This book builds a fresh perspective on therapeutic narratives of intimate life. Focusing on the question of how popular psychology organises everyday experiences of intimacy, its argument is grounded in qualitative research in Trinidad in the Anglophone Caribbean.

Against the backdrop of Trinidad’s colonial and postcolonial history, the authors map the development of therapeutic institutions and popular therapeutic practices and explore how transnationally mobile, commercial forms of popular psychology, mostly originating in the Global North, have taken root in Trinidadian society through online social networks, self-help books, and other media. In this sense, the book adds to social research on the transnational spread of a digital attention economy and its participation in the proliferation of popular psychological discourse.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with self-help readers, the book considers how popular psychology organises their everyday experiences of intimate life. It argues that the proliferation of self-help media contributes to the psychologisation of intimate relationships and obscures the social dimensions of intimacy in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and other social structures and inequalities. At the same time, the book draws on anthropological arguments about the colonisation of consciousness in the Global South to interpret the insertion of transnationally mobile popular psychology into Trinidadian society.

An innovative contribution to scholarship on therapeutic cultures, which explores the widely under-researched dissemination of popular psychology in the Global South, the book adds to a sociological understanding of the ways in which therapeutic narratives of self and intimate relationships come to be incorporated into everyday experience. As such, it will appeal to scholars of cultural studies, anthropology, and the sociology of gender, sexuality, families, and personal life.

Daniel Nehring is Associate Professor of Sociology at East China University of Science and Technology in Shanghai. His research explores the personal consequences of globalisation and rapid social change. In particular, he is interested in the transnationalisation of therapeutic narratives of self and
social relationships. He is the author of Sociology, a co-author of Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry and the co-editor of Intimacies and Cultural Change.

**Dylan Kerrigan** is a lecturer in Anthropology and Political Sociology at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus, Trinidad and Tobago. His research studies the way societies change over time and the cultural processes that accompany such change. He is a co-author of Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry and is currently developing a manuscript entitled Elites in the Caribbean.
Therapeutic Cultures

This interdisciplinary series explores the role which therapeutic discourses and practices play in the organisation of social life, critically addressing the two broad questions of how therapeutic knowledge is popularised beyond academia and mental health care, and how it participates in popular culture, and in institutional structures and processes in government, law, education, media, health, work, family life, public and private policies.

Therapeutic Cultures seeks to address the histories of therapeutic culture and engage with its contemporary manifestations, so welcomes books that examine the transnationalisation of therapeutic discourses and practices and their uses in local institutional settings, as well as studies of the ways in which therapeutic discourses and practices participate in the social organisation of power, and how they become ingrained across a wide array of institutions.

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Therapeutic Worlds
Popular Psychology and the Sociocultural Organisation of Intimate Life

Daniel Nehring and Dylan Kerrigan
For Mengwei

For Aunty Cathy and Uncle Des
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In *Therapeutic Worlds*, Daniel Nehring and Dylan Kerrigan scrutinize the ongoing global psychologisation of everyday life. Building on ethnographic fieldwork from the Caribbean island of Trinidad, the authors give a unique insight into how popular psychology now creates a moral grammar of intimate life outside of the Global Northwest, which Trinidadian men and women draw on to comprehend their romantic and mundane intimate relations. Nehring and Kerrigan convincingly show how people’s quest to improve and optimise their love-life, which at first may appear helpful and even ‘natural’, could be interpreted as an assemblage of local, national, and transnational forces that ultimately may disturb the development of a stable self-identity and lasting intimate relationships.

Nehring and Kerrigan show that the current ‘psychological imagination’ is far from ‘the sociological imagination’ of C. W. Mills, as it works to systematically obscure citizens’ potential for seeing how their life-biography is intertwined with ongoing historical, cultural, and political processes. The result is not only a thin interpretative framework for understanding our own inner life and other people’s thoughts, feelings, and acts but also, reason Nehring and Kerrigan, the emergence of “the thin self” – a dramatic ontological mutation of Gilbert Ryle and Clifford Geertz’s famous distinction. The authors themselves act admirably according to researchers’ modesty, careful to stress that their results from Trinidad are not necessarily generalisable, but it is at least worth pondering whether Nehring and Kerrigan succeed in mapping some of the mental and emotional consequences of living under the neoliberal late capitalist world order. Almost a decade ago in their book *The New Individualism*, sociologists Charles Lemert and Anthony Elliott described how Western men and women were now expected to make a life for themselves out of a disappearing context, but with self-help literature, therapeutic culture, and cosmetic surgery at their disposal. Yet, Nehring and Kerrigan’s study demonstrates how context stills matters, despite late capitalist dreams of ‘anywhere’ flexibility.

Through assemblage theory, the concept of glocalisation, and attentive fieldwork, the authors are able to lay out how transnational therapeutic culture is not something that simply replaces traditional culture but always
blends in with regional norms and practices, often through a layer of translators, such as national experts who successfully import therapeutic jargon. Hence, *Therapeutic Worlds*, the second addition to Routledge’s new volume series on therapeutic cultures, is an admirable example of our ambition to provide a much-needed nuanced take on ‘the therapeutic turn’ where psychologisation is not something that suddenly arises and colonises traditional culture top-down but always is a result of an extensive negotiation between global and local forces, science and everyday life, and Enlightenment and intimate dreams.

*Ole Jacob Madsen, Edgar Cabanas, and China Mills*
In this book, we explore the psychologisation of intimate relationships. We ask how psychological and psychotherapeutic knowledge comes to permeate everyday life, and we consider what roles it may play in organising people’s experiences of love, romance, marriage, and intimate ties with another. In doing so, we hope to add some new concepts and themes to critical social research on therapeutic cultures, popular psychology, and the psychologisation of social life.

Our argument is grounded in empirical enquiry in Trinidad in the Anglophone Caribbean. We conducted in-depth interviews with self-help readers on the ways in which they use self-help books, life advice in online social media, and other forms of popular psychology to think about and improve their intimate relationships. We observed and gathered documentary sources on Trinidadians’ diverse therapeutic practices, and we mapped their often deep historical roots as well as the transnational social processes of which they form part, from colonialism to contemporary commercial self-help’s cross-border pursuit of consumers.

Through our research in Trinidad, we show how popular psychology constitutes a distinctive moral grammar of intimate life – a public narrative of beliefs, values, and norms that may become profoundly implicated in the ways in which people make sense of their intimate bonds. We use the concept of therapeutic worlds to analyse popular psychology as an assemblage of local, national, and transnational social, cultural, and economic processes, and to chart the relationships that emerge between institutional regimes and individual self-identities in the context of processes of psychologisation. We suggest that, in Trinidad, contemporary popular psychology may contribute to the entrepreneurial mobilisation of intimate relationships through individual efforts to optimise their own mental traits and conduct and those of their intimate partners. In this, popular psychology may contribute to a thinning of the self, in so far as it obscures the ways in which self-identity is constituted through close and intimate relationships with others and in so far as it elides the ways in which these relationships are structured by patterns and inequalities of gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, and so forth. Drawing on anthropological arguments about the colonisation of consciousness, we
argue that this discursive and cognitive abstraction of intimate relationships from their institutional context in Trinidad works to reproduce the social legacy of colonialism and postcolonialism in a neo-colonial form. At the same time, our research reveals how popular psychology may intersect with and underpin the cultural background assumptions of hegemonic neoliberal capitalism.

