COLINE CALES

THE SELF–HELP CULTURE

WITHIN SOCIETY AND THE PUBLISHING INDUSTRY

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INTRODUCTION

"Where there is age there is evolution, where there is life there is growth"
Anjelica Huston

Throughout centuries, self-help has evolved and changed whilst still maintaining its aim and meaning: using self-reliance as a way to achieve goals, constantly improve and reach for a better self. The self-help culture we know today was born from ideas, opinions and beliefs; it appeared within this society mainly through literature. Indeed, besides being acknowledged as the obvious pop culture phenomenon it is today, self-help has always provided advice to numerous civilisations, through various mediums, self-help literature being the most significant one. From the Bible to self-help best-sellers such as *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) by Dale Carnegie, the meaning and aim of self-help have always remained the same. As a literary genre and pop culture phenomenon, self-help has evolved and touched on many themes, making it a subject worth exploring.

The focus of my study will be placed upon the self-help culture within the publishing industry and society as my aim was to present the origins of self-help and its place in the world. The goals of working on this specific topic were to understand the importance of self-help in the publishing industry and society and offer specific information regarding its possible effectiveness and progress in the scientific and medical fields as there is very little information on the subject. Indeed, while self-help has been around for thousands of years, this theme lacks actual research and the study of this subject is still considered as emergent. Consequently, this can affect the reliability of my sources despite the numerous research I did on the subject.

The aims of this dissertation are numerous. First and foremost, I wanted to explore the theme of self-help within the publishing industry as well as in society as it is not a common topic to study and analyse. Also, my goal was to have a better understanding of the obsession with the self and the needs associated with this obsession. Indeed, I wanted to learn and understand the origins of self-help and self-help books as well as their evolution through the centuries as a way to understand society's need for self-help. My aim was to study and understand the importance of self-help in literature and its impact on people.

The objectives of this dissertation will be multiple. Indeed, there will be an intent to demonstrate how self-help has become a major part of consumer society and consequently, show the role and evolution of self-help books as a result of this pop culture phenomenon. In order to do so, I will divide my reasoning into three parts. Firstly, I will present different definitions and synonyms of self-help and draw a broad portrait of self-help books, from ancient times to the 21st century. Secondly, I will explain the need for self-help in today's society as well as discuss its alleged effectiveness and criticism. Thirdly, I will focus my study on the United States, by presenting the business aspect of self-help and discussing the reasons behind the popularity and spread of self-help.

SELF-HELP: TERMINOLOGY AND HISTORY

The self-help genre comes in quite a broad range of formats and, although some people would think of this literary genre as emergent, its history can be traced back to antiquity. To begin with, I will define the self-help genre and explain its purpose as well as every aspect and variation this genre has to offer. Then, I will draw a broad portrait of its history, mention some influential self-help books and discuss the creation of new means aiming to broaden the purpose of the self-help genre.

1. What is the self-help genre?

1.1. Origin and definition of the term self-help

The term 'self-help' was first coined by Scottish author and government reformer Samuel Smiles in his best-seller entitled *Self-Help* which was published in 1859. Indeed, some would say the self-help literary genre was named after Samuel Smiles' piece of work in which the author encourages thrift, conveys the belief that poverty was mostly caused by irresponsible habits and criticises materialism as well as *laissez faire*[1] government. In addition to being the precursor of the self-help books of the following centuries, it was also known as "the bible of the mid-Victorian liberalism" due to its popular influence on the 19th century society. Following the publication of *Self-Help*, all books discussing similar topics started being referred to as works of self-help and soon after, the self-help genre we know today was created.

Over the years, the importance of the self and the way self-help books are used to discover our true self are subjects that have attracted more and more interest. There are many questions on the self, such as what makes us the person we are, what we are, what can be done with ourselves, where we stand in the society, how we can find our true self and so on. Consequently, I will introduce various definitions related to the self and the self-help genre. The term 'self' is defined by the Oxford dictionary as "the type of person you are, especially the way you normally behave, look or feel". The word 'self' as a prefix, employed in the word 'self-made' for instance, would rather mean "by one's own efforts, by their own actions". This is the term used to refer to the self-help genre.

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1 – French term meaning "allow to do". Very popular during the 19th century, this policy consisted in the government's minimal interference in the economic affairs of the society or the citizens.

As defined in the Oxford dictionary, the term 'self-help' means "the act of relying on your own efforts and abilities in order to solve your problems, rather than depending on other people for help". Then, does this definition contradict the very essence of a self-help book? This is something to be discussed later through this dissertation. The definition of the self-help genre found on the Book Genre dictionary website is the following:

> *"books in the self-help nonfiction genre are based on one's own effort and resources to achieve things and goals without relying on the help of others. The books in this genre can be about self-guided improvement in one's economic standing, their intellectual state of being, and in their emotionally and self-worth state of being. They can also be about support groups, how to find them, and what they are about. The support groups provide encouragement and techniques to assist people with similar goals and needs achieve them successfully"*

The Canadian University of Calgary, which conducted a research project on the subject of self-help literature, defines a self-help book as being "any book written with the explicit intention of helping its readers change or improve some aspect of their personal or professional lives".

Although, the term 'self-help' seems to be the most common when describing a work of self-help, there are numerous synonyms also used to refer to both the literary genre and the books.

1.2. Synonyms of self-help books

Indeed, different variations exist to refer to works of self-help such as: 'self-improvement', 'self-care' and 'self-development'. Although self-help books can be referred to as self-care books, self-improvement books or self-development books, all these synonyms have their own meaning.

The Oxford dictionary defines 'self-improvement' as "the process by which a person improves their knowledge, status, character, etc. by their own efforts". Therefore, this definition gives 'self-improvement' quite a broad meaning as it implies that one could improve their health, their actions, their skills, their life in general. This term is the one

that is most closely related to 'self-help' out of all its synonyms. Indeed, both 'self-help' and 'self-improvement' are used to refer to the self-improvement movement, also known as the self-help movement. Encyclopaedia.com presents this movement as the development of a philosophy shared among individuals who wish to solve similar problems, resulting in the improvement of their lives. People experiencing the same issues are invited to share knowledge with and provide emotional support to each other and thus, reach improvement. The self-improvement movement was established by the first Alcoholics Anonymous groups of the 1930s and became even more popular after World War II as it helped veterans cope with post-traumatic stress disorder.[2]

Self-care, according to Lexico dictionary, means either "the practice of taking action to preserve or improve one's own health" or "the practice of taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress" depending on the circumstances of one's situation. Thus, talking about self-care involves someone's well-being and overall health rather than their skills and accomplishments whereas self-help implies an individual's global improvement. If one wishes to improve their mental health and state of mind, then they should preferably search for a self-help book dealing with psychological matters, therefore a book of self-care, rather than a book of self-help giving advice on business for example.

Finally, 'self-development' is another synonym of all the terms listed above. The Cambridge dictionary defines it as "the act of deciding for yourself how to improve your skills and taking action to do this". This definition suggests an improvement in terms of skills but also regarding someone's state of mind. Self-development also shares similarities with 'personal development' as it can be used to refer to a work of self-help, yet, to a smaller extent. Primarily, personal development is a lifestyle model designed to enhance one's entire life: by improving every aspect of their life and achieving personal growth, one should be ready to face any situation life may throw at them. Although both self-development and personal development discuss the improvement of an individual's well-being, skills and life, it is less likely to see

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2 – PTSD: an "anxiety disorder caused by very stressful, frightening or distressing events". *NHS* website.

those terms describe a work of self-help than it is seeing the term self-improvement for example as they are less frequently used.

Although 'self-improvement', 'self-care' and 'self-development' can be used to refer to self-help books, 'self-help' will be the chosen term when talking about works of self-help in this dissertation. Indeed, since the publication of Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*, this term has become the official term to describe works of self-help and is the most widely used term to refer to this literary genre.

While 'self-improvement', 'self-care' and 'self-development' all refer to works of self-help, there are other synonyms of the term 'self-help' that do not share any connection with the self-help literary genre but whose meanings are related to the ones I have explained so far. Therefore, I think it is important to discuss those synonyms as some of them will be mentioned later in this dissertation. As I intend to draw a broad portrait of the history of the self-help genre, I will also define and discuss the names given to the ancestors of self-help books in order to avoid any confusion.

1.3. Variations of 'self-help' and literary ancestors

To begin with, I will discuss the meaning of some synonyms of self-help that do not share any link with the literary genre. However, their meaning is based on the same essence, the importance of the self, the message conveyed by self-help books.

The synonyms of self-help under consideration are the following: 'self-reliance', 'self-sufficiency', 'self-dependence', 'self-support', 'self-subsistence', 'self-healing', 'self-growth'. Although 'self-healing' means that one can heal by themselves and therefore, rather shares roots with 'self-care' as it implies someone's health rather than their skills, the other terms are defined as the ability of one to rely on themselves without reaching for external help. 'Self-growth' is a synonym of 'personal growth', "a desire to become a better version of oneself every day [...], a life-long process to improve one's own performance through formal and informal approaches" (Jain and Apple, 2015: 41). As for 'self-reliance', it is a core value of transcendentalism, a philosophical movement established by writers and philosophers during the 19th century in New

England[3]. These writers and philosophers include Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Henry David Thoreau and Nathaniel Hawthorne, to name but a few. This movement is based on the belief that every individual should be their own independent and confident self; everyone should be able to rely on their own values and beliefs and not try to conform to other people's expectations or society's standards. 'Self-sufficiency' is a synonym of 'self-reliance'; they both share the same roots. Therefore, all those terms revolve around the importance of the self and the effect they have on someone's personal growth, values that a self-help book stands for.

While works of self-help are now referred to as self-help books, they were given various names before Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* was published in the 19th century, as I said previously. The terms I will explain are the following: etiquette, courtesy and conduct.

The terms "courtesy" and "conduct" both define literary genres and are quite similar as they both deal with morals and etiquette. Both genres appeared during mid-Medieval times and remained popular until the 19th century. Etiquette, other than being a French word meaning "tag" or "label", also refers to a set of codes instructing polite behaviour in society. It teaches civilians what to do and what not to do among social groups and is often intended for lower- or middle-class people wishing to enter the upper-class. Courtesy books can also be referred to as books of manners. The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines this literary genre as "a medieval or Renaissance book designed to prepare the young nobleman for the proper pursuit of his courtly duties and pleasures" and "a book designed to prepare a young gentleman for public duties and conduct : a book of advice about social conduct".

In France, conduct books were referred to as "savoir-vivre books" which literally translates to "knowing how to live". The Collins dictionary defines this French expression as "an ability to live life well and with intelligent enjoyment, meeting every situation with poise, good manners, and elegance". In her essay entitled *History of Courtesy Books in Eighteenth Century England* (2000: 1), Cindy Ku explains that "courtesy books were written for both men and women, but the books for

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3 – New England was the name given by Captain John Smith during the 17th century to refer to the eastern region of the United States. It included states such as Maine, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut and Vermont.

women were conduct books that more rigidly defined the roles of each gender in the society". Then, conduct books for women of the 18th century were written with the aim of instructing them in what they could and could not do and they also dictated their alleged "rightful" place within their marriage and family and society in general. Furthermore, in the same essay, Cindy Ku writes that "middle class citizens demanded for courtesy and conduct books to help them advance themselves into the elite society" (*ibid.*) suggesting that conduct books of the 18th century were also written on the matter of social hierarchy.

While this dissertation will focus on self-help books, it is necessary to mention that self-help does not strictly take the form of books and can also be found through sayings, speeches, lectures and so on, which will be discussed later through this dissertation. Although self-help literature underwent numerous changes over the centuries, every work of self-help always shared the same core values: providing help and advice to people in order for them to live a fulfilled and happy life. In the next part, influential and popular examples of self-help works will be discussed and will thus help understand the roots of the self-help genre.

2. Self-help books through the centuries

It is common to think that self-help books made their first appearance during the 20th century; it is in fact, a frequent mistake. In order to become the self-help books we know today, this literary genre had to evolve drastically over the centuries. Historians have managed to retrace the origins of this literary genre and draw a timeline of all the changes it went through from antiquity to the 21st century. Ancient times were the historic birthplace of the self-help genre.

2.1. Antiquity: earliest forms of self-help books

As American sociologist, and cultural critic Micki McGee writes in her book *Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life* (2005: 2) "some social observers have suggested that the Bible is perhaps the first and most significant of self-help books". However, others suggest that the earliest forms of self-help books date back to antiquity: Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, and the Roman Empire.

2.1.1. Religious works

Indeed, many suggest that holy books such as the Bible, the Quran, or the Torah, to name but a few, can be considered as works of self-help. As worshippers are also called 'followers', it implies that they follow a guide in order to improve their life and state of mind. This guide providing advice and lessons on how to succeed and prosper takes the shape of the sacred texts forming the Bible, the Quran, the Torah, and every other holy works existing in the world.

Although their advice is related to religion or spirituality, they encourage a person's improvement on their way of life and thinking. Subsequently, every individual perceives the proverbs and sayings as he or she wishes to; such a comment also applies to generic works of self-help as everyone's beliefs and opinions differ.

If you take the Bible as an example, there are some proverbs that one might consider as advice of self-help: "Those who work their land will have abundant food, but those who chase fantasies have no sense" (Proverbs 12:11), "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed" (Proverbs 11:25) or "By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures" (Proverbs 24:3-4). Those proverbs can be considered as inspirational thoughts, therefore, help someone improve their mindset and overall life. Every person has the right to perceive those sayings according to their own opinions and beliefs, thus, it is down to an individual's point of view to see the Bible or any other holy texts, as a work of self-help. However, as most sacred texts are known as guides, they can be considered as one of the main ancestors of self-help literature.

2.1.2. Ancient Egyptian times

Nevertheless, some writers argue that Ancient Egyptian scribes composed the oldest self-help books ever written. Indeed, as explained in Jessica Lamb Shampiro's *Promise Land: My Journey Through America's Self-Help Culture* (2014: 17) and Ian Shaw's *Ancient Egypt: A Very Short Introduction* (2004: 135) such works are associated with a literary genre from Ancient Egypt called 'Sebayt' meaning teaching, originally the name of the oldest written legal code offering "instructions for just rule". Ancient

Egyptian Scribes wrote sets of rules and statements on papyrus intended for every citizen of Ancient Egypt who wished to live a fulfilled life. In her article 'A Short History of Self-Help, The World's Bestselling Genre' (2013), American self-help author Jessica Lamb Shapiro states that this literary genre is "an instructional literature on life". Holy texts aside, the earliest form of self-help literature is said to be *The Maxims of Ptahhotep*, a literary work from Ancient Egypt; it was written in the aim of teaching very important cultural values from that time. Those values were believed to allow anyone to live a good life, have self-control and an overall great moral behaviour.

2.1.3. The Roman Empire

Likewise, Ancient Rome writers provided civilians with all sorts of works, teaching them to behave properly. Roman authors wrote treatises, poems, pamphlets and so on, on how to live a prosper and good life. *Remedia Amoris*[4] and *Ars amatoria*[5] are two poems written by the Roman poet Ovid offering advice on matters such as love and intimacy. Similarly, the works of the well-known Roman philosopher and politician Cicero *Laelius de Amicitia*[6] and *De Officiis*[7] provided guidance on friendships based on his own experiences and his perspective on how to live and behave in society. Those works were amongst the most popular of the Roman Empire. Ancient Rome was also very closely linked to Ancient Greece's society and their ways to behave.

2.1.4. Ancient Greece

Indeed, works of self-help were also found in Ancient Greece. Those works would be in the form of meditations, aphorisms, and maxims on the best ways to live, quite similar to Ancient Egyptian and Roman works. Indeed, Ancient Greece is known to be the birthplace of philosophy thanks to famous philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, to name but a few. Also known to be the historical cradle of new ways of thinking and living such as democracy, it can be considered as a turning point in the way civilisation behaves, thinks and lives. This turning point can be explained thanks to Boethius's famous work, *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Boethius was a Roman senator, consul, philosopher, author and Aristotle's translator.

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4 – *Remedy of Love* or The Cure for Love in English.
5 – Translated as *Art of Love* in English.
6 – Also known as *De Amicitia* or *On Friendship* in English.
7 – *On Duties* in English.

His composition discusses the nature of free will, destiny, true and false happiness, divine foreknowledge, good and evil, fortune and chance. He managed to write it while being imprisoned as a result of being accused of plotting to overthrow King Theodoric the Great. While *The Consolation of Philosophy* influenced the population of Ancient Greece, it also managed to have an impact on the Middle-Ages' society. Indeed, it was translated into various languages in Europe and read by many influential people such as English monarchs. King Alfred of the 9th century as well as Queen Elizabeth I of the early Renaissance were both inspired by Boethius' composition. Geoffrey Chaucer, the author of *The Canterbury Tales* published in the 15th century, also read *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Thus, through his composition, Boethius managed to influence the population of Ancient Greece, the whole Middle-Ages period as well as early Renaissance and is, still to this day, a notable work.

2.2. Medieval times

Although Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome self-help works shaped the Middle-Ages and influenced Medieval times' authors, writers from this period also managed to establish new literary genres and new stories that grew into being the self-help books we know today.

2.2.1. Books for leaders

Indeed, it is important to mention that the Middle Ages witnessed the introduction of what is called 'Mirrors for Princes', another form of self-help literature which was quite popular during both the Middle-Ages and the Renaissance. This type of work was written in the aim of advising leaders such as monarchs and dictators for example, on how to rule their people. In their book *From Irenaeus to Grotius: A Sourcebook in Christian Political Thought* (1999: 211), Oliver O'Donovan and Joan Lockwood O'Donovan state that Sedulius Scottus' treatise entitled *De Rectoribus Christianis*[8] "is an early and influential example of the 'mirrors for princes' genre". Sedulius Scottus was an Irish teacher, scriptural commentator and grammarian who lived during the 9th century; his treatise is considered to be one of the earliest forms of the mirrors for princes literary genre and was followed by many other works. His work was originally

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8 – *On Christian Rulers* in English.

written "to instruct Lothar II, Emperor Lothar I's son and king of Lotharingia, in his royal duties" (*ibid.*) and overall intended for Christian rulers and princes.

The most popular book of this genre, however, was Renaissance work, *The Prince*, written by Niccolò Machiavelli in 1513 and published in 1532. He was an Italian diplomat, writer and philosopher and his work is considered as the most popular book giving advice on how to rule a nation. His surname, Machiavelli, gave its name to the noun 'Machiavellianism', the political theory of the author and the adjective 'Machiavellian' defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary as "the view that politics is amoral and that any means however unscrupulous can justifiably be used in achieving political power", a policy "marked by cunning, duplicity, or bad faith". Niccolò Machiavelli's *The Princes*, as well as Sedulius Scotus' pieces, are considered as being an early form of self-help books, just like Boethius' composition and every other work I mentioned before.

2.2.2. The emergence of new genres

As we have seen throughout these examples, behaviour was seen as an important matter in order to live a good life. Indeed, books called "courtesy books" or "books of manners", also appeared during the Middle-Ages, especially in the 13th century, popularised by Italian and German writers. Those pieces of work dealt with behaviours and morals, manners to have within the royal courts of the time. During the Middle-Ages, those books educated aristocratic and middle-class people on topics like religion, ethics, social awareness and social conduct.

There were many courtesy books written during Medieval times in Germany and Italy, but, the most popular ones might be the following: German poet Tannhäuser's book of manners published around the 1200s, German anonymous poems entitled *Winsbecke* and *Winsbeckin* written in the 13th century and German poem by Italian lyric poet Thomasin von Zirclaere *Der Wälsche Gast* published in the early 1200s. All three of those German poems were written in Middle High German, a type of German language spoken during the Middle-Ages, from the 9th century to the 12th century. *Winsbecke* is a father to son poem in which a father gives his son advice on how to behave in society, whereas *Winsbeckin* is about a mother and her daughter

discussing perils, attractions, and attributes of love. Thomasin von Zirclaere's poem is considered as being the first book addressing both boys and girls on the matters of courtesy, chivalry, courtly love; once again, this piece of work was based on philosophy and ethics.

