Frank and is amongst only a handful of organisations around the world permitted to do so. The Trust’s work is inspired by Anne, and builds on that of her father, Otto Frank, using Anne’s legacy to challenge prejudice and discrimination. The Trust provides educational interventions aimed to empower young people between the ages of 9 and 15 years to challenge all forms of prejudice. The AFT School’s program uses Anne’s famous diary as a means to engage young people with her life and experiences. It enables young people to reflect on Anne’s experiences alongside their own whilst also acknowledging and recognising the antisemitism she endured, and which led to her untimely death alongside millions of other Jews murdered in the Holocaust. Further details of the work of the AFT are available from their website [Anne Frank Trust UK](https://www.annefranktrustuk.org/)

The Trust runs two substantial programs for schools, both drawing on Anne’s story as their central focus. The important aspect that is common to both programs, assessed in the present research (Study 1 and Study 2 respectively), is the use of biographical contact as the vehicle for change.

The central text of the biographical contact program is Anne Frank’s famous diary. Quotes from the diary are used extensively during the training process along with ‘video diaries’ created by the Anne Frank House. These imagine Anne filming her experiences rather than writing them, making her experiences immediately relevant and accessible to today’s generation of young people. Drawing on these readings and video extracts from Anne Frank’s diary the biographical contact training includes information on the following:

- Some of the events leading up to her birth in 1929 such as the loss of World War I for Germany and the Treaty of Versailles.
- Anne’s early life in Germany.
- Her time in hiding and her experiences in camps after being arrested.
- A consideration of her other family members and their relationships.

Throughout the program, the AFT presents Anne as an individual by emphasizing her personality, interests, and preferences, rather than portraying her solely as a victim. This approach is intended to foster empathy, encourage perspective-taking, and increase perceptions of shared humanity. In this respect, biographical contact differs from more conventional educational or contact programs, which typically focus on conveying information about outgroup members, developing social skills (see Beelmann & Lutterbach 2020, for a review), or employing interventions designed to elicit collective guilt as a means of reducing prejudice.

The aims of the AFT are to use biographical contact with Anne Frank to reduce prejudice towards Jewish people and other marginalised groups, and the theory and logic for their approach which also underpin our predictions (developed further in Study 2) are in line with this. The central hypothesis is that biographical contact with Anne Frank will increase willingness for contact with Jewish people and, importantly, also with members of other outgroups that are vulnerable to extremism.

The specific aims of the current research are to:

evaluate the impact of the AFT program on willingness for contact with Jewish people (Study 1).

evaluate the impact of the AFT program on willingness for contact with six other groups (Study 1), and,

to test whether knowledge of prejudice, perspective taking, and confidence to talk about prejudice are among plausible underpinning mechanisms affected by biographical contact (Study 2).

Study 1: Biographical Contact and Secondary Transfer Effects

Study 1 specifically addresses whether prejudice reduction generalizes to a range of groups that either may be sources or targets of radicalization. This so-called secondary transfer effect (STE; Pettigrew, 1997, 2009) was identified as a means by which contact with an initial or primary outgroup positively influences attitudes towards secondary outgroups who were not involved in the contact experience. It has been argued that the STE may be constrained by a

stimulus gradient whereby attitudes would generalise most readily or perhaps only, to groups perceived to be sufficiently similar to the primary outgroup (see Harwood et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 2009). However, Goodbun & Abrams (2025) found evidence that biographical contact with Jewish people was positively related to reductions in prejudice toward 11 other social groups and that similarity to the target group did not moderate the transfer. Study 1 aims to provide a further test of the extent of secondary transfer arising from biographical contact, focusing specifically on groups liable to be linked to issues of radicalization and extends prior work by analysing data collected around periods of COVID-19 lockdown in the UK—a context characterised not only by restricted and reconfigured social contact, but also by heightened salience of group identities.

Method

Design

The study used a nonexperimental within participants (pre-post intervention) design. Variables measured include basic demographics of gender, age, religion and ethnicity. The dependent variable was willingness for contact.

Ethics approval for the evaluation measures was obtained from the Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Kent (Ethics approval id: 201815375395705107).

