

Helping the Self

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To carry a concealed weapon here in Texas, a person must pay a \$140 application fee, have no history of major crime or mental illness, demonstrate an understanding of use-of-force laws and pass a shooting proficiency test with a .38 caliber revolver or a 9-millimeter semiautomatic handgun.

And one other thing: the applicant must be in touch with his or her inner child.

—Reported in the *New York Times*, 8 November 1995

Real men don't get on the couch.

—Spokeswoman for George Bush, 1992

Marlo Morgan's *Mutant Message Down Under* was on the *New York Times*'s best-seller list for over six months in 1993–94. "Inspired by actual experience" with Australian desert life, it was "sold as a novel to protect the small tribe of Aborigines from legal involvement" (xiii). Morgan is a redemptive American soul, reaching into the rich lode of Protestant desires to mock her own secularity and pomp, leaven them with primitivist spiritualism, then peddle this spirituality on retreats for the terminally anxious who are also terminally affluent. A related videotape of her talk to a U.S. "Survival Center" audience tells us something about her appeal. The video slick indicates that although Ms. Morgan's "education spans four continents and includes multiple degrees [she] attributes her most valuable teachers not at [*sic*] the universities and clinics but instead the primitive, illerate [*sic*] Australian Aborigine bush people of the wild out-back desert." A logo shows a black kangaroo nestled against what looks like (1) cross sections of teeth; (2) mesas from the drive through Monument Valley in John Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939); or (3) the upper reaches of a cactus.

Morgan is recorded in medium shot, with a single-camera setup sometimes zooming uncertainly in to medium close-up (redolent of stand-up comedy). The story goes that Morgan looks to Australia because the U.S. health system is not supporting her work for "wellness." She removes her watch to mimic "Aboriginal time" and pretends to dig a hole onstage as a "potty." She recounts meeting Aborigines, drunk and drugged, in the inner city. White Australians, she says, respond to her criticisms of race relations by saying "Abos" do not have a European sense of time, will not

learn to read and write, and go “walkabout,” making them unemployable. She, however, provides start-up capital and organizes young urban blacks to start a company, thereby establishing her difference from white Australians. But Morgan mocks her own condescension as a person claiming to understand life, money, and self: “pretty asinine statement.” Still, the company works and she feels very proud.

Her next encounter, she tells her audience, is with tribal Aborigines, who also live a proud life, but this time far from whiteness. They offer her “a big rag . . . and it was well-used” in order that she can be “cleansed” by wearing no underclothing. As part of her initiation into Aboriginal ways, she is made “filthy,” a “testing” that evaluates her capacity to go beyond learned behavior and appearance to reveal “the very moral of my bones in my guts. . . . Who was I really?” This is essential for Aborigines because of their experience with meddling ministrations from Christianity. They know about a “divine oneness,” in contradistinction to the sectarian diffusion of Christianity. She is invited on a “walkabout . . . across Australia,” the narration on-screen interspersed with a sign reading, “WARNING NOTHING AVAILABLE NEXT 1000 KILOMETERS [*sic*].” She explains that she cannot go because of bills, governments, and foreignness, but is told she has been chosen and needs the experience to develop as a person.

On the walk, her feet are grievously injured. But she puts up with bleeding, blisters, and intense heat, “walking around on these stubs you’re borrowing. They aren’t really yours.” She wanders fourteen hundred miles in four months, receiving folk medication and unfamiliar food. Then comes the key transformation: “They unwound everything I stood for. . . . There isn’t anything in me that is the same as it was then. . . . I don’t eat the same, I don’t look the same.” Each morning in the desert “I would look out. And there’s nothing out there. Really nothing.” But blacks are excited about each day and what to do. As they get up, they stand “like a satellite dish” and speak “to the world.” Finally, she offers these lessons to the “Survival Center” audience: “You are not your body [applause]. You only have a body. . . . Let your self get out of the way.” Ego disappears, and one recognizes that all people have all talents. “It is very important to live in harmony with the universe.” All used materials “can go back to the earth.” Tribal Aborigines are nonjudgmental and nonhierarchical, “like wonderful, wonderful children” but “wise” as well. “Every day is a wonderful day.” Disputes are resolved by putting a person physically in the place of her adversary. (*Gestalt* psychology meets ideal communicative rationality. We’d take a ride to the landfill in preference, thanks.)

Morgan’s guides call her “mutant” because white people do not eat naturally occurring food; have allergies to nature; and suffer mental illness and senility, unlike “her tribe,” whose members live to 110 because “they

have avoided the Australian government.” The tape cuts to a silhouette of black birds in flight, then back to our narrator (“I now see this like an Aborigine”). Prayer is said for her “on the day that I was released to go back to my society,” by which time Morgan has “developed a hoof” on the bottom of her foot but “felt beautiful” until she sees herself in the window of a store, “at the level of a beggar.” Once critical of street people asking for help, she now understands, recalling an Aboriginal prayer for her that said white people “seem to understand truth, but it’s buried. . . . We have selected this mutant as our messenger,” a bird “to tell the world that the real people are leaving.” Morgan’s arms are upraised as she recaptures the moment.

The story references a longstanding tendency in industrial societies to project imagined pasts onto indigenous people, to see the “natural humanity” of the “noble savage” as a source of true personhood that can shine through “civilization’s artificial rationality” (Lutz and White 1986, 409). This virtual reinstatement of Eden is, ironically, integral to the contemporary longing to know oneself through a differentiation from the “primitive.” Put another way, Morgan’s use of Aboriginal life shows that the teleological endorsement of advanced industrial societies is paradoxically nostalgic for simplicity, a personal, environmental, and collective harmony that can only come with minimal social organization and everyday spirituality. Lower Fifth Avenue therapy owes a great deal to desert cosmology, because Freud and Jung studiously elevated indigenous peoples into model psychic subjects. This is not uncontested terrain, however. When Morgan went to Japan in 1997 for a series of talks, her address in Kobe was interrupted by Paul Sampi and Robert Eggington, Aboriginal men in tribal attire who rose to “condemn [her] book as a fabricated New Age fantasy, and [her] journey into Aboriginal culture as nothing more than a hoax.” She called on her accusers to realize that “we are all together on this planet, but you are full of anger and hate, [sic] it is time to join the rest of the world” (qtd. in Skelton 1997). Possibly.

How can people pay money to receive Morgan’s message, or sit in silence as it is delivered? Remember the narrator of Jerome K. Jerome’s *Three Men in a Boat* (1884)? He reads a medical manual and diagnoses himself as having symptoms of every illness described, apart from housemaid’s knee (8–9). Worrying away at those questions produced this account of how personal advice books and therapy make a person “subject to someone else by control and dependence” and connected to an “identity by a conscience or self-knowledge” (Foucault 1982b, 781). The aim is to combine the political *technology* of feelings discourse with its political *economy*. Our animating logic will be that certain conjunctural factors produce the conditions for *Mutant Message Down Under* and its kind. On the political technology front, these include (1) ethical incompleteness; (2)

the relationship of state health services and sexological training to civil society; (3) the counterculture and feminism as social movements; and (4) shifting relations between psychotherapy and psychopharmacology. On the political economy front, the factors are (5) the displacement of traditional religious civic culture by commodity and Evangelical culture; (6) the decline of state mental health care and its displacement onto the “private” realm; (7) health-care capitalism since the mid-1990s, which has seen insurance companies attack middle-class therapy; and (8) new emphases by corporate publishers on the care of the self. The last seven of these points will be familiar to most readers, and should come out through the text. For the moment, we shall devote a little space to ethical incompleteness, as this may look out of place.

