

# Messages of Support

Helping others who have survived traumatic experiences can be good for you.

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<p><b>Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre</b>          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.</p> <p><a href="http://youngandwellcrc.org.au">youngandwellcrc.org.au</a></p>	<p><b>Youth Focus</b>          Youth Focus is an independent West Australian not-for-profit working to stop youth suicide. Youth Focus works with young people aged 12-25 to help them overcome issues associated with depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicidal thoughts through the provision of free, unlimited and professional face-to-face individual and family counselling and other mental health services.</p> <p><a href="http://youthfocus.com.au/">youthfocus.com.au/</a></p>
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# Table of contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Table of contents .....	4
Executive summary.....	5
Introduction.....	7
Methods.....	10
Results.....	13
Discussion .....	15
Conclusions .....	17
References .....	18
Appendices.....	21

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Offering a message of support to people who have survived adversity promotes well-being and commitment to act to support those people because it allows for the formation of new identities .....	7
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Figure 2: Offering a message of support to survivors of the Rwandan genocide promotes hope, positivity and commitment to act to support those people because it allows for the formation of new identities .....	13
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# Executive summary

## Background

The video screen regularly brings us evidence of suffering in far off places. Many of us feel both sad and powerless when we are confronted by such images. Although we may want to help we may not know how to offer support to those far away people. Given that it is difficult to act in these circumstances it can be tempting to turn away, and understandably, to seek to shield young people from confronting images that they can do little about.

However, there are excellent reasons to believe that survivors of traumatic events will benefit from receiving support from others. Those survivors, however, are often physically remote from the people who could support them. It is also easy to forget that survivors of trauma need not be silent victims who, if they are allowed to speak at all, are given the opportunity to recount stories of harm. Survivors can be champions, who are wise advocates of change, and sources of inspiration. Survivors, especially in recovering post-conflict societies, rarely have the opportunity to communicate with international supporters. Technology, however, makes it possible to connect members of the international community with survivors of traumatic events without anyone needing to travel vast distances. It is possible for people to provide support to trauma survivors but what are the effects of doing so? It is said that it is better to give than receive but is that really true? If it is true then we might be missing an opportunity for benefits all the way round. Young people are often said to be “digital natives” who are comfortable interacting over platforms such as YouTube. This research considers the positive psychological outcomes that may flow to young people who offer online support to other people who have survived enormous adversity.

## Objectives

The Messages of Support project was designed to explore how audiovisual messages can be used to provide a creative outlet to allow young people to express and develop support for trauma survivors. The positive psychological outcomes of doing so could be manifest at both personal and social levels: supporters can positively affect vulnerable others, encouraging connectedness to people in other countries, while developing new empowering identities as active providers of support. The major objective here was to ensure that generating the content was beneficial for the young people creating the content. If the messages are judged to be of high quality we would then make them available to survivors of trauma for their benefit. We are interested in the effects of creating real (rather than pretend) messages so the project does make that content available to survivors. The task of assessing the benefit for that audience, however, is beyond the scope of this project.

## Methods

159 young Australians watched two messages of hope created by survivors of the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and responded by creating their own response in the form of an audiovisual message of support that was uploaded to YouTube. Participants completed measures of hopefulness, social identity, commitment to action to support survivors of the genocide, and well-being. In a second phase of the research, experts viewed a selection of the messages and provided feedback as to their suitability for wider dissemination amongst Rwandan survivors. A selection of messages is available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/sppru> with more to be released.

## Conclusions

Creating an online message of support fostered a sense of shared identity with Rwandan genocide survivors and other supporters who want to work together for a better future for Rwandan survivors. This renewed sense of self, in turn, promoted commitment to future action to support survivors, hope for the supporters' own future, and generated an immediate increase in positive mood. The research produced superb high quality video messages of

support that Rwandan experts have welcomed and we are seeking to make available to Rwandan survivors. The research suggests that the benefits of creating the messages outweighs the potential costs.

The negative use of online video platforms often receives attention but this research shows it is possible to use audiovisual messages in positive ways.