Participants

Eight schools participated in the AFT peer education program during the 2020-2021 academic year. In each of the eight schools a number of students were trained by the AFT to become peer educators, with a focus on imparting knowledge about Anne Frank, her life and wider issues of prejudice. After the training program the peer educators then went on to teach other students in their schools via methods such as assemblies and videos.

In total, the AFT trained 139 young people as peer educators during the 2020-2021 period (122 completed both pre and post intervention questionnaires and were included in the following analyses). Participants were between the ages of 11 and 14 years. The demographic characteristics of the sample can be found in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of participants at baseline

Variable	n	%
Gender		
Male	27	22.1
Female	72	59.0
Other	1	0.8
Missing	22	18.0
Ethnicity		
White	34	27.8
Asian/Asian British /Asian Scottish	45	36.8
Black/African/Caribbean/Black British/Black Scottish	15	12.4
Mixed/Multiple ethnic groups	4	3.2
Other ethnic group	1	0.8
Prefer not to say	0	0
Missing	23	19.0
Religion		
Church of England	6	4.9
Muslim	42	34.4
Other Christian	12	9.8
Roman Catholic	2	1.6
Hindu	3	2.5
Jewish	1	0.8
Sikh	4	3.3
None	22	18.0
Another Religion	4	3.3
Don't know	6	4.9
Missing	20	16.4

Willingness for Contact with Other Groups

Willingness for contact with 16 social groups was measured using the Contact Star (see Figure 1) an efficient and engaging technique developed jointly by the AFT and the University of Kent in 2015 to evaluate attitudes toward multiple groups (see also Purewal, 2014).

The Contact Star asks young people to consider how much they would be willing to spend every lunchtime for a whole week with individuals they have never met before and who are from 16 different social groups. Participants are asked to rate how much they would like

to do this for each group using on the star using a 7 point scale (1 = not at all like to, 4 = neither like nor dislike, 7 = very much like to do this), where 1 is the farthest tip of the star and 7 is closest to the centre of the star (and hence to the self). For the present analyses only those groups pertinent to risks associated with radicalization are included. These are Jewish, Gypsy, Black, Muslim, Immigrant, Christian, and Refugee.

Procedure

Participants generated personalized identification codes and completed the Contact Star twice: once prior to the peer education training (pre-intervention), along with demographic information, and again two weeks after the intervention (post-intervention). Pre- and Post-intervention Contact Stars were completed blind to the AFT workers and teachers.

During the intervention, the peer educators were engaged with a comprehensive biographical contact experience (detailed in the previous section) – spending time with AFT workers where they learnt about all aspects of Anne’s life.

Once the biographical contact training is complete, the peer educators are asked to develop their own peer education materials to share their learning with others via methods such as assemblies, videos, lessons, artwork etc. Two weeks after the training peer educators completed the post intervention Contact Star, once again blind to the AFT workers and teachers.

Figure 1
The Contact Star

Full name: _____

School: _____

Date: _____





Your answers are completely private, confidential and anonymous. We won't share your name with anyone else. This means you can be completely honest and not worry about being judged or having your answers shared!

Imagine that you have to spend lunch time for a week with **one person you had never met before**.
How much would you like it if this person was...

(Use the star to mark you answers. **1** = Not at all like to, **4** = Neither like or dislike, **7** = very much like to.
Please make sure you choose **one number for each person.**)

I would like to spend my lunch times with someone who is.....

Living with a mental health issue e.g. depression

A Gypsy Traveller

British

LGBTQ e.g. Gay

Black

Disabled

Muslim

Homeless

Old

German

Immigrant

Overweight

Jewish

Christian

A Refugee

A Teacher

Results

All analyses were carried out in SPSS Statistics 29.

Change in Willingness for Contact

We conducted repeated measures univariate ANOVAs on willingness for contact with each of the seven groups of interest. Participants who maximally scored their willingness for contact with a given group (i.e. scored them a 7 in the pre-evaluation) were considered to have no measurable room for improvement at post evaluation and were excluded from the analyses pertaining to that group. These results are presented in Table 2.

There was a significant positive effect of biographical contact on willingness for contact with Jewish people, as well as on willingness for contact with all six other groups. The largest increases in willingness for contact were observed for Jewish and Black groups ($\eta^2 = .18$); effects for the remaining groups were moderate in size ($\eta^2 = .07 - .12$).