In England, *Book of the Civilised Man* by Daniel of Beccles from the 13th century is said to be "an early example of the codification of medieval morals and manners in written form" (Whelan, 2017: 15). This poem is considered as a turning point in the way people behaved in English court society. It discusses social hierarchy and how to behave around people of lower or higher status. It also deals with self-control and tells the reader to "be careful to whom, what, why and when you speak". It also gives advice on how to eat and "relieve" oneself politely. Finally, it deals with sexual morality, informing men on prostitutes as well as advising them to choose a wife according to her personality and property value. This type of literary genre retained its influence during the whole Renaissance period and underwent considerable changes.

2.3. The Renaissance

Following the Middle-Ages, the Renaissance period witnessed the evolution of conduct and courtesy books as well as the birth of a brand-new printing process. As society and mentalities evolved, new behaviours and manners were established.

2.3.1. Gutenberg's new printing process

At the very beginning of the Renaissance period, around 1440, Gutenberg revolutionised the printing process. Indeed, Johannes Gutenberg, a German goldsmith, printer, inventor, and publisher, created what is known as the Gutenberg printing method. Although woodblock printing, one of the first forms of printing process ever created, first appeared in China around 500, Gutenberg invented the printing process we know today. This involved creating a metal matrix with engraved letters that would, thanks to the use of ink, type those letters on a sheet of paper. In his book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962), Marshall McLuhan states that, by 1500, "fifteen to twenty million copies of 30,000 to 35,000 separate publications" were printed, as a result of Gutenberg's printing process. This invention enabled the creation of greater quantities of books, therefore making

them cheaper and more affordable for middle-class and lower-class people. Thus, Gutenberg's printing method was a turning point in the history of books, including self-help books, as people could then write down their own methods on the best ways to live and were able to buy those books. This invention not only influenced the evolution of literary works but also enhanced the spread of self-help books.

2.3.2. The expansion of courtesy books and conduct books

The Renaissance period had just begun, and courtesy books were still successful within the European society. Indeed, Giovanni della Casa's book of manners *ll Galateo, overo de' costume*[9] was among the most popular of this period. This book, published in 1558, is considered as a guide explaining to readers what to do and what to avoid, regarding the way they dress, converse or act. In the author's own words, "our manners are attractive when we regard others' pleasure and not our own delight".

While most of the examples of courtesy books and conduct books previously cited were intended for lower- and middle-class people, some of them were written for elites. *The Book of the Courtier* (1528) written by Italian author, courtier, diplomat and soldier Baldassare Castiglione is among the most popular of the period. In contrast to *Galateo: The Rules of Polite Behaviour* by Giovanni della Casa addressing general civilians, *The Book of the Courtier* was meant for people belonging to the upper-class and the nobility. Indeed, the title speaks for itself: courtier. As well as being the definition of someone practicing flattery, according to the Cambridge dictionary, this word also means, "a companion of a queen, king, or other ruler in their official home". Baldassare Castiglione was a courtier himself and attended numerous rulers such as Dukes and Marquesses. His work is a series of dialogues explaining what an ideal courtier should be and overall advising noble and upper-class people on how to befriend a leader.

Throughout the whole 1600s and 1700s, both conduct books and courtesy books still managed to influence European society: people loved to read books giving advice on weight-loss, parenting, marriage time management, home management,

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9 – *Galateo: The Rules of Polite Behaviour* is the English title.

etiquette, success, self-control, mind power, grief and self-medicine. These books were slowly but surely growing into the self-help books we know today.

2.4. The 18th century

At the start of the 18th century, both conduct and courtesy books gained even more popularity and recognition. Although such books still offered civilians guides on how to behave properly, writers of the 18th century decided to focus their works on gender roles and social hierarchy.

2.4.1. Conduct books for women

Indeed, as mentioned at the beginning of this dissertation, conduct books underwent some changes during the 1700s, focusing on women and their place within society, especially how they should behave in society in order to be a respectable lady and a faithful wife. While 21st century authors do not write entire books on how a woman should behave, it was quite a common occurrence during the 18th century. Popular books such as *The Young Ladies Conduct* by John Essex (1722), *The Lady's Preceptor* and *The Whole Duty of a Woman*, both written by anonymous authors, dissuaded women from gaining knowledge and pursuing education and rather put the emphasis on good manners and etiquette. Such books neglected women's intellect and reduced them to being wives to their husbands and mothers to their children.

Nonetheless, some works encouraged women to seek education and knowledge. *Letters on the Improvement of the Mind* by Hester Chapone, *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters: with reflections on female conduct, in the more important duties of life* by Mary Wollstonecraft, *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* by Hannah More and *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* by Erasmus Darwin are among these books.

In 1773, Hester Chapone, an English author, wrote her book formerly intended for her fifteen-year-old niece. Through her work, she advised women to read the Bible and take an interest in history and literature. She also encouraged them to learn about book-keeping, household management, botany, geology and astronomy. It became quite popular and was even translated into French.

Mary Wollstonecraft was an English philosopher, writer and advocate of women's rights as well as being the mother of Mary Shelley, the well-known author of *Frankenstein*. *Thoughts on the Education of Daughters*, published in 1787, taught mothers, women and teachers how to educate a girl and take care of an infant. Mary Wollstonecraft is also famous for her later works *A Vindication of the Rights of Men* (1790) and *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) in which she argued that a woman should be educated and acquire knowledge as, according to her, it would benefit the nation.

Likewise, Hannah More also composed such works. She was an English conservative and religious writer and philanthropist. Although she wrote *Strictures on the Modern System of Female Education* (1799) encouraging women to read and get educated, she believed that women were intellectually inferior to men.

Finally, *Plan for the Conduct of Female Education in Boarding Schools* published in 1798 was written by Erasmus Darwin, an English physician, physiologist, inventor, philosopher, poet and slave-trade abolitionist. Through his book, Erasmus Darwin suggested that women should study the following subjects: literature, grammar, arts, history, geography, modern languages, arithmetic, natural history, mythology, embroidery, aesthetics, drawing. He also gave women advice on how to dress, exercise and practice good posture.

Although some of these authors encouraged women to seek education and acknowledged the fact that women were capable of learning and reading, they still discussed their roles as mothers and did not consider them as equal to men. Furthermore, some 20th century writers argued that conduct books for women portray an ideal picture of how a woman should act, sound, look, talk and think. Nancy Armstrong, an English scholar, critic and professor, wrote in her book entitled *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (1987: 47): "so popular did these books become that by the second half of the eighteenth century virtually everyone knew the ideal of womanhood they proposed".

Finally, it is important to notice that most of these conduct books for women were written by women; it may imply that they knew what women wanted and were

capable of doing. Also, it is fair to say that those works enhanced the evolution of self-help books as well as women's rights as they brought awareness to women's condition, encouraged them to seek education and created new content for the self-help genre.

2.4.2. Conduct books on social hierarchy

Mid-18th century, Britain was hit by the Industrial Revolution. Some companies evolved while others emerged, greatly benefitting the country and its economy. As new jobs were created, more and more people were able to work and make money as well as reach higher status. Some working-class people made their way into the middle-class and hoped to be a part of the upper-class someday. Thus, courtesy books for middle-class people aiming to reach higher status made their appearance during this period. In fact, Cindy Ku (op. cit.: 1) states that authors of the 18th century were asked, by the middle-class community, to write guides teaching them good manners that would help them reach their goals.

British writers from the Georgian Era[10] such as Adam Petrie, F. Nivelon and Sir John Barnard composed works explaining the good manners middle-class people should acquire. *Rules of Good Deportment* by Adam Petrie was published in 1720 and offered middle-class civilians with a set of rules explaining how to behave so they would not be associated with lower-class people, judged as "inferior" by society. F. Nivelon is the author of *The Rudiments of Genteel Behaviour* published in 1737, a book explaining and illustrating the proper manners a middle-class person should have, in order to, once again, distinguish themself from a lower-class person. Some of the illustrations showed how to replicate a perfect bow and how to stand, walk and dance properly. Finally, Sir John Barnard published his work, *A Present for an Apprentice* in 1741, carrying the same message as the former two: if one's aim is to enter the upper-class community, then one should learn how to behave properly in various situations. In his essay 'Investigating Personal Character: Sir John Barnard – A Portrait and *A Present for an Apprentice*' (2016: 70), Harold Pearce reveals that Sir John Barnard's treatise was initially written as a letter to the author's son, giving him

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10 – The Georgian Era is the name given to the period between 1714 and 1830 in Great Britain. It referred to the first four Hanoverians monarchs: King George I, King George II, King George III and King George IV of Great Britain.

advice on how to be a good apprentice so, he would be able to make his way into the higher society.

Conduct books discussing women and social hierarchy influenced the way the society of the 18th century behaved, acted and thought. Those works created a model and a goal for people to achieve and reach.

2.5. The 19th century

As the world and the entire society evolved and changed, authors continued writing works of personal development as well as book of manners with the aim of creating a "perfect" society. Those books became deeply anchored in people's lives and dictated their way of living. While the phenomenon of courtesy and conduct books was very widespread in European society, it had also reached the United States, at the time known as the New World. American authors were inspired by this literary phenomenon and decided to create works of self-help of their own; as a result, it impacted America's society as much as it did Europe's. Consequently, more and more books on the topic emerged and shaped people's lives.

2.5.1. Emergence of the self-help genre in the New World

It is the case of *American Etiquette and Rules of Politeness*, a book written by 19th century American historian Walter R. Houghton. In this book, which was published in 1883, he presented his opinions on which attitude one should acquire and avoid. Through the numerous chapters, Walter R. Houghton set a strict list of what he thought was allowed or inadmissible: he discussed "the value of etiquette", "salutations and greetings", "riding and driving", "dinners", "business", "harmony of colours in dress", "games, sports and amusements", "funerals", "the toilet", "higher culture of women" and etiquette in various situations. However, years before Walter R. Houghton, an American poet, lecturer, essayist, transcendentalist and philosopher named Ralph Waldo Emerson, inspired by the transcendentalist movement, had compose works on the matter of self-reliance and self-sufficiency, all matters close to self-help literature.

2.5.2. Transcendentalism

Indeed, in 1841, Ralph Waldo Emerson published a collection of essays, *Essays: First Series*, touching on various subjects based on transcendentalism, a 19th century movement introduced earlier (cf. pd: 4). One of Emerson's essays entitled 'Self-Reliance' specifically stresses the importance of individualism, one of the core values of transcendentalism. He begins his essay with a Latin quote by Roman poet Perseus "*Ne te quaesiveris extra*" meaning "do not seek for things outside of yourself", fitting his statements quite appropriately. In his essay, the author emphasizes that one should focus on their own personal growth in order to reach true happiness and peace of mind; he also expresses that doing so will influence other people's well-being.

In Europe, some writers also composed works related to self-help; during the same period, Scottish lawyer and leader of the phrenological movement of the 19th century George Combe used phrenology to write his works of self-help.

2.5.3. Phrenology as an embodiment of self-help

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, phrenology is "the study of the conformation of the skull based on the belief that it is indicative of mental faculties and character". George Combe believed that phrenology allows us to understand the nature of an individual. Therefore, by knowing what a person is made of, this would lead to one's own happiness and improvement. Based on his beliefs, George Combe wrote many works, including *The Constitution of Man* which was published in 1828 and in which he expresses thoughts on self-help. In this work, Combe argues that an individual should fulfil their purpose and responsibilities if their wish is to reach for happiness as, according to him, such a thing is acquired through personal growth. He also states that the cultivation of one's capacities and skills located in the brain leads to improvement of the self. Although, *The Constitution of Man* is not registered as a work of self-help, its content can be considered as such as it deals with self-improvement.

2.5.4. The birth of Self-Help

A few years later, the 19th century witnessed the publication of the book that shaped the self-help genre of the 20th and 21st century: *Self-Help* by Samuel Smiles. As

mentioned earlier, *Self-Help* was published in 1859 by Scottish government reformer and author Samuel Smiles. This Victorian Era[11] book gave its name to the self-help genre of the following centuries. *Self-Help* is considered as a best-seller: it sold over a quarter of a million copies and was translated into French, Dutch, Japanese, German, Arabic, Danish, Turkish, Italian as well as into some languages spoken in India. Some even referred to it as "the bible of mid-Victorian liberalism". Through his work, Samuel Smiles sought to teach people the importance of perseverance, good manners, thrift, personal growth, hard-work, education and a fruitful business. As I previously said, *Self-Help* states that even poor people should get access to knowledge and education in order to improve themselves and prove themselves worthy of respect and recognition before the eyes of the entire society. Samuel Smiles addressed his book to anyone who wished to improve themselves and who believed they could do so on their own, the very essence of a self-help book. This famous piece of work gave importance to ambitious and persistent people who aimed for greater things for themselves and their family.

Self-Help achieved great recognition, to such an extent that it inspired British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and influenced her politics. During her term of office, she called for a return to "Victorian values", as she put it during an interview in the 1980s (T. Millstein, D. and D. Pionke, A., 2016: 2), the political values of Samuel Smiles' period. While every single work mentioned so far shaped the self-help genre of modern times, Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help* is the work that truly established it. The title of his book instituted the official term used to refer to the self-help genre and its contents embody the very essence of the self-help book of modern times. *Self-Help* paved the way for the authors of self-help books of the 20th and 21st centuries.

2.6. Self-help genre of the 20th and 21st centuries

Following Samuel Smiles' work on self-help, numerous authors, philosophers, politicians and artists aspired to write their own works on the matter. Early on, pioneers of the self-help movement of the 20th and 21st centuries turned works of self-help into a pop culture[12] phenomenon. Many of the books they wrote sold

11 – The Victorian Era refers to the period of English monarch, Queen Victoria's reign from 1837 until 1901.

12 – Short for 'popular culture'. Defined as "cultural activities or commercial products reflecting,

millions of copies worldwide, appeared on 'The New York Times Best Seller List'[13] and are considered to be the best self-help books of all time. While works of self-help have been around for thousands of years, their meaning and their aim have remained the same through the centuries. Therefore, what is interesting to see is the way authors of modern self-help books have decided to maintain the substance of self-help books while modernising their approach on the matter in order to fit modern society standards.

2.6.1. Bestsellers among the self-help genre

While the bestselling book of all time is arguably 17th century Spanish classic, *Don Quixote* by Miguel de Cervantes which sold over 500 million copies worldwide, some works of self-help are also considered as bestsellers. Through this part, it will be interesting to see that while self-help is an ancient literary genre, it is, still to this day, one of the most popular literary genres. The list of bestselling self-help books that will be discussed are considered to be the most influential works of self-help of modern times; then, the popularity of those books show that the self-help genre and the self-help culture in general are still very prominent matters for modern society.

Books are considered bestsellers based on the number of copies they sold and consequently, their popularity. The list of bestselling self-help books I will discuss was established by American magazine *Parade* in 2017. In order to provide accurate information on the matter, I will support my point with further rankings of best-selling self-help books established by other websites.

You Can Heal Your Life (1984) by Louise Hay, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937) by Napoleon Hill, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998) by Spencer Johnson, *The Secret* (2006) by Rhonda Byrne, *How To Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) by Dale Carnegie, *Men Are From Mars and Women Are From Venus* (1992) by John Gray, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) by Stephen R. Covey, *Chicken Soup for the Soul* (1993) by Jack Canfield and Mark Victor Hansen and *Awaken the Giant Within* (1992) by Anthony Robbins are a few of the bestselling self-help books of modern times. While

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suited to, or aimed at the tastes of the general masses of people" by Dictionary.com.

13 – List of best-selling books in the United States established by the American newspaper *The New York Times*.

they all deal with different issues such as business, relationships, positive thinking, self-reliance and personal growth, they all encourage readers to thrive for happiness and fulfilment and therefore, belong to the self-help genre. Every single one of those self-help books sold millions of copies, between 80 million and 10 million depending on the work; all of them were also translated into numerous languages. Furthermore, the similarities in the authors' background and professions are relevant to the way their stories are told; their approach is based on motivational support and psychology which allow their works to belong to the same literary genre. Those self-help books influenced modern society to such an extent that some of them are still mentioned in TV series, songs or films and both *You Can Heal Your Life* and *The Secret* were adapted into film documentaries in the 2000s.

After almost a century, those books, as well as other popular works of self-help of modern times, are still attracting an abundant number of people, influencing their way of living and inspiring authors to write their own self-help books. Their influence shows their importance within the publishing industry, competing not only against other nonfiction works but novels as well. Besides creating international bestselling self-help books, pioneers of the self-help genre of the 20th and 21st centuries established new methods to expand the meaning and the aim of those works.

2.6.2. The emergence of new methods to develop self-help

As previously seen, self-help has remained very popular through books; this part will discuss the emergence of new methods aiming to broaden the substance of a self-help book. Indeed, as self-help is continually evolving, it is interesting to see how self-help developers of the 20th and 21st centuries have managed to create new means to broaden the aim of self-help outside the literary genre. Besides writing new well-known works of self-help, their developers established those new methods with the aim of solving society's issues as well as possible.

As I mentioned earlier, the self-help movement appeared in the 1930s, established by the Alcoholics Anonymous group, the first self-help group ever created. Good Therapy, an American website where people can find support groups and get help, defines self-help groups as follows:

"Self-help groups are self-governing groups made up of individuals who share the same or a similar concern or issue. Members provide emotional support and advice to each other. Typically, membership is free or involves only a minimal fee or donation. The belief behind self-help groups is that the shared experience of group members is highly valuable in the promotion of understanding and healing." (GoodTherapy Team; 2016)

Initially created for people suffering from alcohol addiction, self-help groups quickly became popular and started being used to discuss other matters. People began to meet to discuss post-traumatic stress disorder, drug and smoking addiction, compulsive shopping and gambling, eating disorders, remission, loss and so on. Those group meetings aim to create a safe place for people to share their experiences, come together to help one another and get rid of the guilt, shame or sadness one might feel.

Besides the creation of those self-help groups, self-help also has developed under the form of lectures and open talks presented by motivational speakers or simply people wishing to share their experience. Those open talks usually take place in large rooms full of people, hosted by a person sharing their experience and method and providing motivational and emotional support to the audience. Most of these motivational lectures are recorded so they can reach as many people as possible. One of the most famous creators of motivational lectures is TED[14], an American media organisation founded in 1984. TED conferences discuss numerous matters like business, personal growth, child development and social change, to name but a few. The purpose of those open talks is to provide motivation and support to people so that they feel like they can achieve great things, similar to what a self-help book aims for. Consequently, motivational speakers made their appearance at the same time as motivational lectures. The majority of motivational speakers are authors of self-help books.

Also, self-help has been popularised by other media platforms: talk shows appeared, with the same aim as lectures and open talks, such as "The Self-Help Improvement Show with Dr. Irene Conlan", available on the Internet but also self-help podcasts (Orr, A.F.; 2021), such as "The Happiness Lab with Dr. Laurie Santos" and "Feel Better,

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14 – TED stands for "Technology, Entertainment, Design".

Live More with Dr.Chatterjee", self-help blogs like "Live Bold and Bloom", "The Happiness Project" or even self-help courses like "The Open Mind Center".

Self-help courses share similarities with another self-help medium: 'The School of Life', founded in London in 2008 by Alain de Botton and Sophie Howarth. This institution is depicted as "a global organisation devoted to teaching you how to lead a more fulfilled life". They offer courses via digital format like books, films, articles, online classes and online therapies discussing emotional well-being, healthy relationships, career paths, anxiety, confidence, friendship, etc. 'The School of Life' quickly became popular and started developing other schools in various parts of the world: Paris, Amsterdam, Berlin, Antwerp, Istanbul, Tel Aviv, Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Taipei, Seoul, Melbourne and Sydney. In 2019, they published a self-help book entitled *The School of Life: An Emotional Education*. On top of that, they have a YouTube channel and both an Instagram and a Twitter account to connect with their followers and guide them. Similar to the previous methods, 'The School of Life' was created to help people better themselves in various areas of their life.

