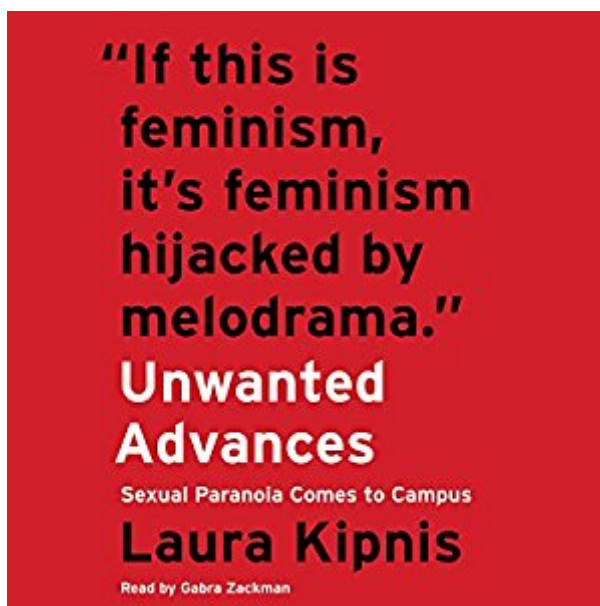


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# Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes To Campus



## Synopsis

From a highly regarded feminist cultural critic and professor comes a polemic arguing that the stifling sense of sexual danger sweeping American campuses doesn't empower women, it impedes the fight for gender equality. Feminism is broken, argues Laura Kipnis, if anyone thinks the sexual hysteria overtaking American campuses is a sign of gender progress. A committed feminist, Kipnis was surprised to find herself the object of a protest march by student activists at her university for writing an essay about sexual paranoia on campus. Next she was brought up on Title IX complaints for creating a "hostile environment". Defying confidentiality strictures, she wrote a whistle-blowing essay about the ensuing 72-day investigation, which propelled her to the center of national debates over free speech, "safe spaces", and the vast federal overreach of Title IX. In the process she uncovered an astonishing netherworld of accused professors and students, campus witch hunts, rigged investigations, and Title IX officers run amuck. Drawing on interviews and internal documents, *Unwanted Advances* demonstrates the chilling effect of this new sexual McCarthyism on intellectual freedom. Without minimizing the seriousness of campus assault, Kipnis argues for more honesty about the sexual realities and ambivalences hidden behind the notion of "rape culture". Instead, regulation is replacing education, and women's hard-won right to be treated as consenting adults is being repealed by well-meaning bureaucrats. *Unwanted Advances* is a risk-taking, often darkly funny interrogation of feminist paternalism, the covert sexual conservatism of hook-up culture, and the institutionalized backlash of holding men alone responsible for mutually drunken sex. It's not just compulsively listenable; it will change the national conversation.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Although I agree with most of the reviews here, it is important to acknowledge that Kipnis knows that sexual assault happens, but can be less of a problem if we stop pretending that repeating "Men should not rape" is a good intervention. Nor is making every campus sexual encounter a potential rape accusation. I teach at Northwestern, and thought the Ludlow accusations were fishy from the start. But Kipnis had access to amazing sources—everything she revealed, I think these accusations were less fishy than rotten. He should not have lost his job. I hope it is some (albeit surely insufficient) compensation that his case spawned this amazing book. Buy it. Read it. Spread it. If the Daily Northwestern does not write about this, and soon, we will know that there is no free press on our campus.

