Messages of Support

A report of a pilot study investigating the role of creating positive messages in support of others who have survived traumatic experiences

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Messages of Support

A report of a pilot study investigating the role that creating positive messages in support of others who have survived traumatic experiences plays in developing personal and social wellbeing

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This research would not have been possible without the original messages of hope recorded by Rwandan survivors. We acknowledge that contribution and recognise the resilience and courage of those messengers, and of the everyday Rwandans who continue to heal and rebuild for their own futures and for the future of their country.

Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre

The Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre is an Australian-based, international research centre that unites young people with researchers, practitioners, innovators and policy-makers from over 70 partner organisations. Together, we explore the role of technology in young people’s lives, and how it can be used to improve the mental health and wellbeing of young people aged 12 to 25. The Young and Well CRC is established under the Australian Government’s Cooperative Research Centres Program.

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Murdoch University is a research-led university with a reputation for world-class research in select areas of knowledge. Our researchers engage with significant social and scientific challenges of our time that include climate change, food security and production, infectious diseases, mental health, politics and governance - past and present. We have a reputation for excellence in teaching fuelled by our enthusiasm for research, the creation of new knowledge and its dissemination for the benefit of our communities both locally and abroad.

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Main Messages

Both accessing and creating rich online content have the potential to increase personal and social wellbeing, and to facilitate ongoing community engagement among young creators.

Creating messages in support of survivors of traumatic experiences can be challenging, but every young person who took part in the Messages of Support pilot study found the task both satisfying and worthwhile. Participants believed that creating, circulating, and accessing hope and support messages benefits not only survivors and creators, but also others who view the messages. A framework that enables message creation, circulation, and access, and that can be adapted across different contexts of vulnerability (that is, where young people are at risk of psychological and/or physical harm) has the potential to facilitate wellbeing in vulnerable individuals, strengthen connections within vulnerable groups, and encourage positive relationships between vulnerable and non-vulnerable communities.

Young people are ready to engage in online content creation activities designed to produce outcomes for the common good, and are appreciative of the process and outcomes when they do so.

The extent to which young people engage in online interaction is well documented. Media reports often focus on the negative consequences of those interactions (for example, cyberbullying and hate speech). The potential for negative effects is clear and real; however, Messages of Support demonstrates that young people are eager to engage in positive supportive online behaviour by creating content supportive of others if given the opportunity to do so, and have access to tools and processes that facilitate that engagement. Moreover, young people are driven to take part in positive online activities because they understand and appreciate the benefits to themselves and to others of engaging in positive behaviours, and the enormous potential for online activity to extend the reach of positive ideas and actions to those who might not otherwise be exposed to them.

Focused content creation will best facilitate positive change.

Opportunities for young people to take part in online activities are common and increasing in contemporary society. However, the wealth of those opportunities are often focussed on entertainment and/or peer or friendship interactions, and this can overwhelm awareness of other uses and purposes of the online realm. On the other hand, there are also numerous examples of young people engaging in positive online activities where they are given opportunities to do so. Promoting and providing access to focussed creation tools and activities, and designing them to facilitate social and personal wellbeing will increase awareness of such activities, and encourage participation in online actions geared towards achieving positive change.

Providing opportunities for feedback from young people about process and delivery will enhance the production and dissemination of creative content.
The young people who took part in the Messages of Support pilot were engaged and enthusiastic about the creation and access tasks. They were also ready and eager to discuss their experiences of participation, and keen to provide suggestions about modifications and additions to process and procedures when invited to do so. Reflections about experiences proffered from the perspectives of participants provide valuable insights into factors that may be overlooked or under-appreciated by researchers, and including participants in discussions about process and delivery encourages a sense ownership and control of projects and their aims. The young participants in Messages of Support provided a range of ideas that will be useful in developing and delivering the messages framework to a wider audience.

On platforms on which content created around vulnerable communities is circulated online, policies governing moderation of public interaction about that content are necessary to safeguard against harm.

Potentially, all publicly accessible online content is open to malicious or harmful commentary, and the potential negative consequences of such attacks should not be understated. Indeed, negative commentary directed at online support of vulnerable communities may have especially serious repercussions. The forms of content that will be generated through projects acting as part of Research Program Two of the Young and Well CRC will, by definition, involve vulnerable young individuals who may be less resilient to, and less prepared to defend against malicious (or even robust) commentary. Therefore, on platforms where such content is publicly available, mechanisms and rules controlling the capacity for public interaction on those platforms is essential to safeguard content creators and accessors from distress and harm. For example, platform administrators should consider whether public commentary is moderated or excluded, or whether to allow anonymity or pseudonymity (which themselves serve as essential safeguards for privacy and security in some contexts), and develop clear rules or guidelines explaining policies controlling commentary and interaction. Administrators must also consider the resource implications associated with safeguarding interaction – for example, moderation of commentary may require significant resourcing. Finally, we suggest that involving communities themselves in decisions about commentary and interaction will both enhance policies and facilitate education about acceptable terms of use.
Executive Summary

In line with the aims of the Young and Well CRC, the Messages of Support project explores how new information technologies can be used to provide a creative outlet to allow young people to support others who have survived a traumatic experience. A growing body of psychological theory and research suggests the potential for affirmative messages to positively affect vulnerable others, encourage broader social and community citizenship and engagement, and increase message creators’ own wellbeing. At the same time, new and evolving communication technologies are increasing people’s capacity to access and use affordable, efficient, and effective mechanisms to create and share rich and meaningful content. Messages of Support integrates work across those fields to develop and test an applied framework that allows young people to create and share positive messages of hope and support across different domains of disadvantage or vulnerability.

Background: Hope for the Future

There is growing evidence to support the connections between hope, support, wellbeing, and engagement. For example, recent research points towards how hopefulness for the future and positive social support can benefit vulnerable people, including increasing self-worth and positive cognitive outlook (Hobfoll, et al., 2007). Positive outcomes manifest at both personal and social levels; people can feel connected and engaged insofar as they perceive that others support their recovery, resulting in increasing unity within groups or communities. Similarly, social connection and engagement can enhance personal wellbeing in that community connections can increase feelings of individual wellbeing and self-worth (Mellor, et al., 2008).

Recent work has sought to adapt ideas towards devoting applied solutions for increasing individual wellbeing and social engagement within vulnerable communities. For example Gee, Khalaf and McGarty (2007) used focussed small group interactions between vulnerable people and lay and professional supporters as a mechanism to develop strategies for specific supporting actions (for example, community awareness raising events such as concerts, competitions, movie screenings; establishing school and university based support networks). Similarly, since 2009, the 100 Messages of Hope project has sought to design and implement a dissemination model for messages created by survivors of the Rwandan Genocide with the aim of helping other survivors deal with trauma, and to build a case for broader social change in Rwanda and internationally. Involving partners from government and non-government organisations in Rwanda and researchers at Murdoch University in Australia, 100 Messages of Hope aims to create 100 messages from Rwandan survivors and share those messages with a Rwandan and an international audience using both new and traditional forms of communication technology (McGarty, Lala, & Thomas, 2012).

Messages of hope are intended to bolster calm, efficacy, connectedness and hope amongst people who may understandably have difficulty experiencing any of these feelings. The project uses examples of survival created by other, ‘everyday’ survivors. In other words, messages of hope are not presented by celebrities or super-copers but ordinary people who have grappled with enormous and seemingly overwhelming tragedy, have found ways to continue, and are willing to share that wisdom with others.

Rather than transmitting stories of atrocities and suffering, messages of hope express positive stories of survival. Such messages bolster efficacy by demonstrating that it is possible to survive tragedy, trauma, and vulnerability. Messages of hope bolster connectedness for the listeners by providing examples of other people publicly speaking out about their challenges and aspirations (particularly important in contexts where mental illness is intensely stigmatised). Most obviously, messages of hope contribute to feelings of hope (Hobfoll, et al., 2007; Molenaar, 2005).
Providing Online Messages of Support

The current Messages of Support project adapts and extends ideas explored in 100 Messages of Hope. The ultimate goal of Messages of Support is to develop a broader framework for creating, circulating, and accessing positive messages of hope and support that can be adapted and applied across wider contexts in which young people experience vulnerability and disadvantage. Such a framework could offer intriguing advantages for vulnerable young people. For example, support messages created by young people vulnerable in one domain (for example, the homeless) and offered to other vulnerable groups (e.g., people suffering from mental illness) may empower people who traditionally consider themselves recipients of services by transforming them from passive recipients of support to active providers of support.

The Messages of Support pilot study represents the first stage of developing the broader Messages framework. In the pilot study we sought to compare the effects of watching (accessing), making (creating), and sharing (circulating) content by having our young participants create messages of support in response to messages of hope created by Rwandan survivors for the 100 Messages of Hope project.

While we propose that creating and accessing hope and support messages will have positive consequences for wellbeing, we first wished to evaluate and refine our materials, procedures, and instruments before offering the Messages framework to vulnerable participants. For this reason, participants in our pilot study were secondary school and university students who did not specifically self-identify as members of a vulnerable group. In the pilot, 33 young Australians watched two short videos recorded by Rwandan survivors and then created their own videos supporting survivors. Participants also completed brief surveys measuring wellbeing and evaluating their experience of participation. Support messages created by participants were shared on a dedicated YouTube channel created specifically for the purpose, and are currently available for view on that channel: http://www.youtube.com/sppru.

Using an established online circulation platform such as YouTube provides some key advantages. For example, YouTube is free, and so open and accessible to many different groups. Similarly, content created and shared online also has the potential to be more generally accessible to groups that might not otherwise engage in such activities (for example, as a result of physical or psychological barriers to face-to-face participation, lack of economic resource, limited access to training, etc.).

The design and methodology we used in the pilot study allowed us to collect and analyse three distinct, yet interrelated forms of data. Our young participants responded to surveys containing questions about relevant psychological factors including wellbeing and hope. They also took part in debriefing sessions during which we asked them for their views about taking part in the project. Finally, the support messages created by participants in support of Rwandan survivors provided rich qualitative data demonstrating their ideas, opinions, and feelings about survivors, and the role of hope and support messages.

Results

Overall, our analysis of the data provided evidence in support of our methods and processes. Our young participants thought the task of creating and accessing messages was easy to understand and easy to do. Digital tablets (iPads) were used to deliver both content and surveys. Most participants were generally familiar with touch screen devices, and all participants found the technology accessible and simple to use. The technology allowed delivery of a very individualised research experience. For example, participants had significant freedom over their own content creation (for example, the process of content creation was easy and could be carried out alone with no pressing time constraints). Displaying messages created by participants through a dedicated YouTube channel also provided a very easy and accessible mechanism for content sharing. Participants themselves had easy access to
the channel, and knew of and appreciated the reach of the YouTube platform as a method of content sharing. Nonetheless, we also identified some issues that suggest YouTube may not be an ideal forum for sharing content specifically focussed on vulnerable young people. For example, the range and granularity of comment moderation options may not be extensive enough. Similarly, control over look and feel, and display of and access to other channel content is likely insufficient (for example, more control over the ability to control display of suggested videos is required).

