

ALLUSION AS A TOOL OF SHAPING THE CONCEPT "NARCISSISTIC PARENT" IN MODERN AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGY BOOKS

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Abstract: This paper explores the use of allusion as a linguistic, cognitive, and linguistic and psycholinguistic tool in shaping the concept of the "narcissistic parent" within modern American psychology literature. Focusing on four widely-read self-help and psychological books: *Will I Ever Be Good Enough? Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers* by Karyl McBride, *Narcissistic Mothers: How to Handle a Narcissist Parent and Recover from CPTSD* by Caroline Foster, *Narcissistic Parents: The Complete Guide for Adult Children* by Michelle Martin, and *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents* by Lindsay C. Gibson, the study identifies how authors use cultural, literary, mythological, and even cinematic allusions to frame and communicate the complex psychological dynamics of narcissistic parenting. The findings demonstrate that allusion serves as a bridge between academic theory and a nonprofessional understanding, enhancing both the emotional and intellectual resonance of the narcissistic parent figure. Moreover, the study finds that allusions facilitate cognitive and cultural comprehension, therapeutic engagement, foster identity reconstruction, and contribute to a shared cultural lexicon around narcissistic abuse and recovery from it.

Keywords: allusion, narcissistic parent, American psychology, self-help books, emotionally immature parents, metaphor

Introduction. The concept of the "narcissistic parent" has developed as a central point in contemporary American psychology, particularly within self-help and trauma recovery literature. This figure typically characterized by emotional unavailability, self-absorption, manipulation, gaslighting and invalidation of their children's needs gained cultural coloring alongside growing awareness of narcissistic personality traits in family relationships. However, for many readers without formal psychological training, such concepts can remain abstract, obscure and inaccessible. Authors of self-help psychology books utilize a wide range of strategies to make these ideas more clear, comprehensible and emotionally resonant. Among these, allusion stands out as a particularly powerful stylistic device.

Allusions, references to mythological, literary, religious, and popular cultural figures and narratives, provide immediate emotional and symbolic depth and gives a clear understanding of the topic. They represent complex ideas in familiar

frameworks, allowing readers to both linguistically grasp and emotionally connect with psychological concepts. In the context of narcissistic parenting, allusions serve to validate readers' experiences, build the bridge between the old and new knowledge and reinterpret them to understand the concept. This study argues that allusion not only enhances textual richness but plays a fundamental role in therapeutic meaning or sense making in the concept comprehension.

Material and Methods This study adopts a qualitative content analysis approach. The main materials in this study are four widely circulated self-help psychology books addressing narcissistic and emotionally immature parenting:

1. McBride, Karyl. *Will I Ever Be Good Enough? Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers* (2008)
2. Foster, Caroline. *Narcissistic Mothers: How to Handle a Narcissist Parent and Recover from CPTSD* (2018)
3. Martin, Michelle. *Narcissistic Parents: The Complete Guide for Adult Children* (2019)
4. Gibson, Lindsay C. *Adult Children of Emotionally Immature Parents* (2015)

Each text was studied thoroughly and in details, and passages containing explicit or implicit allusions were cited and categorized in thematic groups. The categorization focused on the source of the allusion (mythological, literary, religious, cultural, cinematic), the function of the allusion (explanatory, therapeutic, rhetorical), and its psychological or emotional effect on the narrative. Additional attention was paid to how allusions were located within larger narrative parts, such as trauma recovery journeys or identity rebuilding.

The methodology also included a review of relevant secondary literature on the role of metaphor and allusion in psychological texts, trauma theory, and therapeutic narrative construction. This theoretical framework helped to contextualize the textual findings within broader discourses and clinical practices.

Results The analysis resulted in a full classification of allusions divided into five main categories:

1. Mythological Allusions:

The Narcissus myth is the most common narrative. McBride consistently utilizes it to illustrate the mother's inability to emotionally recognize her child, portraying her as focused on her own reflection. Foster uses it as a metaphor for the destructive self-obsession of narcissistic mothers.

Echo, the silenced nymph in the same myth, is also implicitly evoked as symbolic of the neglected or invisible child.

Allusions to Pandora and Medusa appear sporadically in Martin's book, symbolizing unpredictable emotional explosions and maternal manipulation.

2. Literary Allusions:

Gibson references *Peter Pan* to depict emotionally immature parents who resist adulthood, maturity and responsibility.

Foster and Martin draw on *Cinderella* to illustrate sibling relationship problems, including scapegoating and favoritism.

McBride includes references to *The Wizard of Oz*, comparing narcissistic mothers to the Wizard, presenting grandeur but concealing deep insecurity.