Table 2

Study 1, Means, Standard Deviations and One-way Repeated Measures Analyses of Variance on Willingness for Contact with Social Groups

Group	Pre-evaluation		Post-Evaluation		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η^2	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>				
Jewish	4.44	1.33	5.04	1.29	16.25**	1,76	0.18	
Black	4.80	1.12	5.41	1.35	11.51**	1,53	0.18	
Muslim	4.72	1.15	5.21	1.35	7.82*	1,57	0.12	
Christian	4.71	1.11	5.12	1.32	7.81*	1,72	0.10	
Refugee	4.47	1.26	4.88	1.51	7.39*	1,81	0.09	
Immigrant	4.58	1.21	4.90	1.39	6.93*	1,78	0.08	
Gypsy	4.16	1.45	4.57	1.67	7.63*	1,99	0.07	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .005$, *** $p < .001$

Given that the seven attitude measures were conceptually related, mean scores were calculated to provide an overall test of time on attitude. To avoid ceiling effects, any group for which the participant reported the maximum possible score at baseline was excluded from that participant's mean score at both pre- and post-test. A repeated measures ANOVA revealed a significant effect of time on overall attitudes, $F(1, 108) = 26.45$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .20$.

We then conducted repeated measures ANOVAs this time controlling for school (8 levels), once again excluding participants who had no measurable room to improve. Significant main effects of time were observed for all groups except Christian and Black, indicating changes from pre- to post-test. There were also significant main effects of school for four out the seven groups (not Jewish), suggesting differences between schools. However, no significant Time $\times$ School interactions were found, indicating that changes over time were broadly consistent across schools. These results are provided in Supplementary Materials S1.

Secondary Transfer Effect

The AFT are committed to reducing antisemitism but also to challenging all forms of prejudice. Ensuring their programs improve positivity and willingness for contact with a variety of groups, thereby reducing the likelihood of extremist or radicalized attitudes, is therefore of central importance.

Given that prejudice reduced significantly toward all groups, we proceeded to test whether improved willingness for contact with Jewish people could be a vehicle for becoming more willing to have contact with other groups. For each participant we computed mean pre and post contact star scores toward all non-Jewish groups excluding those that they themselves belonged to (specifically Muslim, Christian or Black self-categorizations or their combinations). We conducted a hierarchical regression analysis with willingness for contact with non-Jewish outgroups as the dependent variable. We entered pre-evaluation willingness for contact with Jewish people, and pre-evaluation willingness for contact with ‘other groups’ in the first step, and post willingness for contact with Jewish people in the second step. This procedure therefore tests whether change in willingness for contact with Jewish people predicts change in willingness for contact with other groups. To be consistent with the secondary transfer hypothesis, there would have to be a larger effect at Step 2 than Step 1. Table 3 shows a summary of the hierarchical regression analysis.

Step 1 reveals that overall individual differences in willingness for contact to other groups as well as Jewish people prior to biographical contact accounted for 31% of the variance in willingness post-intervention. Step 2 reveals that post intervention willingness for contact with Jewish people accounted for a further 43% of the variance in post intervention willingness for contact with other outgroups. The change in willingness for contact with

Jewish people therefore substantially and significantly predicts change in willingness for contact with other groups.

Table 3

Study 1, Hierarchical Regression Results Predicting Change in Willingness for Contact for Other Groups

	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> ²	ΔR^2
Step 1					13.47*	.31	.31*
Jewish Pre	0.20	0.12	.02	0.17			
Other Groups Pre	0.65	0.17	.54	3.83*			
Step 2					118.64*	.73	.43*
Jewish Pre	-0.26	0.08	-.29	-3.20			
Other Groups Pre	0.53	0.11	.44	5.00*			
Jewish Post	0.69	0.06	.77	10.89*			

*Step 1 includes pre-evaluation willingness for contact with Jewish people and other groups. Step 2 includes the effect of post Jewish attitudes. * $p < .001$*

A reverse hierarchical regression was conducted to examine whether change in attitudes to non-Jewish outgroups predicted change in attitudes to Jewish people. The model remained statistically significant, however as expected, the Step 2 change in R^2 was smaller than in the primary model, indicating a weaker incremental contribution in the reverse direction.

