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Reclaiming humanity together: The impact of intra- and interpersonal factors on survivor readiness to reconcile in post-genocide Rwanda

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Abstract

After the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, many grassroots initiatives in Rwanda have focused on reconciliation. The current study examined the relationships between survivor readiness to reconcile and génocidaire shame, guilt, and self-forgiveness and survivor traumatic stress, desire for outgroup interaction, and beliefs about outgroup members. Survivors ($n = 45$) and their direct perpetrators ($n = 46$) who participated as a dyad in a local peacebuilding program were interviewed at four strategic phases. No significant relationship was found between survivor readiness to reconcile and génocidaire shame and guilt; génocidaire self-forgiveness did not mediate this relationship. Higher survivor traumatic stress symptoms were associated with lower readiness to reconcile, and greater survivor desire for outgroup interaction was associated with greater readiness to reconcile. Fewer survivor prejudicial beliefs towards génocidaires were significantly associated with higher readiness to reconcile. Decades after the genocide, reconciliation follows a non-linear trajectory and may be more influenced by intrapersonal than interpersonal factors.

Reconciliation in a post-genocide context can be an ambiguous and messy process. Rwanda is no exception, where generations of intergroup conflict and deep grievances on both sides culminated in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi.[1] Although national justice processes were swiftly implemented after the genocide, many contend that they failed to effectively transform the relationships between survivors and their direct perpetrators (herein referred to as génocidaires). Due to the level of brutality and high rate of civilian involvement in the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi, much of the current literature has focused on why so many ordinary people participated in the Rwandan genocide, as well as survivor recovery. However, less is known about the process of reconciliation between survivors and génocidaires over time, or what motivates survivors to engage in this process. The current longitudinal study seeks to better understand the various intra- and interpersonal factors that impact survivor readiness to reconcile with génocidaires. Based on structured quantitative interviews with survivors and génocidaires who participated in *Cows for Peace* (CFP), a local peacebuilding intervention based on intergroup contact theory, we examined the relationships between survivor readiness to reconcile and the following factors throughout the course of the intervention: génocidaire shame and guilt and self-forgiveness, survivor traumatic stress symptoms, desire for outgroup interaction, and beliefs about outgroup members.

BACKGROUND

Reconciliation in Rwanda

The concept of reconciliation has many different definitions, and the way in which it is conceptualized may in part depend upon the harm that was done and the context in which it took place. As such, a brief historical context of the conflict in Rwanda may aid in the exploration of how various intra- and interpersonal factors impact survivor readiness to reconcile. Following the genocide, there was a large discrepancy between the government narrative of reconciliation and the experience of Rwandan citizens. Transitional justice initiatives, including the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) and National Unity and Reconciliation Commission (NURC), were characterized as top-down political missions. By adapting identity management strategies, these initiatives promoted supercategorization based on nationality in order to foster peace. For example, the NURC used the slogan "One Rwanda" to emphasize a shared aspect of identity (i.e., nationality) for Hutus, Tutsis, and Twa. In an in-depth qualitative study, Eugenia Zorbas (2009) identified the gaps between the public transcript of unity and reconciliation and the "hidden transcripts" that more accurately described the social reality of Rwandan citizens.[2] Although the community-led gacaca courts processed almost one million common offenders using elements of restorative justice to reintegrate génocidaires into their communities, many Rwandans were still left with the need for non-politicized, interpersonal reconciliation processes.

As Daniel Rothbart & Karina Korostelina (2007) noted, "Any conflict resolution strategy that does not address the psychological needs of the victims and victimizers can only have a superficial effect on the resolution, especially of ethnic and sectarian conflict."[3] Since survivors and génocidaires continue to live in close proximity with one another, and often rely on one another for livelihood, many have adopted the survival strategy of "chosen amnesia." This phenomenon takes place when "the past is distorted to establish group coherence...People never talk about the past because it brings back bad memories and problems."[4] The deep and unaddressed social divides that led to the genocide may still be present in Rwanda today, and possibly threaten lasting peace.

Although the process of reconciliation is context-specific, most scholars agree that it must take place in the context of relationship. In *The Moral Imagination*, John Paul Lederach (2011) describes it as "the capacity to imagine ourselves in a web of relationships that include our enemies...The centrality of relationships provides the context and potential for breaking violence, for it brings people into...the space of recognition that ultimately the quality of our life is dependent on the quality of others."[5.] This suggests that reconciliation is a social, dyadic process that requires the participation of *both* the harmed party and the harm-doer. It involves taking personal responsibility for one's actions and acknowledging that individuals and groups are inherently dependent upon one another for their well-being. Specifically in Rwanda, this process of holding génocidaires accountable increased a feeling of security for survivors, which was identified as one of the key preconditions for reconciliation.[6.]

Factors affecting survivor readiness to reconcile

By definition, reconciliation requires both the harmed and the harm-doer to directly engage with one another. But what motivates or impedes a survivor to intentionally interact with the génocidaire who committed violence against them or their family member(s)? A brief analysis of intergroup relationships prior to the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi may provide a deeper understanding of how survivors approach this process.

