

**Self-Compassion and Burnout in Socially Progressive Student Activists:  
Hope and Hopelessness as Mediators**

by

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### Abstract

Many university students engage in socially progressive activism (e.g., activism on behalf of marginalized groups), which has been key to societal change benefitting disadvantaged communities. However, limited social change and external support can lead to activist burnout, and, in turn, discontinuation of social justice efforts - this harms the efficacy of activist movements. Self-compassion has been associated with lower burnout among workers (McDonald et al., 2020); higher hope (Neff & Faso, 2015); lower hopelessness (Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021), which is a component of activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015); and increased goal adjustment (Miyagawa et al., 2018). To determine if and how self-compassion might affect burnout and intention to quit activist work among student activists, the current study surveyed 175 socially progressive student activists on their levels of self-compassion, burnout, hope, hopelessness, goal adjustment and intention to quit activist work. Mediation analyses assessed possible mediation models (parallel, sequential) linking self-compassion to burnout and intent to quit through hope, hopelessness, and goal adjustment. Parallel mediation analyses found that self-compassion significantly predicted burnout through the mediators hope and hopelessness, and in turn burnout was the only variable to mediate the relationship between self-compassion and intent to quit activist work. The sequential model predicting intent to quit found that hope and burnout significantly mediated the contribution of self-compassion. Qualitative results supported hope and hopelessness as constructs relevant to how student activists think about their social justice efforts. The results of this study add to the body of research indicating an important role for self-compassion in maintaining hope and reducing hopelessness and that these effects help reduce burnout in, and intent to quit activist work. These results may be valuable for student activist organizations seeking to promote the motivation and well-being of their membership.

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## **Self-Compassion and Burnout in Socially Progressive Student Activists:**

### **Hope and Hopelessness as Mediators**

University students have long been associated with socially progressive activist causes, from the anti-war movements of the 1960s and 1970s, to the Black Lives Matter movement of today (Rhoads, 2016). Student activism has been a part of many positive societal developments, including enhancing legal rights for members of the LGBTQI+ community and people of colour, as well as increasing awareness of issues such as income inequality and violence against women (Rhoads, 2016). However, in recent years, more attention has been paid not only to the effects of student activism on the world we live in, but its effects on the student activists themselves. Engagement in socially progressive student activism can be difficult as it may generate conflict with others and frustration with the slow pace of change. These difficulties may lead to feelings of burnout, where individuals become overwhelmed with exhaustion, and loneliness, and find it difficult to prioritize their own wellbeing (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Linder et al., 2019). Given these findings, it is important to better understand psychological influences that might help these individuals maintain their mental wellbeing, and their engagement with the social justice issues they feel passionately about.

In this thesis I used quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate whether self-compassionate attitudes help protect student activists from feelings of burnout and the desire to quit activist work. A second, related, goal of the thesis is to understand possible mechanisms for the influence of self-compassion. Specifically, I examined whether the constructs of hope and hopelessness might explain the relationship between self-compassion and burnout among student activists. Further, I examined hope, hopelessness, burnout, and the related construct of goal

adjustment (the ability to disengage from unrealistic goals and reengage in more achievable aims) as potential explanations for how self-compassion may be associated with the intent to quit. In addition, I posed two open-ended questions to participants, one related to how their hope for change on behalf of socially progressive causes had evolved over time, the other about their reasons for involvement in activist work. The qualitative information derived from these questions was intended to provide some context for the study by allowing for a better understanding of how participants felt about their activist work, and how hope factored into that work.

To contextualize this work, I defined socially progressive activism, and the construct of burnout, as well as activist burnout specifically. I then discussed the significant body of research on self-compassion and its link to burnout among workers in various fields, and how self-compassion's beneficial influence on hope, hopelessness, and goal adjustment may be a mechanism by which it affects activist burnout, and intention to quit activist work. Finally, summarized the hypotheses proposed in the current study, as well as the methodologies and analyses used to test these hypotheses.

### **What Is Activism?**

Activism is a term infrequently defined within previous research (Cabrera et al., 2017). For the purposes of the current study, I used the following definition: that activism refers to acting in support of a particular cause in a way that goes beyond normal activities (Martin, 2007). According to Martin (2007) non-violent activism can take many forms: there are acts of protest and persuasion such as speeches (Doan, 2017), marches (Dunivin et al., 2022), and picketing (Brucher, 2011); acts of noncooperation such as strikes (Bowman, 2020) and boycotts (Lightfoot, 2019); and acts of intervention such as sit-ins (Varda, 2019), and non-violent

occupations (Smith, 2012). Activism encompasses both direct action, which is physical and public (such as marching in a protest), and support work, which takes place behind the scenes to help make direct action possible (Martin, 2007). This would include organizing people to take part in a protest and raising or applying for financial aid in support of a particular cause (Martin, 2007).

Methods of activism have evolved along with society; the creation of the internet has given rise to online activism, which allows people to communicate about issues, and organize through technology such as social media (Martin, 2007). This latter type of social justice work might include posting information related to a particular cause on a social media platform such as Twitter - sometimes as part of a larger social-media specific campaign through tools like hashtags (Brown et al., 2017). Individual social media posts can, as part of a collective effort, be used to spread awareness of causes and challenge dominant social narratives (Brown et al., 2017; Clark-Parsons, 2016) as well as share information about resources for marginalized groups (Clark-Parsons, 2016). Social media may also offer additional opportunities to help/get involved in activism, such as making monetary donations (Lewis et al., 2014), organizing in-person activist events such as protests (Mundt et al., 2018), sharing ideas (Mundt et al., 2018) and offering protection to those engaging in riskier in-person social justice activities (Sacoman, 2021).

Social media activism specifically, is somewhat controversial in terms of how it compares to in-person activist activities. Some have found that social media activism may facilitate more shallow engagement in causes, and less actual commitment and work to bringing about desired change (Yilmaz, 2017). However, while social media activism is often a relatively small commitment compared with in-person activism, other researchers have suggested that

online engagement in issues can inspire involvement in more concrete forms of social justice work (Greijdanus, et al., 2020). Social media can help people to recognize situations as unfair, and appeal to their sense of morality, as well as provide them with a feeling of solidarity with others involved in a particular cause (Greijdanus, et al., 2020). In support of social media activism, engagement in online activism has been found to be positively related to engagement in offline activism (Greijdanus, et al., 2020). Because of this, within the scope of the current study both in-person, and online or social-media activities will be considered as activism.

Activism can be done on behalf the full spectrum of political causes, both liberal and conservative. Right-wing causes could include pro-life activism (Avanza, 2019) and extremist “ethnocratic” activism (Ekman, 2014). Other activists work on behalf of left-wing causes, and in support of marginalized groups, such as anti-racist (Bhattacharyya et al., 2020) and pro-choice activism (McCammon & Beeson-Lynch, 2021). However, for the purposes of making the causes included in this study more homogeneous, activism was defined as acting in support of socially progressive causes. Progressive causes are aimed at advancing and/or protecting the rights of those who are marginalized or less powerful in society (Martin, 2007). Traditionally this has centred on humans, but in recent years, progressive causes have broadened to include advocacy on behalf of animals, and the natural environment more generally (Martin, 2007). Examples of activist movements focussed on progressive causes, include the Black Lives Matter movement, which seeks to advance the rights of Black people (Banks, 2018); the Fridays for Future movement, which seeks to push governments to take action against climate change (Wahlström et al., 2019); and the Me Too movement, which seeks to end sexual assault and violence, particularly in the workplace (Lee, 2018).

While those with a liberal perspective might see the increased efficacy of socially progressive movements as a clear benefit of this research, those who do not share these views might question how necessary studies on this type of activism might be. More conservative individuals could see a robust progressive activist community as a detriment rather than a boon to our society. However, to support a healthy, functioning democracy, all views, opinions, issues, and communities should be part of the public discourse. According to Parkinson and Manbridge, as quoted by Baekkeskov et al. (2021), the creation of public policies necessitates a debate on the various options available for that policy (e.g., a policy towards a recreational drug should not be created without open debate about whether criminalization, decriminalization, legalization, etc. is the best possible decision). This process allows all citizens to see what viable solutions exist and make their own decisions about which of those solutions they support. While no one is required to agree with all opinions, it is important that discussion of issues significant to all members of society does take place, rather than be ignored.

Socially progressive activism may be particularly in need of support in the current discourse as it is centered on members of marginalized communities, who might have less power and resources to advocate for themselves and their needs and opinions within that discourse. Advocating for diverse groups allows their voices to be heard in our democracy in a way that might not otherwise be allowed, giving others the opportunity to see alternatives to current policies that not only would be beneficial to that marginalized group, but to themselves. Whether they ultimately decide to oppose or support the views of socially progressive activists, all individuals should have a right to hear those views and come to their own decisions.

**What is Burnout?**

Burnout occurs when employees faced with chronically high levels of job-related stress reach a state of exhaustion, in which they do not feel connected with the work they do and perceive their efforts at work as fruitless or useless (Maslach et al., 2001). Burnout has been associated with a variety of negative outcomes for individuals in many different fields, particularly those with careers involving emotionally-taxing work (West et al., 2018). Generally, burnout occurs under conditions where workers feel that: they are being treated unfairly; conflict is pervasive in the workplace; their work is not in line with their values; there is little reward or reinforcement for work; they are overworked; and they lack control over their work (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Those who experience burnout have been identified as being at higher risk for developing a wide range of health problems. Individuals who experience burnout are more likely to be diagnosed with serious physical health issues (such as coronary heart disease) (Salvagioni et al., 2017), and have lower mental wellbeing (such as depression and insomnia) (Armon et al., 2008). Koutsimani et al., 2019). Beyond personal problems for individual workers, burnout is often associated with substandard work performance – among physicians, burnout has been linked to higher rates of medical error and patient dissatisfaction, and lower rates of productivity (West et al., 2018). A recent meta-analysis found that among physicians, burnout was associated with reduced empathy for patients, and greater intention of quitting work positions - both of which would negatively affect these physicians' investment in or quality of work (Williams et al., 2020). Similar effects have been identified in nurses (Bakhamis et al., 2019), and in both blue-collar and white-collar workers (Toppinen-Tanner et al., 2002). Finally, burnout has been identified as a significant predictor of worker turnover in many professions, including with

teachers (Rajendran et al., 2019), healthcare workers (Willard-Grace et al., 2019), and mental health personnel (Scanlan & Still, 2019). In sum, burnout has a serious impact on the functioning of workplaces, potentially even causing harm to those accessing these workers' services.

### **Burnout in Activists**

While research on burnout has primarily been focussed on individuals working in the fields of health care and mental health, burnout is not only limited to those in caring professions. More recent research has attempted to examine how burnout functions in the activist community. As occurs in caring professions, those involved in activism may experience greater levels of emotional exhaustion, because they are more aware of issues of social injustice than their peers (Kovan & Dirkx, 2003). Not only are those involved in activism more emotionally impacted by knowledge of social issues, but they often also seem to place extensive pressure on themselves to create change. For instance, a study on animal justice activists, found that these individuals often felt a deep emotional involvement in their work, and considered their contributions to the animal justice movement to be their duty (Gorski et al., 2019). Racial justice activists have also been found to feel a sense of moral and emotional obligation to contribute to social change (Gorski, 2019).

Adding to this burden, activists often face conflicts with other members of the movements they are involved in, as was found in Chen and Gorski's (2015) investigation into social justice and human right activists experiences of activist burnout and how this condition impacted their activist work and lives more generally. Data was collected from interviews with 22 activists, before being analysed: in the process of coding, the authors identified a number of themes related to the symptoms, causes, and implications of activist burnout in this population.

Notably, they found that activists struggling with burnout often noted that they felt attacked or dismissed within their social justice circles (Chen & Gorski, 2015). In organizations and movements there can be differences of opinion on the best course of action for accomplishing social justice goals, as well as schisms over who is given credit for activist work carried out by a group (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

The experience of this intra-community discord appears to particularly affect activists from marginalized groups. Gorski and Erakat (2019) attempted to further understanding how dealing with white activists in racial justice movements, can drive burnout in people of color who take part in activism on behalf of these causes. Using a grounded theory approach, the authors analysed responses from 22 interviews with people of color involved in racial justice causes who struggled with activist burnout. Results demonstrated that these activists felt taken advantage of, and unsupported by many of their white allies (Gorski & Erakat, 2019). Female interviewees faced similar difficulties with misogyny in the activist community, often feeling that their abilities were denigrated by the men they worked with (Gorski & Erakat, 2019).

Activists may also feel a lack of support from those outside the movements they are a part of, as was identified in a study by Linder et al. (2019) aimed at increasing understanding about the drawbacks of participating in activist labor among university students who identify as being part of minority groups. Individual interviews were conducted with 25 participants from 14 different post-secondary schools and the authors identified a variety of themes in their gathered responses related to the work involved in engaging in socially progressive activism, and the costs of this work. Student activists discussed experiencing burnout due to feelings that their wider university communities did not support their advocacy work. Other students and faculty were sometimes actively antagonistic; student activists noted being bullied or passed over for

certain opportunities due to their beliefs (Linder et al., 2019). Furthermore, these activists noted that their universities provided them with limited resources in terms of access to mental health outreach (Linder et al., 2019). For many of these students, insubstantial institutional assistance for the negative impacts of their work felt particularly insulting, since student activism often benefitted their post-secondary schools (Linder et al., 2019).

Lack of encouragement and assistance for social justice work can also come from closer sources as discussed in Vaccaro and Mena's (2011) investigation of the experiences of LGBTQI+ university students of color who participate in activism on behalf of predominantly white LGBTQI+ social justice organizations. Using a phenomenological research methodology, the authors conducted multiple interviews with six students at a majority white university to collect responses. Among a variety of stressors which appeared to drive burnout amongst participants, Vaccaro and Mena (2011) identified a connection between this state and limited familial and cultural support for activist labour. Thus, many of the same causes of burnout in professionals such as doctors and nurses (e.g., intercommunity conflict, sense of unfair treatment from others and lack of reinforcement in terms of support), also appear to be involved in activist burnout.

Beyond causes, the consequences of burnout are also similar in both activists and workers. In a phenomenon analogous to higher rates of worker turnover, burnout may lead many activists to step away from their social justice roles. Rodgers (2010), in her study of emotional labor in members of a human rights organization, conducted 50 interviews with individuals both previously and currently involved in a social justice group and found that a third of her participants left their positions due to burnout-related issues. Chen and Gorski (2015) found that 21 of the 22 activists with burnout they interviewed left social justice work due to difficulties

with depression and insomnia. Finally, Vaccaro and Mena (2011) noted that many student activists in their study mentioned scaling back their activist duties, because of burnout. This suggests that the effects of burnout extend beyond the individual, since losing the involvement of experienced activists may contribute to larger issues of movements being unable to accomplish their goals due to limited personpower (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Activist turnover may also make it more difficult for younger supporters of activist causes to find mentorship (Chen & Gorski, 2015).

One of the most prominent aspects of activist burnout appears to be hopelessness surrounding the causes and issues these individuals are involved with. In a series of interviews with activists, Chen & Gorski (2015) found that many of their participants noted that a loss of hope led them to distance themselves from their social justice work. This hopelessness appeared to stem from the sense that the energy and effort put into activist work was not effective in creating change, which ultimately led to feelings of failure (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Further qualitative research has found similar results: in studies conducted with animal rights activists (Gorski et al., 2019), and with racial justice activists (Gorski, 2019) (which pursued similar questions and followed a similar methodology to the 2015 study by Chen and Gorski) individuals in all groups indicated that their experience of hopelessness was due to feelings that social change was impossible. Powers and Engstrom (2019) similarly identified hopelessness as a prevalent issue among social workers frustrated with the slow rate of government change in response to environmental issues. This idea was echoed by Albright and Hurd (2019), who suggested that while activism might seem like a positive coping strategy for marginalized students with political turmoil-induced anxiety, that this may not necessarily be true. Engagement in activism could ultimately lead to hopelessness, as the slow pace of social

progress might prevent the sort of change these individuals would desire (Albright & Hurd, 2019). Burnout in other professions has been connected to a sense that one's work is not meaningful (Schaufeli et al., 2009). However, in activists, it does not appear that the cause being advocated for is not meaningful or important, but that the work being done on behalf of that cause is not successful.

Quantitative research also supports the wide-spread phenomenon of activists struggling with hopelessness towards the possibility of social justice. A survey of activists in the field of human rights, found that a significant number of participants experienced hopelessness (Satterthwaite et al., 2018). The sense of failure engendered by lack of progress is often of particular significance for activists. As their beliefs surrounding these issues are of such great importance to them, many activists see a failure to create desired social change, as a failure of their life's purpose (Driscoll, 2019).

### **Self-Compassion and Burnout**

Due to the high personal and professional costs of burnout there is a need for strategies that can help individuals successfully manage their work-related distress. Because a large proportion of causes of burnout are related to structural forces such as unfair workplace treatment (Maslach & Leiter, 2016), many of the proposed solutions may need to also be structural. For example, in their study on burnout in physicians, Shapiro et al. (2018) suggest that burnout could be greatly reduced by putting more effort into increasing employee health and safety; making sure employees are treated respectfully and compensated fairly; and reducing the amount of time staff spend dealing with technological difficulties and attending meetings.

However, researchers have also attempted to find psychological strategies that could be helpful to individuals who are exhausted by their workplace situations, including self-

compassion. The construct of self-compassion, which has its roots in Buddhist philosophy, was defined by Neff (2003) as having the ability to access one's suffering with kindness and acceptance, and without judgment. Self-compassion is comprised of three major components: self-kindness (approaching oneself with kindness as opposed to judgement), common humanity (seeing one's experiences as difficulties that everyone encounters), and mindfulness (having the ability to be aware of one's suffering with a healthy amount of distance) (Neff, 2003). According to theory, individuals with higher levels of self-compassion should enjoy better mental health than those with lower levels, because they have a more adaptive response to painful, negative experiences. Rather than dwell on, and blame themselves in such distressing situations, people who are highly self-compassionate should treat themselves with care and have greater awareness of their negative emotions (Neff, 2003). Because of this, they should be able to assess the situation they are in with more clarity, and take steps to resolve the issue (Neff, 2003).

Supporting this, a 2012 study by Breines and Chen found that individuals in a self-compassion intervention were more motivated to improve themselves on a moral or personal failing. Similar positive relationships between self-compassion and self-improvement have been identified in athletes (Ceccarelli et al., 2019), individuals experiencing body dissatisfaction (Moffitt et al., 2018), and in individuals who feel responsible for the loss of a romantic relationship (Zhang & Chen, 2017).

Since the concept was first defined, self-compassion has been connected to several theories of psychological health. Based on its' initial conceptualization, as well as several studies, self-compassion has been identified as promoting better emotional regulation, making it a valuable tool in situations in which one is experiencing stress and pain (Inwood & Ferrari, 2018; Neff, 2003). Additionally, the self-kindness aspect of self-compassion has been related to

the humanistic psychology concepts of unconditional positive regard, self-acceptance, and nonjudgmental acknowledgment of failure (Barnard & Curry, 2011). Attachment theory has also been found to relate to self-compassion, as those with higher levels of secure attachment have been identified as being more self-compassionate (Neff & McGehee, 2010). Beyond psychological theories, self-compassion has been found to have a positive influence over many aspects of mental wellbeing, and life functioning. Self-compassion has been connected to lower levels of depression (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012), anxiety (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012), and stress (MacBeth & Gumley, 2012), higher levels of physical health (Phillips & Hine, 2019), and more adaptive responses to stressful situations such as transitioning to university (Terry et al., 2013), and coping with divorce (Sbarra et al., 2012). Similarly, self-compassion interventions have also been connected to improved psychological health (Ferrari et al., 2019)

Given these benefits, many have suggested self-compassion as an attitude that could provide relief to those struggling with burnout. This claim is supported by numerous studies that have consistently shown a negative relationship between self-compassion and burnout. Research on healthcare professionals and first responders have found self-compassion to be significantly negatively related to all three components of burnout, as defined by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, low personal accomplishment) (Hashem & Zeinoun, 2020; McDonald et al., 2020). Not only is the relationship between these constructs significant, but self-compassion has even been found to be a stronger predictor of burnout than depression, in a survey of Veterans Affairs mental health staff (Atkinson et al., 2017).

These findings have been replicated in survey data from nurses (Duarte et al., 2016; Durkin et al., 2016), midwives (Beaumont et al., 2015), and pediatric residents (Olson et al., 2015). However, because this research is correlational, the conclusions that can be drawn are

limited. Based on these studies, it cannot be determined whether it is self-compassion that protects against the development of burnout, or whether low levels of self-compassion are a consequence of burnout (Atkinson et al., 2017). For example, employees who are emotionally exhausted and who find their work meaningless, may be less inclined to be compassionate towards themselves. In this explanation, the relationship between self-compassion and burnout would be significant, without self-compassion actually being beneficial for struggling workers.

However, there is also evidence that self-compassion can be helpful to individuals who are already experiencing symptoms of burnout. In recent years, researchers have moved beyond looking for correlations between self-compassion and burnout, to examine whether self-compassion interventions genuinely provide benefits for the groups they are intended for. Eriksson et al. (2018) found that a randomized control trial to assess a self-compassion intervention targeted to psychologists, showed that the intervention significantly reduced the level of burnout within the sample relative to controls. A similar intervention was found to successfully decrease burnout in nurses (Delaney, 2018). Self-compassion can even be beneficial when it is not the main focus of the intervention used - mindfulness interventions which include elements of self-compassion training, have also been found to reduce burnout. A mindfulness loving-kindness intervention (related to self-compassion) significantly reduced burnout in a sample of nurses (dos Santos et al., 2016). Gozalo et al. (2019) found a similar effect when examining the impact of a mindfulness intervention that incorporated self-compassion training, on a sample of medical professionals.

Though it cannot be certain in these mindfulness-based studies that it was increased self-compassion that led to psychological benefits, other research has suggested that self-compassion does play a significant role in the relationship between mindfulness and burnout. A study

examining the impact of a mindfulness-based intervention on nurses' psychological health, found that self-compassion significantly mediated the relationship between the effects of the intervention and lower levels of burnout (Duarte & Pinto-Gouveia, 2017). This suggests that self-compassion does partially account for why mindfulness proves beneficial for those struggling with an emotionally exhausting workload. Overall, the results of intervention-based research on this topic, imply that low self-compassion is not a symptom of burnout. Rather, self-compassion is a tool which can help individuals struggling with burnout to mitigate the effects of their fatigue and disconnection. This may allow these individuals to continue their work without having their performance, and physical and mental health, negatively affected. Furthermore, since these workers should be better able to handle the stressors of their job, while still performing at a high level, the communities served by these individuals could also be provided with a greater level of care.

