

Book Review: Elizabeth Lunbeck, *The Americanization of Narcissism*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014. ISBN: 978-0674724860 (Hardback). 367 Pages. \$35.00.

Reviewed by Anders Wykow Hansen¹

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Is America becoming more narcissistic? With this question, posed in a short introductory chapter, Elizabeth Lunbeck effectively lures in the reader. It is the same question social critics have been asking – mostly to answer it themselves – with increasing frequency for almost half a century. Lunbeck never answers the question, nor does she attempt to. This is partly because there is no exact science to measure narcissism, and partly because the author’s focus is to capture the contradictory and ambiguous nature of narcissism rather than contribute to an already opinionated debate. While most of us spend absurd amounts of time on social media, Lunbeck’s thorough and nuanced research shows that this behavior is not necessarily synonymous with an increase in narcissism.

Lunbeck, Professor of History at Vanderbilt University, has written a well-researched and highly engaging book on the concept of narcissism that will satisfy both scholars and readers interested in psychoanalysis more generally. The book delicately balances the theoretical with the biographical in its portrayal of the professional and personal feuds between leading psychoanalysts in their efforts to define narcissism and, by extension, the scope and goal of psychoanalysis.

The first part of the book, “Narcissism in the Me Decade,” explores the revival of the concept of narcissism in the 1970s and then goes on to show how the concept is still being used by social critics and psychoanalysts, albeit with differing meanings and intentions. Part two,

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