Most immediately, our research is meant to highlight the importance of scholarship on therapeutic cultures and processes of psychologisation in the Global South. Research in this field has been largely built around concepts, theories, and themes that have resulted from scholarship in the Global Northwest. Recently, there have been efforts to decentre enquiries into everyday therapeutic cultures through studies that have highlighted transnational flows of therapeutic discourses and practices that reach beyond the Global Northwest and through research self-consciously set in the Global South. Our study is intended to contribute to this trend. Simultaneously, we hope that it might also add to the incipient and as yet embryonic global turn in sociology. All too often still, sociological enquiry is defined by scholarship in and focused on the Global Northwest, while research elsewhere – say, in the Caribbean or in Latin America – is confined to the enclosure of ‘area studies’, whatever that may be. In this sense, through empirical research in the Global South, we add to important current strands of academic debate on therapeutic culture, notably the transnational diffusion of therapeutic discourses and products, the relationships between therapeutic discourses and everyday experience, and the interactions between psychological knowledge and capitalism.

Daniel Nehring
Shanghai, China, December 2018

Dylan Kerrigan
Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, December 2018
Acknowledgements

This book has a long history, and it is closely tied to our earlier work on transnational popular psychology. In particular, Emmanuel Alvarado has contributed in important ways to the early stages of the development of this text, and we would like to thank him for many constructive discussions. We would likewise like to thank the members of the academic network Popular Psychology, Self-Help Culture and the Happiness Industry for sharing ideas and informing our thinking about therapeutic culture in many interesting and creative ways. We are particularly grateful to Edgar Cabanas, Ole Jacob Madsen, and China Mills, with whom we have collaborated closely in the development of this network.

We would also like to thank our team of local researchers and interviewers who helped conduct much of the data collection. These are Allyce Woodhouse and Sonia Ria-Williams.

Finally and most importantly for this book have been the Trinidadians who talked to us about their encounters with popular psychology. We are very grateful for their contribution and their interest in our research, without which we could not have completed this book. We would like to thank all the women and men who gave up their time to be interviewed for this study and who were willing and open to answer our personal questions.

Daniel Nehring would also like to express his gratitude to the Department of Sociology at the Catholic University of Daegu in South Korea, and especially to Lee Jung Ok and Kim Dong Il, for providing an intellectual home during the final stages of his work on the book.

Dylan Kerrigan would also like to thank Elizabeth Darwish for her constant support and insightful feedback throughout the development of the project.
1 The psychological imagination

*Insights to Intimacy* promises a dream come true. The book offers to set its readers on the path to true love. In this sense, it is not very different from many other self-help books, new and old. Published in 2016, it has nonetheless quickly risen to the status of a minor bestseller. By the third quarter of the year, its paperback edition had become the 160th best-selling book of the 35,404 love and romance self-help manuals available on amazon.co.uk, and its e-book edition was performing similarly well.

The book couches its promise of true love in emotionally highly charged language. Christian Pankhurst, *Insights to Intimacy*’s author, sets the tone straight away in the introductory chapter’s opening paragraphs:

You know you want it. Deep down, you’ve always wanted it: a blissful, connected, magnetically charged love relationship with a wonderfully matched partner who sees you fully and adores you endlessly. Does it sound like a fairy tale? It’s not. No matter what your current relationship status might be, you’re about to gain access to that dream. The powerful, proven practices you are about to learn will unlock the romantic connection and deeper intimacy you’ve always longed to experience. This relationship book is unlike any other. It will show you how to be in an authentic, delicious relationship with yourself, and you’ll discover why that’s such a critical precursor to being in a relationship with a partner. You’ll recognize your long-buried truth as you blast through the all-too-common myths that have kept you from experiencing relationship bliss.

When you and your partner practice integrating the three synergistic components of a Heart IQ Relationship, you’ll have the tools to transform your entire experience of life. You’ll be:

1. Powerfully, naturally healing each other’s past wounds and neglect.
2. Using communication skills that keep you deeply, meaningfully connected to your beloved and to yourself.
3. Enjoying a healthy sexual connection that provides an endless stream of aliveness and vitality for you both. (Pankhurst 2016, e-book introduction.)
Here, Pankhurst relies on a direct appeal to deeply felt desires to draw his readers into his argument. The two opening sentences evoke wonderful experiences of romantic love that any of his readers must surely always have longed for without realising that they are more than just a dream. Pankhurst unsettles his readers’ emotions, inviting them to admit that, deep down, they both wish for and want bliss, connectedness, magnetically charged love, and adoration. On the back of this highly emotional entreaty, he then sets out his promise: “powerful” and “proven” practices that will make true love come true.

Metaphors of change play a crucial role in Pankhurst’s account of these practices. He claims that they will “transform your entire experience of life”, “unlock” deeper intimacy, and lead to an “authentic” relationship with oneself and one’s intimate partner. This notion of authenticity is crucial to understanding how Pankhurst envisions personal change. He conceptualises it as the recognition of a hidden, true self that can be recovered through systematic introspection and behavioural adaptation so as to unlock a hidden potential. In this sense, he writes of the “long-buried truth” that his readers can recognise by leaving behind the myths that have kept them from experiencing “relationship bliss”.

*Insights to Intimacy*’s recipe for true love therefore relies on a model of self-directed personal change. The text assumes that individuals possess the capacity to act autonomously in understanding hidden fears, conflicts, and anxieties; addressing these anxieties; and, in so doing, creating a truly loving relationship with an intimate partner. This model is evident throughout the book. Consider, for instance, the following description of intimate relationships:

> Our intimate relationships are profound mirrors to our inner conflict and unresolved issues, making them the perfect vehicle for our personal healing and awakening. It’s not always an easy journey, but in my opinion, there’s nothing more rewarding and important than mastering the art of intimate relationships. Why? Because the greatest gift you can give to the world is to become a fully healthy you… And a fully healthy you doesn’t just impact your life, but it positively transforms and heals all those whose lives you touch, especially your children. Isn’t that worth the effort and sometimes uncomfortable exploration of your inner world? (Pankhurst 2016, e-book front matter; emphasis in original.)

Arguing that intimate relationships are “mirrors” to inner conflicts, Pankhurst strongly differentiates the self from the social relationships that surround it. The latter mirror the former in so far as they are externalisations of conflicts and tensions that are internal to the individual psyche. Thus, spiritual healing, becoming a “fully healthy you”, must be the first step in transforming one’s intimate relationships. The transformation of
one’s social relationships therefore is a consequence of one’s transformative and therapeutic engagement with one’s “inner world”. Consequently, *Insights to Intimacy* proposes a two-step model of personal change. This begins, in part one of the book, with recipes for cognitive and emotional transformation to allow readers to “become a healthy you”. Proposals for individual change are then followed, in part two of the book, by suggestions to transform readers’ intimate relationships and “become a healthy couple”.

The book thus presents love as a special quality locked within the self. Individuals have to work hard at transforming their selves to set love free, using the techniques the book presents. If they achieve this inner transformation, it will change both, improve their emotional well-being and their intimate relationships with others in profound ways. Pankhurst describes this special, transformed state as “joy”:

> Our default state, as human beings, is joy. The only things keeping us from experiencing an endless stream of joy are the judgments we constantly run. It’s as if joy were raining down upon us at all times, but we’re only holding up a thimble to catch our share when we could be catching oceans of it! Heart IQ is learning to watch and notice what closes us to receiving joy, so that we can choose to remain open instead. When we become aware of how we close, we need to start loving and accepting it with deep, sincere appreciation. The irony (and secret) to fully loving and accepting yourself is that this can only be fully realized through the power of being felt and witnessed by others. (Pankhurst 2016, e-book chapter 1.)