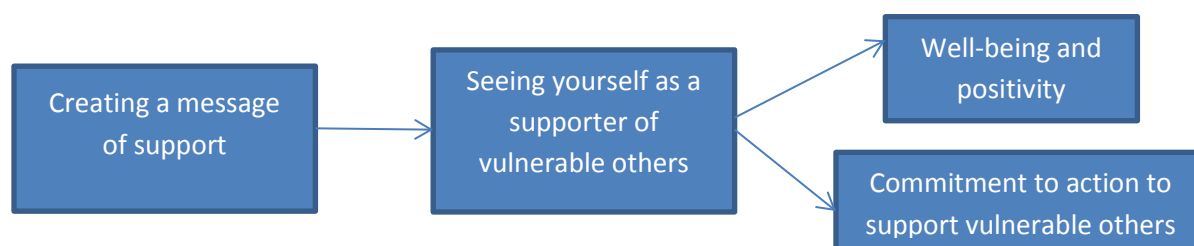
# Introduction

## Offering messages of support online

Internet-supported interactions are increasingly become a primary mode of communication, particularly amongst young people (Birchmeier, Dietz-Uhler & Stasser, 2011). Much research and public discussion focuses on the antisocial or negative outcomes of internet-supported interactions, such as cyber-bullying, ostracism, and decreased self-esteem. However online spaces are also being used as environments for engaging in pro-social behaviour. Young people can use Facebook to support those in their immediate friendship networks (Niland, Lyons, Goodwin & Hutton, 2015), but young people can also use new forms of social media to express their support for people across vast geographical and social distances. For example, when evaluating the use of online cancer support groups, research has shown that one of the three most common uses of these online spaces was to offer support to others (Meier, Lyons, Frydman, Forlenza & Rimer, 2007). Similarly, Mellor and colleagues (2008) found that people using an online cancer support group found that people were more likely to *offer* support than to request it.

The Messages of Support study explores the potential of social media to act as a vehicle for young Australians to offer support to others and, in doing so, accrue benefits to one's own well-being as well as promoting benefits to the broader community. Put differently, the current research explores the proposition that providing messages of support to vulnerable others boosts the well-being of the person doing the supporting, as well as increasing their engagement with the welfare of members of other groups. We expect that both of these positive outcomes will occur to the extent that people can realise new identities associated with the act of support. That is, the act of providing support online may generate new identities that promote well-being and action to support others. Figure 1 provides a conceptual overview of the process.

**Figure 1: Offering a message of support to people who have survived adversity promotes well-being and commitment to act to support those people because it allows for the formation of new identities**



## Offering support online as a vehicle of well-being

One way that people can promote positive outcomes to their own well-being is through engaging in prosocial behaviours: actions undertaken to promote the well-being of others (e.g. Klar & Kasser, 2009; Mills & Smith, 2008; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). For example, activism has been linked to subjective well-being and life satisfaction, as well as a high ratio of positive to negative affect (Klar & Kasser, 2009). Mills and Smith (2008) linked activist's increased well-being to the experience of meaningfulness associated with other-focused behaviour. Likewise, individuals who volunteer have been shown to experience significantly greater well-being than non-volunteers (Mellor et al., 2008; Thoits & Hewitt, 2001). Volunteers experience enhanced positive affect and report feeling positively about themselves (Piliavin, 2010). Prosocial behaviour has also been found to increase other indicators of well-being such as meaning in life, self-actualization, environmental mastery, autonomy and personal growth (known as eudaimonic indicators of well-being; e.g. Klar &

Kasser, 2009; Piliavin & Siegl, 2007; Vecina & Fernando, 2013). There is some evidence that eudaimonic well-being may be impacted more by the act of supporting others than hedonic well-being which is typically measured by life satisfaction, and positive and negative affect (Vecino & Fernando, 2013). Offering support online should improve well-being in much the same way.

The opportunity to provide support may be particularly important for vulnerable people, especially for those who are recipients of support services, and who, due to disadvantage, may typically be excluded from opportunities to provide support to others. Interestingly, some research has found that people who are disadvantaged or vulnerable may benefit more from providing support than do the advantaged (e.g. Piliavin & Siegl, 2007). This could be because they start from a lower baseline of well-being and have more to gain. Although our review of the literature reveals no studies comparing the impact of volunteering on disabled and non-disabled people, research has shown that supporting others benefits the disabled in terms of increased well-being and self-esteem (Carone, Burkner, & Gardner, 2007) empowerment and reduction in psychiatric symptoms (Woodside & Luis, 1997), and a new sense of identity (Fegan & Cook, 2012). This is especially pertinent to young disabled people who are involved in a transition to adulthood and are particularly vulnerable to social exclusion (Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014).

