CAN COMPASSION APPEALS CHANGE THE WORLD? A CRITICAL REVIEW AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION

This is a preliminary version of the manuscript. The final version must be read at the journal

Valor, C., Antonetti, P. & Crisafulli, B. Can Compassion Appeals Change the World? A Critical Review and Reconceptualization. *J Bus Ethics* (2025). https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-025-06220-5

ABSTRACT

Compassion appeals are employed to mobilize prosocial actions that address global grand challenges. However, the evidence of the effectiveness of such appeals is still mixed, with studies using a multitude of persuasion appeals and examining diverse outcomes. To explain the mixed findings, we conduct an integrative, critical review of 77 articles (altogether reporting 116 empirical studies) on the role of compassion appeals in motivating prosocial behavior. This review explains the conditions that determine the relative effectiveness of compassion appeals. First, we identify the appeal components and contextual factors that elicit compassion. Successful elicitation is a prerequisite for the effectiveness of compassion appeals. Second, we reveal that compassion often is elicited with distress, an emotion actively regulated by audiences. Consequently, persuasive compassion appeals are most effective when elicited compassion is maintained within an area of acceptability, demarcated by elicitation and backfiring thresholds. Third, we show that mixed findings are often due to a mismatch between the motivation elicited by compassion and the prosocial action encouraged by the appeal. Compassion motivates the relief of immediate suffering but is not suited to drive sustained commitment toward promoting structural social change. To address this limitation of compassion, we conceptualize the need for compassion blends, mixed emotions where compassion is elicited along with guilt and/or moral anger. We explain why and how compassion blends can motivate transformative prosocial behavior. The results from our critical review inform an agenda for future research and offer actionable insights for the design of effective compassion appeals.

Keywords: *appeals; global problems; moral foundations; prosocial behavior; literature review*

It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break; the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job, which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.

Barack Obama

It is not enough to be compassionate. You must act.

14th Dalai Lama

INTRODUCTION

Political campaigners, NGOs, and charities routinely leverage compassion appeals to support initiatives aimed at addressing the world's "grand challenges" or global development problems such as poverty and climate change, whose resolution requires the coordinated, prosocial action of multiple key actors (de Ruyter et al., 2022; Van Lange et al., 2013). These appeals are crafted to elicit compassion by exposing recipients to the suffering of humans, animals or the planet (Lu & Schuldt, 2016). Portrayals of suffering are employed to encourage different types of prosocial behavior, such as donations (e.g., *Action Against Hunger* campaigns) or policy change (e.g., *Amnesty International* campaigns). All these different types of individual and collective actions are critical for addressing grand challenges (de Ruyter et al., 2022).

Compassion appeals build on an ethic of care—the idea that the suffering of others appears immediately morally salient (Gilligan, 1982; Graham et al., 2012; Schein & Gray, 2018). Indeed, the perception that suffering is unacceptable and should be alleviated is a foundation of morality (Atari et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2012). In this sense, compassion appeals moralize suffering to energize prosocial behavior (Thomas et al., 2009). Goetz and colleagues (2010) eloquently explain how compassion "emerged as a brief state oriented toward reducing the suffering or needs of vulnerable offspring, as a desirable trait within mate selection and alliance

formation processes, and as a brief state predictive of cooperative relations with non-kin" (p. 355).

However, current research on compassion appeals offers mixed findings. Some studies indicate that compassion appeals motivate prosocial behavior (e.g., Dumitrescu & Bucy, 2021; Sung et al., 2023), whereas others do not (e.g., Bor & Simonovits, 2021; Kang et al., 2022). The contrasting evidence is conceptually surprising as it contradicts psychological accounts of compassion as a moral emotion that evolved to favor coordination to address social problems (Goetz et al., 2010; Schein & Gray, 2018). Managerially, the inconclusive evidence poses a notable challenge to practitioners striving to leverage compassion to promote social change. The ability to increase the persuasiveness of compassion appeals rests on clarifying the reasons behind such mixed evidence and developing strategies to pursue collective goals (de Ruyter et al., 2022; Van Lange et al., 2013).

This field of research is fragmented, with studies presenting a multitude of approaches to studying the subject. First, there is wide heterogeneity in how compassion appeals are designed, such as in the number and type of victims portrayed or the severity of the suffering—e.g., starving children (Albouy, 2017), children with hearing impairment (Jin et al., 2021) or an injured vulture (Berenguer, 2007). This heterogeneity precludes understanding the main elicitors of compassion. Second, some studies assume that, once elicited, compassion motivates prosocial action (e.g., Hussain & Wieffering, 2021), whereas other scholars consider resistance to persuasion as a mechanism that hinders motivation to help (e.g., Baberini et al., 2015). Relatedly, although most studies measure compassion alone, some studies measure other emotions activated by the appeal, such as anger or guilt (Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Basil et al., 2008). Finally, researchers study very different types of prosocial behaviors ranging from donations or volunteering time (Batson et al., 1995a) to offering support toward redistributive policies (Bor & Simonovits, 2021).

The presence of mixed findings and the wide variety of approaches call for an integrative, critical review of extant evidence (Ogbonnaya & Brown, 2023). We propose three research questions to examine the field of research on the elicitation of compassion to promote prosocial behavior: *RQ1. How and under what conditions is compassion elicited by persuasive appeals? RQ2. Why and when are appeals to compassion resisted? RQ3. How and why appeal-induced compassion motivates engagement in prosocial helping or transformative behavior?* By systematically synthesizing and integrating this dispersed body of evidence, we can identify underlying patterns, resolve apparent contradictions, and generate a coherent understanding of why and when compassion appeals are likely to motivate action aimed at addressing grand challenges. Our goal is to offer a theoretical integration and extension of the psychology of compassion appeals (Alegre et al., 2023; Post et al., 2020). Accordingly, we synthesize and reinterpret past literature to offer a springboard for future research and further theoretical advancement.

The analysis of 77 articles (altogether reporting 116 empirical studies) uncovers three main conditions that contribute to the (in)effectiveness of compassion appeals. First, we map the conditions—namely, appeal components and contextual factors—that contribute to activating compassion, a precondition to its social effectiveness. Second, we show that compassion appeals are elicited with distress and can backfire if distress is stronger than compassion. Consequently, the persuasiveness of compassion appeals is characterized by an area of appropriateness when compassion is higher than distress. We discuss how this area implies an elicitation threshold (when the appeal is sufficiently moving to trigger compassion) and a backfiring threshold (when distress overcomes compassion). Third, we reveal a mismatch between the action tendency of compassion and the prosocial actions required to overcome grand challenges. Compassion may predispose individuals toward occasional, prosocial helping that offers immediate relief to suffering. However, this emotion is not psychologically

suited to motivating broader reflection and sustained commitment to structural social change (Malthouse et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2009). Compassion alone seems insufficient and inadequate to drive support for the institutional changes required to resolve complex problems such as plastic pollution or refugee crises. Ultimately, the use of compassion appeals to promote prosocial actions which are misaligned with the emotion's underlying motivation can contribute toward explaining extant mixed evidence.

We theorize a novel approach to the psychology of compassion appeals. Drawing on mixed emotions scholarship (Oh & Tong, 2022), we theorize the concept of compassion blends, where compassion is elicited jointly with moral anger (labeled *commitment*) and guilt (labeled *atonement*). Compassion blends can be conducive to prosocial actions that require sustained commitment and institutional change (de Ruyter et al., 2022; Thomas et al., 2009; Van Lange et al., 2013). While compassion communicates concern and urgency regarding others' suffering, moral anger and guilt stress moral agency and the ability to act to reverse injustice (e.g., Knupfer & Matthes, 2021; Lu, 2021; Pagano & Huo, 2007). Blends build on ethics of both care and responsibility (Schlaile et al., 2018), pairing compassion with moral anger (Tangney et al., 2007) or guilt (Fischer & Roseman, 2007). As attention broadens to transgressed justice principles, receivers feel urged to restore a moral order where harm is forestalled (Rogers et al., 2018). Moreover, an ethic of responsibility emphasizes accountability for the consequences of one's actions and a sense of moral agency that promotes engagement in transformative prosocial actions even if the latter are costly (Schlaile et al., 2018). The insights produced by our review yield important managerial implications. These are translated into a practice-focused, hands-on tool (Figure 5) that can be leveraged by practitioners to design effective compassion appeals.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we establish the conceptual boundaries of the emotion of compassion and explain the tensions in prior findings. Next, we describe the method

applied for the review and the analysis of the articles selected. The findings are structured into three subsections, each addressing one of the research questions. Finally, we propose a reconceptualization of compassion appeals around the idea of *compassion blends* and develop the implications, future research, and managerial tools to action the findings.

COMPASSION AND PROSOCIAL BEHAVIOR

The conceptualization of compassion

The conceptual space of compassion is characterized by closely related yet distinct concepts. Sympathy and empathic concern are two labels often used in the literature as synonyms for compassion (Batson et al., 1983; Xu et al., 2021): they describe general feelings of care and concern for victims of undeserved suffering. Pity is also sometimes employed as a synonym for compassion (Fiske et al., 2007). However, pity has status implications, as it refers specifically to a feeling of care and concern for someone who is perceived as less competent than oneself (Fiske et al., 2007). Pity might therefore be better understood as a specific type of compassion.

The emotional experience of compassion creates an altruistic, prosocial motivation to help those in need (Goetz et al., 2010; Klimecki et al., 2016). This emotional experience should be differentiated from cognitive and affective empathy (Batson et al., 1983; Xu et al., 2021). Cognitive empathy refers to a perspective-taking experience in which individuals imagine personal thoughts and perceptions from another's perspective. Affective empathy refers to the experience of emotional congruence with others or feeling the same emotion as others do. Despite these important differences, many authors use the label "empathy" to describe feelings of sympathy or compassion. In many of the studies reviewed, empathy is measured using items that tap into how *moved*, *sympathetic* or *compassionate* individuals feel (e.g., Albouy, 2017; Dickert et al., 2011; Lee et al., 2014).

Mixed findings: The processing of compassion appeals

Compassion appeals have been studied in very heterogeneous contexts. From social care to poverty, environmental issues and health, scholars in different domains of social sciences have examined whether the elicitation of compassion motivates different forms of prosocial behavior. Some of these contexts, such as poverty or environmental issues, share the characteristics of collective action problems (Olson, 1971), requiring the coordinated action of multiple, loosely connected individuals (de Ruyter et al., 2022) whose responsibility is dispersed (Van Lange et al., 2013). To facilitate engagement in collective action, portrayals of victims' plight must be perceived as personally relevant and unjust, and a sense of agency and self-belief that the plight can be overcome needs to be conveyed (van Zomeren et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2018). Identifying the appeal components that motivate these perceptions and activate compassion is the first objective of this review.

Additionally, individuals can resist the elicitation of compassion (Malthouse et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2018). Individuals may invoke the responsibility of others to justify their inaction, especially when appeals seek to encourage costly prosocial behavior (Rogers et al., 2018). The motivation to resist or counterargue against a compassion appeal is further heightened by the fact that the messaging in the appeal may also elicit negative feelings. Feelings of distress activated by the portrayals of others' suffering may motivate such resistance (Batson et al., 1983). In compassion appeals where audiences are often exposed to stimuli depicting the suffering of others, compassion carries a negative valence and may be activated concurrently with other negative emotions such as distress or anxiety (Albouy, 2017; Dickert et al., 2011). These negative emotions may prompt resistance to persuasion (Friestad & Wright, 1994) as audiences regulate emotions (Gross, 1998; O'Keefe, 2000). Accordingly, the second objective of this review is to explore whether the mixed evidence in existing research might be explained by resistance to such negative emotions.