Social boundaries and dehumanization

Intra- and interpersonal factors that affect reconciliation in Rwanda may be partially shaped by each group's historical narratives of intergroup conflict prior to the genocide. According to David Moshman (2007), mass atrocities are facilitated by the dehumanization of individuals or groups—a phenomenon that is typically preceded by the creation and/or strengthening of social boundaries.[7.] These can later be leveraged by group leaders at specific times to mobilize members in response to a perceived threat. In Rwanda, these social boundaries were drawn long before the 1994 genocide. Early colonial powers introduced ethnic categories, using a pre-existing social hierarchy to promote the idea of a racially superior group (i.e., Tutsis) to rule on their behalf. This continued to be reinforced by an educational system and economic policies that further disadvantaged Hutus, and was solidified by the emergence of state-issued ethnic identification cards.[8.,9.] In 1959, the end of colonial rule in Rwanda prompted disenfranchised Hutus to engage in a violent rebellion, resulting in the death of approximately 50,000 Tutsis and a mass exile of Tutsis into Uganda (and later the formation of the Rwandan Patriotic Front). While Hutus perceived the rebellion as a social revolution, Tutsis viewed the event as a genocide or massacre. The pattern of perceiving violent events targeting specific ethnic groups as collective traumas (or victories) is present throughout the generations of conflict in Rwanda. Vamik Volkan (2001) labeled this phenomenon *chosen trauma*— "the transgenerational transmission of a mental representation of a traumatic historical event."[10.] This often occurs after a large group experiences a conflict with another group that results in feelings of helplessness, victimization, and a loss of dignity, followed by an inability to mourn the event. Chosen traumas have the power to significantly shape large group identity and can be reactivated long after the event has ended. This can also result in individuals experiencing trauma symptoms and/or amplify the desire for revenge and trigger acts of violence.

Trauma & reconciliation

It is no surprise that reactivation of chosen traumas can occur during the reconciliation process, causing survivors to experience trauma reactions (e.g., fight, flight, or freeze response) while engaging with génocidaires. Existing literature demonstrates that higher trauma symptomology is associated with lower survivor readiness to reconcile. For example, one study found that former child soldiers in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo who reported more post-traumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) were significantly less open to reconciliation and experienced more feelings of revenge.[11.] Another study conducted by Phuong Pham, Harvey Weinstein & Timothy Longman (2004) in Rwanda reported that those who met criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were more likely to endorse the ICTR and less likely to support the gacaca courts or more restorative approaches to justice.[12.] Those exposed to more traumatic events during the genocide were also less likely to have positive attitudes towards community, nonviolence, and interdependence with other ethnic groups. This indicates that addressing contextualized trauma symptoms in survivors is key to promoting readiness to reconcile.

Chosen traumas can also be exploited to promote prejudicial beliefs about outgroup members. For example, after the RPF launched an invasion into Rwanda in 1990, the Hutu regime built upon pre-existing prejudice and fear to rally mass groups of Hutus to commit violence against their Tutsi neighbors. This was done primarily through the use of propaganda, disseminated largely through radio programs.[13.] This widespread dehumanization of the Tutsi was made possible in part by pre-existing stereotypes—a factor known to be one of the strongest predictors of violence against an outgroup.[14.] Through the process of categorization, many génocidaires came to view all Tutsis as subhuman (e.g., commonly referenced as cockroaches), and therefore an enemy that must be destroyed in order to protect the ingroup.[15.,16.] This indicates that, along with existing trauma, addressing prejudice and rehumanizing outgroup members (for both Hutus and Tutsis) is vital to the reconciliation process.

Justice-oriented healing: Storytelling and perspective-taking

Justice-oriented approaches can provide an opportunity for both trauma healing and rehumanization of the outgroup, as well as create a sense of safety for survivors. For example, truth-telling and an honest recounting of past harms in a public or semi-public setting render it difficult for harm-doers to deny what happened. Additionally, truth-telling can address the role that chosen traumas played in the 1994 genocide by providing space to acknowledge the history of suffering and discrimination on both sides.[17.] This facilitates the process of decategorization, in which individuals from different groups develop more nuanced perspectives of each other based on individual characteristics versus group identity.[18.] Story-telling can also play a role in helping both parties reclaim a sense of humanity.[19.,20.]

While sharing one's experiences has been documented as a key aspect of healing for survivors, existing literature also indicates that survivor readiness to reconcile may be somewhat dependent upon the harm-doer's ability to reclaim their own sense of humanity. In Rwanda, many génocidaires reported that as their participation in the genocide increased, they began to lose touch with their own humanity. Several experienced a slow desensitization to violence and a need to disconnect from themselves and others, as well as feelings of numbness.[21.,22.] To create a safe environment for a survivor to engage with the génocidaire, the latter must demonstrate that they have reconnected to themselves and others enough to understand the harm they caused,

take responsibility for their actions, and express regret.[23,24] This may be explained in part by the theory of perceived perspective-taking, which proposes that "a victim may infer that the offender experiences these moral emotions when the offender has (successfully) taken the victim's perspective."[25]

Génocidaire shame and self-forgiveness

As génocidaires began to accept responsibility for their actions during the transitional justice processes that took place after the genocide, many grappled with overwhelming feelings of shame and guilt.[26] In many cases, remorse, guilt and shame in perpetrators have been positively associated with conciliatory attitudes in survivors.[27,28] Shame is socially adaptive when it motivates the perpetrator to participate in the reconciliation process in hopes of relieving the unpleasant emotion, thereby promoting cooperation, social survival, and relationships.[29] When shame facilitates the re-integration of a perpetrator back into their community, it can play an important role in reconciliation.[30]

However, shame becomes a barrier to survivor readiness to reconcile when it overwhelms the génocidaire. Unresolved shame can trigger defensiveness, resulting in the génocidaire minimizing blame, justifying their actions, or blaming the victim.[31] This causes further harm to the survivor and impedes the reconciliation process.[32,33] Shame can also lead to persistent self-condemnation or punishment, resulting in rumination and avoidance.[34] Thus, the psychological state in which the génocidaire enters the reconciliation process may be very important. If a survivor engages with the génocidaire and perceives that she or he is overwhelmed by shame or defensiveness, the survivor may be less ready to engage the reconciliation process. To our knowledge, no research has been conducted in Rwanda to determine if or how these emotions impacted survivor readiness to reconcile.

