

# Love yourself

## The relationship of the self with itself in popular self-help texts

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### **Abstract**

The rise of psy discourse has been the subject of considerable academic attention, but one of its most popular and visible forms, the self-help book, has received comparatively little attention. This article provides a Foucauldian analysis of a selection of relationship manuals; it examines the ways in which they set up a relation of the reader's self to itself, and it explores the ethical valorizations and teleologies therein. The emphasis on the relationship with the self, and the development of mastery over the emotions advocated in the books, is related to the values held in liberal democratic societies.

**Keywords:** emotions, Foucault, popular psychology, psy, self-help literature

Our age is often characterized as being preoccupied with self-referential systems (Giddens, 1992; Weeks, 1995) and in particular with the examination and reformation of the self which may take the form of a reflexive project of self (Bauman, 1982; Featherstone, 1991; Lash and Urry, 1994) in which 'we are not what we are, but what we make of ourselves' (Giddens, 1991: 68). Therapeutic discourses have played a significant role in this process (Bellah et al., 1996 *inter alia*) and it is through psychological explanations that we are now accustomed to making sense of increasingly diverse phenomena (Moskovitz, 2001). Many critics have asserted that the rise of psychology has had depoliticizing effects. Rieff (1987), for example, claims that we have witnessed the birth of a new epoch – that of 'psychological man', who is privatized and individualized. Lasch (1979) states that there has been a turn to the self in recent decades, a tendency to live only in the present day, and a retreat into narcissism fuelled by therapy. Sennett (1986) claims that, because public life has become increasingly subject to the values of private life, we are weakened in our ability to cope with public and

political life. Cloud (1998) argues that the depoliticizing effects of therapy and self-help are used as a political strategy by contemporary capitalism to serve the purposes of powerful economic interests.

In contrast, Giddens believes that therapy is 'emancipatory', being both a product and a cause of increased reflexivity, and he claims self-help books are part of the 'democratization of daily life' (Giddens, 1992: 64, 156). However, while the increasing influence of the 'psy'<sup>1</sup> disciplines has been the subject of significant academic enquiry (Rose, 1999), the self-help text, one of the most popular and visible manifestations of the widespread influence of therapeutic discourse, has received comparatively little attention. Existing studies tend to focus on their history (Starker, 1989) or the ways in which they are used by their readers (Simonds, 1992). Some have attempted to ascertain the 'efficacy' of self-help books, with varying results (Delin and Delin, 1994; Scholz and Forest, 1997).

Lichterman states that the self-help readers in his study read 'believingly but loosely', sometimes experiencing problems trying to remember particular messages, but showing a willingness to entertain psychological interpretations of personal troubles and assuming that within self-help books, 'the categories and analyses themselves are legitimate' (Lichterman, 1992: 427, 432). Hochschild's (1994) article analyses the content of self-help manuals, and finds them to be part of the 'hijacking' of the women's movement by capitalist and instrumentalist values, and Rimke (2000) demonstrates that self-help books can be seen as a technique of governmentality, or 'the conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1982: 220–1) – a process involving a multitude of governing agencies and authorities, attempting to govern different kinds of behaviours, for different purposes and with different consequences (Burchell et al., 1991; Dean, 1999; Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1996, 1999). I am in broad agreement with Rimke's approach, but this article differs from her approach and those above as it seeks to provide a technical examination of the ethical valorizations and teleologies in relationship manuals. In particular, it asks: what prescriptions and proscriptions are provided with regard to specific emotional involvements? What kinds of ethical self-understanding are being promoted? What sorts of identities are being provided? What kinds of emotion are lauded or promoted as being 'healthy', and what kinds are considered undesirable or unhealthy?

