Are Activists Neglecting Themselves

While Helping Others?

The Role of Gilbert's Flows of Compassion

in Activists' Well-being.

Written by Hanna Boeckenhoff (2085186)

First Supervisor: Judith Austin, MSc

Second Supervisor: Dr Christina Bode

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Department of Psychology, Health & Technology University of Twente

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Illustration by Hanna Boeckenhoff

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND
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THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Abstract

Background: As activists are situated in a culture of selflessness, self-care is discouraged. Many factors direct the attention of activists to the suffering of nature, animals, other people or entire social groups. Pressure on and perceived responsibility of activists is high while progress is slow. Therefore, activists are subject to high distress lowering their well-being, though when activists are not overwhelmed, activism can have many positive effects. But there is promising evidence that Gilbert's flows of compassion (compassion for others, self-compassion, receiving compassion) increase well-being. Furthermore, there is no consensus in research on how to measure the extent of activism. Therefore, this study explores this with different existing scales. Mainly, this study explores whether the flows of compassion mediate the activists' well-being and stress level. It is to be expected that higher levels in the flows of compassion would result in higher well being and lower stress levels.

Method: Through convenience and snowball sampling (N=118), social justice and environmental activists were recruited to answer an online questionnaire. Three scales were used to measure the extent of activism concerning activistic behaviour, social justice intention and environmental beliefs. Other measures were the Compassion Action and Engagement Scale, the Perceived Stress Scale, the Mental Health Continuum and scales measuring minority distress and compassion practices. Pearson correlation tests calculated the correlations between variables, and an ANOVA analysis measured the relationship between activism and well-being or stress. Finally, the effect of the flows of compassion on the relation between activism and well-being/stress was determined through six mediation analyses for each activism measure using the Process-tool.

Results: The results showed that the levels of compassion for others (M=96) were significantly higher compared to the level of self-compassion (M=82), t(117) = -9.6, p=.00. Additionally, this sample of activists showed significantly higher levels in the flows of compassion ($M_{actvists}$=87) than the norm (M_{norm}=67), t(117) = 16.4, p=.00. Next, the level of well-being was not

significantly different to the norm, $t(117) = -1.4, p=.16$. The flows of compassion did partially

mediate the relationship between activistic behaviour, social justice intention or environmental

beliefs and their well-being or stress level.

Conclusions/Discussion: The respondents showed higher levels of compassion for others,

ability to receive compassion and self-compassion, which could be a reason for their average well-

being, as compassion abilities helped to cope with stress. Further, the flows of compassion did

partially mediate the effect of activism on well-being and stress. Partial mediation suggests other

indirect effects, and possible ones are confidence level, activists' commitment and compassion

practices. As the flows of compassion are promising to reduce the impact of activists' distress and

increase their well-being, this research should be repeated to explore this claim further and

identifying other indirect effects as well as researching the flows of compassion as one construct

since these were correlated. Further suggestions include further developing a valid measurement of

activism, including different forms of activists and the theory of planned behaviour, as the

measurements in this study were not widely used.

Keywords: Activism, Measure Activism, Well-being, The flows of compassion, Compassion,

Compassion towards others, Self-compassion, Receiving compassion

Introduction

"People are suffering. People are dying. Entire ecosystems are collapsing. We are at the

beginning of a mass extinction and all you can talk about is money and fairy tales of eternal

economic growth. How dare you." (Shaffer, 2019). The quote of Greta Thunberg, a well-known

environmental activist of the new generation, illustrates activists' emotional investment, sense of

urgency and the need to act.

It is essential to clarify what it means to be an activist like Greta and what past research says

about measuring activism. Activism is defined as taking actions to catalyse, encourage or bring about

change to elicit social, cultural, political or other transformations (Cox, 2009; Fuad-Luke, 2009). A

few examples of social justice and environmental activism are movements improving or

safeguarding democracy, self-determination, equality and combating climate change (Cox, 2009).

Overall, activists try to foster societal change towards better societal or environmental circumstances.

Through various actions, like demonstrations, protests, petitions or social-media campaigns, activists

try to support their cause as either full-time, employed or leisure activists (Cox, 2009).

However, there is no consensus in research about measuring being an activist quantitatively

since studies approached the concept differently (Swank & Fahs, 2016; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011; Klar

& Kasser, 2009). Some studies identified activists by being a member of an activistic group (Swank

& Fahs, 2016; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011; Klar & Kasser, 2009). Other studies identified activists by

approaching visitors of activistic events or self-identified activists on social media and by using

snowball sampling (Genova, 2019; Lombardi, 1999; Paul Gorski, Stacy Lopresti-Goodman & Dallas

Rising, 2019; Waldner, 2001). Inspired by Ajzen's Theory of planned behaviour, one way to

measure activism is to assess the activistic attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm,

and intention to change society, predicting the engagement in activistic behaviour (1991). Existing

scales measure activism by intention to or engagement in activistic behaviour and beliefs about the

environment (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010; Torres-Harding et al., 2011). Beliefs or attitudes form the

motivation to practice activistic behaviour and determine the importance of activism in one's

hierarchy of roles (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Gorski et al., 2018). Additionally, the extent to which one

engages in activistic behaviour is the most direct form to identify activists and is associated with

one's social identity and, also shown by a study measuring environmental activism actions (Klar &

Kasser, 2009; Milfont & Duckitt, 2010; SGuin, 1998; Tindall et al., 2003; Torres-Harding et al.,

2011). Therefore, assessing the extent of engaging in activistic behaviour, beliefs and intentions

seem most promising to explore measuring activism.

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Research partially provides evidence highlighting the benefitting effect of activism on well-being. Complete well-being is defined by the presence of social and psychological well-being and the absence of psychopathological symptoms. At the same time, realising their potential, coping with normal life stressors and working productively to contribute to society (Arslan & Allen, 2020; World Health Organization, 2012). When activists are successful and not overwhelmed by the stressors, activism is associated with increased life satisfaction, self-esteem, self-actualisation, connectedness with others, prosocial motivation, the experience of positive affect and reduced distress (Leak & Leak, 2006; Matsuba et al., 2012; Kaiser & Byrka, 2011; Klar & Kasser, 2009). Another advantage is that activist behaviour can result in a sense of personal significance, vitality and greater well-being (Cox, 2009; Foster, 2015; Post, 2005; Klar & Kasser, 2009). Therefore, activism can positively affect the activist's well-being when the activist is not overwhelmed.

In contrast, the culture of activism entails many obstacles for well-being due to the exposure to unique stressors, which makes it important to explore activists' well-being (Gorski et al., 2018). Particularly, social justice and environmental activists are typically deeply emotionally invested in their causes and feel profoundly responsible for making a difference (Jacobsson & Lindbolm, 2013). Commitment is amplified as activists fight against the suffering and structural oppression on a large scale (Effler, 2010; Gorski et al., 2018; Wood, 2011). A lot of pressure is put on activists trying to change society for the better, being aware of the struggles and the pain of the disadvantaged groups in society, as well as many drastic problems threatening nature (Effler, 2010; Gorski et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011; Wood, 2011). Nowadays, activists largely organise online, and through social media, the infinite news cycle constantly confronts activists with injustice and violence, adding more focus on negativity, affecting activists' well-being negatively (Foster, 2019; Greijdanus et al., 2020; Hoog & Verboon, 2020; Post, 2005; Scharff et al., 2016). Additionally, efforts by activists are often hampered by public apathy, the slowness of progress and insufficient resources (Gomes, 1992). This often results in activists being overwhelmed by their tasks, responsibilities or

setbacks, as reflected by the wealth of research about negative stressors in the activist culture (Gorski et al., 2018; Post, 2005; Rogers, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Thus, activists face different obstacles increasing distress, potentially decreasing their well-being.

Due to the high amount of stressors often experienced by activists, their well-being can be substantially decreased. Illustrating the high distress in activism is the mental health condition "Activist burnout", which is defined as the deterioration of activist's physical and emotional health, negatively impacting their abilities through the stressors of activism (Gorski et al., 2018). Which is caused by the activist's unique traits, the overwhelming scope of injustice and retaliation for activism and toxic activist-communities (Chen & Gorski, 2015, Gorski, 2018; Gorski et al., 2018). Also resulting in activist-burnout, a study concerning human rights activists revealed a culture of selflessness, in which self-care is discouraged as all energy should be directed towards the cause (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski et al., 2018; Rogers, 2010). Thus, the existence of activist burnout shows the serious mental health consequences of high distress.

Moreover, many activists are experiencing discrimination which adds to the distress in these activists. As various racial justice activists are not only fighting against but also experiencing the effects of racism if they belong to a minority (Gorski et al., 2018). Caused by structural discrimination, marginalised groups suffer from minority distress, making marginalised activists more vulnerable to severe mental health issues (Bontempo & D'Augelli, 2002; D'Augelli et al., 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin, 2007). Even when activists possessed good coping skills, individual strengths and resilience, these traits were insufficient to overcome the minority distress (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Therefore, marginalised activists are more likely to be overwhelmed than non-marginalised activists due to minority distress causing decreased well-being.