The notion derives from Kant and the German Romantics’ belief in an ethical substance that is singular to each human subject. Prior to Kant, Abraham’s duty when God orders him to kill Isaac is understood in absolutes. But then the ability to draw on moral codes to order conduct becomes a requirement, an endless exercise of competition between desire, practice, individuality, and the collective. Self-determined subjectivity and broader social needs enter an ongoing struggle. On the Left, this takes a physiocratic turn. Originally whole, each person’s ethical substance is split by the division of labor, when an aesthetically derived sense of full personhood separates from its social equivalent, and only cultivation (the humanities or therapy) can reconcile them. We can trace an entire series of dialectical investigations from this presumption that industrial society alienates human subjects from themselves, stretching from Hegel to Marx and beyond. Contemporary manifestations include the valorization of split subjectivity in much textual theory and a love of indeterminacy over zero signifieds more generally. Elsewhere, the sense that people are internally conflicted is powerful within the “awareness” movements, with assorted talk about “wholeness” and “integration”—these perform homologous operations to those on the Left. In either case, to be caught in the web of ethical incompleteness (some call it “textual indeterminacy,” while others prefer “out of touch with my gut”) makes for unending stickiness. The worried well become willing workers in the civics version of therapy (Robinson 1997).

At an institutional rather than a Romantic or mystic level, we can identify terms that define subjects as internally riven or separated from others, nominating the sane versus the mad, the criminal versus the well-behaved, and the healthy versus the sick. These categories take material form in administrative decisions and institutions of scientific knowledge and capitalism. And self-directed techniques turn a person into a subject: gay versus straight, private versus public, and learned versus learning. Struggles for power take place over “the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different, and they underline every-

thing which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others, splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way” (Foucault 1982b, 777–78).

The raw stuff of human beings, then, is *not* individuals or an ethical substance: people *become* individuals and are deemed to lack ethical substance through discourses and institutions. With modernity, religious rites of passage are increasingly displaced, supplemented, or made purely symbolic by scientific accounts of personhood. Status and ancestry join measurement and confession, as ritualistic shame meets inner guilt and state authority, making ethical incompleteness as civic and Protestant as it was ecclesiastical and Catholic. Epistemology shifts, with facts and interpretations deriving from experimentation and self-examination rather than from authority and confession. But even as this looser model of power appears, so too do hospitals and psychologists, utilizing new forms of knowledge to multiply and magnify the expression of power over bodies. For example, adults who lack the ability to narrativize their feelings and struggles to the satisfaction of psychologists are incarcerated for failing the duty of disclosure. And this is a corollary of Enlightenment freedoms. Lest we view contemporary manifestations as an exclusively new-world or New Age phenomenon, it should be noted that Germany saw the number of self-help groups double to sixty thousand during the 1980s, while the ten best-selling nonfiction books in South Korea for 1996 included three titles on sexual relationships for the young and three on defeating adversity to study at university. This references another key to the genre: directing workers to some mixture of toil, entrepreneurship, manipulation, and displacement of success onto leisure (Foucault 1979a, 193, 224, 296; 1987, 23; Albee 1977, 152; Biggart 1983; What the world is reading 1997).

Such a dialectics of power necessarily produces contradiction. For instance, far from being Pollyannaish accounts of domestic bliss, U.S. women’s-magazine articles on marriage in the 1940s and 1950s depict the household as a site of struggle where happiness and intellect are exchanged for stability and conformism; perhaps a more realistic version of the heterosexual contract than today’s mantra “you can have it all.” Women read in detail about incredible drudgery, not about fantasies of professional or romantic fulfillment. In the 1960s, this literature shifts toward sexual pleasure and high romance—though not necessarily together—and away from self-sacrifice and loyalty. Such shifts bring their own disciplines and loyalties, their grammars and vocabularies of consent and orthodoxy (Foucault 1995, 292; 1988a, 15; and 1982a, 73–74; Cancian 1987, 163; Cancian and Gordon 1988; Moskowitz 1996). That contradictoriness makes self-help an important site for critical politics.

Historicizing Feelings

“We believe that feelings are immutable, but every sentiment, particularly the noblest and most disinterested, has a history,” suggests Foucault (1977, 153). Feelings are often held to exist in a state of grace, as “true,” uninstitutionalized forms of understanding and realness. But emotions are signified, and as such are subject to historical, spatial, economic, and cultural forces, just like aircraft or cable companies. Feelings are discursive constructs, determined by certain conditions of definition and response: as Adela Pinch (1995, 100) remarks, sympathy and pity shift their meaning in accordance with changing views of “victimhood, poverty, and the social contract.” English-speakers in the Middle Ages, for example, experienced a feeling called “accidie,” seemingly now gone. Where English today has over 2,000 emotion-words, with tiny shades of meaning, and Dutch has 1,500, Malay has 230, Taiwanese Chinese 750, and Chewong just 7, while the Yoruba do not have words for depression. Translation and back-translation conversation analysis suggests that even seemingly equivalent terms may describe different conditions. Bedouin Arabs, for example, do not inquire about feelings or request line-by-line retellings of conversational exchange (Russell 1991, 426, 428; Russell and Sato 1995, 384–85; Albee 1977, 153; Abu-Lughod 1990, 24–25).

Nor should we accord feelings discourse a special gendered status. German Romanticism of the 1800s enshrined Friedrich Schlegel’s “tender manhood,” which conceived of men as sensuous, emotional creatures, a contrast with his notion of “independent femininity.” The Enlightenment era of rationality had its double in *Empfindsamkeit*, or spiritual sensitivity, among intellectuals of both sexes. It called for the expression of feelings and attention to the passional. Men were encouraged to record their emotions in diaries and discuss the results with others. In short, they textualized and voiced idealized feelings in a historically and geographically specific way. Closer to our own time, we might consider changes in the management of the American infant. Between the 1940s and 1960s, manuals on domestic pediatrics moved from describing the child as a machine that should be handled only when broken, to endorsements of spontaneous physical affection as sources of bonding and development for babies and parents. Anthony Synnott references the alternately contradictory, separate, and isomorphic influences on such developments of “Freudian theory, psycho-therapy, primate research and anthropology . . . the Hippy movement, sensitivity training, somatopsychic theory, existentialist philosophy and, especially, the women’s movement” (Schlegel qtd. in Trepp 1994, 132 n.25, 132–35; Brody 1997; Synnott 1993, 161).

The history of loss and grief in the United States is also illuminating. After World War I, mourning was deemed disrespectful to the dead in

war, who had lost their lives so others could move on. Grief was to be transcended as part of accepting the many moments of separation that characterize life. After World War II, public discourse over grief was muted, with people encouraged to overcome the potentially disabling emotions associated with the death of others. Today, by contrast, we find intense therapeutic investments in generating new identities among the bereaved, enabling them to display full adjustment to new circumstances. Similarly, there wasn't much empathy around the United States before the turn of the century: the word didn't exist in English until psychologists coined it in the 1920s. Within a few years, it had come to signify a form of aesthetic response to works of art, but only in the 1950s was it transformed into everyday argot for identifying with others' feelings. Contemporary psychologists struggle to identify and understand the mechanisms of empathy, even as commonsensical norms suggest it is a natural part of life. Empathy developed as a concept at the same time as psychotherapy developed as a profession, endowing a historical event with timelessness. And in the late nineteenth century, when European restrictions on women's freedoms were loosened by urbanization, the means of coping with this innovation in gender relations provoked new anxieties. Agoraphobia was invented to explain emergent forms of public life and morality (Stearns 1994, 158–59, 250; Duan and Hill 1996, 261–62; de Swaan 1990, 146–47).