This characterisation of joy underlines a second aspect of *Insights to Intimacy*’s self-directed approach to personal change. On the one hand, the book is concerned with diagnosing and improving its readers’ intimate relationships. On the other hand, it frames these intimate relationships as a device in the pursuit of individual emotional satisfaction or “joy”. Indeed, elsewhere in the book Pankhurst suggests that it may be necessary for couples to break up if their relationship is not conducive to joy: “The journey is not really about the other; it’s about you coming into your joy, your self-love, your self-confidence....After the declared period of time [to make the relationship work], if the partnership is still causing you more pain than joy, you’ll know you need to move on” (Pankhurst 2016, e-book chapter 11). In this account, what matters is not so much creating and maintaining a relationship with an intimate partner on its own terms and for its own sake but rather developing this relationship as a spring of personal fulfilment.

In order to draw readers into this argument, Christian Pankhurst relies on appeals to his readers’ emotions. At the same time, he posits a strong claim to its intellectual and scientific legitimacy. First, he designates his recipe for true love the “Heart IQ Relationship”, as shown above. This label references academic psychology’s theories and methods of intelligence testing.
and gives *Insights to Intimacy* an academic appearance as well as an air of uniqueness. Second, he reinforces this appearance by relying on seemingly scientific language. In the opening paragraphs of the book, quoted above, he claims, for instance, that the Heart IQ Relationship consists of “three synergistic components”. Elsewhere, he writes of the “6 Laws of Emotional-Energetic Couple Dynamics” (Pankhurst 2016, e-book chapter 5) and claims that his proposals amount to a unique “philosophy” (Pankhurst 2016, e-book chapter 3). Finally, Pankhurst stakes a personal claim to authority by describing in considerable detail how he left his work as a chiropractor and spent time, from the mid-2000s onwards, with “the best seminar leaders, facilitators, and group dynamics experts in the world” to develop and perfect his method (Pankhurst 2016, e-book front matter). Through these statements, Pankhurst creates the impression that his prescriptions for true love are built on academic knowledge in psychology and related fields.

*Insights to Intimacy* can be read on its own, as a guidebook on love and intimate relationships. However, to do so would be to misunderstand the book’s nature and purpose. It is simultaneously a self-help book and a marketing tool meant to foment a larger commercial enterprise. The cover of the book’s electronic edition proclaims that Christian Pankhurst is the “Founder of Heart IQ™”. The use of the acronym for trademark offers a first clue as to the commercial implications of Pankhurst’s writing. Throughout the text, he frequently encourages his readers to visit websites belonging to his Heart IQ network, offers his readers an online access code for “FREE demos and tutorials”, and presents “success stories” of couples who have gone on a “Heart IQ journey” resulting in “wonderful change”. Even a cursory online search reveals that Christian Pankhurst is quite active beyond his writing, offering a wide range of workshops and events through the online Heart IQ Network (Heart IQ Network BV 2016a), showcasing his work on Facebook, TV, a YouTube channel, and so forth. With its book-length treatment of Pankhurst’s self-help method and its claims to academic authority, *Insights to Intimacy* is just one of several interlocking elements of a broader commercial strategy. While some of these events are advertised as free of charge, others involve substantial charges. For example, the “Relationship Mastery Foundations Program” is described as the first part of an eight-week training academy, at a cost of US$197 (Heart IQ Network BV 2016c). However, the “Heart IQ Ultima” event is much more expensive at €3500, promising a “7-Day advanced Heart IQ™ Circle Retreat for only the most experienced practitioners and participants” (Heart IQ Network BV 2016b). Many other more or less expensive courses and events can likewise be booked through the Heart IQ Network website. Similarly, his book makes the commercial dimension of Pankhurst’s interests more than clear. For example, it contains stories of happy customers who bought into Heart IQ and found bliss in their relationship. The book explicitly encourages its readers to follow suit and extend their engagement with Heart IQ through Pankhurst’s website:
Success Story from Judith & Graham

Judith began her Heart IQ journey about a year before her husband, Graham, joined her. They are both now actively involved and have just celebrated their 25th wedding anniversary. Judith says that Graham has changed since coming into the work: “He used to get stressed when things went wrong in our relationship because he couldn’t fix them. I felt uncertain that I could share with him what I was feeling because I didn’t want to cause him stress. Graham has learned the importance of just being there with me, which means that I could tell him what I was going through, knowing that he can hold me without needing to fix my pain.” Graham says that he has seen wonderful changes in Judith, too: “Judith is enjoying life more, both with and without me. We’ve both learned to say what we want, rather than what the other thinks we should want.” The couple was overjoyed to receive a message from their niece on their 25th wedding anniversary. Even in the midst of the pain of her own parents’ divorce, she shared, “I would be happy as anything to have a relationship like yours.”


It therefore seems accurate to describe Pankhurst as a self-help entrepreneur who pursues commercial success through his media presence and live events.

Themes and questions

Christian Pankhurst’s ostensible success is no accident. Beyond its apparent success as a minor bestseller, books like Insights to Intimacy are a typical example of the extraordinary success of popular psychology. Consider, for example, the sales value of self-help books in a range of countries around the world.

Table 1.1 International sales of self-help books, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of copies sold</th>
<th>Sales value, national currency</th>
<th>Sales value, GBP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>682,947</td>
<td>$15,733,358.11</td>
<td>£8,888,569.700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>2,172,960</td>
<td>R$47,095,494.09</td>
<td>£10,758,942.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>855,026</td>
<td>₹223,685,543.86</td>
<td>£2,513,432.0126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>16,209,486</td>
<td>¥548,363,984.9</td>
<td>£61,695,731.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>251,083</td>
<td>R47,362,969.60</td>
<td>£2,463,620.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>2,628,307</td>
<td>£24,938,985.89</td>
<td>£24,938,985.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USA</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>$9,847,784</td>
<td>£7,393,650.40</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Beijing OpenBook (China), personal correspondence; Nielsen BookScan (all other countries), personal correspondence. The conversion into British pound used current exchange rates in September 2016 and is therefore slightly inaccurate.
Beyond self-help books, a wide range of other media offer psychologically informed guidance on matters of intimate life, from smartphone apps to magazine advice columns to self-help seminars and workshops. Popular psychology is a significant cultural phenomenon at the international level, and it participates in significant ways in public conversations about meanings and practices of intimacy.

In this book, we ask why this is so. We explore self-help narratives of intimacy, and we look at the ways in which individuals draw on these narratives to organise their everyday experiences and practices of love, romance, sex, couple relationships, and marriage. At the same time, we situate self-help narratives and their uses in everyday life in their socio-economic context. We examine the production of self-help media and consider the role which their publishers and entrepreneurially minded self-help writers play in the diffusion of therapeutic understandings of intimate life. In this context, given their long-standing prominence (Morris 1981), we focus on the self-help book while also considering the significance of other media.

In this context, we pursue three broad sets of questions. First, we ask how self-help books construct meanings of love and intimacy and how these meanings are situated within broader sets of norms, values, and beliefs. Self-help books are a popular and widely read genre, as we have begun to show. They express dominant and subaltern, hegemonic and alternative visions of intimate life, and their popularity means that they have a capacity in their own right to shape public narratives and cultural meanings of intimacy. In this sense, their narratives are significant objects of sociological analysis.

Analysing self-help narratives, we are particularly interested, second, in their transnational production, circulation, and consumption. To what extent and in which ways are self-help narratives transnationally mobile? Since the 1970s, self-help and popular psychology have been widely researched (Lasch 1984; Lasch 1979/1991; Illouz 2008; McGee 2005; Simonds 1992; Rose 1998). However, these studies have largely focused on a few societies in the Global Northwest, with a particular emphasis on the USA. Explaining the growing prominence of popular psychology, they have highlighted institutional developments within these societies without exploring in much depth the role of social processes of transnational scale. The very few extant studies on transnational popular psychology have variously interpreted its cross-border mobility in terms of processes of cultural hybridisation (Nehring et al. 2016; Hoesterey 2015), cultural convergence (Illouz 2008), and the Americanisation of the majority world (Watters 2010). On the whole, these studies have had little to say about the transnational constitution of therapeutic narratives of love and intimacy. Important questions therefore remain unanswered: To what extent are these narratives localised in geographically and historically specific institutional arrangements? How do publishing houses and self-help authors contribute to the localisation or transnationalisation of popular psychology? In which ways and to what extent do self-help narratives resonate with arguments about the individualisation and fragmentation of intimate life that have
played a prominent role in hegemonic Western sociology for the past two decades? To what extent is it possible to speak of transnational – or even global – therapeutic narratives of intimate life? In which ways would such transnational narratives articulate processes of cultural convergence and differentiation?