In fact, some research has connected self-compassion not only to decreased levels of burnout, but also to decreased levels of the negative effects of burnout. In a 2014 study, Olson and Kemper determined that self-compassion was related to medical trainees having greater confidence in their ability to deliver compassionate care. Additionally, doctors who are more self-compassionate have been found to be more engaged with, and less exhausted by their work and are overall more satisfied with their work (Babenko et al., 2018). The outcomes of self-compassion found in Babenko et al.'s (2018) study, not only relate to better performance and improved attitudes towards work, but to the definition for burnout proposed by the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory. In this measure, burnout is characterized in terms of exhaustion and disconnection, both of which were improved in more self-compassionate physicians (Babenko et al., 2018; Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005). Because these studies did not measure burnout, it

cannot be determined whether it is self-compassion's relationship to burnout, that results in these benefits for work performance. However, other research has suggested that burnout does mediate this relationship. A survey of nurses found that self-compassion was negatively related to burnout, and furthermore, burnout mediated the relationship between self-compassion and higher levels of job satisfaction (Vaillancourt & Wasyliw, 2019). This research implies that it is by reducing burnout, that self-compassion relates to more positive work-related outcomes.

### **Self-Compassion, Activist Burnout, Hope, and Goal Adjustment**

While self-compassion has not been studied in relation to activist burnout, it has been shown to be connected to specific components of this experience. As previously discussed, hopelessness appears to play a central role in activist burnout. This suggests that reduced hopelessness and increased hopefulness might have a positive influence on this outcome. Self-compassion has been found in previous research to relate to higher levels of hope. In a study focused on parents of children with autism (a population known to struggle with hope for the future), Neff and Faso (2015), found that participants who were more self-compassionate, also had higher levels of hope for the future. It was suggested that self-compassionate people are more supportive of themselves, which in turn, allows them to be more optimistic (Neff & Faso, 2015).

Additionally, self-compassion may be related to hope through lower levels of rumination (Neff & Faso, 2015). Rumination, defined as becoming excessively focussed on one's suffering without taking steps to resolve that suffering, causes individuals to see their situations as being hopeless, and not worth persisting through (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Self-compassion has been found in numerous studies to be linked to lower levels of rumination. In an outpatient sample of participants with depression, self-compassion was negatively related to symptom-

focussed rumination (Krieger et al., 2013). The same relationship was reproduced in elderly adults (Imtiaz & Kamal, 2016), as well as in university students (Johnson & O'Brien, 2013; Raes, 2010). A trend towards decreased rumination following recall of a shameful experience, has also been identified in students who participated in a self-compassion intervention (Johnson & O'Brien, 2013). Potentially, this observed relationship is due to the mindfulness component of self-compassion, since mindfulness refers to having the ability to acknowledge one's emotions without attempting to either ignore them or become overly immersed in them (as occurs with rumination) (Neff et al., 2007; Neff & Faso, 2015). Being mindful may allow individuals to be aware of negative cognitions without becoming entangled with them, in a way that might lead them to lose hope (Neff, & Faso, 2015).

Alternatively, self-compassion may relate to higher levels of hope, through goal orientation. Sears and Kraus (2009) found that self-compassion meditation interventions increased participants' level of hope as assessed by the Snyder Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991). Snyder et al. (1991) conceptualize hope as being a cognitive set based on having both a sense of agency towards accomplishing goals (believing that you can achieve them) and being able to perceive ways forward to meet those goals. The explanation for why self-compassion would be related to hope (as conceptualized in terms of goal-related behavior) may lie in cognitive distortions. In Sears and Kraus's (2009) study, self-compassionate meditation was found to reduce cognitive distortions, which in turn, mediated the relationship between interventions and increased hope. This was particularly true for distortions related to irrational beliefs about what is required to be a worthwhile person (Sears & Kraus, 2009). These findings suggest that being self-compassionate allows individuals to engage in fewer distortions that impact their ability to accept themselves (Sears & Kraus, 2009). Potentially, it is this change in

self-acceptance, that allows individuals to work towards goals which are realistic for them, as well as to find constructive ways to achieve those goals – which is in line with Snyder et al.'s (1991) definition of hope (Sears & Kraus, 2009).

In a study on a sample of Chinese adults, Yang et al. (2016) found a similar relationship between self-compassion and hope as measured by the Snyder Adult Hope Scale, where participants higher in self-compassion also had higher hope scores (Snyder et al., 1991). Furthermore, they found that hope mediated the relationship between self-compassion and life satisfaction (Yang et al., 2016). Since both components of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory have been found to be significantly related to life satisfaction (Demerouti et al., 2000), this suggests that self-compassion may also influence burnout through changes in levels of hope.

Beyond research on self-compassion and scores on the Snyder Adult Hope Scale, several studies have found self-compassion to have a positive relationship to working towards goals, more generally. Neff et al. (2005), found that people who are more self-compassionate are also more persistent in their academic goals despite encountering barriers and challenges, which according to Yang et al. (2016) is reflective of hopeful thinking. Along with persistence, another important component of adaptive goal-related behaviour is having the ability to disengage from goals which are unattainable and reinvest energy in goals which can be more realistically achieved.

While the study cited above is focussed on the benefits of goal attainment (Neff et al., 2005), goals are not always achievable due to external limitations (Wrosch, 2003). For example, an activist may want to work towards a social justice-related goal such as abolishing the police force in their community, but the popularity of conservative attitudes to policing in that area might make such a goal unrealistic (at least in the short-term). When a goal is genuinely

unattainable, Wrosch et al. (2003) argue that it may be more sensible to disengage from such an aim as continually failing to achieve something that cannot be done could result in feelings of failure. Individuals can then reengage in the pursuit of alternative goals – focussing on new, and personally fulfilling aims could increase their sense of wellbeing (Wrosch, 2003). For example, the hypothetical activist described above could disengage from the unachievable goal of abolishing the police force in their area and reengage with a more attainable objective (e.g., campaigning for city funds to be divested from the police force towards other services). Goal disengagement and/or goal reengagement have been found to have a variety of benefits in a number of different samples, including with the psychological wellbeing of individuals with chronic pain conditions (Ramírez-Maestre et al., 2019) and women with breast cancer (Mens & Scheier, 2016), and with the physical health of older adults (Jobin & Wrosch, 2016)

Goal disengagement and goal reengagement have also previously been linked to increased levels of self-compassion. A study by Neely et al. (2009) found that being able to identify and reengage with new goals was significantly positively correlated with self-compassion, and that both goal reengagement and self-compassion were related to increased levels of wellbeing. Miyagawa et al. (2018), similarly found that after being asked to recall a setback in goal attainment, individuals higher in self-compassion were more likely to disengage from these unattained goals, and to reengage in other, more meaningful goals. If being self-compassionate allows people to adopt healthier behaviours towards setting and attaining goals, these same individuals may also have higher levels of hope, as defined by Snyder et al.'s (1991) theory. Beyond this, disengagement from unattainable goals may even have benefits for one of the most severe consequences of burnout: intention to quit. A study by Stritch et al. (2020) found that there was a significant positive relationship between the extent to which teachers had

unattainable performance goals, and teacher turnover. If instead of becoming deeply invested in these sorts of unmanageable goals, activists disengaged from them, and recommitted to more realistic aims, the risk of those activists leaving activist work altogether might be lessened.

Self-compassion appears to also relate to hope's antithesis – hopelessness. Hopelessness has been found to mediate the relationship between self-compassion and suicidal behaviour (Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021). This relationship may be due to the ways self-compassion and hopelessness differentially impact individuals' responses to negative circumstances. Both self-compassion and hopelessness become most salient and active when one experiences distress (Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021). However, hopelessness and self-compassion lead individuals to make significantly different attributions about the causes of their distress; internal, stable, and global with the former (Abramson et al., 2000, as cited by Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021), and external, unstable, and specific with the latter (Zhou et al., 2013). Thus, possessing self-compassion may allow individuals to hold more adaptive beliefs about the difficult circumstances they encounter, such as seeing activist efforts go unfulfilled. In turn, this may prevent the sorts of hopeless thoughts that could lead one to experience more burnout. A study by Zhou et al. (2013) further supports this explanation for the relationship between self-compassion and hopelessness, as they found that negative cognitive style (defined as making internal, stable, and global attributions about negative events) mediated the relationship between self-compassion and hopelessness depression.

Finally, if it is the feeling that one's efforts have resulted in failure that causes hopelessness in activists, as some of the previously discussed research suggests, this also points to self-compassion as a potentially beneficial factor. Self-compassion has a well-documented connection to individuals showing more adaptive responses to failure, implying a connection

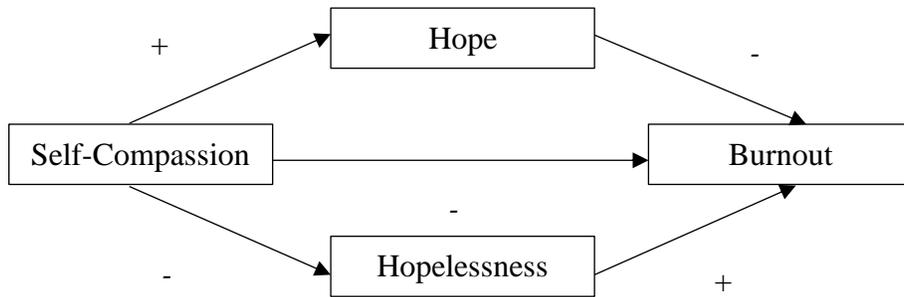
between self-compassion and decreased hopelessness in the activist community. Self-compassion has been found to be related to lower levels of shame, and higher levels of positive affect following an induced failure (Waring & Kelly, 2019). Higher levels of trait self-compassion have also been found to be positively related to seeing failure as a learning experience rather than something to avoid (Miyagawa et al., 2018). If activists lose hope when their efforts to create change appear to fail, then self-compassion may allow these individuals to not only treat themselves with more kindness when faced with these kinds of failures, but to see them as opportunities to learn and grow for later ventures in activism.

### **Overview and Implications of the Present Study**

The current study sought to examine whether self-compassion had an impact on levels of burnout in socially progressive student activists, and furthermore, whether the relationship between these two constructs could be explained by the extent to which participants were hopeful or hopeless (see Figure 1). Additionally, the research explored whether self-compassion was predictive of intention to quit activist work (one of the most negative outcomes of activist burnout). Following from this, the study investigated whether hope, hopelessness, burnout, and goal adjustment (e.g., variables discussed above as having possible relationships to self-compassion and to worker turnover) could explain why self-compassion and intention to quit would be related (see Figure 2). Finally, the current study examined whether a sequential relationship existed between the variables self-compassion, hopelessness, activist burnout, and intention to quit activist work, in that order (see Figure 3).

**Figure 1**

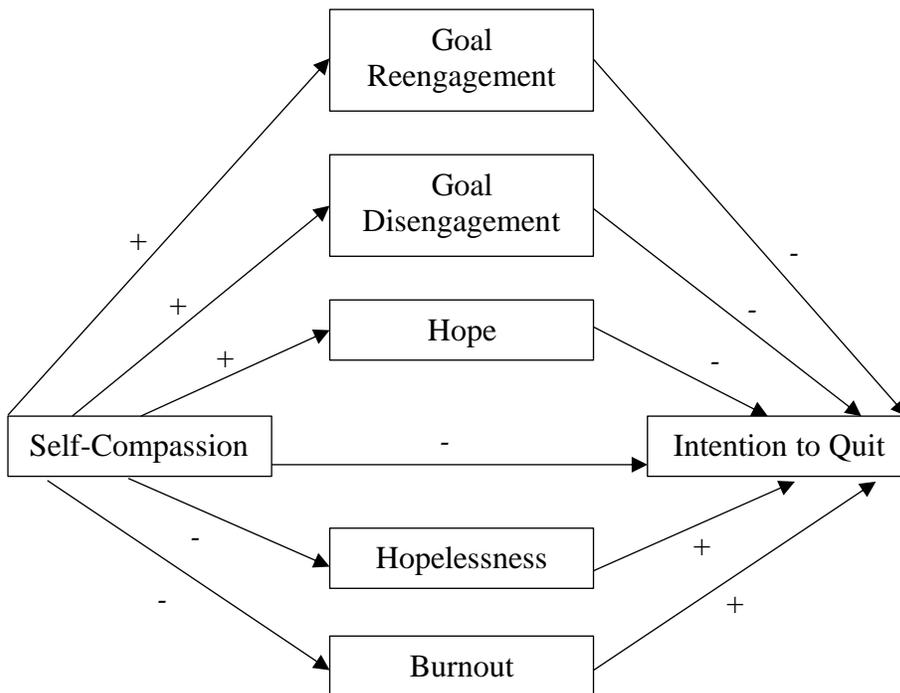
*Pathways Between Variables for Analysis 1*



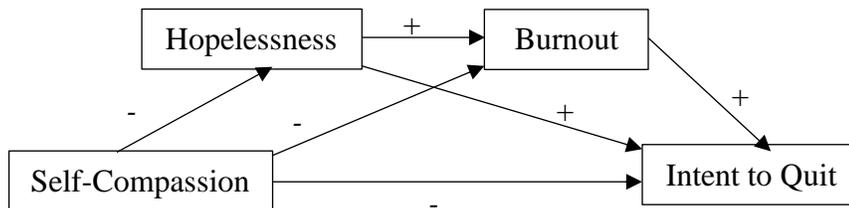
*Note.* Self-compassion has an effect on burnout both directly and indirectly through hope and hopelessness.

**Figure 2**

*Pathways Between Variables for Analysis 2*



*Note.* Self-compassion influences intention to quit, both directly and indirectly through hope, hopelessness, burnout, goal engagement and goal disengagement.

**Figure 3*****Pathways Between Variables for Analysis 3***

*Note.* Self-compassion influences intention to quit, both directly and indirectly through hopelessness and burnout, in sequential order.

Using a survey-based design, the study investigated whether self-compassion was predictive of burnout, hopelessness, hope, goal adjustment (goal disengagement and goal reengagement), and intention to quit activist work. Secondly, the study examined whether hope and hopelessness were predictive of burnout, and whether burnout, goal disengagement, goal reengagement, hope, and hopelessness were predictive of intention to quit. Measures of hope and hopelessness were both included in the scope of this study because they refer to related, but separate constructs (Huen et al., 2015). Finally, the study explored whether hope and hopelessness mediate the relationship between self-compassion and burnout; whether hope, hopelessness, burnout, goal disengagement, and goal reengagement mediate the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work; and whether hopelessness mediates the relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout, which in turn mediates the relationship between hopelessness and intention to quit activist work.

In addition, to check the specificity of our activist burnout measure, the current study included a measure of academic burnout. If academic and activist burnout were highly correlated, it could suggest that students struggled with burnout more generally (perhaps due to

causes such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic), and that higher levels of activist burn-out are not necessarily due to the strain of activist work. If the correlation between activist and academic burnout were low, it would imply that activist burnout was driven by different factors than academic burnout (such as difficulties associated with activism), rather than by underlying high levels of general burnout.

Based on previous research on burnout and self-compassion, it was hypothesized that participants higher in self-compassion should have lower levels of burnout. Additionally, lower levels of burnout were hypothesized to be related to higher levels of hope and lower levels of hopelessness, based on the prevalence of hopelessness as a component of activist burnout in several earlier studies. Based on previous research on self-compassion's relationship to higher levels of hope, lower levels of rumination, and more adaptive goal-directed behaviour, it was expected that self-compassion should be related to higher levels of hope and lower levels of hopelessness, and that hope, and hopelessness should mediate the relationship between self-compassion and burnout, in socially progressive student activists. Self-compassion was hypothesized to predict higher levels of goal disengagement and goal reengagement as well. Self-compassion, hope, goal disengagement, and goal reengagement were expected to be negatively related to intention to quit activist work, while hopelessness and burnout were hypothesized to be positively related to intention to quit activist work.

Additionally, burnout, hope, hopelessness, goal disengagement, and goal reengagement were all expected to mediate the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit. Finally, it was hypothesized that not only would hopelessness mediate the relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout, but that burnout itself would mediate the relationship between hopelessness, and intention to quit activist work, and that both variables would mediate

the self-compassion and intention to quit activist work relationship in sequential order. These hypotheses are based on previous research on the relationships between self-compassion, burnout, goal adjustment, and worker and activist turnover.

As previously discussed, burnout can lead activists stop engaging with the causes they are involved in, not only causing them significant distress, but also preventing activist movements from being able to achieve their social justice aims (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Rodgers, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). Following from this, if self-compassion were to have benefits for hope, hopelessness, burnout, goal adjustment, and intention to quit in student activists, the universities, and organizations these individuals are a part of, could potentially lend more support to students by offering self-compassion interventions and resources. By being given support and being taught an attitude that mitigates the negative psychological effects of social justice work, more activists may be able to stay involved with the causes they care about, without sacrificing their mental health. With a larger base of involved volunteers, the movements themselves may be able to become more sustainable in terms of holding onto members and more easily effecting necessary social change.

### **Hypotheses**

To summarize the above discussion, the following hypotheses were examined within the current study. Self-compassion was hypothesized to have significant negative relationships with activist burnout, hopelessness, and intention to quit activist work, and significant positive relationships with hope, goal disengagement and goal reengagement. Activist burnout was hypothesized to be negatively related to hope and positively related to hopelessness, while intention to quit activist work was hypothesized to be negatively related to hope, goal disengagement and goal reengagement, and positively related to hopelessness and activist

burnout. Hope and hopelessness were hypothesized to mediate the self-compassion and activist burnout relationship. Hope, hopelessness, activist burnout, goal disengagement, and goal reengagement were hypothesized to be mediators of the self-compassion and intention to quit activist work relationship. Lastly, hopelessness and burnout were hypothesized to mediate the self-compassion and intention to quit activist work relationship, in sequential order.

### **Positionality of the Researcher**

I, Sophie Hanson, am a middle-class, White, Canadian-born student in the clinical psychology program of a public university, who has previously conducted research looking at self-compassion. As an undergraduate university student, I was immersed in a culture of on-campus student activism, through both my own involvement (e.g., on behalf of causes related to environmental protection and increasing literacy in developing nations), and through observing the work of other students. Some of this work has included donating money, social media activism, signing petitions, contacting government officials, and participating in marches. I have also observed changes in the social discourse surrounding activism in recent years, especially as catalyst events such as the COVID-19 pandemic have highlighted inequalities within society, and lead many to push for change through activist work.

Though not currently involved in a specific activist cause, I have had the sensation of being overwhelmed by the difficulty of creating socially progressive change and witnessed others undergo this experience. Though aforementioned events have increased participation in activist work, many voice frustration and exhaustion when progress is slow to occur. Witnessing these tensions within my own community and in society at large, made me interested in not only activist-related burnout, but in what factors might protect against this negative state of being and improve the psychological health of activists in general. My previous experience examining the

psychological benefits of self-compassion in university undergraduate students made me curious as to whether this self-attitude might play a role in preventing activist burnout – as a result, I sought to create a study that could bring both of my research interests (self-compassion and student activist wellbeing) together.

Despite my history with socially progressive causes, my status as a largely privileged member of Canadian society in terms of race, class, and citizenship, does mean that I have been less impacted by many of the issues which harm members of marginalized groups. It must be acknowledged that this privilege may have created gaps in awareness on the issues that arise from this study, particularly with regards to questions on how coming from a diverse background might impact students' attitudes towards socially progressive causes. Because of this, I have conferred with committee members to check my understanding on issues that my social position may limit my knowledge of. Thus, the biases created by my privilege could be tempered, although not fully removed.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

To assess the number of participants that would be needed for the study, a power analysis was conducted using the application Monte Carlo Power Analysis for Indirect Effects (Schoemann et al., 2017), based on the results of a previous parallel mediation model where self-compassion was a predictor (Phillips, 2018). The analysis revealed that to achieve 80% power, a sample of 194 participants would be required, for small mediation effects to be detected as significant at the .05 level. However, prior to data collection it was decided that 150 participants would be the minimum amount required to conduct analyses. Participants were obtained for the study using the online recruitment tool SONA to advertise to students in introductory psychology

courses, and by contacting activist groups on the University of Manitoba campus to ask for their participation. Groups that were contacted included: The Young Communist League; University of Manitoba Indigenous Concerns on the Environment; One for the World Manitoba; Feminist Legal Forum; Student Energy University of Manitoba; University of Manitoba Working for Inclusivity in Chemical Sciences; University of Manitoba Wetlanders; Active Minds (an organization spreading mental health awareness); and the University of Manitoba Consciousness-Raising Association of Feminists. All of these organizations listed engagement in activist work on behalf of socially progressive causes within their promotional materials. Their activities include attending protests, raising awareness for socially progressive causes on the university campus, and engaging in fundraising initiatives.

The email address listed for each activist group was used to touch base with the organization's main point of contact, alert them of the study's existence, and ask whether group members would be interested in participating. This email also asked how many group members there were (to assess response rate following data collection), and whether records had been kept of former members that could be additionally contacted (to reach individuals who had already left activist work, potentially because of activist burnout). Of the groups contacted, only Active Minds and the University of Manitoba Wetlanders agreed to pass along the survey information, and only the University of Manitoba Wetlanders provided a number of individuals they had forwarded the email to (neither group provided information on former members who could be contacted). These two groups were contacted a month after the initial email to ask if they would pass along a reminder to complete the survey to their members. Only two individuals contacted through approaching activist groups, completed the survey. The other participants were gathered through a convenience sample of introductory psychology students. Only students who

participated in socially progressive activism were intended to be included in the final sample. Criteria for inclusion was determined by responses to questions on activist involvement described in the sections below.

### **Procedure and Materials**

All participants were asked to complete a survey on Qualtrics®, in the Winter of 2022. Students in introductory psychology courses, were given two course credits following completion of the survey, in compensation for their time. Students in activist groups who were not in introductory psychology courses, were given the opportunity to enter a draw to win an iPad. To complete the survey participants needed to be aged 18 or older, be current students at the University of Manitoba, be fluent in English, and have some level of involvement in socially progressive activist work – questions assessing these items were included early on in the survey, and students not meeting the requirements did not progress further in the questionnaire. The survey included items assessing demographic information, participation in activism, and levels of self-compassion, hope, hopelessness, burnout, goal adjustment and intention to quit activist work. Four attention check items were included throughout the survey.

### ***Demographics***

Demographic questions included: assigned sex at birth, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, and year of university study. To assess socioeconomic status, participants were asked to report their family's average yearly income, from a series of options ranging from \$10,000 to over \$100,000.