This article forms part of a wider study, for which I selected for analysis 14 best-selling therapeutic relationship manuals<sup>2</sup> from 1973 to 2001. The term 'best-selling' is somewhat ill-defined, with different agencies and publications producing different results and different lists. For her study of general self-help books from 1963 to 1991, Simonds (1992) used as her source the weekly *New York Times* best-seller lists from 1963 to 1991, and all the books in my study that were published prior to 1991 (nine in total) are also in her list. For the other five books I used a combination of sources – the *New York Times*, the *Independent* newspaper and a list produced by the

BPI (BPI, 1998, 1999, 2000) on the themes of 'Mind, Body and Spirit'. This is not, therefore, to be regarded as a definitive selection; nonetheless I am confident that it represents a fair reflection of recent popular therapeutic relationship manuals.

This article takes a broadly Foucauldian approach in an attempt to describe the beliefs and procedures involved in the production and reproduction of popular psy discourses and knowledges in relationship manuals, the ways in which these are practically implemented and practised, and the power effects associated with these phenomena. A Foucauldian approach seeks to examine the productivity of encounters with discourse – it does not seek the *truth* of a *real* sexuality or a *real* love that is somehow 'beyond' the reach of psy discourse; neither does it draw conclusions about the causes of production of objects and relations under study. By using a Foucauldian approach, one is freed from an impulse to replace 'false' truths with 'correct' truths and from asking unproductive questions about the causes and functions of rule (Valverde, 1996). The aim of such an analysis is therefore a modest one: to aid social thought in grasping certain present realities of how things work. In this article, I hope only to open up the knowledges and truths within self-help literature to inspection, in order that one may begin to *assess* them, rather than accepting, condemning, celebrating or ignoring them. That is to say, I hope that by providing a technical analysis of how self-help literature operates, this study will open up new possibilities of how one might make a move towards thinking about such texts in a fresh way.

## **The paramount importance of the self**

The reader (presumably) purchases a relationship manual because she<sup>3</sup> has concerns about her relationship (or lack thereof), but the authors commonly 'shape up' the issue (Hodges, 2001), and begin by providing the reader with a new problem. Despite the claims of the books to be concerned with enabling the reader to find a partner and/or sustain a romantic relationship, most of the material contained within them is concerned not with love, nor with meeting and attracting potential partners, but with the care for, and nurturance of, the self. 'True intimacy with another human being', we are told, 'can be experienced only when you have found true peace within yourself' (DeAngelis, 1990: 271), and 'Many women make the mistake of looking for a man with whom to develop a relationship without first developing a relationship with themselves.... The search must begin at home, within the self' (Norwood, 1986: 146). Another author concurs that 'This journey does not begin with you and your partner; it begins with you' (McGraw, 2001: 1). This is because 'Authentic love requires that you discover and embrace your authentic self' (Carter-Scott, 2000: xviii), and 'a great marriage is not so much finding the right person as *being* the right person' (Morgan, 1973: 38). The reader is reminded that 'the only person you

will live your entire life with is yourself' (Friedman, 1985: 243), and promised that, by reading a particular book, 'You will be helped to learn how to value and promote your own well-being' (Norwood, 1986: 203–4). To achieve this is to recognize 'our highest responsibility – ourselves' (Beattie, 1992: 89). The reader is therefore provided with a new ethical identity: where she had mistakenly thought that her relationship was the problem, she is persuaded that it is her identity as an authentic self that is the issue, and that she has an ethical obligation to this self. Thus it is the *relationship with*, and *responsibility to*, the self that is seen as being of primary ethical significance.

In order to achieve this effect, the authors constitute the self as being *ontologically separate* from itself. They imply this separation of the self from itself, in statements such as that we should 'make a commitment to ourselves' (Beattie, 1992: 126), and in passages such as:

What is self-esteem anyway? It is your reputation with yourself – in essence, it is what, over time, you have come to believe about yourself. If you have low self-esteem, you have built up a bad reputation with yourself. If you have high self-esteem, you have built up a good reputation with yourself. (Vedral, 1994: 20)

