Open Scientist Handbook • OSH

Become a Caring Open Scientist

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"So it's kind of like if your house catches on fire. The bad news is there is no fire brigade. The good news is random people appear from nowhere, put out the fire and leave without expecting payment or praise. ...I was trying to think of the right model to describe this form of random acts of kindness by geeky strangers. ...You know, it's just like the hail goes out and people are ready to help. And it turns out this model is everywhere, once you start looking for it" Jonathan Zittrain, [Ted Talk](#) 2009.

Kindness, Culture, and Caring: The Open Science Way

There are lots of ways that the rational, logical, hyper-competitive, winner-take-all, zero-sum, prisoner's dilemma, nice-guys-finish-last, single-bottom-line, annual-productivity ratchet—or add your adjective here—mindset is just wrong for sustaining the academy and bad for science. For decades now, the same neo-liberal economic schemes that have been used to reshape how governments budget their funds have also made dramatic and disturbing inroads into university budgets and governance. Open science can show how that trend is a race to the bottom for universities. What do you say, we turn around and go another way?

"I have learnt silence from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant and kindness from the unkind." Khalil Gibran, *Sand and Foam*.

A century without kindness: the impact of external logics

The banishment of kindness as a necessary part of being an academic,—just one more feature of adopting the neoliberal marketplace logic, and another effect of hyper-masculinity in the workplace—allows academics to defer judgements about kindness:

“We want to argue, however, that although kindness is a commonplace in pedagogical encounters, easily recognisable by its presence or absence, attending to it can be subversive of neo-liberal assumptions that place value on utility and cost above other human values” (Clegg and Rowland 2010).

The word for kindness in Latin is *humanitas*: kindness makes us human. “[T]he Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius, a leading Stoic philosopher, speaks of kindness as ‘mankind’s [sic] greatest delight’ (Philips and Taylor 2009, 18). In Aristotle’s teachings, kindness is a component of *phronesis*: an entire type of “practical wisdom” that we’ve slowly devalued over the past 300 years (Juarrero 1999) [and you can blame Hume and Kant and all the usual suspects for this]. *Phronesis* combines virtue with a notion of adult comprehension: a way of knowing the right thing to do in all circumstances. It has little to do with intellection, and everything to do with broad experience and learning.

“Kindness is not deference, not conflict-aversion, not niceness or politeness. It's a quality of grounded, dignified, powerful warmth. It's the acumen that allows you to see other people with exquisite precision, and to know that you love them in detail” (Academics Taking Action 2018) [Lab Notes on Power in Academia <http://sophiatintori.com/zine/readable_concatenated.pdf> Accessed October 3, 2019].

The road to a doctorate is long and difficult, and so adding another layer of learning to the process might seem short-sighted. And yet avoiding learning *phronesis* in your daily life is probably not any easier than practicing this, since the absence of *phronesis* leads to serial mistakes in moral and practical judgement, any one of which can be “career defining” in a negative sense. “Practical wisdom” is integral to “doing the right thing” while you learn to “do the thing right.” Doing the right thing often includes knowing how to exercise kindness with others.

A child can show kindness, and we welcome this. An adult (one who has learned some *phronesis*) can act in ways that are kinder than a child, because this adult is experienced in a broader range of social circumstances and personal relationships. An adult can be—to use the Yiddish—a *mensch*. And a *mensch* can be kinder than a non-mensch or a pre-mensch.

Kindness starts with intention

Real kindness begins with a clear intention. This adds an important aspect of self-judgement to its base. Without this aspect you cannot actually be kind, even if others

might interpret what you are doing as being kind. How do you actually judge your intentions, particularly in relationships with other people and things? Something to contemplate. Also note: Clegg and Rowland (2010) remind us that kindness is not equated with leniency or “being nice.” Real kindness uses courage to articulate accurate observations and open learning moments that can be difficult and painful for both parties.

Kindness is something you learn and do

Kindness is a normative human practice in a wide range of social frames: parenting, friendship, governance, teaching, caregiving, civil interactions. Zittrain (above) reminds us that the internet was built on kindness and generosity.

In nearly every human social endeavor, kindness matters. Even in highly-competitive sporting events, “sportsmanship” is highly valued, and is actually an internal normative form of kindness. Why should kindness, and critical interrogations about its role, be absent from research and management in the academy?