Furthermore, people who wish to improve themselves or achieve great things can seek the help of life coaches, via an app or an actual person. Indeed, thanks to the development of new technologies and the appearance of new devices like smartphones and tablets for example, apps dealing with self-improvement were created. Most of them are free and discuss weight loss, fitness, meditation and so on. Seeking the services of a life coach is an alternative solution to self-improvement apps and seems to be really popular in western society. The aim of a life coach is to communicate with their clients so they can determine their needs and their goals.
Likewise, self-help guides and therapies have also been developed and offered to people wishing to heal and better themselves. These self-help guides are mostly free, available to download in PDF format through different platforms and organisations, such as the NHS website and MOODJUICE, although their website is no longer available. The latter offered self-guides for multiple issues: anger, chronic pain, anxiety, stress, PTSD, sleep problems, panic, obsessions and compulsions, shyness, depression and bereavement.

Although self-help has been around for thousands of years, stakeholders of the 21st century self-help culture have constantly been finding new ways to broaden and develop self-help's aim and meaning. Its ongoing development plays a major role within the publishing industry as it has impacted people's life since its creation. Consequently, as self-help has been deeply anchored into our day-to-day life for centuries, modern society has considered self-help as an answer to its numerous issues. However, claiming to provide solutions to health and social problems can attract numerous critiques, either positive or negative. As we are going to see in the next chapter, the subject of self-help continues to constitute a great interest for modern society as a potential solution to global issues, resulting in mixed reactions from the public.

ON THE NEED FOR SELF-HELP IN TODAY'S SOCIETY, ITS EFFECTIVENESS AND CRITICISM

Self-help has been around for centuries, coming in many shapes and sizes; consequently, its use and need in today's society can raise many questions on its actual effectiveness, therefore bringing both positive and negative critiques and opinions. In this chapter, I will focus on the 20th and the 21st centuries self-help culture and discuss several points. Indeed, I will try to understand and explain both the meaning and the need for self-help in today's society, what self-help means for people and what it may bring to modern society. I will also discuss its alleged effectiveness, the way it is perceived and greeted by professionals and people in general and the way it is addressed and conveyed. Finally, I will present both positive and negative aspects of self-help in today's society as a way to develop critical thinking. In order to do so, I will explain the need for modern self-help and the way it is delivered by firstly, trying to understand people's need for self-help and secondly, presenting the various approaches and methods of modern self-help and their meaning.

3. The need for modern self-help and the way it is delivered

In this first part, I will present and explain the need for self-help by going through the various reasons why people in modern society might feel the need to use self-help in all its forms and therefore, fathom why it has taken such a huge place in the world nowadays. Then, I will discuss the way modern self-help is delivered, the different approaches and methods used by self-help conveyers and consequently, how this may have an impact on people's need for self-help.

3.1. Understanding people's need for self-help

I will start this first sub-part by presenting the numerous motives that could explain why people might feel the need to use self-help, questioning their need and establishing how it is linked to modern society's "new" problems. In order to do so, I will base my argumentation on best-selling self-help books, articles and further studies on the subject.

The need for self-help comes from various and multiple intentions and aims; reasons some would consider shallow and others essential, with deeper meanings. Regardless of the type of need, all of them are generally linked to society and the way people live. These needs obviously imply an improvement, whatever it may be about, although sometimes they can lead to addiction.

3.1.1. Society's diktats and conformity

As the first chapter presented the origins and whole history of self-help books and culture through the centuries, it seemed fitting to start discussing the need for self-help concerning society's diktats and conformity. Indeed, the production of self-help books and other mediums is almost always a response to people's requests or society standards. As British author Joanna Cannon would say: "The need for acceptance is a basic human instinct – although some value it more than others. We all want to fit in, to belong." (Cannon, J.; 2016). Hence, feeling the need to conform to society's diktats and standards, wanting to belong to a certain group, seems to be part of human nature. Most of the self-help books published before the 20th and 21st centuries, such as conduct and courtesy books for example, were written as a response to people's requests on how to behave properly, how to give in to society's rules and guidelines. Likewise, the Bible or any other religious works can help individuals find their identity and therefore, help people know that they belong to a social group. As self-help books work as guides, it is quite understandable that some people might feel the need to embrace these guides and live their life according to their various advice.

Society's diktats vary a lot and are quite numerous, depending on society's main interests and of course, century. Beauty standards and the pursuit of perfection dictated by society have always been present; consequently, plenty of books, guides, blogs and so on, were created with the aim to help people fit into society such as conduct books for women of the 18th century. Best-seller *Dukan Diet* published in 2000 by Pierre Dukan is a self-help book on weight loss and it is an example of the modern self-help books written to serve these specific needs. Also, from the 21st century and especially social media, have emerged new expectations that can be a burden for the younger generation; the constant reminder of reaching milestones, victories, achievements and edited appearances can lead to the fear of being left aside and the fear of missing out or FOMO[1]. Furthermore, the pursuit of perfection and the need to be good at everything people set their minds on is a common tendency nowadays; it can be found in multiple self-help books and guides, on how

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1 – FOMO. In: Cambridge Dictionary [online]: "FOMO is an abbreviation for 'fear of missing out': a worried feeling that you may miss exciting events that other people are going to, especially caused by things you see on social media".

to be better at something or how to master such or such task, for instance. These concepts are deeply linked with self-help books and self-help in general as they deal with improvement and reaching goals dictated by society. They are one of the sources of people's need for self-help, and as a consequence self-help feeds from these social opinions and rules. Similarly, trends and social movements also share ties with the self-help culture as these aim at reaching goals and achieving personal ambitions and objectives.

3.1.2. Social movements and trends

Trends and social movements are quite similar to society's diktats as they are numerous and vary from centuries, decades and generations. Following trends and acting in accordance with social movements are also a part of human nature as, for some people, it means belonging to a social group, achieving goals and improving in order to adapt. Indeed, as humans, it is very common to seek endless improvement; it is a part of human evolution and our place in the world, and it is closely linked to adapting in order to survive and understanding the changes around us. Sonali Bendre states that "the point of human evolution is adapting to circumstance. Not letting go of the old, but adapting it, is necessary." As there is a need for constant evolution, adaptation, survival and improvement, it results in a need for people to seek and reach for these goals and there are plenty of self-help books on the matter, *Evolve Yourself: Conscious Personal Evolution* (1998) by Rich Rahn being one of them.

Similarly, trends and social movements such as self-acceptance and self-care also focus on the self and allow achieving personal and inner improvement; *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are* by Brené Brown (2010) or *The Self-Love Experiment: Fifteen Principles for Becoming More Kind, Compassionate and Accepting of Yourself* by Shannon Kaiser (2017) are two examples of the self-acceptance trend. This social movement focuses on the inside rather than on the physical aspect of things and people and it represents a need for society to feel better about itself internally and love itself. Similarly, the intention behind self-acceptance and endless improvement can also be found through spirituality.

Indeed, it appears that a lot of people are growing more and more interested in ancient beliefs and positive principles such as the Law of Attraction, positive psychology, manifesting, meditating and so on. Spirituality, although not a new concept and lifestyle, is becoming more and more popular, regardless of people's age and culture. Although certain dictionaries would describe spirituality as linked to religion as both share "belief, comfort, reflection, ethics and awe" (Delagran, L.; 2016), Louise Delagran from the University of Minnesota describes spirituality as follows:

> *"Spirituality is a broad concept with room for many perspectives. In general, it includes a sense of connection to something bigger than ourselves, and it typically involves a search for meaning in life. As such, it is a universal human experience – something that touches us all. People may describe a spiritual experience as sacred or transcendent or simply a deep sense of aliveness and interconnectedness."* (*ibid.*)

From spirituality have emerged concepts that can be associated with self-help, as these concepts are used to improve people's lifestyle and mindset, such as the Law of Attraction, manifesting, positive thinking and positive psychology, which I will explain in detail later on. As well as all of these concepts, the pursuit of happiness, mentioned in the *Declaration of Independence* of 1776, and fulfilment can also explain people's need for self-help, as it can be linked to social need. Once again, there is a need for people to feel better on the inside and as such, these concepts can be quite useful in order to cope with daily social struggles and everyday life.

3.1.3. Health reasons

As I will discuss later, professionals are growing interested in self-help as a tool to heal people or to help them improve their health; for people suffering from minor or major health issues, self-help seems to be worth the try. Society as a whole wishes to see a positive outcome when using self-help to improve its health and issues, hence the need for self-help dealing with health problems.

There are a multitude of health issues and although I will not discuss all of them or go into too many details, there are many works of self-help dealing with anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder, eating disorder, grief, post-traumatic stress disorder, sleep issues and anger issues, such as *The Cognitive Behavioral Workbook for*

Depression: A Step-by-Step Program (2006) by William J. Knaus and *Overcoming Grief* (2008) by Sue Morris, to name but a few. As mentioned earlier, there are also guides to help with these types of issues such as the MOODJUICE guides available on the NHS website. Similarly, self-help apps are growing more and more popular to help people deal with stress, anxiety, insomnia, and so on. As I will discuss later, self-help has been an interesting and attractive medium for the scientific and medical fields in order to develop programs aiming at improving people's health issues and life in general.

As there are multiple self-help platforms, books and mediums to improve a problem or to heal, purchasing a self-help book or downloading a self-help app on the matter can be related to the fact that people might want to keep their problems to themselves or do not have enough money to pay for therapy and medication. In *Oracle at the Supermarket: The American Preoccupation with Self-Help Books* (1989), Steven Starker, an American psychology professor and author, points out four reasons why people might feel the need to buy works of self-help: cost, accessibility, privacy and excitement (1989: 5). Indeed, buying self-help books can, for some people, seem like the only solution to their issues, or the easy way out, as a self-help book or guide is cheaper than going to therapy. The lack of trust and reliance to discuss personal and private matters as a result of fear and vulnerability is also very important to acknowledge; purchasing works of self-help allows a person not to confide in a professional or a friend but rather trust a self-help book to heal, a more reliable solution for some people. Indeed, there is an intense and important need for them to heal, cure their issues and improve their health. However, in some cases, consuming too many works of self-help can lead to undesirable effects, such as addiction.

3.1.4. Self-help addiction

The Merriam-Webster dictionary defines addiction as follows:

> *"a compulsive, chronic, physiological or psychological need for a habit-forming substance, behavior, or activity having harmful physical, psychological, or social effects and typically causing well-defined symptoms (such as anxiety, irritability, tremors, or nausea) upon withdrawal or abstinence: the state of being addicted."*

People can become addicted to a number of things and as a consequence, it can deeply affect their mental health and life in general. The need for self-help books can result in an addiction for certain people; ironically, their initial need for self-help might be associated with trends, health reasons, society's diktats which encourage them fall into a vicious circle. Indeed, the causes can come from the fact that they are always seeking improvement and cannot seem to reach it, or they can simply be obsessed with works of self-help and think they are buying them out of deep interest, love almost.

Peter Shallard, owner of the blog 'The Shrink for Entrepreneurs', wrote an article on self-help addiction, entitled "Why Self-Help Can Become an Addictive Trap". Here is what he thinks can cause self-help addiction:

> *"Getting hooked on growth makes you an addict. [...] Growth in general is great, but when you have a few major breakthroughs with the help of one particular guru or philosophy you start to become an addict. [...] The way it happens is simple: initially the breakthroughs feel so great that you want to keep coming back for more. Again and again."* (Shallard, P.; 2013)

Indeed, the need for self-help can sometimes become too much and suffocating, especially if a person believes that only works of self-help will resolve all of their issues and does not seek the self-help books designed for their needs or does not seek the help of a medical professional. Consequently, this attitude leads to an endless acquisition of self-help mediums to improve or heal. As such, self-help addiction is the result of always wanting to achieve goals, whatever they may be about, and never reaching perfection.

As seen, there are various occurrences causing the need for self-help and different profiles feeling these multiple needs; as such, each of these needs is met with different methods and approaches, expanding the possibilities of self-help and allowing people to deal with their issues with the means that fit them best.

3.2. The various approaches and methods of modern self-help

As 'self-help' is quite a broad term that touches on several subjects and aspects, different approaches and methods to deliver self-help matters were created. Here, I will focus on explaining the way modern self-help is delivered to people and the reason why those different approaches might be relevant to understand people's need for self-help. In doing so, I will discuss positive psychology, positive thinking, the Law of Attraction, meditation, manifesting and negative self-help in details and base my argumentation on articles, definitions and a study, that I will briefly present.

3.2.1. Positive psychology: a new approach for self-help

Psychology Today, an American magazine discussing psychology and human behaviour, describes 'positive psychology' as follows: "Positive psychology is a branch of psychology focused on the character strengths and behaviours that allow individuals to build a life of meaning and purpose – to move beyond surviving to flourishing." Positive psychology focuses on the positive side of things and is presented as an optimistic approach; it concentrates on strengths rather than weaknesses, on the positive rather than the negative. As its aim is to improve an individual's quality of life, it is widely used in works of self-help, including for instance *Meaning in Positive and Existential Psychology* (2014) by Alexander Batthyany and Pninit Russo-Netzer.

The term 'positive psychology' was first coined by American psychologist Abraham Harold Maslow in 1968; he was the first to refer to his work as 'positive psychology'. Since then, his work on positive psychology as well as his methods have influenced numerous psychologists, scientists and people around the globe. Throughout his life, Maslow developed various works, methods and theories, all of which based on positive and humanistic psychology; his best-known theory is *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*, first created in 1943. His motivational theory takes the form of a five-level pyramid, depicting various human needs, going from the most basic to the most specific: physiological needs, safety needs, belongingness and love needs, esteem needs and

self-actualisation (Dr. McLeod, S.; 2020). Alongside his theories and methods, he also published several works such as "A Theory of Human Motivation", originally published in *Psychological Review* in 1943 and *Motivation and Personality* (1954).

In the 1990s, American psychologist, educator and author Martin E. P. Seligman, influenced by Maslow's work, became one of the leaders of the positive psychology movement which focuses on higher human nature and embraces the positive side of things; nowadays Seligman is considered as one of the pioneers of positive psychology. He published numerous works on positive psychology and self-help, such as *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (1991) and *Character Strengths and Virtues* (2004), a book he wrote alongside Christopher Peterson, created to counter the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (1952) that focuses on the negative side of things, by presenting a positive and optimistic approach to mental disorders. In 2003, he founded the Master of Applied Positive Psychology, or MAPP, an educational program, available at the University of Pennsylvania; it is the first educational initiative of the Positive Psychology Centre, created to promote research, training, education and the dissemination of positive psychology.

In an article entitled "What is Positive Psychology and Why is It Important?", available on the website *PositivePsychology.com*, author and Master's graduate Courtney E. Ackerman discusses the importance of this approach as well as its alleged benefits, based on several studies. She explains that "positive psychology teaches how to harness the power of shifting one's perspective to maximize the potential for happiness in many of our everyday behaviours". She also introduces the PERMA model, a concept created by Seligman, which stands for "positive emotions", "engagement", "(positive) relationships", "meaning" and "accomplishment/achievement" (E. Ackerman, C.; 2020). According to Courtney E. Ackerman, this model is supposed to provide a "comprehensive framework for understanding wellbeing as well as a foundation for improving wellbeing". While she acknowledges some downsides of positive psychology, she states that this concept has "a huge potential for improving the lives of people around the world, and many impactful findings have already been discovered" which implies the positive influence of this approach.

Besides, further research and studies have been conducted on the subject of positive psychology within self-help books. Indeed, in his study entitled "Do self-help books help?" (2008), Ad Bergsma, a Dutch psychologist and author, discusses the effectiveness of self-help books and positive psychology, and more precisely the way this approach is used in works of self-help. In his research, he analyses 57 best-selling psychology books on positive psychology; this already shows that positive psychology is widely used in works of self-help. The themes of the positive psychology-based self-help books of the analysis are as follows: personal growth, personal relations, coping with stress and identity. Ad Bergsma states that "self-help books may be the most important – although not the most reliable – channel through which psychological insights find their way to the general audience" (2008: 341). This suggests that self-help books are one of the best, if not the best, mediums to convey and deliver psychological concepts and theories as positive psychology and self-help share the same aim; as such, the positive psychology movement of the last decades has helped make this approach popular.

3.2.2. Pseudoscience, positive attitude and spirituality

While positive psychology is one of the most popular approach used in self-help books and self-help in general, there are other methods used in the self-help culture that are quite similar to this first approach: positive thinking, the Law of Attraction, the art of manifesting and the practice of meditation. Unlike positive psychology, these approaches are referred to as pseudoscience and mindsets and are related to religion and spirituality.

Positive thinking, a positive mindset and attitude, is closely related to the past approach. American author, motivational coach, speaker and philanthropist Tony Robbins describes positive thinking as follows:

> *"an emotional and mental attitude that focuses on the good and expects results that will benefit you. It's about anticipating happiness, health and success – essentially, training yourself to adopt an abundance mindset and cultivate gratitude for your own successes and those of others."* (Robbins, T.; 2021)

This approach used in the self-help culture focuses on optimism at any given moment, although it does not mean ignoring the reality of things and issues. In a recent article, James Clear states that "positive thinking is about much more than just being happy or displaying an upbeat attitude" (Clear, J.; 2021) and that it could develop benefits in the long run. Similar to positive psychology, positive thinking is widely used in modern self-help books; the best-known self-help books discussing positive thinking are *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952) by Norman Vincent Peale, *Learned Optimism: How to Change Your Mind and Your Life* (1991) by Martin E. P. Seligman and *As a Man Thinketh* (1903) by James Allen. The popularity of these best-selling self-help books shows people's demand for and response to positive thinking-based literature.

The Law of Attraction very similar to both positive thinking and positive psychology. It is described as "a pseudoscience based on the belief that positive or negative thoughts bring positive or negative experiences into a person's life" (*Wikipedia, The Free Encylopedia*; 2021) and is used in works of self-help. The Law of Attraction is, in other words, based on the belief that thoughts convey energy, meaning that a positive attitude attracts positive energy while negative thinking attracts negative energy. This approach is linked to the New Thought philosophy or movement, also referred to as Higher Thought and is, according to the writers of *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "a mind-healing movement that originated in the United States in the 19th century, based on religious and metaphysical presuppositions" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 2018). This concept became popular thanks to two best-selling self-help books, *You Can Heal Your Life* by Louise Hay, published in 1984 and *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne, published in 2006. Although a well-known approach used in self-help books and everyday life, it lacks scientific evidence and is therefore referred to as a pseudoscience. This spiritual concept is however widely used in self-help books due to trendy movements, popularity, a wish to live a simpler life, and growing interest in spirituality rather than religion and manifesting.

The act of manifesting is quite similar to the Law of Attraction as there is no actual evidence and proof of its effectiveness; it is however growing more and more popular and therefore used in self-help. On the *Lawofattraction.com*'s website, manifesting is described as follows: "whatever you focus on is what you are bringing into your

reality. You may focus and manifest through meditation, visualisation or just via your conscious or subconscious" (Hurst K.; 2020). It consists of energy and vibration and being able to connect to those elements; it has grown very popular over the last few years, particularly thanks to social media. The best-known self-help books discussing manifesting are *Ask and It Is Given* (2004) by Esther Hicks and Jerry Hicks and *Super Attractor: Methods for Manifesting a Life Beyond Your Wildest Dreams* (2019) by Gabrielle Bernstein.