If you follow college news, you might think that there is a rape epidemic on American college campuses. Large gangs of men, mostly athletes and frat boys, are stalking young women, willfully forcing them to have sex with them. Northwestern University professor Laura Kipnis is no fan of rape, but in her book *Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus* she exposes the anti-feminist, police-state attitudes and tactics that reveal what she sees as backwards progress for feminism and academic freedom. Kipnis was drawn into this issue when a philosophy professor on her campus came under Title IX investigation due to an allegedly inappropriate relationship with an undergraduate student. Note that the allegations surrounded a night on the town; the pair did not have sex. Kipnis responded with an article for the *Chronicle of Higher Education* in which she argued that adult students should be treated like adults. She subsequently came under a new Title IX investigation because she offended some of the women alluded to in the article. Most of the book details the case against the philosophy professor and Kipnis's subsequent case. It left me in disbelief that a campus bureaucracy could be so . . . for lack of a better word, stupid! She writes, "rampant accusation is the new norm on today's campus; the place is a secret cornucopia of accusation, especially when it comes to sex." Kipnis is especially offended by the anti-feminist attitudes behind campus sex codes and the ineffectiveness in preventing violence against women. "Policies and codes that bolster traditional femininity . . . are the last thing in the world that's going to reduce sexual assault." Title IX is being used by women to "remedy sexual ambivalences or awkward sexual experiences, and to adjudicate relationship disputes post-breakup." Since Kipnis's offense was writing an essay, her case was a bit different from others. But she studied the

philosopher's case extensively. After the essay was published, she became an outlet for people all over the country who sent her stories of their own Title IX investigations. In the course of these interactions, she became an expert on Title IX procedures--or the lack of them--and in the many ways Title IX is abused. The process is heavily weighted against the accuser. "Typically the accuser doesn't know the precise charges, doesn't know what the evidence is, and can't confront witnesses." Accusations are encouraged for encounters that happened months before, and that, at the time, seemed to be consensual. Kipnis states that Title IX has created "an accusation machinery so vast and indiscriminate that it becomes a magnet for neurotic schemes, emotional knife play, and monstrously self-exonerating agendas." She never denies the reality of rape, but bemoans a system in which virtually any sexual act can be considered rape. The definition of rape, under Title IX, has become broader and broader. A Title IX case doesn't even have to include physical contact. It could include gestures, words, or, as in her case, an essay. And universities are often happy to settle with the accusers. In a passage that is sure to make her even less popular among Title IX activists, she writes, "the premise that accusers don't lie turns out to be mythical. By sentimentalizing women in such preposterous ways, aren't Title IX officials setting schools up as cash cows for some of our more creatively inclined women students?" I've seen this happen at my own alma mater, which has been writing some big checks and, as a result, attracting lawyers like ants to honey. In another more extended discussion that will make Title IX activists apoplectic, she addresses drinking by college students. College women want to show their equality with men by drinking like them and partying with them. She tells stories of frat parties (that make me want to be sure my kids never get near one) that inevitably lead to, in fact are designed to lead to, women passed out drunk and readily available for sex. But "anyone who suggests that women should drink less to avoid sexual assault will be 'disemboweled upon arrival into the gladiator arena of public discourse.'" Title IX training programs steer clear of addressing this important element of women's safety. She again reflects on the anti-feminist attitudes that Title IX espouses, which says that "Women don't drink; men get them drunk. Women don't have sex; sex is done to them." She argues, "This isn't feminism, it's a return to the most traditional conceptions of female sexuality." Don't misunderstand. In case you haven't figured it out, Kipnis is no male chauvinist right-winger. She's a liberal feminist whose sexual morals are far from Puritanical. ("I don't have anything against escapism and irresponsibility, and you certainly won't hear me arguing against drunken hookups. 'F--- all the guys you want' would be my motto. Just don't f--- the ones you don't want . . .") What Kipnis does have something against is kangaroo courts, people being accused of things and not being permitted to defend themselves, accusers suffering consequences without even an opportunity to respond to accusations, the rights

of some people being sacrificed for an illusory, deceitful goal of women's safety. Unwanted Advances should be required reading for any faculty member or administrator who is responsible for Title IX implementation. Of course we want students on campus to be safe, and we want a means for them to seek justice if they are victims of a crime. But before college administrations double down on Title IX, as my alma mater has done, they should take Kipnis's perspective and concerns into consideration. Thanks to Edelweiss and the publisher for the complimentary electronic review copy!

