

Rewriting the Rules Resources

1 – Rewriting the Rules of Yourself

This resource covers our relationships with ourselves and self-care. It includes some of the activities from the book, as well as extra ones, to explore the rules of how we relate to ourselves, and to consider some alternative understandings. You can go through the ideas and practices individually, discuss them in a group, or just pick out the ones you find useful.

Rewriting the Rules starts with our relationships with ourselves because these are often seen as fundamental to our relationships with other people. What do you think about this? Is there truth to the idea that you need to love yourself before you can love anybody else? Any problems with that idea?

How we're encouraged to treat ourselves

Check out the trailer for the film [Bridget Jones's Diary](#), or the quote from Helen Fielding's book which this was based on below.

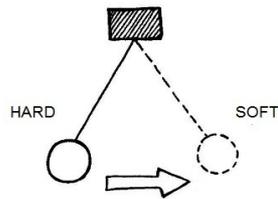
Thursday 23 February. 8 st 13 (if only could stay under 9st and not keep bobbing up and down like drowning corpse – drowning in fat), alcohol units 2, cigarettes 17 (pre-shag nerves – understandable, calories 775 (last-ditch attempt to get down to 8st 7 before tomorrow)

How do you think we are encouraged to treat ourselves by wider society? You might also want to think about media like lifestyle magazines, reality TV programmes, commercials, and celeb culture in general:

You might come up with something like the following:

- No emphasis on developing self-awareness or looking after ourselves
- Fear of solitude and the need to fill up any 'empty' time and space with busy-ness or distraction
- Emphasis on self-perfecting (celebrity, success, being excellent and approved of)
- Emphasis on self-monitoring (finding true self, comparing to others, hiding our 'lacks')

Hard and soft relating to ourselves



Rewriting the Rules suggests that we tend to pendulum swing from a hard way of treating ourselves (I'm rubbish compared to other people and must get better by eradicating all my flaws) to a soft way of treating ourselves (I'm rubbish and may as well just accept it because that's just who I am and nothing seems to make any difference) and back again.

Think through an average day in your life - perhaps a day you've just had - in what ways did you relate to yourself in a hard way and in what ways soft? Do you think you spend more time at the hard or soft end of the pendulum swing? Are there any times that you relate in a different way?

Plural selves

Write the names of five people in your life in the boxes along the top of the grid below (e.g. a close family member, a friend, a good colleague, someone you get on well with online). In each box for each person put 'X' if you mostly behave in the way described on the left of the grid with that person, put a 'O' if you mostly behave in the way described on the right of the grid. Leave it blank if neither fits at all.

X	Person 1: _____	Person 2: _____	Person 3: _____	Person 4: _____	Person 5: _____	0
Outgoing						Shy
Fun						Serious
Protective of them						Protected by them
They take control						I take control
Patient						Impatient
Emotional						Unemotional
Responsible						Free
I can really be myself						I can't really be myself

After you've completed the grid reflect on the patterns of Xs and Os. Are you the same self in different relationships?

[Trevor Butt study](#): People created their own 'opposites'. Create your own, thinking about which are meaningful to you.

X	Person 1:	Person 2:	Person 3:	Person 4:	Person 5:	0
I can really be myself						I can't really be myself

Butt found that everyone preferred relationships where they could 'be themselves' (not self-monitoring). However, what 'themselves' meant varied remarkably from relationship to relationship. People could feel they were being themselves in relationships where they acted in seemingly completely opposite and contradictory ways.

Think about who you are with, for example: a family member, a close friend, a colleague, a child you know, an older person you know.

Consider how you feel and act, for example: in a work meeting, in bed at night, going to a party, walking with a friend, travelling abroad, in the midst of a crisis.

What do you think? Do different selves, or aspects of ourself, emerge in different relationships or situations?

One metaphor is that we are more like a community of selves than an individual. The group generally has pretty shared goals, and is going in the same direction, but some characters are more dominant than others, and they have quite different qualities and capacities.

