

Popularizing debates on human psychology and behavior has resulted in a lucrative market in self help books in recent years. The best ones make entertaining and informative guides and many people benefit from them. They cover emotional, financial and business issues. Some are more philosophical and some are more practical. There is also a growing trend in parodies of the genre.

The work life balance issue is explored in *The 4-Hour Workweek: Escape 9-5, Live Anywhere and Join the New Rich*. Written by Timothy Ferriss, he describes it as a semi-autobiographical book. He is a wealthy businessman, who found himself to be the victim of overwork and his book is about his way of overcoming the problem and maintaining a profitable business whilst lessening the workload. As with many self help books, this comes from personal experience and is therefore, valued by readers.

John Cleese is a familiar figure in the comic world, famous for Monty Python and the Flying Circus, *Fawlty Towers* and *A Fish Called Wanda*. He has an interest in relationships and co-authored *Families and How to Survive Them* with his therapist, Robin Skynner. The result is an insightful look at the development of human beings, through childhood, adolescence and adulthood against the background of family therapy methods. It also discusses the importance of the role of the father within the family.

One of the best selling books of the 1990s was *Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus* by John Gray. This is the most famous example of gender role self help books and seeks to make sense of husband and wife relationships. The idea is that understanding one another better will lead to better communication. The author proposes that men and women express themselves differently and respond to stress in a different way.

Many of these types of books discuss ways to relieve stress. They are popular because people lead such hectic lives and these self help books encourage the reader to take time out for themselves, benefiting their emotional and physical health. *The Importance of Being Idle* is compiled by Stephen Robins and is a series of journal excerpts and essays on the theme of relaxing. Well known contributors include Mark Twain, Bertrand Russell, Charles Dickens and Samuel Johnson.

For men of a certain age and women who want to understand them, the ideal book is *Understanding the Mid-Life Crisis* by Australian psychologist Dr Peter O'Connor. This is one of the self help books aimed at men, aged between 35-45 that are undergoing marital difficulties and general stress as a result of this emotional crisis in their lives.