

Rewriting the Rules Resources

1 – Rewriting the Rules of Yourself

This resource covers attraction and attractiveness beginning with our relationships with our bodies. It includes some of the activities from the book, as well as extra ones, to explore the rules of how we relate to our bodies and those of others. You can go through the ideas and practices in order individually, discuss them in a group, or just pick out the ones you find useful.

Our relationship with our bodies

Sin, young man, is when you treat people as things, including yourself, that's what sin is. (Pratchett, 1998, p.210)

We saw, in considering our [relationships to ourselves](#), how it was important to move away from hard and soft relating, and how such relating to ourselves also linked to the way we relate to others.

One key aspect of hard relating is when we treat ourselves and others as objects (objectification).

This is what the philosopher [Martin Buber](#) called 'I-it' relating: viewing others through our own lens in terms of what they are for us, rather than what they are for themselves – perhaps trying to manipulate them and control them

Cooper terms this 'I-me' relating when it is directed towards ourselves. When we 'I-me' relate, we treat aspects of ourselves as things, in a detached and objectifying way. One key way in which it is easy to 'I-me' relate is to separate ourselves from our bodies and to treat our bodies as objects

Therefore a useful foundation to 'I-I' relating with ourselves, and '[I-thou](#)' relating with others, is learning to stop objectifying our bodies ceasing: separating them out from ourselves (mind-body dualism), viewing them only in terms of what they can do for our goals, and trying to control them

In what ways do we commonly treat our bodies as objects?

Examples include:

- Wishing our appearance was otherwise than it is (exercise: draw how you would ideally look, what would you change about your appearance?)
- Controlling the food we eat (starving, eating when we're not hungry, not eating what our body wants and needs)
- Not sleeping and resting when we need to – being out of balance with our sleep rhythms daily/seasonally
- Not allowing ourselves to be ill
- Forcing ourselves to work when we are not in the right place
- Forcing ourselves to be sexual when we are not in the right place
- Trying to control our emotions

As with our treatment of ourselves (hard and soft) we are very much encouraged to treat our bodies like this by the culture around us.

Look at magazines and/or advertisements. What are the images of people like you like in magazines and adverts? You could draw this, cut out examples, or write a written description.

Some major themes are:

- Commodification of bodies to sell products
- Body as passport to happiness
- Body ideal: narrow range of beauty, exclusions
- Invention of new 'body errors'
- Fragmentation of bodies (further I-it relating)
- The recent idea of beautifying the body: 'But it's fun and I choose it' - makes it difficult to question it

How does this body obsession impact us (or not)? How do we resist it/creatively engage with it?

Basics of physical self-care

When we're in a bad place it is vital to return to the basics of physical self-care before almost anything else (as we saw last week). These things can also help us towards a better relationship with our bodies.

- Eating enough, and not too much
- Sleeping enough, and not too much
- Getting some physical activity
- Getting some time outside in surroundings that feel good to us

Body Sweep

Tuning in to our bodies (adapted from [Martine Batchelor Meditation for Life, p.37](#))

- You can try this practice lying comfortably on the floor, or sitting.
- Close your eyes and breathe easily, spend a few minutes on each part of the body:
- First pay attention to sensations in and around your head: your scalp and face. Don't try to visualise, just observe what is there and how your head feels.
- Move your attention gently down to your neck and shoulders. Observe any sensations, even painful ones, without grasping at them or rejecting them.
- Move your awareness down your torso. Notice any internal sensations, and the feeling of your clothes against your skin.
- Shift focus to the arms and hands. Feel their contact with the floor.
- Expand your attention down to the pelvic area. Consider sensations there: where does buttock stop and floor start?
- Move on to your thighs and the knees, and then the lower part of the legs: the ankles and the feet. Notice how sensations shift from moment to moment.
- Finally, be aware of your whole body.
- What is the experience of being embodied? How does it feel physically? Recognise and appreciate your ability to feel, to sense as you rest there.
- After you get up, try to pay the same gentle attention to sensations as you move.

Bodies and emotions – focusing

Akin to body-focused meditation is [focusing](#): a gentle and contemplative self-attention based in the work of Eugene Gendlin. This practice is used to come to a better understanding of emotional experience, through learning to tune in to the physical feeling of it. It can be done alone, or with someone listening as you take yourself through it.

Go to [this link](#) to see the short form of focusing with a description you can follow through to try it out. Or follow this one from the [focusing institute website](#):

1. Clear a space

How are you? What's between you and feeling fine?

Don't answer; let what comes in your body do the answering.

Don't go into anything.

Greet each concern that comes. Put each aside for a while, next to you.

Except for that, are you fine?

2. Felt Sense

Pick one problem to focus on.

Don't go into the problem.

What do you sense in your body when you sense the whole of that problem?

Sense all of that, the sense of the whole thing, the murky discomfort or the unclear body-sense of it.

3. Get a handle

What is the quality of the felt sense?