To counter the impact of the numerous stressors in activism on well-being, activists could strengthen their compassion abilities (Effler, 2010; Wood, 2011). Compassion is the ability to be sensitive to suffering and the motivation to prevent and alleviate pain (Gorski et al., 2018). Gilbert

defined three interdependent 'flows of compassion': compassion for others, for yourself and the ability to receive compassion from others (Gilbert, 2017; Gilbert et al., 2017). All these abilities protect individuals from the negative impact of distress, increasing their well-being, resilience and social bonds (Gilbert et al., 2017).

Compassion for others is a driving force and can benefit activists but it can also result in negative consequences. When not overwhelmed and practising self-care, other-regarding compassion is associated with greater well-being and happiness, activating the brain-regions for reward, affiliation and protection from stress (Gilbert et al., 2017; Post, 2005; Klimecki et al., 2013; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Neff et al. 2020). Otherwise, empathising with others and own pain activates similar brain regions, thereby inducing distress and negative emotions, possibly heightening feelings of responsibility in activists (Klimecki et al., 2013). Often activists prioritize others over self-care, resulting in chronic stress, maladaptive coping strategies and emotional drain, potentially causing substance abuse, fatigue, insomnia, burnout and greater risk for health and mental disorders (Beaumont et al., 2016; Gorski et al., 2018; Neff et al., 2020). Therefore, it is central that activists are not overwhelmed by the stressors of activism to prevent a negative impact of compassion for others.

In turn, self-compassion is an important ability to counter getting overwhelmed by stress. Self-compassion entails healthily relating to oneself when facing doubts and stress together with increased self-directed feelings of sympathy and love with reduced feelings of vulnerability and criticism (Lindsay & Creswell, 2014; López et al., 2017; Sirois, 2015; Terry et al., 2013). Fortunately, this ability is learned and promotes activists' well being as it increases their resilience, happiness, self-image, and optimism, while minimising exhaustion and lowering depression, anxiety and stress (Ferrari et al., 2019; MacBeth & Gumley, 2012; Neff et al., 2007; Neff et al., 2020). Likely, activists struggle to fulfil their needs and show poor boundaries, meaning they lack self-compassion. It is common to ignore signs of exhaustion for the greater good and shame voicing

personal struggles (Gorski et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Therefore, self-compassion is an

important ability to protect activists from the effect of distress.

Moreover, the ability to receive compassion from others also influences the other flows of

compassion. This ability entails that practical and emotional support is available for oneself, while

one's social environment is perceived as supportive and compassionate (Gilbert et al., 2017;

Hermanto & Zuroff, 2016). Whether activists have this ability affects their mental well-being and

prosocial behaviour significantly, while it also supports the development of stress-resilience (Gilbert

et al., 2017; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2017; Narvaez, 2017). Practically, having compassionate

relationships buffers activists against the impact of stressors (Brown et al., 2010; George et al., 1989;

Gilbert, 2005; Gilbert et al., 2017; Ozbay et al., 2007). Oppositely, engaging in intrusive

relationships full of criticism often causes mental health problems (Gilbert et al., 2017; Wearden et

al., 2000). Therefore, activists' greater exposure to distress requires coping to prevent negative

consequences for their well-being, potentially by being compassionate towards themselves and

others while being able to receive compassion.

Despite the relevance of the flows of compassion for activists' well-being and stress level,

past research does not explore their relation neither there is a consensus on how to measure activism.

Furthermore, there is a gap in research concerning measuring the flows of compassion in the context

of activism, as previous research explored the flows of compassion individually (e.g. self-

compassion only) rather than an interdependent phenomenon. Research was not focused on activists,

but rather on social professions like teachers or health professionals and compassion (Ferrari et al.,

2019; Lindsay & Creswell, 2014; López et al., 2017; Neff, 2011; Neff et al., 2020). Nevertheless,

activists could benefit from the insights by strengthening the flows of compassion equally to protect

their health, help to cope with stress and increase their well-being that prevents working productively

towards a better society. Therefore, the following research questions were formulated, please refer to

Figure 1:

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1. *Do activists show greater levels of compassion towards others than towards themselves?*

2. *To what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the relation between activism (activistic behaviour, social justice intention, environmental beliefs) and well-being or stress?*

Figure 1

Visualisation of the Research Question: Do the Flows of Compassion Mediate the Effect of Being an Activist on Well-being or Stress
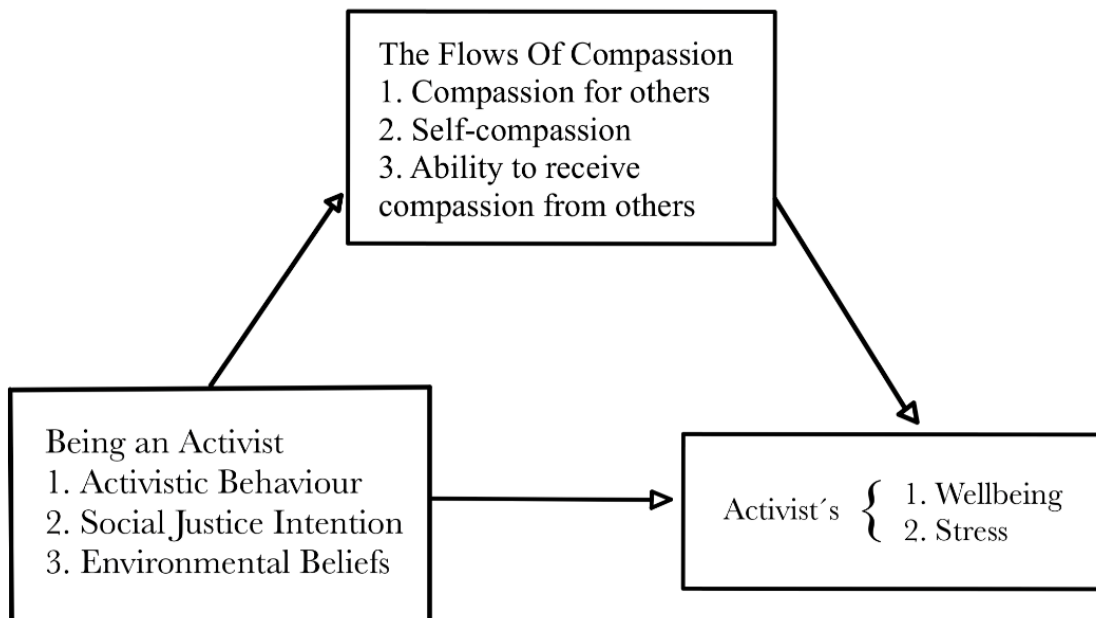
Methods

Design

This research had a correlational survey design to investigate the effect of the flows of compassion on the relationship between activism (activistic behaviour, social justice intention,

environmental beliefs) and well-being or stress. The Ethics Committee of the University of Twente approved this study (request number: 210441).

Participants & Procedure

Data was collected from 20.04.2021 to 13.05.2021, and participants were required to be over 18-years-old, English or German reading, and have internet access. Based on a description in recruitment text (see Appendix A), respondents identified themselves as showing activistic behaviour, intention for social justice activism or environmental activism beliefs, for example, by adjusting one's lifestyle for a cause. They were recruited via non-representative convenience by sending an anonymous questionnaire link via different platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and email. The social media profiles, WhatsApp numbers and email addresses were sourced from the websites of different environmental, animal rights or social justice Non-governmental-organisations (Amnesty International, World Vision, Friday's for Future, die Integreater, PETA/-Zwei, die GRÜNEN, etc.). Additionally, snowball sampling was used since the recruitment text asked the contacted individuals to send the questionnaire to other activists they know. From a total of 199 initial respondents, 78 were excluded because they filled out under 90% of the questions, and eight participants were excluded from data analysis because they were under 18-years-old. As shown in Table 1, a total of 118 responses qualified to be included in data analysis with a mean age of M_{age} = 28,10 ranging from 18 to 75 years. A total of 27 participants identified as male, 84 identified as female, two as non-binary and five chose to self-describe their gender identity. Most respondents were German (N= 82) participants, and the rest were Dutch or indicated another nationality. The majority obtained their A-levels or a higher academic level, and the minority of the sample had a lower level of education. Most participants were students (59,3%) and had a side job or part-time employment (15,3%).

The online programme Qualtrics was used to create an online survey that included a starting statement with the consent form and 24 questions which took around 16 to 20 minutes to complete.

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The questionnaire was also available in English and German, translations by the researcher and two independent parties were compared to create the German version. The consent form (see Appendix B) explained the participants' rights, including voluntary participation and possible withdrawal at any point in time. Further, it was explained that all data was handled confidentially and anonymized. Potential risks like feelings of discomfort were mentioned, yet no obvious physical, legal, or economic risks were associated with participation. Then, participants answered the different questionnaires, followed by demographical questions. Finally, the closing statement included the researcher's contact details and the question if the respondents still agreed to participate. When participants wanted to receive the final report they left an email-address.