Mixed findings: The prosocial behavior examined

The literature on collective action distinguishes between two types of prosocial behavior: prosocial helping and prosocial transformative behavior (Thomas et al., 2009). Prosocial helping behavior provides occasional relief or support to others in need (e.g., monetary donations; Thomas et al., 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). Prosocial transformative actions are sustained, aimed at transforming institutional arrangements or structural conditions such that the causes of suffering depicted in the appeal are addressed (e.g., changes to public policy and legislation; Thomas et al., 2009; Wright & Lubensky, 2009). However, extant work has not examined whether the persuasiveness of compassion appeals differs between these two behavioral outcomes, implicitly assuming that compassion motivates both (Thomas et al., 2009). Yet, there are reasons to question this assumption.

Compassion appeals moralize prosocial behavior by linking it to an ethic of care, concern and empathy for others' suffering (Gilligan, 1982; Graham et al., 2012; Schein & Gray, 2018). Mobilizing an ethic of care seems adequate to motivate prosocial helping. However, transformative prosocial action aligns with a desire to promote justice in social arrangements (Thomas et al., 2009). The moral motivations underlying helping and transformative behaviors are built on fundamentally different intuitions about morality. Prosocial helping is aligned with an ethic of care grounded in automatic, emotion-driven evaluations related to the undeserved suffering of others and the need to nurture and protect others from harm (Atari et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2012). Transformative prosocial behavior is consistent with an ethic of responsibility based on concerns about justice and proportionality in social relationships (Schlaile et al., 2018). Rather than being focused on care and concern for others, transformative prosocial behavior focuses primarily on a sense of responsibility, accountability and moral agency (Schlaile et al., 2018; Thomas et al., 2009; van Zomeren et al., 2018), urging individuals to address such injustices (Atari et al., 2023; Graham et al., 2012). The logic of transformative

behaviors implies that individuals must be accountable for actions that stray from acceptable norms of conduct. Such accountability is paired with a sense of moral agency: individual choices can make a difference in the world, and this sense of personal efficacy motivates even in the face of collective action problems (Malthouse et al., 2023; Rogers et al., 2018). Therefore, the focus on care and the relief of suffering underlying compassion appeals might not be inherently suited to motivate such an assumption of moral agency (Goetz et al., 2010). The third objective of the review is to explore whether the difference between prosocial helping, grounded in an ethic of care, and transformational prosocial behaviors, grounded in an ethic of responsibility, can reconcile the existing mixed evidence.

METHOD

A critical literature review was conducted based on a systematic search of published journal articles. Although we retain a systematic approach to gathering evidence, our goal is not to provide a detailed description of past studies, consistent with systematic and bibliometric reviews (Post et al., 2020). Rather, critical reviews aim to propose a revised and critical perspective, or a "thought-provoking synthesis" (Ogbonnaya & Brown, 2023, p. 368). The critical review approach is adequate for providing theoretical integration, reinterpretation and extension of the psychology of compassion appeals (Alegre et al., 2023).

Based on the Scientific Procedures and Rationales for Systematic Literature Reviews (SPAR-4 SLR), we followed three key stages: assembling, arranging, and assessing (Paul et al., 2021). A systematic, reproducible approach to selecting the literature was followed at each of the three stages, as further discussed below.

Assembly: Literature search

First, we assembled a sample of studies based on keyword searches conducted on the Web of Science (WoS) database, which encompasses research from various disciplines published in

high-quality, high-impact journals (Martín-Martín et al., 2021). WoS is appropriate given our focus on literature from a variety of disciplines that measures compassion elicited by persuasive appeals and prosocial behavior, which is consistent with prior systematic reviews (e.g., Nardella et al., 2023). We employed the string below to run searches in the titles, abstracts, and keywords of the articles. We focused on journal papers but imposed no restrictions based on language, discipline or time period in order to obtain the widest possible pool of articles: (compassion OR empath* OR sympath* OR "empathetic concern") AND (elicit* OR appeal OR elicit* OR communic* OR evok* OR induc* OR campaign) AND (petition OR "collective action" OR protest* OR activism OR advocacy OR volunteer* OR punish* OR "civic engagement" OR sustainable OR green OR environmental OR prosocial OR donation OR change OR altruis* OR charitable OR victim) NOT (medic* OR meditation OR mindfulness OR nurs* OR clinical OR training). This initial search yielded 1,061 results.

Arrangement: Literature selection

In the second stage, we arranged the results in a data extraction sheet (Tranfield et al., 2003) and removed duplicates and non-journal papers, yielding 1,010 articles that were read. When the articles included more than one study, we retained the studies that met all five inclusion criteria: (1) the study was empirical; (2) compassion was elicited by persuasive appeals; (3) compassion was measured as a state, integral emotion; (4) the dependent variable included a measure of prosocial action aimed at grand challenges; and (5) nonclinical adult populations were sampled. We excluded studies focusing on compassion as a trait, interpersonal helping, or unsolicited, spontaneous collective action, as well as literature reviews and conceptual papers. Only empirical work on compassion linked to collective goals and grand challenges was included, with reviews used solely for interpretation. These exclusions considerably reduced the sample (115 articles, 165 studies).

Three independent coders read the sampled studies in full and conducted further screening based on our inclusion criteria; at this stage, 57 articles (84 studies) were retained. Any disagreements were resolved by discussion until a consensus was reached (Kummitha et al., 2025). We next checked for relevant cross-references and backward citations and added 20 articles (32 studies). The procedure yielded a final sample of 77 articles (reporting 116 studies). The PRISMA diagram below details the process.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

Assessment: Literature analysis

Following an abductive approach, which combines theoretically derived descriptive codes with additional codes inductively inferred from empirical data (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), we assessed the articles. The detailed procedure can be found in Web Appendix Part II. These first-order codes were grouped into second-order codes. Finally, we categorized studies into three themes aligned with our review questions. Fifty-one examined appeal components and boundary conditions of compassion elicitation, four analyzed co-occurring processes (e.g., distress), and forty addressed the first two review questions. In relation to our third review question, seventy-three studies focused on helping, and twenty-eight on transformative action, with twenty-one measuring compassion alongside other emotions. Further details on the descriptives of the sampled studies are provided in the Web Appendix Part II.

A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE

The activation of compassion

In response to RQ1, Table 1 summarizes the antecedents and moderators of compassion. Because compassion is activated following the exposure to others' suffering (Goetz et al., 2010), the portrayal of the plight is a primary elicitor of this emotion. Two main features of a plight are implicated in the activation of compassion, namely (i) severity and (ii) legitimacy.

The severity of the plight denotes the seriousness of the victim's suffering (Cialdini et al., 1997), and appraisals of severity elicit feelings of compassion (Iyer & Ryan, 2009; Montada & Schneider, 1989). Severity is often communicated through vivid appeals that offer a detailed and powerful portrayal of victims' suffering (e.g., Bartsch & Kloß, 2019; Dumitrescu & Bucy, 2021). The vividness of the appeal directs receivers' attention to victims' hardship (Grinstein et al., 2019) and makes the appeal self-relevant (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). However, the evidence on the role of appeal vividness is mixed. Some studies note that vivid appeals attenuate rather than enhance the experience of compassion (Allred & Amos, 2018; Wei et al., 2021).

With respect to plight legitimacy, elicited compassion is higher when the suffering is perceived as uncontrollable by victims. There is evidence that plight severity and legitimacy interact (Bor & Simonovits, 2021; Jin et al., 2021); in fact, in appeals where the plight is severe, receivers tend to look for cues that the plight is legitimate, and victims deserve their compassion (Gross & Wronski, 2021).

INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

Notably, four major groups of boundary conditions moderate the elicitation of compassion.[1] The first group concerns processes of identification with the victim, which is also an antecedent to engagement in collective action (van Zomeren et al., 2018). Receivers are more likely to experience compassion toward victims with whom they identify (Batson et al., 1983). Identification is explained by three mechanisms. First, the depiction of single, identifiable victims (e.g., Small et al., 2013) promotes automatic processing and facilitates the elicitation of compassion (Graham et al., 2012). Second, perceived closeness with victims increases the affective processing of the appeal (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Cialdini et

[1] Interestingly, some evidence shows that the identifiable victim effect does not hold when victims are animals (Berenger, 2007; Shelton & Rogers, 1981) or are part of an outgroup (Kogut & Ritov, 2005b).

al., 1997), thus eliciting stronger compassion (e.g., Gross & Wronski, 2021; Gubler et al., 2022). Third, receivers' strong identification with their own group (e.g., collective narcissism; Golec de Zavala et al., 2009) reduces compassion for outgroup victims. (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016).

The second group of boundary conditions concerns receivers' affective traits. Prevention-oriented (*vs*. promotion-focused) receivers are more vigilant against persuasive attempts and consequently less likely to experience compassion (Choi & Park, 2021). Furthermore, individuals who feel socially excluded are less swayed by compassion appeals, as personal feelings of loneliness tend to dampen compassion (Choi et al., 2016).

The third group encompasses receivers' political–moral beliefs. Conservatives (as opposed to liberals) require more intense severity of the plight to experience compassion, especially if the victim is psychologically distant (Dumitrescu & Bucy, 2021; Pagano & Huo, 1997). Nonetheless, appeals are found to emotionally engage conservatives; liberals' prosocial action is driven more by justice concerns than by compassion (Lee et al., 2020; Lu & Schudt, 2016). Similarly, compassion appeals substantially increase donations among individuals who are low in religiosity and less inclined to donate (Saslow et al., 2013). With respect to moral beliefs, individuals with high moral identity are less likely to experience compassion for victims who are perceived as being responsible for their own plight (Lee et al., 2014). Similarly, just-world beliefs lead to victims blaming and reduce compassion (Antonetti & Maklan, 2017; Montada & Schneider, 1989).

The fourth group of boundary conditions relates to contextual cues. Most of the studies are lab experiments that expose individuals to a single, *ad hoc* appeal. However, in real-life contexts, individuals may be presented with multiple appeals concurrently, and fatigue may curb compassion elicitation. Although compassion fatigue has been widely studied in healthcare (for a review, see Sinclair et al., 2017), only one study in our sample showed that

individuals exposed to repeated appeals were less likely to experience compassion (Lu, 2022). Another important contextual factor is receivers' cognitive overload. The temporary impairment of cognitive abilities facilitates compassion elicitation by promoting the emotional processing of appeals (e.g., Choi & Park, 2021). Appeal congruence also increases elicitation. Appeals that pledge to help victims elicit compassion more than recognition appeals that thank or show appreciation to the audience (Pham & Septianto, 2019). Finally, appeals where a charity acknowledges failure to reach its objectives are more congruent with compassion and thus are more likely to activate the emotion (Septianto & Tjiptono, 2019).

