

# TRY CONTROLLING YOURSELF

Apparently self-control is not big this season. Then again nor is world peace or floral prints. But perhaps having restraint over one's impulses, emotions, or desires have never really been on top of the list of priorities: just ask the ancient Greeks, or Romans, or Babylonians

**BUT THERE ARE** various ways of looking at self-control, as something to administer or something to overcome. Of course the predictable next step would be to take real life problems and crisis like what self-control can bestow to our very exposed, very involved online lives. It was, let's be honest, only a matter of time.

The incessant checking of emails on iPhone, the crowding over humdrum 'Instagram' and most prevalently the refreshing of 'Facebook'. All so germane in the 2010 David Fincher film *Social Network* with the mega anti-hero Mark Zuckerberg and his ex-girlfriend's profile page. All these and more are just some of the 21st century misfortunes and they glaringly are all about self-control. The inability to stop and the desire to have right now, right here, is the way of this decade.

But first look at the theory of delayed gratification apt in the 'Marshmallow Experiment', conducted by Walter Mischel in the 60s and 70s at Stanford University in the US. It showed how kids who revealed some self-control and restraint during tests demonstrate a striking range of advantages over their peers when they were tested as adults years later. So there's the crux of the matter – but somehow this has been forgotten and traded for a new attitude of 'now' and of 'everything'. But at least the sense to prevent yourself from getting to the gratification has in various ways somewhat been implemented and have now infiltrated our day-to-day lives.

The befittingly named free and open-source application 'SelfControl' first hit the marketplace in 2009. It let users block their own access to distracting websites, mail servers or anything they see as taboo on the great big land of the web. There is a set period of time that it will block their entry and until the sand runs through that hourglass they cannot get into the confines. Restarting the computer furiously or deleting the application naturally doesn't magically open the sluices. They simply have to wait to obtain their fix.

So now you're semi-controlling the urges to go

online, but maybe blocking what you're wanting to find online, or what's coming at you online is an even easier way to manage this whole process. That could mean a range of irritants including work and play but past relationships seem to have the world of HBO's *Girls*, *New York Magazine* and the app world in a seasoned flurry. But of course the honest truth is we want to see what our exes are doing in their new lives, maybe to gloat or lament but there is a certain degree of curiosity. So let's assess this post break-up routine of 2013.

In this day and age of social media, disentanglement from a past lover is apparently much harder than before. There is the 'Facebook Newsfeed' and then the endless chirrup of 'Twitter', but first if that helps you could rid yourself of gifts that you no longer want – and sites like 'Never Liked It Anyway' make that a triumph. They don't say 'one man's trash...' for nothing.

But the easiest way to end it all, and possibly never enter a friend zone with this person ever again, is applying 'Killswitch', a mobile app that guarantees to seamlessly and discreetly remove all traces of your ex from your Facebook'. Since 'defriending' or 'unfollowing' never truly expels an ex, this app takes the smorgasbord of tears, longing memories and anger, and helps you to control your emotions and their presence.

On HBO's *Girls* the rise of the character Charlie is shown

as all grown up and 'together' by his successful creation of an app, inspired by his ex girlfriend Marnie, that penalises users for calling their exes. Software that can protect you from yourself is the next evolution in self-control, but is it really? The episode was probably inspired, according the *New York Times*, by a Brazilian soft drink company that, with their advertising agency (DDB Brasil), created an app called 'Ex-Lover Blocker' where the app will send your closest friends a text message if you attempt to call an ex and even alerts, embarrassingly, all your 'Facebook' followers of your actions.

If you can curb yourself to not go online, and you can now have jurisdiction over the intrusion of exes' material online, what can possibly be the next evolution? Oh yes, a return to self-control, a place where delayed gratification inspires our behaviour and we are able to control ourselves without the help of an app, a friend or even a robot in times to come. Realistically downloading another app will probably reign... for now.