### ***Activist Involvement***

To assess activist involvement, participants were provided with a definition of socially progressive causes. They were then asked to select the types of socially progressive causes they

were involved with, from a provided list (with an open-ended option, if they participated in a type of socially progressive cause that was not listed). Example options included causes related to racial justice, and pro-LGBTQI+ causes, and participants were asked to select as many options as applied to them. Participants who selected the option “I have been involved in socially progressive causes in the past, but I no longer am” were directed to a different branch of the survey. Here they answered the same questions as were provided to current activists, but with phrasing of the questions changed to reflect that they were not longer involved in social justice work. Thirteen members of the total sample indicated that they were previously, rather than currently, involved in socially progressive activism, and responded to items in this corresponding survey branch.

After selecting all types of causes they were involved in, all participants were asked to select the single cause they were or had previously been most significantly involved with from the same list (once again, with an open-ended option provided), and name the specific cause/organization. The study was designed so that the cause participants entered at this stage was then included in answers to subsequent questions (e.g., “How have/did your experiences, identity and/or background influenced your involvement with Black Lives Matter/Active Minds/Green Peace/etc.?” depending on the cause they entered). Participants were then asked how long they had been involved with their most-significant cause (from less than a month, to over five years), and whether involvement had begun before or after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following this, participants were asked three questions examining the extent to which their selected activist cause was salient or important to their identity on a scale from 1 to 10; these questions were adapted for the current study from a 2012 study by Thoits. Participants

were then shown a list of activist methods, including attending marches, contacting government officials, running fundraising events, and promoting causes on social media. They were asked to indicate how often they had engaged in these activities, in the previous two years, on a scale from 1 (never) to 6 (more than 10 times). Any activity they had taken part in at least once was included in a follow up question where participants rated how important that activity was to helping them feel involved and that they were making a difference, from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (extremely important).

Following this, participants were asked the extent to which their work on behalf of their most significant cause took place online vs. in-person, on a scale from 0 to 10 (where 0 indicated all activist work took place online, and 10 indicated all activist work took place in-person). This question was used to determine whether participants varied on the other measures included in the study (such as burnout) depending on whether their activist work took place more online, or more in person.

### *Self-Compassion*

To assess self-compassion, Neff's (2003) Self-Compassion Scale was employed. This measure is comprised of 26 items making up subscales for each component of self-compassion. Items referred to activities and emotions associated with both the positive and negative trait for each main component. Participants were asked to rate their level of engagement in these activities and emotions on a five-point scale (where 1 = almost never, and 5 = almost always). After negative items were reverse-coded, items were summed together to obtain a total score, with higher scores indicating higher levels of self-compassion.

It should be noted that there has been some controversy over the factor structure of this scale. Some researchers have suggested that a two-factor model (e.g., self-compassion vs. self-

critical attitudes) has more psychometric validity than a single higher-order factor model where an overall score is computed for self-compassion, or a six-factor model based on the sub-scales discussed below (Costa et al., 2016). However, a recent study examining structure of the scale in 20 unique samples found statistical support for both the six-factor model and single higher-order factor model over a two-factor model (Neff et al., 2019). Thus, the use of a total self-compassion score employed in the current study is supported. The Self-Compassion Scale has been found to have acceptable internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alphas range from 0.68 to 0.78) (Neff, 2003; Zhang et al., 2020), and good test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.93$ ), construct validity and content validity (Neff, 2003).

**Self-kindness vs. self-judgement.** Five items on this scale measured self-kindness (ex: "I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering"), and five items measured self-judgment (ex: "I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of this attribute.

**Common humanity vs. isolation.** Four items on this scale measured common humanity (ex: "When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through"), and four items measured isolation (ex: "When I'm really struggling, I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of this attribute.

**Mindfulness vs. over-identification.** Four items on this scale measured mindfulness (ex: "When I'm feeling down, I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness") and four items measured over-identification (ex: "When something upsets me, I get carried away with my feelings"). Higher scores indicate higher levels of this attribute.

### *Hope*

To assess participants' level of hope, Snyder et al.'s (1991) Adult Hope Scale was employed. This measure consisted of 12 items; participants were asked to rate how much each item is true or false of them, on an 8-point Likert scale (where 1 = Definitely False, and 8 = Definitely True). There are four items in each of the two subscales, Agency ("I energetically pursue my goals") and Pathways ("There are lots of ways around any problem"), in addition to four filler items ("I feel tired most of the time"). Item scores from the first two subscales were summed together, with higher scores indicating higher levels of hope. The Adult Hope Scale has adequate internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0.76 to 0.95), and moderate test-retest reliability ( $r = 0.54$ ) (Amirav et al., 2018). The content validity of the scale is good, and the structural validity is fair (Amirav et al., 2018).

### *Hopelessness*

To assess hopelessness, the Hopelessness and Helplessness subscales of Lester's (2001) Helplessness, Hopelessness, and Helplessness Scale (HHH-H) was employed. Lester's (2001) scale was created in response to the more commonly used Beck Hopelessness Scale, which includes items pertaining to both helplessness and hopelessness; on Lester's (2001) scale, these items are within separate subscales. Hopelessness in social justice activists with burnout, appears to incorporate feelings of helplessness due to efforts not creating desired change (Chen & Gorski, 2015). For these reasons both the Hopelessness and Helplessness scales were included in this study to assess hopelessness. These measures consisted of 10 items each - participants were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on a 6-point Likert-type scale (where 1 = Strongly Disagree, and 6 = Strongly Agree) (Lester & Walker 2007). Positively and negatively

worded items were included in both scales - positively worded items were reverse coded before all items were summed for a total score.

**Hopelessness.** Four items on this scale were negatively worded (ex: “I don’t expect to get what I really want”) and six items were positively worded (ex: “In the future I expect to succeed at what concerns me most”). Higher scores indicated higher levels of hopelessness. This measure has been shown to have acceptable internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = .80.) (Lester & Walker, 2007), a test-retest reliability score of  $r = .52$  (Vatan & Lester, 2008), and a strong correlation with the Beck Hopelessness Scale (Pearson’s  $r$  ranges from .67 to .72) (Lester & Walker, 2007; Vatan & Lester, 2008), providing evidence for the concurrent validity of the measure. In terms of construct validity, several studies have shown the Hopelessness subscale to be significantly correlated with suicidal ideation (Gençöz et al., 2008), anxiety (Vatan et al., 2011), and depression (Lester, 1998).

**Helplessness.** Nine items on this scale were negatively worded (ex: “I can hardly ever find ways around the problems I face”), and one item was positively worded (ex: “I can do just about anything I set my mind to”). Higher scores indicated higher levels of helplessness. The helplessness subscale has been found to have acceptable internal consistency reliability (Cronbach’s alpha = 0.79) (Lester & Walker, 2007), a test-retest reliability coefficient of  $r = .73$  (Vatan et al., 2011) and a moderate correlation with the Beck Hopelessness scale ( $r = 0.48$ ), providing some evidence for the concurrent validity of this measure (Lester & Walker, 2007). It has also been found to be significantly correlated with both suicidality (Lester & Walker, 2007), and anxiety (Vatan et al., 2011), providing evidence for construct validity.

***Burnout***

To assess burnout Demerouti et al.'s (2003) Oldenburg Burnout Inventory was used. This 16-item measure included two subscales, exhaustion, and disengagement, each consisting of four negatively worded, and four positively worded statements. Participants rated their agreement with each statement, on a Likert-scale from 1 (strongly agree) to 4 (strongly disagree).

Negatively worded items were reverse-coded and summed with the positively worded items for a total score. Two versions of the Oldenburg Burnout Inventory were employed, one to examine burnout related to activism, and one to examine burnout related to academic work. For the former, items were modified so that the word "work" was changed to "activism", "activist work", or "engaging in activism", to better reflect the focus of the current study. This measure has previously been altered for use in student samples by Reis et al. (2015), without issue; in fact, Reis et al.'s (2015) adaptation of the scale was used to assess academic-related burnout in this study. Former activist participants completed a version of the activist burnout scale, where they were asked to reflect on how they had felt when they were involved in activist work.

Individual items were rephrased to be in the past tense to reflect this difference. The Oldenburg Burnout Inventory has been found to have acceptable internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's alpha over .70), and moderate test-retest reliability ( $r = .51$  for exhaustion;  $r = .34$  for disengagement) (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005), as well as good content, structural, and construct validity (Shoman et al., 2021). It has been found to be highly correlated with the frequently used Maslach Burnout Inventory, while uniquely accounting for engagement (burnout's opposite), and a greater variety of burnout experiences (Halbesleben & Demerouti, 2005).

**Disengagement.** Four items on this scale were positively worded (ex: I always find new and interesting aspects in my activism) and four items on this scale were negatively worded (ex: It happens more and more often that I talk about my activism in a negative way.) Higher scores indicate higher levels of disengagement for this measure.

**Exhaustion.** Four items on this scale were positively worded (ex: I can tolerate the pressure of my activism very well) and four items on this scale were negatively worded (ex: After engaging in activism, I usually feel worn out and weary.) Higher scores indicate higher levels of exhaustion for this measure.

### ***Goal Reengagement and Disengagement***

Wrosch et al.'s (2003) Goal Adjustment Scale was employed to assess goal reengagement and goal disengagement. This measure consisted of ten items; participants were provided with the sentence stem "If I have to stop pursuing an important goal in my life..." and ten statements referring to behaviours that respond to that situation. Participants rated their level of agreement with each statement on a five-point scale (where 1 = strongly disagree, and 5 = strongly agree). Six items on the scale referred to goal reengagement, and four referred to goal disengagement. Internal consistency reliability for this scale has been found to be adequate (Cronbach's alpha between .79 and .84 for the disengagement subscale, and between .86 and .89 for the reengagement subscale) (Wrosch et al., 2003).

**Goal Disengagement.** Two items on this scale were positively worded (ex: It's easy for me to reduce my effort towards the goal) and two were negatively worded (e.g., I stay committed to the goal for a long time; I can't let it go). After reverse coding, item scores were summed for a total, with higher scores indicating higher levels of goal disengagement.

**Goal Reengagement.** All items on this scale were positively worded (e.g., I seek other meaningful goals) and scores were summed for a total with higher scores indicating higher levels of goal reengagement.

### *Intention to Quit*

Intention to quit was assessed by Spector et al.'s (1988) single-item measure, which asked participants how seriously they had considered leaving their current job, on a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (extremely often). Higher scores on this scale indicate greater intention to quit. This question was adapted for the current study, by changing the words "current job" to "activist work" and specifying that the question should be answered based on the cause which the participant was most significantly involved with. Quitting was defined in the context of this study, as making a conscious choice to no longer participate in activist work on behalf of a socially progressive cause. The survey was designed so that participants who were previously involved in activist work were not provided this question to respond to. This was because they had already quit activist work, so it was not logical to assess intention to quit.

A follow up question was included asking what participants reasons for choosing to cease their involvement with their most significant cause would be, if they were to do so (to determine if quitting was related to burnout). Options included causes of burnout (frustration with organizational infighting, frustration with lack of social change, and sense of discrimination within activist organizations), and causes unrelated to burnout (not being interested in the socially progressive cause anymore, having a lack of time for activist work). Participants were instructed to select all options applicable to their reasons for leaving activist work. Former activists were provided this same question to respond to but were asked to answer based on why

they had left their activist work (i.e., the question was not phrased hypothetically, because they had already ended their involvement).

### *Qualitative Items*

Participants were asked two open-ended survey items to better contextualize the quantitative data from the study. For the socially progressive cause they were most significantly engaged with (or previously most significantly engaged with cause if they were no longer involved) participants were asked to describe how their levels of hope had changed since they first began working with that cause. Furthermore, participants were asked why they felt this change had occurred, and whether they felt their experiences, identity, and/or background influenced their involvement with the cause that had been most significant to them. Responses were allowed to range from 200 to 1000 characters in length.

Hope and hopelessness as they pertain to activism are significant constructs within this study, and within previous research on activists (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019; Gorski & Chen, 2015). The qualitative item on hope allowed participants to expand on how this variable pertained to their own involvement in social justice causes in a manner which the quantitative scale assessing this variable would not be able to capture. For example, participants would be able to acknowledge whether or not hope factored into how they thought about their activism, or why they might continue to be involved in their socially progressive endeavours. Considering that this study largely focusses on why participants leave activist work, it was also thought that this item might help capture why these individuals would choose to stay. Their reasoning for continued involvement is important for understanding how to help activists feel able to continue on in social justice activities. The second item was intended to expand on this purpose by examining reasons why participants might decide to become involved in activism

in the first place. Finally, both questions allow for a better understanding of how participants engage in activism.

## Results

### Data Preparation

After data was collected, the initial number of participants was reduced by removing: 10 duplicate responses; 87 participants who did not meet study requirements (e.g., were not University of Manitoba students, were not age 18 or older, were not fluent in English, and had never been involved in activist work) 41 participants who did not complete 80% of items on one or more of the scales included in final analyses (e.g., scales related to student and activist burnout, self-compassion, hope, hopelessness, goal adjustment, and intention to quit activist work); 12 participants who gave an incorrect response to at least two out of four attention check questions; and 10 participants who did not indicate that the cause they were involved in was socially progressive (see Figure 4 for exact numbers of participants included in the data set at each stage of the data cleaning process). While not used as a metric for participant removal, completion time was assessed, with the minimum completion time for responses included being eight minutes.

All duplicate responses were examined prior to removal to determine whether they were likely to have been completed by the same participant. All responses flagged as duplicates also lacked 80% item completion for at least one scale included in final analysis. While the duplicate responses were removed before responses with extensive missing data, those duplicates would have been excised at that step in the removal process, even if they had been kept in at the earlier stage. Following data cleaning, scales assessing hope, student burnout and self-compassion each had one or two missing data points. Thus, when calculating totals for these scales, mean

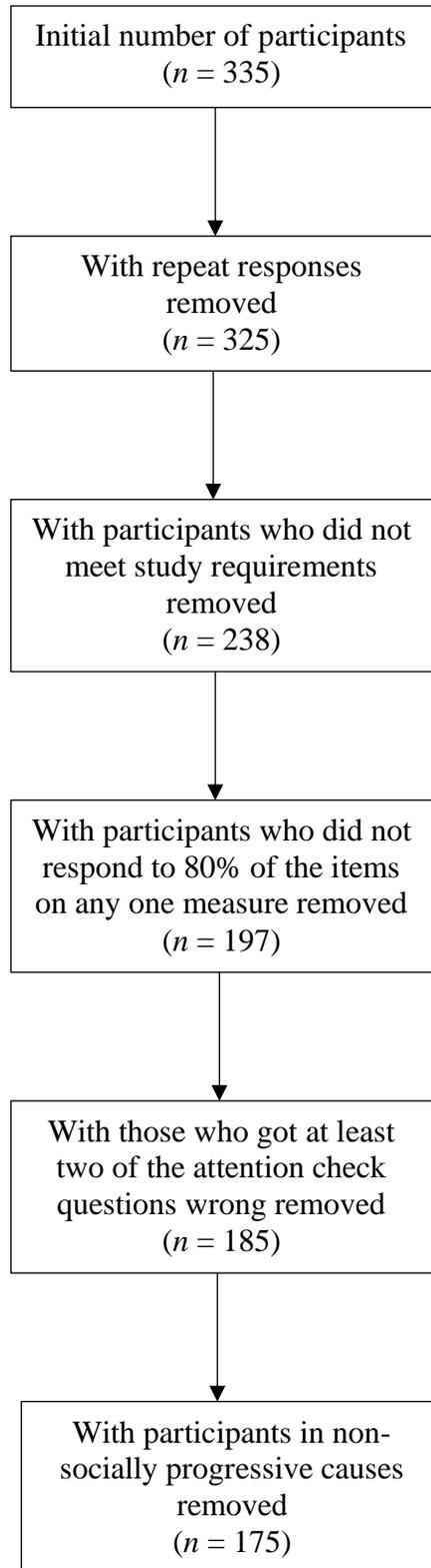
imputation was used to account for absent values. Absent values in the data set were few and number and random, meaning that mean imputation was an appropriate technique for addressing this concern (Curley et al., 2019). This method was chosen for the simplicity of its use (as few values needed substitution) and because it allowed all observations to be included in data analysis (Curley et al., 2019).

Removal of participants not involved in socially progressive activism, had its own decision-making process. Several variables were examined to determine if participants were involved in progressive causes: the items asking participants to name the cause they were involved in; the items asking participants to select all possible types of socially progressive causes they were involved in (e.g., racial justice and equality, mental health awareness and support); and the open-ended survey items analyzed through qualitative methods. Items asking participants to name their most significant cause were initially examined to determine if any causes listed were not socially progressive. At this point in data cleaning, two socially regressive causes were flagged for removal (e.g., a conservative think tank, and an anti-choice organization). Some participants listed organizations that were neither socially progressive or regressive, such as university clubs or religious organizations; other participants did not list any specific cause or organization. For all participants in this subset, responses to open-ended survey items, and selected types of progressive causes were examined. If participants had selected at least one type of progressive cause (e.g., causes related to racial justice and equality) and/or had indicated that the work they did on behalf of their cause was progressive in their responses to open-ended survey items (e.g., engaging in socially progressive activism as part of a religious organization), their data was included in final analyses.

In addition to the two participants removed because they had listed involvement in a socially regressive cause, eight other participants were left out of final analyses. Two of these individuals had noted in responses to open-ended survey items that they had never engaged in any activist work (and had mistakenly answered the question asking about involvement in socially progressive activism). Another three of these participants' responses indicated that their activism was not socially progressive (e.g., trying to increase involvement in a particular religion). Finally, three individuals were removed from the data set because it could not be discerned whether they were involved in socially progressive activism or not, based on responses to open-ended survey items (e.g., these questions were not answered), or selection of types of activist causes (e.g., they only selected the option "other", but did not specify what "other" referred to).

### **Demographics**

After data cleaning, a sample of 175 participants was included in final analyses. The majority of this sample was assigned female gender at birth (83.4%) and identified their current gender identity as female (80.0%) and their sexual orientation as heterosexual or straight (75.6%). First year university students made up 73.1% of the sample ( $n = 128$ ), with age of participants ranging from 18 to 41 years ( $M = 19.88$ ,  $SD = 3.82$ ). The majority of the sample reported their yearly family income as being above \$100,000 (28.0%); 26.2% of the sample reported an income lower than \$50,000. In terms of ethnicity, participants most commonly specified identifying as White (42.3%;  $n = 74$ ), with an additional 13.1% identifying as Filipino and 12.6% identifying as having more than one ethnicity.

**Figure 4***Flow Chart of Removal of Participants at Each Step in Data Cleaning*

### **Activist Participation**

Responses to activist participation-related survey items were analysed to determine not only which types of socially progressive causes participants were involved in, but also the length and level of commitment they had for those causes. The categories of activism that most participants reported engaging in related to racial justice and equality (73.7%) and mental health awareness and support (65.1%). This was consistent with the most endorsed options for the single cause participants were most significantly involved in (26.6% selected racial justice causes; 22.0% selected mental health awareness causes). Over half the sample (57.1%) had joined the cause they were most significantly involved with prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, and nearly a third had started working on behalf of that cause two years prior to completing the survey (32.0%). Survey respondents indicated that they generally perceived their activist work as being of moderate importance to them. This finding is based on the average rating of responses to three questions assessing the salience of activist work to participants' identity: level of participants' commitment to most significant cause ( $M = 6.23$ ,  $SD = 2.35$ ), level of importance of most significant cause to participants ( $M = 6.52$ ,  $SD = 2.41$ ), and how well being an activist with most significant cause described participants ( $M = 5.83$ ,  $SD = 2.38$ ).

Concerning the nature of specific actions taken in their activist work, Internet-based activism was common within the sample, with over a third of those included indicating that all their work on behalf of the cause they were most significantly involved in took place online (34.3%). This was mirrored by participants' responses to the types of activist work they engaged in the most (see Table 1). Of all the options listed for types of activist work, posting about causes on social media (including signing petitions) was the activity the greatest percentage of participants had engaged in at least once, in the previous two years. Nearly a third of these

individuals (30.3%) had taken part in online activism 10 or more times. Other activities the majority of participants had been involved in at least once in the two years prior to completing the survey included: attending marches, rallies, protests, and sit-ins; collecting or making donations; participating in or helping to organize/run fundraising events; and joining socially progressive causes. Social justice activities with low-levels of engagement included writing to promote social justice-related causes in newspapers and magazines and taking on positions of more responsibility in progressive causes (83.9% and 78.2% had never engaged in these activities, respectively).

Further survey items investigated how significant the different types of activist work were to participants. Table 2 lists what percentage of participants found the social justice activities they were involved in to be not at all, slightly, moderately, very, or extremely important to helping them feel involved in activist work and that they were making a difference. Each percentage is of the number of participants who took part in that activity at least once, not the total number of participants. For each listed activity, over 75% of those who took part considered that type of social justice work to be moderately to extremely important to feeling involved in activism, including online activism. Considering both the frequency with which participants engaged in online social justice activities and the importance of online activism to those involved, analyses were carried out to examine whether the extent to which participants engaged in online as opposed to in-person activist work, had a significant relationship to any other major variable in the data set. It was determined that this construct was only significantly correlated with hope, with participants who engaged in a greater proportion of in-person social justice activities being more hopeful ( $r(172) = .21, p \leq .001$ ).