Using online technology to offer support to disadvantaged others in far away countries is an appealing way to engage youth and to provide opportunities for prosocial behaviour. Moreover, this act can reposition youth who are recipients of support services into active providers of support. Our research therefore sought to involve both vulnerable and non-vulnerable youth.

An important question relates to *why* acting pro-socially (volunteering, engaging in activism and the like) bolsters well-being? There is emerging evidence that social identification and a psychological sense of belonging to groups plays an important role in facilitating well-being (S.A. Haslam, Jetten, Postmes & C. Haslam, 2009). Belonging to more groups, and internalising these memberships as part of your overall sense of self, has a positive impact on resilience and well-being (C. Haslam et al., 2008). We therefore consider the idea that, through creating messages of support, participants come to a new sense of self or social identity based in that support for survivors of the Rwandan genocide (Figure 1).

Moreover, the positive effects of social identity formation seem especially likely if the content or meaning of the new identity is both empowering (i.e., it empowers a person to feel like they can make a difference) and has the dual benefit of extending well-being to others. Beyond the benefits of group membership (relating to connectedness and social support; S.A. Haslam et al., 2009) considering ourselves as a member of a group who wants to help others, and acting in accordance with that, promotes a sense of positive mood and well-being because it fosters meaning, purpose, and greater life satisfaction.

## **Offering support online as a vehicle of commitment to action to support others**

Offering support online not only holds the potential to promote greater well-being in young people who offer that support, but we also expect that it has the potential to promote a further commitment to improve the circumstances of disadvantaged groups. Social media provide spaces for young people to engage with and learn about the world. When people hear stories of adversity and survival, and are moved to engage with those stories by being positioned as active supporters, we expect that this will promote further commitment to act to support the well-being of the group as a whole. That is, the act of supporting a person online may initiate a broader commitment to support the welfare of that group in general (e.g. Thomas et al. 2015). Consistent with this view, it has been shown that engaging in online actions to support marginalized groups or protest social can promote broader repertoires of



engagement offline (e.g. Chan & Guo, 2013) especially if the online engagement allows for the expression of core values (Macafee & De Simone, 2012).

As above, a further question relates to *why* acting to support people online (through the provision of a message of support) would be expected to promote a broader commitment to the cause? We test the idea that, offering support can foster a sense of connection with the people we are offering support to, while also creating a sense of connectedness to others who are offering support to the same group. As illustrated in Figure 1, we conceive of this as a process of social identity formation. Social identities can be differentiated from personal identities on the basis that social identities are those that we share with other people (Turner, Oakes, Haslam & McGarty, 1994). When people identify as a supporter of a cause, this identity becomes a part of the self-concept (“who I am”), but it also becomes a part of the self that is shared with other people who also support the cause (“who we are”).

Perhaps most importantly, a sense of common cause (social identification) with other people who share your world-view is a key antecedent of collective action (i.e. actions that seek to bring about change for an entire group of people; see Smith, Thomas & McGarty, 2015). When people share a similar opinion or orientation about “how the world should be”, this provides the psychological link that allows them to feel common cause and take coordinated action to change the circumstance of their own group (van Zomeren, Postmes & Spears, 2008) or disadvantaged outgroups (e.g. Thomas, Mavor & McGarty, 2012).

### **A Message of Support in response to a Message of Hope**

The current research leverages off the Messages of Hope project (Lala et al., 2014), where Rwandan genocide survivors recorded positive messages expressing how they have rebuilt their lives, sharing their hopes and aspirations for the future with local and international online audiences. We focused here on the potential uses of social technology as a vehicle to offer support to others, and the positive personal and social outcomes of doing so. To do so, we asked young Australians aged 18 – 25 (including vulnerable populations) to use an iPad to produce and share video messages of support in response to Messages of Support recorded by young survivors of the Rwandan Genocide. This is a challenging creative communication task which included mastery of using technology to produce and share messages, and planning and filming a message which contained emotionally challenging content.