The self is thereby constituted as the primary site of therapeutic transformation, and the 'depth and quality of the link between you and your self' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 2) becomes the primary ethical substance (Foucault, 1982) on which the reader is enjoined to work. Further, the authors posit a notion of a self that has become separated from, or forgotten by, itself. Because '[we] may lose ... our selves' (Beattie, 1992: 130), the work upon the self is likely to begin with 'finding yourself again' (Forward, 1986: 277), or with a 'search for the lost self' (Hendrix, 1997: 47). There may be a need to identify what one author describes as 'a potentially devastating lack of congruence between my inner self and my outer self' (Dowling, 1981: 28). One book is unusual in that it explicitly *states* a separation of the self from itself:

There is a distinction between you and your 'self'. Your self is the core of your being, the essential entity that exists irrespective of your personality, your ego, your opinions, and your emotions ... 'you' are the observer, coach, editor, and critic who surveys your thoughts, words, feelings, and behaviors and determines how much of your essential self is shown to others. (Carter-Scott, 2000: 1–2)

Having identified a split from the self, the authors state the need to 'reach into your heart and soul, and tap into your core' because 'It's time for "the cavalry" to arrive – the person you really are' (McGraw, 2001: 94). Beattie's one hope for her book, she says, is that it will 'awaken you to your *self*' (1992: 236).

The reader must *learn* to understand the significance of this newly posed ethical problem, but this process is, at the same time, seen as being somehow innate, natural, universal and eternal. Thus we are told that 'The first

*natural* step you must take is to learn to love, honor, and cherish yourself' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 2, emphasis added), and we are assured that 'giving to yourself' is relating to yourself 'in a very natural way' (Vedral, 1994: 39). Furthermore, 'cherishing yourself is your *birthright*' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 4, emphasis added). This ethical form of life is 'who we are, and who we were meant to be' (Beattie, 1992: 123). The authors thus diagnose the reader as having a wrong relationship with the self, contrasting this with the correct and healthy one. In doing so they create a site requiring intervention from a specifically psy authority, and normalize and naturalize psy ontology.

This psychologized emphasis on the self is, therefore, presented as innate, essential, or as an inalienable human right, from which we have nonetheless become separated, or that we have simply forgotten. For while most people, we are told, might treat others with consideration, kindness and respect, 'when I ask these same people how many of these behaviors and actions they extend to themselves, most sheepishly admit that the answer is little to none' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 3). The fact that these clients react *sheepishly* implies that they already believe, from the moment that the therapist asks the question, that they are not fulfilling their relationship with their self as they should. One author asks:

When's the last time you said something complimentary to someone? Just a few hours ago? When's the last time you said something flattering about yourself? Months ago – and meekly? Self-acknowledging behavior is a tough problem for many people. (Friedman, 1985: 118)

However, the reader must learn that these behaviours should also be used in the relationship with the self, and to 'require respect, kindness, caring, and integrity in your relationship with yourself' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 12). Because she has become separated from this birthright, in order to rectify and restore the reader's relationship with the self, the latter is constituted as the prime site on which she must work, where self-love, self-nurturance and the acquisition of self-knowledge are the work to be performed, in order to create a new ethical identity, new patterns of behaviour and more appropriate emotional responses.

## **Love thy self, nurture thy self, know thy self**

Having thus diagnosed the reader as experiencing a pathological identity in the form of a wrong relationship with the self, the authors advocate a programme in which the reader must learn to *love* the self. One book begins with 'Rule One: You Must Love Yourself First' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 1). In others we are told to 'Have a love affair with yourself!' (Beattie, 1992: 119), or to 'practice celebrating your magnificence' (DeAngelis, 1990: 57), and 'you *must* begin to tell yourself that you are lovable ... [because] no-one else can do the job' (Vedral, 1994: 36–7).

One author admits that ‘perhaps it sounds self-centred to love yourself’, but she assures us that ‘it’s most necessary if you’re going to love others, including your husband’ (Morgan, 1973: 44). Loving the self is also necessary for its own sake, however, because in an uncertain world, ‘what matters is that you put forth the time and energy to learn to love the one person who will absolutely be with you for the rest of your life – yourself’ (Carter-Scott, 2000: 18). Indeed, love from the self is so fulfilling that love from another may become superfluous: ‘in time, to your great relief, you may find that you no longer need a love transfusion from a man. You will be able to give it to yourself’ (Vedral, 1994: 39).