The coactivation of compassion and distress

Because compassion involves the vicarious experience of others' suffering, it is often elicited concurrently with negative emotions of distress, sadness or fear (e.g., Bennett & Vijaygopal, 2019; Perrault et al., 2015; Shelton & Rogers, 1981). We answer RQ2 by demonstrating that the coactivation of compassion and distress can explain resistance to compassion appeals. Compassion appeals stress the plight of victims to overcome a first *elicitation threshold* given that individuals naturally resist attempts to elicit negative feelings (Batson et al., 1999; Cavanaugh et al., 2015). However, such appeal components can elicit distress if they surpass a second *backfiring threshold*. For example, when a plight is presented as overly severe, one's willingness to act decreases (e.g., Cockrill & Parsonage, 2016; Kang et al., 2022). This outcome is explained by the competing tendencies of these emotions: compassion increases compliance, whereas distress promotes avoidance and rejection of appeals (Bennett & Vijaygopal, 2019). This process, and the difference between a persuasive appeal and a potentially backfiring appeal, are illustrated in Figure 2. The analysis suggests an area of acceptability of compassion appeals between the two thresholds identified.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

Compassion appeals can backfire because distress is often managed by engaging in maladaptive responses (Balderson, 2023; Basil et al., 2008) or by avoiding exposure to compassion appeals (Shaw et al., 1994). However, longitudinal evidence suggests that experiences of distress attenuate over time, whereas compassion does not (Herrera et al., 2018). Consequently, as distress fades, the lasting experience of compassion may facilitate prosocial behavior (Kemp, 2023). Symbolic actions also help manage distress. Receivers can help one victim at the expense of the group (Batson et al., 1995a, b), or engage in less costly actions that assuage distress but are unlikely to tangibly ameliorate victims' suffering (e.g., Cameron et al., 2017). Dickert and colleagues (2011) show this effect: decisions to donate are shaped by the willingness to appease distress, but the amount donated is a function of the compassion experienced. Distress then leads receivers to comply by making the lowest possible donation.

Distress is activated with compassion when individuals doubt their ability to alleviate the plight presented in an appeal (Goetz et al., 2010). Accordingly, the act of increasing self-efficacy (i.e., assessments of one's own ability to engage in prosocial action) and response efficacy (i.e., the effectiveness of an action in alleviating suffering) not only activates compassion but is also more likely to motivate action by curbing distress (e.g., Basil et al., 2008).

Compassion, helping and transformative action

The evidence reviewed answers to RQ3 by showing that compassion appeals do not typically promote transformative prosocial behavior. Compassion motivates helping behavior, such as donating or volunteering (Kemp et al., 2013; Saraquini et al., 2022), but does not encourage behavior aimed at addressing injustice (Gault & Sabini, 2000) or structural unfairness (Montada & Schneider, 1989). Similarly, compassion fosters collective action aimed at addressing pressing humanitarian needs (Goenka & Van Osselaer, 2019; Pagano & Huo, 2007) but does not motivate transformative action to eradicate the cause of suffering

(Knab & Steffens, 2021). When compassion is elicited by a single victim (e.g., one refugee), the motivation to help might not translate into support for the wider group (e.g., refugees in general; Bor & Simonovits, 2021; but see also Batson et al., 2002). Taken together, the evidence indicates the limited power of compassion in motivating transformative prosocial behavior (Thomas et al., 2009). Rather, compassion impels individuals to provide immediate relief to specific victims.

Notably, studies have shown that transformative action is motivated by appeals that activate compassion in combination with other emotions, namely, (moral) anger (e.g., Bagozzi & Moore, 1994; Fernando et al., 2014; Iyer & Ryan, 2009) or guilt (Albouy, 2017; Basil et al., 2008; Iyer et al., 2003). For example, Fernando and colleagues (2014) report that individuals who experience anger and compassion simultaneously are more likely to engage in collective action. Similar results have been reported for compassion paired with anger (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016, 2017; Knupfer & Matthes, 2021; Yu et al., 2015) and compassion paired with guilt (Pagano & Huo, 1997; Yan & Cortese, 2023). These observations lead us to propose a reconceptualization of compassion appeals, as further explained below.

A RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF COMPASSION APPEALS

Conceptualizing compassion blends for transformative prosocial behavior

We reconceptualize compassion appeals as persuasive messages that elicit a blend of emotions. The literature on motivation for collective action has acknowledged the energizing forces of compassion, anger, and guilt (van Zomeren et al., 2018), but these emotions have been studied and tested individually. We argue that compassion reinforces these emotions, which in turn boost prosocial responses. Building on Oh and Tong's (2022) theoretical framework of mixed emotion specificity, we propose specific compassion blends and highlight their unique suitability for motivating transformative prosocial behavior. Oh and Tong (2022)

integrate decades of research on appraisal theories of emotions to suggest that discrete emotions within blends integrate according to different patterns, depending on the underlying appraisals associated with the emotional experience (Scherer & Moors, 2019; Smith & Ellsworth, 1985). When two emotions with complementary appraisals are combined, they lead to additive effects, defined as stronger effects that are coherent with the underlying direction of the appraisals in question (Oh & Tong, 2022). Applying this insight, we argue that compassion blends, namely mixed experiences of compassion and guilt or compassion and anger, have a stronger influence on prosocial motivation because of the complementary appraisals of the integrated emotions. We focus on moral anger and guilt because of the empirical evidence of these blends in past work and the complementary characteristics of these negative emotions.

Figure 3 summarizes the process through which compassion appeals activate emotion blends. It explains how the appraisals associated with each specific emotion in the blend complement one another, thereby building stronger prosocial motivation in terms of the cognitions activated and the associated behavioral consequences. Consistent with the discussion presented in Section 4.1., appeals that present severe, underserved plights activate feelings of compassion and a desire to help the victims. This is the first mechanism [M1] through which compassion appeals lead to behavior that addresses grand challenges, driven by an individual's desire to relieve others' suffering.

However, the experience of compassion also activates a desire to determine responsibility, accountability and moral agency, and through such a process, compassion blends might be activated. The severity of the plight is likely to motivate a moral assessment of the victim's situation, and the unfairness of the victim's plight motivates a desire to find a blameworthy culprit (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Gray & Wegner 2009). Individuals implicitly seek to determine who should be held accountable and whether reparatory actions can be implemented (Crossley, 2009; Schein & Gray, 2018). Moral anger and guilt aim to attribute responsibility,

accountability, and agency (Haidt, 2003). When blame for the plight is attributed to a third party, moral anger is mobilized (e.g., Iyer & Ryan, 2007). This leads to the second mechanism [M2], through which compassion appeals motivate (transformative) prosocial behavior. Moral anger creates a desire to restore justice/fairness by seeking redress or by inflicting punishment (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Haidt, 2003), thus leading to transformative behavior. In contrast, when the self is considered responsible/accountable for the suffering, guilt is activated (e.g., Pagano & Huo, 2007). Guilt is associated with a desire for self-improvement (Tangney et al., 2007), which is consistent with the third mechanism [M3] of promoting prosocial (transformative) behavior. The processes leading to moral anger and guilt can also be reinforced by designing an appeal that, beyond describing the plight, focuses explicitly on processes linked with attributions of responsibility (Figure 3).

INSERT FIGURE 3 ABOUT HERE

Appeals that mobilize compassion with moral anger or guilt encourage subsequent, complementary cognitions which motivate prosocial action given that both an ethic of care and an ethic of responsibility are activated. The blend of emotions moralizes victims' plight: moral anger is linked to perceptions of injustice (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Iyer & Ryan, 2009), whereas guilt is linked to beliefs of past morally reprehensible actions (Haidt, 2003; Tangney et al., 2007). The motivational force of blended emotions makes individuals feel responsible for the suffering, and urging action aimed at rectifying wrongdoing (Haidt, 2003). This perception of responsibility is further explained by the appraisals of agency associated with the emotions or the belief that the individual can effectively address the victim's plight (Haidt, 2003; Lerner & Keltner, 2000; Tangney et al., 2007). In turn, judgments of injustice and responsibility nurture a sense of accountability, as receivers perceive to have control over the outcome (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016; Lindebaum & Geddes, 2016).

We differentiate between two blends, labeled as *atonement* and *commitment*. The atonement blend, including compassion and guilt, encourages audiences toward compensatory or reparative actions (e.g., Pagano & Huo, 2007), as guilt is associated with a desire to solely repair past wrongdoings (Tangney et al., 2007). In contrast, the commitment blend of compassion and moral anger motivates receivers to participate in demonstrations (Montada & Schneider, 1989) or promote organizational activities to fight discrimination (Iyer & Ryan, 2009). Given the motivational force to reinstate the violated moral principle, moral anger is likely to encourage receivers to redress the underlying injustice by, for instance, supporting redistributive policies (Gault & Sabini, 2000; Montada & Schneider, 1989). Often, such motivation is accrued by a desire for revenge and punishment against the agent perceived to be responsible for the plight (Knupfer & Matthes, 2021).

Importantly, it is conceptually possible that both moral anger and guilt could occur in a blend with compassion. For example, a corporation could be held accountable for questionable behavior by an individual who acknowledges some personal responsibility for the wrongdoing. The coexistence of both guilt and anger would lead to additive effects and potentially encourage transformative prosocial behavior. However, to the extent that the two emotions propose somewhat contradictory interpretations of the situation (Oh & Tong, 2022; Schein & Gray, 2018), a blend incorporating both anger and guilt will ultimately be dominated by one of the two emotions, as individuals lower the implicit inconsistency caused by contrasting appraisals.

Elicitation of compassion blends

Figure 4 presents examples of appeals eliciting compassion blends, consistent with the logic presented above. Consider Example A in Figure 4, which was used in one of the reviewed studies (Yan & Cortese, 2023). In this case, the motivation for prosocial helping associated with compassion (for the animals mentioned in the text) is combined with a desire to atone for

previous wrongdoings. Guilt activates an ethic of responsibility, prompting receivers to acknowledge harm and question broader behaviors (e.g., plastic use). By stressing accountability, the blend of compassion and guilt fosters transformative action.

INSERT FIGURE 4 ABOUT HERE

Example B in Figure 4 summarizes the text of a video appeal examined in one of the reviewed studies (Glasford, 2013). When famine appeals pair compassion for victims with moral anger at a culpable government, receivers show stronger political action intentions. In this sense, compassion alone raises concern but no action. Suffering cues elicit care, while identifying culprits elicits anger and responsibility, motivating efforts to address the root cause of the suffering (Haidt, 2003).

Summarizing the preceding discussion, Table 2 captures the differences between appeals that focus on compassion, guilt or anger individually and those that focus on commitment or atonement blends. In addition to the appraisals communicated, the emotions elicited and the associated behavioral responses, Table 2 illustrates messages for each type of appeal. The examples demonstrate the ability of compassion to activate moral concern for the victim's plight, which kindles a sense of personal agency and moral responsibility coherent with both guilt and moral anger. Rather than considering the three emotions in isolation, as past research has long contended, we propose compassion blends as a novel theoretical approach to explaining prosocial action.

INSERT HERE TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

DISCUSSION

Theoretical implications

This review reconciles existing mixed evidence on the role of compassion in addressing grand challenges. First, we unravel the antecedents and moderators of compassion elicitation.