With regard to the delivery of surveys, participants understood survey questions, however, there was some variation in the time individual participants took to complete activities. These variations in timing, combined with feedback elicited from participants during debriefing sessions, suggested useful ways in which some processes could be modified when applying a Messages framework in the field. For example, while nearly all participants were able to complete the surveys without any help from the researchers, a few participants whose first language was not English did have difficulties with some questions (for example, those including emotion terms). Further, feedback during debriefings suggested that differing cultural norms or levels of literacy could also affect peoples’ ability to complete some questions. Situational variables might also affect time available to participants to complete creation or evaluation tasks. These factors make us mindful of the need to allow flexibility within the framework. For example, qualitative rather than quantitative methods may be more suitable in some contexts than in others.

Sensitivities and Limitations

The pilot study also highlighted issues around information and consent, especially when working with young and participants. Feedback from schools who were invited to take part showed that parents were wary of allowing their children to participate because of anonymity and confidentiality issues related to sharing information online. Their reluctance reinforces the need for very clear research guidelines, processes, and participant information about how and why content will be created and shared online. It also suggests the potential utility of developing different forms of delivery for information aimed at participants and parents/guardians. For example, information could be delivered in video format so that parents were able to see examples of shared content created by other participants. Similarly, it might be effective in some situations for researchers to verbally deliver information and consent materials in the field. The main point regarding design and methodology will be to allow flexibility of process so that methods, procedures, and analysis can be tailored to best suit particular contexts of vulnerability and participation.

Apart from valuable information about process, we also found support for our central idea that creating and sharing messages of hope and support has the potential to benefit those who engage in those activities. Our young participants told us that they found the survivor messages inspirational and moving. Although they were often challenged by the gravity of survivors’ experiences, participants were enthusiastic and appreciative about having the opportunity to create their own support messages. They believed that messages of support can positively affect survivors, and that both hope and support messages have the potential to develop connections and understanding between individuals and groups. Our participants also felt that hope and support messages could encourage unity and purpose within society and lead people to engage in other helping activities. Most encouragingly, all of the young people who took part in this project by accessing and creating messages did so with genuine regard for the tasks, and every participant found both the process of watching and creating messages rewarding and worthwhile.

Conclusions

In summary then, our findings from the pilot study suggest that our original motivation behind developing a messages framework that can be applied across different contexts of vulnerability is sound. Our
methods and processes worked well to allow our participants to watch and create content, and we received valuable experience and feedback about potential modifications to process that could improve our design and implementation. Young participants perceived both messages of hope and messages of support as valuable tools to develop and encourage wellbeing, engagement, and positive social change. Perhaps our most significant, and satisfying, outcome was the very positive reception that the young people who took part in our project had to the creation task.

Based on the results of this pilot study we look forward to developing the messages framework into a tool that can be usefully applied across other areas and contexts. We plan to further develop and refine our methods, guidelines, and processes to suit specific contexts of vulnerability or disadvantage, and enable vulnerable participants to create and share positive messages within their own communities and across the other participating communities.

Our ongoing research will initially employ the same technologies used in the pilot (for example, iPads, YouTube sharing) to record and share messages online through a dedicated YouTube channel. At the same time, the potential capabilities of developing communications technologies are also promising. For example, the richness and breadth of interaction promised by Web 2.0 technologies (for example, social networking) point to new and dynamic systems of content sharing and creation, and there is significant scope for the project to explore these new mechanisms. Creation and sharing of text, audio, or pictorial stories across mobile devices (for example, mobile phones), and through social networking sites (for example, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) could extend accessibility of the framework.

The ultimate goal of our research is to inform development of our key applied outcome – a flexible, digital media framework suitable for deployment across multiple contexts of vulnerability, specifically designed to facilitate personal well-being and social engagement through the creation and sharing of positive hopeful supportive and stories and narratives.
Introduction

MESSAGES OF SUPPORT

The Messages of Support project was designed to explore the role of technology in providing a voice and creative outlet to express and develop support for trauma survivors amongst young people without a history of similar trauma. The project’s long-term goal is to develop a framework for generating online messages of hope (from survivors of trauma) and messages of support (from young supporters) that can be adapted across both Australian and global contexts. We hypothesise that generation and distribution of hope and support messages through such a framework will result in specific beneficial outcomes for survivors and supporters, and also expose the wider community to positive messages from and about vulnerable groups, and so catalyse processes of meaningful support for those groups more generally.

A significant body of psychological research demonstrates how feelings of hopefulness for the future and positive social support can assist recovery and facilitate wellbeing in people who have survived trauma (for a review see Hobfoll et al., 2007). Benefits to traumatised individuals can include the experience of positive emotions, increased self-worth and positive cognitive outlook. Beneficial outcomes may not only occur at the personal level; hopefulness and social support can also lead to positive consequences for groups, communities and broader society. For example, feelings of connection and social engagement may be supported within survivors of trauma when they learn that other individuals and groups support their recovery and this can in turn foster and strengthen positive and supportive groups or communities. What is more, that connection and community engagement may bolster personal wellbeing – so, strengthening connections to local or global communities might, in turn, increase feelings of individual wellbeing and self-worth (Helliwell & Putnam, 2004; Van Willigen, 2000).

There are growing efforts to develop methods to leverage connections between hopefulness, social support, wellbeing, and community engagement into applied solutions for vulnerable people. For example, Gee, Khalaf, and McGarty (2007) described a method of formalising and directing small group based interactions into cooperative communities in which members of vulnerable communities (in this case persons with mental disorders) and their supporters (both lay and professional) are brought together to find ways to advance the cause of the vulnerable group. While the explicit aim of such cooperative communities is to enhance the welfare of vulnerable persons, less work has investigated how understanding the needs and providing support for vulnerable people has an impact on the supporters. Nevertheless, there are sound reasons to anticipate that providing support might also be associated with positive outcomes for the supporters. For example, social movement participation, activism and volunteerism have all been linked to increased happiness and wellbeing (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Meier & Stutzer, 2008).

In summary then, evidence supports the value of hopefulness, support, and engagement for both survivors and their supporters. Recent work (McGarty et al., 2012; Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009a, 2010), also suggests that offering messages of support for survivors may promote actions that can improve the lives of disadvantaged, marginalised and at-risk others through increased community engagement and activism. That is, having offered messages of support to survivors of trauma, supporters may be more likely to work to promote solutions around violence prevention and local activism. Thus, creating support messages may bring about a twofold (i.e. personal and social) transformation in personal wellbeing, but also promote greater levels of community engagement and global citizenship. One important aspect of the rationale underpinning messages is that they will be created by everyday survivors and supporters. Although public expressions of support for a wide variety of causes and issues are not uncommon online, such expressions are often only highly visible when they come from high profile leaders or celebrities. The Messages of Support framework will provide an avenue for people who might otherwise be relatively anonymous to publicly express their support in a public forum, alongside other similar peer group supporters.
Along those lines, the potential advantages for vulnerable young people are particularly intriguing. The long-term goal will be to take young people who experience disadvantage in one domain (for example, homelessness) and encourage them to offer messages of support to other vulnerable groups (for example, mental health vulnerability). The idea here is to empower young people who traditionally receive assistance (for example, counselling services) to transform their self-perception from being passive recipients of support to active providers of it.

MESSAGES OF HOPE

The Young and Well CRC confronts the issue of whether technology can help address a huge untreated mental health burden. The Messages of Support pilot drew from experiences in a very different context, the aftermath of mass killing in Rwanda, by building upon and extending Messages of Hope to apply a technological solution developed by Africans (with assistance from Australia) to issues confronting young Australians.

The 1994 Rwandan Genocide involved approximately 1,000,000 homicides and countless other acts of physical and sexual violence perpetrated over a period of 100 days. The number of untreated cases of post-traumatic stress disorder currently overwhelm the formal mental health systems of that country. Some of the burden has been taken up by traditional social and familial networks of interaction and support, however, these networks too are unable and unsuited to cope with the scale of need. Is there a way then to fast track the organic person-to-person and community processes to deliver support more rapidly by using new information communication technologies?

Since 2009 researchers from Murdoch University have sought to support a collaboration entitled 100 Messages of Hope. The project aims to present 100 messages from survivors of the Rwandan Genocide in which they express their hope for the future, for the benefit of other survivors and for a wider audience viewing their messages. The role of the Australian team was to design a dissemination model for the messages and to ensure that the process was likely to generate positive effects.

Involving experts in clinical psychology (trauma and counselling), social psychology (intergroup relations, reconciliation and cooperation), and media (cultural representation of trauma and African community participatory video), the scientific basis of the message of hope program draws on research in clinical and social psychology, and deploys insights from research in media and film by seeking to use narratives rendered on film and deployed online.

Safety, calm, connectedness, efficacy, and hope have been identified as essential factors for recovery after trauma (Hobfoll et al., 2007). Restoring civil society and political institutions can contribute to safety but the other factors appear more intangible and, even where safety can be guaranteed survivors of genocide can experience a deep-seated psychological anguish. The challenge then is how to bolster calm, efficacy, connectedness and hope amongst people who feel incapable of experiencing any of these. Messages of hope provide positive examples of survival from other, ‘everyday’ survivors who are not celebrities or super-copers but ordinary people who have grappled with enormous, seemingly overwhelming, tragedy and have found ways to continue and are willing to share their story.

It is important to note that the messages do not transmit stories of the atrocities themselves. It is vitally important to document those stories in genocide recovery but stories of harm can themselves be retraumatising (Molenaar, 2005). Instead messages of hope express positive stories of survival and so bolster efficacy by demonstrating that it is possible to survive enormous tragedy, reinforce connectedness by providing examples of other people publicly speaking out about their challenges and aspirations (particularly important in contexts where mental illness is intensely stigmatised), and most obviously, contribute to feelings of hope.

Hope is a positive future-oriented emotion that can be applied as readily to personal or collective circumstances, and is central to coping processes because it requires a belief in the possibility of a favourable outcome (Thomas, McGarty, & Mavor, 2009b). Further, and incorporating ideas about efficacy
and action, researchers have tested applied models that seek to promote and enable positive action and change in a variety of areas, including combating stigma against mental health disorders, promoting support for international aid, and investigating social change in deeply impoverished Indigenous communities in hyper-resource rich regions (Thomas, Mavor, & McGarty, 2012; Thomas & McGarty, 2009; Thomas, et al., 2009b). Following that work, and drawing upon ideas about narratives as powerful resources for dealing with trauma (Berndsen & McGarty, 2010), the Rwanda project uses video messages shared online as an engaging and effective way to convey emotion.