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Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N=118) in Frequencies, Percentages, Mean and Standard Deviation (SD)

	Categories	*N*	*%*	*M (SD)*
Age (in years)		118		28.1 (12.6)
Gender Identity	Women	84	71.2	
	Men	27	22.9	
	Non-binary	2	1.7	
	Self-described	5	4.2	
Nationality	German	82	69.5	
	Dutch	11	9.3	
	Other nationality	25	21.2	
Highest level of education	Primary school	2	1.7	
	Secondary/Middle school	10	8.5	
	Vocational education	5	4.2	
	A-levels/Abitur	53	44.9	
	Bachelor/Master degree/PhD	48	40.7	
Current Occupation	Student	70	59.3	
	Unemployed	6	5.1	
	Side job/part-time employed	18	15.3	
	Fulltime employed	14	11.9	
	Self-employed	11	9.3	
	Retired	4	3.4	
	Other	12	10.2	

Note. *M* = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

Instruments

Demographical variables

Participants were asked to fill out demographical questions regarding their age in years, gender (Female, Male, Non-binary, Self-describe), nationality (German, Dutch, Other nationality),

the highest level of education (No official qualification, Primary school, Secondary/Middle school, Vocational education, A-levels/Abitur, Bachelor/Master degree/PhD) and current occupation (Student, unemployed, side job/part-time employed, fulltime employed, self-employed, retired, other).

Minority Distress. This questionnaire aimed to measure possible stress associated with experienced discrimination and gain more insights into the number of marginalised activists in the sample (Williams et al., 1997). First, participants can specify what causes they advocate for by 10 answer categories [Environmental justice, Racism, Cultural or religious discrimination, Sexism/Feminism, LGBTQ+ rights, Ableism (f.e. mental health, disabilities), Ageism, Classism, Sizeism or other appearance-based discrimination, Other] on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Strongly disagree') to 5 ('Strongly agree') (Williams et al., 1997). Next, participants indicate to what extent the participants experience (or expect to experience) the negative consequences of these topics in their life since it can have serious negative consequences on their mental health (Rankin, 2007; Williams et al., 1997). The seven items all describe acts of discrimination or negative treatment from others, and the participants estimate the frequency on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (' Never') to 5 ('Always'), for example ', You are not getting the same chances as others.' (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$ = .75; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$ = .88) (Williams et al., 1997). The follow-up-question is based on an existing questionnaire specifying what the participant identifies as possible reasons for the negative consequences, for example 'Your gender', 'Your weight' or 'Being a person of colour (POC)' (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011; Williams et al., 1997). In total the participant can choose from 12 options adjusted for the purpose of this study (Williams et al., 1997), including the option 'None' for people who don't experience negative consequences.

Activism Variables

Since literature does not entail a widely used instrument to measure the extent someone

engages in activism, this study explores three ways to measure activism, namely the participants'

social justice intention, environmental beliefs and extent of engaging in activistic behaviour.

Activistic Behaviour Scale (AB). The AB measures to what extent respondents engage in

activistic behaviour entailing seven items, each is describing an activistic action (see Appendix C).

This scale is an altered version of the 'Activism Scale' measuring environmental activistic behaviour

(see Appendix D). The AB, in this study, referred to as *activistic behaviour*, is measured on a five-

point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Never') to 5 ('Always') (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.76; Cronbach's

$\alpha_{past\ research}$=.80) (SGuin et al., 1998). A 5-point Likert scale was used instead of the original 7-point

Likert scale, and all of the original items of the Activism Scale were altered and reformulated by

including social justice behaviour rather than environmental only (all items). Some items of the

original activism scale were still included, describing behaviours like supporting petitions, writing

letters, financial support and participating in protests for their cause (Klar & Kasser, 2009; SGuin et

al., 1998). Next, one item was deleted ('Voting for a government proposing environmentally

conscious policies') because every citizen ought to vote for their interests, and this does not seem to

be unique to activists (Meien, 2007). Additional examples and variations of the behaviour were

added to the original items in order to include a variety of activistic behaviours and ensure that

respondents understand what this behaviour entails. Three items were added since more behaviours

could be identified in other studies about activism and were not included in the original

questionnaire. The first added item describes behaviours like 'Educating others, expressing my

opinion, distributing information or engaging in discussions about an environmental or social justice

cause' (Milošević-Đorđević & Žeželj, 2017; SGuin et al., 1998). The next added item describes

being a volunteer or active member for an activistic group 'Being an active member or volunteering

in an institution or movement related to an environmental or social justice cause (e.g. refugee camps,

help-hotline, cleaning-projects etc.).' (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Mair, 2002; SGuin et al., 1998; Swank & Fahs, 2016). Next, an item was added surrounding making adjustments to one's lifestyle 'Adjusting personal behaviour to better care for the environment and/or contribute to social justice (e.g. recycling, saving resources, changing diet, gender-neutral language, products with a message for the cause)' (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Tindall et al., 2003).

Social Justice Scale Short Form (SJS-SF). The 24-item SJS-SF assesses the attitude, perceived behavioural control, subjective norm forming the intention to fight for social justice, in this study referred to as *social justice intention*, measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Definitely false') to 7 ('Definitely true') (Torres-Harding et al., 2011). The questionnaire is grounded on the theory of planned behaviour by Ajzen to predict behaviour and a higher mean score indicates that the participant is more likely to engage in behaviour for social justice (1991). The attitude of the participants is assessed by the first 11 items (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.92; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.95), for example 'I believe that it is important to help individuals and groups to pursue their chosen goals in life.' (Torres-Harding et al., 2011). The next five items measure perceived behavioural control (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.73; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.84), for example 'I am confident that I can have a positive impact on others' lives.' (Torres-Harding et al., 2011). The subjective norm is measured by the following three items (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.83; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.82), for example, 'Other people around me are supportive of efforts that promote social justice.' (Torres-Harding et al., 2011). Lastly, the intention of the participants is measured by the last four items (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.82; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.88), for example, 'In the future, I will do my best to ensure that all individuals and groups have a chance to speak and be heard.' (Torres-Harding et al., 2011).

Environmental Attitudes Inventory Scale (EAI) – Environmental Threat subscale (ET). The EAI-ET assesses participant's beliefs about the natural environment and its quality, in this study referred to as *environmental beliefs* (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010). The sixth subscale from the

Environmental Attitudes Inventory Scale (EAI), named 'Environmental threat' (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present}$

$_{study}$=.88; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past research}$=.77-.87) consists of 10 items (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010). The

original 193 item questionnaire with 12 subscales is measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from

1 ('Strongly agree') to 7 ('Strongly disagree') (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010). This subscale concentrates

on assessing the belief that the environment is endangered and seriously damaged by human activity.

As well as the belief that catastrophic consequences will occur as a result, for example, 'If things

continue on their present course, we will soon experience a major ecological catastrophe.' (Milfont

& Duckitt, 2010). Whereas the reverse items assess the belief that the environment is robust and no

irreparable damage is likely, for example, 'The idea that the balance of nature is terribly delicate and

easily upset is much too pessimistic.' (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010).

Well-being Variables

Mental Health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF). The MHC-SF assesses the

participant's well-being in the past month and is referred to as *well-being* in this study and measured

on a six-point Likert scale ranging from 1 ('Never') to 6 ('Everyday') (Ryff, 1989). The short form

of the MHC survey consists of 14 items (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present study}$=.89; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past research}$=.89) and

derived from the long-form (MHC-LF) (Lamers et al., 2010). First, three items measure emotional

well-being (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present study}$=.85; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past research}$=.83), for example 'Satisfied with life'

(Lamers et al., 2010). Followed by five items assessing the social well-being (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present}$

$_{study}$=.72; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past research}$=.74), for instance 'That you had something important to contribute

to society' (Keyes, 1998; Lamers et al., 2010). Finally, the last six items are measuring the

psychological well-being of the participants (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present study}$=.79; Cronbach's α_{past}

$_{research}$=.83), for example, 'Confident to think or express your ideas and opinions' (Lamers et al.,

2010; Mullen, 1970; Ryff, 1989; Zubaida & Cantril, 1967). The mean score of all items describes the

positive mental health of the participants, and the norm data from a representative Dutch sample

shows a mean of M=2.98 (SD=0.85) (Lamers et al., 2010).

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The perceived stress scale assesses the stress level during the past month and is referred to as *stress* in this study. The stress level was measured with 10 items (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.82; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.84-.86) on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ('Never') to 4 ('Very often') (Cohen, 1986; Cohen et al., 1983). The participant is asked about their feelings and thoughts during the last month. An example of an item is 'In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?' (Cohen, 1988). The norm data is from a representative sample in the United States (N=2387), these respondents showed a mean of M=12.1 (SD=5.9) for males and M=13.7 (SD=6.6) for females (Cohen, 1988).