These findings substantiate Loewenstein and Small's (2007) claim that compassion "is an erratic, immature, force which responds to a wide range of situational factors that are not normatively justifiable" (p. 112). Our integrated synthesis identifies such situational factors and shows how these stabilize or undermine this "erratic force".

Second, this review introduces the perspective that persuasive compassion appeals are most effective when elicited compassion is maintained within an area of acceptability demarcated by *elicitation* and *backfiring thresholds*. The notion that emotion elicitation should be modulated to avoid aversive experiences that are too intense for the audience has been discussed in relation to guilt appeals (O'Keefe, 2000). We theorize a similar dynamic for compassion. Appeals should overcome the elicitation threshold and effectively activate compassion. However, appeals should equally attempt to minimize distress. In this sense, appeals shall not surpass the backfiring threshold, so as to pre-empt receivers' maladaptive behaviors. Although the reviewed studies predominantly propose a linear relationship between appeal components and compassion activation, we theorize the relationship as nonlinear so that the upper and lower limits in emotion elicitation are identified along with moderators that might influence the thresholds proposed.

Third, our review shows that, even when successfully elicited, compassion typically facilitates helping actions. While contributing to grand challenges, helping is not sufficient to resolve global issues that require an ethic of responsibility (Thomas et al., 2009). Scholars therefore need to be realistic about the role of compassion in motivating prosocial behavior and study compassion in behavioral contexts which are consistent with the psychological features of this emotion.

Fourth, our analysis highlights an important characteristic of compassion which has been neglected in the psychological literature on compassion (Goetz et al., 2010) and its prosocial role (Batson et al., 1995). By directing attention to the suffering of others, compassion can

trigger considerations about the responsibility for the plight and the moral agency associated with the situation under investigation. This process explains why compassion appeals may activate blends of moral emotions associated with prosocial motivation (Haidt, 2003). Emotions in blends have complementary appraisals (Oh & Tong, 2022), thus can generate additive effects that are likely to influence prosocial behavior. We conceptualize their underlying psychological structure and illustrate how the blends distinctly motivate prosocial action. Our model offers a novel understanding of compassion. Although this emotion has limited influence on transformative behavior when considered individually, compassion thrives as part of an emotional blend. Two blends that combine compassion with moral anger and guilt are conceptualized. The model presented in Figure 3 highlights an important distinction between types of prosocial behavior and reconceptualizes their link with compassion (Iyer et al., 2003) by revealing, for the first time, the psychological mechanisms underlying each type of prosocial behavior.

Agenda for further research

The study provides three novel directions for future research (see Table 3). First, future research could empirically test the conceptual model proposed in Figure 3 to understand how appeal components activate compassion blends, under what conditions blends emerge, and how blends impact transformative prosocial behaviors. Existing studies measuring compassion, anger, and guilt (e.g., Antonetti & Maklan, 2016, 2017; Pagano & Huo, 1997; Yan & Cortese, 2023) have not yet explicitly considered the possibility that distinct mechanisms lead to prosocial helping or transformative action. Future research can also consider potential boundary conditions for the three mechanisms to clarify the circumstances under which compassion blends are activated. For example, the identity of the victim, whose relevance in the elicitation of compassion is discussed in our review (e.g., Gross & Wronski, 2021), could be less prominent when guilt and anger are accounted for. Guilt and anger involve attributions

of responsibility for the suffering and concerns about moral agency. We expect that concerns about victims' identity will play a less conspicuous role when negative emotions of anger and guilt are at play. Cultural variations in moral foundations might also affect the blends theorized, as cultures differ in relation to the centrality of harm/care and fairness/justice in moral evaluations (Atari et al., 2023).

A second area of inquiry concerns the extension of our proposed model. Future work could focus on other emotions potentially activated by compassion appeals. We find that sometimes compassion coarises with disgust (Kemp, 2023) or hope (Homer, 2021). Disgust and compassion may have additive effects: disgust may heighten concern for the victims and provide a strong motivation to help (Kemp, 2023; Sung et al., 2023). However, such a blend may not include the necessary appraisals of responsibility, accountability, and moral agency to motivate transformative behavior. Likewise, hope may increase response efficacy, thus heightening the motivation to alleviate suffering (Homer, 2021; Hussain & Wieffering, 2021; van Leeuwen et al., 2013). However, the blend of compassion and hope might not mobilize moral judgments of injustice; hence, the impact on transformative prosocial actions remains unclear. Further work could also explore blends that include moral emotions of pride or gratitude (Haidt, 2003).

We further advise scholars to examine the role of emotion regulation in extending our model. Emotion regulation is an important yet largely overlooked mechanism that could play a multifaceted role in compassion blends (Gross, 1998). First, the regulation of one emotion may affect the experience of other emotions, thus shaping the configuration of blends. For example, in the atonement blend, if distress is also elicited, the emotional experience may be highly aversive (O'Keefe, 2000). To address negative feelings of distress, receivers might revert to regulatory strategies aimed at reframing the problem, ultimately reducing guilt as well as compassion (O'Keefe, 2000). Second, the composition of a compassion blend may influence

the occurrence of emotion regulation strategies. For example, guilt might suppress the use of neutralization strategies because of associated efficacy beliefs (Antonetti & Maklan, 2016). Similarly, the anticipation of warm glow or positive feelings associated with the act of giving might weaken maladaptive responses and maintain compassion activation (Baberini et al., 2015; Dickert et al., 2011). Based on such logic, appeals that activate positive emotions may help individuals cope with distress and curb emotion regulation strategies.

A further extension concerns the role of thresholds in compassion elicitation. Using mixed methods to test how the occurrence of compassion blends affects the elicitation and backfiring thresholds would provide more theoretical precision regarding how the blends operate to influence prosocial behavior. Future studies could draw on scholarship on mixed emotions (Oh & Tong, 2022), emotion regulation (Gross, 1998), and coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) to provide a more systematic account of the interplay of emotional blends, emotion regulation processes, and engagement in the prosocial actions we theorized.

INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

6.3. Managerial implications

Our review presents important implications for practitioners. We clarify the conditions necessary for appeals to elicit compassion and the consequences for behavioral outcomes. Severity and legitimacy of the plight dictate the elicitation of compassion, and both features can be communicated in different ways in an appeal. By identifying the individual characteristics of receivers that are conducive to the elicitation of compassion, our review facilitates segmentation and targeting activities. The mapping of the elicitors of compassion (Table 1) offers managerial guidance on how to design and deliver persuasive campaigns.

Furthermore, we advise pretesting persuasive campaigns to minimize backfiring risks. The elicitation of distress needs to be minimized. Figure 2 offers a useful heuristic to both evaluate

the risks inherent to different compassion appeals and to design campaigns that elicit the target emotion. We recommend that managers pretest their potential campaigns against factors that elicit distress, using specific scales to measure the elicitation of discrete emotions.

Relatedly, the identification of compassion blends has important managerial implications. Eliciting compassion with moral anger or guilt leads to greater persuasion (e.g., Fernando et al., 2014). Figure 3 highlights critical mechanisms whose activation can be targeted and tested to develop campaigns that are able to address global challenges through compassion elicitation. When specific interventions are designed to promote transformative prosocial behavior, managers should consider the activation of cognitive and behavioral pathways that are consistent with the atonement and commitment blends. Figure 5 provides a hands-on tool for practitioners based on the key insights emerging from this review.

INSERT FIGURE 5 ABOUT HERE

By integrating diverse evidence and reconceptualizing the role of compassion in addressing grand challenges, this review invites scholars to move beyond single emotion appeals and to reimagine how complex moral emotions can drive transformative change. The proposed framework clarifies why compassion fails to mobilize structural transformative action and charts new pathways where the ethic of care meets the ethic of responsibility. We urge scholars to test, refine, and extend these ideas, ensuring that practitioners can design compassion appeals capable of addressing the grand challenges of our time.

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Table 1. Summary of factors involved in compassion activation

	Main elicitors of compassion	**References**
Severity of the plight	Intensity or seriousness of suffering (+)	Antonetti & Maklan (2016); Cialdini et al. (2007); Grinstein et al. (2019); Iyer & Ryan (2009); Ketron & Naletelich (2019); Knust & Haugestad (2018); Kunst & Hohle (2016); Montada & Schneider (1989) ; Pfattheicher et al. (2016)
	Vividness (+) conveyed with…	Antonetti & Maklan (2017); Bartsch & Kloß (2019); Dumitrescu & Bucy (2021); Glasford (2013); Kogut & Ritov (2005a);
	Detailed description of harm	Grinstein et al. (2019); Kogut & Ritov (2005a); Shelton & Rogers (1981)
	▪ Virtual reality	Herrera et al. (2018)
	▪ Storytelling formats	Bagozzi & Moore (1994); Gross (2008)
	▪ Photos of plight/sad victims	Baberini et al. (2015); Dumitrescu & Buci (2021); Choi & Park (2021); Homer (2021); Kang et al. (2022); Lu (2020); Pham & Sepianto (2019)
	Personalization (+)	Bartsch & Kloß (2019)
Legitimacy of the plight	Uncontrollability or external attribution of the plight (+)	Antonetti & Maklan (2017); Bor & Simonovotis (2021); Glasford (2013); Gross & Wronski (2021); Jin et al. (2021); Kogen & Dillipain (2017); Lu (2021); Lu & Schuldt (2016); Yu et al. (2015).
	Boundary conditions	**References**
Relationship with victims	Identifiability and singularity of victim (+): single victims identified with names, biographies or pictures	Choi & Park (2021); Dickert et al. (2011); Homer (2021); Kogut & Ritov (2005a, b); Oceja et al. (2017); Perrault et al. (2015); Västfjäll et al. (2014)
	Perceived similarity of victim (+): shared identity, influenced psychological closeness with virtual reality or storytelling	Antonetti & Maklan (2016); Cialdini et al. (2007); Batson et al. (2002); Ein-Gar & Levontin (2013); Gault & Sabini (2000); Grinstein et al. (2019); Gubler et al. (2022); Herrera et al. (2018); Karaçanta & Fitness (2006); Kogut & Ritov (2005a,b); Knupfer & Matthes, 2023); Montada & Schneider, (1989); Sung et al. (2023); van Leeuwen et al. (2013); Wong et al. (2021);

	Highly ingroup identified individuals (-)	Antonetti & Maklan (2016); Iyer & Ryan (2009); Iyer et al. (2003); van Leeuwen et al. (2013)
	Antipathy towards victims (-) (e.g., stigmatized groups)	Batson et al. (2005); Bennet & Vijaygopal (2019); Bor & Simonovits (2021); Cameron et al. (2017); Gross & Wronski (2021); Gubler et al. (2022); Montada & Schneider (1989)
Receivers' cognitive-affective style	Regulatory prevention orientation (-)	Choi & Park, 2021
	Social exclusion (-)	Choi et al. (2016)
	Alignment with receivers' intrinsic motivation (+)	Kong (2022)
Receivers' moral-political beliefs	Conservative ideologies (-) and religiosity (-)	Dumitrescu & Bucy (2021); Lee et al. (2020); Lu & Schudt (2016); Pagano & Huo (1997); Saslow et al. (2013)
	Moral identity (-, with underserving victims)	Lee et al. (2014)
	Beliefs in a just world (-)	Antonetti & Maklan (2017); Montada & Schneider (1989)
Context in which the appeal is received	Compassion fatigue	Lu (2022)
	Cognitive overload (+)	Dickert et al. (2011); Small et al. (2013) Choi & Park, 2021
	Help now (+)	Pham & Septianto (2019)
	Negative past performance of charity (+)	Septianto & Tjiptono (2019)