Like rationality, kindness is a form of practice, not an emotion. You can no more “feel” kind than you can “feel” rational. Unlike rationality, kindness necessarily involves *others*: their perspectives and needs. Kindness can and will also be judged by others for its qualities. Is it genuine? Is it motivated by a need to be perceived as kind? Is it effective in performing its intention? What is its intention? In the academy where intellectual judgements run wide and deep, kindness opens up another opportunity to be judged. But so does being unkind. Or it should. For decades, the lack of kindness in our research institutions and workplaces has gone unremarked. It is time to remark these.

Culture provides meaning to intentions

Again, kindness begins with intention. The same activity with different intentions can be a kind, caring conversation, or it can be a cruel interrogation. Intentions are themselves colored by culture. Culture provides a layer of shared meaning/learning that helps the individual (both the intend-er and the intend-ee) discover and interpret shared meaning as *intended*. You and the other person can answer the question: what did you mean?

The social world always contains this layer of culture. There is no society without it. Individuals hold this layer as a shared/learned resource. The cultural values you bring to your open science organization can assemble the meanings that add clear intentions

to shared kindness. Just as some institutional cultures today—and inside the academy—support bullying and demeaning actions (NAS et al. 2018).

One feature of kindness is that it enables both halves of the double meaning of the term “care.” To really care *about* someone or something, you need to tap into genuine kindness. To care *for* someone or something can merely be a job. But this job is also reduced without the impulse of kindness. That is why it is time to...

Put care back in your career

“[B]y infusing bureaucratic maintenance work with an ethic of care, we can challenge contemporary workplace attitudes surrounding “productivity” and “efficiency,” moving toward the recognition of maintenance itself as a valued contribution. We can also broaden access to systems of information, thereby supporting its generative value...” (Maintainers et al. 2019).

The Maintainers <<http://themaintainers.org/>> extend an ethic of care to each other and to their work: they keep everything running, instead of inventing new stuff. This ethic is born in kindness, and requires a level of humility not casually found in the academy, where intellectual heroics overshadow moral choices.

Nell Noddings, who is a “care theorist,” someone who makes “the caring relation basic in moral theory” (2003), looks to recenter care as a normative behavior in education and the academy. She also separates the care that is expected in work (for example, doing something really well, or managing the needs of a student/patient) as a conformity to a workplace ethic, from *caring*: human acts “done out of love and natural inclination” (Noddings 1988). What really works—in teaching and learning, and in team dynamics for collaborative research—is not completing the task of due-diligence, but rather building a framework of mutual caring nurtured from authentic kindness.

Bringing *care* into this discussion has now moved us away from communities, cohorts, and institutions. Care directs us back to intentions that are articulated in culture, but which also speak to being human in a *mutually responsible human environment*: a phrase not usually descriptive of the academy. “[W]e are led to redefine responsibility as response-ability, the ability to respond positively to others and not just to fulfill assigned duties” (ibid).

Open science is also science done through care and kindness: science that much more resembles the model of peer production within a commons, than it does a winner-take-all corporate struggle. “[W]ithout receiving conventional, tangible payments or favors

in return, peers exercise kindness, benevolence, charity and generosity” (Benkler and Nissenbaum 2006). Open science demands new levels of response-abilities: based on new and expanded academic freedoms (See: Values, freedoms and principles) and internet-enabled collaborations grounded in what Fitzpatrick (2019) calls “generous thinking.”

“This is generous thinking: listening to one another, recognizing that we have as much to learn as we do to teach, finding ways to use our collective knowledge for the public good. From the broadest rethinking of our political and institutional landscape, to developing new ways of working in public, to sharing our ways of reading, to focusing on the most intimate practice of listening — at each level, we must be connected to, fully part of, the world around us” (Fitzpatrick 2019).

Generous thinking expands here, emerging out from the university to help heal the troubles of the surrounding communities through active caring, and also to grow publics that can continue the work of caring outside the academy and among themselves.

Coda:

There are a lot more articles and books about the history of kindness and care that point out how these virtues were heralded as the basis of human happiness for centuries, and only recently (last 3-400 years) have these been eclipsed by more individualistic moral models (thanks to Hobbes, Kant, etc.—the usual suspects). So... practicing open science may also be good for your happiness. Doing open science can improve your happiness, and the happiness of those around you. How about that?

Online [Bibliography](#)