Compassion Variables

The Compassion Engagement And Action Scale (CEAS). To measure the flows of compassion, the CEAS (Cronbach's α = .92) was used and in this study referred to as *the flows of compassion*. A total of 29 items with answer categories ranging from 1 ('Never') to 10 ('Always') asking about the frequency the participants experience the described (Gilbert et al., 2017). The three subscales each contain 13 items to measure self-compassion (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.81; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.72-.90) ("I am motivated to engage and work with my distress when it arises"); compassion towards others (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.90; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.90-.94) ("I am motivated to engage and work with other peoples' distress when it arises"); and the ability to receive compassion from important others (Cronbach's $\alpha_{present\ study}$=.91; Cronbach's $\alpha_{past\ research}$=.89-.91) ("Other people are actively motivated to engage and work with my distress when it arises") (Gilbert et al., 2017). The first section of each of the three subscales reflects the different compassion attributes like sensitivity to suffering, non-judgemental, empathy, distress tolerance and care for well-being (Gilbert et al., 2017). The second section is about concrete compassionate actions to cope with the distress (Gilbert et al., 2017).

Compassion Practices. Two study-specific questions were asked to assess whether

participants engage in compassion, mindfulness or related practices in order to know how many

activists use utilise these practices (e.g. meditation). First, if they practice compassion exercises, and

when they do, the participants are asked to specify the type of practice. The second question asks the

participants to indicate how often they do the compassion exercises on a scale ranging from 0

('Never') to 6 ('Daily').

Data analysis

All data analyses were done with the application 'IBM SPSS Statistics 25'. First, the dataset

was ordered, and the reversed items and reverse scoring were recoded. Then, the demographics,

including the minority distress measures, were investigated by calculating the minimum, maximum,

means and standard deviations using descriptive and frequency statistics of the different

characteristics. Next, Cronbach's Alpha was calculated to determine the reliability for each

questionnaire and all subscales. One-sample t-tests were performed to compare the total scores to

norm statistics, which was also done to answer the first research question by comparing the scores of

the respondents in compassion towards others and the self. By calculating a two-tailed Pearson's

correlation, the correlation between all the different variables was determined. The effect size was

labelled as low when the value of r varies around .10, moderate when r varies around .30 and strong

when r was higher than .50 (Lachenbruch & Cohen, 1989) and an alpha level of $p<.05$ was used to

indicate statistical significance. Additionally, a linear regression analysis (ANOVA) was conducted

in order to specify the effect of being an activist on their well-being or stress level. Three separate

mediation analyses were performed for each measure of activism to answer the second research

question. This was repeated for the measure of stress using the PROCESS tool (version 3.5) by

Hayes (2017), which uses ordinary least squares regression, yielding unstandardised path coefficients

for the total, direct and indirect effects. A mediation would be found when a significant indirect

effect was found (Zhao, Lynch, & Chen, 2010; Rucker, Preacher, Tormala, & Petty, 2011). For each

path, unstandardised regression coefficients were calculated in the simple mediation model. The path

a shows the effect between one measure of activism on the flows of compassion, path b the effect

between the flows of compassion and well-being or stress when controlling for one of the activism

measures. Lastly, path c illustrates the direct effect of a measure for activism on well-being or stress

when controlling for the flows of compassion.

Results

Sample Characteristics

The extent of activism in the respondents

First, the sample characteristics concerning the activism measures showed to what extent the

respondents engaged in activism. As shown in Table 3, nearly all respondents fought against Racism,

Sexism and Environmental Justice. And the majority fought against cultural and religious

discrimination, Ableism, Sizeism or other appearance-based discrimination. Most respondents

advocated for around six causes. The first activism measure assessed the activistic behaviour of the

respondents and showed that the participants engaged on average 'About half the time' in all

activistic behaviours (see Table 2). The participants indicated to engage in actions usually done in a

group about half the time (f.e. protesting, volunteering, etc.) and to engage the least in writing letters

and petitions to the government or institutions. Whereas individual behaviours were displayed more

than group behaviours, like educating others, distributing information and adjusting their behaviour

(f.e. changing diet or language). Meanwhile, the respondents perceived fighting for social justice as

important and a social norm, believed they could reinstall social justice and plan to do so.

Respondents agreed with the environmental activism beliefs, meaning participants believed that the

current threat to the environment is real, the environment is irreparably damaged, and an ecological

crisis is bound to happen ($M_{activists}$=6.3; M_{norm}=5.1). The activists who participated in this study held

significantly stronger environmental beliefs than the general population, $t(117)=15.4$, p<.001.

Therefore, the respondents in this study indicated that they regularly engage in activistic behaviour, intend to fight for social justice, and believe in the environment being severely threatened.

Well-being and Stress levels of the respondents

Next, measures concerning the well-being and stress level provided data about the sample (see Table 2). The participants had an overall moderate mental health with a mean score of 2.9. Since the norm statistic for the Dutch population lay around 3.0, activists seem not to have had significantly lower well-being than the general population, $t(117)=-1.4$, $p=.156$ (Lamers et al., 2010). Looking at the stress level the participants experienced in the last month, they seem to have experienced higher stress levels since the sample showed an average score of 17.4 on the perceived stress scale. At the same time, the norm statistic lay at 12.9 as an average for males and females, $t(117)=7.9$, $p<.001$ (Cohen et al., 1983). Indicating that the respondents had average well-being but still experienced high distress.

The ability of the flows of compassion and the compassion practices of the respondents

The level of self-compassion ($M_{activists}=82$) was significantly lower than the level of compassion towards others ($M_{activists}=96$), $t(117)=-9.6$, $p<.001$ (see Table 2). Nevertheless, the participants still had higher levels in the combined flows of compassion than the general population ($M_{activists}=87$; $M_{norm}=67$), $t(117)=16.4$, $p<.001$. All flows of compassion separately were significantly higher than the general population (Self-compassion: $M_{activists}=82$; $M_{norm}=65$, $t(117)=11.1$, $p<.001$; Compassion towards others: $M_{activists}=96$; $M_{norm}=73$, $t(117)=14.6$, $p<.001$; Receiving compassion: $M_{activists}=83$; $M_{norm}=63$, $t(117)=11.7$, $p<.001$) (Gilbert et al., 2017). Exactly 60 participants practised compassion exercises, while 46 of the respondents exercised their compassion regularly, meaning one, multiple times a week or daily. Most practised mindfulness exercises ($N=11$) and gratitude

journaling (*n*=11), followed by meditation (*n*=8), writing a diary with self-reflection (*n*=8) and

practising yoga (*n*=8).

The minority distress experienced by the respondents

Additionally, the activists in this sample sometimes experienced negative consequences of

the causes they advocated for and, on average, belonged to three marginalised groups (see Table 2).

Most felt that they were discriminated against due to their gender, age, appearance, or educational or

income level (see Table 3). Accordingly, most respondents did not experience severe negative

consequences based on the causes they advocate for and therefore not experience severe minority

distress.

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of Activism-, Well-being-, Compassion-, Minority distress Variables

	Scale Range	Minimum- Maximum	*M (SD)*
Activistic Behaviour	1-5	1.0 - 4.9	3.1(0.8)
Social Justice Intention (SJS)	1-7	2.8 - 7.0	5.9 (0.8)
Attitude		2.0 - 7.0	6.5 (0.8)
Perceived behavioural control		2.8 - 7.0	5.9 (0.8)
Subjective norm		1.8 - 7.0	5.6 (1.1)
Intention		2.0 - 7.0	5.8 (1.0)
Environmental Belief (EAI)	1-7	2.9 - 7.0	6.3 (0.8)
Well-being	1-6	0.7 - 5.0	2.9 (1.0)
Stress	0-4	4.0 - 30.0	17.4 (6.2)
The Flows of Compassion	1-10	50 - 115	87 (13)
Self-Compassion		44 - 123	82 (16)
Compassion for others		11 - 127	96 (17)
Receiving Compassion		25 - 127	83 (19)
Discrimination	1-5	1.0 - 5.0	1.8 (0.7)
Minority	1-12	1.0 - 10.0	2.8 (1.9)

Note. M = mean; *SD* = standard deviation.