Table 2. Comparing across different emotional appeals for addressing the grand challenges

Appeals	Appraisals elicited	Emotion(s) elicited	Behavioural responses	Representative messaging	Possible calls to action
Compassion focused	Concern for the plight and the victims' suffering	Compassion	▪ Prosocial helping	*Hundreds of marine turtles die each year due to entanglement in plastics. Marine life is choking.*	Donate to an animal conservation charity or a plastics reduction initiative.
Guilt focused	Responsibility and agency for personal wrongdoing	Guilt	▪ Amending past wrongdoing	*Each of us produces 150kg of plastic waste each year and much of marine litter is made of single-use plastics. Our everyday plastic use is choking marine life.*	Stop using single-use plastics now; Support a referendum to ban single-use plastics.
Anger focused	Blame and severity of others' wrongdoing	Moral Anger	▪ Punishing the wrongdoer	*Petrochemical giants are increasing exponentially their production capacity for plastics. Marine life is choking yet the corporate lobbyists continue to promote single-use plastics. Join us to fight them.*	Boycott firms using single-use plastics now Support a referendum to ban single-use plastics Support a single-plastic tax.
Atonement focused	Concern for the plight and the victims' suffering Responsibility and agency for personal wrongdoing	Compassion and Guilt	▪ Prosocial helping ▪ Amending past wrongdoing	*Hundreds of marine turtles die each year due to entanglement in plastics. Marine life is choking.* *Each of us produces 150kg of plastic waste each year and much of marine litter is made of single-use plastics. Our everyday plastic use is choking marine life*	. Donate to an animal conservation charity or a plastics reduction initiative Stop using single-use plastics now Support a referendum to ban single-use plastics

Commitment focused	Concern for the plight and the victims' suffering Blame and severity of others' wrongdoing	Compassion and (moral) Anger	▪ Prosocial helping ▪ Punishing the wrongdoer	*Hundreds of marine turtles die each year due to entanglement in plastics. Petrochemical giants are increasing exponentially their production capacity for plastics. Marine life is choking, yet the corporate lobbyists continue to promote single-use plastics. Join us to fight them.*	Donate to an animal conservation charity or a plastics reduction initiative Boycott single-use plastics Support a single-plastic tax. Support a referendum to ban single-use plastics

Table 3. Summary of research agenda

Research direction	Specific research questions
Test the conceptual model	● How and why do compassion appeal components activate each compassion blend? ● Which receivers' or contextual conditions moderate this activation? ● Under which conditions do compassion blends influence helping vs. transformative prosocial behavior?
Extend the conceptual model: other compassion blends	● What other compassion blends can be activated by appeals? (e.g. disgust or hope) (Homer, 2021; Kemp, 2023) ● How do their constitutive appraisals interrelate to drive helping *vs*. transformative prosocial behavior?
Extend the conceptual model: other mechanisms	● Beyond additive relationships among emotions in a blend, are there other mechanisms explaining these interrelations, namely ambivalence or coexistence (Oh & Tong, 2022)? How do these mechanisms explain the influence of compassion blends on prosocial behavior?
Extend the conceptual model: emotion regulation	● Do compassion blends affect the elicitation and backfiring thresholds of appeals? How and why do the co-occurrence of emotions make backfiring appeals less likely? ● How do emotion regulation and blend composition influence one another? (Gross, 1998; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984)

Search criteria	Details
Publication date	No restrictions
Keywords in the title, abstract and keywords of articles	(compassion OR empath* OR sympath* OR "empathetic concern") AND (elicit* OR appeal OR elicit* OR communic* OR evok* OR induc* OR campaign) AND (petition OR "collective action" OR protest* OR activism OR advocacy OR volunteer* OR punish* OR "civic engagement" OR sustainable OR green OR environmental OR prosocial OR donation OR change OR altruis* OR charitable OR victim) NOT (medic* OR meditation OR mindfulness OR nurs* OR clinical OR training)
Database	Web of Science
Language	No restrictions
Document type	Peer-reviewed journal articles
Research type	Empirical (any method)
Research discipline	No restrictions

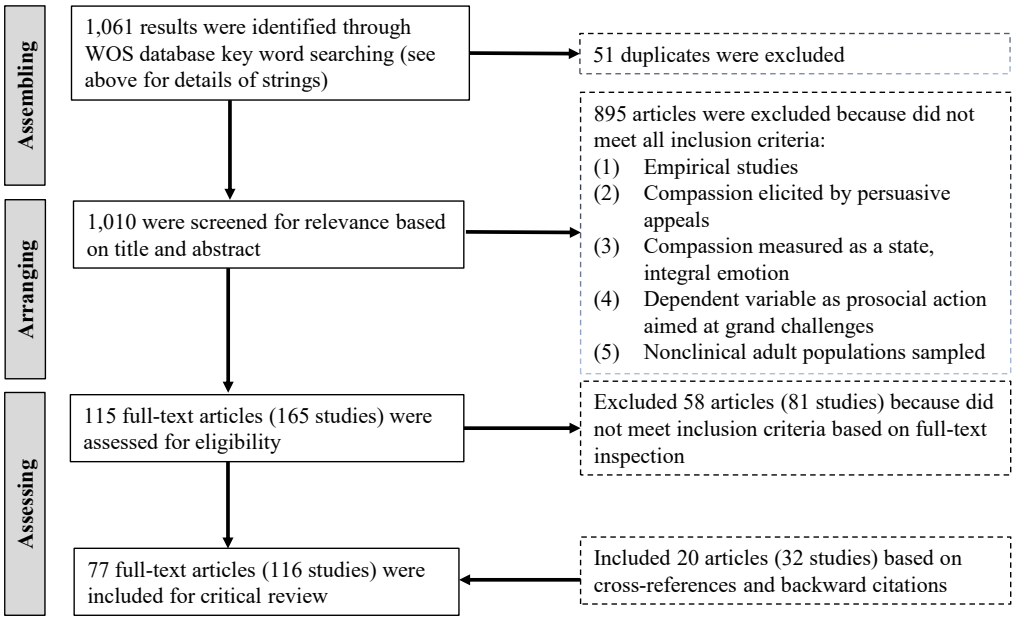
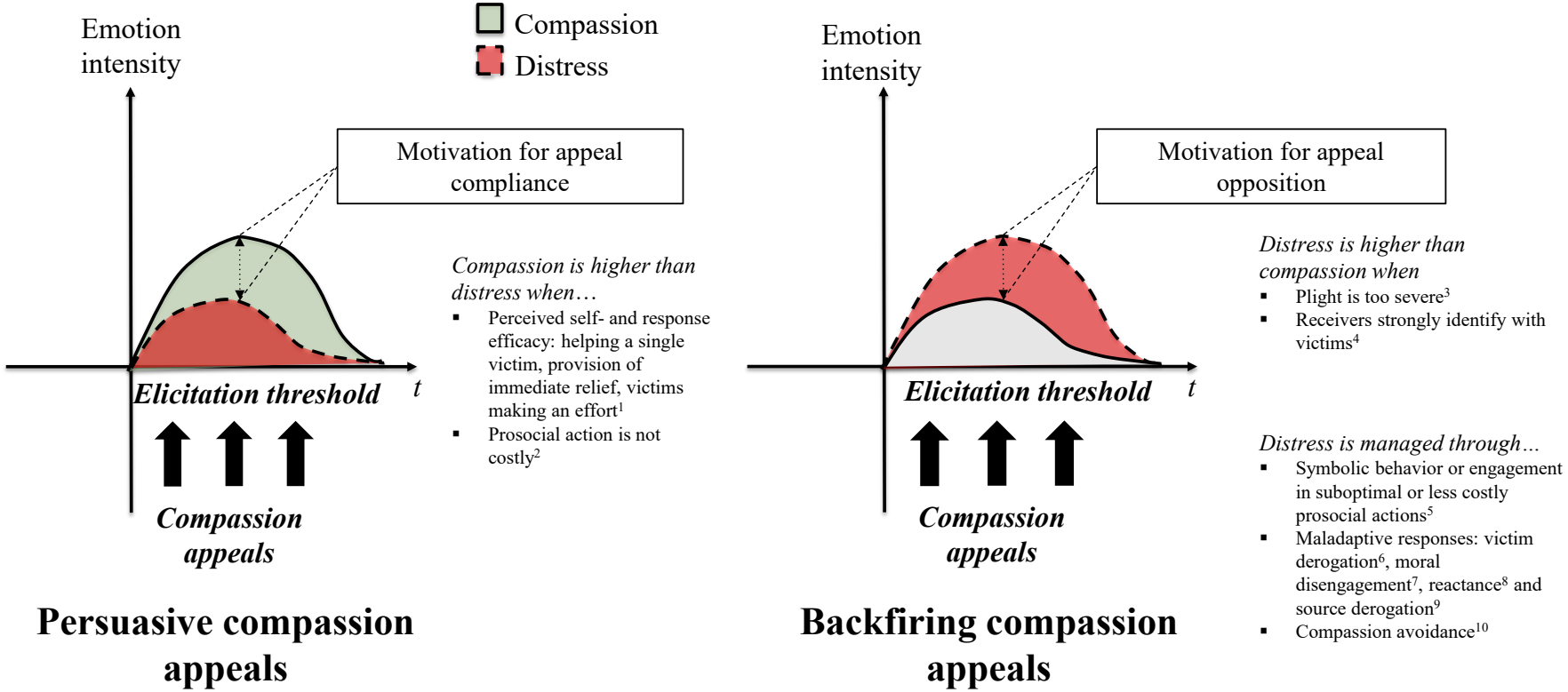


Figure 1: A step-by-step process of article (study) collection



[1] Albouy, 2017; Bor & Simonovits, 2021; Gault & Sabini, 2000; Glasford, 2013; Homer, 2021; Jin et al., 2021; Kong, 2022; Shelton & Rogers, 1981; Västfjäll et al., 2014; Yan & Cortese, 2023; Yu et al., 2015: Wei et al., 2021. [2]Cameron et al., 2017; Ketron & Naletelich, 2019; Yu et al., 2021. [3]Kang et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2020; Wei et al., 2021. [4] Wei et al., 2021. [5] Batson et al., 2019; Karaçanta & Fitness, 2006; Kemp, 2023; Kogut & Ritov, 2005a, b; Lu, 2021; Saraqini et al., 2022; Wei et al., 2021. [6]Antonetti & Maklan, 2016a,b; Balderson, 2023; Montada & Schneider, 1989. [7]Baberini et al., 2015. [8] Basil et al., 2008; Bartsch & Kloß, 2019. [9]Kang et al., 2022; Ketron & Naletelich, 2019. [10] Shaw et al., 1994