The 100 Messages of Hope project is ongoing, alongside other associated projects also being undertaken in Rwanda by Murdoch University researchers (see Appendix I). Messages of Support adapts the process began in the Messages of Hope project towards the creation of support messages. The pilot phase of messages of support uses a selection of Rwandan messages of hope as the focus around which support messages are generated, with participants creating messages in support of the efforts of Rwandan survivors to heal and rebuild.

AIMS OF THE MESSAGES OF SUPPORT PILOT

Ultimately, the ambition of the broader Messages project is to develop an online message creation and circulation framework that is widely applicable across varying contexts of disadvantage and vulnerability. A key benefit of online content production is that participation is relatively inexpensive and is open to many different groups. Thus, creative content production conducted online has the potential to be more accessible to groups that might not otherwise engage in the creation activity (for example, as a result of physical or psychological barriers to face-to-face participation, lack of economic resource, limited access to training, etc.). That wider accessibility also has the potential to promote development of broad-based communities (e.g. including members from different vulnerable groups) across temporal and geographical boundaries.

The first phase of the development of the creation and circulation framework was the Messages of Support pilot study described in this report. The pilot sought to compare the effects of watching (accessing), making (creating), and sharing (circulating) content by having participants create messages of support in response to messages of hope created by survivors of the Genocide in Rwanda. The five key objectives of the pilot were:

1. to evaluate the effects of message creation with a sample of non-vulnerable youth (i.e. young people who do not self-identify as members of a vulnerable group)
2. to elicit feedback from message creators about their perceptions of the task
3. to test and refine processes and procedures related to the production of support messages
4. to refine the ethical framework and guardian/participant information and procedures
5. to undertake development of a preliminary content sharing platform
Methodology

The Messages of Support pilot was based on an idea first explored in the Messages of Hope project currently underway at Murdoch University. Adapting that idea to the aims of the Young and Well CRC involved seeking messages of support for survivors of genocide from young Australians. That is, we asked young Australians to view video messages of hope from Rwandan survivors (audio in Kinyarwanda but subtitled in English) and to create their own messages supporting and affirming survivors’ efforts to heal and rebuild.

The pilot research employed a quasi-experimental counter-balanced design that included collection of baseline measures of wellbeing, measurement of differences between accessing and creating messages, and ensured all participants had the opportunity to create support messages (that is, the pilot research did not implement a strict experimental control condition where one group had no access to the intervention). This was a particularly important factor as we believed that the creation task would be beneficial to participants and so did not wish to deny any participants the opportunity to engage in that activity.

RECRUITMENT

Participants were students recruited from a Perth metro independent secondary school (Murdoch College), and undergraduates from Murdoch University. Information about the study was posted around the Murdoch University campus and sent by email to the secondary school inviting interested young people to take part in the study. Undergraduate participants could choose to receive either partial course credit or a monetary reimbursement for taking part.

In total, 33 young people participated in the pilot study. Sixteen males and 17 females took part, and participants were aged between 16 and 26 years old. Parent/guardian consent was required before participants under the age of 18 could take part, and all participants completed individual participant consent forms immediately before their actual participation (see Appendix II). Most participants took part individually (that is, they received training and recorded their messages one at a time), although 14 participants received training in small groups (that is, one group of 4, one of 3 and four groups of 2 people). Note however that, even where participants competed other parts of the study in a small group, by design all participants completed the message creation task individually (that is, all participants were alone when creating their support message). The creation task was completed alone to ensure as much as possible that the content of participants’ messages were not influenced by others and that they relayed as accurately as possible participants’ own thoughts and feelings.

PARTICIPATION

Participation involved two sessions – an initial session on the Murdoch University campus lasting approximately 70 minutes, and a second on-line session lasting about 15 minutes completed one month after initial participation. During the on campus session participants watched two short videos recorded by survivors of the 1994 Genocide in Rwanda, created their own video in support of survivors, and completed two brief surveys (wellbeing and task evaluation). Survivor videos and surveys were presented on iPads and participants also used iPads to record their own support messages. In the second online session participants completed a follow-up survey (see Appendix III for details of surveys).
PROCEDURE

Surveys

Participants completed a common set of instruments that measured the following variables: resilience and wellbeing (Cummins & Lau, 2005); hope and empowerment (Snyder, et al., 1991); identity and connectedness (Leach, et al., 2008; Schubert & Otten, 2002); collective hope; global community citizenship (Morais & Ogden, 2010); and feelings about the creation task (Watson & Clark, 1994).

Experimental Conditions

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions. After completing participant consent forms and before starting activities, participants in all conditions read information providing background about Rwanda and the genocide (see Appendix IV):

1. Group 1 (G1) acted as the control group. After reading background information, G1 participants completed the wellbeing survey (thus supplying baseline measure of wellbeing). Researchers briefly described the Messages of Hope project and told participants they would be watching three messages recorded by survivors in Rwanda as part of Messages of Hope. Participants then viewed survivor messages and received instructions about how to record their own support messages. For their support messages participants were asked to create a message demonstrating their support for the efforts of Rwandan survivors to heal and rebuild based on the representative messages of hope they had just viewed. Participants were advised that content, style, and length of messages was completely under their own control. Researchers reminded participants that messages would be shared online and that others, including genocide survivors themselves, would be able to view them. Participants were advised they could create multiple messages if they wished and then pick their favourite to be shared. Participants were left alone to record their messages. After recording was completed participants completed the evaluation survey.

2. Group 2 (G2) participants read background information, viewed survivor messages, and then completed the wellbeing survey (providing data about the effect of accessing messages). They then received instructions about how to record their own support messages, recorded their messages, and completed the evaluation survey.

3. Group 3 (G3) participants read background information, viewed survivor messages, received instructions about how to record their own support messages, and recorded their messages (providing data about the additive effects of accessing and creating messages). They then completed the wellbeing and evaluation surveys.

All groups completed the same follow-up survey one month after their initial participation.

As the table shows the key difference between Groups 1, 2 and 3 was the order in which participants completed the survey and content access and creation activities so that all participants participated in message creation. This three-condition design provides a measurement of base-line wellbeing (from G1, wellbeing before any intervention), measurement of wellbeing after viewing messages (that is, G2), and measurement of wellbeing after viewing and creating messages (that is, G3). Measuring wellbeing at these three points thus provides a mechanism to assess the effects on wellbeing of access to content alone, and the cumulative effects of access to and creation of content.
Table 1: The order in which participants completed the survey, content access and creation activities

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<th>Time 1</th>
<th>Time 2</th>
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<tr>
<td>Group 1</td>
<td>Test</td>
<td>Viewing Creation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 2</td>
<td>Viewing</td>
<td>Test</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group 3</td>
<td>Viewing</td>
<td>Creation Test</td>
</tr>
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While some quantitative data were obtained through participants’ survey responses, participant numbers in each condition were not high enough to provide sufficient power for meaningful statistical analysis or discussion of the survey data. Nevertheless, sufficient data were collected for piloting purposes, including qualitative information derived from responses to open-ended questions and in debriefing sessions. The qualitative data obtained were subjected to thematic analysis, and the key themes and ideas raised by participants are presented below illuminated with excerpts from interactions with individual participant.
The Data

Three forms of data were collected during the pilot study:

1. Responses to quantitative survey items measuring wellbeing, hope, identity and global citizenship
2. Qualitative feedback from participants about their experience of taking part
3. Messages created by participants in support of Rwandan survivors

THE SURVEYS

One aim of the pilot study was to evaluate the effects of message creation. First, it is important to note that survey items were primarily drawn from existing, verified scales. For example, wellbeing and empowerment were measured using items from the Personal Wellbeing Index (Cummins & Lau, 2005) and the Snyder et al. Hope Scale (1991) respectively (see Appendix III for surveys). Where new items were developed these were done so to evaluate perceptions of the creation task and potential actions that might be taken in support of Rwandan survivors (for example, “I enjoyed creating my support message”, “I have discussed supporting survivors in Rwanda with my friends and family”). The use of standard scales ensures that the data collected about specific factors will be accurate, reliable, and comparable.

KEY POINTS

Item Comprehension

In the first on-campus session a researcher was always present when participants were completing surveys. Immediately before survey administration participants were informed about the general nature of questions and encouraged to ask the researcher if they were unsure about any of the items. Almost all participants were able to complete surveys unaided. However, three participants who were non-native English speakers had difficulty understanding certain emotion terms used in the PANAS scale (Watson & Clark, 1994); both were able to continue after discussing the terms with the researcher.

Along similar lines, two participants had difficulty with the Schubert and Otten (2002) pictorial measure of identification. Again, after discussion with the researcher, both were able to complete the measure; nevertheless, we will review the use of measures when implementing the broader project (see ‘Survey Length’ below).

Item Relevance

The Leach et al. identification measures were presented to participants in the first survey. These items measured identification with others who supported Rwandan survivors (with an expectation that creating a support message would increase identification). Due to the counter-balanced design, participants in Group 1 completed survey 1 before watching Rwandan survivors’ messages of hope or creating their own messages of support. During debriefing, two participants in that group stated they had found the Leach et al. questions difficult to answer because they had not yet formed an opinion about Rwandan survivors (having had little prior exposure to the issue). Both participants were reassured by the researcher about the purpose of the items.

Although it is widely known that a genocide did occur in Rwanda many young Australians may have little appreciation of the events that took place there, or of the current circumstances of Rwanda or its people
(indeed, one of the aims of the Messages of Hope project is to increase awareness about these very
issues). In that regard, we expected G1 participants to display uncertainty about identification with other
Rwandan supporters, and that such uncertainty would tend to be reflected in low or neutral identification
within that condition. Therefore, we are confident that uncertainty about these items in G1 do not indicate
that measures are unsuitable.

Survey Length

When designing the pilot study we were conscious of the participation time required for each session.
Although individually each of the surveys was relatively brief, the first project session included two surveys
as well as requiring participants to watch and create messages. Before taking part, participants were
informed that the first session would last approximately 60-70 minutes. Although this was a reasonable
estimation of session duration on average, there was considerable variation between individual participants
(the shortest session took approximately 50 minutes, the longest approximately 100 minutes). This
variation occurred because some participants took longer completing surveys or elected to take more time
creating support messages than did others (but it is important to note that all participants genuinely
engaged with the content creation tasks and research activities).

Variations in timing were not problematic during the pilot study where we had control over the research
environment, and participants had available time. In contrast, the duration of sessions is likely to become
more important when the broader project is undertaken with community partners in the field. In more simple
terms, we anticipate some modification to the surveys used in the pilot study will be necessary, including
the possible removal of items that participants found difficult (for example, the Schubert and Otten scale),
or that may be less relevant to vulnerable group members (for example, ‘organising events’ as a measure
of action).