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Table 3

Frequencies for Activistic Behaviour, Causes, Cause of Discrimination, Compassion Practices

Frequency of activistic behaviour	Never	Sometimes / Half the time	Most times/ Always
Participation/Volunteering at activistic events	17 (14.4%)	53 (45%)	48 (40.7%)
Being an active member/volunteer for a movement or institution	27 (22.9%)	42 (35.6%)	49 (41.5%)
Protesting for a cause	24 (20.3%)	55 (46.6%)	39 (33%)
Letters/petitions demanding improvement	32 (23.7%)	60 (50.8%)	26 (22%)
Financial support for a cause	28 (23.7%)	59 (50%)	31 (26.2%)
Educating others, express opinion, distribute information, discussions	7 (5.9%)	33 (28%)	78 (66.2%)
Adjust personal behaviour for a cause	4 (3.4%)	22 (18.7%)	92 (78%)
Activist's Causes	Yes	Neither	No
Environmental Justice	103 (87.3%)	7 (5.9%)	8 (6.8%)
Racism	101 (85.6%)	11 (9.3%)	6 (5.1%)
Cultural or religious discrimination	65 (55.1%)	32 (27.1%)	11 (9.3%)
Sexism	99 (83.9%)	12 (10.2%)	7 (5.9%)
LGBTQ+ rights	90 (76.3%)	19 (16.1%)	8 (6.8%)
Ableism (f.e. mental health, disabilities)	78 (66.1%)	29 (24.6%)	10 (8.5%)
Ageism	45 (38.1%)	44 (37.3%)	29 (24.6%)
Classism	59 (50%)	40 (33.9%)	19 (16.1%)
Sizeism/appearance-based discrimination	65 (55.1%)	29 (24.6%)	23 (19.5%)
Other causes	30 (25.4%)	20 (17%)	7 (5.9%)
Compassion practices	*n (%)*		
Never	52 (44.1%)		
Sometimes	20 (16.9%)		
Regularly	46 (39%)		

Note. N(%)= Frequency (Percent)

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Correlations between activism, well-being, compassion and minority distress

First, the calculated Pearson's Correlations showed that all separate flows of compassion were positively correlated with each other (see Table 4). There was a strong positive correlation between well-being and self-compassion, and well-being was positively and moderately correlated to the flows of compassion. Next, a low negative correlation between environmental beliefs and well-being was found, whereas no significant correlation was found between well-being and social justice intention or activistic behaviour. A weak positive correlation was found between stress and activistic behaviour, social justice intention or compassion for others. In contrast, stress and environmental beliefs were positively and moderately correlated. A strong negative correlation between well-being and stress next to a moderate negative correlation between stress and self-compassion. Furthermore, there was a moderate positive correlation between activistic behaviour and the flows of compassion and a moderate positive correlation between the level of social justice intention and the flows of compassion. Being an activist correlated positively with compassion towards others. As expected, a member of a minority and experiencing discrimination is negatively correlated with well-being and positively correlated with stress.

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Table 4

Correlations Between all Variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Activistic Behaviour	/	.62**	.51**	-.06	.25**	.34**	-.06	.43**	.38**	.05	-.04	-.07
2. Social Justice Intention		/	0.55**	-.03	.26**	.44**	.00	.53**	.44**	.07	-.04	-.09
3. Environmental Beliefs			/	-.29**	.42**	.27**	-.08	.44**	.23*	.24**	-.02	-.00
4. Well-being				/	-.66**	.39**	.52**	.04	.35**	-.00	-.19*	-.21*
5. Stress					/	-.12	-.37**	.21*	-.13	.15	.23*	.28**
6. The Flows of Compassion						/	.67**	.77**	.84**	.29**	-.16	-.19
7. Self-Compassion							/	.22*	.36**	.32**	-.08	-.22*
8. Compassion for others								/	.52**	.15	-.05	.01
9. Receiving Compassion									/	.19*	-.22*	-.22*
10. Compassion Practice										/	.15	-.08
11. Discrimination											/	0.38**
12. Minority												/

Note. *p<.05., 2-tailed; **p<.01., 2-tailed.

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND
STRESS LEVEL

The effect of activism, minority distress, compassion practices on well-being or stress

Through conducting a linear regression analysis (ANOVA), the effect of being an activist on their well-being was explored. First, the effect of activistic behaviour on well-being was nonsignificant (B=-.05, p=.493) and activistic behaviour had a weak positive effect on stress (B=.03, p=.007). There was no significant effect of social justice intention on well-being (B=-.03, p=.712), whereas social justice intention had a weak positive effect on stress (B=.03, p=.005). Lastly, stronger environmental beliefs affected well-being negatively (B=-.24, p=.001), whereas environmental beliefs had a weak positive effect on stress (B=.06, p<.001). Additionally, higher minority distress results in lower well being (B=-.13, p=.041), higher stress (B=.03, p=.012) and not a significant effect on the flows of compassion (B=-.01, p=.093). Calculated with a linear regression analysis (ANOVA), the frequency of practising compassion practices did have a weak positive effect on the flows of compassion (B=.05, p<.001), but compassion practices did not affect well-being (B=-.004, p=.987) or stress (B=.06, p=.115).

The influence of the flows of compassion on the effect of activism on well-being or stress

A simple mediation was performed to analyse whether activistic behaviour, social justice intention or environmental beliefs describing being an activist, predicts their final score on the scale measuring well-being (MHC-SF) or stress (PSS) and whether the direct path would be mediated by the ability to be compassionate (see Table 5). Regarding the individual flows of compassion, the relationship between the variables for activism and well-being or stress was not mediated by self-compassion, compassion towards others, nor the ability to receive compassion. Otherwise, the flows of compassion affected activist's well-being (p<.01).

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Table 5

Mediation Analysis for the Activistic Behaviour, Social Justice Intention or Environmental Beliefs as

Predictor, The Flows of Compassion as Mediator, Well-being or Stress as Outcome Variable

				Total effect	Direct effect	Mediation by The Flows of Compassion	95% CI, indirect effect	
Outcome Variable	Predictor	a	b	c	c'	a x b	Lower	Upper
Well-being	Activistic Behaviour	5.38**	0.03**	-0.08	-0.26*	0.19*	0.08	0.30
	Social Justice Intention	7.59**	0.04**	-0.04	-0.33*	0.28*	0.12	0.49
	Environmental Beliefs	4.34*	0.04**	-0.35**	-0.51**	0.16*	0.03	0.24
Stress	Activistic Behaviour	5.38**	-0.11*	1.83*	2.41**	-0.58*	-1.15	-0.05
	Social Justice Intention	7.59**	-0.13**	2.06*	3.08**	-1.02*	-2.17	-0.22
	Environmental Beliefs	4.34*	-0.12**	3.21**	3.72**	-0.51*	-0.99	-0.07

Note. The effect is expressed by regression coefficient b. a = effect of predictor (Activism Variables: Activistic behaviour, social justice intention, environmental beliefs) on the mediator (The Flows of Compassion); b = effect of the mediator (The Flows of Compassion) on the outcome variable (well-being or stress); c' = direct effect of the activism variables on well-being or stress; a x b = indirect effect of the activism on well-being or stress through the flows of compassion. CI=confidence interval. *$p<.05$, 2-tailed. **$p<.01$, 2-tailed.
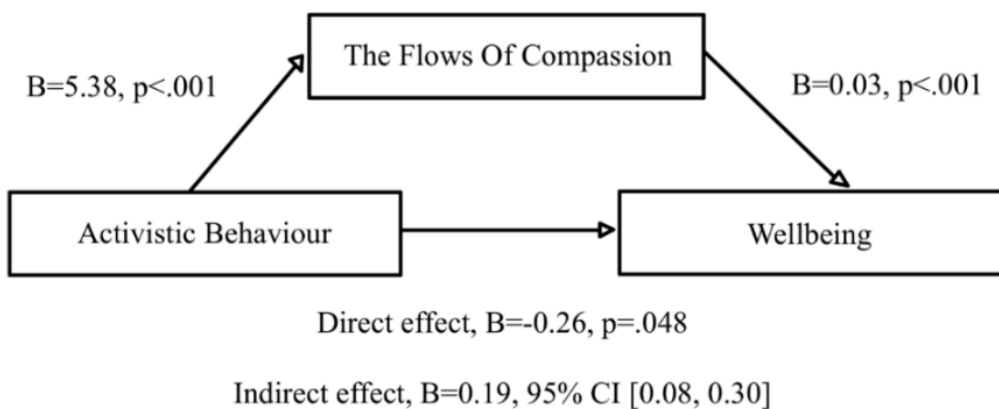
THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

To what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the effect of activistic behaviour on well-being?

The effect of activistic behaviour on well-being without the mediator was not significant (B=-0.08, p=.604). After entering the flows of compassion as the mediator into the model, activistic behaviour predicted the flows of compassion significantly (B=5.38, $p<$.001) (see Figure 2), the more activistic behaviour was displayed, the higher was the level of the flows of compassion. In turn, a higher level of the flows of compassion led to a higher level of well-being (B=0.03, $p<$.001). The direct effect of activistic behaviour and well-being with the mediator was significant (B=-0.26, p=.048). Meaning, the relationship between the activistic behaviour and the activist's well-being was partially mediated by the flows of compassion, indirect effect *ab*= 0.19, 95%-CI [0.08, 0.30]. Consequently, more activistic behaviour led to lower levels of well-being, and higher levels of activistic behaviour led to higher levels in the flows of compassion, which resulted in greater well-being.

