

MARIANNE POWER

How do I love ~~me~~ thee?

Instead of chastising yourself for being too single or not successful enough, why not count the ways you are, in fact, awesome?



THIS TIME TWO YEARS AGO I DID SOMETHING CALLED THE HOFFMAN PROCESS.

It's a week-long intensive therapy course that's meant to help you shed a lifetime's worth of issues in eight days. A friend of a friend had done it and, although she didn't tell me the details, I sensed it involved

sharing your deepest, darkest secrets with strangers and talking about your childhood. It sounded like my idea of hell. I booked it.

At that point I was 34, single and utterly miserable. All my friends were married and having babies, while my relationships never lasted more than a few months. My single status made me feel like a failure, and Valentine's Day was a painful reminder of what I didn't have. I used to listen to colleagues talk about where their partners were taking them for dinner, or sign for their flower deliveries, and feel a stab in the heart. February 14th (along with being single at weddings) was up there as one of my most hated days of the year. I couldn't understand what I was doing wrong, why I couldn't fall in love and get married like everybody else. On the first day at Hoffman I answered my own question when I stood up in front of 25 strangers and found myself blurting out, 'I don't believe anybody decent could ever love me.'

As soon as I said it, it explained everything. Of course I could never hold down a relationship; I didn't think I deserved one. I didn't think I was good enough for anybody to love me. Later that week, we had to write down all the bad things we say to ourselves and my list filled out a poster-sized piece of paper. It was stuff you wouldn't say to your worst enemy. We then had to beat the living daylight out of that paper with a shoe (it was a weird week). And after nearly an hour of bashing, the most amazing thing happened. For a split second, I felt what it was like to not hate myself. It was bliss. I not only loved myself but I opened my eyes and looked around the room and loved everyone in it, in a way that I've never loved other people before. It was beautiful.

Turns out, it's impossible to really love other people – or allow them to love you – if you're busy hating yourself. I came out of that week a different woman. Shortly afterwards, I went on a road trip around the States and found that, actually, men do like me, quite a lot. I couldn't go for a coffee without getting approached. I was taken to

old-fashioned drive-ins, asked to dance under the stars. It was extraordinary. Nothing about me had changed except for one major thing: I had the glow of somebody in love. With myself. I realised that when you love yourself, you shine. People are then drawn to you.

All my life I thought I was waiting for someone else to love me, to make me feel okay. But, actually, it has to start with you. I grew up in a house where 'she really loves herself' was an insult, a sign that you're full of yourself and big-headed, but I don't think that's true. I now see that unless you love yourself, no fancy job, no amount of clothes, no man, no money will make you feel good. Loving yourself is the start of everything – it's the most important love of all.

I recently read a brilliant book called *Love Yourself Like Your Life Depends On It* by Silicon Valley entrepreneur Kamal Ravikant. He brought himself from a breakdown

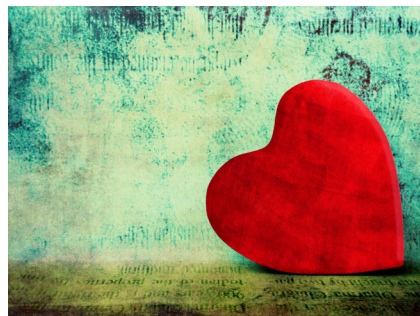
back to full health just by repeating the words 'I love myself' in his head all day. Sounds crazy, but his story is inspiring and moving, and is part of something called the 'radical self love' movement.

Self-help guru Louise Hay suggests spending 10 minutes every morning looking into the mirror and repeating the words 'I love you' to yourself. Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? I tried it a few times and it felt embarrassing and silly and, some days, not true. It's interesting to see what thoughts pop into your head when you do it. Quite often I think, 'I'm too fat to love myself', which is awful. But you have to love yourself as you are right now –

not when you are half a stone lighter or when you're doing better at work. Loving yourself means accepting your strengths and weaknesses, and realising that you're fine just the way you are. It's not easy but it's worth it.

Despite all my romantic adventures over the last couple of years, I'm single again this Valentine's Day, but I don't feel sad and alone, as I used to. Instead, I feel blessed and at peace. I'm looking forward to a hot date with myself on the sofa, with a big bowl of pasta and a nice glass of red. I won't be getting any cards through the post, but I will be getting a big bunch of roses. I know that for certain because I've ordered them. Why not? Oscar Wilde said that 'to love oneself is the beginning of a lifelong romance' – and he's right. 📌

To read more about Marianne's experience, visit helpmeblog.net



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