Finally, meditation is slightly different than the previous methods as it is a practice used in various religious traditions, especially Hinduism and Buddhism. In an article on meditation, Kendra Cherry describes meditation as follows:

> *"a set of techniques that are intended to encourage a heightened state of awareness and focused attention. Meditation is also a consciousness – changing technique that has been shown to have a wide number of benefits on psychological well-being."* (Cherry, K.; 2020)

The reason why this practice is used in works of self-help is because it shares a few similarities with self-help: according to Kendra Cherry, practicing meditation in the long run can be quite beneficial. Indeed, she writes that practicing meditation:

> *"help you deal with stress, [...] help with symptoms of anxiety and depression, [...] improve self-awareness, [...] help you feel more empathy for yourself and others, [...] improve immunity, [...] improve mindfulness"* (*ibid.*)

There are a few self-help books based on meditation: *The Miracle of Mindfulness* (1975) by Thich Nhat Hanh and *Get Some Headspace: 10 Minutes Can Make All the Difference* (2011) by Andy Puddicombe, to name but a few.

Each of these methods and approaches used in self-help focuses on positive thoughts in order to achieve goals and peace. While they are widely used in the self-help culture, more importantly in works of self-help, their effectiveness has yet to be proved; indeed, one should believe in these approaches rather than search for actual proof of their effectiveness. Unfortunately, the popularity of such methods and the popularity of self-help as a whole can have consequences.

3.2.3. Negative self-help

As implied by the name, negative self-help is opposed to positive self-help, which are the methods previously presented; indeed, this new approach is quite different. According to American self-help author and blogger Mark Manson, positive self-help created an "obsession with our 'self'"; he believes that "negative self-help" is more effective than its counterpart. Indeed, on his blog 'Mark Manson – Life Advice That Doesn't Suck', he describes negative self-help as "an approach to personal growth based not on what feels good, but rather on what feels bad. Because getting good at feeling bad is what allows us to feel good" (Manson, M.; 2021). Manson believes that understanding and accepting the fact that "there's no end to the pain" will eventually lead to positive emotions and a more realistic view on life. Quite naturally, Mark Manson himself has written a few self-help books discussing negative self-help, including *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck* (2016) and *Everything Is F*cked* (2019). Negative self-help can be seen as some type of reversed positive self-help and can resonate positively in the ears of people who are against or irritated by positive self-help; negative self-help might suit realistic and pragmatic people better.

Negative self-help may also be connected to the Chinese Yin and Yang concept of dualism, as it means that "all things exist as inseparable and contradictory opposites" (Cartwright, M.; 2018). As happiness is the opposite of sadness, it means that in order to feel happiness, we must feel sadness and vice-versa: one cannot exist without the other.

Offering different approaches is a clever way to reach as many people as possible, as every person is their own individual. However, the alleged effectiveness of the methods and approaches used in self-help is worth questioning.

4. Self-help: a solution to today's society problems?

In this part, I will focus on the effectiveness of self-help books and self-help as a whole by discussing self-help as an alleged answer to society and people's issues. I will also discuss self-help conveyers and explain their importance for the effectiveness of self-help.

4.1. The effectiveness of self-help

As self-help promises improvement and help, regardless of the matter, it seems only natural to question its effectiveness in order to determine whether or not it can be trusted and useful. A multitude of articles discuss this matter often offering mixed reviews such as Nick Duerden's *Independent* article "The modern fix: Do self-help books really work?" (2012). The conclusion is almost always the same: while some people state that self-help is helpful and others believe that self-help is useless, there is no actual and scientific evidence of its effectiveness, although one particular type of books and approach seems to offer promising results. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind that self-help is very subjective and personal, allowing different conclusions and opinions depending on people's experiences.

Ad Bergsma's study "Do self-help books work?" offers solid material as a foundation for my reflection. He focuses his study on the effectiveness of self-help books with a psychological approach in the Netherlands, his motherland. While he warns potential self-help books readers about the negative effects of self-help, supported by psychologists and professionals' expertise, he seems to be keen on self-help and suggests positive results. Before sharing his reflection, he assures that "we were not able to find any studies that empirically investigated the effectiveness of the best-selling self-help books in the Netherlands" (2008: 349), therefore meaning that no one can be absolutely sure whether self-help books really help or not.

Bergsma states that "'one-size fits all'" (2008: 350) self-help books are most unlikely to work, as well as optimism-oriented self-help books for anxious readers: "the recommendation to look at the bright side is counterproductive for people who are very anxious" (2008: 350). Also, the negative consequences of self-help can sometimes be severe: Bergsma states that "failure to benefit from a self-help book may lead to self-blame and/or the worsening of symptoms" (2008: 351), supported by Rosen's "Self-help treatment books and the commercialisation of psychotherapy" (1987). Later on in his study, he also explains that in some cases, the consequences can be dangerous: for example, if the reader tries to 'cure' their serious issue by seeking help from a self-help book, without the support and guidance of a professional. Throughout his reflection, Bergsma repeatedly advises self-help consumers about

the importance of seeking professional help and guidance and also warns them about the danger of self-diagnosis and treatments.

However, it has been empirically proved that "reading problem-focused self-help materials can be effective in the treatment of disorders, and even have outcomes comparable to therapist administered treatments" (2008: 350), suggesting here that reading a self-help book in relation to a specific issue one might suffer from, or using a self-help treatment, is likely to work and help; self-help treatments were effective for anxiety, depression, mild alcohol abuse, headaches, insomnia and sexual dysfunction according to Mains and Scogin's "The effectiveness of self-administered treatments: A practice-friendly review of the research" (2003), Marrs' "A meta-analysis of bibliotherapy studies" (1995) and Gould and Clum's "A meta-analysis of self-help treatment approaches" (1993). Bergsma provides further evidence of the effectiveness of self-help by referring to the *Authoritative guide to self-help resources in mental health*, a collaborative work published in 2000 which gathers "reviews and ratings of more than a thousand American clinicians about 600 self-help books for different categories". According to Bergsma, the reviews and ratings are predominantly positive as "nineteen percent of the books are considered very helpful and one percent is rated negative" (2008: 352), suggesting the effectiveness of these books. Furthermore, the Dutch psychologist mentions a survey about self-help books conducted on 67 volunteer hospital workers in order to have their views and professional opinions on the effectiveness of certain works of self-help; 85% considered the books "sometimes helpful" or "often helpful", which again, gives quite an optimistic and positive view on self-help.

Overall, Ad Bergsma's study leads us to believe that self-help books and self-help in general can work; however, there are a few specific conditions. While Bergsma states that reading problem-oriented self-help books is likely to be effective, seeking professional help and guidance should be a priority and essential, in order to avoid a mild or dangerous negative outcome; it is important to be cautious about self-help books and stay away from self-diagnosis. Although we still cannot be certain of the effectiveness of self-help books, Ad Bergsma's study implies that such books can bring benefits.

4.2. Self-help as a way to improve and fight people's issues

Self-help is a complex and delicate subject. People who believe in self-help and self-help books are convinced they benefit self-help consumers; those benefits can however be seen as doubtful. Likewise, many have been interested in self-help for scientific purposes: could self-help be useful to treat people's health and social problems? This will be the subject of this sub-part. Firstly, I will go through the alleged benefits of self-help found in articles and secondly, I will discuss various self-help-based studies on health and social issues as a way to expand and broaden each person's critical thinking regarding self-help.

4.2.1. The alleged benefits of self-help

While there is no actual evidence of the effectiveness of self-help books and self-help in general, various articles state the alleged benefits of self-help. In the three articles selected, "Benefits of Self-Help" by *MentalHelp.net: An American Addiction Centers Resource*, "What is Self-Care and Why is Self-Care Important?" available on *TheLawofAttraction*'s website and "The Biggest Benefits of Reading Self-Improvement/Self-Help Books" written by the WMP team, a couple of possible benefits stand out.

Indeed, the writers of these articles state that self-help is beneficial for our day-to-day life. It is supposed that self-help boosts productivity, empowers, motivates and inspires people. On top of that, Katherine Hurst writes that self-help is an ally for our immune system, stating that "there is evidence that most self-care activities activate your parasympathetic nervous system (PNS)". Overall, self-help is said to help our physical health as well as our mental health. Similarly, the writers imply that self-help is also beneficial for people's self-esteem as self-care means taking care of oneself, therefore improving one's opinion of themself and boosting their ego. As well as enhancing people's self-esteem, Katherine Hurst states that self-help increases self-knowledge, helps people become better versions of themselves and wiser; as it focuses on the self, it helps learning more about one's interests. The WMP team writes that self-help expands people's way of thinking, encouraging new adventures and unleashing possibilities, which connects with self-help making people wiser and motivating them. The final important benefit is that self-help is said to allow people to give more to other people as it helps with feeling fulfilled;

it makes people become more available for others in order to help them and it also helps with communicating skills. The minor possible benefits of self-help are as follows: the writers state that self-help is available and inexpensive, that it allows privacy, works as a time saver and offers customised plans in order to adapt to each person and issue.

While these alleged benefits can only be supposed and assumed, some might be supported by professional statements. The popularity of self-help and the awareness of these alleged benefits have drawn the attention of the scientific and medical fields and have allowed them to work on the possibility of using self-help to improve and fight people's health and social issues.

4.2.2. Self-help to fight, improve or reduce health and social issues

This sub-part will focus on various self-help-based studies on anxiety and drug addiction. In order to do so, I will present these studies and discuss the results of each one. Consequently, these scientific studies as well as their results will back my argumentation as there are still few scientific materials on self-help books, their effects and self-help in general.

RESEARCH 1 – *Telepsychology and Self-Help: The Treatment of Fear of Public Speaking*

The first research I will present is *Telepsychology and Self-Help: The Treatment of Fear of Public Speaking*, carried out in 2008 by a Spanish research team: Cristina Botella, Veronica Guillen, Azucena García-Palacios, Maria J. Gallego, Rosa M. Banos and Mariano Alcaniz. This research is a self-help Internet-based telepsychology program for the treatment of fear of public speaking; the program is called "Talk to Me". Professionals describe social phobia as "one of the most prevalent mental disorders" and "the most feared situation among the general population" (2007: 46); social phobia includes fear of speaking, eating and writing and is also linked to anxiety disorders. As people who struggle with social phobia tend not to reach for help, there is very little treatment for this type of fear. Therefore, the aims of this research were "to design new, more-cost effective methods of treatment delivery" and "to shorten the face-to-face contact with the therapist without reducing the effectiveness of the treatment" (2008: 46).

The treatment was conducted on 12 participants, all women from 19 to 29 years old; they were asked if they wished to be treated. Before starting the treatment, 8.33% were diagnosed with generalised social phobia, 66.66% with nongeneralized phobia and 25% with specific social phobia; the main phobia was fear of public speaking, especially regarding the education system. Each of them was assessed by a psychologist and the program; on top of that, participants also had three more assessments programmed: the first one pre-treatment, the second one post-treatment and the final one, at one-month follow-up. All participants were asked to do a diagnostic interview and pass four questionnaires.

"Talk to Me", the self-help treatment program is Internet-based and "designed to guide the patient through the therapeutic process" (2008: 50); it protects and guides each participant and also adjusts to each person. The program is divided into four different scenarios in which each person has to deal with a public speaking situation. In addition to the treatment, patients were advised to "do exposure" (2008: 52) on a daily basis in order for them to feel less anxious and overwhelmed. Also, it was possible for the program supervisors to assist participants if they felt depressed during the course of the treatment.

The results showed quite a significant contrast between the beginning and end of the treatment. Each participant seemed to avoid certain triggering situations less and improved at post-test; these promising results were maintained a month later. At one-month follow-up, generalised social phobia 'disappeared' and nongeneralized social phobia was less significant. On the contrary, specific social phobia rose. Regarding the self-help evaluation, participants rated the utility of the treatment at 7.8 on a scale from 0 to 10 (2008: 54).

During and after the treatment, researchers came up with some observations; they acknowledged the danger of the Internet and guaranteed that all data was protected and only accessible to researchers. They made sure to state that assistance and advice regarding the self-help treatment were always available and that it was also possible for the participants to use emails and chats in order to check on them and for them to feel somewhat reassured.

The treatment showed positive effects on the participants. The researchers stated that "the telepsychology program helped the sample improve their social phobia or at least decrease the severity of it" and that all participants relied more on their self-efficacy in order to deal with stressful situations. They suggested that such self-help programs need to be well and sufficiently tested before being delivered to a higher amount of people. As a whole, the self-help treatment showed that it was less time consuming, allowed a high degree of confidentiality and scheduling flexibility, reached a great amount of people and reduced travel time (2008: 55).

RESEARCH 2 – *Effectiveness of self-help programs in drug addiction therapy*

The next research I will discuss is *Effectiveness of self-help programs in drug addiction therapy*; this aimed to provide evidence of the effectiveness of the 12-step programs followed by alcoholics and narcotic addicts and "examine whether the use of self-help groups after addiction treatment is associated with higher rates of abstinence". This research was conducted in 2006 in Norway by John-Kåre Vederhus and Øistein Kristensen.

The '12-step program', also referred to as 'the twelve steps', was created by Alcoholics Anonymous, which we previously discussed in the first chapter. This program is described as "the spiritual foundation for personal recovery from the effects of alcoholism, not only for alcoholics but also for their friends and family in Al-Anon Family Groups" (Buddy, T.; 2020). In this research, the 12-step program and self-help groups were examined in order to determine their effectiveness.

The research was conducted on 114 participants, men and women, over 25, who were all diagnosed by a psychiatrist: 59 were diagnosed with alcohol dependency and 55 were diagnosed with multiple drug dependency (2006: 1). Out of 114, 6 passed away. When some of the participants agreed to join self-help groups, they completed the National Client Form for Addiction Treatment, a questionnaire that collects "socio-demographics, physical and psychological health and substance use" (2006: 2) information.

The results of the research showed that "38% still participated in self-help programs two years after treatment" and "two years after starting in the self-help groups, 43 patients (58%) still participated regularly (at least once a month)" (2006: 3). Overall, it was found that participants who participated regularly in the self-help groups had a higher chance to stay sober. In view of this research and its overall positive and promising results, the authors conclude that "health workers therefore ought to recommend their patients to participate in self-help groups as a part of their rehabilitation" (2006: 6).

It is important to state that while the promising effectiveness of self-help books is still unproven and debatable, self-help programs are likely to be effective, which is a positive outcome for self-help in general. However, despite their apparent success and positive impacts, self-help programs still have a lot to prove to the public and to professionals. Also, it is interesting to question whether the pertinence of self-help is linked to its capability by focusing on self-help conveyers and the relevance of their works.

4.3. Self-help conveyers and their relevance

This next sub-part will focus on the relevance of self-help conveyers, questioning the content of their work and how it is related to their effectiveness. As previously seen, self-help conveyers come in all shapes and sizes: there are motivational authors, coaches and speakers as well as medical professionals of all sorts, psychologists, psychiatrists, doctors, paediatricians, etc. In an article entitled "A Guide to Writing Self-Help", *NY Book Editors*' bloggers advise that:

> *"to write a self-help book, you do need to have experience, whether it's professional or personal. While anyone can write a self-help book on any subject they choose, if you want yours to be successful, you need to back it up with life experience at the very least. And a lot of research."* (*NY Book Editors*' bloggers; 2018)

As anyone can write a self-help book, it is interesting to question the effectiveness and the reliability of those written by random authors.

If we take a look at the list of bestselling self-help books of the 20th and 21st centuries established by the American magazine *Parade* in 2017 that we previously discussed, out of ten self-help authors, only one, Spencer Johnson, author of *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998), holds a psychology degree and a medical degree. All the other authors are either speakers, coaches, businessmen and businesswomen, trainers, lecturers, etc. Likewise, in 2018, Morgan Wild, who wrote a dissertation entitled *Preferences of Self-Help Books and Their Presumed Credibility in the College Population* at the Murray State University in Kentucky. Her work aimed at investigating the credibility of self-help and self-help books with the help of professionals and college students. According to her research on self-help books, "within the current Amazon best seller list, only two self-help books are written by mental health professionals" (2018: 12). This suggests that self-help book readers would rather buy a popular self-help book than a self-help book written by a medical professional; the writer's background or profession does not truly matter, only the public response regarding the work does. However, as seen with the previous research results, psychology-based self-help books are more likely to be effective; only medical professionals trained in psychology can write psychology-based self-help books. Then, do medical professionals deserve more credit for their self-help works?

In a *Psychology Today* article entitled "Five Things You Need to Know About Self-Help Books" (2012), Dr. Susan Krauss Whitbourne provides a five-step guide on how to choose self-help books. The first recommendation she gives is "to check out the author's credentials" as according to her, one should "look for authors with doctorates in psychology or related fields" as their content is the most relevant, effective and helpful. This implies that professionals indeed deserve more credit than random self-help authors. She also adds that "many of the people who include their names on a self-help book didn't actually write 100% of its content", therefore tarnishing non-professional self-help authors and their content. She further warns that "experts may also have been experts at one time but have since lost currency with the most recent research", suggesting that it is best for the self-help book reader to know if the author, professional or not, is up to date with their research and consequently, advice. She then advises to "think of the book as your therapist", saying that the content of a good self-help book should be similar to a good therapy. This suggests that only a psychologist or other mental health professional is qualified to write

an effective self-help book, once again praising the relevance of professionals. The third recommendation she offers is to "look critically at the quality of the writing" which resonates with the previous advice: a good self-help book, in order to be well-written, should include relevant and reliable research and competent explanation. To that she adds that through self-help books, "you want to learn something that you didn't already know, and the chances are that you'll learn more from people who have gained respectability in their field" meaning once again that it is better for the book if the writer is competent and up to date on the subject.

These articles, along with previous studies, show that the author's occupation and work method have an impact on the work's relevance and effectiveness. However, it seems that the popularity of the book or the author will most of the time prevail over its content and consequently its relevance and effectiveness. Therefore, while self-help books written by medical professionals are more likely to be effective, it does not mean they will receive more credit for their work than random self-help book authors. This observation plays a major role in the way self-help is perceived and the different opinions, negative and positive, regarding the self-help industry and culture.

5. Public opinion: different points of view regarding the self-help culture

This last part will explore the public opinion regarding self-help books and the self-help culture, collecting the different opinions, both positive and negative, of professionals and people in general. This part aims to delve into the various opinions and critiques in order to have a better understanding of self-help. Also, it will help us understand the way these critiques can influence the self-help industry. Therefore, it is important to wonder why self-help generates both negative and positive critiques and which side is more prominent. I will focus on positive feedback before diving into negative critiques.

5.1. Positive feedback

As with so much else in life, self-help generates both positive and negative criticism; positive opinions will be the main focus of this sub-part. The alleged benefits previously discussed constitute a positive result for self-help, and so does the

effectiveness of some self-help programs and treatments. In the same dissertation written by Morgan Wild, the author shares some more positive criticism towards self-help.

In this study, Wild presents both positive and negative feedback regarding self-help; I will only focus on positive critiques in this part. Wild starts by discussing the beneficial collaboration between self-help books and treatments with medical professionals, and the way self-help books are being more and more used as support and assistance during treatments: "in 2000, 85% of psychotherapists reported regularly recommending self-help books during treatment, 82% recommended self-help groups" (2018: 1). The fact that some professionals are actively recommending self-help to patients shows self-help as being beneficial and helpful.

She then discusses the American Psychological Association's[2] views on self-help. According to Wild, APA "identified four overarching advantages for general self-help programs" (2018: 4): accessibility, cost effective, autonomy and education. The American Psychological Association's Task Force on Self-Help Therapies considers that self-help treatments have the advantage to reach numerous individuals with different issues, have shown to be cost effective, help decrease reliance on professionals and increase the patient's autonomy and provide prevention knowledge. Wild also lists the advantages of self-help books within the industry, supported by Norcross, Bergsma and Lohse and Spiller's studies (2018: 4); most self-help books are cheap and easily accessible, they also allow privacy and can be used before, during and after treatments with professionals, whether these treatments failed or not.