We are also mindful that additional questions will be added to the survey following development by the
Young and Well CRC of standard items measuring online activity, In the full project we will seek to
streamline the first session procedure to ensure that total participation time adheres as closely to 60
minutes as is possible. It is also possible that the administration of surveys may not be feasible or
appropriate in some contexts, in which case alternative methods of wellbeing measurement will be
employed (see ‘Condition Division’ below).

Implications for the Main Project

The pilot compared the effects of accessing and creating content by employing a counter-balanced design
such that participants were randomly allocated to one of three groups. Surveys administered at different
times to different groups allow comparisons of access and creation effects. Our intention is to transfer the
same design to the broader project where participants will be drawn from groups representing vulnerable
communities so, where appropriate, and with the agreement of participating communities, a counter-
balanced condition design will be used. However, in some circumstances random allocation to conditions
may not be possible or appropriate. For example, it may be that opportunities arise for access to groups of
participants in the field, but not in an environment that is conducive to controlled experimental design (for
example, all participants are present together).

Similarly, different levels of literacy or cultural norms or practices may affect participants’ ability to complete
quantitative and/or written instruments. If formal surveys are unsuitable it may be more appropriate and/or
effective to elicit information about wellbeing outcomes through other methods (for example, qualitative
interviews or focus group analysis). As with issues influencing the use of randomisation, we anticipate that
factors around quantitative versus qualitative design will be dealt with on a case-by-case basis depending
on anticipated conditions in the field and liaison and advice from participants and representatives of target
communities.

Employing qualitative techniques in future iterations of the project will afford various analysis techniques to
be employed. For example, analysis of creative content and, potentially, interactions with participants, will
be examined for integrative complexity related to patterns and strategies of language use (Suedfeld,
Tetlock, & Streufert, 1992). Analysis will also incorporate Creswell and Plano Clark’s (2007) ideas about
data validation, where qualitative data is used to expand and embellish on quantitative data. Accordingly, data will be examined for ways in which participants present and interrelate themes – for example, consistent mention of characteristics related to participants’ identification with other content creators when expressing hopefulness. Following Reid, Flowers & Larkin’s (2005) interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA, see also Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009) we will also acknowledge the value of the lived experiences of our participants themselves as they construct their messages. Consequently, we acknowledge the real potential for our qualitative analysis to reveal themes and ideas not considered in our original theoretical construction.

Overall, the key finding regarding design and methodology will be to allow flexibility of process so that methods, procedures, and analysis can be tailored to best suit particular participant contexts.

PARTICIPANT EXPERIENCE

Participant experience was measured in two ways during the pilot study. Formal measures consisting of one open-ended question in each of evaluation and follow-up surveys were included and participants were encouraged to comment on their experience during face-to-face debriefing conducted after the first research session. Overall, participants reported high levels of satisfaction with the message creation task.

It is important to note that procedures, including those related to the debriefing process, developed as the study progressed. For example, throughout the study delivery of instructions and procedures about presenting and creating video messages were modified based on feedback from participants. In the initial stages less time was devoted to debriefing, and the process was less focussed. As the study progressed, the importance of post-participation debriefing became more apparent and so researchers engaged in more directed discussions with participants. Put more simply, our research procedures improved over time because we learnt from our mistakes and from the comments of our participants. Clearly, as procedures developed participant experience will have changed, however the change in process over time is reflective of pilot research and, indeed, is the aim of a successful pilot.

KEY POINTS

Written Responses

Only relatively minimal information was collected through the two formal survey questions. Eight responses in total were received across the two surveys: four comments in the evaluation survey in the first session and four in the follow-up survey one month after participation. Responses here expressed a mix of uncertainty about the quality of the commenter’s support message (three participants), lack of knowledge about Rwanda and the Genocide (one participant), and appreciation for the aims of the project (five participants). One participant expressed doubts about whether creating support messages would help Rwandan survivors in a meaningful way (although see ‘Face-to-face Discussion’ below).

In hindsight, the lack of written feedback from participants was not surprising. Surveys in the first session were administered using iPads and, while these devices are well suited for administering scale type items and presenting and recording video messages, their available screen space and keyboard functionality are less suited for entering longer free form text answers. Before starting the session participants were advised they would have the opportunity to discuss the project when the session had ended. It is possible, therefore, that participants elected not to provide written feedback in anticipation of an opportunity to comment face-to-face. By necessity, the two open-ended questions were also general in nature (i.e. calling for any comments about the project). Participants may have found it difficult to respond without further, more specific, prompting.
Face-to-face Discussion

In contrast to written feedback, participants were generally eager to contribute during debriefing discussions. Debriefings were conducted either one-on-one when participants took part individually, or in small groups when more than one participant took part at the same time. During the early stages of the project debriefings focussed mainly on discussing procedural aspects with participants. For example, participants were asked about clarity of instructions, time available to complete tasks, and how easy it was to use the technology to watch and create messages.

Written material provided to participants consisted of an information sheet about the study, a participant consent form, and a general information page about Rwanda and the Genocide (to ensure that all participants began the project with the same base level of knowledge). Researchers talked through the written information with the participant and provided additional verbal instructions about and demonstrations of procedures related to watching and creating messages and answering survey questions. Participants were encouraged to question researchers if they were unclear about any information or procedures.

I found the study to be straightforward; your instructions were very clear and easy to follow. The handout you provided me with was informative, it gave me more of an understanding of the premise of the research and its background, which enabled me to create my video. (P 21)

All but 3 participants were highly satisfied with the clarity of the written documentation, finding it relevant and easy to understand. As noted, however, there was uncertainty about Rwanda and the Genocide. For example, 6 participants were concerned that their knowledge of Rwanda and its people was insufficient (e.g. lack of knowledge about political structure and process) to participate effectively. In other cases, participants requested more detailed information about the Genocide itself (e.g. more extensive historical background, more information about atrocities committed). Where participants had such questions they were reassured that detailed knowledge about the Genocide was not necessary, and that the purpose of the Messages of Support project was to think about the efforts of everyday Rwandans to recover, rather than focus on the Genocide. Researchers did not discuss the availability of additional resources about Rwanda or the genocide as this was not the aim of the project. In all cases participants were satisfied with researcher responses and continued with the study.

Similarly, participants were highly satisfied with verbal information and demonstrations provided by researchers during study sessions. All but 2 participants were familiar with touch screen devices (e.g. smartphones, tablets). That familiarity extended to having watched videos on similar devices, but generally did not include having created their own videos. Nevertheless, all participants were able to successfully watch and create video messages after instructions from researchers. No significant issues were experienced with the technology used during the project, reflecting the willingness to explore and widespread proficiency with new technologies common in many young people.

Participants were also generally satisfied with timing of research activities. However, to streamline participation, researchers did modify some processes as the project progressed. The most significant modifications were to alter instructions about the time available to record support messages, and the nature of debriefing.

Originally, fifteen minutes had been assigned to allow participants to create their own support messages, however, after the first 6 participants had taken part it became apparent that a longer time period would be required. Subsequently, participants were given an open-ended period to create their messages. Under the new timing regime average creation time extended to approximately 25 minutes, but with sizeable variations (i.e. between 15 to 45 minutes). Participants used the extra time to rehearse and create multiple versions of their messages, better conceptualise their message ideas, and write scripts for their message content. As discussed above, session time may become an issue in the field. Based on our pilot data, we believe that allowing 25 minutes for message creation will be sufficient and provide an adequate balance between the creation task and collection of other data in an ideal 60 minute window. It is important to note that these timings assume sessions administered by researchers working directly with participants in the field. If administration can be automated then it may be possible to allow participants to create messages...
and complete other research activities in their own time (e.g. by developing an online module or mobile phone app to administer the research, feasibility of which will be considered in future project iterations).

As the research progressed, the focus of debriefings was modified to include discussion about a wider range of issues. This change was made for two reasons. First, we realised that most participants were interested in talking about their experience of participation. Due to concerns about overall participation time we initially allowed for a relatively short debrief, however participants were happy and even eager to discuss their experiences and so debriefing sessions were extended. Second, as participants gave more feedback about their participation we realised that they could offer insights relevant to both our research aims (e.g., participants spoke about their perceptions of the effectiveness of the project) and our research procedure (e.g., participants offered feedback and ideas about the process of taking part). Participants were asked if they would be willing to take some time to discuss their experience of the project in more depth. All participants were happy to engage in such discussions. Participants were explicitly asked if they perceived their support message as being worthwhile, and about possible improvements to procedures.

**Themes and Issues**

Generally, participants perceived value in creating support messages and were satisfied with their own individual messages. Key positive themes raised by participants were:

- **Educative value**: Participants believed that both message creators and others who watched their creations would learn something positive from support messages. They considered that creators and viewers would learn about the positive efforts of Rwandan survivors to rebuild, and about the resilience and hopefulness of people in general.
- **Impact on survivors**: Participants thought that support messages would demonstrate to Rwandan survivors that others were aware of and supporting their efforts to heal and rebuild.
- **Connection to others**: Participants suggested that support messages demonstrated social connectedness and shared human values.
- **Making a contribution**: Participants felt that creating support messages offered a way for creators to make a positive contribution to the world.
- **Ease and accessibility**: Participants said that the capacity to use accessible and available communications technologies to create and share a message offered a way for people to contribute where they might not otherwise have the opportunity or capacity to do so.
- **Control and direction**: Participants felt they had control over their message content, and that messages provided a direct connection with survivors.

Many people in the community (myself included) at time take things for granted and forget that there are people out there who suffer from fates far worse than ours. I am hopeful that there will be continued support for the Rwandan survivor and other people around the world who have suffered in one way or another. The fact that projects like that still exist proves that there is hope yet!

Encouragingly, these themes were largely congruent with our expectations about the effects of watching survivor messages and creating support messages. We argued that creating and accessing messages would facilitate knowledge and support for survivors, and participants agreed, also pointing out the educative benefits for third party observers of the process. Similarly, participants agreed with our suggestion that creating messages in support of others could lead to increased feelings of community and connection.

Our contention that message creation would provide a mechanism of engagement for everyday people (as opposed to political leaders or celebrities) was also affirmed by the young people who took part in the pilot. Participants appreciated the opportunity to contribute, and the level of control they had over the content and style of their messages. One interesting idea raised by participants was the perception that messages offered a more direct connection to survivors by allowing communication without mediation through a third party (for example, such as a charity).
I think there should be more people out there who should spend their time and help these poor people. I think the University should encourage a bigger group of people in order to make a big impact.

Although clearly not a direct measure of impact on survivors themselves, our participants also affirmed our proposal that messages of support have the potential to benefit the survivors at which those messages are aimed. Participants believed that awareness of public support has a positive effect on the people to which that support is given.