Figure 2. Thresholds in compassion appeals

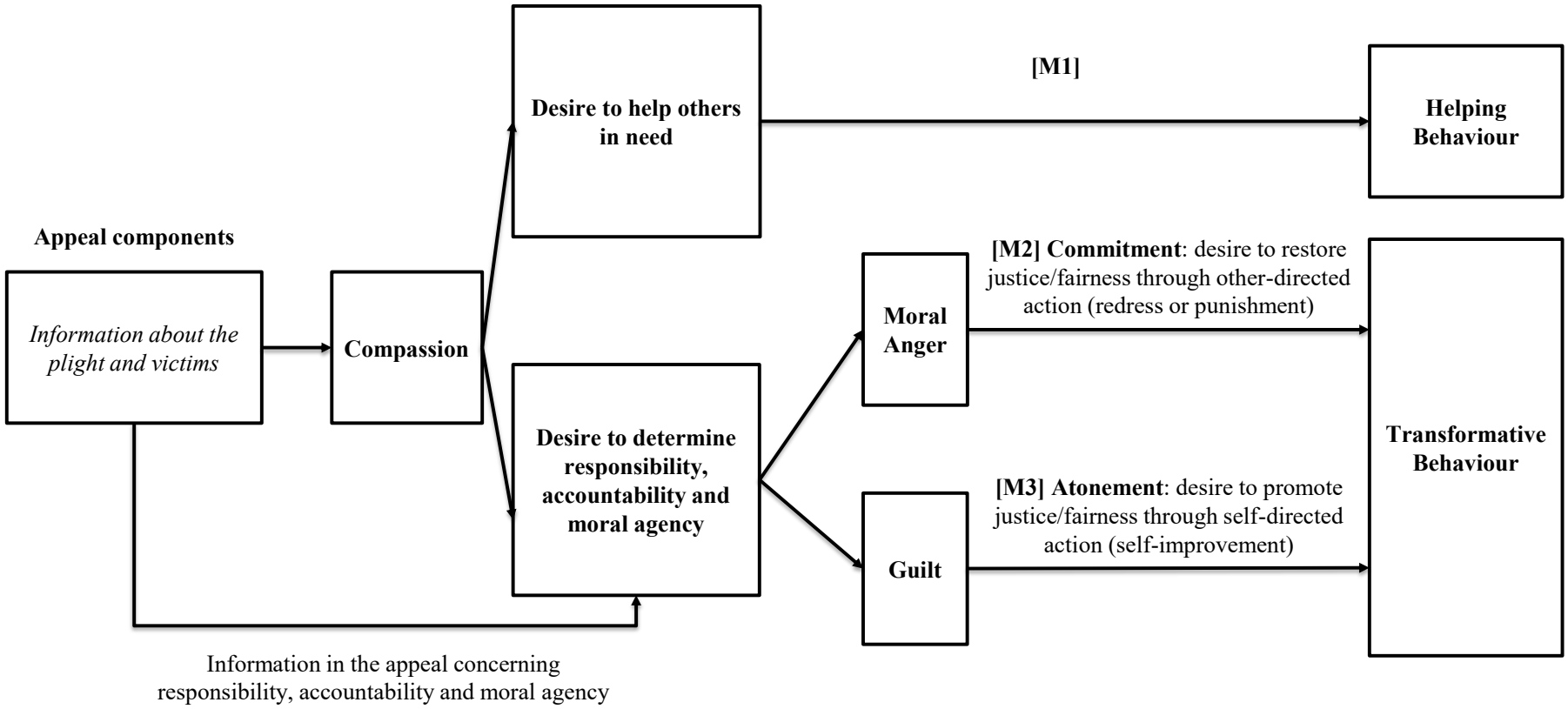
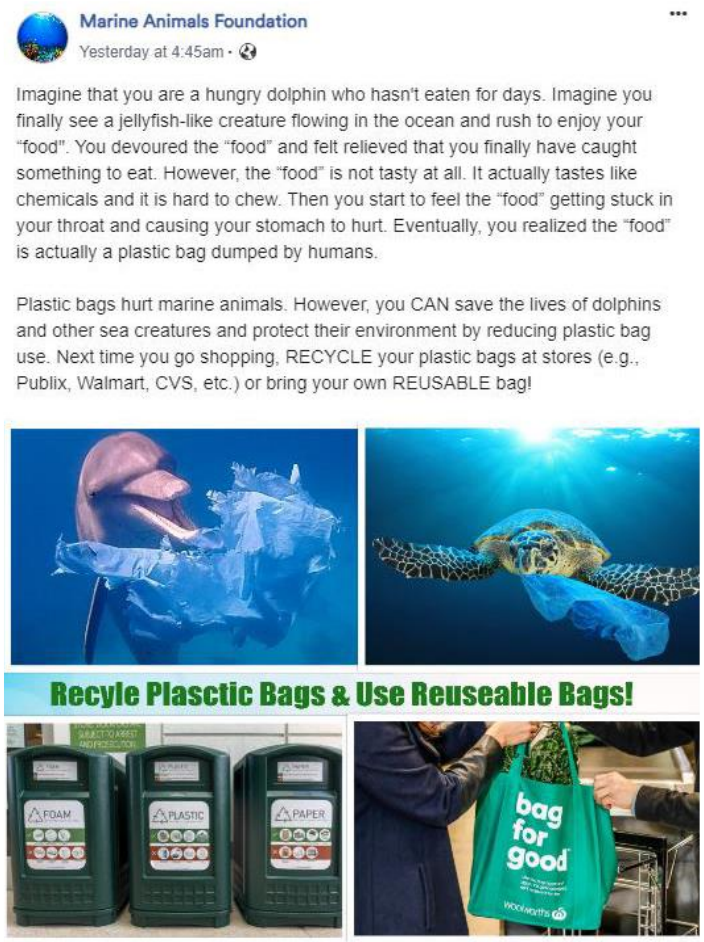


Figure 3. A conceptual model of compassion blends

Example A (Compassion and Guilt) (Yan and Cortese, 2023)



Example B (Compassion and Anger) (Glasford, 2013)

A therapeutic feeding center just outside of Morati in Niger has been ground Zero for the country's hunger crisis. . . . There has been fleeting attention from the international community, a spotlight that has now disappeared, leaving a country in crisis. . . . International Aid Organizations have been asking for help since last year, but, despite a forecast of a famine, their calls were ignored. . . . the government denies there is a famine and that children need food. . . . Of course it is not surprising that the government says there is no famine in Niger, because this situation is also the result of the government's own policies. . . . as you can see there is no shortage of food here. In fact the country isn't suffering from a food shortage, but rather the people's access to it. . . . the government insists that farmers plant crops for export, driving food prices even higher. Currently more than half the population can't afford a bag of rice, surviving on just one dollar a day.

Figure 4: Examples of appeals blending compassion with guilt or anger

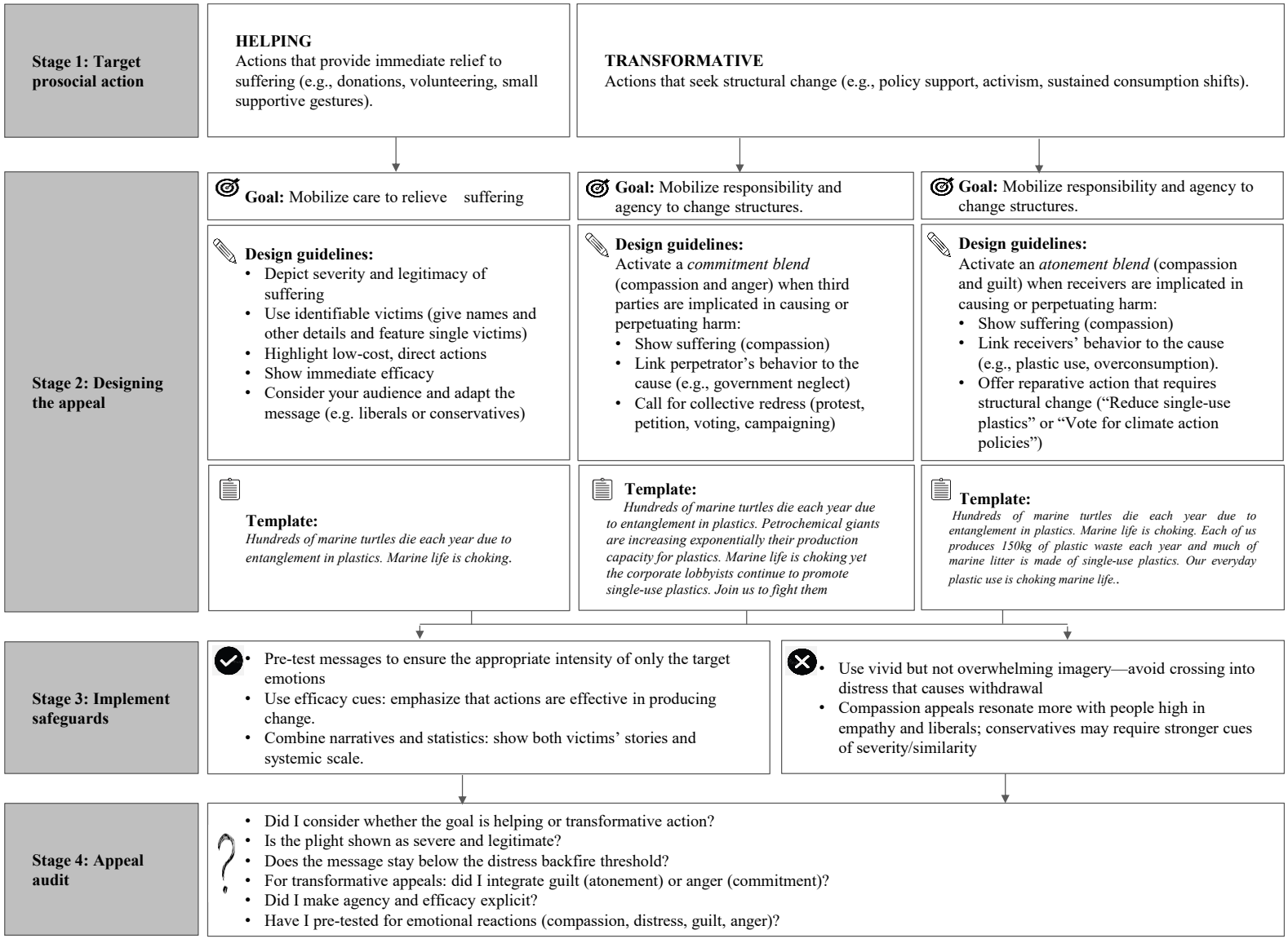


Figure 5: Hands-on tool for designing and delivering effective compassion appeals