Furthermore, Wild discusses the many positive outcomes of self-help treatments, "outcomes comparable to therapist-administered psychological treatment" (2018: 7). She particularly stresses the effectiveness of self-help for depression and anxiety: "the effectiveness of self-help treatments for depression and anxiety disorders have been found to be a cost-effective and convenient alternative to professional psychology (Redding, Hebert, Forman & Gaudiano, 2008)" (2018: 8-9). This means that self-help treatments are increasingly showing and securing their effectiveness and reliability

2 – Also referred as APA, the American Psychological Association is "the leading scientific and pro-fessional organization representing psychology in the United States".

over the years, improving the popularity and reputation of the self-help industry. While these positive opinions might seem encouraging, there is a significant amount of negative criticism regarding self-help, disputing its effectiveness and reliability.

5.2. Negative critiques

Indeed, self-help has been at the receiving end of negative critiques for decades. This can be verified simply by searching for critiques regarding self-help on the Internet; the results are predominantly negative critiques, showing a generally negative opinion of self-help.

In the same dissertation written by Morgan Wild regarding self-help, negative critiques made towards self-help can also be found. The first criticism she discusses regards the "one size fits all" (2018: 11) approach mentioned by Ad Bergsma in his study "Do self-help books work?", previously discussed. Indeed, there is a lack of individuality and problem-focused books which is an overall negative trait for self-help. Likewise, there is a lack of assistance and professional backup in most self-help books. The therapeutic relationship seems rather absent, which according to American psychology professor Bruce Wampold's observation she uses, "must be established for change to occur" (2018: 11). Consequently, this can reduce effectiveness. Wild also states that professionals noticed a worsening of symptoms caused by 'do it yourself' techniques as "many self-help books may over pathologize emotional experiences" (2018: 12). Ad Bergsma raises a similar argument in his own research; he uses Csikszentmihalyi's statement that "self-help books will not help most readers to be thin, powerful, rich and loved; and even if they succeed the readers will still be as unhappy as before they read the book" (2008: 349). Also, in a GQ article entitled "Why Self-Help Might Actually Be Making You Less Happy" (2018), Danish psychologist Svend Brinkmann discusses the way self-help tends to pathologize emotions and mental health issues, which can be unhealthy.

Furthermore, Wild discusses the problem of self-help books' titles and how "exaggerated and persuasive" (2018: 12) they can be. She uses American professor Rosen's argument that "such titles contain exaggerated claims and promise effectiveness without explaining the limitations of the self-administered treatment"

(2018: 12). Indeed, such titles, sometimes provocative, can attract the reader and promise positive results. She then presents a major criticism regarding self-help books which is linked to the content of these books, or the lack thereof. Indeed, she states that "the majority of published self-help books [95%] have never been empirically evaluated congruent with the current literature" (2018: 13), consequently influencing their effectiveness. Likewise, the lack of "the three-component evidence-based practice framework developed by the American Psychological Association [...] within self-help books risks maintaining a comprehensive treatment approach" (2018: 13). This can arguably lead to the worsening of symptoms and dangerous self-diagnosis.

In his study "Do self-help books work?", Bergsma also discusses the outdated advice offered by self-help books, using American science journalist Annie Murphy Paul's article "Self-Help: Shattering the Myths" (2001). In this article, she presents five common self-help myths: "vent your anger, and it'll go away", "when you're down in the dumps, think yourself happy by focusing on the positive", "visualize your goal, and you'll help make it come true", "self-affirmations will help you rinse low self-esteem" and "'active listening' can help you communicate better with your partner" (2008: 349). She contradicts each myth by using research results conducted by psychologists and other medical professionals. This suggests that self-help books present false information and advice and therefore, constitutes a negative critique.

In the same GQ article previously mentioned, Danish psychologist Svend Brinkmann discusses self-optimisation linked to self-help and states that it is "a process without end". This implies that self-help represents a never-ending circle of wanting to fix something and constantly looking for improvement, quite similar to addiction. This never-ending circle however can be beneficial for the self-help industry net worth and business situation.

Finally, in his article "Why the Self-Help Industry Is Dominating the U.S." (2019), Marshall Sinclair argues that the term 'self-help' is quite ridiculous. Indeed, he states that "If you're looking for self-help, why would you read a book written by

somebody else? That's not self-help. That's help! There's no such thing as self-help. If you did it yourself, you didn't need help." This criticism is in fact quite common; for some people, 'self-help' is not the appropriate term to refer to such books or such a movement as the consumer has to rely on someone else for help.

These positive and negative opinions regarding self-help show us a few things. On one hand, the most common positive aspects of self-help are the alleged benefits in the everyday life and the few effective self-help programs, allowing struggling people to hope for a better life. On the other hand, negative criticism regarding self-help is mainly based on the lack of expertise, research and individuality and the abundance of outdated and generalised advice.

As we have seen throughout this chapter, self-help is deeply anchored in society and is not likely to stop growing in the near future. The various approaches used in self-help and the way people live play a major role in the way self-help is still growing and attracting people. Besides, the possible effectiveness of some self-help programs and certain self-help books and mediums secures a promising future for self-help. However, some, who think of self-help as fraudulent and dishonest, might see the self-help industry as opportunistic, its goal being to make as much money as possible.

SELF-HELP: A BUSINESS EMPIRE

Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, self-help stakeholders have developed and offered countless methods and approaches in order to attract as many people as possible, consequently leading to the creation of a business empire and a cultural phenomenon. In the first two chapters, I have focused on the historical background of self-help as well as on modern society's need for self-help; in this last chapter, the aim is to discuss the business side to self-help. That is to say, explain how this specific market has become as successful as it is today. Throughout this chapter, my focus will be placed upon the U.S. self-help market; firstly, because statistics, regarding net worth, readers, authors, downloads and predictions, are predominantly based on the American market and secondly, because this country, as I will discuss later, has played a major role in the rise of self-help. Worldwide statistics will however be briefly discussed.

To begin with, I will give a socio-economic overview of the self-help industry, reviewing statistics and the impact of COVID-19 on this industry. Then, I will present and explain the factors that led to the creation of a commercial phenomenon, discussing the importance of the Western influence on self-help. Finally, I will focus on the way self-help is promoted, going through the various marketing strategies used by self-help stakeholders, as a way to explain its rise to power.

6. Understanding the self-help industry: a socio-economic overview

In this part, the aim is to present a few statistics about self-help in order to understand this market, its growth, its target audience and to have an idea of where it stands today, through different changes and events. In order to do so, I will start by presenting the net worth of various self-help mediums, the profile of self-help consumers and agents and the place of self-help within the publishing industry. Then, I will discuss the way the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted the self-improvement market, allowing to understand the current situation of this industry.

6.1. Statistics: a look at the net worth, consumers and the publishing industry

This sub-part will present multiple information and statistics regarding self-help. First, I will focus on self-help consumers, stakeholders and agents and then, I will discuss recent reports on self-help books, the self-help culture within the publishing industry

and current self-help market net worth and predictions for the years ahead. In order to discuss these materials, I will base my argumentation on several market reports, articles and studies.

6.1.1. Consumers and agents

To begin with, it is interesting to explore self-help consumers and agents in order to understand their profiles and see if there is a same pattern and target audience. In a *Quartz* article about self-help book readers and writers, reporter Youyou Zhou argues that in the U.S., writers of self-help books are mostly men while the readers are predominantly women. Indeed, she uses a Goodreads report stating that "roughly three quarters of readers are women" (Zhou, Y.; 2017). Here are two graphs presenting her observations.
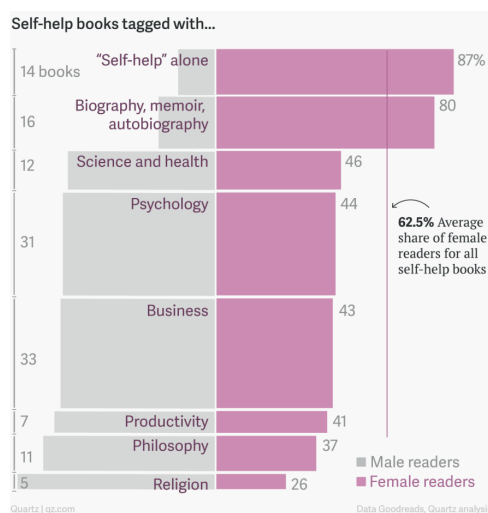
1: Goodreads graph showing the percentage of women readers. (*Quartz*; 2017)

2: Goodreads graph showing the difference between the percentage of women and men readers. (*Quartz*; 2017)

The first graph clearly shows that women are avid self-help book readers, with 87% of them reading self-help books. She notes that as "there are more men writing and more women reading", "most women end up getting [advice] from male authors", which seems to be a specific trait of the self-help genre. Besides, Zhou shares another chart showing that "men are less likely to be interested in books by female authors". This second graph clearly shows that women are most likely to be interested in reading a self-help book written by a woman, compared to men; as for self-help books written by men, the chart does not show any significant difference.

On that same note, Morgan Wild also states in her study that women read more than men in general and that psychology majors are avid readers of self-help books (2018: 48). She writes that "women and psychology majors were found to have more favorable attitudes towards self-help reading compared to men and non-psychology majors" (2018: 6). Her observation does not only show that women are more interested in self-help books than men, but it also demonstrates that self-help book readers are more likely to be educated, most of the time studying psychology, and that they are avid readers in general.

Besides being mostly women and college educated, self-help book readers are most often millennials[1], a generation of people born between 1981 and the mid-1990s[2]. In an Ornatopia article, the writers argue that "many millennials are into mental health wellness apps". Indeed, they state that "according to a study, 94% of millennials are "resolved" in personal improvement" (Ornotopia; 2020). A number of factors allegedly impact their interest in self-help: "student debt, credit card debts, and the Great Recession caused a great impact on Generation Y". When compared to other generations, "Gen Y spends twice as much as Baby Boomers[3] when it comes to products concerning self-care and improvement". As such, millennials are more inclined to read self-help books than other generations due to the period they grew up in, social events and issues or even their stage in life. In another article presenting statistics about self-help, millennials are described as the "industry's primary consumers"(Jacimovic, D.; 2020). Indeed, journalist Darko Jacimovic states that "millennials are considered the future of this market, as around 75 million consumers worldwide belong to this generation" and 94% of them "are willing to spend up to $300 per month on things that can help them improve themselves". The fact that most millennials know how to use the Internet and social media, more so than previous generations, and that these networks play a major role in promoting self-help nowadays can explain this generation's eager interest in self-help.

To sum up, self-help book readers are mostly millennials, women, educated, with interests in psychology and literature. While men are less likely to use self-help,

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1 – Millennials are also known as Generation Y, or simply Gen Y.
2 – Millennials are sometimes considered to be born between 1981 and the early 2000s.
3 – Baby boomers are the generation of people born between 1946 and 1964.

they seem to be prolific self-help book authors and self-help agents in general, compared to women.

6.1.2. Self-help books within the publishing industry: topics, sales and rankings

Now let us examine the current situation of self-help books within the publishing industry to see the place of this genre within the market. The NPD Group[4] provided several reports of the state of self-help books during 2020 and the beginning of 2021. The first report shows that 2020 was a good year for non-fiction books, as sales of non-fiction books "rose by 3.3%" compared to 2019; non-fiction books, which obviously include works of self-help, constitute "41% of the total [print book] U.S. market" (*NPD Group*; 2020). This information shows an increase in the popularity and sales of self-help books in the last year.

The NPD Group also shared classifications of the best-selling print books of 2020 and 2021 in the United States. The table below presents these rankings.

Best-selling books of 2020			
Title	Author	Publication date	Ranking: 0 - 10
Untamed	Glennon Doyle	March 10th, 2020	7th place
Best-selling books of 2021			
Title	Author	Publication date	Ranking: 0 - 10
Atomic Habits: An Easy & Proven Way to Build Good Habits & Break Bad Ones	James Clear	October 16th, 2018	6th place
The Four Agreements: A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom	Don Miguel Ruiz	November 7th, 1997	10th place
Best-selling books of May 2021			
Title	Author	Publication date	Ranking: 0 - 10
What Happened to You? Conversations on Trauma, Resilience and Healing	Bruce D. Perry and Oprah Winfrey	April 27th, 2021	7th place

4 – "The NPD Group, Inc. is an American market research company founded on September 28, 1966 and based in Port Washington, New York. In 2017, NPD ranked as the 8th largest market research company in the world, according to the independent AMA Gold Report Top 50 report."

As it can be seen on the table, a few works of self-help are included in the ranking of best-selling books of 2020 and 2021. These four best-selling books of 2020 and 2021 discuss "the top three self-help topics" of 2020, such as "confidence (10.2%), career/interview (7.8%) and motivation (7%) (Jacimovic, D.; 2020). While fiction is more popular for the general public, these reports show that self-help books, both recent and older works, are still selling well in 2020 and 2021 in the United States. Indeed, Don Miguel Ruiz's self-help book was published almost 24 years ago, in November 1997, and is still one of the best-selling self-help book in 2021; this shows the popularity of self-help despite the change of approaches and emergence of new ones. These reports suggest a positive and promising future for the self-help industry.

6.1.3. Self-help market net worth and predictions

Throughout the last centuries and the last two decades of the 21st century, self-help conveyers have come up with multiple methods and mediums to develop self-help, increasing the popularity of this market as well as its net worth. A Market Research report presents the net worth of 9 self-help industries as far as 2018: infomercials generated $1.35 billion in sales, audiobooks produced $769 million, print and eBooks were a $800 million market, apps made $27 million, personal coaching rose to $1.02 billion, motivational speakers were said to make more than $1 billion per year, weight loss programs generated $4.7 billion, public seminars were a $335 million market and finally, holistic institutes and training companies generated $126 million (LaRosa, J.; 2018). The different net worth of these self-help industries is a testament to the growing popularity of self-help and the creation of a commercial empire.

This growth can be seen through the reports and graphs previously presented and the works I will be discussing. For self-help books alone, Micki McGee states that self-help "expanded dramatically in the last quarter of the twentieth century, particularly in its final decade" (2005: 11) and that "by 1998, self-help book sales were said to total some $581 million" (2005: 11). In the 2000s, "the self-help book industry made $650 million dollars in sales" (2018: 2), according to Morgan Wild. In 2019, the NPD Group stated that the self-help book industry of the 2010s reached "$18.6 million" (*NPD Group*; 2019). The next graph shows the increase in sales from 2013 to 2019; the growth is quite significant as self-help book sales reached almost 20 million dollars in 2019, which is twice as much as in 2013.

3: NPD graph showing the rise of self-help book sales
from 2013 to 2019. (*NPD Group*; 2019)

Regarding the self-help industry as a whole, "inclusive of books, seminars, audio and video products, and personal coaching", it was a "$2.48 billion-a-year industry" in the 2000s. (2005: 11). In the 2010s, "the total U.S. self-improvement market was worth $9.9 billion" (LaRosa, J.; 2018). According to John LaRosa, "the overall market should increase to $13.2 billion" by 2022; this prediction is indeed encouraging for the future of the self-help industry.

Also, the global personal development market which "covers all aspects of individual grooming for professional and personal life through various seminars, workshops, webinars, conferences, books, personal coaching, and digital platforms" (Anonymous; 2020) rose by $38.28 billion in the U.S. in 2019 and is expected to have a growth of 5.1% by 2027. The next graph shows the prediction's increase; it clearly demonstrates the growth of each self-help markets' net worth, from $10.13 billion dollars in 2016 to almost $40 billion dollars in 2027. This forecast, though unpredictable, is a testament to the continuing growth of popularity of self-help.
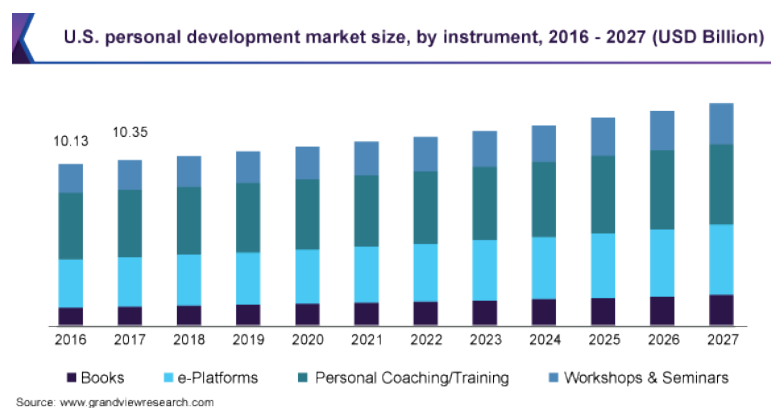
4: Graph showing the prediction for the 2020s.
(*Grand View Research*; 2020)

Incidentally, this report is the only one to present predictions about the self-help industry for other regions of the world: South America, the Middle East, Africa, Europe and Asia. Regarding North America, it shows that this region "accounted for the largest revenue share of more than 35.0% and is expected to maintain its lead over the forecast period", as discussed through the previous articles and reports. South America, the Middle East and Africa's self-help markets are predicted "to witness significant growth from 2020 to 2027 owing to a rise in participation in the self-improvement programs focusing on communication skills". The European self-help market, a prolific consumer of this industry, rose by "$10.96 billion in 2019" which is encouraging, though less than the U.S. market. Finally, the report reveals that the self-improvement market in Asia Pacific "is expected to witness the fastest growth over the forecast period". These numbers and statements indicate an international growth in popularity and revenue in the years to come, especially for some regions of the world where self-help is less prominent than in North America or Europe. The development of the self-help culture in countries where this industry and lifestyle are not a part of the initial culture shows the interest and attractiveness of self-help.

While all self-help mediums are hugely popular and likely to grow even more in the future, tech is becoming more and more valuable for self-help nowadays, as it is seen as more practical and accessible than books or even seminars. Indeed, this can be seen through the popularity of self-improvement apps and the number of downloads they get each year. In a Brand Minds article, content manager Iulia-Cristina Uță states that apps are "easily personalized" and "socially connected", that they "provide the user with a rich multimedia experience" and "offer in-person coaching sessions" (Uță, I-C.; n.d.). In the same article, Uță provides statistics from Market Watch, stating that "U.S. consumers spent $32 million on self-care mobile apps [...] in the first quarter of 2018", which is a large amount of money regarding self-help apps alone. The three most popular and downloaded self-help apps in 2018 both in the United States and worldwide were *Calm*, *Headspace* and *10% Happier*. On top of that, *Calm* is featured on American Airlines "boarding videos and in-flight entertainment systems" and "more than 300 companies, including Google, LinkedIn, GE, Adobe, Genentech and Unilever, are offering Headspace to employees as a health and wellness benefit" which is a testament to the popularity of this growing self-help tech. This considerable use of self-help apps can also be linked to the fact

that millennials are prolific users of self-improvement and is an effect of quarantine and isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

6.2. COVID-19's impact on the self-improvement market

The COVID-19 pandemic obviously had an impact on a large number of different industries; therefore, it is interesting to focus on its effect and outcome for the self-help industry. Once again, the focus will be on the United States market.

As seen earlier, the NPD Group showed a rise in print book sales in 2020, especially non-fiction books which include self-help books. In December 2020, the American market research company wrote a report presenting consumer's purchases and mindset during the pandemic. Indeed, they wrote:

> *"Hunkered down in their homes and feeling the anxiety and stress of the ongoing pandemic, U.S. consumers have been purchasing at-home remedies to relieve their stress. Sales of self-help books, candles, and massaging appliances have all grown by double-digits this year." (NPD Group; 2020)*

Early on in the pandemic, self-help and therapy matters became really trendy, "with double-digit gains in the 13 weeks ending August 1 this year [2020]". As a result of this trend, self-help book sales rose by 22% and continued growing "through mid-December, with single-digit growth compared to last year", as a direct impact of the pandemic. These numbers, compared to 2019, show that the COVID-19 pandemic truly influenced Americans to use self-help as a way to entertain themselves and take care of themselves. The NPD Group also reported that massaging places witnessed a growth: "in the 6 months ending October 2020, 5.6 million massaging appliances were sold, an 86% increase compared to the same time last year", another evidence of the pandemic aftermath.