Viewing the Messages of Hope, and creating a Message of Support in response, has the potential to create an international dialogue, forging connectedness across geographical boundaries, and promoting action towards social change. We also anticipate that the messages will create a positive cycle of intercultural communication but these developments are beyond the scope of this project.

# Methods

The current research involved seeking messages of support for survivors of genocide from young Australians. We asked young Australians to view video messages of hope from Rwandan survivors and to create their own messages supporting and affirming survivors' efforts to heal and rebuild.

The research employed a quasi-experimental counter-balanced design that included collection of baseline measures of well-being, measurement of differences between accessing and creating messages, and, importantly, ensured all participants had the opportunity to create support messages (this was a crucial 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 local (Perth metro) independent secondary school, and undergraduate University students. Undergraduate participants could choose to receive either partial course credit or a monetary reimbursement for taking part. The Sydney sample (15 male, 53 female) was comprised primarily of first year psychology students at Western Sydney University (WSU) who participated for credit towards their course.

We sought to access vulnerable populations as well as non-vulnerable ones. These included students using Equity and Diversity services through Murdoch University, Western Sydney University and Notre Dame University (Sydney), Youth Focus, and youth living with cancer through the Leukaemia Foundation. In total, 154 young people participated in the study. 25 vulnerable and 129 non-vulnerable youth 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 1). Most participants took part individually (i.e., they received training and recorded their messages one at a time), although a number of participants received training in small groups (i.e., up to three participants took part at the same time). Note however that, even where participants completed other parts of the study in a small group, all participants completed the message creation task individually (i.e., all participants were alone when creating their support message).

It was also striking that in our recruitment from the general student community at Western Sydney University that eight participants divulged to the researcher that they were survivors of (in some cases refugees), or had been affected by, mass violence. We have not separately analysed this coincidental recruitment.

## MESSAGES OF HOPE

Participants viewed two pre-recorded messages of hope from Rwandan survivors (one male; one female). Each video featured a Rwandan genocide survivor speaking about their positive stories of survival and growth following the 1994 genocide. Survivors expressed their hopes and efforts towards generating a positive future, for themselves and for their nation. These survivors emphasised themes such as the importance of accepting the past and overcoming misfortune, the importance of contributing to the development of their country, the need to find strength in solidarity through sharing their experiences, and the importance of seeking support and supporting others.

## PROCEDURE

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 2):

- Baseline condition. After reading background information, participants randomly allocated to the baseline condition completed measures of well-being, hope, identification and commitment to act to support survivors of the Rwandan genocide. This group therefore provides us with a population-level estimate of mean levels independent of experimental effects. After completing this baseline measurement, participants then viewed messages of hope, received instructions about how to record their own support messages, recorded their messages, and completed the evaluation survey.
- Control condition. Participants in the control group read background information, viewed messages of hope, and then completed measures of well-being, hope, identification and commitment to act to support survivors of the Rwandan genocide. This group therefore provides us with an estimate of the effect of exposure to the Message of Hope. Participants then received instructions about how to record their own support messages, recorded their messages, and completed the evaluation survey.
- Experimental condition. Participants in the experimental group read background information, viewed messages of hope, received instructions about how to record their own support messages, and recorded their messages. They then completed the measures of well-being, hope, identification and commitment to act to support survivors of the Rwandan genocide. This group provides us with information relating to the effect of creating a message of support (over and above exposure to the message of hope).

The primary difference between experimental conditions was the order in which participants completed the measurement in relation to the message creation activity. Note that in all conditions participants were given complete freedom regarding the length and content of support messages.

## THE DATA

Two forms of data were collected:

- Responses to quantitative survey items measuring well-being, hope, positive and negative mood, social identification, and commitment to support survivors of the Rwandan genocide
- Messages created by participants in support of Rwandan survivors

A selection of messages is available at <https://www.youtube.com/user/sppru>

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Questionnaire items were primarily drawn from existing, verified scales. Well-being, (positive and negative) mood, and hope were measured using items from the Personal Wellbeing Index (Cummins & Lau, 2005), the PNAS (Watson, Clark & Tellegen, 1988) and the Snyder et al. Hope Scale (1991) respectively (see Appendix 3 for surveys). Identification as a supporter of survivors of the Rwandan genocide was adapted from Leach et al.'s (2008) social identification scale, and commitment to support survivors of the genocide based on

Thomas et al., (2012). The use of standard scales ensures that the data collected about specific factors is reliable.

