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Echo Personality Disorder

The term **Echo Personality Disorder** was coined by British Psychosynthesis practitioner Patrick Hurst, as a replacement term for 'Inverted Narcissism' and 'Covert Narcissism' which later terms place unwarranted emphasis on narcissistic qualities of the personality, which in many of these individuals may not be a feature at all.

EPD is a highly differentiated form of Dependent Personality Disorder, marked by behaviours of compliance and a need to 'mirror' significant others -parents, spouse, friends, employer. Individuals with EPD may be attracted to relationships with individuals showing marked narcissistic traits -people who need to be mirrored or praised- though this in no way forms a "standard" or "universal pattern" as is often claimed by theorists. EPD individuals may enter into relationships with a great variety of people, though at core there is a tendency to choose situations in which unrequited love will be the outcome.

These traits -choosing significant relationships where love can never be satisfactorily consummated, and the tendency to mirror significant others- were motivating features for choosing the term Echo Personality Disorder. In Greek mythology **Echo was the lover of Narcissus**. In this myth Echo, a forest nymph, falls in love with the egocentric youth Narcissus, and when he shows clear signs of rejecting her she persists in her attachment, and will not be moved from her aim. **She finally satisfies herself with**

the masochistic task of echoing back to him all that he says. This too is a central feature of EPD behaviour in relationships, where the individual will mirror, echo, and compliment another at the expense of their own self-worth and dignity. This echoing behaviour, though, does not exhaust the mythological potential of Echo, even if commentators on the myth narrow their descriptions to this single episode with Narcissus. Echo also has relations with Zeus, Hera, Pan, and Gaia, which have a different coloration to those she has with Narcissus, and has many friends in the form of other forest nymphs - "sisters" as we would call them today; attesting to the complexity we find within the Echo personality constellation.

Self descriptions of EPD individuals often relate a lack of self worth, and an accompanying fear of rejection, abandonment, and loss, as a result of feeling "unacceptable" to others. These agonizing fears are a driving force behind the above-mentioned interpersonal coping style (mirroring and reflecting others). These individuals protect themselves from rejection/abandonment by acting so agreeable to others, via their mirroring capacity, that chances of re-experiencing abandonment agony is brought to a safe minimum. Others generally enjoy being around the benevolent atmosphere cultivated by an EPD individual. Unfortunately this interpersonal style of relating amounts to a false existence with little or even no true-self expression, leading to poor psychological health, and lack of identity.

One characteristic predisposing background of EPD involves individuals being parented by caretakers who are themselves self-absorbed, narcissistic, or overly punitive. In this kind of environment the child learns that asserting one's 'true self' will be met with a form of (often serial) rejection, to which the child responds by substituting 'compliant' behaviour in place of true selfhood. Such compliant behaviour can then be witnessed as a stable feature throughout the child's growing-up years, with other school children, and within the family.

Depression, smoking, alcoholism, and addictive behaviours all occur with very high frequency in this personality type.

On a more positive note, EPD individuals are excellent contributors to society and family life; are often perceptive of the needs of others; and enjoy contributing in a helpful fashion. The highly respected religions of Christianity and Buddhism are based on such principles of altruism and charity, and this is a lifestyle at which the EPD individual can be said to be expert. Good traits such as these cannot be written off with a catch-cry of 'pathology', and if the EPD individual can regain a healthy sense-of-self whilst maintaining these good traits, they have the potential to become paragons of social behaviour.

-Essay based on Patrick Hurst's definition of EPD.

Echo: a quote from 'Narcissism and Character Transformation'

by Nathan Schwartz-Salant

"It has been said that the Echo episode was added by Ovid to a prior version of the myth; if this is so it only more attests to Ovid's genius, for Echo admirably represents the feminine counterpart of Narcissus. And she also represents what is found clinically when facing narcissistic attitudes of extreme defensive control. Then the demand for mirroring, the demand that we "shut up and listen!" -respect the meaning of this control- indeed reduces us to an echo, unless, that is, we blunder. But otherwise we are indeed controlled...and we have little voice of our own."

"In early treatments of the myth, perhaps up to the twelfth century, Narcissus is the main concern, and Echo is secondary. But gradually she becomes important in her own right, treated with compassion as an example of unrequited love."