Kipnis has at least two goals in this book: (1) She wants to describe some of the especially outrageous activities that are a consequence of Title IX; and (2) she wants to propose and suggest some fixes and solutions. The fixes are more on a personal level rather than changing the way institutions and universities have responded to the demands for protecting students from sexual abuse. Although I suspect that she would agree that that protection is in fact needed, her recommendations go more along the lines of educating and training young women to protect themselves and to engage in behaviors that would make it less likely that they be abused. Recommendations of this kind are tricky ones to make, because Kipnis knows that she will be accused of "blaming the victim". Kipnis tries to "square this circle" by both supporting reasonable action to stop abusers and recommending wiser and safer behavior by young women. This likely will not work to ward off criticism by those who want absolutely \*all\* blame placed on the abusers. But, Kipnis feels it's worth trying, because to \*not\* do so is both dangerous to and infantilizes young women. In the sense that it teaches college women that they are not in control of their lives, it sends a paternalist message that someone else will take care of them, and it misleads them into thinking that their lives will be made safe for them with no action on their part. There is an additional insidious consequence of not teaching young women that they must take care of themselves and their own safety: these women will graduate and go on to live and work in a world where the university can not possibly protect them (even if it could while they were students). And, while many of them, in part because they will be graduates of elite universities, will work and live in relatively safe environments, that will not be true for all of them. Kipnis is giving us a picture of a world faced by current college students that has seen profound changes since I was in college in the 1960's and early 1970's. In that earlier period there was more of an inclination by students themselves to view college administration and bureaucracy with distrust, as the enemy almost. I was, keep in mind, a member of the don't-trust-anyone-over-30 cohort. But, now, students, especially female students feel they should be able to expect protection from school administration. Title IX and

our Federal government seems to back them up on this. In response to this demand, colleges and universities seem to have taken on tasks and formed departments and organizations and hired on people. There are economic costs to doing so, and much of that cost is likely being passed on to students. Governments, our Federal government in particular, have a tendency to solve problems by creating and enforcing requirements\*without\* providing the funds to pay for compliance. And, much of the book is an account of Kipnis's research into some particularly dramatic (and outrageous, if you are sympathetic with the accused abusers) investigations and disciplinary actions by universities. This account can be taken, I believe, as an attempt by Kipnis to motivate us to agree that universities should not be pursuing these cases, that this should be left in the realm of our legal system, and, especially, that universities should not be allowed to use procedures that do not protect the legal rights of those involved. In case you believe that this issue has been settled, it's not. An opinion piece on the Op-Ed page of the N.Y. Times of 8/4/2017 by Jon Krakauer and Laura L. Dunn titled "Don't weaken college rape policies" argues in favor of the use of the "preponderance of evidence" standard for settling claims against those accused of rape. Women need and have a right to expect protection, and it's argued that the use of the "preponderance of evidence" standard would give them more protection. However, that article contains this confusing statement: "Whenever a student is accused of sexual assault, university administrators need to render their judgment with tremendous care, because erroneously determining that a student is responsible for sexual misconduct can cause lasting harm." It's hard for me to imagine how using tremendous care can be consistent with using the "preponderance of evidence" standard of proof, since that standard only requires a small likelihood for guilt over innocence. Given that disciplinary action, in particular expulsion from school, is being based on that weak standard of evidence, it should come as a little surprise that accused students have gone to court to seek redress. I do not have the legal mind capable of untangling this issue, so I'll have to leave it to others to do so. However, it seems clear that young women need protection and that society and universities and colleges should be taking a variety of approaches to give them that protection in addition to (or perhaps instead of) making it easier to successfully accuse an abuser (as recommended in the N.Y. Times article mentioned above), including: education on how to protect oneself, more campus police and security, better outdoor lighting, etc. The low bar for conviction required by "preponderance of evidence" standard is not the only objection that Kipnis makes against universities. She also criticises secretive proceedings, not allowing the accused to have legal counsel during investigations, and other lack of due process abuses. One of Kipnis's worries is that society and universities are giving young women a false sense of security. They need to be taught and warned about which