The second form that care of the self takes is that of *nurturing* the self, which means to ‘cherish that frightened, vulnerable, needy child inside us’ (Beattie, 1992: 106), and involves ‘actively caring for every facet of yourself. It shows up in every action you take, from putting on a sweater to protect yourself from a chill to leaving a job that does not fulfil you’ (Carter-Scott, 2000: 4). This responsibility of caring for the self is of such importance that other activities may have to be curtailed, such as in the following case:

As Sophie tried to keep up her self-care, she came to the realization that she couldn’t do it all – working full-time, taking care of the house, doing the grocery shopping, and looking after the dog allowed her no time for a regular regimen of self-care. (Doyle, 2000: 74)

The solution to this, which Sophie duly arranged, we are told, was that she should have a part-time job rather than a full-time one in order to be able to concentrate more fully on caring for herself.

Because she likely has ‘forgotten’ how to care for herself, the reader may mistakenly regard this as being hedonistic or narcissistic, and may find that she experiences uncomfortable emotions, or ‘resistance’.<sup>4</sup> The authors portray this as the self resisting work performed for its own benefit, but they insist that this problem can be overcome by the technique of self-mastery – the reader should ‘choose at least one nurturing act per day and do it, even if you initially have to coax yourself’ (Carter-Scott, 2000: 17). One author pre-empts any possible resistance from the reader to this idea by saying ‘Perhaps this seems silly to you; you may view it as pampering or babying yourself, or you may see it as unimportant. However, I assure you that taking care of yourself now is *vitally* important’ (Forward, 1986: 189).

This responsibility of the self to nurture itself is to be taken so seriously that one author says ‘I ask my clients to make a *contract* with themselves. On this contract they list ten simple activities that they agree to do each week. I suggest that each day they do *at least one* of these activities’ (Forward, 1986: 189). She goes on to suggest that the reader should do the same, and says, ‘I urge you to view the contract you make up for yourself as meaningful and binding’ because ‘it is essential that you nurture yourself

just as you nurture others. Your self-caring activities are the first step towards breaking that painful old pattern of not looking after *you*' (Forward, 1986: 190).

As part of the process of taking care of her self, the reader is enjoined to turn the psy diagnostic gaze upon herself. She is required to *monitor* the self – to 'evaluate every thought, feeling, and behavior that you have' (McGraw, 2001: 213), and to 'Be alert to what you are thinking ... also, look out for self-denigrating statements' (Forward, 1986: 186). If the reader finds herself thinking such thoughts she should 'catch that thought like a rubber ball. Look at it and say the thought out loud' and then 'answer yourself back' (Vedral, 1994: 179) – that is, she should engage in *dialogue* with the self and 're-train' her inner voice. 'When you insult yourself, apologize to yourself immediately. You might say something like "I didn't mean that. You have lots of good qualities, like a terrific sense of humor".... I don't expect you to be perfect' (Doyle, 2000: 224).

The self can therefore be seen as something which is somehow insulting, thwarting and conspiring against itself, but this behaviour of engaging in a dialogue with the self is 'how to win the battle of the mind' (Vedral, 1994: 114). This battle between the self and itself is to be won by the techniques of *monitoring* the self for negative thoughts, *interrupting* and *intervening* where wrong thinking is discovered, *engaging in dialogue* with the self by addressing such thoughts, and *mastering* the self by training the unconscious mind towards right thinking.

However, above all, it is vital that the reader should *know* the self. One should begin any search for satisfaction in a relationship by carrying out 'an inner assessment of who you are, what you are about, and ... what it is that you truly want' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 32), because a relationship 'depends not on your ability to attract the perfect mate, but on your willingness to acquire knowledge about hidden parts of yourself' (Hendrix, 1997: xvi). It is vital to 'Get to know your intuitive mind [because] it will help to move you ... into partnership' (Spezzano, 1994: 2).