**Table 1**  
***Frequency of Participation in Social Justice Activities by Percentage***

Activity	Never	Once	Twice	3 – 5 times	6 – 10 times	> 10 times
1. Posted in support of a cause on social media, including signing an online petition	10.3	8.0	9.7	22.3	18.9	30.9
2. Collected or made a donation(s)	23.4	21.1	17.1	26.9	3.4	8.0
3. Put up a poster, sign, flag, sticker, or other symbol in support of a socially progressive cause or an organization dedicated to a socially progressive cause	25.7	17.1	20.6	18.9	8.6	9.1
4. Joined a socially progressive cause	37.9	29.9	13.8	12.6	2.3	3.4
5. Participated in or helped organize/run a fundraising event	43.4	16.0	16.6	17.1	3.4	3.4
6. Attended a march, rally, protest, or sit-in	44.0	22.9	20.6	10.9	0.6	1.1
7. Maintained membership in an organization that is dedicated to a socially progressive cause	55.2	20.7	9.8	10.9	2.3	1.1
8. Participated in or helped organize/run a speaking event to raise awareness	62.9	12.0	9.1	8.6	5.1	2.3
9. Contacted a government official(s)	67.4	14.3	9.7	5.1	1.1	2.3
10. Took on a position of greater responsibility at an organization that is dedicated to a socially progressive cause	78.2	11.5	4.0	4.6	1.7	0.0
11. Written to promote a social justice-related cause in a newspaper or magazine	83.9	8.0	3.4	2.9	0.6	1.1

**Table 2*****Importance of Activities to Feeling Involved in Social Justice Work by Percentage***

Activity Number (Number of Participants)	Not at all	Slightly	Moderately	Very	Extremely
1. ( <i>n</i> = 157)	3.8	15.9	28.0	26.8	25.5
2. ( <i>n</i> = 134)	0.7	11.2	27.6	33.6	26.9
3. ( <i>n</i> = 130)	2.3	16.2	36.9	25.4	19.2
4. ( <i>n</i> = 109)	2.8	14.7	33.0	29.4	20.2
5. ( <i>n</i> = 98)	2.0	9.2	27.6	34.7	26.5
6. ( <i>n</i> = 98)	1.0	9.2	27.6	32.7	29.6
7. ( <i>n</i> = 79)	1.3	8.9	32.9	35.4	21.5
8. ( <i>n</i> = 65)	1.5	6.2	15.4	43.1	33.8
9. ( <i>n</i> = 57)	1.8	12.3	29.8	26.3	29.8
10. ( <i>n</i> = 39)	0.0	15.4	23.1	35.9	25.6
11. ( <i>n</i> = 29)	6.9	6.9	51.7	13.8	20.7

*Note.* Percentages are of participants involved in the activity, not the total sample size.

The study was not only concerned with the way in which participants were involved in social justice work, but also the reasons why participants did (*n* = 13) or might (*n* = 162) cease their involvement in activism. The most frequently endorsed option of those provided was that respondents no longer had enough time in their schedule for activist work (selected by 70.3% of participants), a cause which is not an aspect of burnout. However, over half of all participants (50.8%) selected at least one activist burnout-related motivation for why they did or might stop participating in activism (e.g., frustration with infighting or lack of change, feeling discriminated

against within a social justice organization) and 50.3% selected COVID-related burnout as an impetus. 70% of the sample reported feeling burnt-out by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic frequently or very frequently.

### **Quantitative Analyses**

After data was cleaned and all participants who did not meet study requirements were removed, responses to quantitative items were ready for statistical analysis. To determine whether the direction of relationships between variables was in line with the hypotheses, correlations were computed between all constructs included in analyses. Parallel mediation analyses were carried out to test the hypothesized mediation effects for the self-compassion and activist burnout relationship, and for the self-compassion and intention to quit activist work relationship. Reverse mediation testing was conducted to support the directionality of the proposed models, for both of these relationships. A sequential mediation analysis was carried out to test the hypothesized mediation effects in the serial mediation model proposed for the self-compassion and intention to quit activist work relationship. To further support results of this analysis, subsequent sequential mediation analyses were conducted using hope instead of hopelessness as a mediator and examining whether including hope or hopelessness as a covariate impacted the results of either model. All analyses were conducted using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS v4.1 macro.

### **Qualitative Analyses**

Following data-cleaning and removal of participants who did not meet study requirements, responses to open-ended survey items were extracted for closer examination. Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was employed to determine the most commonly occurring patterns in the qualitative dataset. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), qualitative

analysis offers flexibility in the manner in which data is analysed – it provides researchers with a variety of methods for identifying the themes of their data which was judged to be important in this situation where no specific theories or hypotheses were guiding how the qualitative portion of the study should be examined. It should be noted that themes (in this study specifically, and in research using thematic analysis more generally) do not already exist in the data to be identified later, but are stories the researcher creates about the data, based on what is present, and their own background and abilities (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Therefore, it should be noted that the circumstances of this research project (a thesis which is the sole work of the author) necessitated that this process was carried out by a single individual who was new to the use of thematic analysis.

Before this process was begun, responses to the first two questions (e.g., “For (most significant cause), how has your hope for change shifted or evolved since you first began your activist work?” and “Why do you think that is?”) were combined as these items were linked together in the original survey and an initial examination of the data showed that participants gave similar or the same answers to both prompts. Responses to all questions were initially read through in their entirety without any coding, for familiarization with the data set. Following this step, the first 50% of the responses were read through again – each response was given initial codes or keywords that best captured the meaning of the response provided. Once this step was completed, these codes were then closely examined to determine whether there was any overlap in keywords listed; commonly occurring keywords were flagged as potential themes. The remaining 50% of each data set was then read through – each response was examined to determine whether it merited inclusion within any of the initial themes. If not, it was marked with better fitting keywords. After this, all responses and themes were reviewed for a second and

third time in order to establish which themes worked best to capture the larger patterns within the response set, and what different subthemes they might contain. Each initial theme was examined for whether it should remain as is, whether it might be a subtheme of a larger theme, or whether it should be left out of thematic analysis altogether. Notes on this process were created and edited as analysis eventually produced a smaller number of themes, some with multiple subthemes included within them.

For each theme created, a definition was generated to describe which types of responses it would include and exclude. Responses were sorted through again so that two quotes for each could be identified for inclusion in the tables below. The choice of quotes was based on how well they captured different aspects of the theme in question, while also being clear and concise, and demonstrating the diversity in different types of causes (e.g., racial justice, environmental activism, LGBTQI+ advocacy) participants were involved in. Each quote came from a specific participant and no participant contributed more than one quote. An order was identified for overarching themes that best provided a narrative structure for the patterns and types of responses identified. All steps described here (e.g., familiarization with data; generation of initial themes; searching for, reviewing, and defining and naming themes; and producing the final report seen here) are based on Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2019) own method for thematic analysis.

## **Quantitative Results**

### ***Preliminary Analyses***

Before conducting the proposed analyses, I examined the descriptive statistics and intercorrelations between all major variables. Table 3 reports means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's Alphas for these constructs, and Table 4 reports correlations. Cronbach's alphas show that all multi-item constructs had acceptable or better internal consistency reliability.

**Table 3***Summary of Means, Standard Deviations and Cronbach's Alphas for All Variables (n = 175)*

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation	Cronbach's Alpha
1. Self-Compassion	74.37	17.91	.94
2. Hope	47.51	8.15	.86
3. Hopelessness	55.36	15.11	.90
4. Activist Burnout	36.10	4.97	.74
5. Student Burnout	42.67	6.99	.86
6. COVID-Related Burnout	4.93	1.04	-
7. Goal Disengagement	10.79	3.00	.77
8. Goal Reengagement	21.07	3.95	.84
9. Intention to Quit Activist Work	2.39	1.26	-

(n = 162)

*Note.* \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

As can be seen in Table 4, self-compassion had significant correlations in the expected direction with all the variables it was hypothesized to predict. Self-compassion had positive relationships with the proposed mediators hope and goal reengagement, and negative relationships with the proposed mediators hopelessness and goal disengagement. Self-compassion also had negative correlations with the proposed outcome variables of intention to quit activist work and activist burnout, as well as with the two other burnout measures included in the study (e.g., student burnout and COVID-related burnout). Student burnout and hopelessness had particularly strong correlations with self-compassion. Hope was also

significantly correlated with all other proposed mediators and outcome variables (with the exception of COVID-related burnout) and had a strong negative relationship with hopelessness.

Hopelessness was moderately positively related to the outcomes of activist and student burnout, goal disengagement, and intention to quit activist work, and had weak correlations with both COVID-related burnout (in a positive direction) and goal reengagement (in a negative direction). Activist burnout had a moderate positive correlation with student burnout but no significant correlation with COVID-related burnout; however, this variable had the strongest correlation with intention to quit activist work of any other construct included in analyses. Intention to quit activist work itself, had no significant correlations with goal disengagement and reengagement, nor student and COVID-related burnout.

**Table 4****Summary of Intercorrelations Between All Variables (n = 175)**

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. SC	-	.46**	-.65**	-.36**	-.53**	-.32**	-.19*	.25**	-.28**
2. Hope		-	-.66**	-.42**	-.43**	-.13	-.31**	.24**	-.23**
3. Hopelessness			-	.47**	.47**	.25**	.39**	-.25**	.33**
4. AB				-	.35**	.12	.30**	-.14	.49**
5. SB					-	.42**	.29**	-.08	.14
6. CB						-	.08	.06	.08
7. Dis.							-	.18*	.13
8. Re.								-	-.09
9. CLA									-

(n = 162)

*Note.* SC = Self-Compassion; AB = Activist Burnout; SB = Student Burnout; CB = COVID-Related Burnout; Dis. = Goal Disengagement; Re. = Goal Reengagement; CLA = Intention to Quit Activist Work

\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$

**Hypothesis Testing**

**First Hypothesis.** The first analysis was intended to determine if hope and hopelessness mediated the relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout. The hypothesis was assessed through parallel mediation analysis, using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS v4.1 macro within SPSS. Relevant assumptions for testing these analyses were met, though there was a single outlier in the data set. This participant was not removed as the data still met the assumption of

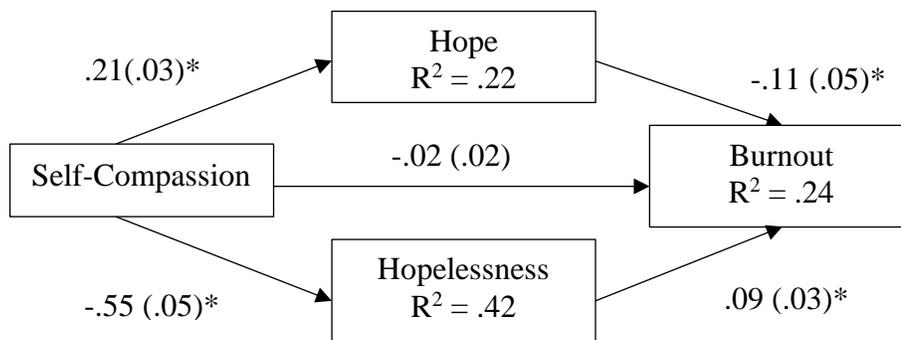
normality and the results of an analysis without the outlier had the same significant relationships, as the analysis with the outlier included. Thus, the original sample size was kept intact.

Assumptions checking found that multicollinearity was not occurring within the data set, as Tolerance and VIF were both within acceptable limits. Results for these analyses are reported in Figure 5. Given significant effects of self-compassion on the mediators and the mediators on activist burnout, non-parametric bootstrapping was used to test the model’s indirect effects for hope ( $IE = -.02$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.05, -.002)$ ) and hopelessness ( $IE = -.05$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.09, -.01)$ ) and neither confidence interval was found to contain zero. This result provides evidence that hope, and hopelessness jointly mediate the relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout, such that self-compassion is positively associated with hope and negatively associated with hopelessness, while burnout is negatively associated with hope and positively associated with hopelessness.

**Figure 5**

***Mediation Analysis Summary for Self-Compassion, Hope, Hopelessness, and Activist Burnout***

( $n = 175$ )



*Note.* Mediation model with regression slopes evaluating the role of hope and hopelessness in mediating the influence of self-compassion on burnout in socially progressive student activists.

Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in

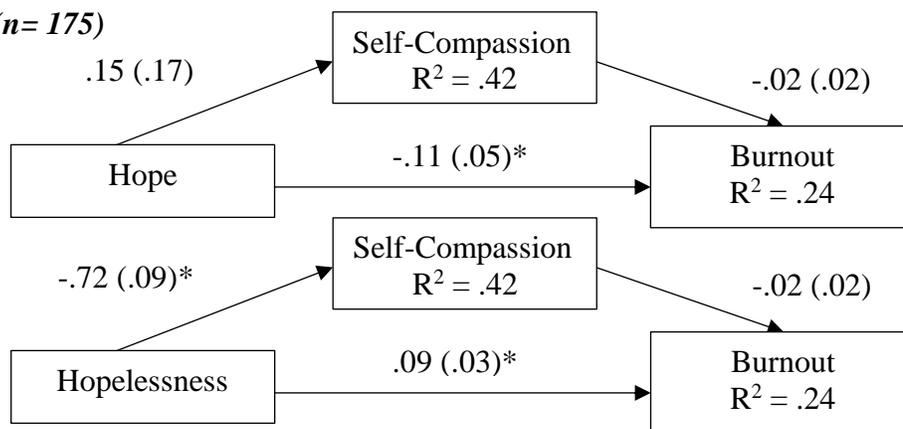
parentheses.  $*p < .05$

In light of the cross-sectional nature of the study, directionality cannot be inferred from the findings. Therefore, reverse mediation testing was conducted to provide a stronger test of the mediation hypothesis. These analyses were intended to determine if the placement of variables within the model (predictors and mediators), was supported. In both analyses self-compassion was entered as a mediator. If the original model were correct, self-compassion would not mediate the effects of hope or hopelessness on burnout. The results of these analyses are reported in Figure 6. Non-parametric bootstrapping to test the indirect effects for the model using hope ( $IE = -.003$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.02, .01)$ ), and the model using hopelessness ( $IE = .02$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.02, .06)$ ), found that both confidence intervals contained zero. These results provide evidence against reverse mediation, that support hope and hopelessness as mediators and not predictors in the proposed model.

**Figure 6**

***Reverse Mediation Analysis Summary for Self-Compassion, Hope, Hopelessness and Activist***

***Burnout (n= 175)***



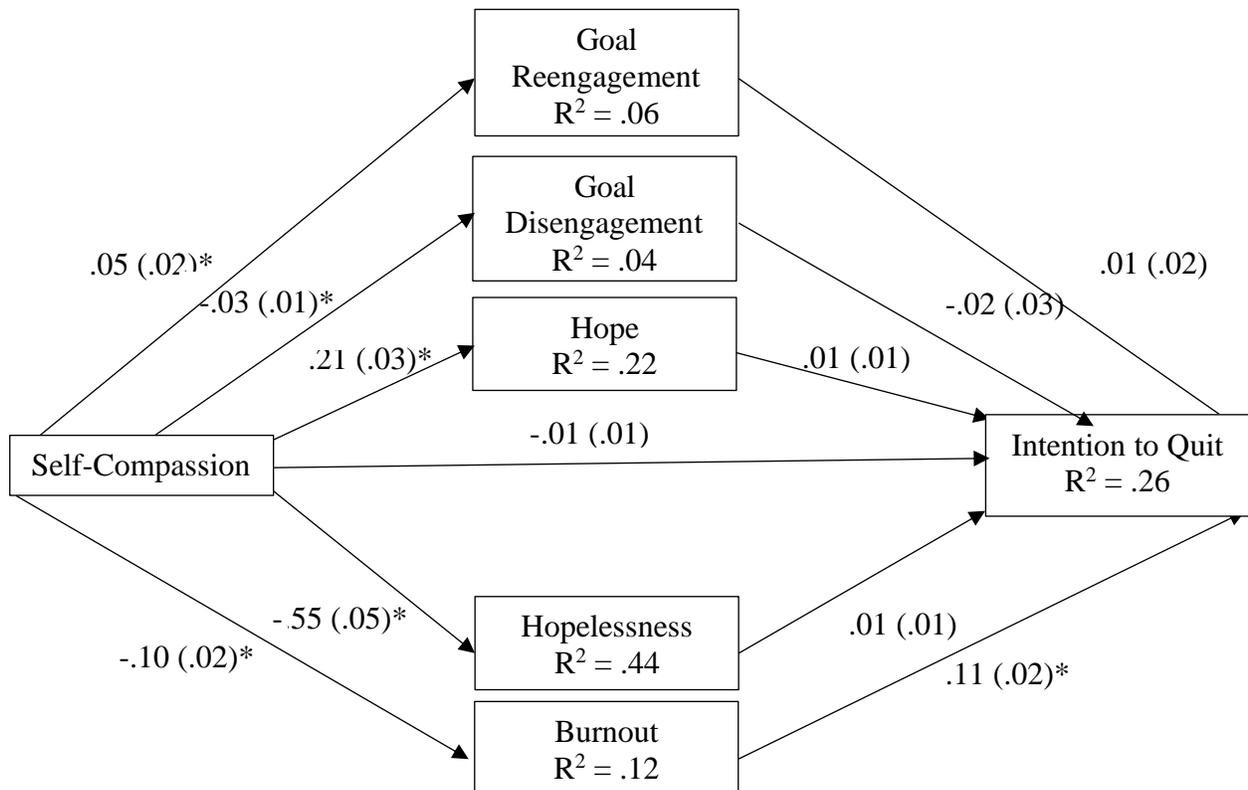
*Note.* Mediation models with regression slopes evaluating the role of self-compassion in mediating the influence of hope on burnout, and hopelessness on burnout, in socially progressive student activists. Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in parentheses. \* $p < .05$

**Second Proposed Analysis.** The second proposed analysis was conducted to examine whether hope, hopelessness, activist burnout, goal reengagement, and goal disengagement jointly mediated the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work. To assess this hypothesis, a parallel mediation analysis was carried out using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS v4.1 macro. It should be noted that this analysis used a smaller sample size ( $n = 162$ ), as former activist participants ( $n = 13$ ) were not asked what their level of intention to quit activist work would be. An analysis with prior activists included (with the highest level of intention to quit activist work being entered for each of these participants) yielded results with the same significant relationships as the current analysis. The analysis without prior activists included in the sample was employed, as it did not require assuming level of intention to quit for participants.

Most assumptions for testing these analyses were fulfilled, but outliers were present in the data set, and the assumption of normality was not met. Initially, a decision to Winsorize the outliers was made to reduce their effects on the data set, but this resulted in the assumption of independence of residuals no longer being fulfilled. Thus, a choice was made to leave the outliers within the data and proceed with analyses. Tolerance and VIF were both within acceptable limits, so it was assumed that multicollinearity was not occurring within the data set. Results for these analyses are reported in Figure 7.

**Figure 7**

*Mediation Analysis Summary for Self-Compassion, Hope, Hopelessness, Activist Burnout, Goal Disengagement, Goal Reengagement, and Intention to Quit Activist Work (n= 162)*



*Note.* Mediation model with regression slopes evaluating the role of hope, hopelessness, activist burnout, goal disengagement, and goal reengagement in mediating the influence of self-compassion on intention to quit activist work in socially progressive student activists. Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in parentheses.

$*p < .05$

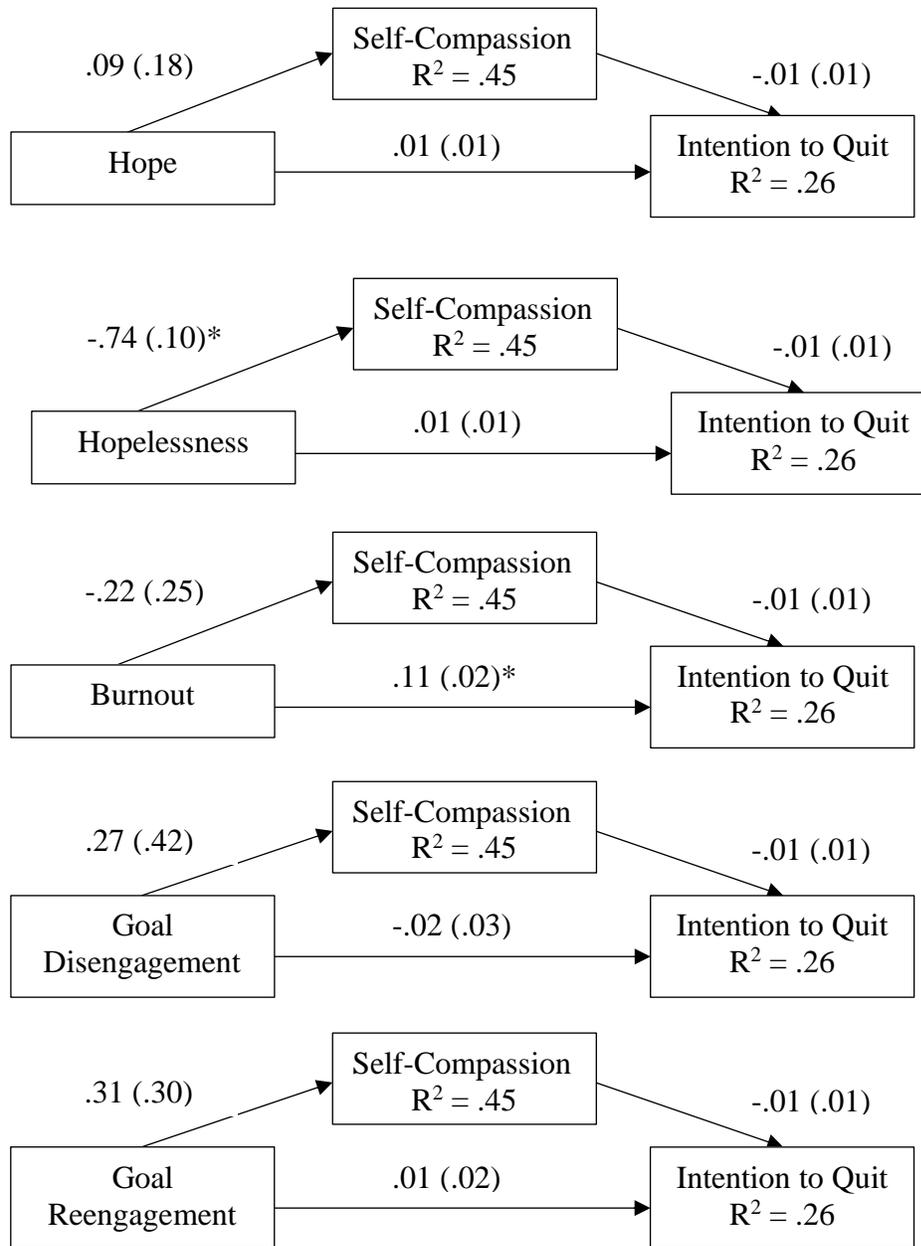
Though self-compassion significantly predicted all mediating variables, only activist burnout significantly predicted intention to quit. The model’s indirect effects, tested using non-parametric bootstrapping, showed similar results. The confidence intervals associated with the

indirect effects for hope ( $IE = .002$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.01, .01)$ ), hopelessness ( $IE = -.01$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.02, .005)$ ), goal disengagement ( $IE = .001$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.002, .003)$ ) and goal reengagement ( $IE = <.001$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.002, .004)$ ) all contained zero, whereas the confidence interval associated with the indirect effect for activist burnout did not ( $IE = -.01$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.02, -.004)$ ). This result provides evidence that among the five mediators examined, activist burnout uniquely mediates the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work.

