

[Current Issue](#)[Advance Access](#)[Volumes](#)[Instructions for Authors](#)[About ▾](#)[Search](#)[Vol 6 No 4 \(2014\): Therapeutic](#)

Theme: Therapeutic

[Home](#) / [Archives](#) / [Cultures](#)/ [Cultures](#)

The Self-Help Book in the Therapeutic Ontosphere: A Postmodern Paradox

Jean Collingsworth

Independent scholar

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3384/cu.2000.1525.146755>**Keywords:** Self-help book, ontosphere, therapeutic discourse, postmodern paradox, metanarrative

Abstract

The self-help book is a prominent cultural and commercial phenomenon in the therapeutic ontosphere which permeates contemporary life. The generic term 'ontosphere' is here co-opted from IT to describe a notional social space in which influential conceptualisations and shared assumptions about personal values and entitlements operate without interrogation in the demotic apprehension of ". It thus complements the established critical terms 'discourse' and 'episteme'. In the therapeutic ontosphere the normal vicissitudes of life are increasingly interpreted as personal catastrophes. As new issues of concern are defined, it is assumed that an individual will need help to deal with them and live successfully. Advice-giving has become big business and the self-help book is now an important post-modern commodity. However a paradox emerges when the content and ideology of this apparently postmodern artifact is examined. In its topical eclecticism the genre is indeed unaligned with those traditional 'grand narratives' and collective value systems which the postmodern critical project has sought to discredit. It endorses relativism, celebrates reflexivity and valorizes many kinds of 'personal truth'. Moreover readers are encouraged towards self-renovation through a process of 'bricolage' which involves selecting advice from a diverse ethical menu along-side which many 'little narratives' of localized lived experience are presented as supportive exemplars. However in asserting the pragmatic power of individual instrumentality in an episteme which has seen the critical decentering of the human subject, the self-help book perpetuates the liberal-humanist notion of an essential personal identity whose stable core is axiomatic in traditional ethical advice. And the heroic journey of self-actualization is surely the grandest of grand narratives: the monomyth. Thus the telic self-help book presents the critical theorist with something of a paradox.

References

Adler, Emily (2013): 'Here's Why the "Internet of Things" Will Be Huge and Drive Tremendous Value for People and Businesses', *Business Insider*, 7 December 2013: <http://www.businessinsider.com/growth-in-the-internet-of-things-2013-10> (accessed 06 February 2014).

American Psychiatric Association (1980): *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-III*, Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

American Psychiatric Association (1987): *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-III-R*, Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

American Psychiatric Association (2013): *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders: DSM-5*, Arlington, VA: American Psychiatric Publishing.

Atkins, Kim (ed.) (2005): *Self and Subjectivity*, Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell. DOI: [10.1002/9780470774847](https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470774847)

Bailey, Eileen & Donald Haupt (2010): *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Adult ADHD*, New York: Penguin/ALPHA.

Beattie, Melody (1986): *Codependent No More: How to Stop Controlling Others and Start Caring for Yourself*, Centre City, MN: Hazelden.

Beck, Ulrich (1992): *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*, London: Sage.

Bok, Derek (2010): *The Politics of Happiness: What Governments Can Learn From the New Research on Well-Being*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Bourke, Joanna (2006): *Fear: A Cultural History*, London: Virago.

British Library Public Catalogue: http://catalogue.bl.uk/primo_library/libweb/action/search.do?dscnt=1&dstmp=1391686880905&vid=BLVU1&fromLogin=true (accessed 06 February 2014).

Bruce, Steve (2002): *God is Dead: Secularization in the West*, Oxford: Wiley/Blackwell.

Brynjolfsson, Erik & Andrew McAfee (2014): *The Second Machine Age: Work, Progress and Prosperity in a Time of Brilliant Technologies*, New York: Norton.

Campbell, Joseph (1949): *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, New York: Meridian.

Carnegie, Dale (1936/2009): *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, New York: Simon and Schuster.

Chandler, David S. & Elliot Kay (2004): *How an Idiot Writes a Self-Help Book*, New York: iUniverse Inc.

Coelho, Paul (1993): *The Alchemist*, San Francisco, CA: Harper.