This process of coming to know the self may simply involve *listening* to the self. Beattie suggests that we should 'Listen to what our precious self is telling us about what we need' (Beattie, 1992: 116), Carter-Scott encourages us to 'listen to and honor your inner messages' (2000: 12), and Norwood advises us that 'You must listen carefully to your inner voice regarding what is good for you, and then follow it. This is how you develop healthy self-interest, by listening to your own cues' (Norwood, 1986: 229). However, rather than simply listening to the self, a more active process may be required, such as one author's suggestion that the reader should 'take yourself apart, see what you are made of, and then slowly and lovingly put yourself back together again' (Vedral, 1994: 298). Indeed, large portions of all the books are taken up with questions that the reader is exhorted to ask herself, and exercises to perform in order to know the self more fully. The

authors urge the reader to 'be honest with yourself' when answering such questions as, 'Do you blame others for what's wrong in your life?', 'Do people demonstrate a lack of respect for you?', 'Can others easily make you feel guilty?' and 'Do you tend to hide from yourself?' (Friedman, 1985: 50). Beattie includes several long passages that consist entirely of questions, such as 'Do I sometimes feel I have an overdeveloped sense of responsibility, which makes it easier to be concerned with others rather than myself?' and 'Do I find it hard to look at my own responsibility to myself?' (Beattie, 1992: 204). Spezzano's volume is essentially a workbook, consisting of a series of exercises to be carried out over a 30-day period. For each exercise, there are spaces provided for the reader to answer questions about herself, such as: 'What am I afraid of?' or to complete statements such as 'I feel unhappy when ...' (1994: 25, 15).

In case the reader is unaware of the arduous nature of performing the prescribed ethical work, the authors unequivocally depict the development of the teleological relationship with the self as involving a great deal of hard work. Hendrix, for example, says that 'You will discover that doing the exercises requires a significant amount of time and commitment.' He insists that:

To complete them all, you will need to set aside an hour or two of uninterrupted time each week for several months. You may even have to hire a babysitter or give up some other activity to find the necessary time – just as you would if you were going to a weekly appointment with a therapist. (Hendrix, 1997: 312)

As well as requiring that the reader commit herself to the required amount of work, the authors stress that the prescribed tasks are likely to be emotionally uncomfortable. One author says 'I feel it only fair to caution you that this is not going to be an easy book to read' (Norwood, 1986: 3), and another says 'I want you to know that this book is not going to make things easy for you' (McGraw, 2001: 7). DeAngelis says, 'Believe me, it isn't easy' (1990: 88), and Cowan and Kinder say, 'Change ... requires adopting new modes of behavior, which are always uncomfortable in the beginning' (1986: 188).

The gruelling course of action ahead may be 'terrifying' (Doyle, 2000: 19). Courage is required because 'progress' through therapeutic insight is a painful, disturbing and difficult process: 'Facing your own problems means that ... you are now left with nothing to distract you from your own life, your own problems, and your own pain' (Norwood, 1986: 222). But, the reader is assured, it is necessary, or even wise, to put oneself in an uncomfortable situation in order to gain something of greater value: 'Penny had a very wise therapist who explained to her the concept of stretching beyond one's comfort zone' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 86). One author tells us the story of Jackie, who

... said to me after our first three sessions together: 'I thought therapy was supposed to make me feel better. I'm feeling worse now than I did before I started! How am I supposed to do new things when I feel so terrible?'

Forward assures us that this is evidence that 'Jackie made a very typical mistake', because 'the intensity of her discomfort was not a sign that we were going in the wrong direction: rather, it indicated that the process was beginning to work' (1986: 170–1). The authors thus help to *legitimize* the psy form of ethical life by depicting the prescribed tasks as being painful, arduous and demanding, thus pre-empting any conception of them as being egoistical or narcissistic.

