Rampant Unfettered Narcissism: A Defense

Laura Kipnis

Wednesday, March 19
4:00 pm
Few Hall Multipurpose Room, G27

Laura Kipnis is the author of Against Love: A Polemic, The Female Thing: Dirt, Sex, Envy, Vulnerability, and most recently How to Become a Scandal: Adventures in Bad Behavior. She is a professor in the Department of Radio/TV/Film at Northwestern University, has received fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation, and has contributed to Slate, Harper’s, The Nation and The New York Times Magazine. She lives in New York and Chicago.

Lecture Abstract:
Every society gets the character type it requires: the industrial era required hard work and self-sacrifice, the expansion of consumer society demanded a more hedonistic personality, and the rise of digital capitalism requires new versions of selfhood that you and I are coming to embody. The shorthand for this ascendant type is the Narcissist—though needless to say, the narcissist is always someone else. The term isn’t new, it’s been retrofitted for this ascendant type and the constellation of traits—compulsive confessionalism, a craving for attention combined with impoverished self-esteem, a conviction of your own exceptionalism—being elicited and reinforced. Though contrary to previous treatments—from Lasch’s Culture of Narcissism to the moral panic of contemporary pop psychology—there’s no longer any Archimedean perch “outside” these conditions from which to inveigh. If the main complaint about narcissists is their grating sense of entitlement, these attacks have taken on a political valence in the reign of neoliberalism, as entitlement became a code word for redistribution. The question of what we are entitled to propels this inquiry, as does irritation at other people’s narcissism.

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