

the spotlight one more time, when, after his body was returned to Mexico—hence the title *The Return of Comrade Ricardo Flores Magón*—some of his adherents claimed he had been assassinated. Ricardo thus became a martyr, the very thought of which would have made him cringe. Enrique went on to become the mythmaker, allying with the revolutionary state, to memorialize his brother and their movement.

Lomnitz wonderfully captures the personalities of the PLM on both sides of the border. He reveals their strengths and weaknesses, follies and futilities with an admirable evenhandedness. He adeptly evokes the shadowy world of revolutionary exiles. The Flores

Magóns were no one's heroes, and counted among history's losers. Would the PLMers have wanted it any other way?

Historians know so very little about how revolutionaries act and think, especially those who lost. Lomnitz does us a great service by illuminating the psychologies and everyday lives of a small, and for a brief period effective, band of intellectuals; one, perhaps small, example of what it was like to live in times of profound upheaval.

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ELIZABETH LUNBECK. *The Americanization of Narcissism*.  
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On November 26, 2014, Canadian radio host Jian Ghomeshi was released on bail following a court appearance in Toronto to face five criminal charges involving sexual assault and choking. The charges came a month after he was fired from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Canada's public broadcaster. The CBC had dismissed Ghomeshi when, its spokespeople said, they were confronted with "graphic evidence" that Ghomeshi had physically injured a woman (Ian Austen, "Jian Ghomeshi, Canadian Radio Host Facing Sexual Assault Charges, Is Granted Bail," *New York Times*, November 26, 2014). In the weeks leading up to his court appearance nine other women came forward with similar allegations, some dating back a decade. Ghomeshi pleaded not guilty to all formal legal charges. He freely admitted that he enjoyed "rough sex," but insisted it was always consensual (Anne Kingston, "Jian Ghomeshi: How He Got Away with It," *Maclean's*, November 6, 2014).

Jian Ghomeshi was big news on both sides of the border. Ghomeshi had been the host of the radio program "Q With Jian Ghomeshi" since its inception in 2007. "Q" mainly featured interviews with a wide variety of artists, writers, actors, filmmakers, and musicians and, besides being one of the CBC's most successful programs ever, was the network's flagship show. It was also syndicated on 180 radio stations in the United States through Public Radio International (PRI). "Q" was "one of the faster-growing public radio programs in the U.S.," a PRI official stated, with 858,800 U.S. listeners and a live taping in Los Angeles on October 16, 2014 (Kingston). The "Q" YouTube channel averaged 1.5 million hits per month. Until women began coming forward with stories of abuse in 2014, Ghomeshi's fame was ascending in Canada and the United States.

What his mass listening audience did not know, however, was that Ghomeshi, according to a former "Q" producer, was "a narcissist. Very self involved" (Jonathan Gatehouse, et al., "Why No One Stopped Him,"

*Maclean's*, November 17, 2014). Experts agreed. One Vancouver-based physician referred to Ghomeshi's "overweening narcissism," which featured the abundant "pathological quirks of an apparently disturbed and charismatic individual" (Gabor Maté, "Jian Ghomeshi and the Problem of Narcissistic Male Rage," *Toronto Star*, November 4, 2014). A Canadian journalist called him manipulative, "self-absorbed," and "deceitful" (Rick Salutin, "Mystery of the Ghomeshi Interviews," *Toronto Star*, December 11, 2014). Radio was the ideal medium for Ghomeshi whose soothing voice created what observers called an "illusion of intimacy." Behind his easy-going, tolerant, and approachable image, however, Ghomeshi was a coddled star who quickly gained a reputation at the CBC for being merciless toward staffers who openly disagreed with him. A "Q" producer said: "You get along with Jian or Jian would get you fired" (Kingston, "Busted: The Toxic CBC Environment that Abetted Jian Ghomeshi," *Maclean's*, December 19, 2014). CBC employees who had been targets of Ghomeshi's sexual attentions at work quickly learned that complaining would likely be career-ending.

There was an eerie, if uncanny, similarity between the testimony of people who knew or worked with Ghomeshi and the traits that the historian Christopher Lasch cited as characteristic of the typical narcissistic personality in late-twentieth-century America. Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* was published in 1979 and was heralded at the time by none other than U.S. president Jimmy Carter. Ghomeshi might not be American himself, but he certainly fits Lasch's description of a narcissist as someone who benefited from the "cult of celebrity," the peculiar process whereby modern-day Americans (and Canadians for that matter) projected their dreams of fame and glory onto media stars (Lasch, p. 21). Yet he was also an example of how contemporary society tended to thrust people like Ghomeshi into "po-

sitions of eminence” (Lasch, p. 231). As he basked in the glow of an ever-growing group of admirers and appreciative CBC brass, Ghomeshi was one of the “beautiful people,” to borrow Lasch’s terminology, demanding nothing less of his co-workers than unstinting praise. He was a grim example of how ambition, self-centeredness, and seductive charm could easily morph into what the field now calls narcissistic personality disorder.