Despite this significant result for activist burnout as a mediator within the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit, directionality could not be inferred based on this analysis alone. Thus, reverse mediation testing was conducted to determine if the placement of self-compassion and activist burnout within the model was supported. Five similar analyses were conducted with the other mediators to determine if the model was significant when they were placed as predictors and self-compassion as a mediator (and remaining variables were entered as covariates). The results of these analyses are reported in Figure 8. Non-parametric bootstrapping to test the indirect effects with self-compassion as a mediator, found that all associated confidence intervals for these effects contained zero. Given the lack of evidence for indirect effects for the hope, ( $IE = -.001$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.005, .003)$ ), hopelessness ( $IE = .004$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.005, .01)$ ), activist burnout ( $IE = .001$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.003, .01)$ ), goal reengagement ( $IE = -.002$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.01, .004)$ ), and goal disengagement ( $IE = -.002$ ; 95%  $CI = (-.01, .01)$ ) models, the analyses suggest that the directionality for the proposed model between self-compassion, activist burnout, and intention to quit activist work is supported. Models for the other mediators cannot be supported in any direction.

**Figure 8**

*Reverse Mediation Analysis Summary for Self-Compassion, Hope, Hopelessness, Activist Burnout, Goal Disengagement, Goal Reengagement, and Intention to Quit Activist Work (n= 162)*

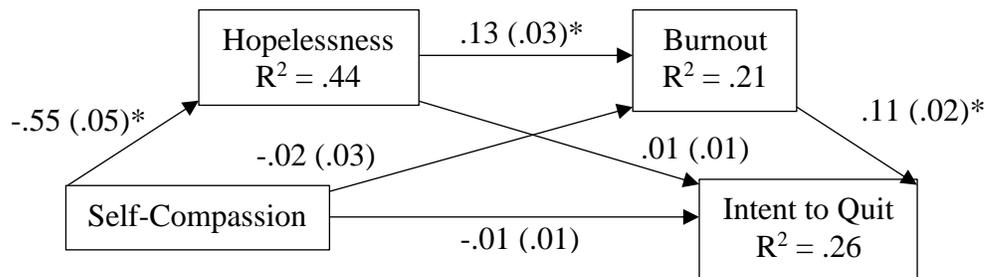


*Note.* Mediation models with regression slopes evaluating the role of self-compassion in mediating the influence of hope on intention to quit; hopelessness on intention to quit; burnout on intention to quit; goal disengagement on intention to quit; and goal reengagement on intention to quit. Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in parentheses.  $*p < .05$

**Third Proposed Analysis.** The third proposed analysis was intended to determine if hopelessness and activist burnout serially mediated the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work in sequential order. A sequential mediation analysis was carried out using Hayes' (2012) PROCESS v4.1 macro. The assumption of normality and independence of residuals were not met, though other relevant assumptions were fulfilled. Multicollinearity was determined to not be occurring as Tolerance and VIF were found to be within acceptable limits for the data set. Results for these analyses are reported in Figure 9.

**Figure 9**

***Mediation Analysis Summary for Self-Compassion, Hopelessness, Activist Burnout and Intention to Quit Activist Work (n= 162)***



*Note.* Sequential mediation model with regression slopes evaluating the role of hopelessness in mediating the influence of self-compassion on activist burnout; the role of burnout in mediating the influence of hopelessness on intention to quit; and the role of hopelessness and burnout in mediating the influence of self-compassion on intention to quit, in sequential order. Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in parentheses.

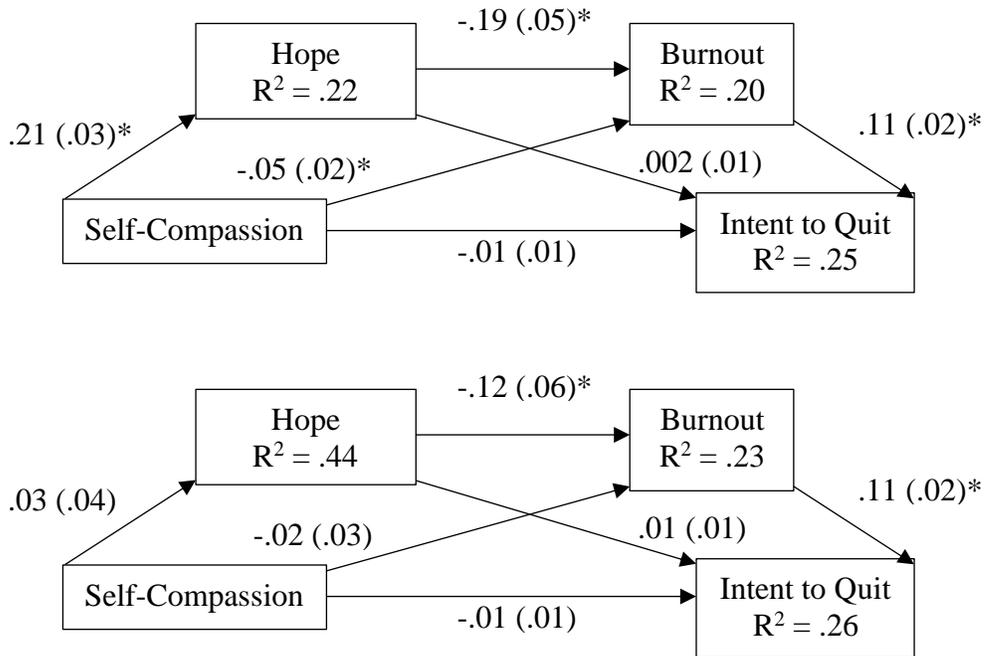
\* $p < .05$

It was found that self-compassion significantly predicted lower levels of hopelessness, which in turn significantly predicted higher levels of activist burnout, which then significantly predicted higher levels of intention to quit activist work. The analysis did not identify any other significant relationships between variables. Non-parametric bootstrapping was used to test the model's indirect effects. When hopelessness ( $IE = -.004$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.01, .01)$ ) or activist burnout ( $IE = -.003$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.01, .004)$ ) was a sole mediator, both confidence intervals were found to contain zero. When both variables were included as mediators ( $IE = -.01$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.01, -.003)$ ), the confidence was found to not contain zero. This result provides evidence that hopelessness, and activist burnout serially mediate the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work.

Given that hope and hopelessness were highly correlated, the analysis was repeated with hope included in the model in place of hopelessness, with results reported in Figure 10. Here results were similar for effects of self-compassion on hope, hope on burnout, and burnout on intention to quit. However, when testing the indirect effects of self-compassion on intention to quit activist work, confidence intervals did not contain zero when either activist burnout was the sole mediator in the model ( $IE = -.006$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.01, <-.001)$ ), or when both mediators were included ( $IE = -.005$ ;  $95\% CI = (-.01, -.002)$ ). However, once hopelessness was entered into this model as a covariate, all confidence intervals for indirect effects did contain zero. This suggests that the model using hope as a mediator was only significant because hopelessness was influencing the relationships between variables. The results of these analyses are reported in Figure 10. To determine whether hope had a similar influence on the model with hopelessness and activist burnout as mediators, a separate analysis re-examined this relationship with hope included as a covariate. The significance of direct and indirect effects in this analysis were the same as in the model without hope as a covariate. Thus, the hypothesis that hopelessness and activist burnout uniquely mediate the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit in sequential order, was supported. The results of this analysis are reported in Figure 11.

**Figure 10**

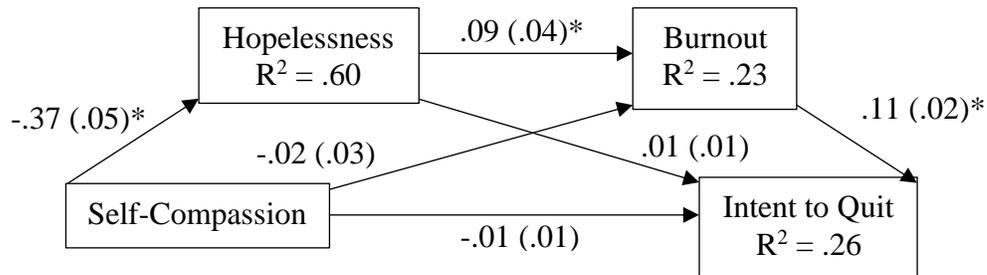
*Mediation Analyses Summary for Self-Compassion, Hope, Activist Burnout, and Intention to Quit Activist Work (n= 162)*



*Note.* Sequential mediation models with regression slopes evaluating the role of hope in mediating the influence of self-compassion on activist burnout; the role of burnout in mediating the influence of hope on intention to quit; and the role of hope and burnout in mediating the influence of self-compassion on intention to quit, in sequential order. First model depicts the relationships between variables with no covariates, second model depicts the relationship between variables with hopelessness as a covariate. Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in parentheses. \* $p < .05$  Second analysis had hopelessness included as a covariate.

**Figure 11**

***Mediation Analysis Summary for Self-Compassion, Hopelessness, Activist Burnout and Intention to Quit Activist Work with Hope As a Covariate (n= 162)***



*Note.* Sequential mediation model with regression slopes evaluating (in socially progressive student activists) the role of hopelessness in mediating the influence of self-compassion on activist burnout; the role of burnout in mediating the influence of hopelessness on intention to quit; and the role of hopelessness and burnout in mediating the influence of self-compassion on intention to quit, in sequential order. Hope included as a covariate in the model. Path loadings are unstandardized. Standard errors for each unstandardized path are in parentheses. \* $p < .05$

### **Qualitative Results**

***For (Most Significant Cause), How Has Your Hope for Change Shifted or Evolved Since You First Began Your Activist Work? Why Do You Think That Is?***

One hundred and fifty-one responses were included in thematic analysis for this prompt. Many themes were initially generated based on what participants most commonly referenced in their responses: increased awareness and education about social issues (at a personal level, a macro level, and absence of this awareness or understanding); use of social media for activist work; the importance of younger generations in producing social change; catalyst events such as the COVID-19 pandemic or George Floyd's murder spurring social change; collective efforts in

activist work; systemic barriers to change; change being slow to occur; and seeing change occur as a cause for hope.

After examining these initial themes, a pattern emerged in which almost all of these codes could be placed in two categories: subthemes motivating hope for future change, or subthemes discouraging hope for future change. Ultimately it was decided that these would themselves be two overarching main themes, with the initial themes being listed as subthemes or being left out the final thematic analysis due to overlapping too heavily with other subthemes. For example, catalyst events and social media, while frequently mentioned, are both aspects of the larger subtheme of spreading awareness of social issues. The importance of younger generations in creating social change can be viewed as a version of collective action being a cause for hope. Finally, another reading of the data and themes prompted the inclusion of another addition under subthemes motivating hope: many participants listed feeling involved in a cause (not necessarily with mention of collective action) as causing them to feel more hopeful about the possibility of progress.

In its final form the analysis presents two main themes describing how participants' hope for change shifted or evolved over the course of their relationship to the cause they were most significantly involved in. One main theme broadly covers reasons why activists' may have become less hopeful or feel that their level of hope for change is limited. In contrast, the second main theme covers reasons why participants considered themselves more hopeful for future change on their cause of interest, or why they continue to feel hopeful (sometimes despite the presence of issues which fall under the first main theme). These main themes and their underlying subthemes are listed below in Table 5. It should be noted that neither main theme nor

any subthemes are mutually exclusive. Participants' responses often included both subthemes that discouraged hope, and subthemes that motivated hope in contrast to that discouragement.

**Subthemes Discouraging or Limiting Hope for Change.** These responses noted reasons why participants may have felt less hopeful about change on behalf of the cause they cared about, or which may have mitigated the amount of hope they had. Some responses noted that they were hopeful in spite of these reasons, which fell under one of three subthemes:

*Others Lack Understanding of or Empathy for the Cause.* Some responses listed feelings of discouragement rooted in individual responses to socially progressive issues. Specifically, these participants' level of hope was mitigated by seeing others not understand or be interested in the cause most significant to them, or even seeing others be actively hostile toward the idea of socially progressive change. This lack of understanding of social justice issues and/or empathy for marginalized groups was connected to feeling less hopeful about the possibility of future progress. One participant specifically cited other people being unwilling to change because they are comfortable with certain harmful patterns (1); another described individuals being unwilling to extend empathy to people they see as being inferior to them (2).

*Systemic Barriers to Change.* Some responses noted barriers to progressive change on a much wider and more powerful scale than individuals who lack understanding and empathy. Several participants mentioned that a major barrier to change occurring, and thus to their level of hope, was systems and powerful others opposing social progress. This could take the form of governments, wider social systems, and the wealthy and powerful more generally, making activist work difficult. A response in this section cited government inaction as a reason to feel less hopeful (3), while another pointed to corrupt leadership as a reason why progressive issues might be ignored or dealt with unjustly (4).

***Issue is Ongoing or Slow to Change.*** Whether individual or systemic barriers to change were mentioned, an oft-cited reason why level of hope might be diminished or mitigated was the sense that progress was not occurring or only occurring slowly. One response noted seeing daily evidence that the cause they are most passionate about is an ongoing issue (5). A different participant noted that they believe it will take a significant length of time to resolve the issue most significant to them and that this makes them see their activist work as being less meaningful (6).

***Subthemes Motivating Hope for Change.*** In spite of the myriad reasons participants' level of hope might be diminished, many still noted reasons why they held onto hope for change on behalf of the cause most significant to them. As mentioned above, these reasons for hope would often be provided in the same response as reasons listed as being frustrating or discouraging. The reasons participants were hopeful for change fall under the following four subthemes:

***Increasing Awareness or Understanding.*** Many participants noted that they personally had become more aware of socially progressive issues, which motivated them to want to make a difference. Others described this change in the wider populace. They became more hopeful as they saw a societal shift in understanding about the importance of these issues and the need for action. For example, one participant discussed changes in societal attitudes toward mental illness as being as reason to hope for continued change on this issue (7). A separate response highlighted social media as being important to them feeling that they were contributing to growing awareness of the cause most significant to them (8) – social media was frequently suggested by participants as a tool for increasing learning and understanding about an issue.

***Feeling Personally Involved in a Cause.*** The latter response listed above highlights another subtheme in why participants felt hopeful – not only were they more aware of a socially progressive issue but they felt personally involved in the cause and that their involvement was important. Responses included in this subtheme noted that being actively involved in socially progressive work and making contributions made them feel as if change could occur (9 and 10).

***Collective Action.*** Beyond individual involvement in a cause, feeling part of a larger group fighting for progress was often listed as providing a sense of community, strength, and hope. Participants often described a feeling of solidarity with likeminded activists, and with people who may have faced similar struggles to themselves. Two sample responses noted that collective action showed them that many people care about progressive issues, and that larger groups can effect change (e.g., such as obtaining justice for victims of police brutality) (11 and 12).

***Seeing Impact of Socially Progressive Activism.*** Finally, whether individually, or in a group, actually seeing progressive change occur was important to being able to hope for further change in the future. Sometimes this change occurred on an individual level (e.g., the response noting that a personal goal for activist work was reached and generated more hope in others) (13). Sometimes this change was noticed on a larger and more historical scale, such as with the participant describing the shifts in the treatment of those living with disabilities over time – as decades have passed, more support to these individuals has been offered (14).



sometimes feel discouraged that things won't change to be honest, but still, I can't sit and do nothing.

- Issues are ongoing or slow to change - My hope for change has stayed about the same. I am confronted with the problem and the solution daily. I have met others who are passionate for change, and who work hard for it to happen, and yet through education I know that animal welfare is a huge issue where I live and online buy and sell programs are still flooded with backyard breeders looking to make a quick dollar at the detriment to the animals' health and wellbeing. 5
- My hope has evolved as I saw the world coming together to fight for justice and equality, but I felt as though my work was insignificant in comparison to the long road ahead of work needing to be done, to reverse the systematic racism rooted in North America. 6

*Subthemes Motivating Hope for Change*

- Increasing awareness or understanding - I think there is more mental health awareness. there is more advocacy and special events hosted by Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba. I really think society is changing in the way we look at mental health. 7
- My hope for change evolved by realizing that there was more hope because of the amount of people I am possibly influencing on my social media. The more views I get after posting something related to the concern, I feel more hopeful since more people are being exposed to it. 8
- Feeling personally involved in a cause - I think being an active participant for the cause and contributing has helped me feel more positive and hopeful that our cause will eventually be seen through to the end. I think also having a network of likeminded people has made me feel more positive. 9
- I feel more involved with the current issues and feel like I am making a change in the society. I think my effort makes me more hopeful that things will change for the better. There [have] definitely been times where I lost hope and thought that no amount of effort can make our world a better place again. However, when I see so many people gather on the internet and act for a 10

cause, it makes me gain more faith in humanity and makes me more hopeful for a better outcome. Sometimes, I notice that I starting to [lose] hope but this community is so uplifting and gives you a spark of hope.

Collective action	- Many others are involved in this cause, meaning people care. Seeing other people at protests who also think it's a big deal make me hopeful that we could actually make a change. After being informed I think it was a wakeup call that we need to be doing more to save the world we love for the future.	11
	- Ever since the movement, more and more people support and come out to the movement no matter the age, gender or race, it has become a worldwide movement for change and the officers who have committed wrongful crimes are being arrested for what they've done	12
Seeing impact of socially progressive activism	- I had one goal, and I had accomplished it, I had prepared and advocated for many months before the big event, which helped broadcast my story in many ways. Being an Indigenous woman, looking back we were brushed under the carpet and once I had started to speak up for my family's feelings and anger towards authorities, it sparked hope in others.	13
	- My hope for the cause has increased since I became involved. I used to think no one pays enough attention to those living with disabilities, especially intellectual disabilities, to result in noticeable changes in the community. Because I get to see change being made throughout history - from the birth of the organization in the 1960s to present day and beyond - to better the lives of those we support and these changes directly affected the community I now live in	14

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***How Have Your Experiences, Identity and/or Background Influenced Your Involvement With (Most Significant Cause)?***

One hundred and sixty-one responses were included for thematic analysis for this prompt.

Initial themes coded included motivation due to personal experience with discrimination, being

close to members of marginalized groups, and becoming educated on socially progressive issues. Upon subsequent reviews of the data, the former theme was divided into two subthemes based on whether the individual identified as a member of the community they work on behalf of. The latter two categories were recategorized as subthemes of a larger main theme of activist participation due to witnessing a need for social change (on a personal or societal scale). A second pair of main themes were added, once repeated examination of the data made clear that external and internal motivators for being involved in activism were noted in many participants' responses. Lastly, two initial themes were left out of the final analysis: recognition of personal privilege and sharing personal experiences as part of activist work. Both initial themes were determined to fit better within the existing main themes and subthemes, without need to be included separately.

The four main themes for how participants' background, experiences, and identities may have influenced their involvement in the causes they listed as being most significant to them, are as follows: having experienced a need for advocacy themselves; having witnessed a need for action on socially progressive issues; environmental motivators influencing them to get involved in socially progressive activism; and having internal values and traits driving their activist work. It should be noted that none of these categories are mutually exclusive and that individuals' may have referenced multiple themes in their responses to the question posed. See Table 6 for responses (annotated below).

**Involvement Due to Having Experienced a Need for Advocacy.** Many participants' responses included a reference to becoming involved in a socially progressive cause due to personally needing or having needed socially progressive activism to protect their rights and

wellbeing. These individual experiences motivated the causes they became involved with in one of two ways:

***Directly Impacted.*** Some activists were motivated to take part in a cause that directly advocated for the needs of a group they are or were personally a part of. Progress made on behalf of such a cause would benefit these individuals as well as other members of their group. One individual stated that being directly impacted by racism motivated her to be involved in ending racial discrimination (15). Another mentioned that their involvement in climate activism was partially driven by concern over environmental damage negatively impacting their own future as one of many who might live to see negative effects of global warming (16).

***Understanding from lived experiences.*** Other activists were involved in social justice work on behalf of a group that they did not belong to; they were not personally impacted by progress made by the cause that they were part of. However, their interest in these social justice issues was driven by their own experiences with being part of a marginalized group and understanding the need for advocacy on behalf of those with similar issues. Two individuals mentioned being involved in the Black Lives Matter movement as non-Black people of color. Both understood the need to fight against racial injustice on behalf of Black people having experienced such prejudice themselves (17, 18).

***Involvement due to having witnessed a need for action.*** Participants often mentioned in their responses that they had become involved in socially progressive causes because they had witnessed or learned of the need for activism and change on behalf of a particular issue. These responses could also be grouped into one of two subthemes:

***On Behalf of Close Other.*** Some mentioned that their involvement in socially progressive activism was because they were close to a member of a marginalized group. These

participants had witnessed friends or family members etc., be discriminated against or need to be advocated for. One participant noted involvement in the Special Olympics due to having a family member living with a disability (19) while another described wanting to become involved in LGBTQI+ activism because of having friends in the LGBTQI+ community (20).

***On Behalf of Society.*** Participants' responses often included reference to having witnessed events on a wider scale that influenced their decision to get involved in activist work. This may have included learning more about a social justice issue or seeing an event which highlighted the need for socially progressive change. One participant mentioned learning about climate change and being motivated to make a difference in a high school class (21). Another individual discussed becoming more aware of racial discrimination happening around them, and this motivating them to want to be part of ending these prejudicial practices (22). This same response noted a recognition of personal privilege as being part of their motivation to take part in activist work – this was mentioned in the responses of several participants whose answers were included under the main theme of “involvement due to having witnessed a need for action”.

***Environmental Motivators.*** Participants endorsing this theme noted that environmental reasons (e.g., school, family, friends, religious organization, etc.) drove a desire to be involved in a socially progressive cause. One participant noted their parents instilled in them the importance of equality for all as a motivation to be involved in activist work (23), while another participant described a friend who taught them about the harms of animal testing and initially got them interested in the issue (24).

***Internal Motivators.*** This theme refers to individuals who noted that their activist work was motivated by internal reasons such as their personal values and traits. A participant included in the table below noted their involvement in socially progressive change was due to their being an

empathetic person, who believes in the importance of avoiding harm to others (25). A personal belief about the value and importance of animals, was a reason listed for being involved in an animal rights cause (26).

**Table 6**

*How have your experiences, identity and/or background influenced your involvement with (most significant cause)?*

Theme	Definitions and quotes	In-text identifier
<i>Experienced Need for Advocacy</i>		
Directly Impacted	- Being a black woman, I feel the need to be more involved because I am directly affected by racial injustice. I have to do what I can to eliminate racial injustice so that generations to come don't have to deal with it.	15
	- My experiences that I got at a young age within my country [have] influenced my involvement with such organization[s] as it helps spread awareness about global issues such as climate change. In addition, my future depends on such changes to be made as without them the future for the earth does not seem very good.	16
Understanding from Lived Experience	- My experiences and identity as an Indigenous woman have influenced my involvement with [Black Lives Matter] because many of its supporters were there throughout protests my people have put on like the blocking of the railroads in Canada. As a member of a minority group, I feel a responsibility to amplify the voices of those in other marginalized groups.	17
	- I am also a [person of colour] so I find it easier to resonate with the community, but I will never experience the extent of racism they do systematically. I can't lie, I grew up in a racist community. I've seen first-hand how cruel people [can] be to other people just because of their skin tone and background. I've also experienced racism myself. I think the combination of those things, and just with my personality in general, made me want to get involved with [Black Lives	18

Matter]. I think that [people of colour] need to stand together.