Forgiveness (including self-forgiveness) can also be pivotal in the reconciliation process. Forgiveness of the harm-doer indicates that the survivor has released their anger and desire for revenge, and can facilitate personal healing, build trust in the community, and prevent future violence.[35,36] Although reconciliation may be promoted when a harm-doer's apology is met with understanding, empathy and acceptance, this burden should not be placed on the survivor.[37] Alternatively, self-forgiveness may help génocidaires take responsibility without becoming overwhelmed by shame.[38] Self-forgiveness can be thought of as "a willingness to abandon self-resentment in the face of one's own acknowledged objective wrong, while fostering compassion, generosity, and love toward oneself."[39] Unlike interpersonal forgiveness, self-forgiveness is a "wholly intrapersonal construct" and can take place within a génocidaire prior to or throughout the reconciliation process.[40] This helps the génocidaire restore their moral self, as well as experience increased empathy and willingness to reconcile with survivors.[41]

Given the protracted history of prejudicial beliefs and lack of desire for meaningful interactions between Hutus and Tutsis, as well as reactivation of collective traumas for both groups, survivor readiness to reconcile with génocidaires may depend on several concurrent processes. These include addressing intrapersonal factors, such as individual and collective psychological trauma, génocidaire self-forgiveness, and survivor desire for outgroup interaction and beliefs about outgroup members. Several interpersonal factors should also be considered, including survivors' perception of génocidaire shame and guilt. As these dynamics can potentially shape the development and outcomes of peace interventions, they have been carefully considered in the design and evaluation process of Cows for Peace (CFP) which paired survivors of the 1994 genocide

against the Tutsi with their direct perpetrators.[42.] Together, the dyads participated in a 14-month intervention that included a psychoeducational workshop, peer cell groups, and cooperative cow raising. The current study specifically examines the relationships between survivor readiness to reconcile and the following variables at select phases of the intervention: survivor traumatic stress, desire for outgroup interaction, and prejudicial beliefs about outgroup members, as well as génocidaire shame and guilt and self-forgiveness.

Hypotheses

Given that prejudicial beliefs and strong social boundaries can increase or perpetuate conflict, we hypothesized that, after participating in key programmatic activities, higher survivor readiness to reconcile will be associated with increased desire for outgroup interaction (H_1) and decreased prejudicial beliefs about génocidaires (H_2). We also hypothesize that higher survivor readiness to reconcile will be significantly associated with fewer trauma symptoms (H_3). Finally, higher survivor readiness to reconcile will also be associated with higher shame reported by their direct génocidaire (H_4). Moreover, we hypothesized that this relationship will be mediated by greater génocidaire self-forgiveness (H_5). Clarity on these relationships will continue to inform the development and implementation of peacebuilding interventions with the aim of promoting continued interpersonal reconciliation in Rwanda (see Figure 1).

METHODS

Intervention: Cows for Peace

Cows for Peace was developed and implemented by a local faith-based organization in Rwanda, Christian Action for Reconciliation and Social Assistance (CARSA). While a brief description of program development and intervention activities can be found below, more details, including a full program evaluation, have been published in a previous manuscript.[43.] The program applied principles of contact hypothesis to promote reconciliation between génocidaires and survivors they directly harmed during the genocide in 1994.[44.] Research suggests that promoting meaningful and sustained interactions between two groups with a history of conflict can significantly contribute to the reconciliation process, as this enables meaningful relationships to develop, an increased desire for outgroup interaction, and stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs to be challenged.
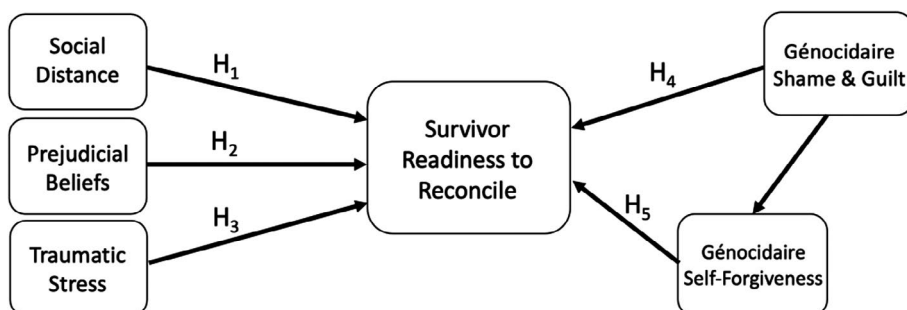

FIGURE 1 Intra- and interpersonal factors affecting survivor readiness to reconcile

This can be accomplished in several ways, one of which includes Gordon Allport's (1954) theory of intergroup contact, which suggests that when conflicting parties work towards a superordinate goal—a common aim that benefits both groups if achieved—the salience of ingroup identity decreases and a more inclusive collective identity is promoted. This is only successful under certain conditions, including cooperative interdependence and positive interactions.