But in regards to the process of therapy, "is the process of echoing, being an empathetic mirror, even in real, psychic depth, enough for the transformation of the narcissistic character disorder? Surely, without sensitive and effective mirroring there is little chance of penetrating the narcissistic defenses. Like Narcissus, narcissistic characters are terrified of being controlled, for they have so little sense of personal power. Hence the sadism and extreme cruelty that dominates their behaviour when in any way pressed, just "Hands Off!" Embrace me not! May I die before I give you power o'er me!" is Narcissus' reply to Echo's advances. But while a meaningful echoing response is necessary, there is reason to doubt its transformative effectiveness even when it exists with great psychic depth."

Echo: from 'Echo's Passion'

By Patricia Berry

Little has been written about the figure of Echo, and those who have commented tend to regard her negatively. These comments cluster in themes:

(1) Echo has a self-defeating passion. She is in love with an unattainable object (Narcissus). This is an impossible love, since Narcissus can't, and continually rejects her. Echo in this view is a kind of masochist. (2) Echo lacks identity; since she can only echo what others have said, she has no identity of her own. She (3) is only responsive, (4) merely mimics, (5) never originates.

What about this identity Echo lacks? The idea of "identity" is very trendy in current psychology. "Just be yourself," we say, as though one could step into something called "self," as though whatever else one is doing is not one's self but something other. Self identity implies an entity distinct from surroundings and other persons. It implies an essential sameness, oneness, and internal unity of personality.

The commentators are right. Echo is not selfsame or one; nor is she separate from her surroundings. (She needs surroundings in order to speak.) Psychiatrically, Echo has indeed a very poor sense of identity. Further, her boundaries are so loose that she has been, at one time or

another, involved with everything...

Maybe the reason we have concentrated on Narcissus to the exclusion of Echo is that Echo's passion is much more difficult. Echo's passion is painful; her longing is unrealizable. Echo's passion requires distance, a space between her and her beloved. To be true to Echo, one must cultivate this distance that agonizes and yet is one's aesthetic passion... This echoing distance creates a space for beauty. And Echo's beauty implies not only heat but also suffering, affliction, sorrow. Echo's beauty is equally a suffering and a certain passivity. That is to say, it is a suffering of something beyond one's self-identified bounds or ego. It is related to passio, the Greek pathos. This passion is like a taste or touch all the more poignant because it isn't actual. Or a passion all the more precious because of the pain of its nonconsumation. Nothing in the myth of Echo and Narcissus gets fulfilled -there's no happy ending- at least not in any ordinary sense. The focus of the myth is on unfulfilled passion (Echo for Narcissus and Narcissus for his reflection).

Narcissus and Oedipus, by Victoria Hamilton

According to Ovid, Echo's love feeds on the fact that she is rejected. Her love "grows on grief." It becomes greater because of the grief. And in this love grief, her body wastes away until "she becomes gaunt and wrinkled and all moisture fades from her body into the air. Only her voice and her bones remain: then only voice; for they say that her bones were turned to stone."

The myth tells us that "Echo has been captivated by the voice of another of which she is a mere reflection. Echo and Narcissus fit together perfectly; neither is able to initiate and sustain dialogue.

Although Narcissus' path is littered with heartlessly rejected lovers, it tends to arouse our hostility so that his partner may escape our notice and judgment: Echo's malleability is equally distracting and, indeed, provocative. Not a note of dissonance can be traced in Echo's voice. She offers nothing which might correct Narcissus' ever-expanding delusions of grandeur. Rejection is the inevitable fate which befalls a person who is unable to take the initiative to correct runaways in a system of communication. In many relationships, we find an Echo who is outcast and a Narcissus who casts out. As in the myth, Echo's love remains 'firmly rooted in her heart, and was increased by the pain of having been rejected'. She maintains the belief that rejection is a necessary ingredient to love. But her masochistic fidelity only reaffirms Narcissus in his view that she is no more than a mirror and a pathetic creature. In turn, through loss of self-esteem, Echo is engulfed by melancholia. She falls prey to fits of unmitigated anxiety and to self absorbed, compulsive ruminations. 'Her anxious thoughts kept her awake, and made her pitifully thin... Since then, she hides in the woods and though never seen in the mountains, is heard there by all: for her voice is the only part of her that still lives'. Like many malancholics, in a state of prolonged mourning, her anxiety renders her insomniac which further exacerbates the repetitiveness of her thoughts. Without the break of sleep and the shift in consciousness of dreams, Echo's life folds into

one endless nightmare.”

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