In each relationship or situation, one aspect or self comes to the fore and others go more into the background.

This feels natural and comfortable when selves we are happy with. But can be uncomfortable when feel selves drawn out we are not so comfortable with, or feels more out of our control (the school reunion, back with our family, with an authority figure, being treated a certain way by another person. e.g. as just one side of ourselves gender/culture/sexuality)

Ideas:

- Improving communication between selves (not bricking some up behind a wall).
- Using multiplicity to remember that we are not fixed. Even when feel stuck 'this is not all that we are or all that we will ever be'
- [Andrew Samuels](#) lists 19 ways we might be in relationships with others: warrior, terrorist, exhibitionist, leader, activist, parent, follower, child, martyr, victim, trickster, healer, analyst, negotiator, bridge-builder, diplomat, philosopher, mystic, ostrich. He suggests cultivating the ways of being that don't come so easily to us.

Selves in process

Try the idea of imagining that your life was a book. What would the contents page look like? Write a list of the chapters of your life. You can start at any point in the past that feels right, and end in the present or the future.

- Where did you start?
- Where did you end?
- What kind of book would your book be? What genre?
- Are there any major themes?
- Who is the primary author?
- What would it look like if someone else in your life wrote it?
- Is there any part of your life missing from it?
- How would it look if you focused on this instead?
- Who would be the most appreciative audience for the book, and the most critical audience?
- What would it be called?

We are a work in progress rather than something fixed. [Kenneth Gergen](#): We tell stories through our lives to make sense of a certain end point (something we are now, e.g. father, doctor, gambler, runner). Popular narratives include:

- The tragedy (where we start in a successful place but fall into failure)
- The comedy-romance (where a positive life is interrupted by calamity but order is restored)
- The 'happily-ever-after' (when things get gradually better and better)
- The heroic narrative (where we struggle towards victory against a number of obstacles but eventually win out)

What stories do you generally tell through your life? What might it look like if you started from a different endpoint or used a different narrative structure?

We tend to fix ourselves rather than recognising the ongoing process and the multiplicity of stories (equally valid) that we could tell through our lives.

⤴ [Manu Bazzano](#): it is like taking a bowl to the river, filling it with water, and then looking into that bowl to understand the river. Really we are the river, ever flowing and always in process.

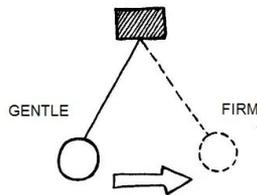
⤴ [Stephen Batchelor](#): it is like fixing a pot rather than spinning it on the wheel

If we find it difficult to love ourselves, can we love our stories:

Instead of clinging to habitual behaviour and routines as a means to secure this sense of self, we realize the freedom to create who we are. Instead of being bewitched by impressions, we start to create them. Instead of taking ourselves so seriously, we discover the playful irony of a story that has never been told in quite this way before (Batchelor, 1997, p.83).

Firm and gentle relating to ourselves

The alternative to the hard and soft pendulum put forward in *Rewriting the Rules* is a pendulum that swings from gentle relating to ourselves (I'm okay and I need to go easy) to firm relating (I'm okay and I can do it) and back again.



What do you think of shifting to something more like this? Go through the day that you described previously. What moments would look different if you moved from hard and soft, to gentle and firm, relating?

Consider the following quote:

What a relief to admit that one is basically and totally lacking: what a discovery to recognize that this is the very thing that one is, and that far from being a handicap this is the very thing that makes human life possible at all... To come to terms with imperfection and incompleteness [is] one of the main tasks of life (Van Deurzen, 1998, p.13)

Self-care

Why might self-care be important?

Possibilities to consider:

- Hard and soft relating doesn't even get what it sets out to achieve
- Comparisons with other are flawed (because we don't know what they're experiencing from the inside and because they - like us - try to present a perfect picture)
- Helps us tune into ourselves for choices and decisions – how to live
- Relationships with ourselves = a foundation to relationships with others
- Self-care helps with conflict – knowing our buttons and demons

Kind and reflective self-care

Practising caring for self to replace habits of self-monitoring, comparing, perfecting and judging.