Warren Susman (1984, 41–48) focuses on the significance of North American Puritanism for feelings discourse. Puritanism has stood alongside the frontier as a defining characteristic of the New World via control of the self, moderation of appetites, and calibration of conduct, all achieved through devotion to a higher being who transcended base human desires but could be emulated by mortals if they wrestled with their hungers and drives. A life-world of the spiritual could be attained through proper behavior, which in turn would compensate for disappointments in material life. Puritanism also connotes collectivity, of course. A decidedly secular domain of law, community, and the earthly universe testified to and expressed the divine universe—intersecting, mimetic, and communicative with that heavenly sphere. But the notion of a collective good was equally experienced as authoritarian oligarchy and plutocracy by those at the bottom of the social order.

Puritanism became a monetary technology, an index and guide to thrift and self-actualization via utilitarian calculation. This decidedly material mode of salvation stressed the propensity to work, save, and invest rather than to consume goods. It supported the formation of capital and the disciplining of the workforce. In the hands of apologists for and heralds of nineteenth-century U.S. capitalism, dominant Puritanism endorsed labor and savings as keys to building an earthly heaven and controlling

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individuals through the material rule of law and the interpersonal rule of belief. But from the late 1880s to 1940, Puritanism was held responsible for the personal and social alienation experienced by intellectuals. Writers began to wonder about other forms of self-expression than those mandated by the narrow corridors of the Puritan home. Freudian discourse centered desire as an inevitable and valuable corrective to the anal retentiveness of prevailing ideology. Aesthetic discourse contributed to notions of expressive totality and sensuous response rather than tightly buttoned shirts. Temperance and censorship were seen to favor and disfavor particular categories of person. Secondly, a middle class was forming between 1870 and 1910, comprising folk who were neither property owners nor proletarians. An intellectual class with managerial and scientific knowledge appeared. Science defined collective health via the discovery of truths that could be tested rather than magically revealed from hermeneutic readings of great books. The corollary to this intense rationalism was a notion of human quintessences that should emerge in art: desires were to be expressed, not denied or displaced. Susman argues that since World War II, Puritanism has enjoyed a revived status in reaction against corporate life and permissiveness, with excessive personal behavior obsessively chronicled and decried.

Arlie Russell Hochschild suggests that there are analogous shifts today to the Protestant work ethic of the nineteenth century. At that time, the rise of capital privileged labor, the economy, and men, as it proffered transcendence from the social relations produced by birth. Contemporary self-help ideas emphasize love, family, and women. This time, the transcendence derives from social-movement politics rather than from ecclesiastical bonds, with stockbrokers and parsons supplemented by “emotional investment counselors.” As she puts it, the “ascetic self-discipline which the early capitalist applied to his bank account, the late twentieth-century woman applies to her appetite, her body, her love” (Hochschild 1994, 1–2, 13).

Many writers, from both Left and Right, are critical of self-help and therapeutic cultures (perhaps forgetting that the greatest number of these groups are devoted to coping with physical and mental disabilities, not learning how to feel). Each side revels in denouncing the solipsistic absorption and selfish individualism of those derided by Bill Clinton as “the worried well.” For radicals, the taste for therapy and personal growth is a bourgeois phenomenon, a luxury of commercial interiorization unavailable to those preoccupied with subsistence living; it is a taste that testifies to middle-class guilt at the ravages of capitalism (though North American polls show growth-group members are three times more likely to describe themselves as conservative than liberal). It is also a reminder of both the “Red Scare” of 1919, when the U.S. government was assured

that psychotherapy could defuse Marxism's appeal to the urban poor, and the later rise of behavioralism, a model of person-as-machine that promised to manage individual conduct. Youth-culture critics argue that the pathologization of young people is part of the way social order and disorder are psychologized. Feminist critics object to the discourse of self-help for "adjusting" women to caregiving. (Radical feminists occupied the offices of the *Ladies Home Journal* in the 1970s in protest at this tendency.) For conservatives, therapeutic culture represents a decline in spiritualism and a rise in secular selfishness, an elevation of self over service. A monumental self-absorption overruns obligations and responsibilities. Alternatively, self-help can be a badge of qualification for high office: the 1992 Presidential election found both Clinton and Gore sharing with the electorate their group therapy encounters and past triumphs over familial alcohol, gambling, and cocaine use. Bush declined to participate in this confessional ritual. Supporters of self-help link it to the mutual-aid societies of the eighteenth century, including trade unions, that provided citizens with buffer zones (self-selected ones at that) between church, state, and capital. Four out of ten Americans today belong to groups that are autonomous from their employment (church, sport, local improvement, group-grope, and so on)—signs of a strong civil society to their proponents. These included Bush, whose administration sought to push back onto "the community" the work of government in educating, housing, medicating, and assisting poorer citizens (Mäkelä et al. 1996, 13; Irvine 1995, 150; Moskowitz 1996, 66; Wuthnow 1994, 336, 71, 4; Musto 1995; Stenson 1993, 43; Prilleltensky 1989, 795, 798; Forbes 1994, 249–50; Riessman and Carroll 1995, 12, 176).

Christopher Lasch's landmark late-1970s critique of American narcissism claims that the ultimate failure of radical popular politics in the 1960s was a retreat to the personal: "psychic self-improvement" displaced faith in popular democracy and collective endeavor and reward. Eating health food, joining recovery groups, learning the discourse of feelings, thumping drums, and believing in Jung may be perfectly reasonable activities—until they are "elevated to a program and wrapped in the rhetoric of authenticity and awareness." At that point they "signify a retreat from politics and a repudiation of the recent past," as the New Left, youth culture, and Vietnam get displaced onto "growth." History is foregone: not merely the collaborative American past, but any sense of *making* history anew. Unlike the returns to spirituality that characterize American religious cycles, this era lacks both a sense of its own origins and any drive toward collective renewal. Confessing to large groups of people, be they readers, group members, cyber pals, or therapists, suggests a self that depends on the attention and approval of others. Far from the "rugged individualist" destined to build culture, this narcissistic subject relies on

informal institutions for validation. Concerns about economic and social inequality are displaced by the therapeutic apparatus onto individual emotions and psychological histories (Lasch 1979, 29–32, 38, 43).

Jane Shattuc, conversely, defends this move to the personal as a new form of politics. She mentions the two-thirds of daytime talk television that is focused on psychological questions. In addition to the testimony of the public and the mediation of presenters, the genre makes significant use of social workers, therapists, self-help writers, and psychologists. The terms of trade vary between discourses of Freudian repression and unconscious drives and twelve-step recovery programs. Free association, vital to the project of psychoanalysis, is off the menu, however; the unconscious must express itself directly in order to fit the genre's dictates: a set number of segments, commercial breaks, and the studio apparatus. And the psychologization of social problems has itself been brought into doubt by Phil Donahue's regular ironized intervention—"All she needs is to go into therapy and everything will be nice?"—while populist appeals to experience debunk some of the very authority figures called on to explicate topics of the day, as self-actualization encounters the psychological establishment. This is not to claim a comprehensive opposition, but a negotiation. The cognitive strand of U.S. therapizing is well represented via lists of how to behave: Oprah Winfrey's patent guide to gender-sensitive schooling is a renowned instance, as rational emotive therapy is deployed to detect and treat ethical incompleteness. Shattuc maintains that these programs are "an arena of collective feminine experience" that promises "a utopian vision of female equality" (Shattuc 1997, 111–13, 116–17, 120, 122; Donahue qtd. on 115). Such claims encourage us to examine the genres of self-help and therapy more closely.