Over the years, scholars have continued to build on Allport's theory. For example, the mutual intergroup differentiation model of Miles Hewstone and Rupert Brown suggests that positive experiences and empathy can be built not only through shared experiences, but also by allowing group categories to be salient.[45.] This enables participants to challenge outgroup stereotypes and develop more positive relationships.[46.] A study conducted by Alexandra Scacco and Shana Warren (2018) in Nigeria also suggests that interventions focused on skill-building, versus peace messaging, resulted in reduced discrimination towards outgroup members.[47.]

Cows for Peace fostered a non-politicized environment in which survivors and those who directly harmed them or their family members during the genocide could have ongoing, intentional contact (herein referred to as a survivor–génocidaire dyad). Three programmed phases included: psychoeducational workshops, peer-led cell groups, and cooperative cow raising. Each phase of the intervention uniquely addressed aspects of the reconciliation process by providing opportunities for survivors and génocidaires to interact in different ways and to varying degrees. More specifically, CFP supported the psychological needs of both survivors and génocidaires and fostered dialogue that enabled participants to tell their stories and provided opportunities for génocidaires to take responsibility and show remorse. It also promoted an environment in which the two groups could intentionally interact over a period of time, while working towards a shared goal.

Phase 1—Psychoeducational workshop: Initiating contact and addressing psychological trauma

The 3-day *Empower* workshop was modeled after a cognitive-behavioral program designed to support war-affected persons in Uganda.[48.] CARSA contextualized the workshop for Rwanda, whose population is primarily Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian, by infusing it with Christian themes of forgiveness and reconciliation. For many survivors and perpetrators, this was the first time many of them had interacted with one another in an official group setting. The workshop provided psychoeducation about the impact of trauma with the goal of fostering empathy and understanding on both sides, as well as practical skills to help participants reframe thoughts about themselves and others. Although dyads were not immediately paired together in the same small group, the format of the workshops enabled survivors and génocidaires to begin sharing their stories.

Phase 2—Peer cell groups: dialogue, story-telling & perspective-taking

During the second phase, groups of dyads gathered in their own villages. Although peer-led, these groups received assistance from CARSA staff as needed. They met monthly for conversations, shared meals, and engaged in communal activities. The cell groups offered an opportunity for participants to engage in continued dialogue about what happened during the genocide, and for génocidaires to take responsibility for the harm they caused. It also provided a context for

génocidaires to tangibly assist and support those they harmed through the communal activities, which including farming and home repairs for survivors. Stronger relationships between survivors and génocidaires aimed to further challenge negative views and beliefs between groups and heightened survivor readiness for reconciliation.

Phase 3—Cooperative cow raising: Working towards a common goal

In the third phase of the intervention, randomly selected dyads received a cow to co-raise, providing a shared goal upon which the pair could continue to build their relationship.[49.] In addition to the historical significance of cows in Rwanda, this type of livestock was selected to be part of the intervention because of the economic benefits it provided to program participants. Although the cow was raised on the survivor's land and a calf was later conceived and given to the génocidaire, the responsibility to care for the cow (e.g., building a shed, buying feed, washing, feeding and grazing the cow, milking the cow, and selling the milk) was shared equally. This created a relationship of mutual dependence not only between the survivors and génocidaires but also between their respective households. Although power dynamics were considered throughout all three phases of the intervention, the overarching aim of the program was to minimize any differential status between survivor and génocidaire dyads, and in doing so address a practical and symbolic root cause of the conflict through meaningful and intentional interactions.

Participants

Eligible participants were: (1) 25 years or older, (2) spoke Kinyarwanda, and (3) directly exposed to genocide events. Survivors and génocidaires were identified in Mushishiro and Nyarusange, two sectors in the Muhanga district (see Kang et al., 2020 reference for full recruitment procedure). All participants took part in the first and second phases of the intervention, and half the dyads were randomly selected to receive a cow during the third phase. The interviews were conducted by six Rwandans—three men and three women, four were Tutsi and two were Hutu. All interviewers had been directly impacted by the genocide. Interviews were conducted in Kinyarwanda, and validated measures from published studies were translated from English to Kinyarwanda, and subsequently back translated to English by a second independent translator for reliability. Prior to the intervention, interviewers met individually with participants; informed consent was obtained and baseline data were collected. The study was approved by Institutional Review Boards at the primary investigator's current and former institutions.

Data collection

Several measures were used to collect information on factors that affect survivor readiness to reconcile. These included the following: (1) survivor beliefs about outgroup, (2) survivor desire for outgroup interaction, (3) survivor traumatic stress, (4) génocidaire state shame and guilt, and (5) génocidaire self-forgiveness. Data were collected at seven time-points between May 2017 and March 2019 using an online data collection system in KoBoToolbox (http://www.

kobotoolbox.org). Interview data was collected and temporarily saved on mobile devices, then synchronized with a cloud server once connection to the internet was re-established in the research office.

Quantitative interviews were conducted over the course of 22-months. For this paper, we analyzed data prior to the workshop at Time 1 (T1), after the initial introduction and workshop at 2 months (T2), after participation in the peer-led cell groups at 4 months (T3), and following the cooperative cow raising at 14 months (T6; see Table 1). Examining the intra- and interpersonal factors that may impact survivor readiness to reconcile at these select timepoints in the intervention can help to clarify how survivors and génocidaires viewed one another and themselves after engaging in different ways and to varying degrees of intensity.