These questions are framed by broader sociological arguments about the relationships between popular psychology and global neoliberalism, including the cultural and local ways and forms which contemporary neoliberal politics may take and instantiate. Scholarship in the Global Northwest has highlighted a deep resonance between popular psychological models of personal development and neoliberal understandings of self-identity and social relationships. Popular psychology’s emphasis on autonomous and self-directed personal fulfilment has been widely interpreted as a cultural rationale that underpins programmes of neoliberal government. In response to these arguments, we ask, third, what the intersections and disjunctions might be in the majority world between hegemonic neoliberalism and popular psychological narratives of love and intimacy. On what terms do these narratives promise to empower their readers within their intimate lives? When, how, and why do self-help readers draw on these narratives to account for their experiences of love and intimacy in everyday life? How does the work of self-help authors underwrite or challenge neoliberal assumptions about self and society, love and intimacy?

Our answers to these questions build on fieldwork conducted over the past two years in Trinidad, one of the two main islands of the nation of Trinidad and Tobago in the Anglophone Caribbean. To map self-help narratives on love and intimacy, we have gathered and analysed more than 150 self-help books. Self-help books are the focus of our argument, as their accounts of self-improvement are lengthier and more detailed than those of other, shorter media formats. Through publication statistics gathered through market research firms and publishers’ associations, we document the production, circulation, and sales of self-help books at the local and international level. The analysis of other media, such as authors’ and publishers’ websites, blogs, newspaper columns, workshops, and seminars has allowed us to further document the cultural and commercial contexts in which self-help narratives are written, converted into commodities, marketed, and sold. Finally, through participant observation and interviews with self-help readers in Trinidad, we explore the ways in which individuals may draw on self-help narratives to account for their everyday experiences of love and intimacy. In this sense, the present study seeks to offer a holistic perspective on self-help narratives of intimate life by situating them in their context of production and consumption.

Our choice of Trinidad as a setting contributes to our objective to extend the remit of research on popular psychology. Compared to recent studies on global mental health (Mills & Fernando 2014), enquiries on the insertion of therapeutic narratives and practices into popular culture have largely remained localised in the Global Northwest and, most notably, in
The psychological imagination the USA. The transnationalisation of popular psychology remains poorly understood, as do its localised uses in the Global South. Trinidad offers important insights in this regard. As a postcolonial and multicultural nation, Trinidad reflects the realities of globalisation in the majority world in significant ways. On the one hand, Trinidad is a site of globalisation in terms of the multi-ethnic, multi-religious, and multicultural make-up of its society, and in terms of the ways in which Trinidadians negotiate the resulting differences and hierarchies of race, ethnicity, class, and gender. On the other hand, Trinidadian society is inserted into globalisation through its position in global socio-economic hierarchies. While the country has achieved a high and growing level of development since its independence in 1962 (United Nations Development Programme 2016) (see Figure 1.1).

It has also been subject to neoliberal structural adjustment programmes since the 1990s (Klak 1997). These reforms have exacerbated existing socio-economic divisions, and they have contributed in significant ways to contemporary problems such as unemployment among the country’s highly educated and highly skilled middle class and concomitant ‘brain drain’

![Figure 1.1](image.jpg) Photograph shows Dr. Eric Williams handing over the British flag, the Union Jack, after the opening of Federal Parliament to the then Governor, Sir Edward Beetham, in 1958.
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(Nurse 2004; Beine et al. 2015). The concomitant insecurity of everyday life – in terms of transitioning from education into work, in terms of keeping work, in terms of making work pay, in terms of leading a ‘good life’ that matches individual aspirations – creates a fertile territory for popular psychology, as individuals look for meaning and stability in a precarious world (Nehring & Kerrigan 2018). As we will show in the following, popular psychology is indeed popular in Trinidad, in a variety of media formats, from self-help apps to workshops to life advice books. Self-help books, for instance, are a typical sight in bookshops in Trinidad’s upscale shopping malls, where they are bought by the country’s aspirational middle class of professionals, civil servants, and academics. At the same time, smartphone apps fill the needs of younger generations, and they loom large in the lives of young, busy, tech-savvy students. On the whole, as we will show in the following, a mosaic of self-help media has captured a highly diverse audience and drawn it into the world of popular psychology. While some of these self-help media are locally made, such as advice columns in local newspapers or workshops organised locally in companies, schools, and universities, many are imported from abroad, and those that are locally made often reflect broader transnational trends, such as positive psychology and mindfulness meditation (Cabanas & Illouz 2016; Reveley 2013). This reflects the position of Trinidadian society in the hierarchy of global consumer culture, and it allows us to explore how readers in Trinidad appropriate a transnational cultural trend in the context of their locally situated everyday lives.

At the same time, this book seeks to contribute to academic debates about contemporary transformations of intimate life. Over the past three decades, Western sociologists have set out strong claims about the progressive individualisation and fragmentation of everyday experiences of intimate life (Bauman 2003; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim 2002; Elliott & Lemert 2006; Hochschild 2003; Illouz 2007). These claims have resonated widely beyond the Global Northwest (Wang & Nehring 2013; Kim 2010; Yan 2010; Ronald & Hirayama 2009), but they have also generated noteworthy and long-standing controversies (Lee 2011; Smart 2007). In the context of these debates, the intersections between popular psychology and cultural narratives of love and intimacy have occasionally been considered (Hochschild 2003; Illouz 2007; Moskowitz 2001). However, in line with the wider academic literature on therapeutic culture, these studies have tended to focus on the USA. At the same time, they do not reflect the wide variety of popular psychological narratives of intimate life. Religious and spiritual therapeutic narratives of intimacy, for example, remain widely under-explored. We address these analytic gaps by exploring self-help narratives of intimate life in Trinidad, by highlighting the transnational dimensions of popular psychology, and by drawing attention to the ways in which popular psychology intersects with, reinforces, and contests the cultural, political, and economic dynamics of neoliberal capitalism in the postcolonial Caribbean.
Intimacy and popular psychology

Love and intimacy thus are significant sites of therapeutic intervention. They form part of the project of contemporary therapeutic culture to open individuals’ lives up to systematic introspection, diagnosis, and behavioural remedies in the pursuit of self-actualisation. Katie Wright invokes the image of the ‘therapeutic society’ to characterise the pervasiveness of contemporary therapeutic culture:

The privileging of psychological discourses and the prominence of counseling as a remedial life strategy are emblematic manifestations of the therapeutic society. Yet the therapeutic extends more widely than concerns with psychological selfhood and the individual in therapy. It encompasses a multifaceted spectrum of discourses, social practices, and cultural artifacts that discursively and institutionally pervade social and cultural life. (Wright 2010, 1.)

The term ‘therapeutic culture’ encompasses, on the one hand, the knowledge and institutionally situated practices of a wide range of mental health professionals. On the other hand, it points to the diffusion of psychological, psychiatric, and psychotherapeutic expert knowledge into popular culture, where it merges with a broad range of public narratives and manifests itself in diverse forms, from self-help books to management seminars to TV talk shows to your academic department’s annual away day.