Discussion

As predicted, following biographical contact with Anne Frank, young people's willingness for contact with Jewish people, and six other groups vulnerable to extremist views and behaviors, saw a significant increase. Importantly, the effect size was, as expected, larger and more reliable for change in willingness for Jewish individuals than with other groups. However, the different effect sizes for the other groups did not fall into a gradient that could easily be interpreted in terms of their similarity to Jews.

It is not just the change in mean levels of prejudice that are affected by the biographical contact. A crucial aim of the intervention is that participants should generalize their understanding of the nature of prejudice which should also improve their orientation toward other stigmatized and disadvantaged groups. The regression analysis addressed the connection between changes in prejudice toward the focal group (Jewish people) at the centre

of Anne Frank's biography and changes in prejudice toward other groups. The analysis showed a strong association between improved willingness for contact with Jewish people and improved willingness for contact with the other six groups. These results are consistent with the hypothesized secondary transfer of improved intergroup attitudes. Thus, the wider general impact of the program on prejudice is clear and is consistent with previous evidence that biographical contact can reduce prejudice (Goodbun & Abrams, 2025). The present study adds new insights to previous evidence by showing that the impact of the program is significant whether delivered online or in person. The question we turn to next is what psychological pathways are involved in this improvement.

Study 2: Intervening Mechanisms

Research on intergroup contact in adolescence consistently shows that effects of contact on prejudice are likely to occur via mediating variables that are particularly relevant during social development (Abrams et al, 2009; Turner et al., 2008; Vezzali et al., 2012). Adolescence is marked by heightened sensitivity to peer norms, social evaluation, and identity concerns, making processes such as intergroup anxiety, expectations of rejection, empathy and perspective taking, and confidence or self-efficacy in cross-group interactions especially important. Positive contact experiences can reduce fear and uncertainty, foster emotional understanding, and build young people's confidence to engage with outgroup peers.

Reflecting such evidence, the biographical contact method used by AFT is premised on its 'logic model' (a priori hypotheses), developed with the University of Kent. This model specified three routes through which the program should achieve reductions in prejudice. Specifically, the model holds that the biographical contact helps to:

- i) educate young people about prejudice and its consequences,
- ii) provide opportunities to take others' perspectives, and
- iii) to feel more confident in discussing issues around prejudice.

To date, there is no evidence on whether any of these intervening mechanisms are influenced by biographical contact. Therefore, Study 2 considers whether biographical

contact specifically affects young people's knowledge about prejudice, their perspective taking and their confidence to talk about prejudice.

Knowledge

Knowledge about outgroups tells us about a group's culture, identity, experiences and social practices (Matusitz, 2012; Sefa Dei, 1999), and is a consistent individual level predictor of intergroup attitudes (see Allport, 1954; Czerwionka et al., 2015; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2008). Higher quality of factual knowledge about outgroups is associated with lower levels of prejudice towards those groups (e.g., Cheso et al., 2024; Mansouri & Vergani, 2018).

As outlined in the introduction, Holocaust education-based approaches are designed to provide historical information on the serious violation of human rights informing participants about the social and political backdrop of such atrocities. This approach aims to appeal to people's shared social norms and values systems, such as those related to human rights and democracy, with the aim of decreasing prejudice and discriminatory behaviors towards outgroups (Beelmann & Lutterbach, 2020).

The biographical contact program delivered by the AFT in the UK, aims to improve knowledge by providing young people with factually correct, meaningful information about Jewish life drawing on the real-life experiences of a young Jewish girl (Anne Frank). It seeks to impart knowledge not just about Jewish people, but about the nature of prejudice itself. Whilst such knowledge may not inevitably reduce prejudice, it is probably an essential element of being able to articulate attitudes and arguments that may counter prejudices expressed by others.

Perspective Taking

Increased perspective taking is a well-established predictor of more positive intergroup attitudes (e.g., Shih et al. 2009; Vescio et al., 2003), and importantly a mediator of the association between indirect intergroup contact and prejudice in both adults (Cakal et al., 2021; Husnu & Crisp, 2015) and adolescents (Vezzali & Giovannini, 2012). Bruneau and Saxe (2012) show that perspective taking can reduce intergroup hostility when individuals actively engage with the thoughts and feelings of outgroup members.