*Witnessed Need  
for Action*

On Behalf of Close Other - My sister is special needs and my family always tried to find something that she was able to do that makes her happy. When they found out about Special Olympics we got involved right away and she loves it. 19

- I have a lot of close friends that are part of the LGBTQ community, so it means a lot to me. My best friend is actually part of the LGBTQ community, so I am especially passionate about my support towards the LGBTQ community. 20

On Behalf of Society - Nothing has really influenced me to be involved with climate change because I had never [known] what climate change was and how bad it is besides when I took a class in high school that opened my eyes and made me want to make a change. 21

- I started to notice racism more than before, especially microaggressions, as well as rethinking the model minority mentality, as it does more harm than good. I also started to embrace my identity as a human being, and to be grateful for my privilege, enabling me to advocate for other people's rights. 22

*Environmental Motivators* - I feel like the way I was raised definitely plays a big part in how I feel on these issues, my parents always taught me that everyone is equal and important no matter their race, religion, gender, etc. 23

- My identity and background haven't influenced my involvement at all, but my best friend is the person who showed me the harms of animal testing. Before her I didn't really know anything about it until we were shopping one day, and I was picking out makeup and she said [to] make sure it's not tested on animals. I had no idea that people tested makeup on animals and I learned the harms of it and why it's completely unnecessary. 24

*Internal Motivators* - I like to think that I am empathetic and compassionate especially towards those that are so vulnerable and innocent because I know what it's like to feel bullied or helpless. I would like to do the least amount of harm possible in my life. 25

- I have always cared about animals and I always will[.] [They] have done lots for us, now it our time to be there

for them and make a change in our life and I will  
continue to try to donate money when I can to make a  
difference. 26

### **Discussion**

The purpose of the current study was to explore the relationships between self-compassion, hope, hopelessness, burnout, goal adjustment and intention to quit among student activists. Three proposed mediational models were explored and analysed. In the first, hope and hopelessness were proposed to mediate a relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout. In the second model analysed, hope, hopelessness, activist burnout, goal disengagement, and goal reengagement were proposed to mediate a relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work. The final model proposed that hopelessness and activist burnout would mediate the relationship between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work in sequential order (e.g., self-compassion impacts hopelessness, which impacts burnout, which impacts turnover intent). These analyses were carried out to test these models, with results intended to determine if self-compassion, burnout, and turnover intent have similar relationships in activist populations as in working populations, and explore whether hope, hopelessness, and goal adjustment might provide a possible explanation for why these relationships might exist. Thematic analysis was also employed to examine major themes of responses to the qualitative portions of the study and contextualize the results of our quantitative analyses. As well, these results were intended to provide insight into why students become involved in activist work, and what themes might impact their level of hope for change on behalf of that cause.

## Hypotheses

Hypotheses will be discussed in order of the analysis conducted. Subsections for these analyses discuss: self-compassion's relationships with mediators and dependent variables; the relationships between mediators and dependent variables; and mediation effects.

### *First Proposed Analysis*

**Hope and Hopelessness Mediate Self-Compassion's Relationship with Burnout.** The results revealed that, as hypothesized, hope and hopelessness both significantly and uniquely mediated the relationship between self-compassion and burnout. Moreover, tests of reverse mediation revealed that the reverse indirect paths from hope or hopelessness through self-compassion to burnout were not significant. Taken together, these findings support the hypothesis that self-compassion exerts a mitigating influence on activist burnout through increasing hope and reducing hopelessness.

Increased self-compassion predicted significantly lower levels of hopelessness and significantly higher levels of hope. With these indirect effects included in the model, self-compassion did not have a significant direct effect on burnout. The finding that self-compassion significantly predicted both hope and hopelessness is in line with various other studies examining the connections between these constructs. Other researchers have generally supported that being more self-compassionate is linked to higher levels of hope (Neff & Faso, 2015; Sears & Kraus, 2009; Yang et al., 2016), and lower levels of hopelessness (Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021; Zhou et al., 2013). Beyond adding to the growing body of literature examining the relationships between these constructs, the current study extends this line of research by demonstrating a new population in which these connections are present - student activists.

An examination of interrelations among the constructs self-compassion, hope, and hopelessness demonstrates that these variables are strongly correlated – hopelessness in particular shares a high correlation with hope and with self-compassion. As these correlations do not meet the threshold of .7 to be considered as measuring the same underlying construct, it is worth considering that hopelessness, hope, and self-compassion should be seen as separate variables. Furthermore, it would be helpful to investigate why self-compassion should be highly correlated with hopelessness but less so with hope, when both of the latter constructs were themselves strongly related.

Considering that hopelessness could be seen as simply an absence of hope, it may appear logical that they should be so closely related, and puzzling as to why they would be positioned as distinct constructs in the current study. However, previous theories of hope and hopelessness demonstrate that the relationship between these variables is not unidimensional. Huen et al., (2015) suggest that hopelessness is a future-focussed state, specifically linked to the expectation of forthcoming aversive events (e.g., Lester's (2001) "All I can see ahead of me is unpleasantness rather than pleasantness"). However, Huen et al., (2015) consider hope (as conceptualized by the Snyder Adult Hope Scale) to be a construct related to the pursuit of goals, which considers past and present events in which goals have successfully been achieved (e.g., Snyder et al.'s (1991) "There are lot of ways around any problem").

Potentially an individual could experience both hope and hopelessness at the same time; for example, a person could feel that negative experiences are likely to occur to them, but also feel that they have the autonomy to successfully overcome these challenges. An activist campaigning for LGBTQI+ rights might anticipate that a bill preventing businesses from discriminating against members of that community, is unlikely to pass in the conservative area the activist lives

in. However, that same individual could simultaneously see ways to cope with these circumstances especially when reflecting on how these issues have been previously overcome. They could then use this reflection to move forward with the situation that they are in. In this particular situation, an activist might look into ways to they could lead a boycott of businesses known to discriminate against those who identify as LGBTQI+, even if the bill in question is not passed.

With an understanding of the differences between hope and hopelessness, it should perhaps be expected that they would have differing relationships with self-compassion. Self-compassion is specifically focussed on how we respond to ourselves in times of suffering (e.g., with kindness, mindfully, and with a sense of common humanity) (Neff, 2003) and hopelessness is a construct representing a type of mental suffering - a sense of doom related to anticipated negative events (Huen et al., 2015). Self-compassion may help someone manage feelings of hopelessness by allowing them to recognize that others likely feel similarly to them or have been in the same hopelessness situation; by helping them to be kind to themselves; and by giving them the ability to be mindfully aware of the hopeless thoughts without excessive rumination. However, it is not necessarily intended to make someone consider how past and present experiences would help them to navigate their aversive circumstances, as we see with hope. Hope as conceptualized by Snyder et al. (1991) and Huen et al. (2015) might be more connected to a self-improvement approach for managing negative emotions. High levels of hope may lead people to reflect on past actions on so that unfortunate situations can be avoided or dealt with more effectively in the present and future, rather than kind, self-loving acceptance of the negative emotions the situation engenders.

**Higher Levels of Hope and Lower Levels of Hopelessness Relate to Lower Levels of Activist Burnout.** Lower levels of activist burnout were related to higher levels of hope and lower levels of hopelessness, as previously expected. Many earlier studies of activist burnout have used a qualitative approach to connect this negative psychological state to feelings of hopelessness surrounding social justice work (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski et al., 2019) or that hopelessness was present in activist populations (Satterthwaite et al., 2018). The current study supports and extends these qualitative findings by demonstrating a quantitative relationship between the constructs of hope, hopelessness, and activist burnout, such that greater levels of hope and lower levels of hopelessness are connected to lower levels of activist burnout. As discussed in the preceding subsection, hope and hopelessness differ and this should apply to how they relate to activist burnout as well. The expectation of catastrophe which characterizes hopelessness may increase activist burnout by causing those involved in social justice to feel overwhelmed by seemingly inevitable setbacks to the causes they advocate for. As described in an earlier example, hope may decrease activist burnout by allowing those involved in social justice to see paths forward to achieving progress on behalf of the causes they are involved with.

**Implications of the Significance of the Parallel Mediation Model.** An initial analysis and reverse mediation testing both supported the proposed model that hope, and hopelessness significantly mediate the relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout. Various studies have connected self-compassion to burnout in populations including physical health care (Beaumont et al., 2015; Delaney, 2018; Durkin et al., 2016; Gozalo et al., 2019; Olson et al., 2015), and mental health care professionals (Atkinson et al., 2017; Eriksson et al., 2018). However, though self-compassion has established relationships with aspects of activist burnout, such as hope and hopelessness, it had not been studied in relation to this negative psychological

state in those advocating for social justice. The current study demonstrates that the relationship between self-compassion and burnout in student activists can be established and that this relationship is mediated by the constructs of hope and hopelessness, as expected. Furthermore, by exploring hope and hopelessness the current study offers a new explanation for why a relationship might exist between self-compassion and decreased feelings of exhaustion and alienation from one's work.

There is also a significant body of literature focussed on the relationships between burnout, and intention to quit work. However, thus far these studies have focussed specifically on working populations, such as teachers (Rajendran et al., 2019), and health care professionals (Willard-Grace et al., 2019) where participants engage in labor in exchange for payment. This research expands on the findings of earlier work by demonstrating that these same relationships are largely replicated in populations of student activists, who engage in labor not for payment but to advance causes they personally believe in. Overall, each of these significant connections between self-compassion and mental health related constructs (e.g., hope, hopelessness, and burnout) add support to the pervasive view that being self-compassionate should have a variety of psychological benefits for members of many different groups facing a diverse array of challenges and needs.

### *Second Analysis*

**Burnout Uniquely Mediates Self-Compassion's Relationship with Intent to Quit.** A test of a multiple parallel mediation model revealed that among five potential mediators, only burnout uniquely mediated the influence of self-compassion on the intent to quit. Moreover, tests of reverse mediation revealed that the opposite indirect path from burnout to self-compassion to

intent-to-quit was not significant. Taken together, these findings offer partial support for the hypothesized mediation model.

**Self-Compassion Significantly Predicts Hope, Hopelessness, Activist Burnout, Goal Adjustment.** As was expected, self-compassion significantly predicted all mediators in the expected direction, with the exception of goal disengagement. The hope, hopelessness, and activist burnout relationships are in line with both previous research (Delaney, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2018; Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021; Neff & Faso, 2015; Yang et al., 2016; Zhou et al., 2013) and with the results of the initial analysis conducted with these constructs. Goal reengagement's relationship to self-compassion is also predictable given previous research indicating that these variables are positively correlated (Miyagawa et al., 2018; Neely et al., 2009). As with hope and hopelessness, findings related to goal-related behaviour demonstrate that the previously documented effects of self-compassion are present in student activist samples. Contrary to expectations (Miyagawa et al., 2018) higher levels of self-compassion were related to lower levels of goal disengagement. Self-compassion and intention to quit activist work were not related.

**Higher Levels of Activist Burnout Relate to Higher Levels of Intention to Quit.** Only activist burnout had a significant effect on intention to quit activist work; no other mediator included in analysis had a significant relationship with this variable. This is in line with the findings of the previous research literature on these constructs. Burnout has been linked to greater rates of intention to quit or worker turnover in both paid (Rajendran et al., 2019; Scanlan & Still, 2019; Willard-Grace et al., 2019) and activist or volunteer populations (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Rodgers, 2010; Vaccaro & Mena, 2011). As well, activist burnout was the only one of the mediating variables included in this analysis that had previously been implicated in intention to

quit specifically. Therefore, previous research does not necessarily suggest that any other mediator should have had an impact on the extent to which participants want to remain in their social justice endeavours. When student activists become overwhelmed by a negative psychological state where they feel exhausted and disconnected from the work that they do, it follows that they may then want to step back from their social justice duties to avoid continual feelings of weary disillusionment. However, aspects of and precursors to activist burnout (like low self-compassion, low hope, high hopelessness, etc.) may not necessarily be enough on their own to induce an individual to wish to leave activism behind.

With the caveat that the average level of intention to quit activist work was low within this sample ( $M = 2.39$ , range = 1-7), this finding does suggest that the experience of burnout is a significant aspect of the desire to leave one's activist work. Beyond the psychologically taxing nature of these feelings of disengagement, losing activists means that movements as a whole lose the valuable manpower needed to effect change on a large scale (Chen & Gorski, 2015). Without large groups of committed individuals working to advocate for change, raising money, and attending marches, progress is made difficult. As well, retaining long-term members of these organizations is important to helping those newly involved to understand how to actually do activist work and navigate the pressures of this type of labour (Chen & Gorski, 2015). If nothing else, this finding should demonstrate the need for organizations which include student activists within their number (e.g., activist organizations and universities) to take the issue of activist burnout seriously.

**Implications of Activist Burnout as a Mediator of the Relationship Between Self-Compassion and Intention to Quit.** Activist burnout was the only variable included in this analysis that significantly mediated the relationship between self-compassion and intention to

quit activist work. This relationship was further supported by reverse mediation testing, which revealed that self-compassion did not mediate the relationship between burnout and turnover intention. One of the most significant reasons to want to mitigate activist burnout would be to minimize the numbers of individuals who leave their activist work behind. If activists experienced less burnout, and thus were more inclined to remain in social justice work rather than leave their positions, then social justice movements would have increased numbers of people working to effect change. These causes, as a result of having strength in numbers, might more easily achieve progress. This finding demonstrates that self-compassion may be a self-attitude that can limit the extent to which people wish to leave their activist work, specifically through the construct of activist burnout.

However, what this analysis does not illuminate is how self-compassion would reduce activist burnout in a way that would also positively impact intention to quit activist work. The other mediators included in the analysis did not appear to significantly impact turnover intention. This suggests that the extent to which someone is hopeful or hopeless, as well as their goal-related behaviour does not directly change how likely they are to quit their activist work or explain how this construct is influenced by self-compassion. Only through reducing activist burnout can we explain how self-compassion links to turnover. This returns us to the first model which attempted to explain how self-compassion would reduce activist burnout. That analysis revealed that self-compassion had an impact on activist burnout through the mediators of hope and hopelessness. Thus, the next step in examining the relationships between these variables would be to pursue a sequential mediation model as was done in the third analysis.

*Third Analysis.*

**Serial Mediation Model: Hopelessness, and Activist Burnout Mediate Self-Compassion's Effects on Intention to Quit.** The results revealed that as hypothesized, hopelessness and activist burnout sequentially mediated self-compassion's effects on intent-to-quit, even when hope was included in the model as a covariate. The converse was not true, however. When hope replaced hopelessness in the serial mediation model, the indirect effect through hope and burnout was only significant when hopelessness was not included as a covariate. This implies that the serial mediation model is best represented with hopelessness and burnout as the mediators. Beyond this, of the two mediators found to be significant in the first analysis, hopelessness appears to be the most strongly linked to the variables of self-compassion and activist burnout and has a stronger role in explaining how these constructs relate to each other and to intention to quit. Hopelessness is frequently implicated in activist burnout literature (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski et al., 2019) in a way that hope is not; as an aspect of exhaustion and disconnection in those involved with social justice, it follows that hopelessness might have a stronger relationship to activist burnout in the current research. Additionally, in this study hopelessness has been found to be more strongly related to self-compassion than hope. As discussed in the earlier section on the first analysis, this may be due to self-compassion's definition as a way of responding to the self in times of suffering (which fits more with effectively managing hopelessness as opposed to being hopeful).

Finally, for the third analysis, as previously expected, the only model significant for indirect effects between self-compassion and intention to quit activist work was that which included both hopelessness and activist burnout as mediators in that order. An analysis including hope instead of hopelessness found a significant indirect effect when only activist burnout was

included in the model as a mediator. However, once hopelessness was added into the model again as a covariate, no significant indirect effects were identified. Thus, of all models tested, the model where self-compassion predicted hopelessness, which in turn predicted activist burnout, which then predicted intent to quit, was the only one with statistical support.

This finding uniquely builds on previous research connecting self-compassion to hopelessness (Kelliher-Rabon et al., 2021), hopelessness to activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski & Chen, 2015; Gorski, 2019; Gorski et al., 2019) and activist burnout to intention to quit (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Rodgers, 2010) by drawing a sequential through line or pathway between all of these variables, together. Only the model including both mediators (hopelessness and burnout) was significant for indirect effects, which supports the veracity of this proposed relationship. As well, hope was not found to have a similarly significant indirect effect in this model when hopelessness was included as a covariate. Therefore, the results imply that it is the influence of hopelessness specifically that allows the relationships between self-compassion, burnout, and intention to quit to occur.

**Implications for the Significance of the Serial Mediation Model.** Beyond the parallel mediation analysis, this model provides us with the strongest suggestion for how to reduce intention to quit (and its attendant negative effects on activists and activist movements) through self-compassion. Self-compassion in and of itself may not cause people to be less likely to leave their activist work or even impact the levels of exhaustion and disengagement they feel towards their activism. However, self-compassion can reduce the extent to which individuals feel hopeless and this can be built on to have wider implications for students involved in social justice.

For example, one could consider the experience of a hypothetical student activist involved in the racial justice movement. This student might be inundated with information about continued discrimination against people of color in society, which could cause them to feel hopeless about their situation and the power of their work to effect change. Gradually they might find participating in activism on behalf of racial justice to be exhausting and become increasingly detached from their social justice efforts. Eventually, they might choose to stop taking part in socially progressive activism altogether. However, if this student was highly self-compassionate, they might be able to respond to themselves kindlier when they feel hopeless, acknowledge their negative emotions and cognitions more mindfully, and see these difficulties as issues which other activists struggle with as well. This might reduce the extent to which they feel hopeless, and by navigating this painful emotional experience more successfully, they could avoid becoming disillusioned with the work they do. Since they would not be burnt-out by their activist work, this student could continue participating in it, and create progress over time as part of a larger group.

This finding expands on previous research on the relationships between self-compassion, burnout, and turnover intention by providing a potential sequential explanation for why these correlations would occur. As with the results of the first analysis, this finding also supports continued investigation into self-compassion's benefits for activists and activist movements, specially through more experimental research aimed at determining whether self-compassion interventions specifically have a causal relationship to hopelessness, and to burnout and turnover intention moreover. These results also suggest that it may be beneficial to examine other mediators of the relationship between self-compassion and activist burnout to determine what aspects of interventions focussed on the self-attitude might prove most helpful for student activists. As well, it might be worthwhile to determine whether other constructs or interventions

provide comparable or improved shifts in hopelessness as this variable appears to have a statistically significant influence on the extent to which activists feel exhausted and disengaged with their work.

***Overall Implications of Findings of Quantitative Analyses.***

The results of all three quantitative analyses clearly demonstrate the self-compassion is a construct that is beneficial to individuals struggling with activist burnout and the consequences of this state (i.e., desire to leave activist work behind). This is significant as self-compassion is a self-attitude for which many existing interventions, resources and treatments already exist and can be used by those struggling with the psychological burden of activist work to help approach their suffering in a more accepting and non-judgmental manner. Given the important work that these individuals provide to society, it is important that these types of resources exist to support them in their efforts and allow them to fully engage with their social justice work, and perhaps help effect greater change.

Additionally, each analysis builds on the one previous to provide a more cohesive understanding of how self-compassion predicts both burnout and intention to quit. These results not only provide a new explanation for the self-compassion and burnout relationship but could potentially provide insights into how the aforementioned existing self-compassion resources might be best adapted for individuals struggling with a sense of exhaustion and disengagement from their daily activities (both activism and work-related). For example, self-compassion materials might be modified to better target hopelessness, which may in turn influence both levels of burnout and intention to quit.

## **Qualitative Analyses**

### ***Subthemes Limiting Hope for Change***

Many of the findings of the current study's qualitative analyses are in line with those of previous research on burnout in progressive activists. The question on shifts in participants' hope for change brought up many of the same causes of burnout found in other studies, as described below. One major subtheme that discouraged or limited hope for change was a sense that others lacked understanding for or empathy for progressive causes, a finding which mirrors Linder et al.'s (2019) study in which burnout was associated with student activists facing antagonism and lack of support for social justice work. Other subthemes limiting activists' hope noted progressive issues being slow to change or not changing and systemic barriers to change. This is much in line with a documented aspect of activist burnout - feeling helpless to create change and being frustrated at a lack of change was a difficulty identified in numerous other social justice communities, including animal rights (Gorski et al., 2019), social justice education (Gorski & Chen, 2015) and racial justice activists (Gorski, 2019).

### ***Subthemes Motivating Hope for Change.***

The collection of qualitative data within this study was more limited than in previous qualitative research and had a different focus: rather than longer, interview-style data collection specifically discussing activist burnout (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski & Chen, 2015), participants answered a single, two-part, open-ended question. Another difference is that the current study's focus was more open and general than previous research on negative, burnout-type issues. For these reasons, qualitative results of the current study were also able to contribute to research on hope and hopelessness in activists by capturing subthemes that encouraged members of this population to feel optimistic about the potential for social progress. These

subthemes included seeing others become aware of social issues, feeling personally involved in progressive change, witnessing or being part of collective action on behalf of a progressive cause, and seeing the impact of activist work on a global or individual scale.

It is notable that many of these subthemes could be seen as being direct opposites of previously documented reasons for burnout and loss of hope. Rather than discouraged by organizational in-fighting (Gorski & Erakat, 2019), participants found hope in groups of people working together harmoniously. Instead of being upset by slow or non-existent change (Gorski & Chen, 2015; Gorski et al., 2019) contributors to this research project noted that they took inspiration from progress that had already occurred or the difference they made in individual people's lives. In contrast to feeling hurt that they were not understood by those outside activist movements (Linder et al., 2019) participants were encouraged at shifts in societal attitudes and awareness of these progressive issues.