Similarly to the rise of self-improvement app downloads, online mediums are growing more and more popular as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of many companies, schools and so on. For example, online learning courses or "virtual events, such as online workshops, seminars, webinars, and live

chats" (*Grand View Research*; 2020) were used by several businesses with the aim to maintain their business growth and provide people with personal development and self-help skills and support. The creation of these online courses and events allows the self-help industry to thrive, continue growing and reach as many people as possible through new and more accessible means. Although self-help has grown exponentially during the last decades, COVID-19 surely had an impact on the self-help industry as the situation encouraged people to focus on the self, take care of themselves and also entertained them during long months of worry and uncertainty. A year later in 2021, some online courses and virtual events are still in full effect, not only to prevent the proliferation of the virus but also because it is more manageable for some people; this way, it allows practicing self-care more often and the industry to continue growing.

As seen throughout this first part, the main focus was the U.S. self-help market. Focusing on this specific market was essential to touch on the subject of the next part which will discuss the influence of the Western world in the expansion of the self-help culture; this next part will contribute to a better understanding of the U.S. responsibility in the creation of the commercial phenomenon it is today.

7. The creation of a commercial phenomenon: Western influence

As seen in the first chapter, self-help was not born in the United States. However, the idea and concept of self-help expanded a lot in the U.S. and other Western regions, such as Canada and Europe specifically. It seems essential to explain the way Western countries, especially the U.S., has played a role, and continue to do so, in the creation of self-help as a commercial phenomenon and how deeply anchored self-help is in American culture, more so than in any other Western culture. This second part will focus on explaining how Western countries with capitalist governments have perpetuated the self-help culture through the consumer society and people's mindset, turning this ancient ethos into a business empire. In order to do so, I will start by presenting the American mindset as a foundation for the creation of a commercial phenomenon and then, I will discuss consumerism as a factor in the growth of the self-help industry.

7.1. The American mindset

As Sandra Dolby writes in *Self-Help Books: Why Americans Keep Reading Them*: "Self-help books, whether we like it or not, are part of the continuing process of constructing and assessing an American worldview" (2005: 8). The United States is one of the most, if not the most, powerful nations in the world and the biggest consumer and seller of self-help. This sub-part aims at presenting how the American philosophy helped shape the self-help industry and how this influence led to the popularity of self-help and consequently, its rise to power. In order to do so, I will start by discussing the individualist attitude of Americans and then, I will discuss the American dream.

7.1.1. Individualism

The term 'individualism' was first used by French aristocrat, political philosopher and scientist, diplomat and historian Alexis de Tocqueville to refer to the attitude of Americans in his work *Democracy in America* published in 1835. The Cambridge Dictionary gives several definitions for individualism: 1 – "the idea that each person should think and act independently rather than depending on others: many Americans believe strongly in individualism" and 2 – "the principle that the single person is more important than the group and that people should work and own things for their own advantage".

The fact that individualism was first used by a foreigner to describe the attitude of Americans rather than by Americans themselves implies that they were used to this mindset and did not question it. Author Sandra Dolby says that Tocqueville used "the now-famous notion of "rugged individualism" as the predominant American character trait" (2005: 20), suggesting that this character trait was one of the most prominent for him. Furthermore, she notes that "though the concept of individualism had been around since the seventeenth century, it was not until Tocqueville undertook his study of American culture that a term seemed to be needed to describe this seemingly ubiquitous personality trait shared by all Americans" (2005: 20). This implies that Tocqueville was surprised by this common American trait, suggesting that this trait is an important part of the American culture. In *Dreaming the American Dream: Individualism and Positive Psychology*, Dana Becker and Jeanne Marecek also discuss this American trait. They state that "self-improvement has long been the mantra of

American individualism" (2008: 1770), which suggests a link between self-help and the American mindset. They also acknowledge a link between positive psychology, an important element of self-help, and American individualism, explaining that this mindset shaped this approach as both discuss "human growth, fulfilment, and values" and "the vision of the relationship between individuals and societal institutions" (2008: 1770). Ralph Waldo Emerson, a famous writer of the 19th century transcendentalist movement discussed in the first chapter, was a firm believer in individualism in his younger years; he considered that in order to achieve happiness, one should focus on their own personal growth, which he wrote about in his work 'Self-Reliance'. As such, individualism was already an American philosophy centuries ago.

Ava Rosenbaum describes the U.S. as "one of the most individualistic cultures in the world. Americans are more likely to prioritize themselves over a group and they value independence and autonomy"(Rosenbaum, A.; 2018). She notes that the "American way of interacting [lack of touch] – also contributes to its individualistic culture, in a self-reinforcing cycle", compared to "collectivistic cultures like in Latin American or Mediterranean countries" which require more touch and proximity. She later adds that the United States and Western European countries share the same individualistic attitude of less proximity and touching one another. The individualism of Americans allows a focus on the self, which is the meaning of self-help. Therefore, it is interesting to discuss the link between their mindset and focus on the self and the growth of the self-help culture in the U.S. Similarly, Sandra Dolby states that "Americans do find it hard to abandon their individualism in favor of community" (2005: 21); this implies that individualism is so deeply anchored into Americans' minds that it allows the self-help culture to thrive and feed from this mindset, creating a foundation for self-help. Dolby adds that individualism is important for self-help books as "an underlying assumption of all such books is the prominence of the self" (2005: 21), once again establishing a link between individualism and self-help. However, Americans still value collectivism as she states that "individuals must have their own house in order before they can sally forth to serve the community" (2005: 21) and that "in general, Americans seek a balance between community involvement and individualism" (2005: 91). This implies that in order to benefit their community, they must focus on their self

and individuality first, as a way to be better for other people. As seen, individualism is a major character trait of the American culture and a foundation for self-help; this mindset, deeply rooted into the American lifestyle also share ties with the American dream as both are symbols of this nation and consequently, the self-help culture.

7.1.2. The American dream

The concept of the 'American dream' was first coined by American writer and historian James Truslow Adams in his work *Epic of America* (1931). This is what he believes the American dream stands for:

> *"is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of a social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position."* (1931: 404)

Similarly, Adam Barone describes this concept as follows:

> *"The American dream is the belief that anyone, regardless of where they were born or what class they were born into, can attain their own version of success in a society in which upward mobility is possible for everyone. The American dream is believed to be achieved through sacrifice, risk-taking, and hard work, rather than by chance."* (Barone, A.; 2021)

Both of these definitions explain that the American dream is not determined by birth but achieved through personal growth, hard work, and a strong will to improve. The values and meaning of this concept are similar to the purpose of self-help; it is through self-improvement and dedication that an individual has the possibility to reach the best version of themselves. Also, both self-help and the American dream are accessible to anyone who works hard enough on their own self. While some think of this concept as being only be accessible to white people, especially white men, it is still a foundation for the self-help culture of the United States. In a Los Angeles Times article (1990), John K. Roth discusses how present the concept of the American dream is in the upbringing of the American youth, explaining the links between this concept and self-help. He writes that:

"whatever the aim envisioned by self-help books, their pitch is usually that grasping the goal is within everyone's reach. […] These books sell both ways: "Anyone can do it," they insist, but their advice is for you, the discerning individual who has the uncommon determination to try" (K. Roth, J.; 1990)

His words show the similarity and the tight relationship between the American dream and self-help as both value determination and ambition.

The obsession with self-made men and women, hard work and constant self-improvement found in the concept of the American dream plays a major role in the growing interest in self-help and its success; it can be seen in several American public figures and literary works. Benjamin Franklin, one of the Founding Fathers of the U.S., a writer, politician, philosopher, scientist and inventor was a self-made man himself, who worked hard to gain his influential position and success. Not only is he an example of the American dream, but he also wrote about it in his work *Autobiography* (1791). In an article about this literary work, Gerardo Del Guercio writes that "Benjamin Franklin believed that every American must perfect each virtue in order to attain the American dream and make America into a great world power" (Del Guercio, G.; 2007). His contribution to the U.S. *Declaration of Independence* (1776) shows the importance of the American dream for the country, consequently encouraging the nation to work toward a better self in order to be a better country; this connects with individualism and collectivism in the fact that Americans have to work on their self first in order to work for their community.

This concept can also be seen in other famous literary works such as *The Great Gatsby* (1935) by F. Scott Fitzgerald; the character of Jay Gatsby is a self-made man and embodies the American dream. In his study of the American dream in literature, John Izaguirre discusses the way F. Scott Fitzgerald depicted the corruption of the American dream through the character of Jay Gatsby as a way to show the obsession of most Americans with the American dream; he writes that Jay Gatsby's "desire to break out of the poverty and limits of his upbringing demonstrate a fundamental principle and belief of the American dream: that one can achieve anything through hard work and perseverance" (2014: 46). The popularity of *The Great Gatsby* and its depiction of the American dream show the prominence of this concept and belief in the United States.

Modern public figures such as Oprah Winfrey also embody the American dream and inspire Americans. Indeed, in her work *The American Dream: Illusion of Individualism and Self-Help in Oprah's Book Club* (2011), Ashley Jean Hight focuses on Oprah Winfrey and what she embodies: "Winfrey is an ideal proponent of the American dream, having garnered celebrity and fame through an individualistic and neoliberal rhetoric" (2011: 4). Oprah Winfrey, American talk show host, television producer, author, actress and philanthropist has shared her life story numerous times, being born into poverty, experiencing abuse and making a life for herself through it all. Her famous talk show, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (1986-2011), focused on self-help, literature, spirituality and mindfulness and she has herself written numerous works of self-help; she is an embodiment of the American dream, is highly respected in the U.S., making her an example to follow for her fellow Americans. The popularity of these real and fictional people helped perpetuate the concept of the American dream and put an emphasis on the self and the individual. The American dream is known all over the world and is one the foundations of self-help, leading to the growing popularity of the self-help culture.

The American way of thinking, the obsession of the self and chasing endless opportunities has undoubtedly allowed the self-help culture to rise in importance. However, the growth of the consumer society, deeply present in Western countries such as the U.S., is also an ally of self-help.

7.2. The age of consumerism

The second chapter showed a multitude of needs for self-help and origins for these needs. This situation encourages an endless creation of self-help books and mediums as a response: this implies the concept of supply and demand, an essential part of the consumer society. Therefore, this sub-part will focus on the consumer society and the link it shares with the self-help culture; I will explain the importance of consumerism for the self-help industry and the way it impacts the popularity of self-help and the creation of a business phenomenon. To begin with, I will give definitions and discuss the origins of consumerism and the consumer object. Then, I will discuss the importance of capitalism within the consumer society and consequently, its link

to the self-help culture. Finally, I will explain the connection between self-help and the consumer society and how they are each other's allies.

7.2.1. Definitions and origins

The 21st century is arguably the age of consumerism, however this lifestyle appeared centuries ago. According to a History Crunch article (2015), the beginning of consumerism dates back to "the late 1600s in Europe" (Anonymous; 2015) in the most powerful European countries of the time such as France, Spain, England and Portugal. It developed throughout the next two centuries when it "became a major societal phenomenon in which the consumption of products became a vitally important task for most people in society"; the Age of Imperialism and the Industrial Revolution were the two events that led to the consumer society we know today. The Age of Imperialism, also known as the Age of Exploration, occurred from the 15th century to the 18th century, led by European colonisers; their exploration allowed them to make new discoveries as well as conquer new lands and establish their rules and lifestyles. The connection to their newly conquered territories and population helped European explorers to have access to new goods, such as food and materials. As a consequence, these discoveries enhanced and boosted the consumption of products in Europe which marked the beginning of the consumer society of modern day; this lifestyle obviously spread over areas like the New World which continued to develop. The Industrial Revolution, which "first began in the 1700s in England and soon spread to many other countries in Europe and North America" (Anonymous; 2015), symbolises a pivotal change in the methods of production. It allowed industries to produce a larger amount of goods really quickly; on top of that, the capitalist economy of Western nations allowed businesses to increase their income as they owned their means of production and sales. Industrialisation and capitalism benefited the governments, the industries as well as the citizens as it became more practical, quicker and cheaper to purchase goods. These new ways of purchasing products developed in the 20th century, which is referred to as "the golden age of consumerism". During this period, "goods became much less expensive and some products were able to sell on a very large scale due to effective marketing campaigns" (Anonymous; 2015), which allowed consumerism to thrive. Nowadays, consumerism

continues to expand thanks to marketing strategies and new techniques to promote and sell products. Now that we have presented and discussed the origins of consumerism, what is consumerism and what does consuming mean?

Adam Hayes describes consumerism as follows:

> *"consumerism is the idea that increasing the consumption of goods and services purchased in the market is always a desirable goal and that a person's wellbeing and happiness depend fundamentally on obtaining consumer goods and material possessions."* (Hayes, A.; 2021)

In other words, consumerism is "a social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts" (*Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*; 2021). From consumerism was born the consumer object. In his work 'Determining the consumer object', Gregory Keir thinks that the creation of products comes from consumers: "people see in things the reflection of their own wants and fears" (1982: 11). He adds that "products are collections of meanings and in order to be successful it is necessary that they communicate satisfaction at both the rational and irrational levels" (1982: 11). In other words, a consumer object is determined by a consumer's wants and needs, something that makes the consumer feel good; everything can be a consumer object as long as it answers someone's needs and desires. As such, a self-help book can be considered as a consumer object as it answers a need from consumers, as seen earlier. Besides, in a study paper, Vanina Papalina discusses self-help books as consumer objects. Indeed, she states that some self-help books are used with the aim of "managing daily activities" and "establishing interpersonal links" and that these books embody "a product of therapeutic culture", "mainstream psychology" as well as "a derivation of the New Age spirituality" (2014: 303). This implies that as there is a self-help book for almost every topic and issue, these works are turned into objects with a daily use and purpose. As self-help is present in our everyday life, it can therefore be considered as a consumer object, a product of consumer culture. Now that we have focused on consumer objects within the consumer culture, it is interesting to discuss capitalism and the ties it shares with consumerism and the self-help culture.

7.2.2. Capitalism as a tool for consumerism and self-help

Capitalism was first put into service "during the later European Middle Ages" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 2020), although its true development as an economic system really began around the same time as consumerism. Its creation led to the dissolution of feudalism, a social, economic and political (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*; 2021) system of the Middle Ages in Western Europe. Capitalism is described as follows:

> *"capitalism is an economic system in which private individuals or businesses own capital goods. The production of goods and services is based on supply and demand in the general market – known as a market economy – rather than through central planning – known as a planned economy or command economy."* (*Investopedia*; 2020)

Capitalism most often works with a democratic system and is considered as the opposite of socialism, although it can be quite complicated and confusing. As discussed earlier, consumerism and capitalism work as each other's allies. Indeed, capitalism is present in most Western countries, just like consumerism. In the same History Crunch article previously discussed, the author states that:

> *"consumerism as an ideology emerged alongside capitalism and spread throughout Europe, North America and the rest of the world as capitalism became the dominant economic system on the planet."* (Anonymous; 2015)

Indeed, most countries use capitalism as their economic system, which plays a major role in the influence and spread of people's consuming habits. On top of that, the same author writes that:

> *"consumerism is an important component of the concept of supply and demand because it involves the supply of goods and services and the demand (consumption) of goods and services by individual consumers."* (Anonymous; 2015)

Indeed, as previously discussed, self-help products, such as self-help books, are a result of the supply and demand system as they answer the consumer's needs and desires. As such, the self-help culture works alongside consumerism and capitalism as a way to be spread throughout the entire globe; this economic system is therefore

an important factor in the spread of self-help, of its popularity and increasing net worth. Consequently, it is essential to focus on the relationship between consumerism and the self-help culture.

7.2.3. Consumerism and self-help

As seen, consumerism is deeply anchored in the Western world; the way the consumer culture serves self-help is worth questioning. In her study on self-help books as consumption objects and their place within the consumer society, Jennifer Rindfleish suggests that the consumer society encourages the use of self-help books and that this is reciprocated. Indeed, she talks about a "continuous reproduction of new and multifarious forms of self-help prescriptions within the context of Western consumer culture" (2014: 8), implying the creation of a never-ending circle in the consumption of self-help goods, coming from both the self-help culture and the consumer society. She mentions Riesman's observation on self-help and consumerism, stating that he "made connections between the pre-eminence of the self in North-American society and the cultural context of consumerism" (2014: 5). Indeed, Riesman believed that the North American society encouraged and incited individuals to seek help from self-help gurus, or what he calls "advocational counsellors", in order to create new ways of consumption; in other words, Western consumer society finds new ways for people to consume products. Rindfleish later notes that "the turn to the self in Western consumer culture has had the effect of not only objectifying and dividing the self against itself but has also heightened the instability of our conception of ourselves collectively as a culture and allowed the domination of the self to be colonised and reified as a consumption object" (2014: 5). Here, she states that people's obsession with the self, both outer and inner, dictated by the consumer society and society in general has led to objectifying the self and wanting to improve or change it by consuming self-help goods. This creates a never-ending circle of thinking that the self needs to be fixed, purchasing a self-help product and failing to improve and change; this consequently allows the spread of the self-help culture.

Besides, Rindfleish mentions that because of self-help and the "feelings of uncertainty" it can create, "individuals in the consumer culture fall victim to a form

of commodified production of 'self-actualisation'" (2014: 6); this also encourages the never-ending circle of consuming self-help. Indeed, the way Western societies and their consumer culture work allows self-help to cultivate its popularity, despite the negative consequences it can have on some people, as mentioned in the second chapter regarding self-help addiction.

As seen, consumerism and self-help work together to develop and gain popularity. Leina Hsu, author of "Self-Care in the Age of Consumerism" (2020) notes that "the concept of self-care has become more and more intertwined with consumerism" (Hsu, L.; 2020), blaming capitalism. Indeed, the self-help culture has become deeply anchored in today's society, especially in Western countries, and has influenced the way people live and interact with each other. She adds that "consumerist self-care is capitalism trying to provide a solution to a problem it created", suggesting that capitalism is closely linked with consumerism and self-help, as seen throughout this sub-part; once again, it echoes the never-ending cycle of finding ways for people to constantly consume self-help products. Besides, she writes that "the commodification of self-care has allowed industries to constantly raise the bar for what it means to treat yourself", always creating new issues to solve, new trends to follow and appearances to have, allowing the self-help culture as well as consumerism to thrive. Self-help and consumerism are feeding off each other because the consumer society thrives on providing goods for people, making them think they need these goods; self-help is appealing as it promises self-improvement in a multitude of fields. This obsession with the self supported by both the consumer culture and self-help can also lead to collective narcissism.

In her study paper on self-help and well-being within the consumer culture, Vanina Papalini argues that self-help can sometimes be associated with narcissism as an individual using self-help wishes to improve something for the sake of their own self and being, in their own interest. She writes that "self-help literature has also been seen as an expression of new narcissism or a promising spontaneity" (2014: 303). The culture of endlessly wishing to improve or change something was born from both self-help and consumerism, which allows them to perpetuate their process. Similarly, Atmika Iyer states that "this well-intended concept of self-improvement was manipulated by our consumer culture" (Iyer, A.; 2020), once again blaming people's

want and need for self-help on consumerism, creating a link between these two. She adds that the "manipulation of what self-care should truly be can lead people in the wrong direction, solely promoting vanity and subsequent narcissism"; this implies that narcissism can be linked to self-help addiction as it suggests an endless need to improve and change. To conclude, she notes that self-help and self-care are victims of consumer society, which is supported by "mass marketing techniques". Indeed, this leads to the final part of this chapter discussing the way self-help is promoted in order to create a commercial phenomenon.