# Results

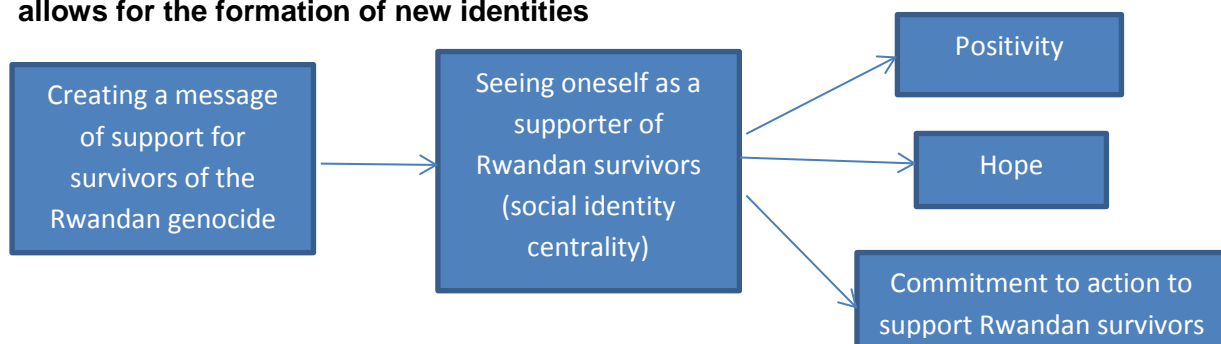
## STATISTICAL ANALYSES

In order to make the key comparison between people in the control group (people who were exposed to the Message of Hope) and the experimental group (people who both watched the Message of Hope and responded by making a Message of Support), we first subtracted from both groups the baseline score for the relevant scale. This allows us to express the effects of the control and experimental conditions relative to the baseline population estimate for each measure.

We then conducted between groups t-tests comparing the (deviation) scores for the control and experimental groups. Between groups t-tests revealed that people who had completed the Message of Support reported that this identity was more central to their overall self-concept,  $t(122) = 2.038, p = .04$  (all other  $ps > .05$ ).

As shown in Figure 2 there was evidence consistent with this increase in identity being the mechanism that connected message creation with the effect of creating the message to other outcomes (see Appendix 4). Specifically there was evidence that the centrality of the identity of being a supporter was connected to increased feelings of hopefulness, positive mood, and commitment to support survivors of the genocide. There were no effects on negative mood or the well-being index.

**Figure 2: Offering a message of support to survivors of the Rwandan genocide promotes hope, positivity and commitment to act to support those people because it allows for the formation of new identities**



## EXPERT EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK

### EXPERT EVALUATION PHASE 1

In 2014 Craig McGarty travelled to Rwanda for the 20<sup>th</sup> Commemoration of the Genocide against the Tutsi. On (April 7) the day of the commemoration ceremony four young genocide prevention activists from Never Again Rwanda, who had earlier that day been presented to UN Secretary General Mr. Ban Ki-moon, reviewed the messages produced by the Australian students.

All of these young activists had been raised in a postconflict society in families and communities that had been ravaged by genocide. In keeping with the imperative to first do no harm, the purpose of these interviews was to assess the suitability and utility of the messages before translating them into Kinyarwanda for viewing by survivors. The interviewees strongly affirmed the value of the messages of support. One noteworthy reaction was that hearing a member of the international community providing a message of support for survivors was in itself affirming, because it showed that that supporter believed

the genocide really had occurred. This point needs to be understood in the context that genocide denial (including in Western countries), and the inaction of the international community in 1994, receives a great deal of media attention in Rwanda and features heavily in the education system. Perhaps the most powerful affirmation was that the interviewees recommended that the messages from survivors and supporters should be translated and disseminated to people in other post-conflict societies, and even to current conflict zones such as Syria, to help prevent young people from participating in violence. They volunteered to help form a social network to promote the intercultural activity by working with young Australians and work is currently underway to advance this.