Interpersonal Manuals

There are three forms of interpersonal manual: general etiquette, sex education or child-rearing, and lifestyle. General etiquette books advise on everyday living, specifically politeness and how to be popular. Sex education books use medical discourse to describe people's bodies, moving between manners primers and more technical treatises. Less aesthetic, such texts are alternately technician and emotive. Lifestyle books reject grand divisions of art from science in favor of a holistic approach, seeking ethical incompleteness in the person as a preliminary to reintegrating them into a "whole" subject. Problems are presented as arising from internalized social expectations.

Publishers Weekly has charted the top-selling U.S. nonfiction titles since 1917. We have taken a sample from each decade dating from then,

and annually since 1990. In addition to war books, the inaugural list is dominated by biographies and autobiographies. The same is true ten years later, although history emerges along with George A. Dorsey's *Why We Behave Like Human Beings*, at number nine. These genres, plus cookery, self-help, humor, and diet books remain on the list. By 1937, self-help is a regular, with Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People* in first place (sixth the following year). His *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living* is popular after the war. A decade on finds Joshua L. Liebman's *Peace of Mind* at number one, while in 1957 Norman Vincent Peale's *Stay Alive All Your Life* is in third place, continuing a string of best-sellers since 1948, including *A Guide to Confident Living* and his massively successful *Power of Positive Thinking* (which sold 300,000 copies on audiotape during the 1990s). *Games People Play* by Eric Berne, M.D., is third for 1967 (the third year in a row), while 1977 has the delightfully titled *Looking Out for #1* at number two and Dr. Wayne W. Dyer's *Your Erroneous Zones* fourth. Erma Bombeck's *Family: The Ties That Bind . . . and Gag* is third for 1987, by which time one out of every three Americans has bought a self-help volume. John Bradshaw's *Homecoming: Reclaiming and Championing Your Inner Child* is sixth in 1990 (a year in which he gave two hundred speeches at a \$5,000 per day rate); *More Wealth without Risk* and *Financial Self-Defense* (both by Charles J. Givens) are seventh and tenth in 1991; 1992 sees *How to Satisfy a Woman Every Time* by Naura Hayden at three and Gail Sheehy's *Silent Passage* at number nine; in 1993, Deepak Chopra's *Ageless Body, Timeless Mind* is at five, *Women Who Run with the Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estes is seven, and *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* by John Gray is ninth. Gray moves up to second for 1994 and number one the following year, as well as having *Mars and Venus in the Bedroom* at seven, while Chopra reappears at number four with *The Seven Spiritual Laws of Success*. By January 1997, the hardback edition of *Men Are from Mars* had been on the best-seller list 196 weeks in a row, and *The Seven Spiritual Laws* for 39 weeks. Gray's first book had sold ten million copies. In paperback, Stephen R. Covey's *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* celebrated its 308th week on the hit parade by early 1997. By 1994, over three hundred U.S. bookstores were exclusively devoted to "recovery" prose, while New Age audio now rivals fiction tapes in sales, despite the indifference of chainstore booksellers until the late 1980s (*People Weekly* 1996, 308–24; Hochschild 1994, 20 n.2; Maryles 1997, 47; Paperback 1997; Weber 1997, 29; Hardcover 1997; Mäkelä et al. 1996, 223; Wuthnow 1994, 118; Rosenblum 1997).

Just as books are sold and group gropes exchanged, the people who embrace them learn new forms of conduct under the sign and tutelage of multiple institutions and discourses. Gray turned his best-seller into a successful Broadway question-and-answer show in 1997. By 1998, his

oeuvre comprised six books, eighteen videotapes, thirty weekend seminars per year, a Mars-Venus Institute and Counseling Center, five audiotapes, and two Websites. The following year, he added a magazine for Valentine's Day. In a similar vein, Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider's popular *Rules: Time-Tested Secrets to Capturing the Heart of Mr. Right*—a “retro husband-snagging guide”—recommends that straight women “hold out” on sex, never telephone men for a date, and refuse to go out on a Saturday night if requested later than Tuesday of that week. Eight hundred thousand copies were sold in the last months of 1996, and film rights were bought by Paramount. A comparable movie deal was made by Tristar for rights to an unwritten answer, *The Code*, which was announced as offering men “time-tested secrets for getting what you want from women—without marrying them” (Quinn 1996; Congratulations 1997; Mäkelä et al. 1996, 25; Gray 1998). For the first time, the entertainment audiovisual industries synchronized with interpersonal manuals!

The Etiquette Book

This genre is often said to begin with Erasmus's *De Civilitate Morum Puerilium* [On civility in children] in 1530. Translations followed into English, German, Czech, and French. The book was adopted as a set text in schools and reprinted thirty times over the next few years. By the close of the eighteenth century, it had run to a hundred and thirty editions. The subject matter of *De Civilitate* is proper conduct: how to look at others, present and maintain clean nostrils, dispose of spittle, and eat. Overt staring at other people is the book's key monitorial maneuver: sight is the principal measure of character, with speech carefully subordinated and subjected to turn-taking rules. The same period ushers in a requirement to evaluate one's own actions and appearances. In the late eighteenth century, the genre is named: “etiquette” is a neologism standing for “*une petite éthique*,” or mini-ethics. This is a shift from the manners model of earlier. What began as a guide to courtiers became a more widespread model of new class societies: Reiherr von Knigge's work on courtesy from 1788 is a break in the literature because it addresses the bourgeoisie as well as the aristocracy (Elias 1978b, 53–56; 1978a, 78, 82; Arditi 1996, 421; Wouters 1995, 120). This process gathers pace across Europe, most spectacularly in the nineteenth century, via “new fields of social management in which culture is figured forth as both the object and the instrument of government: the term refers to the morals, manners, and ways of life of subordinate social strata” (Bennett 1992, 26).

The etiquette book emerges in the United States during the Republic, with extensive church involvement and direction. It develops into a combination of technically “correct” instruction and a more utilitarian form of

advice—making an impression in order to advance one’s material prospects. Cas Wouters’s longitudinal study of North America and Western Europe indicates that etiquette literature plays down differences in expected conduct between classes with the advent of welfare societies in the mid-twentieth century. Rules become rules for all, rather than markers of elevated position. Nineteenth-century etiquette manuals empowered women by declaring domestic conduct a key social grace. Authorially, the genre underwent a major change. Until the 1890s, men had been the dominant givers of written advice, whereas women emerged as equal players at the turn of the century. By 1923, Emily Post’s *Etiquette* was the top-selling nonfiction book, and Frances Benton’s volume of the same title was fourth in 1956 (Lichterman 1992, 421; Arditi 1996, 417; *People Weekly* 1996, 309, 316).

Many etiquette books explain spatial and occupational differences: the announcement in the mid-1970s that the Germans and Dutch would henceforth accept “social kissing”; how to behave as a tourist; how to give and not give offence; how to be an anthropologist; how to drive; how to drink alcohol in a restrained manner; how to act in court or Congress; and how to recognize and avoid sexual harassment. They make possible the experience of retiring for the night on the second evening of a visit to someone’s home to find an etiquette book on the bedside table, dog-eared at the chapter titled “On Staying the Night at Another Person’s House”—what a useful pointer, as one of us found out some years ago. Alternatively, these works may be directly applied to economic advantage: university tests “prove” that waiters who draw a smile on the back of their customers’ bills receive a larger tip than otherwise if they are female, a smaller one if male, which rapidly attains institutionalization in the lore of employees (Rind and Bordia 1996).