8. Promoting self-help: inside the marketing process

Marketing practices can be dated back to antiquity, just like self-help; hence its name, it was used to promote and sell goods on markets (*Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia*; 2021). This business practice was heavily used in the 20th century during the 'golden age of consumerism'. Nowadays, marketing is used by every company as a way to promote and sell as many goods as possible. According to Alexandra Twin, marketing "refers to activities a company undertakes to promote the buying or selling of a product or service. Marketing includes advertising, selling, and delivering products to consumers or other businesses" (Twin, A.; 2020). As the marketing process plays a huge role in the economic ascent and growing popularity of self-help, the aim of this third part is to present and explain three major points: how marketing practices are used by the self-help sector, the mediums through which self-help is promoted and which marketing strategies are used in the publishing industry in order to attract consumers. To begin with, I will focus on the modern tools used to advertise self-help. Then, I will discuss the marketing strategies specifically used in the publishing industry and finally, I will analyse the physical aspect of a selection of self-help books in order to show the importance of marketing practices.

8.1. Using modern tools to advertise self-help

The rise of the Internet and especially social media has drawn the attention of many companies, including the self-help industry. Indeed, social media are widely used by businesses as the contact with the customer is direct. Various websites which specialise in online advertisement give advice on social media marketing, also known as SMM:

"using social media in marketing does more than improve site traffic and help businesses reach more customers; it provides a valuable venue for better understanding and learning from your target audiences. [...] Great marketing on social media can bring remarkable success to your business, creating devoted brand advocates and even driving leads and sales." (Anonymous; n.d.)

The article this quote is derived from also includes ways to use SMM through the different social media platforms and what it consists of: "SMM includes activities like posting text and image updates, videos, and other content that drives audience engagement, as well as paid social media advertising" (Anonymous; n.d.). As seen, using social media to promote goods and services is essential for any business and can bring many benefits.

Online marketing is no stranger to the self-help and self-care industry. In a *Women's Republic* article previously mentioned, Leina Hsu discusses influencers and how they are used to promote self-care: "social media is rife with inconspicuous marketing of self-care items, from skinny teas to skincare. Influencers turn the supposedly private ceremony of self-care into a spectacle" (Hsu, L.; 2020). Indeed, influencers are an important element of online advertising as they have their own online community and communicate directly with them; most of the time, their audience trust them and are willing to consume and purchase the products they are promoting. There are also plenty of social media accounts (Yates, L.; 2020) for self-care and self-help that help promote the industry and grow its popularity. Similarly, self-help authors like Mark Manson, James Clear or Jen Sincero all have their own self-help blogs on which they promote their work and derivative products, which is an excellent way to advertise self-help and increase its popularity.

Another important method of online marketing is adjusting and coming up with new marketing strategies in order to attract consumers. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, many self-care brands and businesses such as TULA and Kylie Skin launched special campaigns (Kulke, C.; 2021). #EmbraceYourSkin by TULA was created to celebrate self-acceptance by sharing makeup-free selfies and the Rose Bath Collection by Kylie Skin aimed at relaxing and practicing self-care during the pandemic. Using events and crises is a clever way to promote goods, especially

self-help and self-care as people sometimes find comfort in this industry and it also allows companies to diversify their marketing approach. As seen, using modern tools to promote self-help can be truly beneficial to attract and influence consumers, consequently increasing the industry's net worth and popularity, but the self-help industry has also come up with more specific techniques to cultivate its success.

8.2. Marketing strategies in the publishing industry

The aim of this sub-part is to present the various marketing techniques and strategies established by self-help book publishers, authors and sellers. The different studies on self-help book marketing have noted a few patterns that self-help stakeholders frequently use and follow as part of the marketing process. In her study, Jennifer Rindfleish discusses the way self-help authors use specific techniques to deliver their advice and guidance. She writes that authors try to make a connection with the readers, sharing personal experiences that most people have lived in order to be closer to their audience; authors also suggest specific methods the readers will have to follow to improve their life and offer unrealistic promises assuring happiness (2014: 14-15). She notes that this pattern is used by most self-help book authors, especially offering exaggerated promises, which is part of the self-help industry marketing process as it creates a never-ending circle of hope, unattainable results and self-help book purchases.

Another specific self-help marketing technique is the way self-help books are sorted in bookshops and how it impacts the selling process. Indeed, in his work *Psychological Self-Help* (1997-2004), Dr Clay Tucker-Ladd presents a few marketing techniques used by self-help stakeholders. He writes that "professional books, like college textbooks or books for psychotherapists" (1997-2004: 37) are not the type of books anyone could find in a usual bookstore, unlike common self-help books. As seen in the second chapter, professional self-help books such as psychology-based books are more likely to work than growth-oriented and personal development self-help books; these are almost always best-sellers, or at least the most popular self-help books. These works, because of their popularity are more often than not, placed in the foreground, just like all best-selling books in general. As such, they have a higher chance to be sold right away, unlike more effective works that are placed

in the background and therefore are more difficult to find. Then, purchasing best-selling self-help books which are less likely to be effective, can only lead the reader to continuously repeat this pattern. Indeed, because of the lack of effectiveness of such books, the reader's only resort is buying more of these books in order to achieve goals and improve. Therefore, this marketing strategy aims at purposedly encouraging readers to buy less effective self-help books as self-help stakeholders know the content of these books and the result of this technique: the way self-help books are sorted encourages the never-ending circle to continue.

Self-help book publishers also use a few specific marketing techniques. For instance, Dr Clay Tucker-Ladd states that "publishers seek books that seem likely to sell because the topic is "hot" or the book has an attractive "gimmick."" (1997-2004: 37). This means that publishers would rather sell a book that is most likely to be popular than an allegedly effective piece of work, as they know that books with a "hot" topic have a higher chance to be sold and to make more sales altogether. This technique is similar to the previous ones used by self-help authors as it assures the sales of trendy self-help books. Similarly, Morgan Wild ensures that "of the annually published self-help books, 95% of these books are published without empirical validation" (2018: 13), therefore meaning that 95% of these books are less likely to be effective. This implies that the effectiveness of a self-help book is not the most important element publishers think about; they believe that with or without effectiveness, the books will be bought if the content and topic are interesting and trendy enough. Then, publishers use this as a marketing technique as they know it will not make much of a difference for consumers.

Morgan Wild also adds that "best-selling books are typically recommended compared to other products which increases sales without proper examination of the books' usefulness or credibility" (2018: 12), once again implying that the effectiveness and credibility of a self-help book is not the main concern for publishers and other self-help stakeholders. As such, best-selling self-help books do not guarantee effectiveness, but they generate more money, which is undoubtedly beneficial to the self-help culture. Furthermore, she notes that these best-selling self-help books use "exaggerated titles, persuasive messages and even curse words" (2018: 51). Using these types of words and promises attracts the eyes and the interest of customers, which can be an

effective marketing technique; readers are drawn to the books, intrigued by the use of words and influenced by the attractive promise offered by the title.

Also, while describing what a consumer object is, Gregory Keir discusses the importance of advertising products, referred to as "promotional activity" (1982: 13). Indeed, according to him, focusing on the image of a product, on its physical aspect and advertisement is part of the marketing process and is essential to attract consumers. The design of products can be linked to the creation of book series as it is important to create a brand of similar goods. Self-help book series such as Jen Sincero's *You Are a Badass* (2013, 2017, 2018, 2020) books, Mark Manson's *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck* (2016) and *Everything is F*cked* (2019), or even the Covey's family self-help book series listed by Vanina Papalini (2014: 306) and available on Franklin Covey's website, are examples of the creation of a brand. These book series are highly successful, and it can be argued that their creation is a marketing strategy from both the self-help authors and publishers to continue selling their books, regardless of their effectiveness, consequently developing the popularity of the self-help industry as well as its net worth. As previously discussed, using exaggerated titles and sometimes swear words is an excellent marketing strategy to attract the eyes and the interest of readers. Consequently, the next part will focus on the physical aspect of self-help books in order to see if there is a specific pattern to follow, their fey features and how essential the physical aspect of books is for the marketing process.

8.3. Physical aspect of the books

In his article, Gregory Keir argues that choosing the image of a product is essential to fit the consumer's desires (1982: 13). Indeed, as the physical aspect of goods is what people see first, most of the time, it has to be carefully thought out and fashioned. This part will discuss the physical aspect of self-help books and how much it affects the marketing process of self-help books and consequently, their popularity and the rise of this industry.

A good impression is key in promoting a self-help book, or any other product. Indeed, Gregory Keir states that the books need to appeal to customers and that their needs need to be met. He writes:

"Needs evoke meaning in stimuli and it is useful to divide these meanings into two sorts: denotive and connotive. The denotive meaning of an object is its being as a physical thing, its rational functional nature. The connotive meaning of an object is its being as an emotive entity, its affective nature." (1982: 11)

This implies that while creating and promoting a product, it is essential to think about the aesthetics as well as the essence of the product and the feeling it might give the potential consumer; the physical aspect is as important as the inner significance and purpose. Therefore, in order to catch the eye of a reader, a self-help book has to invite the reader's gaze through the cover as well as their emotional interest which is done through the details of the cover: the colours, the titles, the structure, etc.

Ad Bergsma states that "the best-selling psychology books are sorted on the basis of the first impression the books make on buyers in a bookstore" (2008: 343). This connects to the marketing strategy used by self-help stakeholders in the sorting of self-help books discussed in the previous sub-part; the works placed in the foreground are more likely to attract the eyes, because of their popularity but also due to their physical aspect. A good impression is truly important to attract the readers and the publishers are well aware of that. Besides, Morgan Wild notes that "consumers of self-help books often make a purchasing decision based on the books' appearance" and that "some of the books include elaborate designs, popular celebrities, and catchy slogans - message framing" (2018: 53). Once again, it shows that the styling and design of a book is essential in order to sell it; every element is scrupulously detailed and thought out by self-help stakeholders. The analysis of book covers that follows aims at explaining and presenting how important the design of a self-help book truly is.

ANALYSIS – BOOK COVERS

Covers are the first information about a book given to the reader; they are essential for the marketing process as they are meant to leave an impression on consumers. In their study of book covers (2011), Doina Cmeciu and Camelia-Mihaela Cmeciu state that book covers convey a message:

"book covers are not only the first visible vehicle of the 'product-sign', containing the relationships between maker – producer – consumer; they indirectly turn into "a seductive

text" which asks for the consumer's response by rousing the curiosity of the decoder of the complex verbal and visual message" (Cmeciu, D. & Cmeciu, C-M.; 2011: 470).

They later add that "within this semiotic web, the book cover, with its verbal and visual textualization, creates a system of relationships between the inside and the outside of the text" (2011: 471). These two statements imply that the message and link created by the book cover are only possible through each element of a book cover: colours, typography, symbols, photographs, drawings, titles, etc. Each of these elements has a general meaning and purpose, although they can create different emotions for each individual; together, they are the paratext. This term was coined by Gérard Genette, a French literary theorist, who first used this term in his work *The Architext: An Introduction*[5] (1979). In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*[6], Gérard Genette explains that a paratext is "what enables a text to become a book and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (1997: 1). Similarly, in her study regarding paratext, Roswitha Skare writes that a paratext is:

"a text that relates (or mediates) to another text (the main work) in a way that enables the work to be complete and to be offered to its readers and, more generally, to the public" (Skare, R.; 2020)

In other words, a paratext is a body of various textual elements which can be found in books as well as on book covers.

Therefore, discussing and focusing on the paratext is essential while analysing book covers as the different elements are chosen in accordance with the content and theme of the book and also because they create a link between the story of the book and the visual appearance of the cover. Therefore, the aim of this last sub-part is to analyse several self-help book covers and the purpose of each element; in order to do so, I will base my argumentation on articles and studies about book cover design. Analysing these elements and book covers will allow a better understanding of the importance of designing covers within the marketing process and of the social dialogue behind the final product; this analysis also aims at showing the way the art of cover design has changed over time in order to adapt to different periods' aesthetics and standards.

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5 – *Introduction à l'architexte* is the original French title.
6 – Originally published as *Seuils* in French, in 1987.

Firstly, I will focus on the meaning of colours for cover design, the choice of the specific colours of the selected covers and the importance of this element for the marketing process. Secondly, I will discuss the typography of written elements, its significance and importance in the design process. Thirdly, I will compare older and more recent self-help book covers as a way to differentiate the various elements and see how the marketing process regarding cover design has evolved.

The selected book covers of this analysis are: *You Are a Badass* (2013, 2017, 2018, 2020) book series by Jen Sincero, The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck (2016) and Everything Is F*cked (2019), *The Self-Care Project* (2017) by Jayne Hardy, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (1998) by Sean Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (1989) by Stephen R. Covey, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) by Dale Carnegie, *Who Moved My Cheese?* (1998) by Spencer Johnson, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* (1974) by Richard Nelson Bolles, *You Can Heal Your Life* (1984) by Louise Hay and The Power of Positive Thinking (1952) by Norman Vincent Peale.
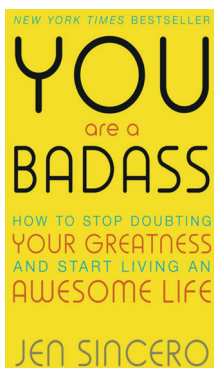
Sincero, J. (2013). *You Are a Badass.* Running Press.
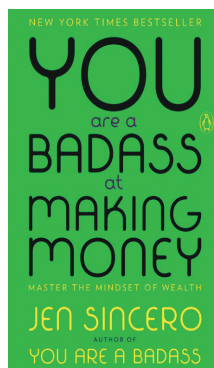
Sincero, J. (2017). *You Are a Badass at Making Money.* Penguin Life.
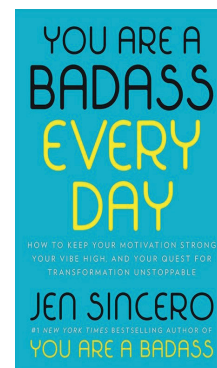
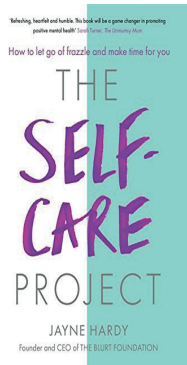Sincero, J. (2018). *You Are a Badass Everyday.* John Murray Learning.
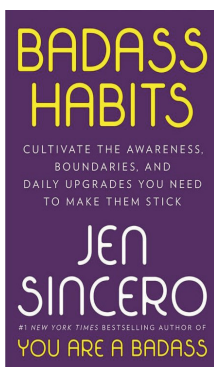
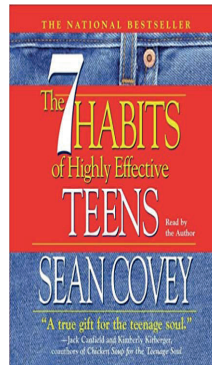Sincero, J. (2020). *Badass Habits.* Penguin Life.
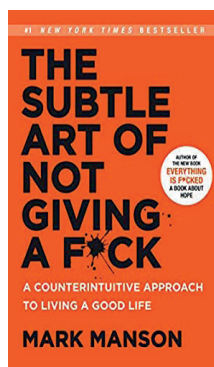
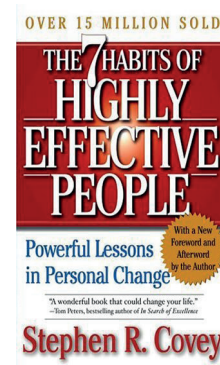Manson, M. (2016). *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck.* Harper.

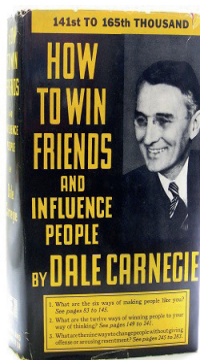Manson, M. (2019). *Everything is F*cked.* Riva.

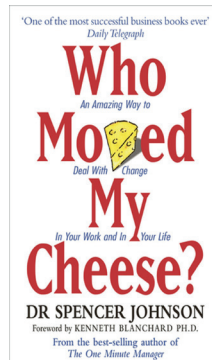Hardy, J. (2017). *The Self-Care Project.* Orion Spring.

Covey, S. (1998). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens.* Simon & Schuster.
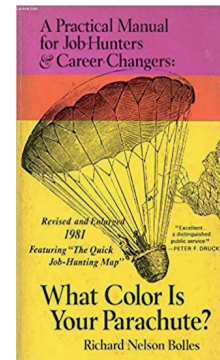

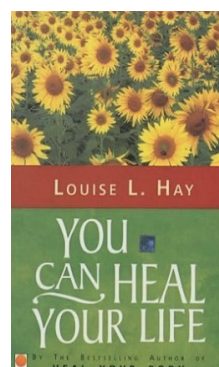R. Covey, S. (1989). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People.* Free Press.

Carnegie, D. (1936). *How to Win Friends and Influence People.* Simon & Schuster.
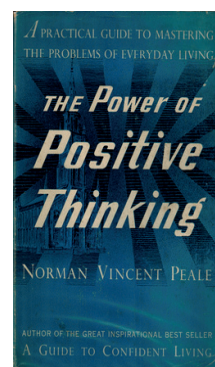

Johnson, S. (1998). *Who Moved My Cheese?.* Putnam Adult.

N. Bolles, R. (1974). *What Color Is Your Parachute?.* Ten Speed Press.

Hay, L. (1984). *You Can Heal Your Life.* Hay House.

V. Peale, N. (1952). *The Power of Positive Thinking.* Prentice Hall.

8.3.1. The importance of colours

Before focusing on the importance and meaning of colours on book covers, it is crucial to briefly discuss colour theory in design first. In a *Smashing Magazine* article, professional Web and graphic designer Cameron Chapman addresses the subject of colour theory for designers and the importance of choosing the right colours depending on the emotions the product must communicate. She states that each colour and shade have their own meaning although they can change according to countries and people. Chapman writes that "color theory is as much about the feeling a particular shade evokes than anything else" (Chapman, C.; 2010). In a *Miblart* article, Anastasiya Lototska discusses the importance of colours on book covers. She states that colours communicate a message and are very useful to promote books: "different colors stimulate the brain and provoke mixed emotions from excitement to frustration. Using this psychological factor, brands have learned how to engage their target audience" (Lototska, A.; 2020). These two articles show that the aim of using colours is to provoke emotions; colours must be thought out carefully so the cover can convey the appropriate message to the reader. Besides, the colour palette chosen for book covers aims at creating a visual message about the content of the book. Therefore, using colours on books is an integral part of the marketing process: creating an atmosphere and a visual message for the book in order to attract the reader's gaze and interest.

In the same *Miblart* article, Lototska explains that each book genre usually corresponds to a colour palette; the colour palette of non-fiction books, especially self-help books, includes blue, yellow, orange and red. Both Cameron Chapman and Anastasiya Lototska define each of these colours; blue symbolises "calm, responsible, sadness", yellow means "happiness, hope, deceit", orange is the symbol of "energy, happiness, vitality" and finally, red is the colour of "passion, love, anger" (Chapman, C.; 2010). As it can be seen, out of the fourteen book covers we have selected, nine display the colour palette associated with the self-help genre, according to their background colour: *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck* is orange, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is red, with an addition of red for *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* cover, *You Are a Badass* and *What Color Is Your Parachute?* are predominantly yellow and *You Are a Badass Every Day*, *Everything Is F*cked*, *The Self-Care Project*

and *The Power of Positive Thinking* have blue covers. While the background colours of *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *Who Moved My Cheese?* and *You Can Heal Your Life* do not fit the colour palette associated with self-help books, these covers include some significant elements that follow the colour palette such as red and yellow fonts and elements. Although the cover of *Badass Habits* does include a touch of yellow for the title, the background colour is purple which does not fit the self-help genre colour palette. The fact that most of these covers conform to the self-help books colour palette shows that there was an intent at matching the visual appearance of the cover to the theme and genre of the book, an aim to convey the message of the book through the colour choices. This echoes with the marketing strategy of self-help stakeholders concerning the physical aspect of these books; colour is essential to convey messages and provoke emotions for the reader, and each colour has its own meaning.

