



SIMILE AS A MEANS OF SHAPING THE CONCEPT OF
NARCISSISM IN THE BOOK *IT'S NOT YOU* BY RAMANI
DURVASULA

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Abstract

This article studies the functional and conceptual role of simile in shaping the notion of narcissism in Ramani Durvasula's book *It's Not You*. As a clinical psychologist and popular science communicator, Durvasula employs simile not just as a stylistic device but as a cognitive tool that structures readers' understanding of narcissistic behavior, trauma responses, and relational dynamics. Through a qualitative philological analysis, the study identifies key simile patterns that interpret complex psychological phenomena into accessible images, this way reinforcing the conceptual frame of narcissism as manipulative, destructional, cyclical, and emotionally erosive. The findings highlight how simile operates as a conceptual bridge between psychological terminology and the reader's experiential knowledge, making the book both rhetorically persuasive and pedagogically effective.

Key words: simile, figurative language, concept, narcissism, cognitive linguistics, stylistics, popular psychology.

Introduction

The increasing interdisciplinarity of contemporary philology resulted in a large interest in how popular psychology texts use figurative language to communicate complex mental-health constructs to general audiences. Among



these devices, simile occupies a pivotal yet understudied position. While metaphor often receives greater scholarly attention, simile's explicit comparative structure ("X is like or as Y") provides a transparent cognitive mapping that is particularly effective for shaping conceptual domains that are abstract, contested, or emotionally colored.

Ramani Durvasula's psychology book *It's Not You* is a notable example of this discourse. The book focuses on narcissistic abuse, emotional manipulation, and recovery. Durvasula's use of simile strategically guides readers toward an embodied understanding of narcissism presenting it not only as a clinical phenomenon but as a real experience that can be recognized, named, and resisted. This study aims to analyze how simile functions in forming the conceptual field of narcissism within the text.

Simile, defined as a stylistic device that expresses explicit comparison using markers such as "like" or "as," serves a number of functions in cognitive linguistics and stylistics. It enables the reader and writer to map a target domain to a familiar source domain, thereby explaining clearly emotional or psychological content of the narrative. In texts dealing with trauma or abusive behavior, similes often function as interpretive instruments that help readers comprehend unfamiliar or subtle dynamics within real traumatic experiences.

Simile also operates educationally. In works of popular psychology, it often becomes a tool for interpreting clinical concepts, reducing cognitive load, and increasing empathetic relatability. This functional dimension is central to Durvasula's rhetorical strategy.

Simile as a Framing Device for Narcissistic Behavior

Throughout *It's Not You*, simile is used to illuminate the changeable and unpredictable characteristics of narcissistic individuals. Comparisons of mood

swings to natural disasters, sudden temperature changes, or unstable terrain shape narcissism as a destructive force. These similes create a real experience in which the narcissist is perceived as inherently neurotic, reinforcing the conceptual frame of narcissism as a danger, uncontrollable threat that a reader has to learn to handle.

By comparing manipulative behavior to “bait,” “hooks,” or “traps,” Durvasula signals intentional actions and danger caused by a narcissist. These similes encourage readers to recognize patterns of emotional abuse and to understand narcissistic cycles as systematic rather than incidental.

Simile and the Victim's Psychological State

Similes describing the emotional effect of narcissistic abuse frequently reference depletion, erosion, or fragmentation. Images such as feeling “like walking on eggshells” or “like being drained of oxygen” articulates the lived reality of hypervigilance and emotional exhaustion. These comparisons legitimize the survivor's experience as well as offering readers a vocabulary to describe their own perceptions.

From a philological perspective, these similes function as conceptual metaphors in miniature: they map the abstract experience of psychological harm to concrete body sensations, fostering empathetic meaning.

Simile as a tool for interpreting clinical concepts

Durvasula often converts clinical terminology, such as trauma bonding, gaslighting, cognitive dissonance, into comprehensible literary comparisons. Similes comparing cognitive dissonance to “mental knots” or gaslighting to “a fog settling over your mind” render complex psychological terms immediately easy to grasp.

This stylistic device's strategy has two purposes. Firstly, it allows the author to maintain scientific integrity while providing accessible understanding. Secondly, it reinforces the conceptual model of narcissism as a disorder that distorts perception and undermines self-worth causing doubts in your own self.

Simile and empowerment narratives

Simile in *It's Not You* is not limited to describing danger, abuse and negative effect. When discussing healing, boundaries and recovery, Durvasula uses similes associated with clarity, stability, and renewal, such simile as "like opening a window after a storm." This example shows that it also serves as rhetorical opposites to damage and destruction, changing the focus from pathology to agency.

Simile becomes a transformational device: it helps audience find recovery not just as some possibility but as a concrete reality.

Conclusion

Simile in *It's Not You* functions as an important linguistic device for shaping the concept of narcissism. By mapping complex psychological phenomena to familiar sensory and experiential domains, Durvasula makes the invisible dynamics of narcissistic abuse visible, noticeable, and narratively logical. Simile simultaneously educates, validates, and empowers the reader, showing them that figurative language in popular psychology is not simply used for literary description but also becomes foundational to concept perception. The analysis confirms that simile functions as a cognitive and rhetorical bridge between clinical discourse and personal lived experience, making it an essential linguistic tool in forming the concept of narcissism in contemporary American psychological books.

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