Biographical narratives foster perspective taking by immersing individuals in the lived experiences, intentions, and emotional worlds of others, thereby making outgroup members more psychologically vivid and relatable. Pinker (2012) argues that exposure to stories, particularly those conveyed through literature and personal accounts, has historically expanded moral concern by enabling readers to imaginatively inhabit the minds of others, a process they link to long-term declines in violence (Pinker, 2011). Together, this body of work suggests that narrative-based approaches operate by activating cognitive and affective mechanisms of mentalizing, ultimately facilitating more nuanced and humanized perceptions of others. Given the robust evidence that both direct and indirect contact reduces prejudice by increasing perspective taking (see Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008), it is expected that the same would be true of biographical contact. We therefore believe that biographical narratives such as the diary of Anne Frank may stimulate perspective taking particularly well because it presents concrete, individualized stories rather than abstract group information, which helps counter stereotyping and promotes empathy by highlighting complexity and shared humanity.

Confidence to Talk About Prejudice

There is scant literature on whether having the confidence to discuss prejudice is associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, lower anxiety in intergroup interactions or willingness for contact. What we do know however, is that active avoidance of conversations related to sensitive intergroup topics is linked with higher outgroup prejudice and intergroup anxiety (e.g., Barlow et al., 2009). Amongst adolescents, confidence in contact reduces avoidance of outgroups and supports prejudice reduction (Turner & Cameron, 2016). Given the nature of biographical contact, and the immersion in dialogue around issues of prejudice and discrimination, it can be expected that this form of contact would positively impact young people's confidence to talk about sensitive intergroup topics. In summary, among the important psychological vehicles for prejudice reduction that may be stimulated by biographical contact, we test its impact on knowledge, perspective taking and confidence to discuss prejudice.

Method

Design

Study 2 was an evaluation of ‘Together Again’ a new workshop launched by the AFT in mid-2020 as young people returned and settled into schools after the UK Covid-19 lockdown. Workshops lasted between 1 and 2 hours and, although shorter than the peer-educator training described in Study 1, still made effective use of Anne’s diary as the primary resource. The study used a pre-post repeated measures design.

Ethics approval for the evaluation measures was obtained from the Psychology Ethics Committee at the University of Kent (Ethics approval id: 201815375395705107)

Participants

328 young people completed the pre-post evaluation for Together Again across six schools (5 primary and 1 secondary) in the east of England in the academic year 2020-2021. The participants were aged between 8 and 11 years ($M = 10.15$) at the time of pre-evaluation; 143 were male, 158 were female, and 27 did not indicate their gender.

Measures

Pre- and post-workshop measures asked participants to respond to items that assessed the impact of the program on knowledge about prejudice and the harm it can cause, perspective taking, and confidence to talk about prejudice (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The need to maximize time for the intervention itself meant that it was not possible to also include the Contact Star or measures of prejudice.

Knowledge was measured with two items (‘I know a lot about what prejudice is’, and ‘I know a lot about the harm prejudice can cause’). *Perspective taking* was measured with 3 items (‘I sometimes try to understand my friends better by imagining how things look from their perspective’, ‘Before criticizing someone, I try to imagine how I would feel if I were in their place’, and ‘When I’m upset at someone I usually try to ‘put myself in their shoes for a while’). *Confidence* was measured with the item ‘I feel confident talking about prejudice’.

Procedure

Prior to the workshop the participants completed the pre-evaluation questionnaire (blind to the AFT workers).

The young people were then guided through the workshop, using the *Diary of Anne Frank* as the primary educational tool, to teach them about Anne's life and using her story to help the young people reflect on what they had personally learnt from lockdown and set their own values and goals moving forward.

Following the workshop the young people completed the post evaluation questionnaire, once again blind to the AFT workers.

Results

The AFT logic model holds that biographical contact should improve knowledge of prejudice, perspective taking and confidence in discussing prejudice. We tested pre-post intervention differences using repeated measure ANOVAs. In principle these three variables should be distinct but also related to one another (as all three should be affected by the intervention). We assessed this using correlation analyses. It may also be the case that increased knowledge is likely to underpin effects on perspective taking and confidence, such that increased knowledge should reinforce the connection between the two. This possibility was assessed using multiple regression analyses. All analyses were carried out using SPSS Statistics 29.