CAN COMPASSION APPEALS CHANGE THE WORLD? A CRITICAL REVIEW AND RECONCEPTUALIZATION

Web Appendix

Part I. Description of studies

Part II. Coding procedure and examples

Part I. Description of studies

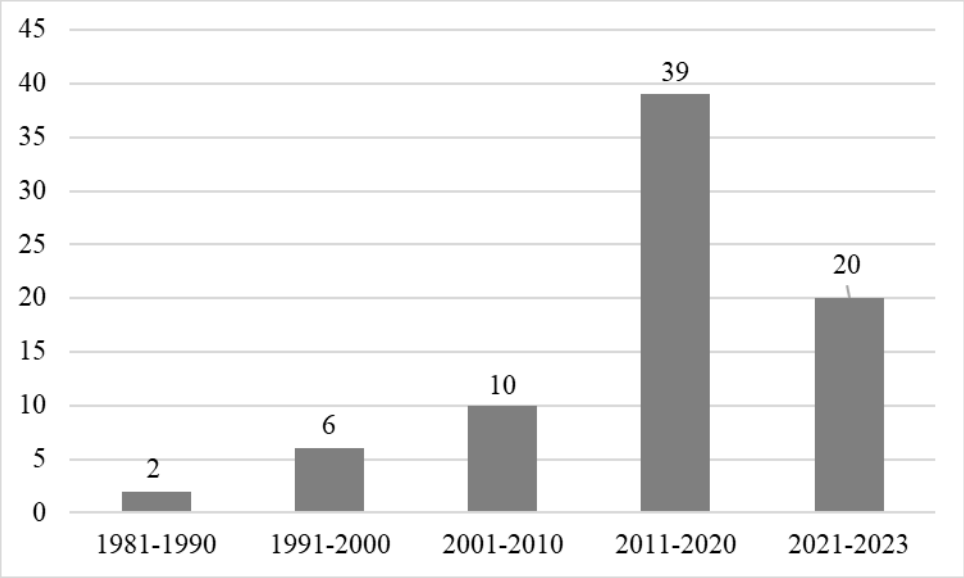


Figure A1: Published journal article by time period

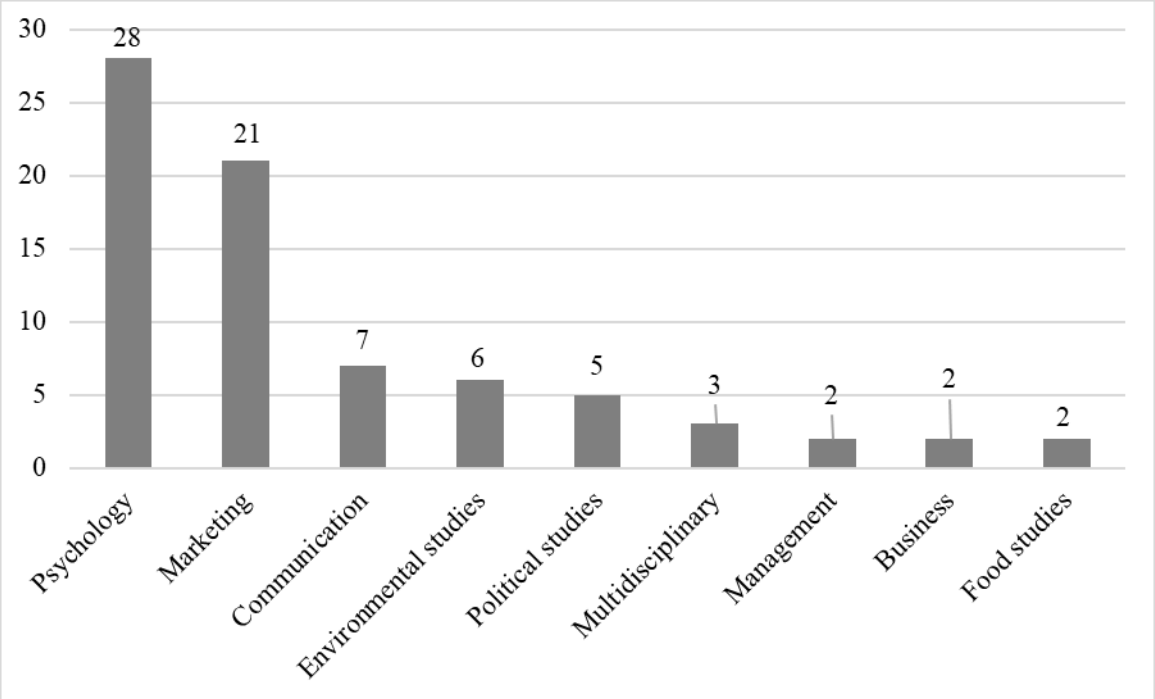


Figure A2: Published journal article by discipline

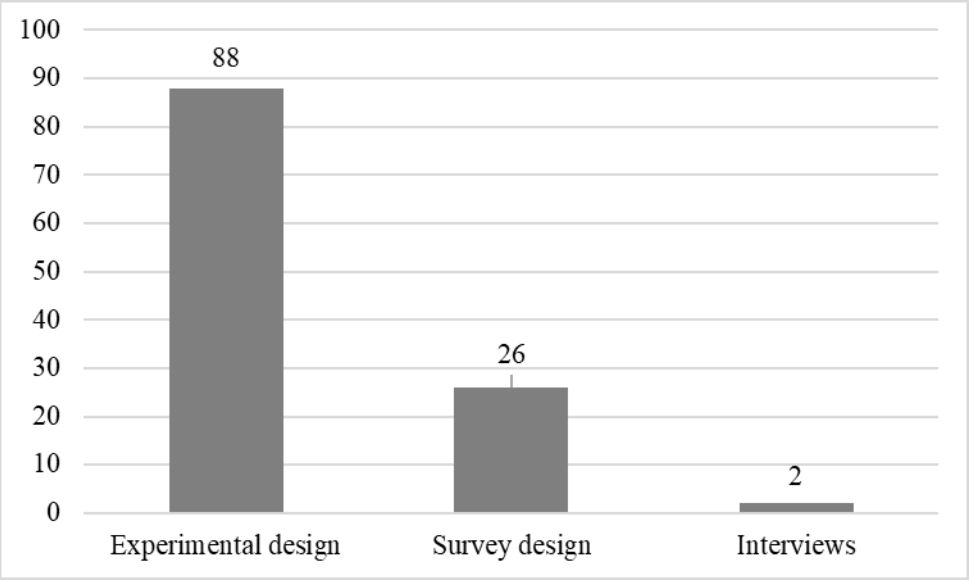


Figure A3: Research methods employed by the reviewed studies

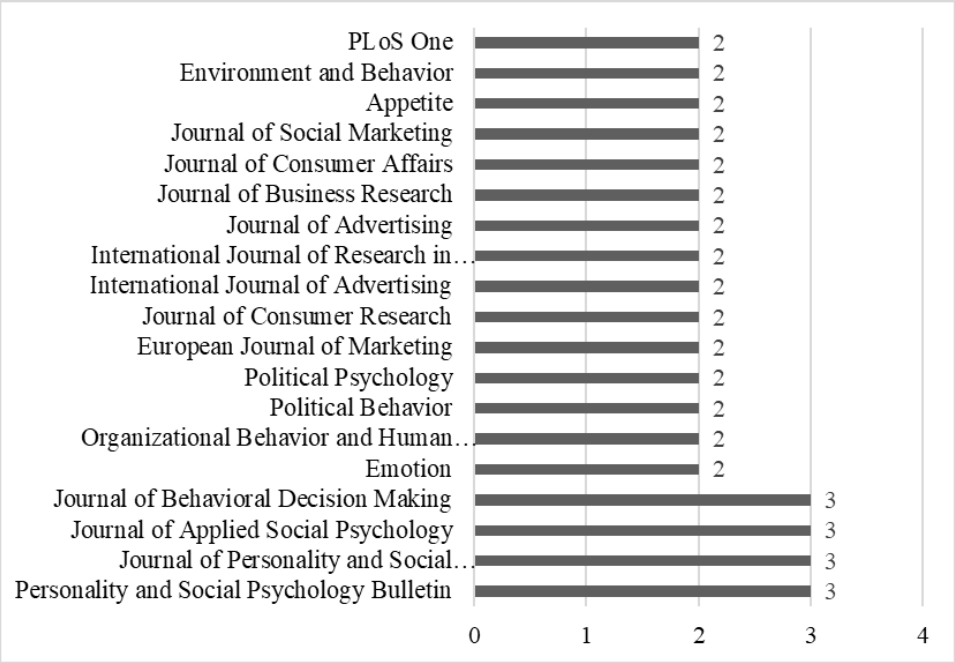


Figure A4: Published articles by journal (≥ 2 articles)