Consortium for Research on Emotional Intelligence (2014): *Bibliography*: http://www.eiconsortium.org/about_us.htm (accessed 06 February 2014).

Counselling Directory (2014): <http://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/links.html> (accessed 06 February 2014).

Covey, Stephen (1989/2013): *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change*, 25th Anniversary Edition. New York: Simon and Schuster [orig. 1989].

David, Susan, Ilona Boniwell & Amanda Conley Ayers (2013): *The Oxford Handbook of Happiness*, London: Granta.

Dean, Eric (1999): *Shook Over Hell: Post-Traumatic Stress, Vietnam and the Civil War*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Dennis, Felix (2011): *How to Make Money: The 88 Steps to Get Rich and Find Success*, London: Vermillion.

Dolby, Sandra K. (2005): *Self-Help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Eagleton, Terry (2007): *The Meaning of Life: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ecclestone, Kathryn & Dennis Hayes (2008): *The Dangerous Rise of Therapeutic Education*, London: Routledge.

Edgar, Andrew & Peter Sedgwick (2002): *Cultural Theory: The Key Concepts*, London: Routledge.

Ehrenreich, Barbara (2009): *Bright Smiles: How the Relentless Promotion of Positive Thinking has Undermined America*, New York: Metropolitan Books/Henry Holt.

Fairclough, Norman (2001): *Language and Power*, London: Longman.

Fassin, Didier, Richard Rechtman & Rachel Gomme (2009): *The Empire of Trauma: An Enquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Foucault, Michel (1966/1970): *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, London: Routledge.

- Foucault, Michel (1982): 'The Subject and Power', Hubert Dreyfus & Paul Rabinow (eds): *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Foucault, Michel (1984): 'The Order of Discourse', Michael Shapiro (ed.): *Language and Politics*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- Furedi, Frank (2004): *Therapy Culture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*, London: Routledge.
- Furedi, Frank (2006): *Culture of Fear Revisited*, London: Continuum.
- Gaglio, Salvatore & Guiseppe Lo Re (2014): *Advances onto [sic] the Internet of Things: How Ontologies Make the Internet of Things Meaningful*, Berlin: Springer.
- Gardner, Dan (2009): *The Science of Fear: How the Culture of Fear Manipulates Your Brain*, New York: Plume Books.
- Gentry, Doyle W. (2006): *Anger Management for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Gentry, Doyle W. (2008): *Happiness for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Giddens, A. (1991): *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Glassner, Barry (2010): *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things*, New York: Basic Books.
- Goleman, Daniel (1995): *Emotional Intelligence: Why it Can Matter More than IQ*, London: Bloomsbury.
- Goulston, Mark (2007): *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.
- Gray, John (1992/2012): *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus: A Practical Guide to Improving Communication and Getting What You Want in your Relationship*, New York: Harper.
- Green, Christopher & Kit Chee (2004): *The Pocket Guide to ADHD: Practical Tips for Parents*, London: Vermillion.
- Greenberg, Gary (2013): *The Book of Woe: The DSM and the Unmaking of Psychiatry*, New York: Blue Rider Press.
- Harvey, David (1991): *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Hoboken, NJ: Wiley/Blackwell.
- Hassan, Ihab (1985): 'The Culture of Postmodernism', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 2:3, 119-32. DOI: [10.1177/0263276485002003010](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276485002003010)
- Heartfield, James (2006): *The Death of the Subject Explained*, Booksurge [Amazon Self-Publishing].
- Hecht, Jennifer M. (2008): *The Happiness Myth: Why What We Think is Right is Wrong*, London: Harper Collins.
- Hefferon, Kate & Ilona Boniwell (2011): *Positive Psychology: Theory, Research and Applications*, Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Hoff Somers, Christina & Sally Satel (2006): *One Nation Under Therapy: How the Helping Culture is Eroding Self-Reliance*. New York: St Martin's Griffin.
- Horwitz, Allan, Jerome C. Wakefield & Robert L. Spitzer (2007): *The Loss of Sadness: How Psychiatry Transformed Normal Sorrow into Depressive Disorder*, New York: OUP USA.
- Illouz, Eva (2008): *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions and the Culture of Self-Help*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Imber, Jonathan B. (ed.) (2004): *Therapeutic Culture: Triumph and Defeat*, New Jersey: Transaction.
- Jameson, Fredric (1992): *Postmodernism: Or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, London: Verso.
- Jay, Francine (2011): *The Joy of Less: A Minimalist Living Guide*, Medford, NJ: Anja Press.
- Jencks, Charles (1989): *What is Postmodernism?*, Chichester: John Wiley.
- Johnson, Spencer (1998): *Who Moved My Cheese?*, New York: Putnam.

