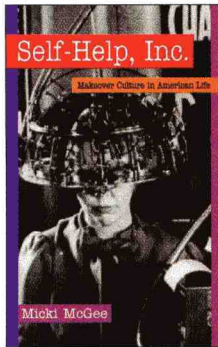
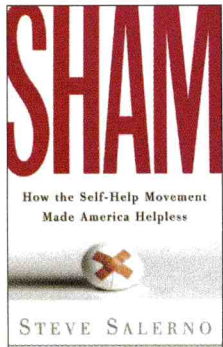


NEW RELEASES

The *PT* Bookshelf

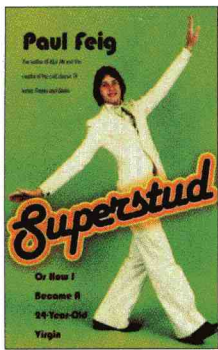


**Sham: How the Self-Help Movement Made America Helpless** By Steve Salerno (Random House)

**Self-Help, Inc.: Makeover Culture in American Life** By Micki McGee (Oxford University Press)

HERE ARE TWO MUCH-NEEDED exposés of the big business of self-help. Take your pick: Both begin with the same George Carlin quote (“If you’re looking for self-help, why would you read a book by somebody else? That’s not self-help—that’s *help*.”) and dissect Dr. Laura, Dr. Phil, fire walkers, cheese movers, *Seven Habits* and the power of now. Self-help is more than a silly waste of time, these authors agree: It obscures social problems, corrodes self-reliance and fosters selfishness.

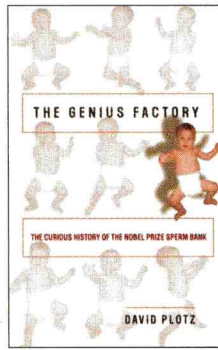
Journalist Salerno’s *Sham* is more fun to read. Along the lines of *Fast-Food Nation*, it’s a high-spirited, well-reported polemic. McGee, a cultural critic at New York University, provides a more scholarly approach, pointing to labor market shifts. Along the way, she considers the ontological paradox of self-invention and quotes Foucault. Her book can be overly theoretical; in Salerno’s, critique occasionally gives way to contempt. Neither author recognizes that good self-help can provide common-sense advice. But in the end, the books’ shortcomings are easy to overlook. Salerno and McGee reveal what practitioners of pop psychology have known for a long time: Self-help is an easy sell.



**Superstud: Or How I Became a 24-year-old Virgin** By Paul Feig (Crown)

THE CREATOR OF TV’s *Freaks and Geeks* recalls incidents on the road to his sexual maturity, from a vivid description of his first orgasm while climbing ropes in his second-grade gym class to an episode in which a drunk guy threw up on his “trophy date” at a rock concert. Feig’s sexual ambitions and attempts to get women to notice him repeatedly

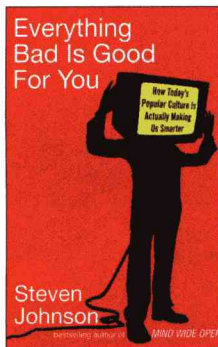
turn to disaster. A funny—and cringeworthy—summer read that might make your own first fumbblings toward sex seem less humiliating after all.



**The Genius Factory: The Curious History of the Nobel Prize Sperm Bank** By David Plotz (Random House)

IN THE 1970S a creepy millionaire who abhorred the common rabble started a bizarre experiment in eugenics: collecting and banking the sperm of Nobel laureates and other social leaders in the hopes of breeding mankind’s “secular savior.” Plotz, deputy editor of online magazine *Slate*, investigates the mysteri-

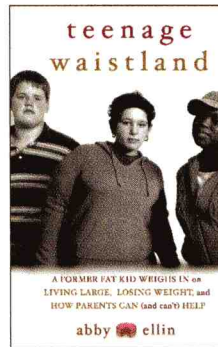
ous benefactors—some of whom weren’t exactly genius material—and their progeny, reuniting donors and their biological children along the way. A fascinating story told with intelligence and sensitivity.



**Everything Bad Is Good For You: How Today’s Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter** By Steven Johnson (Riverhead)

THE SPATIAL REASONING required to triumph in the classic video game *Tetris* and the social networks tracked by an *Apprentice* or *24* viewer are among the many unsung cognitive benefits of contemporary mass media and digital culture, argues Johnson. He proffers a new explanation for a sur-

prising trend: The average IQ has risen by 13 points in the last 50 years. Complex media may or may not breed bigger minds, but either way Johnson offers the best rationale yet for nonstop gaming and reality TV.



**Teenage Waistland: A Former Fat Kid Weighs in on Living Large, Losing Weight and How Parents Can and Can’t Help** By Abby Ellin (Perseus)

MANY TEENAGERS feel alone inside their own bodies, but overweight teenagers feel an even deeper isolation, loathing the bodies they are trapped in. Ellin, a journalist and onetime fat kid herself, explores the sad culture of overweight adoles-

cence, from diet meals to fat camps to surgery. Her advice to parents of obese teens: Love and accept your children, no matter what size they are. Once you stop obsessing about food, maybe they will too.