The globalisation of psychological expert knowledge and institutionalised forms of mental health care have been widely researched and are today well understood. The spread of psychology and its therapeutic applications within the Global Northwest and from the Global Northwest into the majority world has been analysed in considerable detail (Illouz 2008; Plotkin 2003; Damousi & Plotkin 2009; Kleinman et al. 2011). Journals such as Transcultural Psychiatry explore the cross-cultural contexts of mental health practice, while its implication in global hierarchies of knowledge and power have been explored from diverse analytical perspectives (Mills 2014; Fernando 2014; Lakoff 2005).

The transnational dynamics of popular psychology remain much less well understood, as we have argued throughout this chapter. It may be that the focus of extant research on specific societies within the Global Northwest reflects broader trends and biases in sociological research. In her critique of sociological theory’s Eurocentric orientation, Raewyn Connell (2007) examines the long-term consequences of the 19th-century split between Western anthropology’s focus on the colonised societies in the Global South and sociology’s concern with social life in the Global Northwest. Academic sociology has in recent years begun to critically examine its Eurocentrism (Bhambra 2007; Alatas 2006; Gutierrez Rodriguez et al. 2010), and new networks and forms of international collaboration (Keim et al. 2014;
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Bhambra 2014) have contributed to an incipient global turn in sociological research. At the same time, academic Eurocentrism unarguably persists, as business-minded Western universities reinforce their dominance through international league tables and rankings, the massive recruitment of students from the majority world, satellite campuses in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, and so forth.

This pattern is reflected in sociological arguments about popular psychological discourses of love and intimacy. Since the late 1970s, these arguments have been an element of broader debates about the individualisation and fragmentation of cultural meaning and everyday experiences of intimate life. Its promise of empowerment and self-actualisation notwithstanding, scholars have tended to regard the growing cultural influence of popular psychology with suspicion (Wright 2010). Writing in the late 1970s, Christopher Lasch argues that a “therapeutic sensibility” has become pervasive in American society: “People today hunger not for personal salvation, let alone for the restoration of an earlier golden age, but for the feeling, the momentary illusion, of personal well-being, health, and psychic security” (Lasch 1979, p.7). He connects this therapeutic sensibility to the rise of a “culture of narcissism” and points to its pernicious consequences for Americans’ intimate lives:

Americans today invest personal relations, particularly the relations between men and women, with undiminished emotional importance. The decline of childrearing as a major preoccupation has freed sex from its bondage to procreation and made it possible for people to value erotic life for its own sake....This appearance is an illusion. The cult of intimacy conceals a growing despair of finding it. Personal relations crumble under the emotional weight with which they are burdened.... The same developments that have weakened the tie between parents and children have also undermined relations between men and women. (Lasch 1979, p.187f.)

For the purpose of our argument, two features of Lasch’s argument are noteworthy. First, he paints a highly pessimistic image of intimate attachment in the 1970s, and his warning that personal relationships are crumbling is characteristic of the general tone of his work. Second, he unequivocally recognises popular psychology as a central element of this trend. These two features recur in much of the later academic literature on popular psychology. Scholars have widely used popular psychology to illustrate broader trends towards a fragmentation of intimate life. Arlie Russell Hochschild (2003), for instance, analyses self-help books for women to document the rise of a “commercial spirit of intimate life” in American society, in whose context women are invited to “manage their needs” and end emotional investment in relationships that do not yield a satisfactory return anymore. In her seminal work on therapy culture and contemporary transformations of intimacy, Eva Illouz (Illouz 2012; Illouz 2007; Illouz 2008) writes of the rise
of “cold intimacies” in the context of the advent of an emotional capitalism that renders intimate relationships as a market exchange. Anthony Elliott and Charles Lemert (2006) link the rise of popular psychology to broader processes of individualisation. These are characterised by the privatisation of everyday experiences and the emergence of new, highly reflexive, highly fragile, and fleeting forms of love, sex, and intimacy. Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (1999) argue that couple relationships have been rendered fragile and have become sites of therapeutic intervention by the de-traditionalisation of intimate life and the need for individuals to reflexively fashion their own modes of love and intimate attachment.

These studies have all been widely influential in their own right, and they characterise much of the academic debates on popular psychology’s influence on dynamics of intimate life over the past three decades. Theories of individualisation have remained controversial, and they have been subject to extensive revisions and critiques (Lee 2006). Recent research has drawn attention to the limits of individualisation beyond the Global Northwest (Yan 2009; Halskov Hansen & Svarverud 2010) and emphasised the depth and durability of intimate bonds (Smart 2007). However, these revisions and critiques have had little to say about the roles which popular psychology might play in shaping and localising public discourses and everyday experiences of intimate life. Moreover, most of the cited studies and much of the extant scholarship on popular psychology predates the global crisis that began in 2008 and has continued into the present decade. In this context, it seems important to revisit these debates and pursue the questions we have set out above: How do popular psychological narratives represent love and intimacy? How are these narratives shaped by their commercial context of production and circulation? To what extent are they of transnational scale, and in which ways are they situated in locally specific cultural, social, and economic arrangements? How do their readers draw on them to account for their everyday experiences of intimate life?

Through these questions, we develop arguments and lines of enquiry first set out in Transnational Popular Psychology and the Global Self-Help Industry (Nehring et al. 2016). In this book, we developed a first systematic analysis of the transnational scale of self-help publishing. We characterised self-help publishing as a hybrid mixture of texts of national and transnational reach. In this context, we drew attention to the role which the commercial power of international publishing houses and the self-promotion strategies of entrepreneurially minded self-help writers have played in the popularisation of the genre. Importantly, we drew attention to the prominence of neoliberal models of self-identity, agency, and social relationships in self-help texts around the world, and we argued that these models may resonate deeply with readers who have grown up in societies that may offer little by way of long-term stability and security. In this book, we develop these arguments to explore the role which self-help and popular psychology play in global transformations of intimate life.
Self-help books and the self-help industry

To understand the roles which popular psychology plays in the cultural organisation of intimate life, self-help books make for a useful starting point, as they articulate self-help’s psychologically informed arguments in considerably greater length and detail than alternative media, such as YouTube videos, agony aunts’ advice to newspaper readers, or smartphone apps. At the same time, the trajectories of production, circulation, and consumption of self-help books are traceable through publishers’ and authors’ websites, booksellers, and publishing statistics compiled by market research agencies, offering insights into the diffusion of popular psychology at the national and transnational level.

Self-help books offer their readers guidance on a wide range of personal life problems, from professional success and financial gain to love, romance, sex, marriage, and divorce. As with *Insights to Intimacy*, the common point of departure of all self-help books lies in a perceived need for personal change and self-improvement. Self-help books draw on and amplify their readers’ wish to improve their lives by finding happiness, peace of mind, or a spiritual awakening; by achieving professional and financial success; by building and maintaining a loving relationship with an intimate partner; by separating from one’s partner when love has waned; and so forth. The end point of self-improvement in self-help narratives commonly lies in a fully authentic, in some sense ‘true’ self-identity, whose discovery will yield personal fulfilment and successful relationships with others in everyday life. It is in this sense, for example, that *Insights to Intimacy* suggests the development of a “fully healthy you” is the source of truly loving intimate relationships. Thus, self-help books frame personal change as a process of self-actualisation in the pursuit of an authentic self. To this end, these books offer their readers techniques for the systematic examination, control, and modification of their patterns of thought and action in daily life. Christian Pankhurst’s Heart IQ method is one example of such self-help techniques. It relies on a pattern of introspection, critical self-analysis, and behaviour modification to guide its readers towards an authentic, joyful, loving self that is capable of forming and maintaining lasting intimate relationships.