Journal of Happiness Studies (2000-): New York: Springer.

Kaminer, Wendy (1992): *I'm Dysfunctional, You're Dysfunctional: The Recovery Movement and Other Self-Help Fashions*, New York: Addison-Wesley.

Katz, William (1985): *Self-Help: 1400 Best Books on Personal Growth*, New York: Bowker.

Kellner, Douglas (1988): 'Postmodernism as Social Theory: Some Challenges and Problems', *Theory, Culture and Society*, 5:2, 239-269. DOI: [10.1177/0263276488005002003](https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276488005002003)

Kurtz, Ernest (1991): *Not God: A History of Alcoholics Anonymous*, Centre City, MN: Hazelden.

Kutchins, Herb & Stuart A. Kirk (2001): *Making Us Crazy: DSM – The Psychiatric Bible and the Creation of Mental Disorders*, London: Constable and Robinson.

Lacan, Jacques (1968): 'The Mirror Phase as Formative of the Function of the I', *New Left Review*, September/October: 1-51.

Lange, Klaus W., Susanne Reichl, Katharina M. Lange, Lara Tucha & Oliver Tucha (2010): 'The History of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder', *Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder*, 2:4, 241-255. DOI: [10.1007/s12402-010-0045-8](https://doi.org/10.1007/s12402-010-0045-8)

Lasch, Christopher (1979): *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations*, London: Abacus.

Layard, Richard (2011): *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*, New York: Penguin.

Leuner, Barbara (1966): 'Emotional intelligence and emancipation: A psychodynamic study on women', *Praxis der Kinderpsychologie und Kinderpsychiatrie*, 15:6, 196-203.

Levine, Jerome & Irene S. Levine (2008): *Schizophrenia for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Lyotard, Jean-François (1979/1984): *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [Trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi], Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Lyubomirsky, Sonja (2007): *The How of Happiness: A Practical Guide to Getting the Life You Want*, London: Sphere.

Maidman Joshua, Janice & Donna DiMenna (2000): *Read Two Books and Let's Talk Next Week: Using Bibliotherapy in Clinical Practice*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Malpas, Simon (2004): *The Postmodern*, London: Routledge.

Marler, John R. (2005): *Stroke for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley.

Mars and Venus Coaching (2014): <http://www.franchisegator.com/mars-venus-coaching-franchise/> (accessed 06 February 2014).

Mays, Rick & Allan V. Horwitz (2005): 'DSM-III and the Revolution in the Classification of Mental Illness', *Journal of the History of Behavioural Sciences*, 41:3, 249-267. DOI: [10.1002/jhbs.20103](https://doi.org/10.1002/jhbs.20103)

McGee, Micki (2005): *Self-Help Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life*, Oxford: Oxford University Press. DOI: [10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195171242.001.0001](https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195171242.001.0001)

McLaughlin, K. (2009): *The Ever-Expanding World of Mental Illness*: <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php/site/article/7199/> (accessed 06 February 2014).

Mellody, Pia (2002): *Facing Codependence: What It Is, Where It Comes From, How It Sabotages Lives*, San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Metzinger, Thomas (2004): *Being No-One: The Self-Model of Subjectivity*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Mohr, Barbel (2006): *The Cosmic Ordering Service: A Guide to Realising Your Dreams*, London: Hodder and Stoughton.

Molony, Paul (2013): *The Therapy Industry: The Irresistible Rise of the Talking Cure and Why It Doesn't Work*, London: Pluto Press.

Morrison, Blake (2008): 'The Reading Cure', *Guardian Review*, 5 January 2008:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jan/05/fiction.scienceandnature> (accessed 06 February 2014).

Narcross, John C. (ed.) (2013): *Self-Help that Works: Resources to Improve Emotional Health and Strengthen Relationships* , New York: OUP USA.