Notwithstanding the largely positive perceptions, participants did also commonly experience some difficulties during the message creation process. Common issues raised by participants were:

- **Message content**: Most (around 30 of the 34) participants said that starting the creation process was difficult because, initially, they did not know what to say. Participants were generally nervous when they first began their recordings.
- **Message quality**: Three participants expressed concerns that their support messages did not look professional, or displayed a lack of knowledge about Rwanda or the Genocide.
- **Challenged by the Task**: Related to both of the above issues, nine participants suggested they found the task of creating messages confronting or intimidating. That is, they initially lacked confidence in their ability to say anything meaningful to people who had been through such traumatic experiences.
- **Guilt**: Three participants expressed guilt about being reimbursed for taking part in the project (one participant refused reimbursement outright).

Issues were most commonly encountered when participants first started the creation process. Indeed, a period of acclimatization is often necessary in exercises or research that involve filming participants. Similarly, they lacked confidence in their ability to convey the ideas they wanted to in their messages. However, participants resolved these issues by recording multiple versions of their message (something they were encouraged to do in their initial instructions). As participants worked through different versions of messages they refined their content and delivery, eventually arriving at versions they were happy with.

We acknowledge that it is not easy to create a message in support of someone who has survived a traumatic event of which you yourself have no experience. This is reflected very clearly in the difficulties reported by our participants. However, we never anticipated that the process of creation would be effortless (or that an effortless process would yield benefits). We expected that participants would create multiple versions of their messages for exactly the reason they did so - to develop and refine the creative process.

Most importantly, none of the issues raised by participants affected their final evaluations of the project. During debriefings, everyone who took part reported their overall impression of participation as positive and worthwhile, regardless of any difficulties experienced during message creation.

I tried my best, but I'm not certain of how well I did.

As the previous quote suggests though it is important to note that while all assessments were positive, not all participants were unconditionally satisfied with the outcomes. For example, one participant expressed doubts about the long-term value of support messages for both creators and survivors, suggesting that videos could turn out to be ‘all talk and no action’, while another doubted their ability to impact survivors at a meaningful level. Nevertheless, even these two participants felt their participation had been worthwhile.

I found [the] video making task to be challenging as I have never posted a video up on the internet. I also found it difficult as I did not know what type of message was expected of me, or rather I
would have found it easier to complete the task had there been an example of a video presented to me.

Along with their concerns, participants offered suggestions about how some of their issues might be addressed. The most popular suggestions related to:

- **Example messages**: One common suggestion was that creators have access to example support messages to provide guidance about content and style.
- **Preparation time**: Participants also suggested creators be given more time to prepare before recording support messages. For example, it was suggested that creators be emailed details of the task several days before creating their message.
- **Survivor messages**: Seven participants also suggested that more diversity of survivor messages be provided. However, participants disagreed on the type of survivor messages - some believed that messages from a wide range of different survivors would be useful (for example, different ages and gender), while others argued that survivor messages from young people would be most appropriate for the project.

All of these suggestions have some merit and will be considered for inclusion in the ongoing project. It is important to note, however, that some ideas may be counterproductive for the project’s aims. For example, although providing example support messages may make it easier for participants to create their own messages, example messages may also curtail creativity by leading participants to emulate particular content and style. It is also possible that providing participants too much guidance about content may dilute the value of spontaneous message creation. For example, if participants feel that they are primarily copying others’ content they may take less ownership over their own messages and so view them as less meaningful or important.

On the other hand, there may be some merit in providing participants more direct information leading in to study sessions (in fact, participants were provided general information about activities several days before taking part – see Appendix V). Timing of lead in information may become particularly relevant if procedures are automated through online web sites or apps. The type and number of survivor message also raises interesting questions. Given the potential time constraints it may not be possible to increase the number of messages participants can view. Focussing messages to those created by other young people may be worthwhile however and, will become the default scenario where the framework can be extended to include messages of hope created by other vulnerable groups.

**More schools need to initiate more of [these] projects, be it aimed at increasing awareness or other fields of study.**

One final theme also offers encouragement for the ongoing development of the project. We note that four participants declared their hope that the project could be extended to include more participants, and across different locations and domains. This hope reflects participants’ perceptions of the project as leading to positive outcomes, and offers reinforcement of the framework’s potential to be applied across varied contexts of need and vulnerability.

**Information and Consent**

In addition to the data and feedback collected from the young people who took part in the project, we also received useful comments about process from key contacts within the schools we approached as potential sources of recruitment. Originally, two independent secondary schools expressed interest in taking part in the pilot project. Ultimately, however, only students from one school participated. Contacts at the school that decided not to participate cited concerns from parents and guardians about the public broadcast of support messages online and student identifiability as the main reasons for their withdrawal (similar concerns were also expressed by some parents at the school where recruitment did take place).

The public expression of support is intrinsic to the nature of the project. For example, we argue that public messages provide validation of hope to survivors and facilitate wellbeing and connectedness in supporters.
Parents of potential recruits were informed that participation would involve a to-camera video message created by their child being posted to an online forum – a publically accessible dedicated YouTube channel.

We chose to distribute support messages through YouTube because it provides a widely accessible forum through which communication can occur. On the other hand, because online interaction is still in its relative infancy and commentary about the dangers inherent in online interaction appears frequently in the media there is a perception that making information available online can pose significant risks, especially where that information is created by younger people. For example, several high profile reports of online aggression involving provocative attacks (malicious trolling) on grieving support and other wellbeing promotion sites have appeared recently in the media. The potential risks of making content publicly available online are thus very real. Nevertheless steps can be taken to mitigate possible risks and we have submitted a paper for publication on this topic (McGarty, Ebert, Lala, & Thomas, 2013). This pilot study has provided valuable experience about how our information and consent procedures could be improved to better advise parents and young people about safeguards in the content sharing process.

The original information we distributed to parents advised that their child would be identified by their first name only on a controlled YouTube channel (i.e. where commentary was turned off). We believed that the use of first names and a controlled channel would be sufficient protection to ensure that participants would not be exposed to adverse reactions online as a result of their taking part. However, feedback from schools demonstrated that we were mistaken in our belief. In hindsight, it is understandable that parents would be wary when considering their child’s participation given the prominence of commentary about the risks of online interaction.

We received several thoughtful suggestions from our school contacts as well as useful advice from other experienced researchers about possible refinements to our information and consent procedures:

- **Project Name**: The project was originally called ‘Survivors of Trauma’ to reflect the contribution of the survivors who recorded their messages of hope, however, one of our reviewers suggested we alter the name to be less confronting to young participants and their parents. The name ‘Messages of Support’ not only presented a more positive image, it also more neatly captures the nature and aims of the project
- **Pseudonymity**: We had been informed that parents were concerned about identifiably of their children and so we included the option for participants to have their message labelled with a nickname or pseudonym online, and made that option plain in the information material
- **Better Information**: School contacts suggested that parents were concerned about the possibility of their children being exposed to harmful online commentary. Our information sheets to parents did specify that messages would be displayed on controlled sites, but we did not detail the extent of that control (i.e. that commentary would be moderated or disallowed). We will include more information about site moderation in our supporting documentation for the broader project
- **Example Messages**: Apart from concerns about public exposure and identifiability, feedback also suggested some parents were worried about the actual nature of the creation task, and that their children might become distressed by watching recordings made by Rwandan survivors. One possible solution to this issue would be to include sample messages of both hope and support in future information material. For example, where written materials is provided CD’s containing samples could be attached, or where information is provided electronically links to example messages might be included. Support messages collected during this pilot provide an ideal resource from which to select example messages.

As we have noted, we will provide more detailed information to organisations from which we recruit, and to participants and their guardians. However, these issues speak not only to future processes of recruitment and consent, but are also important when considering applications for ethics approvals for future research.

This, and other projects conducted under the umbrella of Young and Well CRC will, by definition, include participation by young people who are under 18 years of age. Therefore, attention to ethical issues related
to methods and procedures, including informed consent, will require considerable attention. For example, projects may include young people who are isolated from contact with legal guardians who can provide informed consent (for example, homeless youth), or whose guardians have low levels of formal literacy (for example, migrant communities). Added to this, information and consent procedures delivered using extensive written material may not be suitable for some young participants themselves (for example, where English is a second language, or where participants have low levels of formal literacy). In such scenarios requirements for the conduct of ethical research will necessitate consideration of alternative methods.

We have already noted our intention to incorporate flexibility of process when applying our framework across different contexts of participation – simply put, we contend that context will determine appropriate methodology and analysis. Although that maxim applies to many aspects of research, our experience suggests the need for careful scrutiny of projects that employ online methods and techniques for data collection, distribution, and analysis.

THE MESSAGES

All support messages created by our young participants can be viewed on a dedicated YouTube Channel at youtube.com/sppru. The channel was created to demonstrate the type of sharing platform proposed as part of the final messages framework. The channel follows the standard rules of configuration allowed on the YouTube platform. So, presentation and interaction options including look and feel, playback, commenting, and display of suggested (related) videos have been set based on YouTube’s permitted options. Although the standard YouTube configuration does provide some control over presentation and interaction, granularity of control is not ideally suited for the type of messages framework we ultimately propose. Nevertheless, we have used YouTube to display messages created during the pilot study because it provides a simple, widely accessible, well known circulation platform. We discuss below possible changes that would make YouTube more suited to the requirements of a platform dedicated to sharing content aimed at improving wellbeing and engagement in vulnerable youth.

KEY POINTS

The video messages of support recorded by participants were subjected to thematic analysis. After all messages had been recorded a member of the project team watched the messages and, for each individual message, listed the broad ideas that participants addressed in their narratives. For example, the initial list for Participant 5 included - shame (at initial motivation for taking part), empathy with survivors, importance of god, amazement/astonishment at ability of survivors to rebuild, while for Participant 21 ideas included - emotional reaction to messages, messages of hope are comforting, strength of humanity, never forget the hurt, understanding and acceptance, unity as a community, sharing stories to build a better world. After this initial phase concise labels were developed based on the initial broad ideas (for example, "sharing stories to build a better world" was labeled "sharing"). All videos were then reexamined to check the applicability of concise theme descriptors. Next, all broad ideas and their corresponding concise labels were listed and, over a period of three iterations, refined down to a core set of final themes. For example, "survivors are extremely brave" (page 18) initially coded as "brave" and "incredible that you have carried on" (page 9) initially coded as "admiration" were both condensed into the theme "admire". After completion of final coding, six themes emerged that appeared more than ten times throughout all participant messages - admire (46 appearances), support (35), future (24), learn (16), unity (14), and Emotional Impact (12). Eight themes had fewer than ten occurrences - share (9), inspirational (8), persevere (6), proud (5), god (4), hope (4), remember (4), thanks (2).
Major Themes

From the rich array of qualitative information available in the support messages created by our young participants we focussed on identifying a number of the major themes related to participants’ reactions to Rwandan survivors and survivor messages.