Lasch’s *Culture of Narcissism* was one of the most brilliant books in a series that dated back to the writings of social scientists Daniel Bell, Philip Rieff, and David Riesman. They and Lasch had warned that the rise of affluence in the twentieth century was paving the way for national decline. Unprecedented abundance of goods and services, abetted by expanding bureaucracies, professions, media, corporations, and educational institutions, was allegedly producing a new kind of national character, which differed substantially from that of pre-World War II history. Increasingly, the argument went, narcissistic traits such as insatiable tastes and a belief in entitlement and immediate gratification were replacing the values of thrift, sobriety, independence, self-sacrifice, and deferral of gratification that had made the country great. To this group of writers, postwar Americans rarely had to worry, like their ancestors had, about food, clothing, and shelter. In the words of economist John Kenneth Galbraith, “When man has satisfied his physical needs, then psychologically grounded desires take over.” “These,” Galbraith warned in 1958, “can never be satisfied.” (*The Affluent Society* [1958], p. 117). Advertising took it from there: Madison Avenue steadily distorted the distinction between needs and wants. In 1966 Rieff predicted the rise of “psychological man,” a person of “leisure, released by technology from the regimental discipline of work so as to secure his sense of well-being” (*The Triumph of the Therapeutic: Uses of Faith after Freud*, pp. 10, 236). According to Rieff, therapists encouraged “psychological man” to think he was discontented and to seek out treatment in an effort to be happier. In 1979 Lasch echoed Rieff’s loathing of everyday Americans’ reliance on expert advice in an effort to achieve emotional health. Lasch wrote that the emergence of psychological man, “[p]lagued by anxiety, depression, vague discontents, [and] a sense of inner emptiness,” signaled a major turning point in modern history (Lasch, p. 13). Leading the way, Lasch asserted, were the narcissists whose shallowness, grandiosity, superficial seductiveness, and intense needs for approval and admiration outfitted them emotionally for success in the corporate, political, government, educational, and entertainment worlds of late-twentieth-century America.

Lasch’s overall emphasis on narcissism as a cause of national decline is the topic and target of Elizabeth Lunbeck’s *The Americanization of Narcissism*. Lunbeck’s objective is to “wrest [the concept of] narcissism from the ‘realm of pathology’” (p. 104). Lasch’s “seamless combination of psychoanalysis and social criticism,” according to Lunbeck, is “outdated” (pp. 16, 17).

She takes issue with the theory that society is dominated by “the vacuous consumer, the ‘ego-addled’ brat, and the preening celebrity,” and argues that some of the features of narcissism are not only healthy in individuals, but also socially beneficial. Approvingly she quotes *New York Times* columnist David Brooks who in 2012 advocated a culture that “‘gives two cheers to [narcissistic] grandiosity’” (p. 253). Besides, as *Time* magazine asked, how is posting photos on Facebook more worrying than couples in the 1960s “‘trapping friends in their houses to watch their terrible vacation slide shows?’” (p. 264). Are not “selfies” just innocent fun? Ditto for shopping: to Lunbeck, consumers flocking en masse to the mall was “a legitimate indulgence and a harmless means to pursue pleasure” (p. 269), not a sign of civilization’s collapse. Where Lasch saw shopaholics, Lunbeck sees people expressing and feeling better about themselves. In the words of a Cincinnati store manager in 1978, “‘Fashion is saying . . . Why can’t I have fun? I’ve earned it. I’ve gotten my head together, now I can enjoy it’” (p. 164).

Lunbeck’s attack on Lasch rests on her careful and thoughtful discussion of twentieth-century psychoanalytic writings on narcissism. Early followers of Sigmund Freud, the founder of psychoanalysis, tended to subscribe to the master’s definition of narcissism as an emotional state mired in pathology. According to classical psychoanalysis, narcissism was fundamentally opposed to the achievement of normal loving relations with other people, notably members of the opposite sex. Narcissists proved unable to “‘move on to a fuller life,’” in the words of analyst Heinz Kohut (p. 72), because they failed to develop beyond the grandiosity of self which is typically associated with infancy. As a result, adult narcissists viewed others as extensions of themselves and hence were prone to tyrannize the people around them. Narcissism, Freud and his followers argued, was closely linked to homosexuality and its echoes of childhood auto-erotism. Orthodox analysts also insisted that women, with their greater interest in fashion, shopping, and physical beauty, tended to be more narcissistic than men.

Yet, Lunbeck argues, psychoanalytic theorizing about narcissism was more diverse than the writings of Freud might suggest. She unearths a strong current of clinical commentary that stressed that narcissism could be healthy. Analysts Kohut, Otto Kernberg, Joan Riviere, and Erik Erikson acknowledged the narcissist’s aggressiveness and hostility, but also described the narcissist’s self-absorption as a painful search for personal identity. As one psychologist remarked: “‘Healthy narcissism can help you succeed.’” Successful people allegedly feel good about themselves, which “‘radiates an inviting glow that improves personal and professional relationships’” (p. 254). Americans struggling to achieve self-esteem was “not cause for alarm,” Lunbeck concludes, but at worst a benign, well-intentioned enterprise (p. 266).