The etiquette primer can be about having a relationship with oneself as well as others, concerned with fulfillment more than politeness. Arnold Bennett’s *Mental Efficiency and Other Hints to Men and Women*, first published in 1920 and reprinted forty years later, gives instruction in “mental calisthenics,” “expressing one’s individuality,” finding a spouse, collecting books, and the distinction between success and contentment. The idea is to treat the mind like a body, if with less visible muscles—it too needs exercise, via “culture.” This will “round off our careers with the graces of knowledge and taste” through “the cultivation of will-power, and the getting into condition of the mental apparatus.” Bennett’s book is based on his response to letters from concerned readers who wish to improve themselves. He recommends reading to increase concentration. Learning poetry and prose by heart is a “‘cure’ for debility,” just as stretching in the morning is for the ailing physique (Bennett [1920] 1957, 9, 13, 18–19, 26–28, 35).

the taste for
therapy and
personal growth
is a bourgeois
phenomenon,
a luxury of
commercial
interiorization
unavailable to
those pre-
occupied with
subsistence living;
it is a taste
that testifies to
middle-class guilt
at the ravages
of capitalism.

Clearly, etiquette births the subgenre of sexual advice, but frequently with a Freudian overlay. Sex educators identify sexuality as holding hidden verities that can be brought out and molded into sociable conduct. Hence the turn toward explaining pupils to themselves—making them parent their future adult identities. This presumes that child sexuality has long been repressed by conventions and strictures. Sexuality is the basis for people’s relationships, so parents, churches, governments, and schools must deal with it in the openness and freedom of the classroom. These assumptions about children derive from case histories of grown-ups, since “psychoanalysis believes that it can write a psychology of the child by carrying out a pathology of the adult.” Another way of figuring this development is to discern a growing and powerful network of psy-experts circling the child, analyzing and provoking sexualized interpretations of conduct as a means of discovering “truth.” This alternative view of sex pedagogy does not see sexuality as a particularly privileged form of understanding people, but as one more discourse in need of having its history catalogued. For sexuality is new. Sex, of course, is old, as old as biology. But deriving whole accounts of the person from limited observation of such acts is recent; it needs Freud and anti-Freud, plus humanistic, experiential feminism, behavior modification, and a raft of other disciplinary practices to sustain it (Hunter 1984; Hochschild 1994, 3).

Sex Fulfillment in Marriage is a typical artefact of this discourse. It was written in the 1940s by a lot of people named Groves. First comes Ernest R. Groves, a professor of sociology and marriage guidance counselor who is also “Director of the Annual Conference on the Conservation of Marriage and the Family.” He is credited with having taught the first American university courses on how to prepare for marriage. The second Groves is Gladys Hoagland Groves, also a marriage guidance counselor and author of marriage preparation texts for college and “the general public.” The third and final author is Catherine Groves, who has written *Get More Out of Life*, “a book telling how troubled people can find help.” Social worker and marriage guide, she has “had to deal with many instances of domestic difficulties of various types,” while as “the wife of a newspaper man and the mother of two children” her own travails are self-evident (Groves, Groves, and Groves 1945). The many Groveses won endorsements from the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and the *American Sociological Review*—validated through science, via medicine and sociology; through social cohesion, via their commitment to the family; and through experience, via the lifestyles of the Groveses themselves and their professional expertise. The preface describes the book as a search for

“harmonious, progressive and character-making fellowship” (ix). The introduction, by Duke University obstetrician and gynecologist Robert A. Ross, declares, “What a relief it is to find emphasis placed on the normal!” meeting the needs of those “anxious to know and practice normal things” (xiii–xiv). The combination of case notes and blood relations (the authors are revealed here as husband, wife, and daughter) elevates *Sex Fulfillment in Marriage* in the eyes of Professor Ross. This is interdisciplinary work, amalgamating the duties of “educator, sociologist, physician, biologist, sexologist” to forge a science of “impulses” and “innate good taste” (xiv).

The Groveses identify sexuality as the culprit in marital breakdown. Presiding over both “a general sense” and one’s own “past,” sexuality holds the keys to pleasure and individual history (18). It works against civilization, but that is also its wonder: “modern men and women, healthy in body and mind, can taste all the flavor of the cruder forms of physical sex and much more besides” (23). But sex has been stigmatized into darkness, a space where everyday knowledge is inadequate (28). It is no longer instinctive, but “an even more complex drive in the civilized human being” (31). To uncover the personal history that births and parents the present day adult, we must enter into a dialogue with ourselves, a therapy without the social worker or shrink, where we come preshrunk, ready to read ourselves for hidden facts that lie beneath a surface of control, in the murky depths of desire. We must undertake exercises of conscience, in the following form: “What were my sex experiences in very early childhood?” (50); “What was the influence of my home upon my sex development?” (57); “How did school influence my sex development?” (62); “What influence did my church and religion have on my sex development?” (66); “How was I trained in modesty?” (68); “What were my sex experiences during youth?” (72); and “What effect has masturbation had in my sex development?” (76). These seven questions reference issues of social management, positioning “sexuality” at the epicenter of everyday individual and collective life: the family, education, religion, manners, development, and confessional self-absorption.

The other side to these concerns is the science of sex, its physical aspects, where the “arts of love” can be supplemented by knowledge of what the Groveses refer to as “sex equipment and its functioning” (106). Women are criticized for having “vague ideas” about “their own sex equipment” and are recommended to explore themselves with a mirror (107). By contrast, men are “franker,” and their “equipment more obvious” (106). The obviousness of their “equipment” still sees “the American husband . . . criticized as a poor lover” (161). Sexually incompetent men must learn the gift of variety. As the authors tell us, “The great musician

does not endlessly play over and over the same composition. His preferences change. He is a great artist because he makes what his skill produces accord with his inner feeling. Thus it is with the true lover” (163).

This is a liberal document, typical of the 1940s: it recommends the selection of sexual positions on the basis of pleasure, and acknowledges the importance of women having financial independence from men (179, 85). Physical abandon is taken to signify a successful marriage. The negative side to such liberalism is the heterosexist discourse that accompanies it, which attacks same-sex love, as the divorce rate and open homosexual activity grow. Post-World War II experts connect these developments to sexual maladjustment. The solution is to rearticulate sex and love, rather than keeping them apart as per the Victorian era.