• **Support**: Unsurprisingly, support was a common theme that appeared throughout the messages created by our young participants. Participants most strongly expressed their support by indicating that survivors were not alone, that they and others around the world cared about and were standing together in support of survivors. Interestingly, some participants affirmed that the world knew about what had happened in Rwanda, while others suggested that even those who didn’t have much knowledge could still provide support. Participants encouraged survivors by stating their belief in survivors’ ability to heal, and emphasised that survivors had not lost everything and that they still had much to offer. In a similar fashion, participants also encouraged survivors to pursue their dreams, and suggested that their messages of hope could inspire others to take actions to help.

> You have people like me who support genocide survivors, and there are many many volunteers who will spend their time to talk to you, to share feelings with you, to encourage you to move on with your life.”

• **Admiration**: Another theme strongly referenced across the support messages was the admiration that participants felt for Rwandan survivors. That admiration was directed towards a number of different factors. Participants mentioned how much they admired the strength of survivors, noting their coping ability and resilience. Participants also admired that survivors were able to forgive transgressions in the past and move on with their lives. Along similar lines, several participants pointed out that survivors displayed no hatred towards those who had perpetrated atrocities during the genocide. Participants also applauded that survivors were sharing their stories, and commended those shared stories as positive examples to others. Aligned with admiration, a number of participants referred to their feelings about the messages of hope. For example, while some participants mentioned how gratified and happy they were having listened to survivors’ messages, others expressed their awe and humility.

> I just finished watching two videos of survivors of the Rwandan genocide and, as I watched them, the feelings that went through me weren’t pity or sorrow, but it was admiration and respect.

• **Future**: Many participants included references to the future in their support messages. Participants hoped that survivors would not dwell on their past and be able to move on from their experiences during the genocide. Participants encouraged survivors to look forward and to focus on the future. Survivors were urged to look to the future not just for themselves, but also for the good of their country. Several participants also expressed optimism about survivors’ futures, assuring that the outlook for their future lives would be bright.

> Although you’ve been through so much pain and loss I think it is important to look forward and make a great life for yourselves instead of focussing on the pain of the past.

• **Learning**: The idea that people could use both messages of hope and messages of support to learn positive lessons was mentioned by several participants. Some participants believed that messages of hope offered a lesson for others about the dangers of prejudice and racial conflict. Participants also suggested that messages could create awareness about the genocide and Rwanda’s efforts to heal. While acknowledging the horrors of the genocide, some participants also expressed hopes that survivors would be able to learn from their experiences and so build a better future.
It's important not to forget your past, but instead of letting it continue to affect their future and their lives they've accepted it as part of them and they're using it to gain strength from, to move forward in life and grow from what they've been through.

- **Emotional Impact**: The experiences of survivors were unimaginable to most of our participants. In their support messages a number of participants explicitly acknowledged that they *could not imagine* what survivors had been through. A few participants also expressed *horror* or *bewilderment* about why the genocide occurred.

I don't think I can even imagine what it was like at all, not even close, I saw the film 'Hotel Rwanda' about seven years ago and I cried and I cried, and it hurt and it was terrible, and I don't know if I would have survived.

- **Unity**: The theme of unity was also popular with several participants. Participants spoke about the strength and importance of community, suggesting that it was important for Rwandans to unite as a society. Broader levels of unity were also mentioned, with some participants speaking about the ability of humanity as a whole to overcome and persevere. Similarly, the idea that survivor messages reflected common human values was also raised – participants admired survivors for holding on to their values in spite of their terrible suffering.

Let us never forget the hurt, the loss, the pain experienced, but let us understand, acknowledge, and maybe accept so one day we can unite as a community, share our stories of life, and build a world in which we never the hurt and pain human beings can inflict.

- **Other Themes**: Other ideas related to these themes also occurred fairly commonly throughout the various messages of support. For example, participants saw the Rwandan messages of hope as *inspirational*, and affirmed that survivors should be *proud* of their achievements. Survivors were also encouraged to *persevere* with *creating and sharing* their stories – creating stories was seen as a step towards letting go and healing, and sharing as a way for those stories to have a wider positive influence.

As with the explicit feedback elicited from the surveys and debriefing sessions, the themes that commonly appeared in their messages of support were in line with our ideas about the positive effects of message creation and sharing. Although acknowledging doubts about their own understanding of survivors’ experiences, participants very willingly expressed a range of positive emotions (including hope, admiration and pride) and offered support for survivors’ efforts. While their support messages canvassed a range of themes, the value of creation and sharing was woven throughout their messages. Participants believed in what the Rwandan survivors had done, and what they themselves were doing by creating support messages as part of their participation on the project. They saw creating and sharing hope and support messages as helping Rwandan survivors, raising awareness and support among others not directly affected by the genocide, and as a mechanism to cultivate social engagement and unity.

**Message Variation**

Despite the general commonality of positive themes, there was also considerable variation in the content of support messages, reflecting the freedom that participants were given regarding message creation. Participants were asked to create a message in support of Rwandan survivors, but that message style and content was completely under their own control. As a result, some participants expressed their support in some detail while others offered only very brief messages in support of survivors. Some participants focussed on directly addressing the experiences of Rwandan survivors, while others used more abstract references to voice their support.

In view of that variation, it would have been possible to rate support messages based on experts’ perceptions about the quality of support they offered. For example, we could have screened messages by an expert panel composed of survivor representatives and/or mental health professionals, and only
displayed those that were judged to offer the best support and contain the most appropriate content. We did not seek to classify support messages in such a way in this pilot study. We gave an undertaking to our participants to display all messages and have done so without prejudice. Furthermore, regardless of the content of their individual message, our direct experience with participants demonstrated that every participant engaged in the creation task with sincerity and with an intention to provide the best message that they could. Nevertheless, were we to apply the framework more broadly across other contexts of vulnerability, we would screen the content of messages before sharing them with audiences that include the vulnerable people that we are seeking to support.

This pilot project was primarily a test of process and methodology. We deliberately chose non-vulnerable participants and, while genocide survivors are clearly potentially vulnerable, it is unlikely that many Rwandan survivors will access the current YouTube channel - we do not intend to publicise the channel within the survivor community. In our judgement then, the possible risks to vulnerable people as a result of viewing any support messages are minimal. However, if the framework is applied in other contexts where both hope and support messages are created by vulnerable people and content is specifically shared among vulnerable communities, screening of messages is likely be required to ensure that no unintentional harmful effects are experienced by vulnerable content accessors. Where screening processes are put in place, the nature and purpose of those processes will be reflected in the consent information supplied to participants. Following our earlier assumptions about the delivery of materials in the field, information about screening will be provided in a manner most appropriate to the specific context (for example, verbal delivery of information may be more suitable than written delivery in some circumstances).

Sharing Messages

As we have noted, support messages are currently shared through a dedicated YouTube Channel created specifically for the pilot project. YouTube is a robust and established platform that also potentially offers easy scalability for future incarnations of the messages framework. Despite these advantages, and its suitability as a platform for pilot content, YouTube, as it currently stands, may not be ideally suited for sharing content that can support specific wellbeing outcomes within vulnerable communities. We suggest a number of potential customisations that would enhance the platform’s suitability for sharing the types of content Young and Well projects are likely to generate.

There may be scope for a range of individual strands across the Young and Well CRC to maintain their own dedicated YouTube channels as one mechanism to share content. If that were to occur, it would be beneficial if separate channels could be housed within a dedicated ‘space’ on YouTube, self-contained from (or within) the public platform. The original brief for the wider Engaging Creativity project suggested using a dedicated Engaging Creativity online content sharing platform as an interactive repository developed to gather and share online content created by young participants. Our suggestion is that such a repository would include the capability to create channels similar to that on the current public YouTube platform. However, control over content, access, and look and feel would be greatly enhanced on a dedicated Engaging Creativity platform.

- **Content:** Clearly, the ability for projects to control the display of primary channel content should remain. However, under the current YouTube model, secondary content is also delivered to channel observers - as suggested (related) videos and advertising. Control over the display of secondary content is currently insufficient. For example, related videos are drawn from the total pool of available YouTube content and selected based on keyword similarities. Content on the messages of support channel use ‘Rwanda’ as one keyword and so any other YouTube video that also uses Rwanda, including videos made by genocide denialists, could potentially appear adjacent to a support video. A dedicated platform should allow channel owners at least three levels of control over secondary content – 1) that no secondary content be displayed, 2) that only secondary content from other channels within the platform be displayed, and 3) the current default, that secondary content be selected from all YouTube channels.

- **Access:** A dedicated platform might also benefit from more fine-grained control over access to channels and the ability to comment on channel content. Current
YouTube options that allow private/unlisted/public settings for content and exclusion or approval of comments are sufficient for channels created under the Young and Well CRC banner. However, more sophisticated access controls (for example, the ability to define groups of access) and comments forums (for example, comment threading, interactive discussion options) could be worthwhile additions to enhance the experience of content creators and their audience.

• **Look and Feel:** The ability for projects to achieve greater levels of consistency over branding would also be advantageous to better signify interrelationships between different channels, channels’ relationship to the Young and Well CRC, and the focus of channel content on achieving specific wellbeing outcomes. At the same time, projects may be sufficiently different that they require a level of customisation for their own channels. Therefore, for example, a dedicated platform might include subtle standard header/footer information marking channels as part of the CRC, but also allow greater customisation through colour, images, and so on.

Although our current pilot focused on a one-off static exchange of hope and support messages, future directions for this and other Young and Well CRC projects may also include developing more dialogic exchange. If that occurs, sharing platforms may need to broaden to include dynamic exchange where vulnerable youth and their supporters can engage in on-going creation and sharing of messages (and potentially other forms of creative expression – for example, music, poetry, story telling). For example, vulnerable youth could work collaboratively within their own communities, or in partnership with other supportive communities, to create shared visions of positive futures for their own local groups, borderer national groups, or international communities. Such collaborations could be applicable across a very wide of target groups (for example, immigrant communities, youth with disabilities, transgender groups).

We anticipate that sharing platforms developed by Young and Well CRC for dynamic and static interaction should sit side-by-side and interactively, available for use by a broad range of vulnerable communities depending on context, need and resource. Platforms should also provide tools and templates to enable target groups and communities to generate, develop and share interactive digital content, and encourage the development of long term repositories of knowledge, creativity and experience that live and evolve as their communities themselves grow and change.
Conclusions

The Messages of Support pilot project represents the beginning of our exploration of the role of technology in providing a public voice and an avenue for public creative expression to those who may otherwise be excluded from such activities as a result of disadvantage or vulnerability. The project was founded on our conviction that the creation and circulation of messages of hope and support from and between vulnerable individuals and communities could lead to benefits for individual wellbeing and towards more cohesive and engaged communities.