Caroline Foster in her book "Narcissistic Mothers: How to Handle a Narcissist Parent and Recover from CPTSD" (2018) uses an allusion to Wizard of Oz fairy tale calling the people who defend the narcissist, dismissing the victim's pain "flying monkeys". "Enablers are the people who support and defend the narcissist. Narcissists recruit enablers to their side. Enablers are usually called 'flying monkeys' ..." This shows how narcissists create alliances to maintain control and silence opposition. Children grow up isolated with their voices neglected.

3. Religious and Biblical Allusions:

Some texts use religious language metaphorically - e.g., "original sin" to refer to a child's innate sense of guilt or shame imposed by the parent.

Foster compares narcissistic family structures to hierarchical religious institutions, emphasizing rigid control and moral judgment.

4. Cultural and Cinematic Allusions:

All four authors reference modern archetypes such as the "helicopter parent," the "tiger mom," and the "drama queen."

Films like *Tangled*, *Black Swan*, and *Mommy Dearest* are alluded to, either explicitly or implicitly, offering powerful visual analogs of narcissistic parenting.

Another author uses allusion to describe the dialog with a narcissist: "But enough about me. Let's talk about you. What do YOU think of me?" A famous movie quote about attention-seeking refers to sharp commentary on conversational narcissism, where others' experiences are ignored and focus back to the narcissist.

"Dreading the 'Hallmark' search for the 'perfect' Mother's Day card... feelings of guilt and sadness overcome the day." This allusion symbolizes the commercialized ideal of motherhood via greeting cards. It highlights how cultural rituals and customs can intensify personal pain, trauma and social denial.

McBride in *Will I Ever Be Good Enough? Healing the Daughters of Narcissistic Mothers* uses allusion to a popular commercial: "Don't hate me because I'm beautiful" (L'Oréal commercial).

In this allusion the mother is exaggerating her beauty, assuming others are envious. It shows narcissism's reliance on appearance and external validation while mocking others' supposed jealousy.

5. Family roles related allusions

Though less frequently quoted, Martin's text emphasizes systemic roles within narcissistic families. She alludes to archetypal roles such as the "golden child" and the "scapegoat." In this system, one child is idealized and burdened with unrealistic expectations, well cared and cherished while another takes blame and criticism, diminished and betrayed.

This allusion to role-playing highlights the theatrical nature of narcissistic families, where each member belongs to a part that serves the parent's psychological needs. Martin also emphasizes how adult children feel "crazy, unseen, and invalidated" until they recognize this system, an allusion to gaslighting - a cultural metaphor drawn from the play *Gas Light* (1938), where reality itself is manipulated.

Discussion Allusions perform a multiplicity of functions in these texts. First and foremost, they aid in concept clarification. The abstraction of psychological concepts such as narcissism, emotional invalidation, or complex trauma is countered by grounding them in familiar narrative frameworks. These stories, whether mythic, literary, or cinematic, serve as symbolic shorthand for patterns of behavior and emotional dynamics.

Secondly, allusions offer emotional validation. By likening the narcissistic parent to Medusa or the Wizard of Oz, the authors indirectly affirm the reader's confusion, fear, or frustration. These archetypes provide a language for emotional truths that are otherwise difficult to express. This function is particularly vital for survivors of narcissistic abuse, who often struggle with gaslighting and emotional erasure.

Third, allusions serve therapeutic and narrative functions. In recounting their own journeys or those of their clients, authors use allusion to structure stories of transformation. For instance, the narrative arc from being Echo - voiceless and reactive - to reclaiming one's voice mirrors the therapeutic process of individuation and boundary setting. In this way, allusions become tools of recovery, helping readers position themselves within a larger mythic or cultural narrative.

Moreover, allusions contribute to the communal language of trauma recovery. By repeatedly invoking shared myths and stories, authors help build a cultural script around narcissistic parenting. This script not only fosters understanding but also solidarity, allowing individuals to feel less alone in their experiences.

Finally, allusions underscore the interdisciplinarity of psychological self-help literature. These texts operate at the intersection of psychology, literature, mythology, and cultural studies. The integration of diverse discourses enhances their appeal and effectiveness, reinforcing the idea that healing is both a psychological and cultural act.

Conclusion Allusion is a powerful linguistic and therapeutic tool in modern American psychology books on narcissistic parenting. It bridges academic theory and emotional experience, enriches narrative structure, and fosters reader identification and transformation. By drawing on mythological, literary, cultural, and clinical references, authors provide readers with frameworks for understanding and recovering from narcissistic abuse. Allusion not only clarifies psychological constructs but also empowers readers to reframe their pasts, reclaim their identities, and participate in a growing community of awareness, recovery and healing. Future studies may examine how the use of allusion evolves in online therapeutic spaces, group therapy settings, and cross-cultural contexts.

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