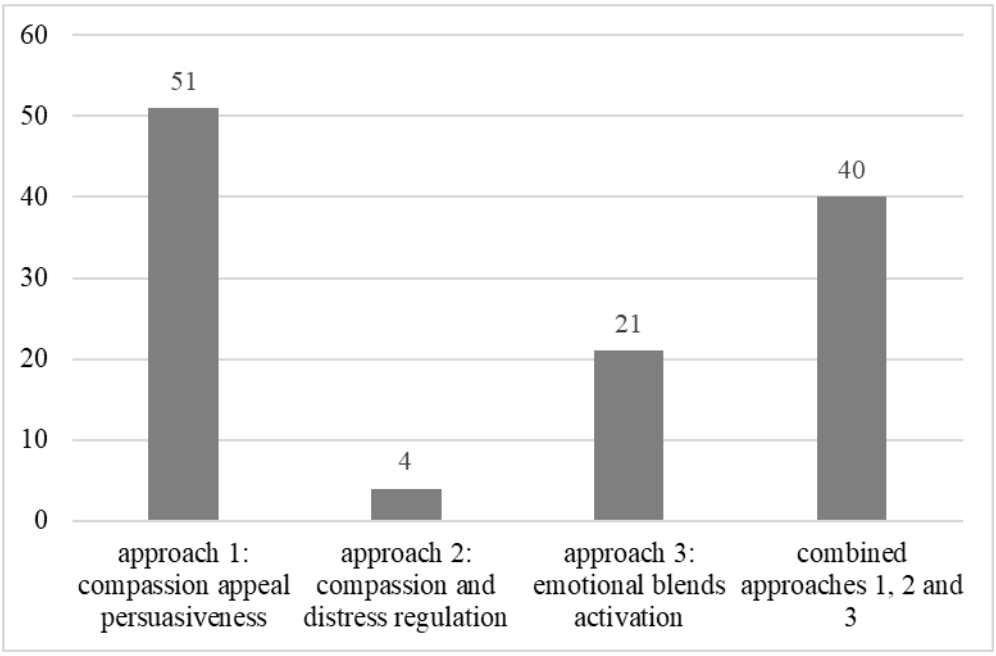


Figure A5: Research themes in the study of compassion appeals

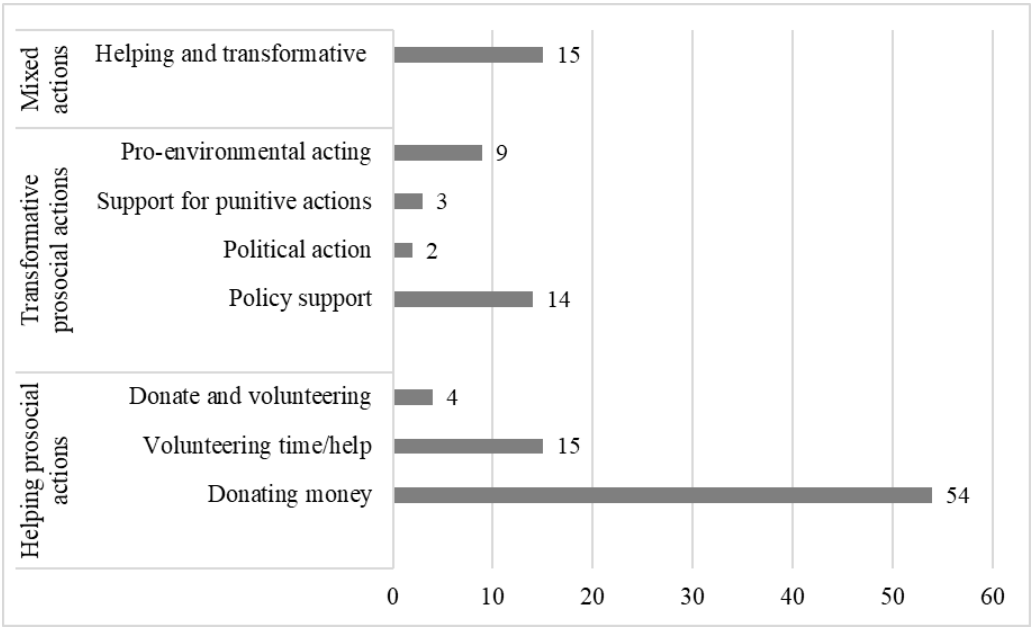


Figure A6: Dependent variables in the reviewed studies

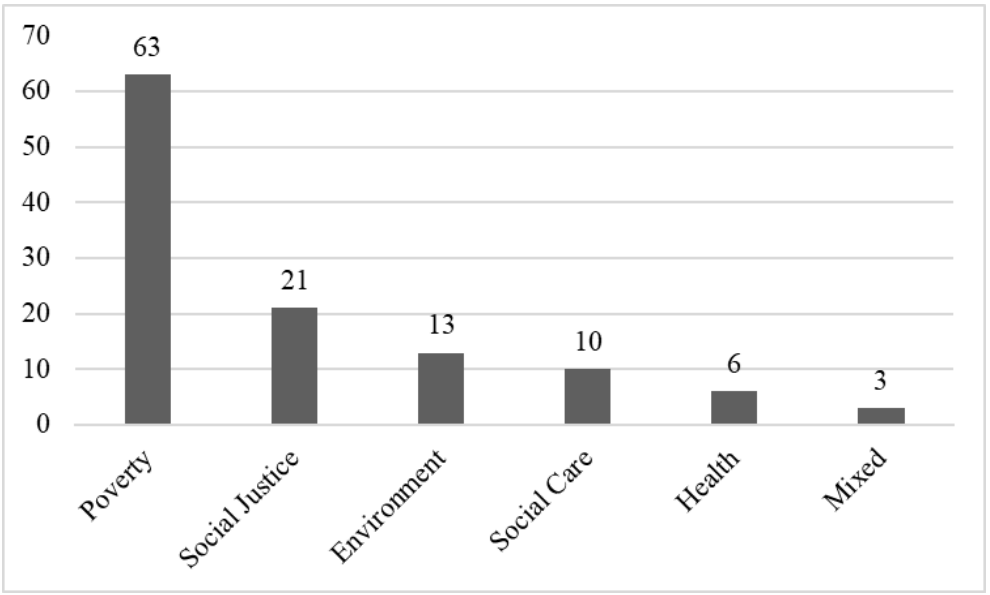


Figure A7: Contexts examined in the reviewed studies

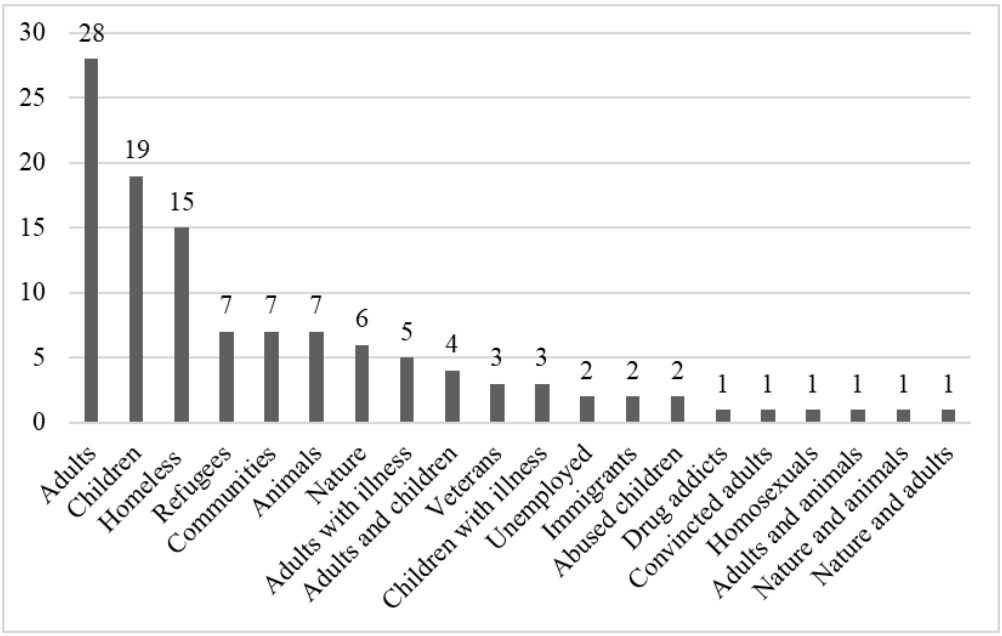


Figure A8: Victims depicted in the reviewed studies

Part II. Coding procedure and examples

First, we defined a set of descriptive codes based on our preliminary reading of the literature on compassion, persuasion and prosocial action. Given our focus on (i) compassion as an emotion and (ii) appeals to compassion, we initially coded (1) the appeal components, (2) the emotion(s) measured, (3) the causal role of compassion (mediator or moderator), and (4) the type of dependent variable measured (helping *vs*. transformative). We coded donating or volunteering as helping behavior and petition signing or support for new policies as transformative behavior. We also employed other codes tapping into the study's aim, type of study (1=empirical, 0=conceptual), discipline, context, victims, measure of compassion, theory, method (interviews, surveys, experiment), type of quantitative method (1=experimental, 2=correlational, 3=action research), sample size, sample type (1=student, 2=community), country where the data collection occurred, target of emotion (1=victim, 2=harmer, 3=third party), dependent variable, antecedent to emotion, mediators, moderators, and key findings. Finally, we created summaries of the studies, and all three coders analyzed them.

Second, we analyzed the summaries created.. We sequentially focused on identifying the antecedents and moderators of compassion activation; the psychological mechanisms underlying compassion activation or co-occurring with compassion, paying particular attention to compassion regulation; and the differences in the antecedents, mechanisms, and moderators between helping and transformative prosocial behavior. The analysis inductively generated additional codes (other mechanisms, emotions, their relationships, and the significance of compassion–action links), which we then applied across all studies. Whenever new codes emerged, we systematically revisited each sampled study and coded it.

Third, these first-order codes were grouped into second-order codes. For instance, all codes capturing identification with victims (e.g., identity of victims, similarity, number of victims, ingroup beliefs) were integrated into the second-order code "identification with victims".

Similarly, emotions labeled moral outrage, outrage or anger were grouped under "moral anger". Afterward, we compared the studies based on the appeal components, the emotions measured, and the dependent variables. For instance, we examined whether the sampled studies revealed a significant relationship between compassion and helping (transformative) prosocial behavior.

Finally, we categorized studies into three higher-order themes aligned with our review research questions.

The table A1 shows the first-order codes assigned to three papers. In Baberini et al. (2015), the antecedents included in the cell reflect first-order codes. These were later grouped into higher-order codes. For instance, the code "gaze" was later assigned to the second-order code "severity" and "number of victims" to "identification with victims". Baberini et al. (2015) was categorized in theme 1 and 2 (antecedents of compassion and compassion resistance/emotional regulation) because the study (a) manipulated appeal components that affect the activation of compassion (i.e., the gaze, victims' facial expression and the number of victims in the appeal) and (b) examined other processes that could influence behavior (i.e., anticipation of warm glow and moral disengagement) (coded as anticipated positive emotions for donating and emotion regulation).

Knab and Steffens (2021) reported two studies, but only the first met our inclusion criteria. They exposed German participants to a description of refugees hosted in government-funded accommodations and examined the emotions felt toward refugees' plight and the intention to engage in helping and transformative prosocial action. Since the study examined an emotional blend (moral anger and compassion), this paper was categorized as consistent with theme three.

Yan and Cortese (2023) report an experiment where individuals are exposed to a video showing marine animals harmed by humans. They manipulated perspective-taking and self- and response efficacy; these component appeals led to categorize the paper as belonging to

theme one. Because they measure an emotional blend (compassion and guilt) while controlling for fear and hope, this paper was also categorized as consistent with stream three.

	Baberini et al. (2015)	Knab & Steffens (2021)	Yan & Cortese (2023)
Appeal component(s)	1	1	1
Emotion(s) measured	Compassion alone	Compassion and outrage	Compassion and guilt; fear and hope as controls
Causal role of compassion	Mediator	Mediator	Mediator
Type of DV measured (1= helping, 2=transformative)	1	1, 2	2
Research aim	What features of photographs (gaze, number of individuals) influence sympathy	Explores a structural connection between sympathy and helping or transformative prosocial actions	How compassion appeals (human-dumped plastic bags harming marine animals) can promote plastic reduction
Type of study (1=empirical, 0=conceptual)	1	1	1
Discipline	Psychology	Psychology	Marketing
Measure of compassion	Sympathy	Sympathy	Empathy
Theory	Not discussed	Power theory	Social Cognitive theory and the extended parallel process model (EPPM)
Method (1=qualitative, 2=quantitative, 3=mixed)	2	2	2
Type of quantitative method (1=experimental, 2=correlational, 3=action research)	1	2	1
Sample size	394	203	257
Sample type (1=student, 2=community)	2	2	1
Country or Platform	USA	Germany	USA
Target of emotion (1=victim, 2=harmer, 3=third party)	1 (child in need)	1 (refugees)	1 (marine animals)
Dependent variable(s)	Helping (donations) Sympathy, disengagement	Transformative (actions that challenge hierarchy) and helping (actions	Transformative (intent to recycle, re-use, reduce plastic use)

		that maintain hierarchy)	
Antecedent(s) of emotion	Gaze, facial expression, number of children in the photo	Identification with refugees, identification with government	Perspective-taking with marine animals
Mediator(s)	[Although not measured, sympathy and disengagement are conceptually treated as mediators]	Sympathy and moral outrage	Empathy, guilt, hope, and fear
Moderator(s)	None	None	Self-efficacy and response efficacy
Key findings	Expressions of sadness (vs. happiness) elicit sympathy. Averted (vs direct) gaze elicits more compassion. Moral disengagement negatively influences compassion.	Outrage correlates with both prosocial actions; sympathy only with helping prosocial action.	Perspective-taking message elicits empathy and guilt. Guilt leads to greater intentions to reuse and recycle plastic bags. Compassion does not influence prosocial action.
Emotion regulation	Moral disengagement		
Other emotions measured	None	Outrage	Guilt
Relationships among emotions	NA	Not reported	Compassion leads to guilt
Relationship compassion-action	Positive and sig.	Positive and sig. with helping prosocial action only	Positive but not sig.