Measures

Based on previous studies in post-genocide Rwanda and the extensive field work of our community partner, we selected the following measures of how survivors and génocidaires were impacted by the genocide, and their attitudes and beliefs about outgroup members (i.e., génocidaires were the referenced outgroup for survivors and survivors were the referenced outgroup for génocidaires).[50,51,52] Information regarding participant age, sex, marital status, and level of education was also collected.

Readiness to reconcile

Survivor readiness to reconcile was assessed using a survey that measured an individual's attitude towards those who participated in the 1994 genocide in Rwanda.[53] Using a 5-point Likert scale, participants were asked to rank their agreement with 21 items. These items included statements such as "Each group has harmed the other" and "I can forgive members of the other group who acknowledge the harm their group did." Higher scores indicated greater readiness to reconcile. Cronbach's α ranged from 0.60 to 0.78 across time points.

TABLE 1 Timeline of data analyzed

Timepoint	Survivors	Génocidaires
3-Day workshop		
T2 Month 2	A, B, C, D	E, F
Cell groups		
T4 Month 4	A, B, C, D	E, F
Cooperative cow raising		
T6 Month 14	A, B, C, D	E, F

A. Survivor Readiness to Reconcile.

B. Survivor Beliefs about Outgroup.

C. Survivor Desire to Interact with Outgroup.

D. Survivor Traumatic Stress.

E. Génocidaire State Shame and Guilt.

F. Génocidaire Self-Forgiveness.

Desire for outgroup interaction

The Bogardus Social Distance questionnaire, a 6-item measure used in a study of ethnic stereotypes in South Africa, was adapted for the current study to measure survivor desire to interact with génocidaires.[54.] Social distance is thought of as the degree of unwillingness to casually interact with outgroup members. Participants rated the extent to which they would be happy, from 1 (Very unhappy) to 4 (Very happy) to have a génocidaire or a family member of a génocidaire marry into their family, or become a close friend, next door neighbor, classmate or colleague, or speaking acquaintance. Higher scores indicated less social distance and greater willingness to relate to génocidaires. Cronbach's α ranged from 0.84 to 0.93 across time points.

Beliefs about outgroup

Based on a scale developed by Elizabeth Paluck (2009) to understand how mass media contributed to prejudicial beliefs in Rwanda, we adapted five items to examine beliefs and perceived social norms regarding interactions with génocidaires.[55.] Using a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 4 (Strongly agree), survivors rated the degree to which they agreed with perceived descriptive and prescriptive norms of génocidaires (e.g., "there is mistrust in my community"; "I advise my children [or the ones I will have in the future] that they should only marry people from the same regional, religious or ethnic group as our own"). Higher total scores indicated greater positive personal beliefs and perceived social norms. Cronbach's α for survivors ranged from 0.25 to 0.67 across time points.

Traumatic stress

Ten traumatic stress symptoms based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 1994) criteria for PTSD was assessed. Survivors used a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 5 = Very Often) to rate how frequently they experienced the list of symptoms. These included trauma-related recurrent automatic thoughts, dreams, flashbacks, pain, sleeplessness, irritability or anger, difficulty concentrating, awareness of danger, and exaggerated startle reflex. This measure had been previously translated into Kinyarwanda.[56.] Higher scores indicated greater traumatic stress, and Cronbach's α ranged from 0.71 to 0.86 across time points.

Génocidaire State Shame and Guilt

The State Shame and Guilt Scale was a 15-item measure of guilt and shame related to a negative event.[57.] Our research team in Rwanda reviewed the questions and determined that the items appropriately addressed the context of the genocide. Génocidaires rated statements such as "I feel remorse, regret" and "I feel tension about what I did" on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not feeling this way at all) to 5 (Feeling this way strongly). Higher scores indicated greater guilt and shame, and Cronbach's α for génocidaires ranged from 0.35 to 0.55 across time points.

Génocidaires self-forgiveness

The State Self-Forgiveness Scale questionnaire measures an individual's attitude towards himself/ herself regarding his/ her specific actions in a particular situation.[58.] Génocidaires' feelings, actions and beliefs were assessed through their agreement or disagreement on a 4-point Likert scale with statements such as, "As I considered what I did was wrong, I believe I am acceptable." The measure is based on a two-factor model, with subscales consisting of Self-Forgiving Beliefs and Self-Forgiving Feelings and Actions (SFFA), although only the total score was used in the current study. Higher scores indicated higher levels of self-forgiveness. Cronbach's α for génocidaires ranged from 0.81 to 0.97 over the time points.

Statistical analysis

Repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to determine changes in survivor readiness to reconcile, beliefs about outgroup members, desire to interact with outgroup members, and traumatic stress symptoms, as well as génocidaire shame and guilt and self-forgiveness across all four timepoints—baseline, after the psychoeducational workshops (2 months), after participating in the peer-led cell groups (4 months) and at the conclusion of the intervention (14 months). Bivariate correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships between survivor readiness to reconcile and four variables of interest (i.e., survivor desire for outgroup interaction, beliefs about outgroup, and traumatic stress). A mediation model was used to examine the relationships between survivor readiness to reconcile, génocidaire shame and guilt and génocidaire self-forgiveness at all four timepoints. Bootstrap methods were used to determine whether or not self-forgiveness mediated the relationship between génocidaire shame and guilt and survivor readiness to reconcile. Analyses were conducted using SPSS 26 and PROCESS, a computational macro that estimates direct and indirect effects in mediation models.[59.]