Nettle, David (2005): *Happiness: The Science Behind Your Smile* , Oxford: OUP.

NHS Choices (2013): *Controversy over DSM-5: New Mental Health Guide* : <http://www.nhs.uk/news/2013/08august/Pages/controversy-mental-health-diagnosis-and-treatment-dsm5.aspx> (accessed 06 February 2014).

Papadakis, Andreas C. (ed.) (1990): *Postmodernism on Trial*, London: Academy Editions.

Pearsall, Paul (2005): *The Last Self-Help Book You'll Ever Need: Repress Your Anger, Think Negatively, Be a Good Blamer and Throttle Your Inner Child* , New York: Basic Books.

Peck, Janice (2008): *The Age of Oprah: Cultural Icon for the Neo-Liberal Era* , Boulder, CO: Paradigm.

Peele, Stanton (1999): *Diseasing of America: How We Allowed Recovery Zealots and the Treatment Industry to Convince Us We are Out of Control* , San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Playfair, William L. (2004): *The Useful Lie: How the Recovery Industry Has Entrapped America in a Disease Model of Addiction* , Stanley, NC: Timeless Texts.

Propp, Vladimir (1968): *Morphology of the Folktale*, Austin: University of Texas Press [orig. 1928].

Purdie, Jeni (2010): *Life Coaching for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley Press.

Ramsay, J. Russell & Anthony L. Rostain (2008): *Cognitive Behavioural Therapy for Adult ADHD: An Integrative Psychosocial and Medical Approach* , London: Routledge.

Reading Agency (2013): *Reading Well*: <http://readingagency.org.uk/adults/quick-guides/reading-well/> (accessed 06 February 2014).

Redfield, James (1994): *The Celestine Prophecy*, London: Bantam.

Rieff, Philip (1966/1987): *The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith After Freud* , 2nd Edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Rice, John Steadman (1998): *A Disease of One's Own: Psychotherapy, Addiction and the Emergence of Co-Dependency* , Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers.

Rosenthal, Edward C. (2006): *The Era of Choice: The Ability to Choose and Its Transformation of Contemporary Life* , Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Salerno, Steve (2005): *SHAM (Self-Help and Actualization Movement): How the Gurus of the Self-Help Movement Make Us Helpless* , London: Nicholas Brealey.

Salovy, Peter & John D. Mayer (1990): 'Emotional Intelligence', *Imagination, Cognition and Personality*, 9, 185-211. DOI: [10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG](https://doi.org/10.2190/DUGG-P24E-52WK-6CDG)

Santrock, John W. (1994): *The Authoritative Guide to Self-Help Books*, New York: Guildford Press.

Schrag, Calvin O. (1997): *The Self after Postmodernity*, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Schwartz, Barry (2005): *The Paradox of Choice: Why More is Less* , London: Harper Collins.

Seligman, Martin (1991): *Learned Optimism*, New York: Knopf.

Seligman, Martin (2011): *Flourish: A New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* , London: Nicholas Brealey.

Smart, Barry (2010): *Consumer Society: Critical Issues and Environmental Changes* , London: Sage.

Smiles, Samuel (1859): *Self-Help: With Illustrations of Character and Perseverance*, London: John Murray.

Szasz, Thomas (2007): *The Medicalization of Everyday Life: Selected Essays*, New York: Syracuse University Press.

Stanley, Jacqueline. (1999): *Reading to Heal: How to Use Bibliotherapy to Improve Your Life* , London: Element Books.

Starker, Steven (2002): *Oracle at the Supermarket: The American Preoccupation with Self-Help Books* , Brunswick, NJ: Transaction.

Strong, Jeff & Michael O. Flanagan (2004): *AD/HD for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

Sykes, Charles (1992): *A Nation of Victims: The Decay of the American Character* , New York: St Martin's Press.

Taylor, Charles (1989): *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Thompson, Willie (2004): *Postmodernism and History*, London: Palgrave.

Travis, Trish (2013): *The Language of the Heart: A Cultural History of the Recovery Movement from Alcoholics Anonymous to Oprah Winfrey* , Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press.