Attempts to scientize sex in the popular mind are fully achieved with the publication of the Kinsey studies in 1948, when *Sexual Behavior in the Human Male* is the fourth biggest nonfiction seller; 1953 sees *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* at number three. Helen Gurley Brown’s *Sex and the Single Girl*, ninth best-seller for 1962, combines the new findings on pleasure (and dissatisfaction) with an interest in evoking and charting a new morality, while William Howard Masters and Virginia E. Johnston’s *Human Sexual Response* legitimizes clitoral orgasm en route to number two four years later. By the end of the decade, finding a way to understand and satisfy is on the agenda: 1970 has Dr. David Reuben’s *Everything You Always Wanted to Know about Sex but Were Afraid to Ask* and *The Sensuous Woman* by “J” in first and third spots respectively, while “M”’s *Sensuous Man* is first the next year and Dr. Reuben’s *Any Woman Can!* comes in fifth, with *The Joy of Sex* by Alex Comfort charting in at four in 1973 and its successor *More Joy* in the same spot the next year. A survey of adult sex manuals to 1980 finds three basic models for women and sex: “different-and-unequal, humanistic sexuality, or sexual autonomy.” Women move from finding sex an unpleasurable duty, through sex as a required essence of personhood, to the idea that pleasure can be achieved without submission to, and indeed without the presence of, men. Sex changes from an anthropological and social topic to a biological and autotelic one (Weinberg, Swensson, and Hammersmith 1983, 312, 315; *People Weekly* 1996, 314–15, 317–20). We can see these trends in such books as *Woman’s Orgasm: A Guide to Sexual Satisfaction* (Kline-Graber and Graber 1975). This could be read as an example of the tentacles of medicine and the psy-complexes making their way across women’s bodies. Alternatively, we might understand it as a technical tool dealing with issues that cannot be safely and easily left up in the air, as women are routinely problematized for their orgasms (by definition, frequency, or method).

The lifestyle book derives in part from the moment in the 1960s when sex and love are partially disarticulated in advice literature, as casual sexual encounters increase along with birth-control use and political activity by gays and lesbians. By the middle of this century, European and North American etiquette books signal an epistemic shift of great proportions: at the end of the 1960s, in place of restraint in search of correct behavior, an exuberant efflorescence of feeling is prescribed. The supposedly greater freedoms produced by liberal sex education have failed to produce happier marriages or less worried people, despite efforts to use sex as a vehicle to wellness. That failure does not, however, serve to question the concentration on sexuality as a key to happy living. Instead, more and more publications focus on the topic, albeit moving beyond directly sex-related matters to interlace those concerns with psychologized versions of early manners manuals, as per Erasmus (Gerhards 1989, 176–77).

This awkward change really starts with singer Pat Boone's memorable *'Twxixt Twelve and Twenty*, which glorifies the maternal beatings he received while growing up. His caring and sharing family history propels the book into second place on U.S. best-seller lists for 1958 and first the following year (the follow-up, *Between You, Me, and the Gatepost*, is tenth in 1960). The message is that feelings are important, if somewhat inscrutable—and who could pass up a damn good thrashing from a devoted parent when suffering adolescent confusion? By 1965, a crossover between etiquette and emotional interiority has made psychocomplex texts into regular sales leaders. Following the success of *Games People Play*, Thomas Harris's *I'm O.K., You're O.K.* is in the top-ten sellers from 1971 to 1973, and Nena and George O'Neill's *Open Marriage* posts good figures (close to two million sold over the decade). By the mid-1970s, the United States offers 164 different brand names of therapy. Twenty years later, the transactional analytic theory of ego states must be parroted by applicants for gun permits in Texas, who are instructed that the “Make my day” line from *Sudden Impact* (Clint Eastwood, 1983) exemplifies aberrant “inner child behavior” (*People Weekly* 1996, 316, 319; Ross 1980, 109; Gerhards 1989, 177; Verhovek 1995).

The media have been important bearers of the therapeutic message. Consider multiple personality disorder (MPD). As Ian Hacking puts it, “[i]n 1972 multiple personalities were almost invisible.” But books, television movies, and talk shows about MPD, along with its (disputed) clinical uptake, led to an explosion within people: by 1982, the average U.S. number of “multiples” was twenty-seven personalities per body. Forty thousand new cases were reported in the decade to 1995, including La Toya

Jackson, Roseanne Barr, and Oprah Winfrey. The disorder became tied to rising interest in child abuse (from 1961) and child sexual abuse (from 1975), while late-1980s concerns with satanism provided additional stimulus. The acceptance of MPD culminated in a 1990 conviction for rape of a Wisconsin man following sex instigated by a woman, on the grounds that he was aware of a “motherly” side to her that differed from the one that initiated and claimed to have enjoyed sex with him. Each of her personalities was sworn in by the judge to testify. Christian fundamentalism and liberal feminism joined forces, one under the sign of uncovering permissiveness, the other child abuse. Gloria Steinem mused about the pleasures of having several different menstrual periods each month, arguing that the “disorder” should be renamed a “gift,” and subscribers to *Dissociation*, journal of the International Society for the Study of Multiple Personality and Dissociation, received a diploma with instructions to “display your professionalism. Be proud of your commitment to the field of multiple personality and dissociative disorders.” For their part, sufferers who mutilated their bodies as part of the disorder could sign up for *The Cutting Edge* newsletter. As some of the memories became tough to substantiate in courts of law, MPD lost clinical support and underwent a makeover into Dissociative Identity Disorder (Hacking 1992, 3, 8–9, 17; Nathan 1994, 77–78, 82, 85, 103; Acocella 1998, 66, 68, 74, 76; Society qtd. in Hacking 1992, 5).

More routine problems have also proven popular. Robin Norwood’s 1985 manual on *Women Who Love Too Much*, a book about addictive relationships (medicine meets friendships and families), sold close on 3 million copies in two years. Related titles include *Men Who Hate Women and the Women Who Love Them* (S. Forward, 1986), *Women Men Love, Women Men Leave* (C. Cowan and M. Kinder, 1987), and *Smart Women, Foolish Choices* (C. Cowan and M. Kinder, 1985). Their message is that women should be less obsessed, easier and lighter in their touch, less emotionally demanding, and not endeavor to change men. In his study of the communities that read these books, Paul Lichterman finds middle-class people with clear ambivalences about their purchases. They neither embrace nor resist the messages, but assimilate them with numerous other inputs—a “thin culture.” The precepts of popular psychology are “adopted loosely, tentatively, sometimes interchangeably, without enduring conviction.” When Lichterman asks his sample of readers who would be unlikely to join them in consuming such objects, the responses are: “someone who is afraid to be open . . . someone who is not willing to face up to their problems [and] . . . still in the dark ages.” Such texts and their readers characterize nonreaders of the genre as inadequate. But these willing explorers of their psyches are not very reliable narrators of what they read, recalling

very little content. The books are emblems of an attitude, signs of a willingness to think about inner truths. They do not present a route to salvation via their subject matter. As one reader spectacularly says, “You could read *War and Peace* and that’s self-growth in another way.” Just as long as we’re all growing. These are limited technologies, used by their readers to deal with specific problems. They are not elevated to holy writ, but are understood as consumer objects circulating in the sphere of merchandising and product differentiation. The loose affiliation of the readers is a sign in part of their multiple demographic backgrounds. At the same time, the fact that readers generally come to the genre after emotional relationships have broken up indicates a search to understand personal “failure” (Jimenez and Rice 1990, 16–18; Lichterman 1992, 444 n.1, 421–22, 426, 428–30, 439).