Self-help writing might seem to overlap with other genres, both in terms of its form and its content. The narrative form of self-help books varies widely. While *Insights to Intimacy* combines personal reflections on the part of its author with a purportedly scientific analysis of love and intimate relationships, self-help writing comprises an eclectic variation of narrative forms, including novels, biographies, and spiritual and religious writings as well as ostensibly scientific treatises. Across these variations, self-help books offer moral guidance on specific aspects of everyday life. Their argument departs from a set of beliefs about the nature of self-identity and social relationships. Self-help authors commonly ask their readers to accept these beliefs and adjust their worldview accordingly. *Insight to Intimacy*’s extensive claims about the ‘true’
nature of love and intimate relationships are one example of this pattern. On this platform, self-help books then advance specific moral principles that will allow their readers to revise their self-identity, adjust their relationships with others, and, ultimately, achieve a sense of authenticity and personal fulfilment. Self-help books thus parallel moral arguments in philosophical, religious, and spiritual texts and other literary works of moral significance.

At the same time, self-help books form a clearly bounded genre in so far as they pertain to the internationally highly successful self-help industry. Around the world today, a wide range of products and services are marketed and sold to people in search of life advice and moral guidance. These include self-help books, magazines like the internationally circulating *Psychologies*, TV talk shows such as *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, phone-in radio programmes meant to support distressed readers, blogs, YouTube channels and websites, smartphone apps, and a wide range of public lectures, seminars, and workshops, such as the recently popular ‘mindfulness’ sessions or the notorious events of ‘dating gurus’ like Julien Blanc (Hendriks 2012). The sales of self-help books illustrate the commercial success and the international popularity of the genre at large, as shown in Table 1.1 previously.

In each of the seven countries listed in the table, hundreds of thousands or even millions of self-help books were sold, at a commercial value ranging from £2.50 to £61.70 each. Self-help books are marketed to readers and recorded by market research firms under dedicated rubrics, such as “Self-Improvement”, “Careers & Success” (Nielsen BookScan 2009), “Self-Help”, or “Relationships” (Amazon UK 2016). This simultaneously differentiates self-help books from, say, the Bible, the Quran, or the works of ancient Stoic philosophers like Seneca and Marcus Aurelius and promotes their public visibility and sales.

This suggests two analytic perspectives on self-help books. On the one hand, they occupy a distinctive segment within national and international markets for self-help products. Self-help authors and publishing houses rely on commercial strategies and marketing ploys to promote their work within these markets. Christian Pankhurst’s extensive use of the “Heart IQ” label to describe his self-help techniques can be understood as such a marketing ploy, akin to the branding of commercial goods and services. It gives his work an air of uniqueness, while its referencing of the intelligence quotient creates an appearance of scientific reliability. The label’s commercial significance is rendered readily apparent on Pankhurst’s “Heart IQ” website, where it regularly appears with a trademark sign (Heart IQ Network BV 2016a). As suggested above, Christian Pankhurst thus epitomises the figure of the self-help entrepreneur. Much more than authors in other genres, he relies on a variety of entrepreneurial strategies and media formats to engage with his audience, convince them of his recipes for self-improvement and, ultimately, to become his customers by buying books, access to workshops, and so forth.

On the other hand, beyond their commercial uses, self-help books can be usefully understood as bearers of particular sets of cultural meaning. Self-help books articulate beliefs about the nature of self, society, and social
relationships, and they set out norms and values that are grounded in these worldviews. In other words, self-help books can be read as moral narratives that manifest and, given their considerable popularity, create and promote specific cultural trends in contemporary society. They operate as tools in a process of socialisation that underpins common-sense assumptions about self-identity and the social ties we form with others. In this sense, they are texts of considerable cultural significance, and their analysis may contribute to a sociological understanding of meanings, experiences, and practices of intimacy in the contemporary world.

**Self-help readers**

Self-help narratives in books and other media may therefore be usefully understood as indicators of the ‘spirit of the times’. They express common-sense assumptions about society and social relationships, and sometimes they also end up challenging this common sense (Nehring et al. 2016). At the same time, it is important to look beyond self-help as a form of public discourse and ask how readers engage with self-help media. Academic critiques frequently focus on the intersections between popular psychology and neoliberal capitalism, and they highlight the role which popular psychology may play in promoting the individualising and de-socialising ethos of neoliberalism (Rimke 2000; Binkley 2011). While these critiques are important, they do not explain what readers do with self-help in their everyday lives, assuming that they are not simply passive consumers of media discourse. Consider, for instance, how Laura explains her interest in self-help books. Laura is 35, married, and works as an architect in Trinidad and Tobago in the Caribbean. When we asked her what made her read self-help, she told us:

It was spiritual and practical at the same time because I don’t go to church or any religious institution so I don’t really have that grounding in terms of something to centre me so the self-help books are helpful in terms of giving me a kind of spiritual awareness of myself, of my surroundings and it’s not caught up in all of the spiritual stuff, doctrines and stories that you don’t know if it real or not. It was something based on reality in terms of how you feel and stuff like that.

Laura lives in a multicultural and multi-ethnic society in which a diversity of faiths – mainly Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam, but also smaller religions such as Rastafari and the Bahá’í faith – play a large role in public life. Her comment on getting “caught up in all of the spiritual stuff” might be read as an allusion to the public prominence of religion in Trinidadian society. At the same time, her secular outlook on life and distrust of religion made her search for other sources of moral guidance in life. The apparently scientific basis of popular psychology – “based on reality in terms of how you feel and stuff like that” – turned self-help into an attractive alternative for her.
Adriana, a graduate student at the University of the West Indies, offered a somewhat similar rationale when we talked about her interest in self-help. While she recognises the spiritual dimension of some self-help narratives, she believes, like Laura, that they make for a secular alternative to institutionalised religion:

I really think it is the people that you know don’t go to church or don’t go to Mosque or don’t go to Temple, where they don’t have that spiritual guide within an institutionalised form, I think self-help guides are a more secular thing. I don’t know if any religious people read self-help guides unless you look at motivational things like Joel Osteen.

The accounts of self-help readers like Adriana and Laura suggest that self-help has come to occupy a distinctive space in the institutional landscape of Trinidad and Tobago, which is characterised by both religious diversity and increasing secularisation, notably among highly educated professionals. Self-help may speak to its readers’ needs for answers to basic questions on how to lead a good life in circumstances in which traditional religion has lost much of its cultural binding power.

From these accounts by self-help readers, important questions follow. Under what circumstances specifically do self-help media become attractive alternatives to traditional sources of moral guidance? What other sources of life advice do they draw on alongside self-help? How do self-help readers choose media to engage with, such as books, smartphone apps, workshops, and so forth? Do they engage deeply with the life advice of specific self-help entrepreneurs, or do they ‘shop around’ among alternative sources of guidance? How deeply do they incorporate self-help’s moral vision into their everyday lives? And finally, how do they negotiate potential contradictions between self-help life advice and the practical circumstances of their everyday lives?

**Therapeutic cultures in Trinidad**

Through our research in Trinidad, we have explored broad questions about self-help narratives, self-help readers, and the transnational self-help business that we have set out in this chapter. Chapter 2 considers how power, the social organisation of intimate life, and capitalism intersect in therapeutic culture. Chapter 3 asks how popular psychology is transnational, sketches the contours of the global self-help industry, and charts the ways in which transnationally mobile popular therapeutic narratives may become implicated in localised experiences of intimate life. Chapter 4 then offers a detailed socio-historical account of the social organisation of intimate relationships in Trinidad from the colonial period onwards, while chapters 5 and 6 look at the ways in which women and men today engage with self-help to try and improve their intimate lives. Chapter 7 next draws on these interview narratives to look at the psychologisation of intimate life and consider questions about the colonisation
of consciousness in Trinidad. Finally, chapter 8 explores the implications of our work for international academic debates about therapeutic culture in terms of the psychologisation of intimate life in the Global South, intersections between popular psychology and capitalism, and the question of to what extent popular therapeutic narratives might empower their readers.