It is intriguing that many participants mentioned subthemes impacting their level of hope that were directly in opposition to the stressors and negative aspects of activism mentioned in earlier studies. An analysis of emotions contained in tweets regarding the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests also had interesting findings related to positivity for social justice causes (Field et al., 2022). Positivity was a frequently endorsed emotion in tweets with pro-Black Lives Matter hashtags, and higher levels of tweets with positive emotions were correlated with higher levels of in-person protest events (Field et al., 2022). Whether engaging in activism causes people to feel more hopeful or being more hopeful compels people to take part in more activist events, this research suggests the value in examining not only activist participants with burnout, but those who are thriving in their social justice work.

The subthemes listed for hope could themselves be used to find solutions for activist burnout and for the issues preventing social justice movements as a whole from being successful. For example, research could examine whether any particular attributes, self-attitudes, or beliefs predict why some activists might be more likely to focus on successful social progress as opposed to failures to create change on behalf of the causes they are passionate about. At a more structural level, activist organizations might benefit from examining which aspects of a movement or an organization causes members to see it as an inspiring social environment or one in which they feel distressed by intra-group conflict.

### ***Reasons for Involvement in Activism***

Extending from previous research on socially progressive work, the current study provides some insight into the reasons students might choose to get involved in these types of causes. While personal experience as a marginalized person was frequently mentioned as an aspect of one's background that inspired social justice efforts, it was also common to see participants note that they were not personally members of the marginalized group they were involved in activism on behalf of. Many participants acknowledged having come from a place of privilege or at least lack of knowledge with their activism. It took them seeing the impact of social issues through loved ones and/or education to motivate them to participate. It may be interesting to further explore specific reasons why individuals get involved in causes benefitting groups they do not belong to. Perhaps this might connect to the finding that internal values and environmental themes were also able to motivate socially progressive activist work. This would suggest that beyond personally experiencing or witnessing the need for social change, themes related to the self and to one's environment can push one to want to create progress.

Environmental themes in particular suggest the possibility of malleable variables that can be

manipulated to encourage a desire to act, even on behalf of groups one is not a part of. Further research into the differences in strength of these background motivators, could provide insight into what best encourages people to want to get involved in activist work.

### *Reflection on Qualitative and Quantitative Findings*

Given that findings from the qualitative and quantitative sections of this study were gathered using different methodologies, they are not easily reconciled. Nevertheless, both sections together provide a more comprehensive picture of how hope and hopelessness functioned in university student activists. In the quantitative portion of the study, hope and hopelessness were measured as general trait-like attitudes (i.e., not specifically about activism). The qualitative portion of the study demonstrates that hope and hopelessness were concerns for participants within the context of their activist efforts.

Responses from participants indicated that hope was particularly meaningful to them and their reasons for wanting to be involved with the causes they cared about. While the item did pull directly for responses about hope and its evolution over time, participants had the option to not respond or report answers suggesting that hope was not a consideration for them in their activism. Therefore, it is meaningful that these individuals largely did discuss the importance of hope as it validates why hope and hopelessness might be significant to the relationships between variables examined in this study (particularly with self-compassion and activist burnout).

The scope of the quantitative research was too narrow to fully capture the wide range of themes identified in the qualitative portion of this study. Participant responses went beyond the constructs of hope, hopelessness, and activist burnout to explore ideas on the power of community, systems of government, and how individuals learn and communicate about socially progressive concepts. However, these findings could suggest possible pathways for furthering understanding

of activist burnout and why people may or may not provide labor to progressive causes. These could then be connected to the constructs measured in the quantitative portion of this study.

For example, one aspect of self-compassion is common humanity – the sense that one’s struggles unite them with, rather than isolate them from, other people (Neff, 2003). Many identified themes in the qualitative results may connect to this idea. Individuals discussed taking part in activism due to a desire to help others one feels connected to, and/or due to it being an aspect of one’s social (e.g., family, school) environment. Hope as well seemed influenced by a sense of being part of something larger than oneself and finding strength in a community of like-minded others. Perhaps the common humanity aspects of self-compassion and other constructs related to sense of community, could be assessed as a mediator of the relationships between self-compassion, hope and hopelessness. This could further our understanding of why these constructs are linked and how self-compassion interventions might be developed to better address concerns around levels of hope and hopelessness in activists (and others struggling with burnout).

## **Limitations**

### ***Context of Study and Type of Activist Work Represented in Sample***

It should be noted that the time at which this study took place, was unique generally and in terms of societal attitudes towards activism. All data was collected during the COVID-19 pandemic in which large-scale changes to daily-life (such as mask mandates, social distancing, etc.) would have been in effect. At the specific time and place in which data was collected (January -March 2022 in Manitoba), many COVID-19 related restrictions either were still in effect or were only gradually being lifted (Petz, 2022). Students would have been attending courses virtually (Benarroch, 2022) and precautions and regulations would also have driven online-based participation for other activities, which could include activist work.

The online-based nature of the current study means that the procedure was unaltered by pandemic conditions. However, these unusual societal circumstances could have had an impact on the data collected by affecting how participants engaged in activism, how they felt about their activism, and their psychological state in general. This is supported by the response to the survey question on COVID-19 related burnout in which it was found that over 70% of the sample endorsed feeling burnout associated with the pandemic frequently or very frequently. Thus, it is apparent that participants' mental wellbeing was impacted by pandemic conditions and this should be considered when interpreting survey results. For example, the negative psychological effects of the pandemic may have meant participants experienced greater levels of burnout and hopelessness and lower levels self-compassion and hope, than they would have if data was collected at another point in time.

Social justice itself was also influenced by COVID-19 related effects on the current time period, as well as by other major events occurring after the pandemic's onset. Societal inequalities were highlighted within the pandemic, with economically and racially marginalized groups having the highest COVID-related mortality rates (Stok et al., 2021). Since the pandemic began, levels of depression (Ettman et al., 2020) and anxiety (Santabárbara et al., 2021) within the American and general populaces have tripled. Additionally, catalyst events such as the murder of George Floyd brought the topics of systemic racism and police brutality to the forefront of public discourse (Grant & Smith, 2021). Given the evidence of a mental health crisis and renewed attention to the problem of societal racism, it may not be surprising that racial justice and mental health awareness and advocacy groups were the most commonly endorsed significant causes within the current study's sample.

Pandemic conditions could also go towards explaining the significance of another finding related to the types of activism participants most commonly engaged in. A huge proportion of the sample had taken part in online activism, sometimes engaging in social justice work exclusively through these platforms. In a 2021 article by Grant and Smith, the authors theorized that because many types of social interaction were limited by pandemic-related shelter in place orders, social media may have gained increased importance as a tool to help people to connect with others and share their emotions. Because social media often increases the extent to which people identify with their in-group (such as belonging to a marginalized community), it may increase the extent to which members of a group experience and spread an emotional reaction to a news event (Grant & Smith, 2021). These online platforms can then enable these groups to gain support for their activist work (Grant & Smith, 2021).

Given their implications for how quickly awareness of social issues can spread over the internet, these findings seem in line with a common experience seen in the qualitative portion of the survey, in which participants highlighted social media as a reason to be more hopeful about the future of an activist cause. Thus, it may be perplexing that hope was the only major variable included in the survey which was correlated with online activist participation, and that specifically, higher levels of hope were actually more strongly related to engaging in more in-person activist work. This is similar to the findings of a study by Field et al. (2022) which found that positivity expressed in tweets related to the 2020 Black Lives Matter protests was correlated with increased in-person protests in the areas the where the posters lived.

Perhaps this difference may relate to another cause of hope often listed by participants in responses to qualitative prompts: communal action. Many participants found that feeling a part of a larger group of people working towards a goal was a strong component of why they felt

more hopeful about the future of their activist work. However, previous research on social media seems to suggest that despite its possible benefits for spreading awareness of social issues, the use of these platforms may relate to feeling disconnected from others or lonely. A study on social media usage in the COVID-19 pandemic found that in younger adults, more frequent social media usage was linked to higher levels of loneliness (Bonsaksen et al., 2021). Despite the fact that participants saw some aspects of social media as making them hopeful for social change, the loneliness engendered by social media usage (activist-related or otherwise) may create a sense of isolation that makes it more difficult to feel that one is in community with a larger group. This in turn, could negatively impact level of hope. Future research on the causes of hope in student activists might want to examine loneliness as a construct, particularly in relation to social media use. It might also be beneficial to reach out to activists who specifically engage in mainly in-person activism. This would allow for a wider variety of different levels of online vs. in person social justice work in the sample and allow for more comparison between these groups.

### ***Participants***

While a university student sample was appropriate for this study, students differ from the general population on variables such as education and socioeconomic status (Hanel & Vione, 2016) so generalization of the study's results to other groups should be done with caution. Self-selection bias may have also been an issue for this study since participation was voluntary; students who chose to take part may have differed from their peer group on the variables examined, such as with levels of burnout. If the full range of burnout scores was not included in this study, (perhaps since participants with higher levels may have been too burnt-out to complete the survey) non-significant results may have been obtained for relationships between the constructs that exist in reality.

An unfortunate limitation of the sample the study's data was gathered from, is that the overwhelming majority of participants were recruited from introduction to psychology courses, not from specific activist groups. This discrepancy may have occurred due to differences in how participants were recruited. Survey respondents from psychology courses received course credit for taking part in the study. These individuals needed to receive credit in order to obtain full marks in the classes they were attending (though they had the option to earn credit through both traditional academic activities and by choosing to take part in other research projects if they did not wish to participate in the current study). Participants from activist groups were compensated with entry into an iPad draw but this may not have seemed as much of a necessity as earning course credit would have been. Though there were no repercussions for declining the current study specifically, completing the survey was one of a variety of options (described above) that students needed to select from to avoid an academic consequence. As well, students may not have recognized the opportunity to win the iPad as an attractive enough reward to warrant participation. Entry into the draw would not guarantee that a reward would be provided, and though iPads represent an attractive compensation for those who do not have them, they may not be of interest to those who do own that particular device or a similar item. If the smaller number of participants who received this particular survey link were also individuals with iPad-like devices, then completing the survey to potentially win another version may not have felt worthwhile. The previous sentence alludes to the main bottleneck that prevented the current study from gathering participants from specific activist groups: few activist groups responded to the initial request for participants. Some of the groups contacted may not have been active at the time the recruitment email was sent out. It is also possible, that the main points of contact decided that the opportunity was not one their members would be interested in taking part in, and

thus they refrained from forwarding the survey links they were sent. Whatever the reasons were that groups did not respond to email contact, the fewer student activists actually received the survey link, the fewer opportunities there would be for members of this population to join the study. Thus, the main failure to collect these participants was not that completing the survey seemed unappealing to them (e.g., they turned the opportunity down), but that they did not get to decide to take part in the first place.

The fact that few individuals recruited from specific activist groups took part in the study, means that to a certain extent, the intended population of student activists was not reached. Despite this issue participants' responses to questions on their activist involvement suggest that the Introduction to Psychology-recruited respondents were meaningfully engaged in social justice work. Questions on psychological connection to social justice revealed that participants found activism to be of moderate importance to them, and questions on participation in activist work were able to demonstrate that all participants included in analyses had a progressive cause they were or had previously been involved in. Based on these responses it can be inferred that the sample did capture the type of participants appropriate for the study's planned hypotheses and analyses: socially progressive student activists.

Another issue within the study is the small number of participants who had left activist work prior to taking part in the study. It was hoped that having more prior activist involvement would allow for the study to include participants who struggled with activist burnout. However, over 50% of participants did list an activist-burnout related reason why they might wish to leave activist work, and the construct was approximately normally distributed within the sample. These details suggest that the sample was able to capture activist participants struggling with burnout to an adequate degree to conduct analyses.

It is also possible that some aspects of the sample used in this study had an influence on the hopeful subthemes frequently mentioned by those who responded to the survey's qualitative items. Participants in the current study were typically young, and their activism was often solely online based. Due to their age and presumably more recent involvement in activism, it is possible that these individuals would have had less opportunity to experience disappointment in social justice work than some of the longer-term activists included in prior research. As well, online activism may represent less of a physical or cognitive burden on activists than other types of social justice work such as getting in touch with policy makers or attending protests. Chen and Gorski (2015) identified that socially progressive activists' hopelessness stemmed from feeling that extensive effort in activist work had failed. If less effortful social justice participation was employed by the individuals included in this sample, lack of progress may have felt less devastating to them and to the level of meaning they found in their activism.

Participants also frequently listed social media's ability to spread awareness of activist issues as a cause for hope, possibly explaining the more hopeful nature of the responses provided. Social media can be part of positive social change: a case study of a social media campaign against domestic violence describes how the popularity of this movement was able to shift dominant "victim-blaming" narratives about this type of abuse in the media, and promote resources for survivors (Clark-Parsons, 2016). Similar findings arose from a case study of the Me Too movement - individuals speaking to their personal experiences with sexual harassment and assault through social media became a larger force together, that was able to inspire action at an individual level and expose the wider issue of sexual violence in society (Clark-Parsons, 2021).

However, this research would stand in contrast to the finding discussed earlier in which hope and participation in online activism were correlated, but higher levels of hope were linked to greater levels of in-person involvement. In fact, the same previously cited Clark-Parsons' (2021) article describes how in addition to the aforementioned benefits of the social media-based Me Too movement, this type of activism also could make participants open to online attacks. Additionally, some activists were critical of social media attention being given to the experiences of more privileged participants (e.g., white, cisgender, etc.) over narratives where sexual violence intersected with other types of discrimination such as racism and transphobia (Lockhart, 2017 as cited by Clark-Parsons, 2021). These fears and frustrations around social media activism, as well as the aforementioned possibility of social media usage being related to greater feelings of loneliness, (Bonsaksen et al., 2021), might make social media activism feel more taxing than hope-inducing. Future research on the specific types of social media activism participants engaged in, and thoughts and feelings on the benefits and drawbacks of involvement in online as opposed to in-person activism, might be an interesting direction for future qualitative research in this area. These studies could provide more clarity into how online activism might differ in terms of the level of hopefulness and hopelessness of participants.

Some survey responses noted that the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst in increasing awareness of social issues. The Black Lives Matters protests which arose in response to George Floyd's murder (several months into the onset of the pandemic) may offer one explanation for why participants felt this way. In the wake of these events, the New York Times reported that, based on both polls and insights from researchers of social movements, the protests comprised the largest movement in United States history (Buchanan et al., 2020). Polls reported in the Washington Post suggest that facing financial consequences due to the pandemic was

linked to increased likelihood of having taken part in a Black Lives Matter protest, providing evidence for COVID-19 having had an impact on activism (Arora, 2020). Furthermore, research has suggested that Black Lives Matter protests did increase awareness of racial justice issues in the general public (Dunivin, 2022).

Possibly, these events and their impact positively influenced the extent to which participants felt hopeful about future change, particularly with regards to racial justice (one of the most frequently endorsed causes in our sample) as suggested by the following study. Field et al. (2022) analyzed the emotional content of tweets with pro-Black Lives Matter hashtags during the 2020 protests and found that over time positivity was the most frequently expressed emotion in these social media posts. The articles cited above represent early research on the phenomenon of COVID-19, protests related to George Floyd's murder, and social progress. As more research is done on social behaviour during and following the pandemic, researchers may be able to better understand whether living during this difficult time in human history had a paradoxical effect on how individuals had perceived progressive change as taking place.

### ***Study Design***

It was only feasible to use one measure to assess most of the separate variables included in the study. The single exception may be the hope and hopelessness scales as it could be argued that by assessing these two closely related constructs from different angles, the study provided comprehensive coverage of participants cognitions about the likelihood of positive or negative future events occurring. This could have led to mono-method bias if the measures included only captured part of the constructs they were intended to evaluate. For example, if the measure used for burnout failed to capture all aspects of the construct, significant relationships found between burnout and variables such as hopelessness may have been identified, that are not present in

actuality. However, none of the possible responses to items on the included scales would reflect positively or negatively on the respondent themselves (e.g., how hopeful, hopeless, self-compassionate, or burnt-out one is, says little about how socially desirable they are). Therefore, participants should have been unlikely to respond dishonestly on the constructs measured in this study (low levels of potential response bias) and more objective measures were not as necessary. Because of these factors, mono-method bias was less problematic for the results of this research.

Spector et al.'s (1988) intention to quit measure may have had some potential issues with psychometric properties. This measure consists of only one question, which often suggests low reliability. However, Wanous et al., (1997) found that single-item measures were as acceptable as measures with multiple items for assessing job satisfaction (a related construct to intention to quit) (Wanous et al., 1997). For narrow constructs like job satisfaction and intention to quit, single-item measures can be employed without issue, so the intention to quit measure used here was not expected to be problematic in terms of reliability (Sackett & Larson, 1990, as cited by Wanous et al. 1997). In addition, intention to quit is not necessarily a strong predictor of individuals actually quitting their jobs (Allen et al., 2005, as cited by Williams et al., 2020). However, the current study is not longitudinal, which prevented us from being able to assess how many participants actually went through with ending their activist involvements. For this reason, using an intention to quit measure was the best method available to try and assess how burnout and other factors might have impacted activists' feelings towards leaving their social justice work.

Additionally, it may have been useful to include a quantitative item in the survey specifically asking participants whether they perceived their activism as worthwhile. For example, a question posed as a dichotomous yes-or-no decision, or with ordinal scale responses

varying the level of worthiness of social justice work (e.g., not worthwhile, somewhat not-worthwhile, somewhat worthwhile, worthwhile), would have provided a bottom-line assessment of whether participants found their activist work to overall be a positive experience for them. While this survey has many items that allow for a nuanced perspective on how respondents feel about social justice activities (e.g., how meaningful they find it, how important it is to their identities, likelihood of leaving), having a clear example of their overall attitudes could have been useful as an outcome variable in its own right. Activist burnout, self-compassion, etc., could have been examined as predictors of this construct, and including this type of item may elucidated some of the current questions surrounding participant attitudes to activism discussed above (especially in relation to social media activism).

Survey-based designs are correlational, meaning there are limits to what conclusions can be drawn from these results; directionality between any relationships identified cannot be inferred, and external factors affecting the relationships between the constructs in the study, cannot be ruled out. However, reverse mediation testing was conducted and largely lent support to the proposed models. As well, self-compassion scores in individuals who completed a self-compassion intervention have previously been found not to significantly differ over the course of a year (Neff & Germer, 2013). Alternatively, though there is some stability in burnout over time, the condition also appears to be situationally influenced (Schaufeli et al., 2011). In general, we would expect a more stable trait (like self-compassion) to influence a less stable trait (like burnout), rather than the other way around. In support of this, as discussed earlier, self-compassion intervention research has demonstrated that these programs do lead to changes in burnout scores, implying that self-compassion is the variable which has an effect in this scenario (Delaney, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2018). However, causation still cannot be assumed based on the

results of this research. For example, a variable not measured in the study, such as depression may have led to significant relationships being found, which do not exist in actuality.

### **Conclusions and Implications for Future Research**

As discussed, in the previous section, causality can never be inferred from correlational research, such as the current study. Therefore, it would be particularly important for research building on the findings of this study to attempt to replicate the influence of self-compassion on other study variables using an experimental design. Self-compassion interventions have been successfully employed in numerous other studies related to hope (Sears & Kraus, 2009) and burnout (Delaney, 2018; Eriksson et al., 2018). Studies which encompass these elements by randomly assigning participants to control or intervention groups may be able to provide better evidence supporting self-compassion as a construct with positive impacts on levels of hope and hopelessness, and on activist burnout through these mediating variables. This type of research would also be able to demonstrate the efficacy of these types of interventions for student activists more strongly to the social justice organizations and universities that might wish to implement these resources for their members. If these findings were replicated in intervention-based studies, it may be advisable to examine whether existing self-compassion resources for individuals struggling with burnout should be specifically tailored towards increasing hope and decreasing hopelessness. Investing in these types of interventions would not only benefit the mental health of activists, but entire social justice movements which are negatively impacted by the effects of activist burnout.

As well, longitudinal designs could provide interesting evidence on the efficacy of self-compassion, hope, hopelessness, and activist burnout as predictors. Such studies could demonstrate how long it might take for student activists to start seeing benefits from self-

compassion interventions, and how long these benefits might last after these sessions conclude. Moreover, the issue of accurately assessing activist turnover could be alleviated in longitudinal designs tracking the degree of involvement participants have in their social justice work over time, and how many participants choose to leave their social justice work altogether. Better assessment of this construct would be helpful in increasing the validity of the study's conclusions regarding burnout and its impact on activists and activist movements.

Future research could also attempt to remedy the issues that were encountered in the current study with regards to recruitment from activist groups. As discussed above, a careful reading of results suggests that the quality of survey responses did not appear to have suffered due to the lack of participation from on-campus activist groups which were contacted, or prior activist involvement. However, participation from these groups would be valuable in future research endeavours as it would support the validity of the study's results for the population it intended to capture. One way to do this might be to reach out to groups outside of the University of Manitoba campus, so that research would be aimed at socially progressive activists and not necessarily student activists. Established social justice organizations local to Winnipeg, or which have chapters in Winnipeg (e.g., the Institute for International Women's Rights Manitoba; Working in Support of Equality Manitoba Inc.), might be more stable in terms of activist membership and the amount of experience members possess.

With the permission of the Research Ethics Board, it might be helpful to contact these groups in a more involved manner than I did with the groups approached in the current study. This might include longer email correspondences with organizers, and with permission of the groups themselves, attending meetings to discuss my research on these issues both past and present. These conversations could include a discussion of why I am conducting research and

how my research might be of use to members of these groups, as well as an opportunity for me to address any concerns activists might have about participating in my research. By doing this, I might be able to build more trust with these activists so that they feel comfortable taking part in future studies.

This greater level of contact could also facilitate knowledge translation within this group. With a closer relationship between myself and the activists I am hoping to study, it would be easier to send prepared materials explaining the results of my work and their implications for social justice workers. I might also have the opportunity to attend meetings to discuss these findings in more detail and answer any questions that might arise. I could also provide resources that members of these groups would find helpful for addressing activist burnout, particularly with regards to self-compassion. While individual activists may want to seek group-based self-compassion interventions, or make self-compassion a target of individual therapy, there are many informal ways to access information and activities designed to help increase self-compassion. Dr. Kristin Neff's website, for example, provides access to a variety of meditations, exercises, and workbooks aimed at helping those who struggle to approach their suffering with kindness and acceptance (<https://self-compassion.org/>). Helping individual activists identify why self-compassion could be useful to them, and how to get started learning about and practicing this self-attitude could be particularly useful for individuals struggling with pain and sorrow related to lack of progress on the issues they care about.

The results of the current study suggest that the use of self-compassion interventions and resources might help these activists to avoid becoming hopeless, and ultimately burnt-out regarding their social justice endeavours. This research also implies that by avoiding burnout, socially progressive activists should be less inclined to leave their activist positions. Not only

should these individual members of causes obtain greater psychological well-being, but the organizations as a whole may be able to achieve more success at actually creating change, due to a larger base of engaged, passionate participants helping to make this progress a reality.