The readership is clearly gendered. One publisher that sold 3 million books on codependency in the United States in 1990 claimed women were 80 percent of the market. The books are often said to divide between “the psychological and the retrofeminist.” For critics, each represents a retreat, or at least some compromise, of feminist principles of equality. As per *The Rules*, many such books operate with an infantilized model of masculinity: men are isolates, hopelessly lost in fantasies of independence, who must be tricked into commitment through denial and manipulation. Women, by contrast, are aware of their fundamental neediness and are encouraged to make their way through a combination of psychological theories about gender difference, turning against feminism in favor of comforting and exciting men. Consider codependency, Melody Beattie’s 1986 invention in *Codependent No More*. It explains why the intimates of alcoholics, workaholics, shopaholics (and countless other types who are deemed guilty of doing something very often) remain with them. There are now over three thousand Codependents Anonymous (CoDA) groups throughout the United States. CoDA manages an interesting dialectic between politics and the psyche: on the one hand, subservience to others’ needs is condemned as unequal and damaging; but its explanation is resumed to psychological disposition rather than social subjectivity. The discourse is marked out by its anti-institutionalism: churches, schools, and families made these problems, and they cannot solve them—only the company of our fellows can take us away from codependency. Bradshaw’s patent causal phrase is “poisonous pedagogy” (Irvine 1995, 145, 147, 149; Rice 1992, 337, 344; Jimenez and Rice 1990, 8, 12; Bradshaw qtd. in Rice 1992, 349). Institutions are bad and feminism is needlessly politicized. In one sense, this move brings together the lament for “Organization Man’s” traumas from the straightjacket of the 1950s and 1960s with the empowerment message of the counterculture, a curious frottage of

angst-laden executives with bead-laden freaks, of the kind we suffer in Ang Lee's *Ice Storm* (1997).

According to this literature, women are endlessly in need of advice on feelings. The supposedly direct line between the self, intersubjectivity, and happiness that comes from the "natural" connection of women to emotions paradoxically requires massive training, an unending intellectual guidance that sees readers and clients always in need of the next publication or therapeutic session (Hochschild 1994, 8–9). New masculinists hunt enviously for similar unities between body and self, places for "reclaiming your original potential." The "development and integration of body, mind, and emotions" will restore the natural aptitudes and tastes distorted by modernity. *Accessing the King in the Male Psyche* (Moore and Gillette 1992) can be done, for example, via *The Warrior Athlete* (Millman 1979). *Newsweek* announces "the first postmodern social movement" in 1991: Robert Bly's followers looking within for the lost monarch. As Carol Gilligan says, where the "feminist movement has held men responsible for their violence and privilege . . . the mythopoetic men's movement has embraced men as wounded" (Ross 1980, 118; *Newsweek* qtd. in Boscagli 1992–1993, 71; Gilligan 1997).

Some of this is rooted in Jung's uptake of Greek and Roman mythology as a basis to masculine and feminine personality, a "collective unconscious" that is said to animate us all. Other accounts derive from middle-class reactions against feminist challenges to male authority and privilege. Sometimes this has been extremely misogynistic and antifeminist; at other moments, it has been expressed as envy at women's feelings discourse, their unity, and their claims to expressive totality. One wing became "men's liberation," the other "men against sexism." Both sides are liable to stress the difficulties of being a man, the pain of leadership, the confusion of roles "under" feminism, the vacuum of authority and direction, and the need to "share." Of course, there are revisionist positions on this: Francesca M. Cancian (1986, 692) argues that what counts as loving conduct has been erroneously feminized in the United States by identifying love with the announcement of feelings rather than with instrumental expressions, such as helping or fucking.

Therapy Discourse

What about professional therapy? Psychiatry has twice announced breakthroughs that appeared to guarantee its stature, during the nineteenth century and the 1960s. First, moral treatment and the "talking cure" (named by Bertha von Pappenheim), then pharmacology and community care (JFK's promise of two thousand Community Mental Health Centers

and the American Psychiatric Association's in-house 1963 declaration that the profession was ready to "inherit the earth") were thought to offer deliverance. This has been a shift—winding, incomplete, and frequently circular—from religious judgments and confessional techniques to medicalized chemical intervention and deinstitutionalized help, from bucolic surrounds and elongated couches to pill-dispensing hospitals and city streets (Musto 1995; Shattuc 1997, 114).

Whereas most academic psychology maps mental processes onto behavioral conduct in an empirical way, psychoanalysis focuses a priori on desire as the driving force of all acts, whether conscious or otherwise. Psychoanalysis depends on two developments: the elevation of confession beyond its religious and penal origins and the "medicalization of sexuality." The contradictory dialectic of inhibitions on speech (etiquette) and "strong incitations to speak" (recovery sessions) gets worked over in the notion that what is repressed—desire—finds ways to speak up no matter what forms of silence are favored. The truth of sex is routinely associated with confession. Protestantism, eighteenth-century pedagogy, nineteenth-century medicine, and psychoanalysis combine to move confession from the special rituals of the Catholic church to fully governmentalized and commodified forms of talk and understanding. When psychiatrists are deciding whether to hospitalize someone on the grounds of madness, they frequently ask questions and receive answers rather than administer physical or written tests, with patients indirectly instructed in what counts as madness and sanity by the direction of these queries in what Kevin Stenson calls "talk among as if equals." It requires clients to account for themselves via linguistic markers such as "I mean" and "so," which are just as crucial as narrative drive or historical validity (Frosh 1989, 250; Foucault 1979b, 73, 1988b, 16; and 1984, 63; Bergmann 1992, 137; Stenson 1993, 53; Gerhardt and Stinson 1994).

Academic psychologists chastise psychoanalysts for leaping from the childhood reminiscences of a handful of adults to rules about what children "universally experience," especially since that experience is allegedly unconscious. Analysts reply that the analytic encounter re-creates the tensions and struggles of childhood, with clients transferring negative feelings for their parents onto therapists. These powerful emotions, frequently at work in a hidden way, can then be directly encountered and changed. Psychoanalytic therapy wants nothing less than a comprehensive restructuring of the subject, in accordance with this totalizing oedipal account. Psychological therapy, by contrast, is limited in its design and claims, concentrating on behavioral techniques to cope with familiar discomforts or a cognitive focus to combat ill-feeling through rationality (Foucault 1987, 19; Frosh 1989, 67–69, 254–55).

In addition to these models, other therapies draw on newer debates in

child development and the acquisition of gendered conduct. It is frequently argued that the absence of fathers from child-rearing leads girls to identify with mothers and boys to “identify” with themselves, becoming anomie subjects in the process. This is then said to generate adult sexual difference: where women find individuation and separation from men difficult, men experience the reverse, fleeing intimacy and togetherness. Both are ethically incomplete. Where the woman lacks differentiation and transcendence, the man fails to identify and cohere. Different intersubjective ethics of everyday life are said to follow from these distinctions. Women have an “ethic of care” that sees them assume responsibility for others. Men function via an “ethic of justice” that prefers abstract principles of rightness to the guidance of embodied human experience. And of course, there is volunteer therapy, where nonprofessionals are given basic, nondirective, client-centered skills of conversation and are encouraged to break down the walls between client and service generated by the institutions and discourses of professionalism. The result is known as “helper’s high,” which sees counselors reporting heightened pleasure from being helpful, along with improved personal health (Jimenez and Rice 1990, 14–15; Riessman and Carroll 1995, 159–60). That brings us to the liminal space that separates therapy from self-help.

Self-Help

Self-help is somewhere in between psychology and psychoanalysis. Like psychology, it privileges the empirical, experiencing subject, favoring the expression of feelings without mapping them onto the unconscious. But it is equally caught up in narrative form, as per psychoanalysis: self-help, like Freudianism, likes nothing better than a good story.