## Self-sufficiency

As part of the process of forming a healthy relationship with the self, we are urged to 'Discover who you really are and where you are going' (Morgan, 1973: 44), and to be aware that 'The measure of self-esteem is determined by self-knowledge, not the opinions of others' (Friedman, 1985: 71) – this is because 'We only need *our* approval' (Beattie, 1992: 107). The teleological woman 'honors the self' (Beattie, 1992: 125) and 'focuses on her own self-care and fulfilment' (Doyle, 2000: 20). Crucially, this means that 'you can align yourself with your desired life path rather than following innumerable bunny trails that lead to nowhere' (Carter-Scott, 2000: 33).

Thus, to form a relationship with oneself is a pre-requisite to personal fulfilment and the reaching of life goals, and in this we can gain a glimpse of the ethical telos of the books, the kind of selves we are being encouraged to become: we are to aspire to be effective, fulfilled and autonomous selves, on an individual, progressive and linear journey through life, with the sole responsibility for the direction that this journey takes. 'The smart woman', we are told, 'is responsible for her own experience in this world' (Cowan and Kinder, 1986: 260). Self-care is at the heart of this way of living:

Self-care is an attitude toward ourselves and our lives that says, I am responsible for myself.... I am responsible for what I give and receive.... I am responsible for how much I enjoy life, for how much pleasure I find in daily activities.... My decisions will take into account my responsibilities to myself. (Beattie, 1992: 114–15)

Taking responsibility for oneself precludes relying on another. 'The only person you must rely on is *you*' (Friedman, 1985: 243), because 'the fact is, a man, no matter how devoted he may be, may decide to pick up and go. You need, therefore, to be able to count on yourself' (Vedral, 1994: 42). The women admired by one author 'are not less, or inferior, or diminished when others choose to leave or if they choose to leave others. They can be

*more*. They have themselves and know how that counts' (Friedman, 1985: 243). Another author says of one of her clients, diagnosed as being a woman who 'loves too much', that 'In order to recover, she had to begin to define the point where others left off, and she, an autonomous person, began' (Norwood, 1986: 174), and Dowling says:

The issue we're addressing here is what psychologists call 'separation individuation,' and it has to do with whether *anyone* – man or woman – can withstand the experience of being primarily and fundamentally alone: one who stands on one's own two feet, [and] develops one's own ideas. (Dowling, 1981: 143–4)

'Once you've dealt with yourself', we are assured, 'you will be prepared to deal with your partner' (Forward, 1986: 172). The work upon the self, and on the self's emotional identity, must therefore come before everything else:

Imagine you're on a plane when the cabin pressure drops suddenly. The oxygen masks fall from the ceiling and in order to stay conscious, you have to put one on. But you're traveling with a child who will also need an oxygen mask.... If you attend to the child first and then pass out, it's unlikely that the child will be able to help you with yours. Therefore it is critical that you take care of yourself first, then help the child. (Doyle, 2000: 70)

In order to pursue the teleological identity and achieve a healthy emotional state, we may have to follow the advice in Norwood's book to 'Become selfish' (1986: 228); which she assures us 'also means being honest' (1986: 229). She tells us that 'becoming selfish ... will make you a better partner' but adds, 'that cannot be your ultimate goal. Your goal must be the achievement of your own, highest self' (1986: 229). Beattie tells us that to follow the programme in her book requires that we 'practice *selfishness* in the highest, noblest ... sense of that word' (1992: 126). We are instructed to 'Know what you want in life before you even get involved in a new relationship, so that your agenda comes first' (DeAngelis, 1990: 50), and told that this should be so 'even if you are the parent of small children' (Norwood, 1986: 228).