Our ideas were based on research illustrating the important role of hope and positive social support for the recovery and wellbeing of victimised or traumatised groups, and recent work developing applied solutions for community engagement using small group interaction. We leveraged ongoing work with survivors of the Rwandan Genocide to develop a framework that would allow young people to create and circulate messages in support of vulnerable others and provide a mechanism to measure the effects of message creation, access, and circulation. We used this pilot to assess the utility of our developing framework, and to evaluate the potential benefits to participants engaging in the messages process.

For the pilot study, we purposefully chose young participants who were not members of vulnerable communities as we wanted to test and refine processes and procedures before directly engaging with vulnerable people. Our participants watched messages of hope created by Rwandan survivors and responded by creating their own audiovisual messages supporting survivors. Support messages were then shared publicly on a dedicated Messages of Support YouTube channel. Participants were asked about their reactions and evaluations of the message creation and access process at varied points throughout the study.

Our results provided good support for the suitability of the methods and processes we adopted in the study. Participants found the processes of accessing and creating messages easy to understand and to engage in. Participants also provided feedback constructive to developing a messages framework for use in the field. Their evaluations about information and consent processes highlighted the need for more clear and detailed procedures in that area, and their engagement with and reactions to measurement items reinforced our thoughts about the necessity for procedural flexibility when administering the messages framework in the field.

Importantly, we also found support for our contention that creating and sharing messages of hope and support has the potential to achieve positive benefits for those who engage in the process. Our participants found the survivor messages moving and inspirational (albeit challenging to listen to) and were enthusiastic and appreciative about creating their own support messages, believing that messages of support could positively affect survivors. Participants also believed that both hope and support messages have the potential to develop connections and understanding between individuals and groups, and to encourage unity, positive values, and purpose within society. Most, although not all, participants also thought that creating messages could lead to engagement with other meaningful helping activities. Perhaps most significantly, all of the young people who took part did so with genuine regard for the task, and every participant found the processes of both accessing and creating messages rewarding and worthwhile.

Overall then, the outcomes of the Messages of Support pilot suggest that our reasoning behind developing a broader messages framework for application across different contexts of vulnerability is sound. We are encouraged by the largely successful implementation of our methods and procedures, appreciative of the constructive feedback we received about improving our practices, and gratified at the very positive reception the project received from the young people who took part. We look forward to building on this initial work to develop and expand the messages framework so that it can be usefully applied across more areas of vulnerability and need.
References


Authors

Dr Emma Thomas
Emma is a Senior Lecturer in social psychology at Murdoch University where she has been employed since 2010. Her research focuses broadly on the conditions under which people will mobilise as members of groups to overcome social injustice. Her work on identity and motivating social justice action, in particular, has been published in high-ranking international journals and adopted by some NGOs. Her current research explores processes of civic engagement amongst young people, and developing support for humanitarian aid efforts.

Professor Craig McGarty
Craig’s journal articles have attracted well over 1000 citations. He led the Murdoch University delegation to Rwanda in 2009 that was in instrumental in helping to create the 100 Messages of Hope website from survivors of the Rwandan Genocide. He has been a chief investigator on four Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Projects and a Linkage Project working with remote Indigenous communities in Western Australia. He is a mentor for a film-based ARC Indigenous Research development project on the Rottnest Island prison.

Dr Girish Lala
Girish has extensive experience and expertise in both on-line and face-to-face research. He is currently involved in designing, preparing and implementing the “Messages” project for the Young and Well CRC, and has contributed to theoretical development, and design, implementation and analysis of on-line and face-to-face research in a number of ARC funded projects. He coordinated the “Sustaining the Rwandan Reconciliation” project at Murdoch University, has worked closely with NGO and government representatives and groups, and held roles in information technology management and support, and website design.

Associate Professor Michael Broderick
Mick has worked with disadvantaged and traumatised communities in Australia (Maralinga), and internationally (Rwanda, Japan, Kazakhstan and Micronesia) helping them share their experiences, often trans-generationally, via digital media and social networking. His short documentary Hope for the Future (2010) screened before 20,000+ survivors of the Rwandan genocide during the 16th anniversary ceremony. He is currently a Chief Investigator on the 3-year Global Hibakusha project, funded by the Japanese government, linking radiation-affected communities around the world.

Dr Angela Ebert
Angela is a Senior Lecturer at Murdoch University. Prior to her work as an academic, Dr. Ebert has worked as a clinician in the area of trauma and especially refugee trauma. She was the Founding Director of the Association for Services to Torture and Trauma Survivors in Perth. Her work related to war trauma, and genocide underpins her collaboration with Rwandan researchers, senior policy makers and service providers in Rwanda. Angela has twice delivered a paper at an International Conference in Rwanda following an invitation by the Commission for the Fight against Genocide, a key Rwandan Government organisation. Her review on the impact of complex trauma was published in a high-ranking international journal.

Associate Professor Martin Mhando
Martin is Associate Professor in the School of Media, Communication and Culture at Murdoch University in Western Australia, and is an award-winning feature and documentary filmmaker. He is co-editor of the prestigious Journal of African Cinemas, published by Intellect, UK. His areas of interest and research include Documentary Theory, Film Production Praxis, African Cinema, Community Media, World Cinema and Indigenous Knowledge. Martin often serves on festival juries and curates film festivals. For the last 6 years he was Festival Director of the Zanzibar International Film Festival in Tanzania, one of the largest cultural events on the East African calendar.
Appendix I – Rwanda Projects

Alongside the 100 Messages of Hope project, researchers at Murdoch University are involved in a number of ongoing projects in Rwanda designed to explore, assist and develop services aimed at improving mental health, individual wellbeing, and social cohesion:

Associate Professor Martin Mhando
Dr. Mhando supervises a PhD student Helene Thomas who has been producing radio documentaries on Rwanda that have appeared regularly on Radio National in Australia. Her work frequently focuses on disadvantaged groups and young people in Rwanda. This focus on participatory media in Africa works towards recognising power relations inherent in media discourses and consciously working towards a restorative balance. A group of six young slum dwellers in Rwanda working with Helene, now use storytelling as a form of journalistic practice in community.

Associate Professor Mick Broderick
Associate Professor Mick Broderick was invited by the WA branch of the United Nations Association to open Refugee Week 2012 at the State Library of WA on Monday June 18 with a talk about Sustaining Reconciliation in Rwanda. The address concentrated on Murdoch University’s ongoing collaborative projects, including the Young and Well messages of hope. Broderick co-launched a travelling UN exhibit “Lessons from Rwanda” with His Excellency, Malcolm McCusker, Governor of Western Australia. At the June-July 2013 Zanzibar International Film Festival, Broderick and Associate Professor Martin Mhando presented a discussion paper and invited guests to initiate an East African screen production strategy that includes Rwandan filmmakers and government agencies. This initiative was very well received by East African partners, especially the motivation to present positive African storytelling and alternative industry pathways outside of Hollywood/Nollywood/Hillywood models. Mhando and Broderick will guide the initial stakeholder consultations across Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania. Broderick and Mhando are also now co-supervising an Australian PhD screen production student (APA), Brendon Briggs, who will develop a feature drama based on field visits and collaborations in Rwanda over the next three years.
Appendix II – Information and Consent Forms

Dear Parent/Guardian,

My name is Emma Thomas, from the School of Psychology at Murdoch University. The Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre, a national body investigating ways to increase wellbeing in young people across Australia, has funded my team to undertake a research project that investigates how young people respond to positive stories of survival from people who have survived distressing or traumatic events.

Young people who take part will be given a brief introduction to the project by a member of my research team and watch two short pre-recorded messages from survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda outlining the positive steps they have taken to rebuild their lives and the hopefulness they feel for their futures. Participants will then record a brief (e.g., approximately one minute long) video message supporting survivors. If your child takes part, their video message will be displayed on the Internet on a controlled YouTube channel and a dedicated project website where others, including the general public, will be able to view it. Your child’s first name or an alias or nickname of their choice will also be displayed on the website.

At the time support messages are recorded, participants will also complete a short survey containing questions about their general wellbeing and their feelings about their participation. Example questions include: “How often do you feel satisfied with who you are?” “How hopeful are you for the future of survivors in Rwanda?” “How satisfying was it creating your support message?” and “In the future would you like to do volunteer work to help individuals and communities abroad?”. Participants will complete a similar survey one month after recording their own messages.

Participation takes about 70 minutes in total. The first session where participants watch two pre-recorded videos, record their own support message and answer a survey takes about 60 minutes.
and will be held at the School of Psychology at Murdoch University. One month after the first session, participants will be emailed a link to a follow-up survey that can be completed online.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and we require written consent from both you and your child before they take part. Participation in the surveys will be confidential, and personal information and responses will not be made available. If they choose to participate, your child will be identified by their first name or an alias or nickname of their choice on the publically accessible project websites.

Even if you provide your consent now, your child will be free to withdraw from the project at any stage, and will be able to request the removal of their video message from the project websites at any time (note that when video messages are displayed on the project websites they can be downloaded by anyone who views them).

If you are willing to allow your child to participate in this project, please complete the attached "Parent/Guardian Consent Form". If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact me, Dr Emma Thomas, on 9360 7209, or my Research Associate, Dr Girish Lala, on 9360 6248 at Murdoch University. This project has been authorised by the Murdoch University Human Ethics Research Committee and you may also contact them on 9360 6677 with any questions.

Thank you for taking the time to consider your child’s participation in our project.

Regards

[Signature]

Dr Emma Thomas  
Chief Investigator, Messages of Support project  
School of Psychology  
Murdoch University


This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/047). If you have any reservation or complaint about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office (Tel. 08 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participation in Research
Messages of Support project – Murdoch University

Parent/Guardian Consent Form

I, __________________________________________ being the parent/guardian

of __________________________________________ consent to my child’s

participation in the Messages of Support research project. I understand the project requires my child to
record a brief video message and complete two short surveys.

I understand that the video message my child records will be posted to a controlled YouTube site and a
project website, and that the message will be identified using either my child’s first name or an alias or
nickname of their choice.

I understand that my child’s participation is completely voluntary, and that I may withdraw consent at
any time, without providing a reason.

Sign: ______________________________________

Date: ______________________________________

PLEASE RETURN SIGNED PARENT CONSENT FORM
Dear Participant,

The purpose of this project is to investigate how people respond to stories of survival from Rwandans who lived through the 1994 genocide. You can help our project by consenting to take part.