Critics write off the “awareness movement” as a money-making venture that takes a particular theorization of the self as a guide to improvement and growth. But rather than dismissing it, we should attend to its specificities. Consider a recent analysis of Dutch and German magazine advice columns over four decades. Until the mid-1960s, they recommended silence on the subject of feelings, shifting gradually into a directive to “own” emotions at all costs. We can see a process that codifies rules for self-conduct to formalize a training in how to be “natural.” This even extends to instructions on how to discover what is “already” there (Gerhards 1989, 740, 742–43). There are important connections here to “the subculture of psychotherapy,” which seeks to “facilitate self-growth, self-understanding, and a . . . change in self-perceptions and functioning.” It is worth noting that such practices are conventional in the bigger U.S. urban centers, as well as in Paris, Buenos Aires, and Sydney. But you’d go

a long way in search of them in Dublin, Delhi, or Jaffa, where religion does that job quite effectively (Now that we have 1997).

One of the high priests of populist feeling and experience is Carl Rogers. He is associated with the “uh-huh” school of helping people in distress, known as nondirective client-centered counseling. This form of psychic management takes the view that therapists have no greater stability or innate qualities than their clients but are simply not currently facing the same difficulties as the person before them. Rogers works from Freud’s basic dictum that all people can voice and understand the nature of their problem but fail to do so directly because they lack a hermeneutic code. (For Rogers, it is emotion. For Freud, it is sex.) In a conversation-analytic sense, Freud is looking to repair others’ remarks; in an interpretative sense, he holds to their statements as intrinsically important. Unlike Freud, Rogers does not understand these psychic conflicts as related to a set series of sexual narratives across time and space, and he has no desire to do more than encourage both sides of the counseling moment to exchange senses in language that relates directly to feelings and experience. He rejects the behaviorist idea that people are simply clusters of individual conduct, instead divining basic human qualities and abilities to change. While social factors are important, the opportunity to develop and be happy lies within. Life is a series of encounter groups that can produce equality and community for all by focusing on feelings (Prilleltensky 1989, 798–99).

We could usefully compare Rogers with twelve-step programs of self-improvement, which derive from Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) and have been redeployed in a series of social, intersubjective, capitalistic activities: borrowing, gambling, shopping, sex, and eating are among them, along with the splendid W.A.T.C.H. (Women and Their Cheating Husbands) and MAD DADS (Men against Destruction Defending against Drugs). In 1990, 13 percent of U.S. adults had attended a twelve-step meeting, often connected to the “inner child,” a critical component in recovering from these dependencies by recognizing and celebrating repressed infancy, thereby permitting the child to parent the adult (Wuthnow 1994, 117; Riessman and Carroll 1995, 117; Mäkelä et al. 1996, 216; Forbes 1994, 233–34). AA emerged from a combination of Britain’s 1930s Oxford Group, a homosocial Protestant evangelical movement, and American temperance (though it avoided the moral fervor that called on all drinkers to stop). Over sixty years, AA has spread across the world to comprise more than ninety thousand groups. The performative aspects of AA, its intersubjective declarations/establishments of truth and fellowship as achieved in the daily meetings that enact and specify these precepts, tell us not only about the very Christian nature of the ritual, but also how it does and does not relate to other customizations of AA ideas and therapy

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as per psycho-
analysis: self-help,
like Freudianism,
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good story.

more generally. We are at the crossroads of medicalization here: persons are labeled alcoholics by others when they are held to be unable to “meet social obligations,” whereas the self-definition encouraged by AA requires people to acquire and recognize a personal and spiritual disease (Cain 1991, 211, 213; Mäkelä et al. 1996, 14, 117).

AA is fascinating for its huge cross-cultural reach and the fact that it is independent of church and state, not-for-profit, and not a charity (that is, no donations or grants are sought or accepted, and its only revenue comes from people at meetings and the sale of literature). It is probably one of the few global enterprises which insists that two-thirds of its governing body must be alcoholics. AA also has special cells for professionals whose work lives would be placed in jeopardy if their alcoholism were known: “Anesthetists in Recovery,” “International Doctors in AA,” and “International Pharmacists Anonymous” are favorites, along with a shadowy group for airline pilots (of course, similar dispensations are not advertised for blue-collar work or jobs gendered as female). AA has successfully internationalized: a third of all members live in Latin America, while the decline of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe has led to major expansion (Riessman and Carroll 1995, 85; Mäkelä et al. 1996, 4–5, 20, 65).

When AA members speak at meetings, they must demonstrate sensitivity to the recipient design and subjectivity expected at each site as defined by the moral standards of AA talk, many of which are “known” but not formally codified. Rules only emerge explicitly when someone breaches them and then seeks to repair this transgression. Ilkka Arminen (1996) has identified three styles of repair in AA life stories: “corrective formulations” either resile from or explain away prior statements that imply deviation (say, holding others responsible for one’s alcoholism); “ordinary word replacement” substitutes correct-line speech for errors; and “more factual” descriptions are replaced by “more subjective ones,” encouraging identification from others by tailoring stories to a universalist discourse of emotions.

One might add that the performance of mistakes and their repair models the very fallibility—recognition of ethical incompleteness—that is integral to membership. Redemption requires endless negotiation and work, however. It is never completed: Protestant performativity wants repetition. In fact, a vast array of people employed in private, state, and community mental health organizations are former clients—the “professional ex-” phenomenon. A self-designation as ill becomes a qualification for occupational mobility: former addicts claim a special relationship to clients that goes beyond clinical understanding. Over 70 percent of employees in the ten thousand substance-abuse centers across the United States are former abusers, and the academic who collects these statistics and analyzes the phenomenon is himself an ex-professional ex-, both former “deviant drinker” *and* former “primary therapist.” This is part of

the romance that asks us to regard “ten million alcoholics as potential help givers—a resource rather than a problem,” and a money-making resource: AA provides a huge international network for business relationships, a place for people to meet across professional cultures and generate economic ties (Brown 1991, 219–20, 223, 226; Reissman and Carroll 1995, ix; Mäkelä et al. 1996, 69).

Self-help also attains spiritual endorsement and technical application in marketing transcendental meditation (TM): in 1975, *TM: Discovering Energy and Overcoming Stress* (Harold H. Bloomfield) enters the best-selling lists. It is not long before IBM, Mitsui, General Motors, the Pentagon, and Mitsubishi are hiring TM experts to lower executive blood pressure. Caring and sharing are popular across business. Today’s collection agencies deal with recalcitrant debtors by sending them videos that describe the therapeutic benefits of talking over their problems with account staff: “We work to make your calls to us a positive experience. . . . You’ll feel so much better because you’ve taken control.” A third of recipients—long-term defaulters all—make at least one payment (Frosh 1989, 244; Segal 1990, 280–84, 289; *People Weekly* 1996, 320; Mills 1989; Now that we have 1997).

Conclusion

The mutant message that began this essay is a symptom not of mass triviality, but of new negotiations of difference and similarity between truth and communication. What is endowed with the status of revelation by true believers, and infotainment by TV producers, becomes a complex morality play about social structures for book and TV audiences. This would situate the current moment of popular culture as one of generic change, akin to the period ushered in by Defoe’s *Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Much of that book’s initially negative reception derived from two competing senses of truth-telling then in circulation. One was bound up with epistolary letters, confession, and the self, and the other with the emerging novel and forms of publication (Hunter 1988, 219). New classifications of writing (the novel) and subjectivity (the calculating self) were intermingling. So it is with the genre of self-help. Arnold Bennett’s “flapper-age” search for “the graces of knowledge and taste” is refined by innovations in commodification, publishing, and ethical incompleteness. To track these moves, we need a spatially and historically sensitive, piecemeal inspection, not timeless endorsements from “real” emotions or automatic denunciations from “real” politics. Marlo Morgan is easily parodied, but her adherents are engaged in a redesignation of themselves that we need to track, along the (frequently discontinuous) paths of political technology and political economy.

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