Foundations: sleeping, eating, some activity, time for kindness, time for what you value, support

Gentleness: Kind self-care

- Being okay with who you are and showing yourself this (e.g. building in a simple daily kindness to yourself)
- Being in the present with yourself (not avoiding yourself)
- Giving yourself a break

Firmness: Reflective self-care

- Learning more about yourself and the way that you take on wider messages (self-observation)
- Increasing self-awareness (about all that you are and how you change)
- Developing critical approach to social messages (like the ones in the media about how we should be)

How might we build self-care into our everyday lives? Where might we start?

How easy do we find it to care for ourselves everyday? Where might any blocks be?

Here are three different forms of self-care that you might find useful and interesting to explore. There are more physical forms of self-care in 2 Attraction, and more relationship-focused ones in 3 Love.

Sitting with ourselves

[Mindful meditation](#) is something we can practice to counter the difficulties a lot of people have in being alone, as well as a way of developing self-awareness.

- Find somewhere quiet and sit comfortably, either on a cushion or in a chair, with your back upright but not tense. Rest your hands in your lap or on your knees.
- Close your eyes and check for any parts of your body that feel tense: your face, your shoulders, your back. Relax these. Breathe in and out three times.
- Now for 10 minutes focus your attention on your breath. Don't try to control its rhythm but just notice it happening. Become aware of the various sensations that accompany it entering and leaving your body: the warmth or coolness of the air, the feeling your body against the floor or chair, the shifting of your clothes against your skin. Let your mind settle on the ebb and flow of the breath like a boat which is anchored, gently rising and falling with the waves. If you find yourself distracted by thoughts or physical sensations don't judge them or try to stop them, just notice them and gently bring your attention back to the breath.

Memories

One way to access different moments of our story is through memory work. We might take the stimulus of a certain sensation, feeling, or object and write memories of this from different points throughout our lives.

Memory work can help us to access our rich lived experience, it can be a useful part to insight about how we operate.

Choose an emotion or experience and write a rich descriptions of how these felt to us. This is not an exercise in being a great writer, but rather to access how it is for you to feel this way.

You can write in any way that works for you. Often people find it useful to write in the present tense (as if it was happening right now). Some find it helpful to write in the third person (he/she...) and others in the first person (I). You might find it valuable to consider all the different senses and to ensure you have included them in your description where relevant. What did this feel like in your body?

My Memory of

Journalling

Reflective journals can be used in such creative ways to access different moments, or aspects of ourselves. For example, I often find it useful to start a journal entry with a brief description of where I am at that moment: What can I see around me? What are the sensations? Where am I in terms of my own feelings? How is my body? What matters are clamouring for attention in my mind at present.

Journal writing techniques for reflection, insight and creativity

- Writing unsent letters to people in our lives
- Dialogue writing: between ourselves and imagined other people, or between different aspects of ourselves
- Write on a theme (maybe every day for a week), keeping a list of possible themes (peace, confusion, passion, change, endings, etc.)
- Streams of consciousness: just keep writing for 15 minutes whatever occurs to you
- I am excited about... I am worried about...
- I remember...
- Write about the same thing from loving, hating, and neutral standpoints
- Write in different places
- Write about a place that you love
- Flip open a book you love and use a line as a starting point
- What kind of animal/plant/food are you?

What doesn't matter:

- Spelling, grammar, punctuation, neatness
- How regularly you write
- How much you write
- Whether you get to the bottom of a problem or figure it out
- Whether it is interesting to other people or not
- Whether you say nasty things, use swear-words, etc.

Rewriting your rules?

Using this resource, plus the lists of further self-care activities in the concluding chapter of *Rewriting the Rules*, plus other ideas you have come across, how might you rewrite your existing rules of how you relate to yourself on an everyday basis?