situations put them at risk and what to do when they cannot avoid those situations. To do so runs counter to the arguments against "blaming the victim", and so Kipnis worries that young women will put themselves at risk, because they have been led to believe that someone or some institution is protecting them. That behavior is dangerous and it infantilizes women. Kipnis is saying, I believe that it adopts a paternalistic attitude toward women. This attitude, in effect, says "you are not capable of taking care of and protecting yourselves; we'll do it for you." An additional downside of the policing role given to universities and colleges is that it expands their responsibilities, tasks, and power. That comes at an added cost to students, since it means increased cost to the school for personnel and salaries. In a time when student costs for higher education are already outlandishly burdensome, you would think that we'd want to avoid that. One insightful form of analysis that Kipnis describes is the use of storyline-before-evidence. Kipnis claims, correctly I believe, that it is a powerful way of arguing if you can first create a storyline and assign roles within that story to people and afterwards search for facts that fit and support that story. Following that strategy and sequence can be very powerful in assigning responsibility for actions. Although I suppose it makes interesting, entertaining, and outlandish reading, I thought that Kipnis spent too much time on the story and persecution of Peter Ludlow. After reading Kipnis's account, there is no way for me to know whether this is an outlier or whether there are many more cases very much like this one. If it's a one of a kind, then while I'd agree that Peter Ludlow received unfair treatment, there is not much that seems to need to be done. On the other hand, if this is a very common occurrence, then it could be used as part of an argument for having more demanding standards of evidence and for moving the persecution of accused rapists and molesters away from university administration and into criminal courts. This story (about Peter Ludlow and his accuser) makes good drama and Kipnis knows how to turn it into fascinating entertainment, but I wonder how much we should really allow it to influence our thinking about young women in college and the way they are being treated, both by their peers and by the institutions they attend. If you are inclined to be a bit skeptical about Kipnis's account of the Ludlow case, you might want to read the article at Slate.com by Michelle Goldberg titled "She's Not Like Those Other Feminists". Kipnis's overall motivation in writing this book is to criticize and reduce the dis-empowerment and infantilization of young women. Without reducing the protections that young women have a right to expect from universities and society, Kipnis wants to encourage young women to learn to take care of themselves. That certainly is a good justification for this book and the time we spend reading it. The later chapters of the book that criticize the risky and unwise behavior of women with respect to sex and alcohol are certainly worth reading and thinking about, especially if you have a daughter or granddaughter who is about to go off to college. However, I

wonder about how prevalent this behavior is among college age women. This is not a book based on surveys, research, and statistical data, so there really is no way for me to tell how many women in college take these kinds of risk with alcohol and sex. You can do a Web search for something like "alcohol sex college women", and you'll find plenty of information about this. So, there certainly is evidence that the behaviors and the negative consequences of those behaviors that Kipnis talks about are prevalent enough and damaging enough to be taken very seriously. One annoyance that I have with the book is that it seems to be exclusively about \*college\* women. That makes sense because these are the women and students that Kipnis has experience with. But I can't help but think that there are many women in our country who are treated much worse than those Kipnis discusses and who have no Title IX bureaucracy to help protect them. It's an entertaining book, and parts of it are very valuable and provocative. It's very much worth reading and thinking about.

A smart, thoroughly researched, and relatively unbiased investigation into the phenomenon of increasing numbers of Title IX cases being brought against students and faculty at American Universities. My one main criticism would be that the book doesn't leave one with a clear sense of how widespread these issues are. The book is obviously focused on liberal universities. In that context it's easy to see how a sort of illiberal feminism has caused a turn towards authoritarianism in campus politics. But because we don't see more than a series of examples, the book doesn't address how many campuses have these issues.

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