Focus group interviews in Kigali, Rwanda, April 7 2014 (20 years after the start of the Genocide)

## EXPERT EVALUATION PHASE 2

In May 2016 Mr. Yves Kamuronsi, Rwanda Director of the Aegis Trust (the international genocide prevention NGO that operates the Kigali Genocide Memorial in Rwanda) and Mr. Glen Ford, Strategic Development Director for the Aegis Trust reviewed the materials. They were also very impressed by the positive, impactful content. They requested that the content be made available through linking from the Aegis Trust website and to visitors at the Kigali Genocide Memorial where additional content could be recorded in the centre.

# Discussion

The implications of the results can be understood in two ways. The first is that the process of creating messages had a range of effects on the young people who created them. The second is that those messages themselves are communications that have implications for, and impacts upon, people who view them.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUNG AUSTRALIANS

The key implication of creating messages for the young Australians was first of all that there were no negative effects of engaging with material that might be expected to be confronting and overwhelming. At the same time the positive effects were relatively muted. Creating a message of approximately 90 seconds duration did not produce massive changes in well-being, positivity or engagement. However, we can see that the messaging paradigm did have an effect in turning on a pathway to positivity and broader engagement. Creating a message led people to take on a sense of being a member of a support community (they formed a social identity as a supporter). That sense of community became a more central part of who they saw themselves to be and that in turn led to a willingness to engage in actions and greater feelings of hope and positivity.

Obviously these are very important pathways to switch on. If we can use an analogy here: the results do not demonstrate that creating messages can drive the young people down the road to well-being and engagement. These results do, however, powerfully suggest that creating messages can put the engine in gear. Our qualitative analyses of the messages of support themselves will be used to further test this perspective. The question we return to below is what could serve to drive that further.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR RECONCILIATION IN RWANDA AND BEYOND

Imagine that we had recruited a group of young foreign university students who knew very little about the Stolen Generations or the Forgotten Australians or British child migrants to Australia, the Northern Territory Emergency Response, or the circumstances of asylum seekers in mandatory detention. Imagine that we gave those young foreign students a short briefing on any of these events, some training on using an iPad, and then asked them to produce audiovisual messages of support for Australians affected by those events. How confident would we be that those messages would be of high quality, and most importantly, that what those young foreigners had to say on any of these matters would be welcomed by the people affected in Australia? How worried would we be that those messages might misrepresent facts, cause offence or complicate matters? How tempted would Australians be to tell those foreigners to butt out?

The events of the Rwandan Genocide are brutal and complex but despite these complexities, young Australians were able to rapidly produce content that is of high quality, and more importantly that is valued by experts (Rwandan genocide survivors and their supporters). We do not believe that this contribution is possible because young Australians are particularly talented or that Rwandans are especially welcoming of the views of outsiders. Much more simply: creating the messages allowed people of good will to do good.

It is worth noting, the Rwandan interviewees had precisely articulated our overarching goal for the two interconnected Messages initiatives: that is, to a) develop a framework for

generating online messages of hope (from survivors of trauma) and; b) document messages of support (from their supporters) that can be adapted across Rwandan, Australian, and other international contexts. We anticipate that generation and distribution of hope and support messages through such a framework will result in specific beneficial outcomes for survivors and supporters. We also expect that framework to expose the wider community to positive messages from and about vulnerable groups, and so catalyse processes of meaningful support for those groups more generally.



# Conclusions

The prospect that the messages will be internationally disseminated at the Kigali Genocide Memorial and through the Aegis Trust is humbling for us and we expect that it will be inspiring for the young people who created the messages. As young Australians are massively overrepresented in the numbers of international visitors to Rwanda it is not unrealistic to imagine that some of the research participants will have the opportunity to reach out again to survivors. Through Western Sydney University we are also hoping to cement teaching and research links with the Aegis Trust and Never Again Rwanda. However, we have not set out to change the lives of our young participants peoples' lives by turning them into Rwanda reconciliation activists. To seek to have done so would have overstepped the line of ethical research. We do think that the research shows how such change could be achieved.