RESULTS

Participant demographics

A total of 45 dyads participated in the current study (survivor $n = 45$; génocidaire $n = 46$). The mean age of participants was 59 years for survivors and 57 years for génocidaires. All the génocidaires were male and approximately half the survivors were female (51.1%). The highest level of education for participants was secondary school, with most having attended primary school (66.7% of survivors; 52.2% of génocidaires). Less than half of survivors were married and living with their spouse (46.7%), while the majority of génocidaires were married and living with their spouse (93.5%; see Table 2). While half the dyads were randomly selected to receive cows during the third phase of the intervention, the current study does not analyze group differences between those who received a cow and those who did not.[60.]

Survivor and génocidaire measures across time-points

The means and standard deviations for the variables of interest are listed in Table 3. The results of repeated measures ANOVA and Bonferroni's post-hoc tests follow. First, survivor readiness

TABLE 2 Background of cows for peace survivor–génocidaire dyads included in analysis (N = 91)

Demographic information	Survivors (n = 45) n (%)	Génocidaires (n = 46) n (%)
Age M (SD)	59.31 (11.65)	56.55 (8.27)
Gender		
Male	22 (48.9%)	44 (100%)
Female	23 (51.1%)	0 (0%)
Highest education attained		
None	13 (28.9%)	20 (43.5%)
Primary school	30 (66.7%)	23 (52.2%)
Secondary school	2 (4.4%)	1 (2.2%)
Vocational	0 (0%)	1 (2.2%)
Marital status		
Married, living with spouse	21 (46.7%)	43 (93.5%)
Married, not living with spouse	3 (6.7%)	1 (2.2%)
Widowed	18 (40.0%)	0 (0.0%)
Divorced	2 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Separated	1 (2.2%)	2 (4.3%)

to reconcile significantly changed across time points (T1, T2, T4, and T6). Post-hoc test further indicated that survivor readiness to reconcile increased between T1 (M = 74.38, SD = 7.01) and T2 (M = 80.40, SD = 5.91), as well as between T1 and T6 (M = 79.56, SD = 5.88). However, readiness to reconcile significantly decreased between T2 (M = 80.40, SD = 5.91) and T6 (M = 79.56, SD = 5.88). Survivor beliefs about outgroup members also changed significantly across time, with increases in positive beliefs from T1 (M = 13.78, SD = 1.85) to T2 (M = 16.02, SD = 2.41), as well as from T1 to T4 (M = 15.51, SD = 1.85) and T1 to T6 (M = 15.42, SD = 2.26). Survivor desire to interact with outgroup members similarly changed across time with significant increase from T1 (M = 14.40, SD = 3.28) to T2 (M = 16.87, SD = 3.27), T1 to T4 (M = 17.53, SD = 2.83), and T1 to T6 (M = 16.51, SD = 2.52). Finally, PTSS reported by survivors also changed across time with significant decreases from T1 (M = 30.02, SD = 5.57) to T2 (M = 22.47, SD = 4.74), T1 to T4 (M = 21.78, SD = 5.21) and T1 to T6 (M = 19.22, SD = 5.76). PTSS scores also decreased from T2 (M = 22.47, SD = 4.74) to T6 (M = 19.22, SD = 5.76).

For génocidaires, reported guilt and shame changed across time with significant decreases in scores from T1 (M = 55.54, SD = 12.70) to T4 (M = 46.02, SD = 12.13) and from T1 to T6 (M = 40.15, SD = 8.66). Guilt and shame also decreased from T2 (M = 53.74, SD = 14.89) to T4 (M = 46.02, SD = 12.13) and from T4 (M = 46.02, SD = 12.13) to T6 (M = 40.15, SD = 8.66). Génocidaire self-forgiveness also changed across time with significant increase in scores between T1 (M = 37.22, SD = 12.42) and T4 (M = 46.83, SD = 14.09), from T1 to T6 (M = 52.98, SD = 10.05), and from T2 (M = 41.33, SD = 15.21) to T6 (M = 52.98, SD = 10.05).

Relationships between survivor and génocidaire measures

Survivor desire to interact with génocidaires was positively correlated with readiness to reconcile (H$_1$) at T1, r (45) = 0.396, p < 0.01 and T2, r (45) = 0.391. The fewer prejudicial beliefs

TABLE 3 Description of variables for survivor readiness to reconcile (means and standard deviation)

Variable	T1 (baseline) M (SD) N	T2 (2 months) M (SD) N	T4 (4 months) M (SD) N	T6 (14 months) M (SD) N
Survivors				
Readiness to reconcile[1]	74.38 (7.01)$_{a,c}$ 45	80.40 (5.91)$_{a,e}$ 45	76.29 (7.37) 45	79.56 (5.88)$_{c,e}$ 45
Desire to interact with outgroup[2]	14.40 (3.28)$_{a,b,c}$ 45	16.87 (3.37)$_a$ 45	17.53 (2.83)$_b$ 45	16.51 (2.52)$_c$ 45
Beliefs about outgroup[3]	13.78 (1.85)$_{a,b,c}$ 45	16.02 (2.41)$_a$ 45	15.51 (1.85)$_b$ 45	15.42 (2.26)$_c$ 45
Traumatic stress[4]	30.02 (5.57)$_{a,b,c}$ 45	22.47 (4.74)$_{a,e}$ 45	21.78 (5.21)$_b$ 45	19.22 (5.76)$_{c,e}$ 45
Génocidaires				
State shame and guilt[5]	55.54 (12.70)$_{b,c}$ 54	53.74 (14.89)$_d$ 41	46.02 (12.13)$_{b,d,f}$ 46	40.15 (8.66)$_{c,f}$ 39
Self-forgiveness[6]	37.22 (12.42)$_{b,c}$ 54	41.33 (15.21)$_d$ 46	46.83 (14.09)$_b$ 46	52.98 (10.05)$_{c,e}$ 46

Significant post-hoc differences ($p < 0.05$) between timepoints are denoted as follows: $_a$T1 to T2; $_b$T1 to T4; $_c$T1 to T6; $_d$T2 to T4; $_e$T2 to T6; $_f$T4 to T6.