Finally, organizing a participant pool which compliments that of the student pool but also includes activists who are not university students might increase the diversity of the sample being studied. Individuals from low socioeconomic status backgrounds are less likely to attend university (Frenette, 2007), and both socioeconomic status and university attendance can also be intertwined with membership in a marginalized racial group (Houle, 2020). Thus, the current study drew a sample from a population already less diverse than the general population. Considering that having experienced discrimination was a major motivating factor in individuals wanting to advocate on behalf of socially progressive causes, it stands to reason that future research should make more of an effort to include marginalized voices. This might allow more quality in the qualitative responses obtained and allow study results to be more generalizable to a wider variety of activists.

In addition to these ideas for future research on activist burnout, researchers examining burnout in doctors, nurses and psychologists might want to investigate whether the relationship between self-compassion and burnout in these populations can be partially explained by the presence of hope and hopelessness as mediators. As was previously suggested with regards to student activists, if hope and hopelessness can be replicated as significant mediators in intervention-based studies in these samples, this could also contribute to a greater understanding of how burnout functions in these populations. This could in turn help researchers learn how interventions can best be tailored to help these professionals thrive at work, even under stressful conditions.

Though questions remain on the causality of the relationships between self-compassion, hope, hopelessness, activist burnout, and intention to quit activist work, this research has been able to determine that these relationships do exist in socially progressive student activists. Given the degree of challenges facing activists today, it is encouraging to find a potential resource for the mental burden this type of work can have on those involved. This is especially true with self-compassion as efficacious interventions exist for increasing levels of this self-attitude. The results of these studies suggest that by meeting the pain of continued struggle for progress with an attitude that is mindful and gentle to ourselves, we can avoid sinking into hopelessness, and have the hope to continue contributing to changes that create a progressive, more democratic society for all people.

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## Appendix A

### Demographic Questions

1. To create your unique questionnaire identifier, please enter the last 4 digits of your student ID, followed by the first letter of your first name, in the box below.
2. Are you currently a student at the University of Manitoba?
  0. Yes
  1. No (SELECTING THIS OPTION WILL DIRECT PARTICIPANT TO EMAIL ENTRY LINKS/FEEDBACK PAGE/END OF STUDY)
3. Are you 18 years of age or older?
  0. Yes
  1. No (SELECTING THIS OPTION WILL DIRECT PARTICIPANT TO EMAIL ENTRY LINKS/FEEDBACK PAGE/END OF STUDY)
4. Are you fluent in English?
  0. Yes
  1. No (SELECTING THIS OPTION WILL DIRECT PARTICIPANT TO EMAIL ENTRY LINKS/FEEDBACK PAGE/END OF STUDY)
5. What sex were you assigned at birth?
  0. Male
  1. Female
6. What best describes your current gender identity?
  0. Male
  1. Female
  2. Something else (ex: gender fluid, non-binary)

3. Indigenous or other cultural gender minority identity (ex: two-spirit)

7. What is your sexual orientation?

0. Asexual

1. Bisexual

2. Gay

3. Heterosexual or straight

4. Lesbian

5. Pansexual

6. Queer

7. None of the above

8. Prefer not to say

8. What is your ethnicity? Check as many as are applicable. The examples in brackets given for some options are not complete – other groups are possible within categories.

0. Arab

1. Black

2. Chinese

3. Filipino

4. Indigenous (First Nations, Métis, Inuit)

5. Japanese

6. Korean

7. Latin American

8. South Asian (East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, etc.)

8. Southeast Asian (Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian, Thai, etc.)

9. West Asian (Iranian, Afghan, etc.)

10. White

11. Other

9. What is your age in years? Leave the slider at zero if you would prefer not to answer.

Move the slider until you reach your age in years. (Scale from 0 to 100)

10. Please report your yearly family income.

0. \$10,000 - \$20,000

1. \$20,000 - \$30,000

2. \$30,000 - \$40,000

3. \$40,000 - \$50,000

4. \$50,000 - \$60,000

5. \$60,000 - \$70,000

6. \$70,000 - \$80,000

7. \$80,000 - \$90,000

8. \$90,000 - \$100,000

9. Above \$100,000

11. In what year of university are you?

0. First year

1. Second year

2. Third year

3. Fourth year

4. Fifth year or beyond

## Appendix B

### Social Justice Activism Participation

Please read the following definitions as they will be used in the next part of the questionnaire.

**Socially Progressive Causes:** Socially progressive causes are aimed at advancing and/or protecting the rights of those who are marginalized or less powerful in society. This includes humans who are part of marginalized groups (such as causes targeted at fighting racism, sexism, homophobia, etc.), as well as advocacy on behalf of animals and nature more generally (such as causes targeting animal abuse, and environmental destruction).

**Socially Progressive Organizations:** These are organizations that work to advance a socially progressive cause.

1. Which types of socially progressive causes are you involved with? Please check all that apply, from the list below. Note that examples of being "involved with" a cause could include having donated money, signed a petition, or attended a rally. You may consider yourself involved in a cause even if you have not been active in it lately (ex: because of pandemic restrictions).
  0. Causes that advocate for racial justice and equality
    1. Feminist/Pro-woman causes
    2. Causes that advocate for environmental preservation
    3. Causes that advocate for animal rights
    4. Pro-LGBTQI+ causes
    5. Causes that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities

6. Causes that advocate for economic justice/ redistribution of wealth
  7. Causes that advocate for mental health awareness and support
  8. Causes that advocate against human rights abuses
  9. Anti-war causes
  10. I have not ever been involved with a socially progressive cause (SELECTING THIS OPTION WILL DIRECT PARTICIPANT TO EMAIL ENTRY LINKS/FEEDBACK PAGE/END OF STUDY)
  11. I have been involved in socially progressive causes in the past, but I no longer am
  12. Other
2. (DISPLAYED IF OTHER SELECTED) If you selected "Other", please specify the cause/causes you are involved in below:
- Note: All the following questions will be shown to participants who are currently involved in activist work, unless specified for former activists. Former activists will only see the questions that are specified for them.*
3. Please select the category that best fits the cause which you are most significantly involved in. You will only be able to select one option. Whatever activity you select is what you should base your answers to the following questions on. (ONLY OPTIONS SELCTED IN QUESTION 1 WILL BE DISPLAYED)
4. Please name the cause or organization behind the cause, you are involved in that belongs to the category you selected.
5. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) If you were previously involved in activism, but are not anymore, please select the category that best fits the cause which you were previously

most significantly involved in. You will only be able to select one option. Whatever activity you select is what you should base your answers to the following questions on.

0. Causes that advocate for racial justice and equality
1. Feminist/Pro-woman causes
2. Causes that advocate for environmental preservation
3. Causes that advocate for animal rights
4. Pro-LGBTQI+ causes
5. Causes that advocate for the rights of people with disabilities
6. Causes that advocate for economic justice/ redistribution of wealth
7. Causes that advocate for mental health awareness and support
8. Causes that advocate against human rights abuses
9. Anti-war causes
10. Other

6. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) Please name the cause or organization behind the cause, you were previously involved in that belongs to the category you selected.

7. Did you get involved in (Cause entered in Question 4) before or after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020?

0. Before
1. After

8. When did you first become involved with (Cause entered in Question 4)?

0. In the past month
1. In the past six months

2. In the past year
3. In the past 18 months
4. In the past two years
5. In the past five years
6. Over five years ago

9. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) Did you get involved in (Cause entered in Question 6) before or after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020?

0. Before
1. After

10. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) When did you first become involved with (Cause entered in Question 6)?

0. In the past month
1. In the past six months
2. In the past year
3. In the past 18 months
4. In the past two years
5. In the past five years
6. Over five years ago

Questions from Thoits, 2012:

**Scale from 1 to 10**

11. How well does being an activist with (Cause entered in Question 4) describe who you are?

(1 = this does not describe me at all; 10 = this describes me extremely well)

12. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) How well did being an activist with (Cause entered in Question 6) describe who you were? (1 = this did not describe me at all; 10 = this described me extremely well)
13. Among your various roles, how important to you is being an activist with (Cause entered in Question 4)? (1 = not at all important; 10 = extremely important)
14. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) Among your various roles, how important to you was being an activist with (Cause entered in Question 6)? (1 = not at all important; 10 = extremely important)
15. How committed do you feel to being an activist with (Cause entered in Question 4)? (1 = I am not at all committed to being this; 10 = I am very committed to being this)
16. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) How committed did you feel to being an activist with (Cause entered in Question 6)? (1 = I was not at all committed to being this; 10 = I was very committed to being this)

17. Below are a list of common activities, done in service of a socially progressive cause.

Please rate how often you have engaged in each activity, in the past two years, on behalf of one or more socially progressive cause(s), based on the definition provided above.

Scale: Never, Once, Twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, More than 10 times

0. Attended a march, rally, protest, or sit-in
1. Contacted a government official(s)
2. Collected or made a donation(s)
3. Participated in or helped organize/run a fundraising event
4. Participated in or helped organize/run a speaking event to raise awareness

5. Posted in support of a cause on social media, including signing an online petition
6. Written to promote a social justice-related cause in a newspaper or magazine
7. Joined a socially progressive cause
8. Maintained membership in an organization that is dedicated to a socially progressive cause
9. Took on a position of greater responsibility at an organization that is dedicated to a socially progressive cause
10. Put up a poster, sign, flag, sticker, or other symbol in support of a socially progressive cause or an organization dedicated to a socially progressive cause

18. How important was each of these activities for helping you to feel involved in socially progressive causes, and feel that you were making a difference? (ONLY OPTIONS

WHERE NEVER WAS NOT SELECTED IN QUESTION 17 WILL BE DISPLAYED)

Scale: Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

19. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) Below are a list of common activities, done in service of a socially progressive cause. Please rate how often you have engaged in each activity, on behalf of (Cause entered in Question 6).

Scale: Never, Once, Twice, 3-5 times, 6-10 times, More than 10 times

0. Attended a march, rally, protest, or sit-in
1. Contacted a government official(s)
2. Collected or made a donation(s)

3. Participated in or helped organize/run a fundraising event
4. Participated in or helped organize/run a speaking event to raise awareness
5. Posted in support of a cause on social media in conjunction with (Cause entered in Question 6), including signing an online petition
6. Written to promote a social justice-related cause in conjunction with (Cause entered in Question 6) in a newspaper or magazine
7. Joined (Cause entered in Question 6)
8. Maintained membership in (Cause entered in Question 6)
9. Took on a position of greater responsibility at (Cause entered in Question 6)
10. Put up a poster, sign, flag, sticker, or other symbol in support of (Cause entered in Question 6) or a related cause

20. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) How important was each of these activities for helping you to feel involved in (Cause entered in Question 6), and feel that you were making a difference? (ONLY OPTIONS WHERE NEVER WAS NOT SELECTED IN QUESTION 19 WILL BE DISPLAYED)

Scale: Not at all important, Slightly important, Moderately important, Very important, Extremely important

21. Please indicate what percentage of your work on behalf of (Cause entered in Question 4) takes place online as opposed to in person.

0. All my work takes place online
1. 90% online, and 10% in person
2. 80% online, and 20% in person
3. 70% online, and 30% in person

4. 60% online, and 40% in person
5. 50% online, and 50% in person
6. 40% online, and 60% in person
7. 30% online, and 70% in person
8. 20% online, and 80% in person
9. 10% online, and 90% in person
10. All my work takes place in person

22. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) How much of your work on behalf of (Cause entered in Question 6) took place online as opposed to in person?

0. All my work took place online
1. 90% online, and 10% in person
2. 80% online, and 20% in person
3. 70% online, and 30% in person
4. 60% online, and 40% in person
5. 50% online, and 50% in person
6. 40% online, and 60% in person
7. 30% online, and 70% in person
8. 20% online, and 80% in person
9. 10% online, and 90% in person
10. All my work took place in person

23. For (Cause entered in Question 4) how has your hope for change itself shifted or evolved since you began your activist work? (200 – 1000 character limit)

24. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) For (Cause entered in Question 6) how has your hope for change itself shifted or evolved since you began your activist work? (200 – 1000 character limit)
25. Why do you think that is? (FOR BOTH CURRENT AND FORMER ACTIVISTS) (200 – 1000 character limit)
26. How have your experiences, identity and/or background influenced your involvement with (Cause entered in Question 4)? (200 – 1000 character limit)
27. (FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) How did your experiences, identity and/or background influence your involvement with (Cause entered in Question 6)? (200 – 1000 character limit)

## Appendix C

### Self-Compassion Scale (Neff, 2003)

**1 2 3 4 5**

**Almost never Almost always**

#### HOW I TYPICALLY ACT TOWARDS MYSELF IN DIFFICULT TIMES

Please read each statement carefully before answering. For each item, indicate how often you behave in the stated manner, using the following 1-5 scale. Please answer according to what really reflects your experience rather than what you think your experience should be.

1. I'm disapproving and judgemental about my own flaws and inadequacies.
2. When I'm feeling down I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.
3. When things are going badly for me, I see the difficulties as part of life that everyone goes through.
4. When I think about my inadequacies, it tends to make me feel more separate and cut off from the rest of the world.
5. I try to be loving towards myself when I'm feeling emotional pain.
6. When I fail at something important to me I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.
7. When I'm down, I remind myself that there are lots of other people in the world feeling like I am.
8. When times are really difficult, I tend to be tough on myself.
9. When something upsets me I try to keep my emotions in balance.
10. When I feel inadequate in some way, I try to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.
11. I'm intolerant and impatient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

12. When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.
13. When I'm feeling down, I tend to feel like most other people are probably happier than I am.
14. When something painful happens I try to take a balanced view of the situation.
15. I try to see my failings as part of the human condition.
16. When I see aspects of myself that I don't like, I get down on myself.
17. When I fail at something important to me I try to keep things in perspective.
18. When I'm really struggling I tend to feel like other people must be having an easier time of it.
19. I'm kind to myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
20. When something upsets me I get carried away with my feelings.
21. I can be a bit cold-hearted towards myself when I'm experiencing suffering.
22. When I'm feeling down I try to approach my feelings with curiosity and openness.
23. Please select the option "Almost never" (Attention check)
24. I'm tolerant of my own flaws and inadequacies.
25. When something painful happens I tend to blow the incident out of proportion.
26. When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.
27. I try to be understanding and patient towards those aspects of my personality I don't like.

**Appendix D**

Adult Hope Scale (Snyder et al., 1991)

**1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8****Definitely false Definitely true****Read each item carefully. For each item, please select the option that best describes YOU.**

1. I can think of many ways to get out of a jam.
2. I energetically pursue my goals.
3. I feel tired most of the time.
4. There are lots of ways around any problem.
5. I am easily downed in an argument.
6. I can think of many ways to get the things in life that are important to me.
7. Please select the option "Mostly false" (Attention check)
8. I worry about my health.
9. Even when others get discouraged, I know I can find a way to solve the problem.
10. My past experiences have prepared me well for my future.
11. I've been pretty successful in life.
12. I usually find myself worrying about something.
13. I meet the goals that I set for myself.

**Appendix E**

## Hopelessness/Helplessness Scales (Lester, 2001)

**1 2 3 4 5 6****Strongly disagree Strongly agree****Read each item carefully. For each item, please select the option that best describes YOU.**

1. I can do just about anything I set my mind to.
2. I am confident that I will complete college.
3. I certainly feel useless at times.
4. I look forward to the future with hope and enthusiasm.
5. I don't seem to be able to cope with crises without the help of others.
6. I don't expect to get what I really want.
7. I can hardly ever find ways around the problems that I face.
8. I have enough time to accomplish the things I most want to do.
9. When I find myself in a jam, I can never think of ways of getting out of it.
10. In the future I expect to succeed in what concerns me most.
11. I have difficulty starting to do things.
12. All I can see ahead of me is unpleasantness rather than pleasantness.
13. I rarely feel in control of my life.
14. When I look ahead to the future I expect I will be happier than I am now.
15. Sometimes I think I may as well give up because there's nothing I can do about making things better for myself.
16. It is very unlikely that I will get any real satisfaction in the future.
17. There are few ways around the problems that I am facing now.

18. I can look forward to more good times than bad times.

19. I can't think of reasonable ways to reach my current goal.

20. I never get what I want, so it's foolish to want anything.

**Appendix F**

Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2003) – Activism Related

**1 2 3 4**

**Strongly agree Strongly disagree**

**Below you find a series of statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale, please indicate the degree of your agreement by selecting the number that corresponds with each statement**

1. I always find new and interesting aspects in my activism.
2. There are days when I feel tired before I begin my activist work.
3. It happens more and more often that I talk about my activism in a negative way.
4. After engaging in activism, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.
5. I can tolerate the pressure of my activism very well.
6. Lately, I tend to think less when I am engaged in activism, and do it almost mechanically.
7. I find my activism to be a positive challenge.
8. During my activism, I often feel emotionally drained.
9. Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of activism.
10. After engaging in activism, I have enough energy for my leisure activities.
11. Sometimes I feel sickened by my activist tasks.
12. Please select the option “Strongly disagree” (Attention check)
13. After engaging in activism, I usually feel worn out and weary.
14. This is the only type of activism that I can imagine myself doing.
15. Usually, I can manage the amount of my activist work well.

16. I feel more and more engaged in my activism.

17. When I engage in activism I usually feel energized.

(FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Demerouti et al., 2003) –

Activism Related

**1 2 3 4**

**Strongly agree Strongly disagree**

**Below you find a series of statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale, please indicate the degree of your agreement by selecting the number that corresponds with each statement. Please answer the questions based on your memories of your involvement with (Cause entered in Question 6)**

1. I always found new and interesting aspects in my activism.
2. There were days when I felt tired before I began my activist work.
3. It happened more and more often that I talked about my activism in a negative way.
4. After engaging in activism, I tended to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.
5. I could tolerate the pressure of my activism very well.
6. I tended to think less when I was engaged in activism, and did it almost mechanically.
7. I found my activism to be a positive challenge.
8. During my activism, I often felt emotionally drained.
9. Over time, one could become disconnected from that type of activism.
10. After engaging in activism, I had enough energy for my leisure activities.
11. Sometimes I felt sickened by my activist tasks.

12. Please select the option “Strongly disagree” (Attention check)
13. After engaging in activism, I usually felt worn out and weary.
14. This was the only type of activism that I could imagine myself doing.
15. Usually, I could manage the amount of my activist work well.
16. I felt more and more engaged in my activism.
17. When I engaged in activism I usually felt energized.

**Appendix G**

Oldenburg Burnout Inventory (Reis et al., 2015) – Academic Related and Additional COVID-19

Related -Burnout

**1 2 3 4**

**Strongly agree Strongly disagree**

**Below you find a series of statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the scale, please indicate the degree of your agreement by selecting the number that corresponds with each statement**

1. I always find new and interesting aspects in my studies.
2. It happens more and more often that I talk about my studies in a negative way.
3. Lately, I tend to think less about my academic tasks and do them almost mechanically.
4. I find my studies to be a positive challenge.
5. Over time, one can become disconnected from this type of study.
6. Sometimes I feel sickened by my studies.
7. This is the only field of study that I can imagine myself doing.
8. I feel more and more engaged in my studies.
9. Please select the option “Agree” (Attention check)
10. There are days when I feel tired before I arrive in class or start studying.
11. After a class or after studying, I tend to need more time than in the past in order to relax and feel better.
12. I can tolerate the pressure of my studies very well.
13. While studying, I often feel emotionally drained
14. After a class or after studying, I have enough energy for my leisure activities.

15. After a class or after studying, I usually feel worn out and weary.
16. I can usually manage my study-related workload well.
17. When I study, I usually feel energized.

To what extent do you feel burnt-out due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (ex: lack of in-person social gathering, switching to online school/work, exposure to tragic pandemic-related news)?

0. Never
1. Very rarely
2. Rarely
3. Occasionally
4. Frequently
5. Very frequently

**Appendix H**

Goal Adjustment Scale (Wrosch et al., 2003)

**1 2 3 4 5****Strongly disagree Strongly agree**

**During their lives people cannot always attain what they want and are sometimes forced to stop pursuing the goals they have set. We are interested in understanding how you usually react when this happens to you. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following statements, as it usually applies to you.**

**If I have to stop pursuing an important goal in my life...**

1. It's easy for me to reduce my effort towards the goal
2. I convince myself that I have other meaningful goals to pursue
3. I stay committed to the goal for a long time; I can't let it go
4. I start working on other new goals
5. I think about other new goals to pursue
6. I find it difficult to stop trying to achieve the goal
7. I seek other meaningful goals
8. It's easy for me to stop thinking about the goal and let it go
9. I tell myself that I have a number of other new goals to draw upon
10. I put effort toward other meaningful goals

**Appendix I**

Intention to Quit (Spector et al., 1988) and Other Questions about Leaving Activist Work

**1 2 3 4 5 6**

**Never Extremely often**

How often have you seriously considered leaving your activist work with (Cause entered in Question 4)?

If you were to leave your activist work with (Cause entered in Question 4), what would be your reasons for doing so? Please check all that apply from the list below.

0. I no longer have enough time in my schedule for activist work.
1. I no longer care about/am interested in the causes I am involved in.
2. I am frustrated with the amount of infighting I see within the activist causes I am involved in.
3. I feel overlooked or discriminated against within the activist causes I am involved in.
4. I am frustrated with the lack of social change for the causes I am involved in.
5. I have lost interest in this cause/my activist work.
6. Activist work on behalf of this cause is not what I thought it would be like.
7. I no longer politically agree with this cause.
8. I am burnt-out from living under pandemic conditions
9. Other

(ONLY DISPLAYED IF YOU SELECTED OTHER) If you selected "other" please list the reason below.

(FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS) What were your reasons for leaving (Cause entered in Question 6)? Please check all that apply from the list below.

0. I did not have enough time in my schedule for activist work.
1. I no longer cared about/was interested in the cause
2. I was frustrated with the amount of infighting I saw within the activist cause I was involved with.
3. I felt overlooked or discriminated against within the activist cause I was involved with.
4. I was frustrated with the lack of social change for the cause I was involved with.
5. I lost interest in that cause/my activist work.
6. Activist work on behalf of that cause was not what I thought it would be like.
7. I no longer politically agree with the cause I was involved in.
8. I was burnt-out from living under pandemic conditions.
9. Other

(FOR FORMER ACTIVISTS and ONLY DISPLAYED IF YOU SELECTED OTHER) If you selected "other" please list the reason below.