Pre-Post Intervention Differences in Knowledge, Perspective Taking, and Confidence in Talking about Prejudice.

Participants whose scores were at ceiling in pre-evaluation (i.e. scored 5) were considered to have no measurable room for improvement at post evaluation and were excluded from the analyses pertaining to the relevant measure. Results of repeated measures univariate ANOVAs on knowledge, perspective taking and confidence items are presented in Table 4.

There was a statistically significant effect of biographical contact on all three measures, revealing improvements in knowledge, perspective taking, and confidence to talk about prejudice, observable on both the aggregated and constituent items.

Table 4

Means, standard deviations and one-way repeated measures analyses of variance of knowledge and perspective taking

Item	Pre-evaluation		Post-Evaluation		<i>F</i>	<i>df</i>	η_p^2
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			
Knowledge 1	2.75	1.07	3.99	0.93	308.57***	1,309	0.50
Knowledge 2	2.79	1.06	3.98	0.97	244.69***	1,275	0.47
PT 1	3.21	0.87	3.58	1.06	36.92***	1,260	0.12
PT 2	3.14	0.93	3.58	1.05	39.69***	1,239	0.14
PT3	2.80	0.97	3.18	1.16	45.73***	1,298	0.13
Confidence	2.65	0.93	3.45	1.08	151.61***	1,295	0.34

Note: PT = Perspective Taking, Confidence = Confidence to talk about prejudice

*** $p < .001$

The analyses were repeated with school (six levels) included as a control factor. Significant main effects of time were observed for all items, and main effects of school for five of the six items. Effect sizes (η_p^2) ranged from .08 to .50 for time (median = .24), .01 to .12 for school (median = .10), and .02 to .10 for the Time $\times$ School interaction (median = .07). The interaction effects likely reflect comparatively smaller time-related changes in one school. Full results are reported in Supplementary Materials S2.

Correlations between constructs

To check the independence of the three constructs we first calculated mean scores for knowledge and for perspective taking and conducted correlational analyses between all three constructs of interest. As expected, the three constructs were positively correlated within pre and post time points, but none of the correlations were sufficiently high to suggest concerns over multicollinearity or measurement confounds. Notably, all three intercorrelations were slightly larger at post than pre intervention (see S3 and S4). However, the moderation test did not support the possibility that increases in the perspective taking – confidence correlation was predicted by increases in levels of knowledge and so we conclude that all three variables were affected together rather than in a particular causal sequence.

Discussion

As expected, biographical contact had a significant impact on all three potential mechanisms tested in Study 2. Following biographical contact with Anne Frank, measures of young people's knowledge of prejudice and the harm it can cause, perspective taking skills, and confidence to talk about prejudice all improved. The effect sizes for these changes were particularly impressive for knowledge ($n_p^2 = .50$ and $.47$) and confidence ($n_p^2 = .34$). The effect sizes for perspective taking were slightly smaller but still in the small to medium range, confirming that biographical contact can meaningfully increase perspective taking.

Whilst we found no hint of causal sequence amongst these three variables, the simultaneous increases in all three and positive correlations between them, which slightly strengthened following the intervention, are fully consistent with the hypothesis that these three variables are plausible mechanisms through which biographical contact may increase willingness for contact with Jewish people, and other groups.

General Discussion

The two studies presented here investigated a recently proposed, and potentially powerful, form of indirect contact: biographical contact. In Study 1 we evaluated young people's willingness for contact with Jewish people and six other groups before and after biographical contact with the Jewish teenager Anne Frank. In Study 2 we examined three plausible mechanisms via which this form of contact may improve willingness for contact and thereby reduce the potential for extremist outgroup attitudes. Through studying effects of biographical contact in a real-world context, i.e., delivery of an anti-prejudice program in schools, the research provided an excellent opportunity to test the potential impact of biographical contact in an ecologically valid manner.

Results from Study 1 established that after engaging in biographical contact with Anne Frank, young people's willingness for contact with Jewish people (the target group) increased significantly. Consistent with the AFT's objective to empower young people to challenge all forms of prejudice and hatred, willingness for contact with six other groups, relevant to extremist ideology, also improved following biographical contact with a member of the target group.