Figure 2

Mediation model of Activistic Behaviour Predicting Well-being and The Flows Of Compassion as Mediator

Direct effect, B=-0.26, p=.048
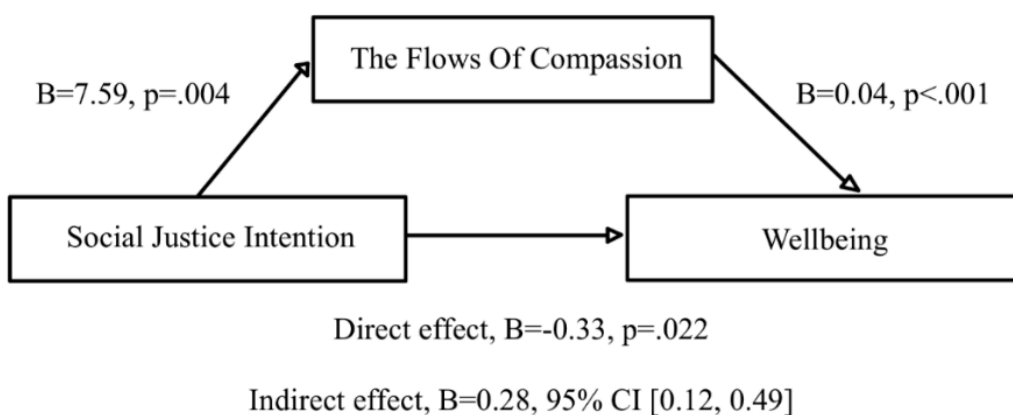
Indirect effect, B=0.19, 95% CI [0.08, 0.30]

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

To what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the effect of social justice intention on well-being?

When social justice intention was used as the predictor for well-being, the effect was not significant (B=-0.04, p=.809). After entering the flows of compassion as the mediator into the model, higher levels of social justice intention led to higher levels of the flows of compassion (B=7.59, p=.004) (see Figure 3). A higher level of the flows of compassion led to higher well-being (B=0.04, p<.001). The direct effect between social justice intention and well-being together with the mediator was significant (B=-0.33, p=.022). Meaning, the relationship between social justice intention and well-being was partially mediated by the flows of compassion, indirect effect *ab*=0.28, 95%-CI [0.12, 0.49]. Therefore, stronger social justice intentions led to slightly lower well-being and higher levels of the flows of compassion, which in turn led to a higher well-being.

Figure 3

Mediation model of Social Justice Intention Predicting Well-being and The Flows Of Compassion as Mediator

Direct effect, B=-0.33, p=.022

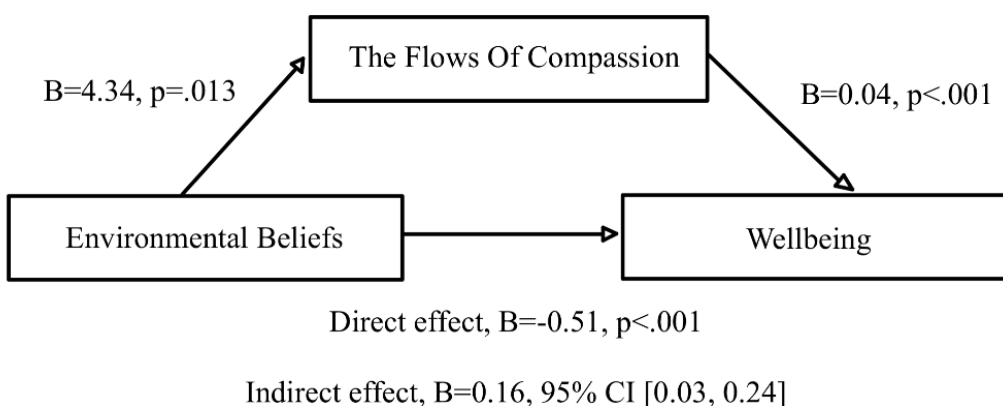Indirect effect, B=0.28, 95% CI [0.12, 0.49]

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

T*o what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the effect of environmental beliefs on well-being?*

The effect of environmental beliefs on well-being was significant (*B*=-0.35, *p*=.001). Stronger environmental beliefs resulted in lower well-being. After entering the flows of compassion as the mediator into the model, stronger environmental beliefs led to a higher level of the flows of compassion (*B*=4.34, *p*=.013) (see Figure 4). Additionally, higher levels in the flows of compassion resulted in greater well-being (*B*=0.04, *p*<.001). The direct effect between environmental beliefs and well-being with the flows of compassion as the mediator was significant (*B*=-0.51, *p*<.001). Meaning, the relationship between the environmental beliefs and well-being was partially mediated by the flows of compassion, indirect effect *ab*=0.16, 95%-CI [0.03, 0.24]. Therefore, stronger environmental beliefs still resulted in lower levels of well-being and higher levels of the flows of compassion, which led to greater well-being.

Figure 4

Mediation Model of Environmental Beliefs predicting well-being and The Flows Of Compassion as mediator

Direct effect, B=-0.51, p<.001

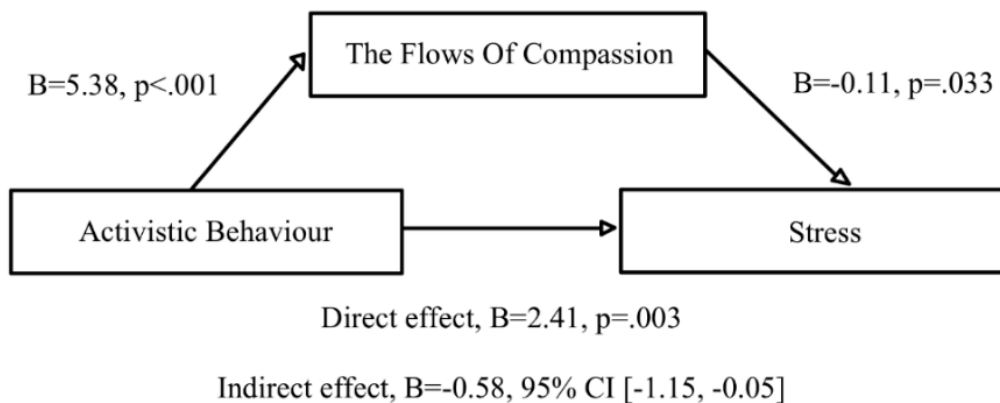Indirect effect, B=0.16, 95% CI [0.03, 0.24]

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

T*o what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the effect of activistic behaviour on stress?*

The effect of activistic behaviour on stress without the flows of compassion as the mediator was not significant (B=1.83, p=.027). After entering the flows of compassion as the mediator into the model, activistic behaviour predicted the flows of compassion significantly (B=5.38, p<.001) (see Figure 5). Then, the flows of compassion predicted the level of stress significantly (B=-0.11, p=.033), meaning that the higher the level of the flows of compassion, the lower the stress level. The direct effect of activistic behaviour and stress on the mediator was significant (B=2.41, p=.003). Meaning, the relationship between activistic behaviour and stress was partially mediated by the flows of compassion, indirect effect *ab*=-0.58, 95%-CI [-1.15, -0.05]. More activistic behaviour still predicted a lower level of stress and a higher level of the flows of compassion which resulted in lower stress.

Figure 5

Mediation Model of Activistic Behaviour Predicting the Stress Level and The Flows Of Compassion as Mediator.

Direct effect, B=2.41, p=.003

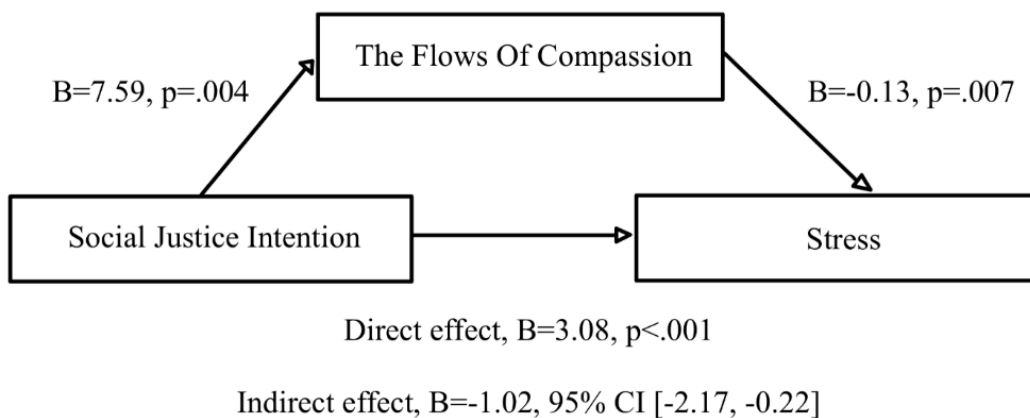Indirect effect, B=-0.58, 95% CI [-1.15, -0.05]

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND
STRESS LEVEL

T*o what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the effect of social justice intention on stress?*

Social justice intention was significant as the predictor of stress (B=2.06, p=.019). After

entering the flows of compassion into the model, higher levels of social justice intention led to higher

levels of the flows of compassion (B=7.59, p=.004) (see Figure 6). A higher level of the flows of

compassion led to lower levels of stress (B=-0.13, p=.007). The direct effect of social justice

intention and stress on the mediator was significant (B=3.08, p<.001). Meaning, the relationship

between social justice intention and stress was partially mediated by the flows of compassion,

indirect effect *ab*=-1.02, 95%-CI [-2.17, -0.22]. Therefore, with the flows of compassion in the

model, a higher level of social justice intention still led to higher stress levels. Higher levels of the

flows of compassion and a higher level of the flows of compassion predicted a lower level of stress.