[1]Range = 52–94, with higher scores indicating greater readiness to reconcile.

[2]Range = 8–24, with higher scores indicating greater willingness to interact with the génocidaire.

[3]Range = 10–20, with higher scores indicating more positive personal beliefs about génocidaire

[4]Range = 11–39, with higher scores indicating greater trauma symptomology.

[5]Range = 16–75, with higher scores indicating greater levels of shame and guilt.

[6]Range = 17–68, with higher scores indicating more self-forgiving feelings, actions and beliefs related to participation in the genocide.

about outgroups a survivor held, the more they were ready to reconcile (H_2) at T1, $r(45) = 0.551$, $p < 0.01$, at T2, $r(45) = 0.684$, $p < 0.01$, and at T6, $r(45) = 0.368$, $p < 0.05$. Higher trauma symptomology in survivors was associated with lower readiness to at T1, $r(45) = -0.350$, $p < 0.05$, at T2, $r(45) = -0.427$, $p < 0.01$, and at T4, $r(45) = -0.352$, $p < 0.05$, but no significant correlation was found at T6 (H_3). Results from our mediation analysis indicated no significant relationship between génocidaire shame guilt and survivor readiness to reconcile at any timepoint. The total indirect effect of génocidaire shame and guilt on survivor readiness to reconcile with génocidaire self-forgiveness as a mediator (H_5) was also not statistically significant at any timepoint (see Table 4).

DISCUSSION

The aim of the current study was to explore the extent to which certain factors impact a survivor's readiness to reconcile with their direct perpetrator after the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda. We considered two types of factors—inter- and intrapersonal dynamics. Our findings indicate that the interpersonal factors measured (i.e., génocidaire shame and guilt and self-forgiveness) do not significantly impact survivor readiness to reconcile at any point throughout the intervention. Moreover, we found that the most important role the

TABLE 4 Bivariate correlations for factors associated survivor readiness to reconcile

Survivor readiness to reconcile	T1 (Baseline)	T2 (2 months)	T4 (4 months)	T6 (14 months)
Beliefs about outgroup	0.551[b]	0.684[b]	0.135	0.368[a]
Desire to interact with outgroup	0.396[b]	0.391[b]	−0.014	0.181
Traumatic stress	−0.350[a]	−0.427[b]	−0.352[a]	−0.04

[a]Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.

[b]Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level.

génocidaire can play is to be actively engaged with survivors over time—the *state* in which they engage the process may have negligible effects on survivors' readiness to reconcile.

This is perhaps because the génocidaire's presence enables a relationship to form that fosters transformation within the survivor, better preparing him or her for reconciliation. This transformation involves several intrapersonal factors, including survivor desire to interact with and beliefs about génocidaires, as well as traumatic stress. These factors (and their relationship to readiness to reconcile) change significantly for survivors as their relationships with génocidaires deepen in a non-linear manner. In fact, survivor readiness to reconcile fluctuated throughout the course of the intervention. Each phase of the program gradually intensified the quality and depth of interactions between survivors and génocidaires with activities that were specifically sequenced to meet the needs of participants and to promote mutual readiness to reconcile. Clarity on how the complexities of this process can help inform the development—particularly the content and sequencing—of future peacebuilding interventions is discussed below.

Desire to interact with outgroup members

Before the intervention (T1) and after the dyad's first interactions at the workshop (T2), survivor desire to interact with génocidaires (e.g., have a génocidaire as an acquaintance, close friend, next door neighbor, classmate, coworker, or marry into the family) and survivor readiness to reconcile were significantly correlated, but this relationship was no longer significant as the interactions between the survivor and génocidaire deepened during the cell groups (T4) and co-cow raising (T6). As previously mentioned, survivors often had close relationships with the génocidaires by whom they were directly harmed. Following the genocide, survivors were possibly less willing to interact with génocidaires (and/or their families) as a protective measure. This social distance between survivors and génocidaires may have increased fear and avoidance of outgroup members, thus contributing to lower survivor readiness to reconcile.[61.] For some dyads, the workshop was the first time the two individuals had formally interacted since the genocide in 1994. Throughout the intervention, survivor desire to interact with génocidaires significantly increased from baseline to each timepoint (T2, T4, and T6). One of the goals of the workshop was to foster empathy on both sides by providing the opportunity for participants to share the nuances of their experiences during and after the genocide. As the intervention progressed and relationships between survivors and génocidaires developed, survivors might have come to perceive génocidaires with more understanding. As a result, it is possible that desire to interact (or lack thereof) played less of a role on survivors' readiness to reconcile.