This returns us to the question of what further steps would be necessary to drive substantial change in positivity and engagement. If (in terms of our earlier analogy) we have good evidence that the engine is put in gear by message creation, then how do we encourage young people to step on the accelerator pedal?

We should expect that more profound changes would be wrought by longer lasting and impactful interventions. If we take the idea of supporting Rwandan reconciliation becoming central to who young people see themselves as being seriously, then a major implication of that idea is that giving people more opportunities to express that identity may be the way forward. That is, once people have created a message of support we should offer them further opportunities to display that support in a way that is compatible with their life circumstances. Social media and other forms of online engagement offer ways of driving the car down reconciliation road. For some people that might be engaging in online communities to moderate messages of support, for others it might be a monthly donation, for a small group of others it may be voluntary or paid work in a post-conflict setting. By offering choices that are compatible with people's sense of who they are we can allow those people to become, in the words attributed to Gandhi, "the change they wish to see in the world" (see Smith, Thomas, McGarty, 2015).

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# Appendices

These include material that is supplementary to the text in the main body of the report.  
Appendix 1. Consent and information forms for participants.



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and Exercise Science

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## Connectedness and Well-being within the Equity & Social Inclusion Community

### You are invited to participate in this important research!

Research has shown that feelings of connectedness play an important role in our well-being, and our capacity to overcome adversity. This research is interested in the experiences of connectedness and well-being within Murdoch University's Equity and Social Inclusion community. As people who continue to overcome challenges, we are also interested in your experience of feeling hope for the future of people who have overcome adversity. In particular, we are interested in learning about your feelings of hope for the future of people who have survived the 1994 Rwandan genocide. You can help our project by consenting to take part!

If you choose to participate you will watch two short 'messages of hope' from survivors of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda. These messages share the hopefulness the survivors feel for their future, and outline the positive steps that they have taken to rebuild their lives after surviving trauma. You yourself will then record a brief (e.g., one minute long) video message supporting Rwandan survivors. Your support messages will be uploaded to a controlled YouTube channel and a project website, for others, including survivors from Rwanda and members of the public, to view.

As part of your participation you will also be asked to complete two brief surveys. The first survey will ask you questions about your own feelings of connectedness and well-being, and your feelings of hope for the survivors of the genocide. The second survey will ask questions about how you felt while you were creating your support message. Completing this study will take you about 1 hour and can be done on campus at a time that suits you.

We understand that some members of the Equity and Social Inclusion community may experience barriers to participating in these kinds of tasks. We will take necessary steps to ensure you are able to participate fully. It is important that you understand that your involvement in this study is completely **voluntary** and we respect your right to decline. You can decide at any time to withdraw your consent to participate in this research. However, since the **questionnaire is anonymous** it will not be possible to withdraw your responses once you have submitted your questionnaire.

If you choose to participate, you will be reimbursed **\$15 for around one hour of your time**, or if you prefer, **1 subject pool credit** for Psychology students.

Once we have analysed the information from this study, we will post a summary of our findings on our website: [http://www.psychology.murdoch.edu.au/researchresults/research\\_results.html](http://www.psychology.murdoch.edu.au/researchresults/research_results.html). You can expect to receive this feedback in January 2015.

**Happy to Go Ahead?** If you are happy to go ahead and participate, or would like more information, please contact us at [murdochmos@gmail.com](mailto:murdochmos@gmail.com) or SMS Cassie on 0425322110. **Please let us know if there is anything we can do to accommodate your participation.**

Regards,

Emma Thomas  
Senior Lecturer  
School of Psychology  
& Exercise Science

Cassandra Barnes  
Honours student  
School of Psychology  
& Exercise Science

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2013/201). 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 e-mail [ethics@murdoch.edu.au](mailto:ethics@murdoch.edu.au)). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

CRICOS Provider Code: 901291  
ABN 61 616 369 313

### Messages of Support project – Murdoch University Participant Information Page

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 yourself 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 on-line.

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 at Murdoch University. She 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

Cassandra Barnes  
Honours Student  
School of Psychology  
Murdoch University

This study has been approved by the Murdoch University Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval 2013/201). 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](mailto:ethics@murdoch.edu.au)). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

## Appendix 2. Information about the Rwandan genocide.



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### 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.

