

Being Civil with Ourselves

Manusov, V. (2011) Being civil with ourselves. *Spectra*, 47(3):16-19.

Intrapersonal Civility

Are we less civil to ourselves than we might be to others? The author posits that many of us suffer from incivility that we direct toward ourselves and discusses how to deal with our harmful self-berating.

Background: Interpersonal vs. Intrapersonal Civility

- Manusov asserts that there are many rules, both social and judicial, that help guide us in dealings with others. If we go outside of these norms of civility, there can be a range of consequences including things like social shunning or imprisonment, depending on the severity of our incivility.
- These interpersonal rules encourage many people to try to maintain a sense of civility with others.
- Because these consequences do not apply to our inner voices, we often act with incredible incivility toward ourselves, being simultaneous victims and perpetrators of intrapersonal incivility. This incivility toward ourselves can perpetuate more incivility with others.

Incivility with Ourselves

- Our critical inner voice can be thought of as a “less than desirable roommate who talks to us with an unceasing monologue.”
- For many of us, we are so used to this incessant, rebuking chatter from our inner voice that we may not even be aware of it. If we were to stop and think about it, though, most of us would realize that we say harsh things to ourselves that we (hopefully) would never say to others.
- Most of us consistently repeat messages to ourselves about how we have fallen short or how we do not measure up.
- Manusov mentions that “this internal dialogue is at the basis of our unhappiness,” and that, although we may rarely notice it, the incivility of our incessant inner dialogue negatively affects us, possibly even transforming into illness — both mental and physical.
- Incivility with ourselves can even spill over into how we relate to others. People who are “angriest with themselves are most likely to act angrily with others.”
- Berating ourselves can result in feeling shame, which is considered a form of self-hatred. If we change our behavior as a result of feeling shame, “these are not free and joyful acts,” but rather “we are allowing our growing and learning to be guided by self-hatred.”

How to Become More Civil with Ourselves

- The first step is to pay attention to what we are saying to ourselves and how we are saying it, rather than just trying to stop it. Then listen to these messages with compassion.
- Try using nonviolent communication skills by avoiding moralistic judgments, unfavorable comparisons, and blame. If we label our thoughts as potentially violent, this can help us change our tone and start to question whether or not our shortcomings deserve the amount of incivility we are aiming at them.
- Becoming more mindful of the incivility of our inner chatter and freeing ourselves of these mental “poisons” of anger, despair, jealousy, and illusion will help foster happiness.

Effects of Becoming More Civil with Ourselves

- Once we begin to become more self-aware and compassionate toward ourselves, we will start to notice an amazing decrease in our sense of burden and a resulting increase in energy.
- Compassion directed at the self encourages compassion toward others. Becoming more civil with ourselves can help us be more civil with each other, thus improving our interpersonal relationships.

Forgiveness is “the creation of meaning” and we usually think of forgiveness happening between people. It is a transformational process that also can happen within ourselves. We can start this process at any moment and begin to feel better by talking to ourselves more compassionately.