Besides the importance of choosing the background colours of covers, the colours of the textual elements also have to be carefully thought out. Indeed, the textual elements must be easy to spot, read and understand. Derek Haines, a Cambridge CELTA English teacher[7], shares some publishing recommendations and ideas on his blog *Just Publishing Advice*. He states that "of all the book cover ideas that can go into excellent cover design, the color of the title is by far the most important" (Haines, D.; 2020) as according to him, the title must be easy to read. Therefore, he advises people to avoid black titles, unless the background is white; for him, the colour black is difficult to read which might weaken the overall appearance of the book, and consequently its selling potential. Haines states that the best colour choice for book titles is white as it is the colour that stands out the most, especially if the title is long. As it can be seen on the selected book covers, six titles are written in black: three of Jen Sincero's books, both of Mark Manson's works and *What Color Is Your Parachute?*. While these titles do not seem that difficult to read as they are either written in capitals that take the whole cover or in contrast with the background colour of the cover, they are less easy to read than white titles, such as *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* or *The Power of Positive Thinking*. For instance, the sub-title "a book about hope" written in white on the cover of *Everything Is F*cked*, is easier to

read than the title written in big black capitals. Similarly, the eye seems to be more attracted to the name "Jen Sincero" written in white on the cover of *Badass Habits* than to the yellow title. Also, while the covers of Louise Hay's and Stephen R. Covey's books contain a lot of elements, like pictures and text, the fact that the titles are written in white capitals makes them easy to spot and read. These observations and examples, as well as Haines' statements, show that white is the best colour choice for titles as it attracts the gaze more than any other colour, despite the cover being simple or heavily illustrated. However, while most of these books do not follow the best colour choice for titles, it does not seem that it affects or has affected their chance of being picked up and bought.

Furthermore, colour contrast and simultaneous contrast are two of the most important rules to follow regarding the clarity of textual elements and the general appearance of a cover. The study of colour contrast was conducted by several renowned colour theorists such as Isaac Newton, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and Moses Harris, to name but a few. Indeed, contrasting colours, or complementary colours, is when colours are opposed on a colour wheel, which provides "maximum contrast" (Vasquez, R.; 2015). Mixing different and opposed colours together creates a specific atmosphere and delivers a message. This concept can be seen through the prismatic colour wheel below, created by Moses Harris in mid-18th century; this colour wheel shows the contrast of colours which helps understand how to use it in order to choose the correct colours in design. Harris' prismatic colour wheel includes numerous colours. Firstly, we can see the three primary colours, red, blue and yellow written in capitals as well as in the centre of the wheel in the three triangle shapes. Secondly, we can see the three secondary colours, orange, green and purple on the wheel and thirdly, we can see the twelve tertiary gradations between the primary and secondary colours. As this prismatic colour wheel not only shows the primary and secondary colours but also twelve other nuances, it helps understand which of these colours can go together and how colour gradation work, as a way to create a harmonious visual; therefore, this also helps understanding how to use colour contrast.
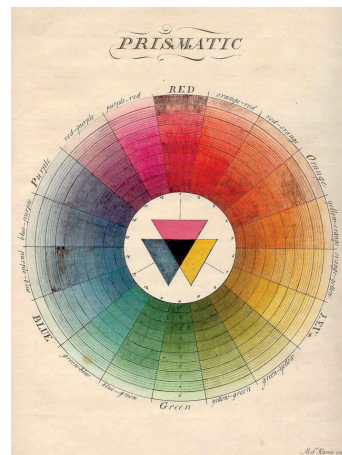
5: Moses Harris' prismatic colour wheel created mid-18th century. (*Open Culture*; 2017).

Similarly, Michael Douma discusses simultaneous contrast in his virtual exhibit *Color Visual & Art*; according to Douma, simultaneous contrast "affects our sense of the color that we see" (Douma, M.; 2006). This contrast can be seen in a few of the selected book covers: the yellow and blue on *You Are a Badass*, *You Can Heal Your Life* and *You Are a Badass Every Day*. The part of the title "every day" on the cover of *You Are a Badass Every Day* is written in yellow capitals which makes it easier to spot and read in contrast to the black coloured first part of the title *You Are a Badass*. This is also the case of the original *You Are a Badass* cover with the sub-title written in green and red or with the green and red elements of *You Can Heal Your Life* cover. These contrasts make the elements easy to spot, read and differentiate. The use of colour contrast can also be seen in three other covers, although they do not coincide with Harris' prismatic colour wheel. Indeed, the titles of *The Self-Help Project*, *Who Moved My Cheese?* and *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, written in purple, red and yellow, are easy to read and understand, especially the title of Spencer Johnson's book as the white coloured background and the red coloured title contrasts each other quite well. This attention to detail in the use of colour contrast is an effective way to create appealing book covers and therefore, a great a marketing technique.

8.3.2. Textual elements and illustrations

The details of colours are as important as the elements on a cover, the way they are placed and how they look. Indeed, just like colours, the presence and style of textual elements and illustrations aim to set an atmosphere, convey a message, provoke

emotions and suggest the theme and content of the book. In this sub-part, the goal is to explain the importance of styling and placing textual elements and illustrations and how this applies to the selected book covers.

The textual elements usually included on a book cover are the title, the name of the author or authors, and sometimes a sub-title; all of the selected book covers include these elements. In another *Miblart* article, an anonymous author discusses the importance of a book cover layout:

> *"every word on the book cover should fulfill its main task. [...] pay attention to the visual hierarchy of the fonts you use in the book cover design to create the perfect balance and make the layout appear very professional"* (Anonymous; 2021).

Indeed, the structure of a book cover is truly important in order to create an appealing visual effect; paying attention to the balance of each element is essential to draw the reader's attention. The anonymous author adds that "the whole composition (sizes of various elements of the inscription, spacing between them, breakdown into lines, etc.) must be readable, logical, and justified" (Anonymous; 2021). The title of the book should be the most prominent textual element of a book cover, however sometimes the name of the author can be the same size as the title if the author is well-known. As it can be seen on most of the selected book covers, the titles are the most prominent feature. On the covers of *Badass Habits*, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* and *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, the name of the author is the same size as the title. The cover of *What Color Is Your Parachute?* is the only one to have the illustration as the most prominent element of the cover; the title is at the bottom, difficult to spot and read. While the title of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is bigger than the rest of the textual elements, the multitude of items present on the cover makes the layout of the cover quite confusing. Overall, the structure of most of the selected covers is well thought out and clearly visible.

It is also interesting to focus on the way these elements are styled as their appearance allows a better understanding of the theme of the book, which is essential for the marketing process. Indeed, the same anonymous author states that

"fonts are the visual keys that hint to the reader what your book is about. Typography represents the message and idea you want your reader to grasp by only taking a quick look at the letters on a book cover. The font helps to stress and highlight the meaning and value of words, phrases, and sentences in front book cover design." (Anonymous; 2021)

There are multiple typographic styles that help capture the theme of the book and similarly to colours, each style has its own meanings. One of the first decisions to make regarding font style is choosing between serif and sans-serif fonts as these are quite different; serif fonts have "extra strokes on the ends of their letterforms" and are considered to be more traditional such as Times New Roman, while sans-serif fonts, like Arial, "lack additional flourishes" which makes them more modern and minimalist (MasterClass team; 2021). Out of the fourteen selected book covers, nine titles are written in sans-serif fonts: the *You Are a Badass* book series, both of Mark Manson's works, *The Self-Care Project*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *The Power of Positive Thinking*. The part "self-care" of the title *The Self-Care Project* is a handwritten font, which can be either serif or sans-serif; in this case, it appears that it is a sans-serif handwritten font. What is interesting to notice is that all the recent book covers have sans-serif fonts, which makes sense as this type of font is meant to be more modern; the overall appearance of these covers is quite simple and clean, thanks to the choice of sans-serif font. Only two covers of older books have titles written in sans-serif fonts, the other five covers have serif font titles; again, the choice of serif font for these older books makes sense as this style is more traditional.

The overall appearance of these older book covers can seem quite oppressive as serif fonts tend to look fuller. These observations suggest that the style of the book cover design of the 21st century is required to be simple and clean. Also, we can notice a pattern in the font choice of Jen Sincero's and Mark Manson's books. Indeed, as they are book series, the font style remains the same as well as the title placement; this can suggest the creation of a brand and identity of the books, which can be seen as a marketing strategy. This is even more strengthened by the fact that the font used on the covers of the *You Are a Badass* series can be found on derivative products such as calendars, notecards and mugs which are available to buy via Jen Sincero's website. Choosing a font style is as important as choosing the

title of a book; these examples and observations show that this is a major part of the design and marketing process of a book and must be carefully thought out.

Besides, what is interesting to see on these covers is the possible impact of these titles on the eye. First of all, the majority of the titles are written in capital letters, except for the titles of *Who Moved My Cheese?*, *The Power of Positive Thinking* and *What Color Is Your Parachute?*. The fact that titles are written in all caps can suggest that the aim was to make the book stand out and therefore attract the gaze of the reader, another marketing strategy. As discussed previously through Morgan Wild's study, most popular self-help books have exaggerated titles. The cover examples show that two of these book titles, *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck* and *Everything Is F*cked*, include curse words and an informal word 'badass" which can incite a reaction of the readers, on top of them being written in all caps. The titles *You Can Heal Your Life*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *You Are a Badass* series imply a promise and can refer to guidebooks' titles. This is also the case of the sub-titles of *You Are a Badass*, *You Are a Badass Every Day* and *The Self-Care Project* that start with "how to"; choosing "how to" for a title or sub-title suggests that the book is a guide to follow, and that the reader will achieve what the title implies, which can be seen as exaggerated promises. These types of titles can be seen as a marketing technique made by self-help stakeholders as a way to draw the reader's gaze and interest.

Furthermore, most of these books include additional items, like textual elements and illustrations. Newspaper quotes and best-selling distinctions are the first example; these are intentionally added on the covers as they can encourage the reader to buy the book because of the popularity and recognition it receives. Similarly, if the author is a medical professional, their medical title will be shown on the cover, like Dr Spencer Johnson for example, as a way to "prove" the effectiveness of the book, reassure the reader and consequently, increase sales. Also, the cover of *What Color is Your Parachute?* includes the indication "a practical manual for job-hunters & career-changers" which reinforces the aim of the book and allows it to fall into a specific category. Besides, some books also include illustrations, whether they are pictures or drawings; this is the case of *You Can Heal Your Life*, *Who Moved My Cheese?*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, *What Color Is Your Parachute?* and both of Mark Manson's books. The presence of symbols can be added to fit

the theme or the title of the book; this is the case of Richard Nelson Bolles' book cover which shows a parachute as well as that of Spencer Johnson's book cover on which the letter 'v' is replaced by a piece of cheese. Both of Mark Manson's books have a stain on the curse words; these stains can be used to partially hide the swear words and reinforce the identity and brand of the books. Finally, both Louise Hay's and Dale Carnegie's books have a picture. Adding photographs on book covers is quite common for autobiographies or biographies as the book focuses on an individual's life; the photograph of Dale Carnegie on the book cover can simply has to do with the fact that he already was the author of two previous books and a renowned lecturer. The picture of sunflowers on the cover of *You Can Heal Your Life* can symbolise the meaning of the title and the link between nature and healing. The use of these illustrations is part of the marketing process as it adds an element of beauty and harmony, aiming to attract the reader's gaze.

As seen throughout this sub-part, the styling, placing and presence of textual elements and illustrations are essential for the marketing process and are therefore carefully thought out by publishers, designers and other self-help stakeholders. These elements are meant to convey a message and provoke emotions as a way to attract the readers' gaze and interest and encourage them to buy these books. Now that we have focused on the colours, textual elements and illustrations of self-help books, comparing recent and older covers is a great way to look at and understand the differences of cover designs through the years.

8.3.3. Comparison: old and recent covers

Over time, the art of cover design has evolved in order to adapt to trends and periods' aesthetics and standards, as an aim to best promote the books and turn them into objects to collect and look at, rather than pieces of literature. This sub-part will focus on the differences between older and more recent self-help book covers in order to see how cover design and marketing strategies regarding self-help books have changed. This analysis will focus on the original covers and most recent covers of four self-help books: *The Power of Positive Thinking*, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* and *What Color Is Your Parachute?*.
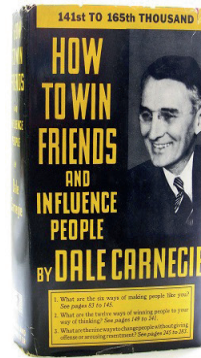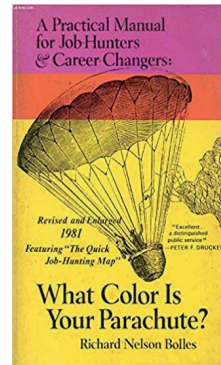
ORIGINAL COVERS
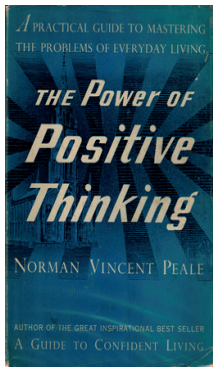
V. Peale, N. (1952). *The Power of Positive Thinking.* Prentice Hall.
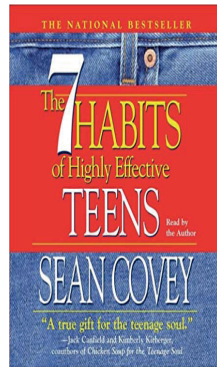
Covey, S. (1998). *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens.* Simon & Schuster.

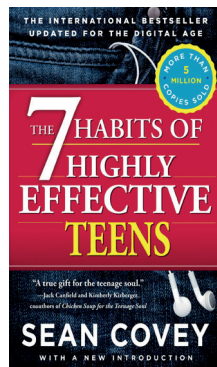Carnegie, D. (1936). *How to Win Friends and Influence People.* Simon & Schuster.

N. Bolles, R. (1974). *What Color Is Your Parachute?.* Ten Speed Press.
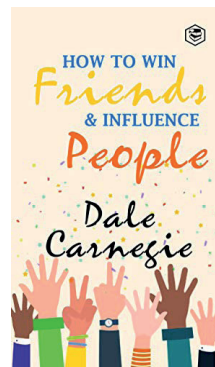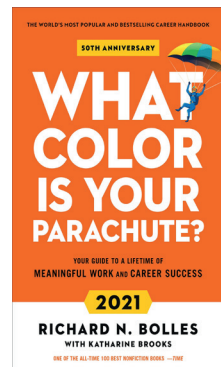
RECENT COVERS

White Shark Publications, 2021.

Simon & Schuster, 2014.

Sanage Publishing House, 2020.

Ten Speed Press, 2020.

Indeed, recent and older self-help book covers are quite different in various aspects; as discussed in the two previous sub-parts, recent covers tend to be simpler and cleaner overall while older covers have more elements, text and illustrations, which can be quite excessive. Recent covers can have informal titles and curse words and older covers tend to include more symbols and newspaper quotes; as a whole, older covers usually include a lot more elements compared to recent ones which look less complex and much more refined.

The differences between the original and recent covers of the selected books are more or less significant. The latest cover of Norman Vincent Peale's book suggests a link to the title of the book and its content, more so than the original cover: the photograph radiates positivity, thanks to the posture of the person but also with the presence of the sun. There is however a connection to the older cover through the colour blue at the very top of the picture. As a whole, the 2021 cover looks quite modern thanks to the handwritten sans-serif font and the choice of including fewer textual elements. Also, the colours of the photograph match the colour palette of the self-help genre.

The cover of *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (2014 edition) looks similar to the first edition's cover thanks to the use of the pair of jeans and the touch of yellow in the title. In order to make it look more modern, a pair of earphones has been added in the back-pocket of the jeans; the contrast of the colours also contributes to this contemporary look. Despite this addition and modernised look, the cover includes slightly more textual elements and has a similar serif font which makes the overall appearance outdated. The recent cover, just like the original one, also fits the colour palette of self-help books. While there has been an effort in redesigning and modernising the original cover, it still resembles the 1998 cover edition.

The 2020 cover of Dale Carnegie's book looks completely different from the original one. Indeed, the black coloured background, yellow font and photograph have been replaced by bright and pastel colours, serif and handwritten fonts, dots and drawings of hands; this choice of colours matches the colour theme of the self-help genre. This cover looks overall more joyful than the first one and fits the theme of the title thanks to the hands in the air which can refer to making friends and having

people around; however, this new appearance looks slightly childish which might not match the target audience. The global appearance of this recent cover looks rather modern and welcoming, compared to the original cover.

Finally, there are some similarities between the updated cover of *What Color Is Your Parachute?* and *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*, previously analysed. Indeed, the bright orange and the sans-serif font style, which fit the colour theme of self-help books, resemble the cover of Mark Manson's book; this shows the modernity of the recent edition of Richard Nelson Bolles' book. The illustration of the parachute, also present on the original cover, is less visible than the title, unlike the first edition, which makes it easier to read; the title, written in white and all caps, also brings clarity and modernity to the cover. The number of textual elements seems to be similar on the two editions, however the size and style of the title make the recent cover look simpler and cleaner than the original one.

These observations and examples demonstrate the evolution of cover design and the way it has changed, from including too many details to more delicate and simple elements, in order to adapt to the target audience as well as the 21st century's standards and trends. The art of cover design has changed as a way to attract younger people and fit into modern society. This evolution is part of the marketing process as it implies creating the physical aspect of an object, its image, brand and identity and choosing specific colours and elements in order to best promote the books and attract the gaze of potential readers. The evolution of cover design has synced with the growth of marketing, choosing simplicity over complexity.

As seen, the self-help industry has grown exponentially over the last century; in the last decades, it has become a commercial and cultural phenomenon. The projections show a bright future for the industry as the increase in popularity and need is not likely to stop anytime soon. The current circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic as well as the growing interest in spirituality and the need to learn more about one's inner self have also offered the self-improvement market an opportunity to thrive. Despite the fact that self-help books have become consumer objects and the negative critiques towards the industry, the promises, alleged benefits and effective research will most likely allow the market to prosper in the future.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have touched on multiple points. To being with, I have presented the different meanings and synonyms of self-help and self-help books and explained the origins of this literary genre and pop culture phenomenon, not only to introduce the subject, but also to show the evolution of self-help through the centuries. Then, I have discussed the society's need for self-help, its various approaches used, its effectiveness and possible benefits and shared its positive and negative criticism; the aim was to explain the origins and needs for self-help in today's society and to discuss self-help in the medical and scientific fields as well as to present the different critiques towards self-help in order to show its impact on society and the mixed reactions it receives. Finally, I have presented the business aspect of self-help, focusing both my research and reflection on the United States. My goal was to show the popularity of self-help and its place within the consumer society, made possible through the huge influence of Western countries, of their lifestyles and capitalist governments.

Consequently, my reflection throughout this work has answered my questions. Indeed, I have explained the place of self-help, especially self-help books, within the consumer society, being used as daily consumer objects and purpose. The way the self-help culture has paved its way to its current position, being mentioned and used in not only literature, but also in psychology, science, medicine and political and social matters states its popularity and impact on the world. The evolution of self-help throughout the centuries has synced with human and social evolution in order to adapt to new periods and lifestyles; this is a testament to its place within society and the publishing industry as a whole. Indeed, the self-help culture has evolved in the way that it has created a multitude of means to share and spread its meaning and aim, choosing literature as its most important vessel of communication.

As seen, I have focused my reflection and research regarding self-help on multiple points; however, I believe that there is still a lot of research to do on the subject of self-help. Indeed, the origins of self-help are very wide as it can be found in a multitude of ancient works and lifestyles, which can result in further interesting discoveries. Also, the evolution of self-help in the scientific and medical fields makes it worth exploring and questioning as the progress so far has been quite positive. Besides, conducting further research on society's need for self-help could also be an interesting and important discussion in the future.

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