What one word, phrase, or image comes out of this felt sense?

What quality-word would fit it best?

4. Resonate

Go back and forth between word (or image) and the felt sense.

Is that right?

If they match, have the sensation of matching several times.

If the felt sense changes, follow it with your attention.

When you get a perfect match, the words (images) being just right for this feeling, let yourself feel that for a minute.

5. Ask

"What is it, about the whole problem, that makes me so _____?"

When stuck, ask questions:

What is the worst of this feeling?

What's really so bad about this?

What does it need?

What should happen?

Don't answer; wait for the feeling to stir and give you an answer.

What would it feel like if it was all OK?

Let the body answer

What is in the way of that?

6. Receive

Welcome what came. Be glad it spoke.

It is only one step on this problem, not the last.

Now that you know where it is, you can leave it and come back to it later.

Protect it from critical voices that interrupt.

Does your body want another round of focusing, or is this a good stopping place?

Embodiment

The philosopher [Maurice Merleau-Ponty](#) pointed out the common split that we make between mind and body – a way in which we engage in 'I-it' relating to ourselves – objectifying the body.

How might we remind ourselves that we are our bodies: body subjects rather than body objects? We might come to see our bodies as friends rather than enemies, our very selves rather than objects to be beautified, controlled and even eradicated.

When do we get that sense of embodiment – being body subjects rather than objects?

Lilliana Del Busso and Paula Reavey found that times people felt most embodied (body subjects) were often when they were in movement and when they were out in the world (and also when they were not being monitored by others)

Movement

There are many different kinds of movement we can try, for example:

Stretching yoga

If we have pets we will notice that after a nap or a walk they will often enjoy a luxurious stretch – it comes naturally to them – but many of us lose that stretching from our lives as we tune out of our bodies and just want to get on with things.

There are many websites detailing [yoga](#) or [qigong](#) exercises. Find the one that works best for you.

Walking outside

Take a fifteen minute walk outside, focusing on your body in the world around you.

Bring something back from the experience: a photograph on your phone, an object you picked up, a written line or two, an image in your memory.

Find your activity

People often engage with exercise to try to shape their body to the ideal. This often leads to a poor relationship with physical activity because we experience it as something unpleasant which we force ourselves to do. It is worth spending some time experimenting with different kinds of activity to find ones that really fit us and that we can enjoy doing for their own sake. For example you might widen the scope beyond gym/jogging to include: playing on a local adventure playground, walking the dog, vacuum cleaning with loud music in your headphones, dancing at a club, cycling, swimming, joining a dance group, etc. etc.

How we relate to other people's bodies (attraction)

In *Rewriting the Rules* we explore how we culturally have a very narrow view of what is attractive. This affects how we view ourselves and others. Often we feel that we are unattractive, or fear that any attractiveness we do have will disappear (which is very dangerous if we invest a lot of our self-worth and confidence in it). We are also often very judgemental about other people's appearance. In the book I use this example of the moment when Susan Boyle appeared on the programme *Britain's Got Talent*, which became a global phenomena.

Think about your own responses to this clip the first time you watched it. Should it be the case that another form of beauty (a beautiful voice) is required to cut through judgements which we make about appearance?

Bloggers have also recently pointed out the ways in which forms of prejudice such as [racism](#) and [transphobia](#) are perpetuated by ideals of beauty and the idea that attraction (and lack of attraction) are natural things that we can't control.

So narrow ideals of attraction hurt our relationships with our own bodies, they hurt other people (through our perceptions of them), and they also limit us in terms of who we might consider having romantic/sexual relationships with given that these are based on physical appearance rather than, for example, connection, shared values, or mutual respect.

What practical ways might there be of expanding out our conception of what is attractive?

In *Rewriting the Rules* we explore the following ideas, which you can add to with your own ideas:

- Experience cultivating a friendship online with somebody you've never met (e.g. a mutual friend on a social networking site, or somebody on an online computer game). Reflect on what it is like not to know what somebody looks like. What qualities is the relationship built on?
- Spend time in a busy place trying to look at people through a different filter than the usual ideals of beauty. What else might be viewed as attractive? Can you find beauty in aspects of appearance which are not conventionally seen as beautiful?
- Check out [Dove Evolution](#) and the [This is My Body](#) project to challenge the idea that the images we see of models are what anybody actually looks like.
- Go to a place, such as a naturist beach, where there are a lot of people who are comfortable in diverse kinds of bodies.
- Get angry about the restrictive messages we receive about beauty and attraction. Engage in some activism about this. See these examples of [fat activist zines](#) or [critical blogs about women's magazines](#).
- Find different ways of experiencing your own body e.g. focusing on sensations which feel good rather than how it appears visually; describing parts you do find beautiful; finding new ways to look at, and value, parts you've found troubling in the past; focusing on what it can do, rather than how it appears. Get together with a friend or partner to try some of these ideas together (about your own body, or each others' bodies).

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 appearance and attraction on an everyday basis?
