

Thinking about Compassion & Love in Academic Libraries

Sandra Cowan, University of Lethbridge

Mary Greenshields, European University Institute

CAPAL Conference - 7 June, 2022



COMPASSION



<https://www.mindful.org/3-ways-to-train-the-compassionate-brain/>

"Definitions of compassion...involve two components: *sensitivity* to suffering and the *motivation* to help alleviate it."

-Kolts & Chodron, 2013, p. 7



COMPASSION AS WELLNESS

"If you want others to be happy,
practice compassion. If you want
to be happy, practice compassion."

-Dalai Lama as quoted in Kolts & Chodron,
2013, p. 7

COMPASSIONATE LIBRARIANS

“Even with patrons who could cause trouble for the librarians, empathic understanding was the rule rather than the exception....’I always try to remember that there’s probably a lot going on with them and so it’s not a personal attack’” (p. 67).

Williams & Ogden, 2021

“Several of the librarians identified the importance of developing relationships with patrons as part of the service they provided—relationships could be the needed help...librarians needed to provide whatever help they could, from Narcan to housing assistance, so that they could be at peace with their choices” (p.68).

“Respondents indicated that their own empathy and compassion for others increased as a result of their low-morale experience. If participants became supervisors or administrators, their low-morale experience prompted them to reflect on and adjust their leadership style to one that highlighted compassion, flexibility, acknowledgement of employee contributions, and a significantly reduced tolerance for abuse.”

-Kendrick, 2021, p. 868

“Compassion meditation, they [therapists] said, helped them be more sensitive and yet, less prone to emotional contagion.”

-Bibeau et al., 2020, p. 14

“...radiating compassion to the coworkers will also reactively elicit compassionate responses”

-Lee et al., 2017, p. 121

LOVE

"Caring for myself is not self indulgence, it is an act of self preservation, and that is an act of political warfare."

- Lorde, 1988

We must change our conception of what knowledge is and who can be considered a knowledge producer. Currently, knowledge production on the campuses is insulated from the broad infrastructural work that sustains academic life [...]. Yet, like women's reproductive work, this work too is mostly invisible.

(Federici, 2019, p. 101)





<https://tricycle.org/trikedaily/encounter-shadow-buddhist-america/>

IDIOT COMPASSION

"It is perhaps most important in working with others that we do not develop *idiot compassion*, which means always trying to be kind. Since this superficial kindness lacks courage and intelligence, it does more harm than good. It is as though a doctor, out of apparent kindness, refuses to treat his patient because the treatment might be painful..."

-Trungpa, 1991, p.126

IDIOT COMPASSION IN THE LIBRARY?

What about...

- Being all things to all people? Mission creep?
- Inability to say no to university or library administration?
- Enabling bullying, microaggressions, systemic disrespect?
- McMindfulness? McCompassion?
- Centering illness and wellness on the individual and denying systemic and institutional impacts on well-being?
- Stereotypes of niceness?
- Demands for compassion as a source of stress?

“Attempts to essentialize and idealize compassion risk losing sight of the event of compassion in favour of moral exhortation.”

-McCaffrey, 2015, p. 20

COMPASSIONATE V. THREAT-BASED THINKING

“Whereas threat-based thinking is narrow, biased and tightly focused, compassionate thinking is broad and flexible. We are able to consider and understand the situation from different perspectives. Compassionate thinking can move back and forth between empathizing and problem-solving, between directing warmth and acceptance to those who are suffering and seeking pragmatic solutions to address the causes and conditions that create and maintain that suffering.”

- Kolts & Chodron, 2013, p.160



A QUESTION FOR YOU

What are some solutions for promoting a more compassionate, loving workplace?



Photo by Hush Naidoo Jade Photography, unsplash.com/es/@hush52?utm



THANK YOU <3

sandra.cowan@uleth.ca

mary.greenshields@eui.eu

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. (2017). *Living a feminist life*. Duke University Press.

Allison-Cassin. (2020). Bodies, brains, and machines: An exploration of the relationship between the material and affective states of librarians and information systems. *Library Trends*, 68(3), 409–430.
<https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2020.0009>

Bibeau, M., Dionne, F., Riera, A., & Leblanc, J. (2020). The influence of compassion meditation on the psychotherapist's empathy and clinical practice: A phenomenological analysis. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*. doi:10.1177/0022167820953258

Federici, S. (2016). *From crisis to commons: Reproductive work, affective labor and technology in the transformation of everyday life* (1st ed., pp. 192–204). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315746890-11>

Federici, S. (2019). *Re-enchanting the world: Feminism and the politics of the commons*. Kairos.

García-Andrade, Gunnarsson, L., & Jónasdóttir, A. G. (2018). *Feminism and the Power of Love: Interdisciplinary Interventions*. Taylor & Francis Group.

Greenshields, M., & Polkinghorne, S. (2022 preprint). Love is a lens: Finding love in library and information studies. *Library Trends*.

REFERENCES

- Hartel, J. (2022, February 7). *The crossroads of information & love: A top 10 list* [YouTube video]. INFideos. <https://youtu.be/UMcwfHsNJwU>
- Hanson, R. (2020). *Neurodharma: New science, ancient wisdom and seven practices of the highest happiness*. Harmony Books.
- hooks, b. (1999). *Cultural criticism & transformation* [video]. <https://youtu.be/zQUuHFKP-9s>
- Jónasdóttir, A. G. (1994). *Why women are oppressed*. Temple University Press.
- Jónasdóttir, A. G. (2010). What kind of power is “love power”? In A. G. Jónasdóttir, V. Bryson, & K. B. Jones (Eds.), *Sexuality, gender and power: Intersectional and transnational perspectives* (1st ed., pp. 1-15). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203834916>
- Jónasdóttir, & Ferguson, A. (2014). Love: A question for feminism in the twenty-first century. In *GEXcel: Love in Our Time* (Vol. 14). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315884783>
- Kendrick, K. D. (2017). The low morale experience of academic librarians: A phenomenological study. *Journal of Library Administration*, 57(8), 846-878. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01930826.2017.1368325>
- Kolts, R. & Chodron, T. (2015). *An open-hearted life: Transformative methods for compassionate living from a clinical psychologist and a Buddhist nun*. Shambhala.

REFERENCES

- Lee, K. C., Oh, A., Zhao, Q. R., Wu, F. Y., Chen, S. Y., Diaz, T., & Ong, C. K. (2017). Buddhist counseling: Implications for mental health professionals. *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*, 4(2), 113-128. [https://doi.org/ 10.1037/scp0000124](https://doi.org/10.1037/scp0000124)
- McCaffrey, G. (2015). Chapter two: Idiot compassion. In Jardine, D.W., Gilham, C., & McCaffrey, G., eds., *On the Pedagogy of Suffering: Hermeneutic and Buddhist Meditations*. Peter Lang.
- Shirazi, R. (2014, July 15). *Reproducing the academy: Librarians and the question of service in the Digital Humanities*. <https://roxanneshirazi.com/2014/07/15/reproducing-the-academy-librarians-and-the-question-of-service-in-the-digital-humanities/>
- Sloniowski, L. (2016). Affective labor, resistance, and the academic librarian. *Library Trends*, 64(4), 645–666. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lib.2016.0013>
- Trungpa Rinpoche, C. (1991). *The Heart of the Buddha*. Shambhala.
- Williams, R. D., & Ogden, L. P. (2021). What knowledge and attitudes inform public librarians' interactions with library patrons in crisis? *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 53(1), 62-74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000620917720>