

## **Abstract**

This research project studies the consumption of ‘self-help’ media texts with respect to black South African audiences. The core objective of this project is to contribute to expanding debates on race, class, identity, and media consumption. Based on in-depth interviews with 10 avid self-help consumers, the paper develops an argument for the role of self-management in race and other social identities. The deployment of the qualitative methodology of a thematic discourse analysis of over seven hours of interview transcripts assists this paper in providing an account of where, when and how self-help media manifests in the lives of the chosen participants. The paper finds that participants are motivated to consume self-help media texts by a need to ‘know’ and ‘understand’ themselves and others in order for these participants to acquire what they express to be an atmosphere of inter-relational harmony. A growth of media texts forming part of a genre related to the practice of therapy in South Africa is owed to what I argue as a deep-rooted culture of ‘reconciliation’ and a preoccupation with emotions which stems from a particularly murky socio-political past still in a constant state of reparation (prevalent in discourses about reconciliation and forgiveness) in the democratic dispensation. As a key inspiration, the once-off yet pertinent process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa has noticeably inspired a genre which supplies its audience with an array of self-help, therapy-inspired media texts thriving on the practice of public confession and testimony (key principles of the TRC). This has paved the way for a culture of ‘treatment’ and ‘remedy’ becoming what this paper refers to as a ‘public affair’. Active participants on these self-help, often therapeutic, media texts on mass media platforms regularly do so at the expense of exposing deeply personal issues to ‘experts’ entrusted to assist with ‘healing’ what are deemed to be problem areas in people’s lives. Referred to by some of the interviewees as ‘brave hearts’, these participants (‘public confessors’) hold a complex position in the minds of the interviewed individuals who, ironically, express admiration and respect to the individuals who publicly testify and confess as they are a valued reference of ‘learning’ but at the same time, an expression of disappointment and shame is bestowed upon these ‘public confessors’ for allowing their argued exploitation by the media. Amidst all this, it is apparent that consumption of self-help media texts have particularly intricate influences on the patterns of self-identity as constructed by the participants of this research project.

**Key Words:** Self-help; Identity; Consumption; Popular Psychology; Popular Culture; Class; Media