Beliefs about outgroup members

Alongside a growing desire to interact, survivors' beliefs about génocidaires also grew significantly more positive from baseline to each timepoint (T2, T4, and T6). It is logical that the more positive beliefs survivors hold about outgroup members, the greater their readiness to reconcile is (and vice versa), which can be seen at baseline and after the workshops (T2). However, it is noteworthy that this relationship between beliefs about outgroup members and readiness to reconcile was not significant after the dyads participated in the cell groups (at T4), but then was significant again at the end of the intervention (T6). One possible explanation for this is that, between the cell groups and the end of the intervention, half of the dyads received cows to co-raise. As the cow was introduced, the survivor's livelihood was suddenly tied to the success of their relationship with the génocidaire, a situation that required a greater depth of social and financial dependency between the survivor and génocidaire. Although specific conflicts during this stage of the intervention were not documented, the pressure of co-raising a cow might have created an environment in which old beliefs resurfaced during high-stress moments of interaction and began to once again impact survivor readiness to reconcile. This warrants further research, as well as the consideration of using lower-risk livestock in future peacebuilding interventions (e.g., chicken and goats).

This finding also suggests that other interpersonal and socio-economic factors should be considered when understanding what impacts survivor readiness to reconcile. Our findings indicate that the psychological state of the génocidaire (e.g., level of shame and guilt) does not affect survivor readiness to reconcile. However, the fact that beliefs about outgroup members began to affect survivor readiness to reconcile again after co-raising the cow suggests that the intensity and nature of the relationship between the survivor and génocidaire, as well as external socio-economic factors, should be carefully considered in the design of peacebuilding interventions.

Traumatic stress

Another intrapersonal factor that appears to impact survivor readiness to reconcile is traumatic stress. Over 20 years after the genocide, survivors who reported higher levels of traumatic stress were also less ready to reconcile, suggesting that time alone nor one-time interventions cannot sufficiently diminish the adverse impact that trauma can have on interpersonal reconciliation. However, CFP intentionally provided psychoeducation to help mitigate the impact of trauma and supported participants over time. This may explain why traumatic stress significantly decreased for survivors from baseline to each timepoint (T2, T4, and T6), and was no longer associated with readiness to reconcile at the conclusion of the intervention. This finding is consistent with previous research stressing the importance of integrating mental health and peacebuilding interventions. For example, existing literature indicates that survivors who experience higher levels of traumatic stress are also more likely to report heightened feelings of revenge and hatred and be less willing to forgive or reconcile.[62] Thus, addressing traumatic stress on an individual and community level is important to establishing lasting peace.[63]

The timing at which trauma symptoms and readiness to reconcile was no longer significant (after the third phase, co-raising the cow) is also notable. Although differences between dyads who were randomly selected to receive a cow versus those who only continued to participate in the cell groups in the current study were not compared, one possible explanation for this

change is the idea that livelihood interventions are empowering in nature.[64.] CFP utilized the livelihood approach, which focused on the relationship between the resources available to an individual, the strategies they employ to access those resources, and the social and institutional systems in which they live and work.[65.,66.,67.] In other words, the livelihood approach emphasizes the use of individual agency. The ability to make choices regarding one's livelihood strategy is significantly impacted by psychosocial factors, including stress, emotional status, locus of control and hope.[68.] Livelihood assistance has been shown to increase hope for individuals, and have the potential to build their capacity to cope and recover from losses and extreme stress, which are often characterized by violence in conflict settings. As survivors built resilience through participating in CFP—both economically and psychosocially—they may have gained new tools to address feelings of helplessness that often accompany traumatic stress symptoms. This could lead to decreased victimization and blame, and therefore greater willingness to reconcile with the génocidaire. While existing literature to date does not specifically address if and how livelihood projects (e.g., cow-raising) are preferred to other forms of intergroup contact, peacebuilding interventions rooted in the contact hypothesis may significantly benefit from future research in this area.

Limitations

Given the complex context of post-genocide Rwanda and the structure of the current study, our findings should be interpreted with caution. Although existing research often clearly differentiates between survivors and génocidaires, many held fluid roles during the genocide, acting in different capacities depending on various contextual factors. Due to only using quantitative methods, the current study does not offer nuanced perspectives of either survivors or génocidaires, nor does it account for confounding variables (e.g., differences in preexisting relationships, génocidaire imprisonment, and premorbid conditions). Although the theory of perspective-taking has been utilized to interpret the ways in which génocidaire shame and guilt may have impacted survivor readiness to reconcile, survivor perceptions of génocidaire shame and guilt were not directly measured. Additionally, the current study was a relatively small sample size and self-selecting, and findings from génocidaires may also be biased based on the fact that some with the means and opportunity fled the country following the genocide. This resulted in a sample that may not be representative of the entire population.[69.] Lastly, our interpretations are limited by the lack of information about the degree to which participants engaged with each phase of the intervention. Moreover, not having a comparison group warrants a more tempered conclusion about the impact of programmatic activities on survivors and génocidaires. Notwithstanding these limitations, the current study offers a unique perspective by following the course of intentional engagement between survivors and those who directly harmed them or their families over the course of 14 months.

CONCLUSION

According to Moshman (2007), "genocides and mass killings are mostly perpetrated by ordinary people playing social roles in groups, institutions and practices to which they are committed...Genocide, in other words, is not so much a crime of hate as a crime of identity."[70.] Understanding the long history of intergroup dynamics in Rwanda can inform interventions that promote survivor readiness

to reconcile. Results from the current study indicate that the success of these initiatives may depend upon efforts to promote meaningful interactions that deepen and transform relationships. This includes increasing the desire for outgroup interaction, fostering relationships that counter stereotypes and prejudicial beliefs, and reducing traumatic stress symptoms and addressing shared understanding of collective trauma—a less than straightforward, yet worthwhile undertaking.

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