

Eva Illouz, **Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help**, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008, 294 pp., \$19.75 (hardcover).

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In the opening passage of sociologist Eva Illouz's *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions and the Culture of Self-Help*, the author acknowledges that her book belongs to a tradition of scholarly attempts to understand therapeutic culture. Broadly put, this tradition can be corralled into two camps. The communitarian critique holds that therapeutic discourse encourages self-absorption that in turn distracts us from social engagement. At its most egregious, we blindly ignore social injustice. The second camp, based on Foucault's historicization of systems of knowledge, argues that "psychoanalysis's project of self-liberation is a form of discipline and subjection to institutional power by other means." In contrast to both perspectives, Illouz claims to analyze therapeutic discourse "without presuming to know in advance what social relations should look like" (p. 4). As a cultural sociologist, Illouz is most concerned with the "work" accomplished through the invocation of the languages and codes of therapy. Illouz's work, which tracks the diffusion of therapeutic language into the workplace and family life, is a welcome addition to scholarship of the therapeutic ethos.

Illouz's book is ambitious, positing therapeutic discourse as the dominant linguistic resource of the American 20th century and claiming global diffusion across high and popular culture, across private and public life. Reaching further, Illouz claims a larger purpose when she says that the therapeutic ethos is an ideal site for understanding how culture works in general practice. Spanning the 20th century, the therapeutic discourse generated a new language of selfhood that is rivaled only by political liberalism and the market-based language of economic efficiency in its wholesale adoption. Like capitalism, the language of therapy has been globally embraced by the institutions of the corporation and the family, thus illustrating how culture and knowledge are intertwined. Part of the fun to be had in reading Illouz's book derives from the profusion of methodological approaches, including historical, critical, and textual analysis, as well as ethnographic approaches, including attending self-help workshops and interviews. I enjoyed the tacking between research approaches; for some, her data may be too wide reaching and her methods insufficiently explained.

While other scholars have located the origins of self-help culture in the United States in 19th century spiritual movements, and even earlier to the self-sufficiency advocated by Benjamin Franklin, for Illouz, it is Freud, as a Weberian charismatic figure, who inadvertently launched the U.S. self-help industry. In particular, it was Freud's warm reception at Clark University and the quick adoption of his ideas by the budding professionals of 20th century self-help culture that set the course for quick diffusion of psychoanalytic perspectives on sexuality, work, and the family. In his fifth lecture at Clark, Freud echoed a sentiment that Americans had long endorsed when he said, "The energetic and successful man is he who succeeds by his work in transforming his wishful fantasies into reality." Thus, Illouz credits Freud with advancing "the meritocratic and voluntarist narrative of self-help." Illouz claims as a general truism that cultural ideas are more likely to catch on if they reconcile social contradictions (p. 50). The

tremendous success of Freud's ideas is due to the fact that they made seemingly sensible two countervailing demands on the modern self. Psychoanalysis provides the injunction to turn inward to search for authenticity and individuality. At the same time, individuals are called by the institutions of modernity to be outwardly rational. What Illouz means by rationality seems to be the vocal and social examination of the self. Freud's success was not due only to the fact that he addressed the uncertainties of the self, but also because media industries were eager to build upon the themes and genres his work constructed. This second chapter on Freud concludes with an interesting but admittedly cursory look at the diffusion of psychoanalysis into advertising, self-help literature, and film.

The book's meaty third chapter takes on the difficult task of charting the diffusion of self-help rhetoric into the corporation. In contrast to the sociology of the organization, which sees the corporation as dominated by masculine norms, Illouz attributes the incorporation of emotions into the work environment to a feminization of the American corporation in the 20th century. Invoking the rhetoric of science and rationality, experimental and personnel psychologists claimed to help managers increase workers' productivity. Elton Mayo was particularly influential in his argument that worker productivity increased if "work relationships were characterized by care and attention to workers' feelings" (p. 69). The adoption of therapeutic discourse within the corporation had a transformative impact; "traditional work relationships based on authority and even force were criticized and rejected and were recast as emotional and psychological entities, thus enabling a (seeming) harmony between the organization and the individual" (p. 74). Given the influence that Illouz attributes to Freud, I would have appreciated specific linkages back to the themes of the second chapter in this and the following chapter. For instance, one of the primary injunctions adopted by the corporation is that the worker exercise emotional self-control; as Illouz's interviews with managers and MBA students explore, "emotionality" in the workplace is considered evidence of weakness. While an association with Freud is implied — emotional self-control belies a socially successful self — I would have welcomed more explicit connections.

Two broad themes are at work in the fourth chapter on the integration of therapeutic discourse in the private life of the family. One revolves around tensions between the competing discourses of feminism and therapy, and the other argues that, integrated through mutual adoption of the therapeutic ethos, life at work and at home is more similar than previously acknowledged. Illouz sets this second theme in contrast to Weber's theory of social spheres, and later, Bourdieu's theory of fields, which hold that fields, such as the market, the family, or religion, are growing increasingly distinct from one another, holding different behavioral norms. Rather, Illouz claims "the languages of economic and domestic transactions have increasingly aligned themselves" (p. 107). The same directive to be self-controlled that Illouz associates with therapeutic discourse in the workplace has taken up lodging in our intimate relationships and not to positive effect. Therapeutic discourse encourages a cool intellectualization of intimate relations for both men and women; "the intense rationalization of the private sphere indicates not only the middle-class women's emotional culture is highly rationalized but also that middle-class men's rationality is deeply enmeshed with emotions" (p. 151).

The fifth and sixth chapters further develop Illouz's hypothesis that self-help culture is gender blind, now within the context of contemporary narratives of selfhood and identity. On their face, Freudian psychoanalysis and self-help culture actually share little in common. To self-help's democratic call to be

pragmatic, hardworking, and positive, Freudian psychoanalysis, which actually follows historically, offers a rejoinder of social privilege, dream work, and free association. And yet, clearly the two distinct cultural frameworks have been intertwined on our bookstores' shelves and in our minds for many decades — addressing personal and social issues of all life stages, including disease, intimacy, happiness, parenting, career, and general well-being. Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow were both responsible for fusing the two discourses, arguing that humans naturally, throughout the lifespan, strive toward self-realization. In doing so, the two greatly expanded the purview of psychologists to include the all-encompassing terrain of health and self-realization. Together, the languages of psychoanalysis and self-help have become deep structural forces that inform our practices of thinking, speaking, and writing about the self. Therapeutic narratives are “narratives in action,” demonstrating that one is in “the process of understanding, working at, and overcoming (or not overcoming) one’s problems” (p. 196).

In conclusion, Illouz is a careful and impressive reader of theory, bringing her empirical research into conversation with classical sociology, Freudianism, and postmodernism, to compellingly chart the expansive reach of self-help culture.