In recent years, insights from the "compassion research" have highlighted the importance of activation in networks associated with affiliation and reward. Compassion may, therefore, represent a very potent strategy for ignoring the presence of suffering or changing the negative reality. Whereas empathy training increased negative affect, compassion training increased positive affect and present with clients. This is consistent with the idea that compassion involves a shift from a reactive to a proactive emotional state, which would enable feelings of safety and compassion to be felt and expressed. This is consistent with the idea that compassion involves a shift from a reactive to a proactive emotional state, which would enable feelings of safety and compassion to be felt and expressed. Hence, compassion training may be a useful strategy for preventing burnout among professionals who are at risk for burnout due to empathetic distress. (Mesca et al., 2014).

Chanting is a contemplative practice found in spiritual traditions worldwide which improves our ability to be compassionate by strengthening vagal tone. In my experiences in spiritual & end of life care, and as a counselling practicum student, I have experienced empathetic distress and I have also felt the benefits of a regular chanting practice. Therefore, I have compiled this guidebook for counsellors who are interested in exploring the power of compassion and resilience through the practice of chanting.

Healthy Vagal Tone activated by Chanting

Neurological basis for Compassion & Resilience

Chanting for Resilience, Chanting for Compassion: A Guidebook for Counsellors

Stacey (Ana) Gheyssen
St. Stephen’s College

Part One: The Book

Audience
Counsellors and others in the helping professions who are at risk for burnout due to empathetic distress.

Sample
Chanting lays the foundation for compassion and increases resilience via the health of the vagus nerve. Give practical instructions for developing a regular chanting practice.

Goals
Provide an explanation of the neurological and physiological basis for the way that chanting lays the foundation for compassion and increases resilience via the health of the vagus nerve. Give practical instructions for developing a regular chanting practice.

Contents
Part One: How we work
• Emotional Sensitivity
• Polyvagal Theory’s Social Engagement System
• High vs Low Vagal Tone
• Physiological requirements of Compassion

Part Two: How we chant
• Improved Vagal Tone
• Improved respiratory

Part Three: How we interact

Acknowledgements
Dr. Stephen Porges is not only the originator of the Polyvagal Theory, but his appreciation of contemplative practices led him to make the connection between chanting, a healthy vagus nerve and compassion. I am grateful.

Feasibility & Next Steps
• Chants will be recorded at home with professional audio equipment and uploaded to SoundCloud, a free website for independent artists. There will be links in the guidebook.
• The guidebook will be formatted as an e-book for my own use in my counselling practice and as a downloadable free resource on my business website to other professionals.
• In addition, I would like to submit a book proposal to local independent publishers.

Project Part II: The Recordings

Hindu Yoga - Bija Seed Sounds
Lam, Vam, Ram, Om, On

These syllables are each considered a seed of powerful sound energy which heals at the level of the chakras that correspond to the physical body and relate to a central psychological issue.

Christian - Gregorian chant
Ubi Caritas Et Amor, Deus Ibi Est
One of the oldest known Christian chants which comes to us from medieval times means “Where charity and love are, God is there”.

Buddhist – Mantra of Compassion
Om Mani Padme Hum
The mantra teaches the six practices that oppose the internal forces that cause suffering: generosity, ethics, patience, perseverance, concentration, and wisdom. It is perhaps the oldest and most well-known of the Buddhist mantras.

Indigenous
Oh Great Spirit, Earth Sun Sky and Sea, You are here, and All around Me
People inspired by Indigenous traditions from around the world have created chants to honor the central place of nature in spirituality.

Dr. Stephen Porges, 2011).

Improves Vagal Tone

Moderating one’s compassion for clients by emotional distance from them (‘detached concern’) was viewed as a way of protecting oneself from intense emotional arousal that could interfere with functioning effectively on the job. However, an imbalance of excessive detachment and little concern seemed to lead staff to respond to clients in negative, callous, and dehumanized ways (Mashal et al., 2003).

One of the implications of Polyvagal Theory is that ‘compassion relies on a neural platform that enables an individual to maintain and express a physiological state of safety when confronted with the pain and suffering of others’ (Porges, 2018).

‘Polyvagal theory explains how the manipulation of vagal pathways is involved in the foundational processes upon which contemplative training and practice are based. These processes require two pathways (passive and active) to regulate the autonomic state and lead to a physiological state, which would enable feelings of safety and compassion to be felt and expressed. Thus, once one is in a physiological state that supports feelings of safety, successful training would result in a resilient autonomic nervous system that would acknowledge, without mirroring, the emotional reactivity and pain often expressed by those who are suffering’ (Porges, 2010).

Chanting, ostensibly a spiritual or religious ritual, is in fact a gateway into developing a state of ease, growth, restoration and health. A passive pathway is provided by being in a safe, quiet space. An active pathway is provided by the act of chanting itself (i.e. long exhalation relative to inhalation leads to parasympathetic nervous system activation). With regular practice, it contributes to maintaining a central state as baseline (Porges, 2017).

Background and Explanation
Those who work in the helping professions, such as nurses, social workers, psychiatrists and counsellors, experience high rates of burnout (Morse et al., 2012).

“Moderating one’s compassion for clients by emotional distance from them (‘detached concern’) was viewed as a way of protecting oneself from intense emotional arousal that could interfere with functioning effectively on the job. However, an imbalance of excessive detachment and little concern seemed to lead staff to respond to clients in negative, callous, and dehumanized ways (Mashal et al., 2003).

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Theoretical Framework

**Neurological basis for Compassion & Resilience**

- **Vagus Nerve**
  - **Healthy Vagal Tone activated by Chanting**
  - **Neurological pathway**
    - **Passive (via reception)**
    - **Active (via chanting)**

**Goals**

- **Chants** will be recorded at home with professional audio equipment and uploaded to SoundCloud, a free website for independent artists.
- **The guidebook will be formatted as an e-book for my own use in my counselling practice and as a downloadable file on my business website to other professionals.**
- **In addition, I intend to submit a book proposal to local independent publishers.**
- **I would like to be a guest presenter and offer online workshops based on the book as part of my professional practice.**

**Feasibility & Next Steps**

- **Project Part I: The Book**
  - **Contents**
    - **Part One:** How we work
    - **Part Two:** How chanting works
    - **Part Three:** How we chant
  - **Acknowledgements**
    - **Who is this book for?**
    - **Links to Recordings**

- **Project Part II: The Recordings**
  - **Hindu-Veda - Rija Seed Sounds**
    - **Christian - Gregorian chant**

**Acknowledgements**

- **Dr. Stephen Porges** is not only the originator of the Polyvagal Theory, but his appreciation of contemplative practices led him to make the connection between chanting, a healthy vagal tone, and compassion.
- **Manon difficulties, founder of the Sanskrit Studies Method and the Luminous Soul Method, taught me that the sound of the mantra holds the breath.**

**Background and Explanation**

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