However, before we move on, it seems useful to continue our argument with a brief introduction to Trinidad and Tobago (T&T) and the forms of therapeutic culture that have emerged from the nation’s notably complex history. Trinidad and Tobago is a twin-island nation-state and natural gas economy, geographically located at the southernmost tip of the Caribbean island chain, seven miles from the Venezuelan coast where the Orinoco River empties into the Gulf of Paria. Formerly British colonies, the islands were connected as one colony in 1889, achieved independence in 1962, and became a republic in 1976. T&T, with one of the highest per capita incomes in the Caribbean and Latin America, is one of the region’s wealthiest and most developed nations. In 2011 the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development took T&T off its list of developing countries and relisted it as a developed nation. This is not to say, however, that there is not vast inequality, poverty, and crime, as all these are deeply associated with a long history of underdevelopment of certain communities on both islands.

Due to the legacies of European imperialism, slavery, indentureship, and colonialism, T&T is demographically a multicultural place where the national anthem contains the lines, “Here every creed and race, find an equal place”. In the most recent census of 2011, the islands’ non-institutional population of 1.32 million was divided into these categories and numbers: East Indian (also called “Indo”) 37.78 per cent (468,524); African (also called “Afro”) 36.49 per cent (452,536); mixed – African/East Indian 8.17 per cent (101,363); mixed – other 16.17 per cent (200,503); Caucasian 0.63 per cent (7,832); Chinese 0.32 per cent (4,003); Indigenous 0.11 per cent (1,394); Syrian-Lebanese 0.08 per cent (1,029); Portuguese 0.07 per cent (837); and other ethnic group 0.18 per cent (2,280). Notwithstanding the positive sentiment of the national anthem, T&T is still a nation that many describe via its ethnic segments and the political pluralism of Indo versus Afro rather than its many mixtures (Premdas 1995). Over the last 20 years, ethnic parties representing either the nation’s Afro-descended population or its Indo-descended population have swapped election victories on four different occasions. Prior to 1995, however, Afro parties ran all the first five governments of independent T&T.

A main reason for this is that, prior to the 1980s and as a legacy of the residential patterns set up after emancipation in 1838, the majority of T&T’s Indo population was rurally based, while the majority of the Afro population was urban. The continuity of ethno-racial politics at the ballot box can often give the impression that the elite economic power holders in the nation are members of either the Afro or Indo political classes – and a few are. However, this omits the vast economic power held locally by lighter-skin minority groups as well as the political economy of the island more generally at the tail end of
the long gas boom from the mid-1990s to 2015 – the country’s second boom following the oil boom of the late 1970s. As Figueira (2017) notes in his study of the ‘Household Budget Survey 2008/2009’ for the Central Statistical Office, the available data demonstrated “that the ethnic groups with the highest percentage distribution in the high income group is as follows: Syrian-Lebanese 83.3%, Caucasian 74.4%, Chinese 52.3%, Other 47.4%, Mixed 29.3%, Not Stated 27.6%, African 24.1% and Indian 17.1%”. This suggests that energy revenues have enriched some much more than others.

Another important aspect of life in Trinidad is the relationship between colonialism and internal mental health (Aho & Liu 2010; Hickling & Hutchinson 2012; Pearce 2014, p.810). As the head of Clinical Sciences at the University of the West Indies, Dr Gerard Hutchinson and others draw attention to the Caribbean’s historical condition and its impact on the mental health of local individuals. Internalised colonialism and oppression are serious environmental considerations for any research into therapeutic cultures in the Caribbean (Fanon 2008; Nicolas & Wheatley 2013, p.172).

In postcolonial societies, individuals often struggle with these issues of agency, control, self-worth, and efficacy, creating self-defeating and psychologically undermining self-concepts. These issues sometimes express themselves as a lack of confidence and self-esteem but may also be represented as a cavalier overconfidence that turns into destructive narcissism, consequently leading to poor decision making. It is the feeling that decisions are made about you without your input and that they may not reflect your identity, interests, or desires. (Hutchinson 2015, p.150.)

This suggests that Caribbean legacies of structural and everyday violence, histories of subordination, and collective historical trauma have long-term impacts on the individual and are important considerations for any assemblage developed to understand the Caribbean experience (Erikson 1994, p.233; Morgan 2014).

Research has also revealed longstanding psychopathological effects of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean that have had significantly negative long term effects on the mental health of many within the Caribbean population. Current research suggests that there is a need to nurture protective strategies to enhance resilience and social capital, which would ensure the wellness and continued survival of Caribbean people in spite of the many challenges they face. (Hickling & Hutchinson 2012.)

In Trinidad and Tobago, therapeutic practices have long played an extensive role in society beyond formal institutional arrangements and clinical practice. This is most centrally so due to the island’s colonial history and subsequent development. For instance, in spite of its recent commercialisation (Aching 2002; Kerrigan 2016b), Trinidad and Tobago’s annual Carnival has long been
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acknowledged as a temporary form of social resistance, personal liberation, and inner renewal (Hill 1972, p.100; Benitez-Rojo 1997, p.212; Best 2001). Tony Hall, a well-respected local theatre designer, carnival artist, and Caribbean art historian has described the Carnival and the activities of ‘playing mas’ or ‘playing yuhself’ – the local expressions for taking part in Carnival – as a “specific mechanism that has to do with spirit possession and masking to reveal inner energy”. Carnival, while having many strands and influences that include Europe, India, Africa, and the Americas (Henry 2008), was recognised in both Carnival research and Cultural Studies as a specific local response to emancipation from slavery and as a temporary form of healing for a large number of the formerly enslaved, because playing Carnival provided therapy in response to the distress, dispossession, and violence of colonialism.

As the local art psychotherapist Santori Hassanali notes, for much of its history Trinidad Carnival can be seen as “therapy” because it offered the formerly enslaved “a medium through which disenfranchised, subjugated, and vulnerable peoples could express, explore, and thereby learn to respond to, cope with, and even reconfigure and restructure the systemic infractions that plagued them” (Hassanali cited in Grey 2017). He goes on to note that this therapeutic function of Carnival has not been completely lost in the commercialised and expensive modern bikini-and-beads ‘pretty mas’ version of Trinidad Carnival, as many participants still express belief in its personal psychological benefits, feeling liberated from the status quo for a time and transformed through the practice of playing a masquerade. For Hassanali, “as a creative artistic process, mas making, and its expression, has the potential to facilitate psychological healing”. This is so because Carnival is a “medium by which an individual’s resistances and defences can be unconsciously circumnavigated, granting access to drives, ideas, memories, thoughts and other repressed material that would usually go unexplored and unexpressed” (Hassanali cited in Grey 2017). Brathwaite, among many others (Bellour & Kinser 1988; Nettleford 1988; Birth 1997; Henry 2008; Nicolas & Wheatley 2013, p.173), has also written about “the healing potentials of the Trinidad Carnival as a foundation of self/communal therapy” (Brathwaite 1997, p.330) and the dance play or ‘drama therapy’ in Trinidad Carnival as both a form of group psychotherapy and “a remediative process for personal wars” (Brathwaite 1997, p.332).