Figure 6

Mediation Model of Social Justice Intention Predicting the Stress Level and The Flows Of

Compassion as Mediator

Direct effect, B=3.08, p<.001

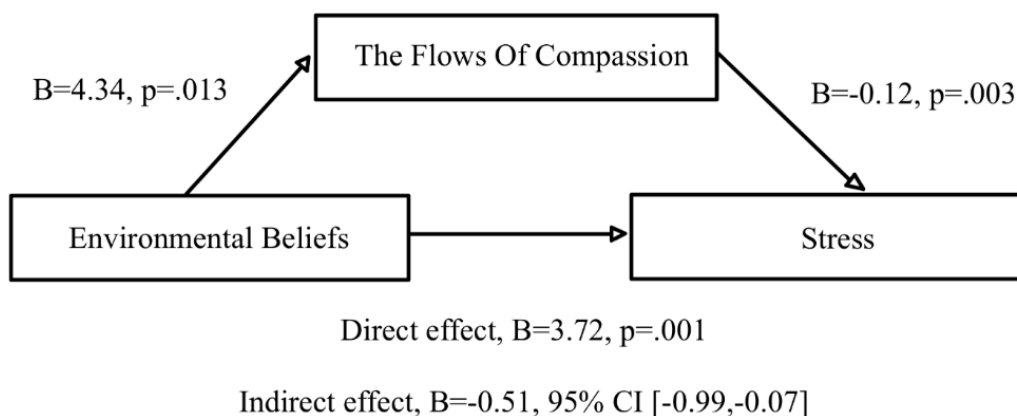Indirect effect, B=-1.02, 95% CI [-2.17, -0.22]

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

T*o what extent do the flows of compassion mediate the effect of environmental beliefs on stress?*

The effect of environmental beliefs on stress was significant (B=3.21, p<.001), meaning that stronger environmental beliefs result in higher stress levels. After entering the flows of compassion as the mediator into the model, stronger environmental beliefs led to a higher level of the flows of compassion (B=4.34, p=.013) (see Figure 7). Additionally, the flows of compassion predicted stress significantly (B=-0.12, p=.003), meaning that higher flows of compassion result in lower stress. The direct effect between environmental beliefs and stress with the flows of compassion as the mediator is significant (B=3.72, p=.001). Meaning, the relationship between the environmental beliefs and the activist's stress level was partially mediated by the flows of compassion, indirect effect *ab*=-0.51, 95%-CI [-0.99, -0.07]. Therefore, stronger environmental beliefs still result in higher levels of stress and higher levels of the flows of compassion, which predicts lower stress.

Figure 7

Mediation Model of Environmental Beliefs Predicting the Stress Level and The Flows Of Compassion as Mediator

Direct effect, B=3.72, p=.001

Indirect effect, B=-0.51, 95% CI [-0.99,-0.07]

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore how the effect of activism on well-being or stress is
affected by the flows of compassion while also exploring a measure of activism. Based on previous
research, it was expected that activists show greater levels of other-related compassion compared to
self-compassion (Gorski et al., 2018). Also, that the level of the flows of compassion mediate the
relation between activism and well-being or stress (Gorski et al., 2018; Pigni & Slim, 2016; Rodgers,
2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Concerning the first research question, findings showed that the
respondents had higher levels of compassion towards others than self-compassion. Concerning the
second research question, findings support that the level of the flows of compassion partially
mediated the relation between activism and well-being or stress. Activism was proficiently measured
by activistic behaviour, social justice intention and environmental beliefs. Additionally, the
respondents showed average levels of well-being, showed higher distress and higher levels of the
flows of compassion compared to a norm population. The majority of the respondents did not
experience minority distress, while half of the respondents practised compassion exercises,
increasing their compassion abilities.

As expected, assessing activistic behaviour, social justice intention, and environmental
beliefs seems to measure activism proficiently. They were strongly and positively correlated with
each other and with compassion for others as a central concept of being an activist (Effler, 2010;
Wood, 2011). Overlapping with previous research, the extent of activistic intentions, perceived
behavioural control to engage in activism successfully, the subjective norm for improving society
and activistic beliefs or attitudes are predicting behaviour accurately, also described by the theory of
planned behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Milfont & Duckitt, 2010; SGuin et al., 1998; Torres-Harding et al.,
2011). Future research should further develop a valid measure for activism, including the theory of
planned behaviour to differentiate activists from non-activists (Klar & Kasser, 2009; Mair, 2002;
Milošević-Đorđević & Žeželj, 2017; Swank & Fahs, 2016). The need for further research is also

stressed, as there is currently little research identifying activism specific behaviours taking into account possible new ways to enact activism, for example, through online activism (Swank & Fahs, 2016; Scharff et al., 2016). The target group in this study includes many different causes aiming to reinstall social justice and protect the environment, which is unique as other studies mostly look at very specific groups of activists, like adolescent gay-rights activists (Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Categorising social justice and environmental activists seems beneficial because this way includes many causes and different types of activists (Torres-Harding et al., 2011). This would allow to include cause-specific behaviours and beliefs, providing more specific information to characterise the activists. For instance, environmental activists often try to foster nature-protecting behaviour while social justice activists aim at interpersonal behaviours (Milfont & Duckitt, 2010; Torres-Harding et al., 2011). In conclusion, to proficiently measure activism aspects of the theory of planned behaviour specific to either social justice or environmental activism seems promising.

The activists in this study showed high levels of distress but moderate well-being matching the norm. A reason for the moderate level of well-being is a possible positive impact of activism in case the respondents did not feel overwhelmed by the factors of activism (Leak & Leak, 2006; Matsuba et al., 2012; Klar & Kasser, 2009; Neff et al., 2020). Together with high levels in the flows of compassion, these findings support the claim that their high compassion abilities help to cope with the distress and therefore still show moderate well-being (Gilbert et al., 2017; Gomes, 1992; Gorski et al., 2018; Singer & Klimecki, 2014; Neff et al. 2020). Additionally, the respondents did not report high minority distress, and therefore this factor does not seem to have much impact on their well-being (Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Rankin, 2007). The high distress of respondents and its negative correlation with compassion for others reflected past research identifying the overwhelming responsibility, extreme focus on others, confrontation with injustice and emotional exhaustion of activists (Gorski et al., 2018; Pigni & Slim, 2016; Rodgers, 2010). Furthermore, activistic behaviour and environmental beliefs were negatively correlated with well-being, possibly reflecting activism's

negative stressors (Effler, 2010; Gorski et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). On this basis, activists should have more excess to distress-reducing interventions to prevent the high and lasting distress from devastating effects on their well-being (Jasko et al., 2019; Shankland et al., 2020). Benefitting interventions are mindfulness practices like gratitude journaling that foster self-reflection, self-care and the focus on a more realistic and optimistic perspective countering activists' confrontation to injustice (Neff et al., 2020; Shankland et al., 2020). As research surrounding activist-burnout identified a culture of selflessness causing high distress, activist-groups should be encouraged to openly discuss the impact of their work on themselves, to be able to make negatively affected activists visible and refer them to mental health professionals (Neff et al., 2020; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). In conclusion, the data in this research does suggest that activism entails numerous stressors and that compassion-abilities can reduce the impact of this distress on their well-being.

Regarding the first research question, it was found that activists showed higher levels of compassion for others compared to self-compassion. The higher levels of other-related compassion did reflect the activists' heightened exposure to suffering, their tendency to be more deeply affected by others' suffering (Gorski et al., 2018; Neff et al., 2020). Whereas, respondents' lower levels of self-compassion compared to other-related compassion also partially reflect previous research identifying the lower self-care in activists (Gorski et al., 2018). Apart from that, a lack of self-compassion is not reflected in this study since the activists had higher scores in all flows of compassion than the general population (Gilbert et al., 2017; Gorski et al., 2018). Furthermore, nearly half of the respondents use compassion practices while most practice these exercises regularly, and compassion exercises were positively correlated with self-compassion and the ability to receive compassion. Therefore, it seems as if consciously practising self-care in compassion exercises can explain the high levels in the flows of compassion, which stresses the importance of these exercises for activists (Shankland et al., 2020). A possible reason is the ongoing isolation and social restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic, heightening the focus on close relationships and

oneself (Bundesregierung, 2021; Groarke et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020). Overlapping with past research, this study supports that the flows of compassion are better explored as one coherent, interdependent concept rather than individually (Gilbert et al., 2017). For instance, accepting compassion from others increases self-compassion since it buffers the effect of self-criticism on well-being (Gilbert et al., 2017). This shows that further research should try to validate this assumption further by assessing all flows of compassion and exploring if one compassion ability can be independent of the others and whether one has an independent effect on well-being (Gilbert et al., 2017). In conclusion, the findings support the importance of all flows of compassion together with the need for compassion practices for activists.