Westheimer, Ruth K. & Pierre A. Lehu (2006): *Sex for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

White, Mimi (1992): *Tele-Advertising: Therapeutic Discourse in American Television* , Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Wilson, John P. & Terence M. Keane (2004): *Assessing Psychological Trauma and PTSD*, London: Guildford Press.

Wright, Katie (2011): *The Rise of the Therapeutic Society: Psychological Knowledge and the Contradictions of Cultural Change* , Washington DC: New Academia Publishing.

Young, Alan (1995): *The Harmony of Illusion: Inventing Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder* , Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Zuckerman (2003): *Elder Care for Dummies*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons.

 pdf

Published
2014-10-01

Issue
[Vol 6 No 4 \(2014\): Therapeutic Cultures](#)

Section
Theme: Therapeutic Cultures

[Copyright \(c\) 2014 Collingsworth](#)

Culture Unbound is an Open Access journal, indicating that all its content is freely available to anyone with an internet connection. Furthermore we publish all our articles under a Creative Commons license that specify what a user can do with a document. Creative Commons licenses are not an alternative to copyright. [They work alongside copyright](#) and enable you to modify your copyright terms to best suit your needs. *Culture Unbound* uses a so called "[Attribution Non-commercial](#)" (CC BY-NC) license which allows users to distribute the work and to re-work it without the author's permission, but not for any commercial purposes and never without acknowledging the original author. *Culture Unbound* does not charge any publication fees from the authors. Authors are welcome to parallel publish their articles without embargo as long as they include a full reference to the original source.

Copyright for all manuscripts rests with the author(s). The editors reserve the right to edit manuscripts. Contributors are responsible for acquiring all permissions from the copyright owners for the use of quotations, illustrations, tables, etc. Each author must, before final publication fill, in a publishing agreement provided by LiU E-Press.

[Make a Submission](#)

Information

[For Authors](#)

Culture Unbound - Journal of Current Cultural Research

ISSN: 2000-1525

Culture Unbound is published under the auspices of Linköping University Electronic Press (LiU E-Press).

Platform and Workflow by OJS / PKP

The Best Self-Help Books of all time. I love books and I read/listen to 7 books a week. Over my lifetime, I have read 1,500+ business and self-help books. Below, I have listed the best self-help books that I have ever read. I used to be a Computer Engineer who used to manage Billion \$ cellphone projects. However, I left that career to start 2000 Books where my team and I compress the top ideas from the world's best business and self-help books into 15 minute videos. Below is my list of the best self-help books of all time. Success Mindset. As A Man Thinketh by James Allen. Grit is the perseverance and passion for long-term goals and the tendency to not abandon tasks in the face of obstacles. Ultimately, it's grit, not talent, that will determine the level of success in our lives. "This book provides the reader with an excursion through the fascinating territory of the narrative metaphor, and visits many of the sparkling developments in the therapeutic practices that are informed by this metaphor. The authors successfully bring together the ideas of others with their own contributions through a variety of forms, including the erudite exposition of ideas, practical and informative maps of therapeutic processes, and examples of therapeutic dialogue. There is something for everybody here. It is chock full of 're-storying' ideas for postmodern story-oriented therapists and maybe even for those still wedded to the self psychologies." - -Joan Laird. "Consistent with their postmodern approach to therapy, Parry and Doan have provided the field with a postmodern book. Start studying Postmodern Therapy. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. is more relevant in the narrative approach than it is in solution-oriented therapy. has proven to be completely irrelevant to all counselors and therapists practicing today. is being replaced by postmodernists with the concept of socially storied lives. A limitation of the postmodern approaches is: therapists require extensive training in providing brief therapy. inexperienced therapists may over rely on techniques and appear mechanistic. A self-help book is one that is written with the intention to instruct its readers on solving personal problems. The books take their name from Self-Help, an 1859 best-seller by Samuel Smiles, but are also known and classified under "self-improvement", a term that is a modernized version of self-help. Self-help books moved from a niche position to being a postmodern cultural phenomenon in the late twentieth century. A postmodern paradox - Free download as PDF File (.pdf), Text File (.txt) or read online for free. Fabio Akcelrud Durão. Much more than documents. Discover everything Scribd has to offer, including books and audiobooks from major publishers. Start Free Trial. Cancel anytime. A postmodern paradox. Uploaded by. liebe2772.