The islands’ ethnic make-up derives from a wide sweep of the world’s territories, including West and Central Africa, China, India and Pakistan, the Middle East, France, Spain, Portugal, Britain, and the Americas. This has created a highly diverse society in cultural and linguistic terms. Scholars have written of the therapeutic effects of the linguistic artistry of its calypsonians, artists, and storytellers (Roheler 1985; Elder 1968). This linguistic play, sometimes spoken of as ole-talk and ‘picong’ (Kerrigan 2016a), a term referring to the common Trinbagonian cultural practice of light comical banter, teasing, and storytelling, has been described as a ritualised form of community building (Winer 2009, p.692). Furthermore, in a society where many are varilingual
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(Youssef 1991, p.87; Youssef 1996) and bi-dialectic and able to speak both Trinidad Creole English (TCE) and Trinidad Standard English (TSE), the use of Creole in both formal and informal settings has been seen by some as a form of creative disorder with therapeutic potential (Nettleford 1988). Writing in the 1960s about the therapeutic potential of such cultural practices, the Tobagonian anthropologist and Temple University professor J. D. Elder noted of both Carnival and the wordplay of Calypsonians that they are ‘escape hatches’ from the horrors of mental illness – ways of dealing with violence so that it ebbs away in order that we do not explode. Calypso songs are thus seen as what they are – techniques with adaptive functions in the society – ritual treatment of real mental health problems which the social and cultural conditions have traditionally generated. (Elder 1968, p.37.)

This research points to a variety of therapeutic practices, such as localised forms of group self-help (Nehring et al. 2016, pp.142–143). These practices may be interpreted as a long-standing strategy for social survival in the context of the harsh colonial and postcolonial realities of life in Trinidad. In this sense, they constitute a localised and distinctive therapeutic ecosystem or world. This interpretation is supported by Caribbean scholars who have written about the power of Caribbean arts and creativity as therapeutic ways to address the negation of self that results from the colonial encounter (Nettleford 2003, p.169). For example, this includes local syncretic religions like the Spiritual Baptists, whose ritualistic use of specific forms of clothing offers spiritual protection and is believed to do therapeutic work (Pearce 2014, p.868). Thus the history of Trinidad and Tobago reveals local therapeutic strategies through which attempts at shaping and transforming the self have acquired long-standing cultural significance.

These strategies are very much implicated in everyday experiences of everyday life, as the Trinbagonian responses to \textit{tabanca} show. ‘\textit{Tabanca}’ is the Trinidad Creole English word for suffering love loss. It is often uttered between friends when one is heartbroken and lamenting the end or loss of an intimate relationship. But ‘\textit{tabanca}’ can also be used to describe the loss of things and possessions, like a \textit{tabanca} for Carnival or the holidays. The ethno-linguist Lise Winer (2009), in her \textit{Dictionary of the English/Creole of Trinidad and Tobago}, describes \textit{tabanca} as:

1\textit{n} A painful feeling of unrequited love, from loving someone who does not love in return, especially someone who was once a lover or spouse

2\textit{n} A painful feeling of loss of something desirable often in reference to political office.

Psychologists Hari Maharajh and Akleema Kalpoo suggest that \textit{tabanca} is a local cultural behaviour pattern and adaptive response indigenous to
T&T that the majority of Trinbagonians are aware of (Maharajh & Kalpoo 2008, p.132). This is based on the response rate of 536 people to their questionnaire survey, where 95 per cent stated they were familiar with tabanca and 82 per cent said they perceived the behaviour as being part of Trinidad culture. Maharajh and Kalpoo’s definition of ‘tabanca’ reads:

Tabanca is a form of love sickness, derived from the French expression meaning ‘to be thrown onto a bank.’ It is described as ‘a state of depression’ accompanied by withdrawal symptoms (inability to eat, sleep, or think) that occurs when one has been rejected by a loved one or experiences unrequited love. It is the loss of a love object. (Maharajh & Kalpoo 2008, p.135.)

There are many strategies for overcoming tabanca in Trinidad and Tobago. Some of the female participants we interviewed for this book suggested strategies such as dating again, moving on, taking some time to heal, or simply finding a new person or job to love. Others told us they turned to God or their family for help during such times. Still others mentioned local aesthetic therapeutic ideas like dance, Carnival, or “spirit wear”, which, according to local clothes designer Robert Young, is “the notion that in dressing the body we also attend to and treat the psyche or spirit in certain way” (Pearce 2014, p.859).

Another strategy we were told about for treating a tabanca or finding love was the use of popular psychology through self-help books and other self-help materials. Our participants mentioned reading works by authors such as Joyce Meyers, T. D. Jakes, Steve Harvey, Dale Carnegie, Michael Baisden, Myles Monroe, Joel Osteen, Rhonda Bryne, Deepak Chopra, Christian Pankhurst, Iyanla Vanzant, Eckart Tolle, Krishna Murti, and Paulo Coelho. YouTube videos, Facebook posts, Facebook support groups, self-help gurus’ personal websites, and wellness blogs were also popular, if not more popular, than reading or listening to self-help books:

My initial reading experience with the self-help thing was something that was recommended from a friend on a site. It was after a breakup, I had just gone through a breakup, and she sent something about how to deal with tabanca or what I would tell my ex, or something like that, and I found the material was useful and since then I subscribed to the website, so daily now I get self-help articles to read” (Interview with Arielle)

This recognition of the usefulness and success of commercial popular psychology alongside other local therapeutic practices stood out from our interviews and research, and it highlights the constant mix of local cultural practices with transnationally mobile forms of therapeutic culture, such as self-help in its various manifestations. It is in this sense that Trinidad is a
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rich site for the exploration of transnational, commercialised popular psychology and its insertion into locally situated experiences.

With this book, we move academic debates on popular psychology forward. First, this is one of very few book-length, English-language studies on popular psychology in the Global South. While there are other important books on processes of psychologisation in the Global South (e.g. Mills 2014; Mills and Fernando 2014), these tend to focus on the clinical application of psychological knowledge. In this sense, our focus on the everyday uses of popular psychological media moves beyond extant research. It does so, moreover, through its focuses on popular psychology’s readers. While the study of popular psychology has burgeoned in recent years, there are very few in-depth studies on the ways in which its readers interpret its narratives and use them to organise their everyday life experience. With our study on the uses of popular psychology in the context of Trinidadians’ intimate lives, we address this omission. At the same time, of course, this book has distinctive limitations. We have much to say about our participants’ experiences of intimate life, and issues of gender and gendered inequalities come to form part of our argument in this context. However, this is not a book about gender inequalities in Trinidad, and it should not be read as such. A further noteworthy limitation lies in our focus on heterosexual intimate relationships. With the present study, we hope to have laid the basis for future in-depth research from these important alternative perspectives.

Notes

1. Trinidad and Tobago differ notably in social, demographic, cultural, and economic terms. For this reason, we decided to limit our analysis to Trinidad only. We also did not include Tobago in our data collection due to reasons of access and differences in the local economies; Trinidad is a relatively developed liquid natural gas hub whereas Tobago is still very much a tourist island.
2. Wherever possible the original spelling, phonetics, and punctuation used by our speakers has been maintained.
3. ‘Playin mas’ is the local Trinidadian expression for ‘playing a Carnival masquerade’: the act of taking part in Carnival. Peter Minshall, the Carnival designer, argues, “In addition to looking at how a mas happens, we can examine how the society, the culture, speaks about it. In Trinidad, we inevitably speak of ‘playing a mas’. We do not say, ‘What mas are you going to wear?’. We say, ‘Wha’ mas yuh goin’ an play?’ And the mas we play, even in the most fun of bands, has a character, a sense of dramatic personage, or mood, or symbolic representation. We do not say, ‘I am wearing a Flamenco costume’, as if we were going to a fancy dress ball, we say, ‘Ah playin’ a Flamenco dancer.’”
5. See also, Trinidad Guardian Newspaper (2014) ‘Mas – A Tool to Transform Trauma’. Originally printed at http://www.guardian.co.tt/lifestyle/2014-05-18/mas%E2%80%94tool-transform-trauma
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