

New Year, same virtue-signalling

By [Ciarán Morrissey](#), Comment Editor (2015/16)

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Everyone's main goal in life should be to better themselves. There's no better time to do that than now.

University is an extremely transformative time, where huge blocks of free time occur alongside access to some of the finest minds in the world.

It is also a place in which people from all strata of society are thrown in together and told to get along.

It's just so full of people, of things, of stuff, that it is simply impossible to make it through the three-or-more years you'll spend here without broadening your horizons and changing some of your views on the world.

Yet, as with most things, self-improvement has, for many people, become relegated to something they blog about, consider in the abstract, or merely feign to do.

New Years' Resolutions are the absolute worst example of this. If you need a socially-sanctioned start date to begin modifying your habits, you're probably not serious about changing them to begin with.

It's endless, crass, 'New Year, New Me' verbal diarrhoea that you see strewn across your news feeds in the fortnight following Christmas – often by those with literally no desire to change their lives and are instead hungry for a pat on the back.

We're turning the practice of self-improvement into a sort of spectator sport, inviting acquaintances to watch from the sidelines as we run for the goal. Except we've stopped running, and the pageantry has become the main event.

The worst example of this was journalist Michelle McGagh's November declaration that she would buy nothing for the next 366 days. Not only is that absolutely, utterly, palpably untrue, all that's being done there is a declaration of an idea, hungry for approval.

There is certainly a danger when we start putting self-indulgent, masturbatory declarations of virtue on a higher pedestal than proven acts of competence or morality. It becomes even worse when this becomes a competition.

So set your goals for 2016; run a marathon, stop smoking, or even just improve things between you and your partner. But ask yourself if you're doing it for your own sake, or to enhance how others will see you.



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