Lunbeck is right about two things: one, Lasch’s reliance on psychoanalysis is indeed dated; and two, some

of the traits identified with narcissism—ambition, creativity, and an interest in self-analysis—are hardly antisocial in themselves. As she puts it, high self-esteem is not necessarily a liability in the CEO of a major company. Some narcissistic traits can be advantageous. People who lead their lives as if they had meaning are often individuals on a journey of personal discovery, the outcome of which can benefit society by improving productivity and inspiring others to live fuller lives.

It is also certainly true that some tenets of pre-1970s psychoanalysis—the conflation of homosexuality and classical narcissism and blaming mothers for breeding narcissism in their children—have not aged well. Yet, narcissism as a concept stripped of its Freudian trappings is still valid. Emotional shallowness is shallowness whether or not one had troubled relations with one's parents in early childhood. Lasch's use of narcissism as a tool for analyzing American culture was first and foremost socio-historical, not clinical: his interest did not lie in getting Americans to crowd analysts' offices, but in identifying the historical forces responsible for shaping contemporary lives. "Modern capitalist society," Lasch wrote, not only elevated Ghomeshi-like people into prominent positions, but it also "elicit[ed] and reinforce[d] narcissistic traits in everyone" by fostering "many varieties of bureaucratic dependence" (Lasch, p. 232). Lasch, far from being simply a hide-bound traditionalist, urged Americans to question the root historical forces that tore asunder the communal bonds governing personal relations. By squarely indicting the consumerism and bureaucracy that accompanied late-twentieth-century capitalism, Lasch was trying to sustain a serious debate over the economic and social factors that had transformed life over the same period. Had Lasch lived long enough to learn turn-of-the-millennium Americans were "bowling alone" in Robert D. Putnam's words, he would not have been surprised by the finding.

Lunbeck's argument would have been much more convincing if she had discussed more fully the whole question of how "healthy" mass narcissism really is. Other than brief attempts to vindicate shopping and the popular concept of self-esteem, she does not grapple with the many present-day trends that suggest a grimmer picture of narcissism. Take the sheer size of America's enormous "caring industry" that had emerged by the early twenty-first century. This industry consisted of roughly 50,000 marriage and family counselors, 77,000 clinical psychologists, 192,000 clinical social workers, 105,000 mental health counselors, 17,000 nurse psychotherapists, and 30,000 life coaches (Ronald W. Dworkin, "The Rise of the Caring Industry," *Policy Review* 161 [June/July 2010]). "We live in an age consumed by worship of the psyche," wrote historian Eva S. Moskowitz in 2001, "a belief that feelings are sacred and sal-

vation lies in self-esteem, that happiness is the ultimate goal and psychological healing the means" (*In Therapy We Trust: America's Obsession with Self-Fulfillment*, p. 1). Yet the data tell us that this quest for "psychological healing" has not delivered the goods. A World Health Organization study released in 2004 showed that rates of most mental illnesses were higher in the United States than in any other countries in the world. Evidence indicates that one in four Americans suffers from depression, anxiety, substance abuse, or an eating disorder, but experts insist this is likely an underestimate. As for marriage, studies show that one of every two marriages fails in the United States (although the divorce rate for first marriages is as low as 30 percent). Americans are also choosing to remain unmarried like never before. The data conflict sharply with Lunbeck's insistence that America is full of self-actualizing people having fun discovering the "something great inside" themselves. In particular, close to a million Americans flock to counselors' offices every year in search of advice for a troubled marriage. According to University of Minnesota professor William J. Doherty, a leading national expert on marriage and the family, some therapists today talk about "starter marriages" or "leasing a marriage," a sure sign, he maintains, of how far consumerism has poisoned attitudes toward the institution ("How Therapists Harm Marriages and What We Can Do about It," *Journal of Couple and Relationship Therapy* 1 [2002]: 9, 10). Either this "caring industry," then, is a response to sheer public demand, or it has managed to hoodwink Americans into believing that they cannot do without such "caring" services, but either way it is difficult to argue that these statistics taken together mean that Americans feel good about themselves. Lasch's warnings about the perils of a therapeutic society appear to have been vindicated.

It is worth repeating that Lunbeck does not fundamentally dispute Lasch's description of Americans as narcissistic. Lunbeck's disagreement with Lasch has to do with their different value judgments about narcissism. Her thesis that Americans could use more, not less narcissism flies in the face of the stubborn findings that the more Americans search for high self-esteem, psychological health, and personal confidence the more elusive these goals become. When it comes to its "worship of the psyche," society seems to be governed by the law of diminishing returns: the more effort Americans expend on the search for contentment the more miserable they are. The fallout is the serial unhappiness that has gripped the nation and the dominance of the narcissistic type in today's society. His own career may be in tatters, but we have not seen or heard the last of the Jian Ghomeshis of the world.

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