One author suggests, 'Each day, ask yourself: Is my life in balance? As I give to others, am I giving to myself?' (Friedman, 1985: 82). Because the authors assume that the reader has been practising nurturing behaviours towards others to excess, she is to work on feeling *less* care for the other and *more* in the relationship with the self. For example, Norwood says that 'Up to now you've probably been nearly psychic at picking up other people's cues' and that the reader should 'Tune those cues out, or they'll continue to drown out your own' (1986: 229). In order to concentrate on the self, it will therefore be necessary to take less notice of the other. Doyle tells the reader that in her relationship with her husband she should 'As much as possible, mind your own business' (2000: 45). Because 'the iden-

tity of “being helpful” is an ego trip’ we are told, ‘you must relinquish the identity of “being helpful” ’ (Norwood, 1986: 216).

By taking more interest in the self ‘You free others in your life to *take care of themselves* without worrying about you’ (Norwood, 1986: 230, emphasis added). Doyle tells us ‘Remember: Let him work out his own problems’ (2000: 145), and Norwood says that by taking less interest in other people ‘you grant others the right to be responsible for meeting their own wants and needs’ (1986: 228–9). The only solution to the problem of excessive concern for the other is the process of ‘detachment’:

Detachment is based on the premise that each person is responsible for himself, that we can’t solve problems that aren’t ours to solve, and that worrying doesn’t help. We adopt a policy of keeping our hands off other people’s responsibilities and tend to our own instead. If people have created some disasters for themselves, we allow them to face their own proverbial music. We allow people to be who they are. We give them the freedom to be responsible and to grow. And we give ourselves that same freedom. We live our own lives to the best of our ability. (Beattie, 1992: 62)

Ideally, this process is to be achieved ‘in love’ (Beattie, 1992: 60) because ‘detachment is not a cold hostile withdrawal ... a severing of our relationships. Nor is it a removal of our love and concern’, although she admits that ‘sometimes *these ways of detaching might be the best we can do*’ (1992: 62, emphasis added). A good relationship will be achieved ‘by redirecting your loving attention away from your obsession with a man and towards your own ... life’ (Norwood, 1986: 4) and escaping the ‘self-sacrificing martyrdom’ (1986: 38) many of us endure. The reader is advised of new ways of dealing with her partner’s emotional needs, such as ‘When he’s in a funk, leave him alone’ and:

Get out of the house, visit a friend, watch television, or read a book. Distract yourself with self-care. His mood will pass eventually. The only constructive thing to do is to wait it out without inviting him to talk about the issue with you, since you’re not his mom or his therapist. (Doyle, 2000: 144)

One author says ‘Things may suddenly go from bad to worse for him. Let them! His troubles are his own to work out, not yours. Let him take full responsibility for his problems and the full credit for his solutions’ (Norwood, 1986: 213). ‘Why should you spend your life dealing with someone else’s problems?’ another asks, ‘Don’t you have enough of your own?’ (Vedral, 1994: 102). Ultimately, though, however it is expressed, the message, and its centrality to the theses of the books is the same: ‘If I make one point in this book, I hope it is that *the surest way to make ourselves crazy is to get involved in other people’s business, and the quickest way to become sane and happy is to tend to our own affairs*’ (Beattie, 1992: 113).

## Conclusion

The therapeutic processes contained within the books can be seen as operating through four different axes (after Foucault, 1992: 26–8; see also Deleuze, 1988: 102–5; Hacking, 1996: 237; Rose, 1998: 190). First, a particular ethical substance is produced upon which the therapeutic process may work. The authors achieve this by establishing the self as ontologically separate from itself, and positing a notion of an emotional self that has become lost, or forgotten, by itself. They further assert that the relationship with, and responsibility to, the self is of primary ethical significance, and the one from which all other relationships follow. Second, a space is constituted within which the reader recognizes herself as requiring therapeutic transformation, or within which the desire for therapeutic intervention is brought about – that is, the reader is brought to recognize that she has a ‘problem’. The authors diagnose her as having an undesirable relationship with the self, and a distorted view of relationships; they thus create a site requiring intervention from a specifically psy authority – an authority that the reader is to turn upon herself. They thereby render the reader’s self as both the subject of, and the agent responsible for, its own transformation. Third, they assert that the necessary ethical transformation of the reader is to be achieved through the development of certain technologies of the self, including self-knowledge, self-love and self-nurturance, through the techniques of monitoring, interrupting, and shaping her behaviour. The authors legitimize the psy form of ethical life, and pre-empt allegations of egotism or narcissism by depicting the prescribed tasks as being painful, arduous and demanding. Fourth, models of conduct are provided, including ‘modes of being’ and definitions of exemplary emotions. Particular teleological models are given of the effective, well-adjusted, autonomous individual in charge of her own emotional life. The ethical *telos* of the books is therefore that of an individual who is self-regarding, and who has mastered the arts of self-knowledge and emotional self-discipline.