As expected, a higher degree of activism led to higher levels of the flows of compassion and, in turn, higher levels of well-being and lower stress levels, while activism still decreases well-being and increases stress levels (Klimecki et al., 2013; Post, 2005). A partial mediation also means that there could still be unidentified indirect effects (Rucker et al., 2011). In this study, some activists engaged in compassion practices which could be one indirect effect, which was not examined as there was no effect of compassion exercises on well-being or stress. But past research shows that a not significant effect can still result in a significant mediation effect (Rucker et al., 2011). Other indirect effect might be the commitment of activists influencing their well-being or stress level, because past research specifies that a higher commitment creates a deep sense of responsibility which causes many activists to work long hours for their cause, not allowing themselves to take time off (Gorski et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Possibly hindering activists from engaging in self-compassion and increasing their stress level, commitment can be an indirect effect. Another possible factor influencing the impact of activism on well-being and stress is the confidence level of activists. Since a more confident activist will be more likely to set boundaries and engage in more self-care, such as expressing one's emotions in music, exercising, healthy sleeping patterns, or eating (Gorski et al., 2018; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Consequently, activists can utilise the flows of compassion to

cope with the distress of activism-culture and protect their well-being. The flows of compassion

explain a part of activism's effect on well-being or stress, but further research still needs to reveal

and control for other indirect effects.

Some limitations can be identified, as the survey about activistic behaviour was not widely

used and strongly altered, the version used in this study still needs further validation. Besides, only a

part of the environmental action inventory was used since the whole questionnaire and the short form

would have been too long for this study, which also limits the statistical power of this measure.

Results of this study may have been impacted by the Covid-19 pandemic, as several respondents

indicated that the pandemic extensively limits their possibilities to practice activism. Therefore they

engaged less frequently in activistic behaviour or couldn't practice an activity recently, as organising

events was forbidden, for example (Bundesregierung, 2021; Groarke et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020;

Zacher & Rudolph, 2020). This study should be repeated to isolate the impact of activism on distress

as the Covid-19 pandemic causes distress originating from social isolation, increased anxiety and

disrupted routines (Groarke et al., 2020; Hou et al., 2020). Different organisations, local groups and

individual activists were contacted with a response rate of around 10%. Smaller organisations and

local groups responded more frequently. Whereas renowned organisations or activists frequently

declined participation. Future research targeting activists should create an incentive to participate,

such as free access to compassion interventions or donations for their cause or movement while

contacting smaller and local activist groups.

This study also has several strengths, filling a gap in previous research as the effect of the

flows of compassion on the relation between activism and their well-being was not yet examined.

This study potentially presents a starting point to measure activism, identifying multiple behaviours

specific to activists, for example, adjusting the personal lifestyle for their cause. As some participants

gave feedback, it is known that the use of text-boxes to fill in their cause was valued, as it made them

feel appreciated and accepted for their work as activists and the possibility to self-describe their

gender was also seen as positive from various respondents. Moreover, this research explored the

effect of the flows of compassion as one interdependent concept matching the research of Gilbert,

while most research concerning compassion rather explores one aspect like compassion towards

others (Gilbert et al., 2017; Hermanto & Zuroff, 2016). This study filled a gap in research concerning

ability in the flows of compassion of activists since this was not researched before. The flows of

compassion can explain how some activists' well-being benefits from practising activism while

others develop high distress, as compassion abilities help to cope with distress (Gilbert et al., 2017).

Consequently, this study provides valuable insights into activists, their well-being, abilities in the

flows of compassion, and measuring activism.

Conclusion

This report provides empirical data emphasising the importance of the flows of compassion

as an interdependent concept for the well-being and stress levels in activists. The findings support

that the activists' compassion for others was higher than their self-compassion, while all flows of

compassion were higher than the norm and about half of the sample practiced compassion exercises.

As previous research suggested, the activists showed higher stress levels, while their well-being was

similar to the norm, potentially explained by their high compassion abilities, which helped to

decrease the impact of the high distress on their well-being. Furthermore, the flows of compassion

partially mediated the relationship between activistic behaviour, environmental beliefs or social

justice intention and well-being or stress. Meaning, higher levels in activism led to higher levels in

the flows of compassion, which in turn led to higher well-being or lower stress levels. A partial

mediation also means that the flows of compassion accounted for a part of the effect, meaning that

higher levels of activism still led to lower well-being or higher stress levels and possible unidentified

indirect effects are likely. Practically, activists should be encouraged to practice their compassion

abilities to counter the impact of the numerous stressors in activism. Future research should further

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validate a measure for activism, repeat this research to further explore the effect of the flows of

compassion on activists' well-being controlling for possible indirect effects like commitment,

compassion practices, and confidence.

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THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Appendix

Appendix A. *Recruitment Text Example Instagram*

Hello, dear Integreater team :)

I'm a psychology student (University of Twente, Enschede) and I'm looking for activists for my study, and since I've been following your organisation for a long time and a dear friend of mine is in the Cologne team, I know you would be a good fit for my study as you fight for more equal opportunities for students.

It takes 16 minutes to fill out everything anonymously, either in English or in German :)

I define activists in my study by their behaviour and motivation, so you don't have to call yourself an activist. To name a few examples, you can participate if you are part of an activistic group, alter your personal lifestyle for your cause, educate others about your cause or sign petitions. I'm investigating the link between activism, well-being and compassion as part of my bachelor thesis.

If you know someone who could also participate, you will help me a lot by forwarding the link, e.g. in the Whatsapp groups! Thank you to everyone who participates :))

LINK:

https://utwentebs.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_cFO76is5HDsyW0e

Thank you very much!

Hanna Boeckenhoff

Appendix B. *Informed Consent*

Thank you for your interest in this study!

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

Before starting the questionnaire, please also read the consent form given below it will also tell you

what to expect from this study.

I appreciate your time and effort.

Hanna Böckenhoff (Researcher)

Judith Austin (Supervisor)

Department of Psychology, Health & Technology (University of Twente)

➔ Faculty of Behavioural Management and Social sciences

Informed Consent

Goal of the study:

This survey is conducted to investigate the role of the different flows of compassion in

activist's well-being for the purpose of a Bachelor thesis.

Procedure of the study (What is expected of you):

The survey entails questions about your well-being, about compassion to others, to

yourself and about receiving compassion from others. Additionally, questions are asked

about which activistic behaviour you engage in and what your motivation is. Finally, you

will answer questions to what extent you are influenced by possible negative

consequences of the cause you fight for and what the cause might be. Your participation

in this study is entirely voluntary, and you can withdraw at any time. Also, feel free to

omit any questions. It will take you **approximately 16 to 20 minutes** to complete the

research study, and in order to take part in the study, you need to agree with this informed

consent.

What happens with the data:

To assure your privacy and to make sure that your identity cannot be identified, all data will be anonymised. Answers to the questions are only used for research aims at the University of Twente. Be aware, as with any online related activity, the risk of a breach is always possible. To the best of our ability, your answers in this study will remain confidential and always remain anonymous.

Are there any costs/reimbursements:

No known obvious physical, legal or economic risks associated with this research study. Still, you might experience some discomfort due to sensitive topics such as well-being, stress and possible discrimination in this study.

Who approved the study:

The ethical committee of the University of Twente.

Where to ask questions:

- Contact: h.m.boeckenhoff@student.utwente.nl (Researcher) OR ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl (Ethics committee)

Note that you also have the right to contact the researcher to ask for the outcome of this research.

[Participants can either check the box 'I give my informed consent or 'I don't want to participate']

[After answering all questions, the participant sees this:]

You're done! Thank you for filling out the survey.

If you feel distressed after completing the questionnaire, we advise you to contact your GP.

In case you have any questions or comments, feel free to write an email to:

h.m.boeckenhoff@student.utwente.nl

THE ROLE OF GILBERT'S FLOWS OF COMPASSION IN ACTIVISTS' WELLBEING AND STRESS LEVEL

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to obtain information, ask questions, or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the Secretary of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Behavioural, Management and Social Sciences at the University of Twente by ethicscommittee-bms@utwente.nl

Do you still agree with sharing your answers anonymously for the purpose of this study?

[Participant can check 'I agree' or 'I don't agree']

Appendix C. *Original: Activism Scale (SGuin et al., 1998)*

To what extent do you engage in the following behaviours? (1– not very often to 7 – very often)

1. Participation in events organised by ecological groups

2. Financial support of an environmental group or cause

3. Circulation of a petition demanding an improvement of government policies regarding the environment

4. Participating in protests against current environmental conditions

5. Voting for a government proposing environmentally conscious policies

    Writing letters to institutions that engage in harmful actions (like discriminate against people or manufacture harmful products)

Appendix D. *Altered: Activistic Behaviour Scale*

To what extent do you engage in the following behaviours?

(1=Never; 2=Sometimes; 3=About half the time; 4=Most of the time; 5=Always)

1. Participation or volunteering at events related to ecological or social justice (groups)

2. Being an active member or volunteering in an institution or movement related to an environmental or social justice cause (e.g. refugee camps, help-hotline, cleaning-projects etc.).

3. Participating in protests against current environmental or social justice conditions

4. Writing letters or circulating a petition demanding an improvement of government or institutional policies regarding the environment or social justice

5. Financial support of an environmental or social justice group or cause

6. Educating others, expressing my opinion, distributing information or engaging in discussions about environmental or social justice causes

7. Adjusting personal behaviour to better care for the environment and/or contribute to social justice (e.g. recycling, saving resources, changing diet, gender-neutral language, products with a message for the cause)