A key question is whether this general effect is simply because participants each expressed a general increase in willingness for contact or whether it was driven by the more specific biographical experience, i.e. whether there is first a primary effect on willingness for contact with Jewish people, and that this then permeates willingness for contact with other groups? Two aspects of the results are particularly noteworthy. Whilst indirect contact methods typically yield a relatively small or limited amount of secondary transfer (Harwood et al., 2011; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006), the present research revealed evidence consistent with secondary transfer to all the other stigmatized groups. Also, consistent with the findings of Goodbun and Abrams (2025) there was no discernible gradient in the effect sizes for non-Jewish groups (Harwood et al., 2011; Pettigrew, 2009), indicating that any differences are not attributable to any particular dimension of similarity between the focal group and the secondary groups. Rather, the biographical contact intervention appeared to attenuate prejudice toward all the other groups at least to some extent. Importantly, whereas the connection between pre-intervention willingness to have contact with Jewish people was not significantly related to post intervention willingness with other groups, the *change* in willingness to have contact with Jewish people strongly predicted the change in willingness to have contact with other groups. This underscores the key role that biographical contact can play in preventing prejudice and radicalization. The findings are consistent with our expectation that greater comprehension of how prejudice affected Anne Frank's life offers insight into prejudice that promotes willingness for contact with Jewish people and by extension contact with disparate other groups that are vulnerable to forms of stigmatization and discrimination.

The present research also provides the first evidence for some potential mechanisms through which biographical contact may achieve prejudice reduction. Study 2 focused on three plausible prejudice-reducing mechanisms that could be activated by biographical contact: knowledge about prejudice and the harm it can cause, perspective taking and confidence to talk about prejudice. Biographical contact with Anne Frank led to increases in all three variables. Because the data did not include measures of prejudice, we are, however, unable to assess whether each plays a distinctive role in ultimately reducing prejudice.

The educational intervention delivered by the AFT constitutes an intensive form of biographical contact, notable for the depth and accuracy of the factual knowledge it conveys

to participating young people. The significant post-intervention increases in students' understanding of prejudice represents a promising development within this area of research. Such biographical approaches could perhaps also help to counteract the misconceptions and negative stereotypes that are frequently observed following more traditional forms of Holocaust education (Foster et al., 2016; Gray, 2013; Pew Research Centre, 2020); outcomes which are well-established antecedents of heightened intergroup anxiety and unfavourable intergroup attitudes (Stephan & Stephan, 1984).

The present evidence on perspective taking echoes earlier research employing fictional narratives (e.g., Van Krieken et al., 2017) which showed that engaging with stories or textual accounts can enhance perspective taking. Comparable findings using nonfictional narratives indicate that such engagement can also reduce negative intergroup attitudes (e.g., Bruneau & Saxe, 2012; Herrera et al., 2018; Vescio et al., 2003).

Biographical contact, as implemented by the AFT, requires the young people to immerse themselves in the writing of Anne Frank, reflecting on and connecting to Anne's writings with their own lived experiences. The increase in confidence to talk about prejudice seen pre-post evaluation in Study 2 suggests that biographical contact with a person who expresses views about prejudice may itself offer ways of discussing the topic that had not previously been available or obvious to participants. In this way it may facilitate feelings of competence in discussing topics related to discrimination or bias, meaning that participants are more likely to reflect critically on their own beliefs, recognise structural contributors to inequality, and potentially adopt more inclusive social attitudes.

Limitations and Future Directions

The present research evaluated a real-world intervention implemented by the Anne Frank Trust UK. Participating schools were recruited by the organisation, and although most were located in areas of relatively high deprivation, no formal inclusion or exclusion criteria were applied. Likewise, peer educators were selected by individual schools. Although these procedures introduced unavoidable selection biases the resulting samples nonetheless included young people from a broad range of regional and demographic backgrounds including those who might be difficult to access via other means and who might have most to gain from prejudice reduction (see also Goodbun & Abrams 2025). Moreover, a particular

strength of the studies is high ecological validity and real-world relevance. The findings are especially relevant to sections of the population who may be most at risk of radicalized victimization or recruitment. However, this approach to prejudice reduction has not been research extensively and the wider cross cultural and temporal generality of these findings have yet to be discovered.

