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

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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.

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"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. *The Self-Help Book in the Therapeutic Ontosphere: A Postmodern Paradox*. Jean Collingsworth. *Sociology*. 30 September 2014. 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... Expand. 2. Open Access. View PDF. Save. Alert. HELP YOURSELF In the last couple of decades, self-help books have been a publishing phenomenon, often topping the best-seller lists. Readers have lapped up their advice on how to do a wide variety of things, from becoming successful and rich to improving their relationships. If you're facing a particular problem in your life, there's a host of self-help books for you. The kind of advice given in self-help books is often more or less the same. What really amounts to pretty standard statements are made in many of them, but does this advice stand up to scrutiny? Psychologists who have studied a range of self-help books connected with happiness say the answer to this is 'not always.'