This emphasis on the individual, however, is not to imply that psy discourse is devoid of notions of social responsibility. On the contrary, it is one of the technologies of subjectivity that forms the ability of the citizen to generate a politically able self, which ‘link[s] personal goals and desires to social order and stability, [and] link[s] power to subjectivity’ (Foucault, 1982: 220). Psy technologies of the self, such as self-esteem, self-knowledge and self-discipline, are also technologies of citizenship (Rimke, 2000) – ways of ‘acting upon ourselves, so that the police, the guards and the doctors do not have to’ (Cruikshank, 1993: 330). The formation of an adequate emotional life is a crucial part of this process.

Far from being emancipatory, and far from being merely oppressive instruments of state control, relationship manuals are an example of the

'government through freedom' (Rose, 1999) that multiplies the points at which citizens have to play their part in the games of self-governance. Far from being asocial, they seek to reform and re-shape our conceptions of the social. And far from being a distraction from the political sphere, they are one of the ways in which that which is deemed political is redefined and refigured. Contemporary liberal democratic forms of power govern 'through the freedom and aspiration of subjects rather than in spite of them' (Rose, 1996: 155), and are therefore entirely reliant on the kinds of emotionally discrete individuals promoted as teleological models in self-help literature. That is to say that 'public' or political life is not negated by self-help – rather, a very particular type of citizen capable of living a particular type of 'public' life is *produced* by self-help (and more general psy) discourses.

Indeed, to suggest that the public, political sphere is somehow separate from the private, emotional sphere is to miss the importance of the ways in which we 'enfold' (Dean, 2001; Deleuze, 1992; Rose, 1998: 188–93) forms of authority into ourselves. Self-help literature permits and requires a notion of social obligation in that technologies of the self such as self-discipline and self-knowledge are the 'right', or ethical, thing to take on, not only for the sake of the self, but for one's partner and for the wider society. By prescribing what is emotionally 'right' or 'healthy' for the individual they also provide a picture of how healthy relationships between individuals should be conducted, and the healthy society that would result. The loving wife, for example, should practise detachment not just because it is good for *her*, but also because it is good for her *partner*. A society in which such relationships were the norm would be one composed of 'effective' citizens who were each able to take care of themselves and understand their ultimate responsibility for their own behaviour, for their own happiness or unhappiness, while detaching themselves from the happiness or unhappiness of others.

## Notes

- 1 I follow Rose (1999) in using the term 'psy' to denote psychology, psychoanalysis, psychotherapy and so on.
- 2 Self-help books tend to be steady sellers, with many copies purchased over a relatively long period of time, and as such their popularity is underestimated by best-seller lists. None of the best-seller lists has a section devoted to 'relationship manuals'. I have specifically looked at books with a psy ontology, and have thus excluded some based on etiquette (such as Fein and Schneider's *The Rules*). I have also excluded John Gray's *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* which is to be the subject of a separate article.
- 3 Throughout this article I refer to the reader as female because self-help books are usually aimed at women (Hochschild, 1994: 2) and women are more likely to

- purchase and read them (Simonds, 1992: 23; Starker, 1989; Wood, 1988: 33). However, this is not meant to imply that it is *only* women who read such books.
- 4 Foucault sees resistance as such an integral part of power that he proposes in methodological terms that, in order to locate where power is at work, we should try to find resistance (Foucault, 1982).

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