Practical considerations also limited the scope of data collection. Demographic variables were controlled statistically but it was not possible to achieve as detailed measurement as would be needed to address issues of intersectionality. Data collection took place during the period in which schools were transitioning back to in person teaching following COVID-19–related disruptions. This also reduced the scope for administering extensive measures and consequently the two studies represent two separate samples and investigate different aspects of the impact of biographical contact. It is important that future research should pursue tests of the mediating psychological paths between biographical contact and prejudice reduction. A randomised controlled trial with a matched control group would offer stronger basis for causal inference, but practical and ethical constraints make such designs difficult in this type of applied context. However, if and when feasible, it would clearly be valuable for future research to conduct experimental studies to compare biographical outgroup contact with conditions such as biographical ingroup contact or no contact, and to compare its effects with those of other forms of indirect contact.

It is possible that young people’s expressions of prejudice may have simply reflected socially desirable responding in the light of any awareness they might have had about AFT’s work. While this would have elevated their pre-test scores, it would also have attenuated, rather than augmented scope for improvement at post-test, suggesting that the present research may have underestimated the potential effect sizes of the intervention.

Even if some socially desirable responding was involved—whether through peer dynamics or adult expectations— this would itself indicate that the program instigates a shift in the salience of social norms that inhibit expressions of prejudice. While such effects might be considered a threat to internal validity in laboratory research, they are less problematic in field studies evaluating interventions that aim explicitly to reduce prejudice. Moreover, response patterns do not suggest uniform impression management: participants did not simply

select uniformly positive ratings across all groups, and variation remained in both baseline attitudes and the magnitude of change across groups.

Overall, the present research provides evidence that biographical contact with an outgroup member can enhance willingness for intergroup contact and facilitate generalisation of positive attitudes, thereby reducing the potential for radicalization or extremist attitudes. Biographical contact can also promote increases in knowledge, perspective taking and confidence to talk about prejudice. These findings raise several important questions for future research: Do any or all these three mechanisms mediate the relationship between biographical contact and willingness for contact; are these the only three potential mechanism or are there more, and what might they be; could briefer or less intensive biographical interventions yield similar effects? Longitudinal work is also needed to determine the durability of prejudice reduction following biographical contact. We would expect effects of biographical contact to be longer lasting than those of other forms of indirect contact because of the deeper and more personalized processing that establishes the psychological connection to the outgroup member. Future studies should also examine behavioral measures, such as the pursuit of new intergroup contacts, and could also explore changes in implicit prejudice.

Conclusion

Deradicalization can be achieved through a variety of methods, but the most important and protective will be to prevent radicalization in the first place. Prevention may also be more viable and achievable than the levels of surveillance needed to stop the most extreme individuals in their tracks. However, the question is where to start? One approach is to target members of, or attitudes toward particular groups that are especially salient in a given period. A different approach is to try to inhibit the process of prejudice formation at its social developmental roots. This generalized prevention of prejudice may seem like a rather abstract objective, but the present research demonstrates that it is achievable. Biographical contact offers several advantages as a prejudice reduction tool, particularly when targeting young people. In addition to having the advantages of other indirect forms contact, it enables participants to make parallels from the text to lived, real-world experiences, offering opportunities for young people to form parasocial relationships with outgroup members which can influence attitudes in a similar manner to direct contact (Bond, 2021). It humanizes the

contact experience via social presence (Lee, 2004), crucially enabling indirect contact to be more than just conceptual. People are more involved in an experience when social presence is high (Gunawardena & Zittle 1997; Han et al., 2016), as it allows more opportunities for perspective taking via shared engagement in shared experiences with the outgroup member, making the contact more vivid and memorable. Finally, intergroup threat creates anxiety about prospective contact experiences (Abrams & Eller, 2016), but the indirect nature of biographical contact seems likely to attenuate such anxiety, increasing willingness for contact and thus helping to ease initial intergroup encounters.

The present research shows that biographical intergroup contact may offer an exciting new prospect for achieving prejudice reduction, and by extension prevention of radicalization, in young people. Future research should explore whether other forms of biographical contact (and other biographies) hold similar potential, and identify which are the most important psychological mechanisms underpinning these effects amongst young people and other sectors of the population.

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