CRICOS Provider Code: 00125J  
ABN 61 616 369 313

**Appendix 3.** Questionnaire items used to measure responses to the message creation exercise.

**Below are statements about how you feel about yourself, and your feelings of hope for the future. Please rate how much you agree/disagree with each statement by circling the appropriate number. [Hope]**

<b>1. If I should find myself in a jam, I can think of many ways to get out of it</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>2. At this time, I energetically pursue my goals</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>3. There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>4. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are most important to me</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>5. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>6. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>7. At this time, I am meeting the goals that I set for myself</b>						

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>8. I have deep inner strength</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
<b>9. I feel my life has value and worth</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

The statements below reflect how happy you are with certain aspects of your life. Please rate how happy you are with each statement by circling the appropriate number. [Well-being]

<b>10. How happy are you about the things you have? Like the money and the things you own?</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very sad	Sad	Somewhat sad	Neither sad nor happy	Somewhat happy	Happy	Very happy
<b>11. How happy are you with your health?</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very sad	Sad	Somewhat sad	Neither sad nor happy	Somewhat happy	Happy	Very happy
<b>12. How happy are you with the things you want to be good at?</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Very sad	Sad	Somewhat sad	Neither sad nor happy	Somewhat happy	Happy	Very happy
<b>13. How happy are you about getting on with the people you know?</b>						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

The following questions ask about your sense of connection with others who support the Rwandan survivors [Social identification]

86. My personal support can make a positive difference to the lives of survivors in
---



Rwanda						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
87. Supporting survivors in Rwanda is a waste of my own time, effort and money						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
64. I feel a bond with other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
65. I feel committed to other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
66. I am glad to be someone who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
67. I think that other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors have a lot to be proud of						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
68. Being someone who wants to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors gives me a good feeling						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
69. I have a lot in common with other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
70. I am similar to other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
71. Other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors have a lot in common with each other						

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
72. Other people who want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors are very similar to each other						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
73. I often think about the fact that I want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
74. The fact that I want to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors is an important part of my identity						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
75. Being someone who wants to help create a positive future for Rwandan survivors is an important part of how I see myself						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

**The following questions ask about specific actions that you may intend to take to support Rwandan survivors [commitment to act to support survivors]**

76. I intend to discuss supporting survivors in Rwanda with my friends and family						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
77. I intend to support survivors in Rwanda by doing some fundraising						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
78. I intend to support survivors in Rwanda by organizing an event						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
79. I intend to support survivors in Rwanda by writing a letter to the government						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
80. I intend to read and research more about supporting survivors in Rwanda						

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
81. I intend to post information to Facebook or another social network about supporting survivors in Rwanda						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree

The final set of questions ask you for your thoughts and opinions on the message of support exercise you just completed. For each of the following emotions, please indicate how much you felt that way while you were creating your message of support: [positive and negative mood]

1	2	3	4	5
Not at all				Extremely

<b>Afraid</b>		<b>Scared</b>	
<b>Nervous</b>		<b>Jittery</b>	
<b>Irritable</b>		<b>Hostile</b>	
<b>Guilty</b>		<b>Ashamed</b>	
<b>Upset</b>		<b>Distressed</b>	
<b>Active</b>		<b>Alert</b>	
<b>Attentive</b>		<b>Determined</b>	
<b>Enthusiastic</b>		<b>Excited</b>	
<b>Inspired</b>		<b>Interested</b>	
<b>Proud</b>		<b>Strong</b>	

**Appendix 4.** Results from the tests of the mediation of the effect of the message creation task on key outcomes.

We considered indirect effects of (mean level increases in) identity centrality on key outcome variables using PROCESS (Hayes, 2012; model 4), controlling for both participant vulnerability and sample (whether the participant was recruited through Western Sydney or Murdoch University). Centrality mediated the effect of experimental condition on commitment to support Rwandan survivors (IE = .284, SE = .140, 95%CI .022, .570), feelings of hope (IE = .045, SE = .032, 95%CI .004, .130) and positive mood, (IE = .070, SE = .040, 95%CI .006, .176), but not negative mood (IE = .030, SE = .034, 95%CI -.007, .136) or well-being (IE = .004, SE = .05, 95%CI -.092, .107).