The study involves two separate sessions. The first session takes about one hour during which you will watch two pre-recorded messages from survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. You will then record a brief (e.g., approximately one minute long) video message supporting Rwandan survivors. Your support messages will be uploaded to YouTube and to a project website for others, including survivors from Rwanda and members of the public, to view. You will also complete two short surveys containing questions about your general wellbeing and your feelings about your participation. The second session takes place one month after you have recorded your messages and answered the first survey, and involves completing a brief follow-up survey online.

Participation in this research is completely voluntary and we require your written consent before you can take part. Participation in the surveys will be confidential, and personal information and responses will only be made available to the researchers. When your video message is posted to YouTube and the project website you will be identified by your first name or a nickname of your choice on those websites.

If you do agree to take part you will be free to withdraw from the project at any stage, and you will be able to request the removal of your video message from the project websites at any time (note that when video messages are displayed on the project websites they can be downloaded by anyone who views them).

Data from the project will be stored securely and on password-protected computers at Murdoch University and will only be accessed by research officers. The project findings will be reported in academic journals and a summary can be available on request.

If you have any questions about the project, please feel free to contact, Dr Emma Thomas, on 9360 7209, or, Dr Girlish Laia, on 9360 6248 at Murdoch University. They will be happy to discuss the project with you, or answer any of your questions.

If you would like to participate, please complete the attached Participant Consent Form.

Regards

Dr Emma Thomas
Chief Investigator, Messages of Support project
School of Psychology
Murdoch University


This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2012/047). If you have any reservation or complaints about the ethical conduct of this research, and wish to talk with an independent person, you may contact Murdoch University’s Research Ethics Office [Tel. 08 9360 6677 or email ethics@murdoch.edu.au]. Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Participation in Research
Messages of Support project – Murdoch University

Consent Form

I understand the information that has been provided to me about the project. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to take part in this project, and know that I may change my mind and stop at any time, without providing any reason. I am also aware that I may skip any survey questions that I do not feel comfortable answering.

I ______________________________ agree to participate in the Messages of Support research project.

I give permission for:
• the video message I record to be posted on YouTube and the project website
• my first name or nickname to appear on YouTube and the project website
• my contribution to this research to be published in a journal, provided that my individual survey responses are not identified in any way

I understand that I can request a summary of findings once the research has been completed.

Signed: __________________________________________

Today’s Date: _______________________________________

Your Date of Birth: ________________________________
Appendix III – Surveys

Survey 1: Wellbeing

How much do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

<1-7 Likert scale, Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree>

1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam
2. I energetically pursue my goals
3. There are lots of ways around any problem
4. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me
5. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem
6. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future
7. I meet the goals that I set for myself

<0-10 Likert scale, Very Sad-Very Happy>

8. How happy are you about the things you have? Like the money and the things you own?
9. How happy are you with your health?
10. How happy are you with the things you want to be good at?
11. How happy are you about getting on with the people you know?
12. How happy are you about how safe you feel?
13. How happy are you about doing things away from your home?
14. How happy are you about what may happen to you later on in your life?

<1-6 Likert scale, Never-Daily>

15. How often do you feel good about yourself
16. How often do you feel satisfied with who you are
17. How often do you feel sure about yourself
18. How often do you feel that you are capable of coping with most of your problems

<1-5 Likert scale, Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree>

19. I think that most people around the world get what they are entitled to have
20. It is OK if some people in the world have more opportunities than others
21. I think that people around the world get the rewards and punishments they deserve
22. I think that many people around the world are poor because they do not work hard enough
23. The world is generally a fair place
24. I am confident about communicating with people from different cultures
25. I am informed about current international issues and events
26. I feel comfortable about giving my views on global issues in front of a group of people
27. I am confident that I can get other people to care about global problems that concern me
28. In the future I would like to do volunteer work to help individuals and communities abroad
29. In the future I would like to participate in events or activities in support of a global cause
30. In the future I would like to get involved with an international humanitarian organization or project
31. In the future I would like to sign a petition in favour of international support for survivors in Rwanda
32. In the future I would like to make a donation to a global charity

Thinking about your participation in this project, please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements: <1-7 Likert scale, Strongly Disagree-Strongly Agree>

33. I feel a bond with other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors
34. I feel committed to other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors
35. I am glad to be someone who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors
36. I think that other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors have a lot to be proud of
37. Being someone who wants to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors gives me a good feeling.

38. I have a lot in common with other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors.

39. I am similar to other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors.

40. Other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors have a lot in common with each other.

41. Other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors are very similar to each other.

42. I often think about the fact that I want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors.

43. The fact that I want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors is an important part of my identity.

44. Being someone who wants to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors is an important part of how I see myself.

45. I intend to discuss supporting survivors in Rwanda with my friends and family.

46. I intend to support survivors in Rwanda by doing some fundraising.

47. I intend to support survivors in Rwanda by organizing an event at my school.

48. I intend to support survivors in Rwanda by writing a letter to the government.

49. I intend to read and research more about supporting survivors in Rwanda.

50. I intend to post information to Facebook or another social network about supporting survivors in Rwanda.

51. Together supporters can improve things for survivors in Rwanda.

52. Together supporters can make a positive difference to the lives of survivors in Rwanda.

53. Supporting survivors in Rwanda is a waste of everyone's time, effort and money.

54. My personal support can improve things for survivors in Rwanda.

55. My personal support can make a positive difference to the lives of survivors in Rwanda.

56. Supporting survivors in Rwanda is a waste of my own time, effort and money.

57. I am hopeful that the situation for survivors in Rwanda can improve.

58. I am optimistic that the situation for survivors in Rwanda can change for the better.

59. I am hopeful for the future of survivors in Rwanda.

60. I feel positive about the future of survivors in Rwanda.

Survey 2: Task Evaluation

1. For each of the following emotions, please indicate how much you felt that way while you were creating your message of support: <items presented randomized; 1-5 Likert scale, Not at all-Extremely>
   - afraid, scared, nervous, jittery, irritable, hostile, guilty, ashamed, upset, distressed active, alert, attentive, determined, enthusiastic, excited, inspired, interested, proud, strong

2. I enjoyed creating my support message.

3. Creating my support message was satisfying.

4. It was difficult to create my support message.

5. Creating my support message was challenging.

6. Creating my support message was worthwhile.

7. My support message will make a positive difference.

8. I would like to participate in this type project again.

9. If you would like to make any other comments about this project please enter them below <open-ended>
10. Each of the options below shows two circles on a line. The circles are different lengths apart in each of the options – for example, the circles in option 1 are further apart than the circles in option 2. The smaller circle on the left is you and the larger circle on the right are other the people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors. The distance between the circles represents closeness between you and other people who want to help – the closer the circles, the closer you are to the other people. Please select the option that best shows how close you are to other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors:

Survey 3: Follow-up

Follow-up survey administered one month after message creation included all items from the wellbeing and task evaluation surveys.
Appendix IV – Rwanda Information Sheet

Messages of Support Project

Rwanda

Rwanda is a land-locked country (i.e., it has no ocean borders) in central Africa with a land area of about 26,500 square kilometres (nearly 100 times smaller than Western Australia). The countryside is mostly savannah grassland, but also has many hills and mountains, and numerous lakes. The climate is relatively mild, with two rainy seasons every year. Rwanda has nearly 12 million people who mainly live in rural areas. Its main industries are farming and mining. Tourism is also growing – Rwanda is one of very few countries where tourists can visit Mountain Gorillas in their natural habitat.

Rwanda is a Republic, and gained independence from Belgium in 1962. Like Australia, it is also part of the Commonwealth, having joined in 2009. Most of the people in Rwanda are Christian (about 97%), and it has three official languages – Kinyarwanda, French, and English. Rwanda’s capital city is Kigali, which is in the centre of the country; Kigali has a population of around one million people. Nearly 43% of people in Rwanda are under 15 years old (in Australia around 19% of people are aged under 15). There are two main ethnic groups in Rwanda – Hutu, who make up about 80% of the population, and Tutsi, who comprise about 15% of the population.

The 1994 Genocide

The United Nations defines genocide as “the deliberate destruction of a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, in part or in whole”. The causes of the Rwandan genocide are very complex. Although there has been a long history of disagreements and tensions between the Hutu and Tutsi peoples in Rwanda, there has also been cooperation and good will (for example, Hutus and Tutsis often married each other). However, after Rwanda was colonised in the early 1900s conflict between Hutu and Tutsi intensified. There were a number of violent episodes in the years leading to the genocide, with peoples from both communities suffering the effects. These growing tensions culminated in 1994, when approximately one million Rwandans were killed over a three-month period. Although most of the people who were killed were Tutsi, and most of the perpetrators were Hutu, many tens of thousands of Hutu also lost their lives.

Hope for the Future

Since the genocide, Rwanda is gradually healing and rebuilding. Although many tensions still exist and the consequences of the genocide continue to affect almost everyone in the country, many people in Rwanda are trying to rebuild their lives and look positively to the future – both for themselves and for other Rwandans. One way this is happening is through initiatives like the 100 Messages of Hope project in Rwanda. That project records positive messages from survivors of the genocide speaking about how they have rebuilt their lives, and their own hopes and aspirations for the future. Projects like 100 Messages of Hope do not seek to diminish or disregard the terrible events that took place during the 1994 genocide – those events should never be forgotten. Instead, these projects believe that successful recovery from trauma involves finding a balance between suffering and hope. Positive messages from survivors themselves can act as examples and help to repair damage to individuals and to society by creating beacons of hope for the community and for younger generations. Messages of support can reinforce that idea by demonstrating to survivors that they are not alone in their struggle, and that others care about their experiences and believe in their ability to heal and grow.
Appendix V – Initial Participant Contact

Dear <participant name> - thanks for your interest in the project.

As you might have read, we're investigating how people respond to positive stories of survival from Rwandans who lived through the genocide. Here's a bit more info. about the study. The only requirement is that you need to be between 18 and 25 years old to take part. Participation involves two sessions. The first session lasts about 60-70 minutes and includes watching two pre-recorded video messages from actual genocide survivors (these are positive messages about how survivors are healing and rebuilding their lives), completing a couple of surveys, and recording your own video message in support of Rwandan survivors.

The second session lasts about 10 minutes and involves completing an online survey one month after the first session (you don't need to be on-campus to complete the survey, we'll just email you a link).

The video message that you record will be to show your support for survivors and the steps they are taking to rebuild their lives. We won't place a limit on how long your message has to be - it can be long or short, and the content will be up to you. You'll also have a chance to record multiple versions so you can pick the one you like best. We will upload the one that you nominate to a dedicated YouTube channel and your message will be identified on YouTube by your first name or an alias or nickname of your choice.

We'll supply more information about how to record etc. during the first session. You don't need any experience with creating videos or on-line content to take part (and you don't need detailed knowledge about the genocide either).

Please let me know if you need any more info. I look forward to hearing from you.