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# ECHOISM: The Silenced Response to Narcissism



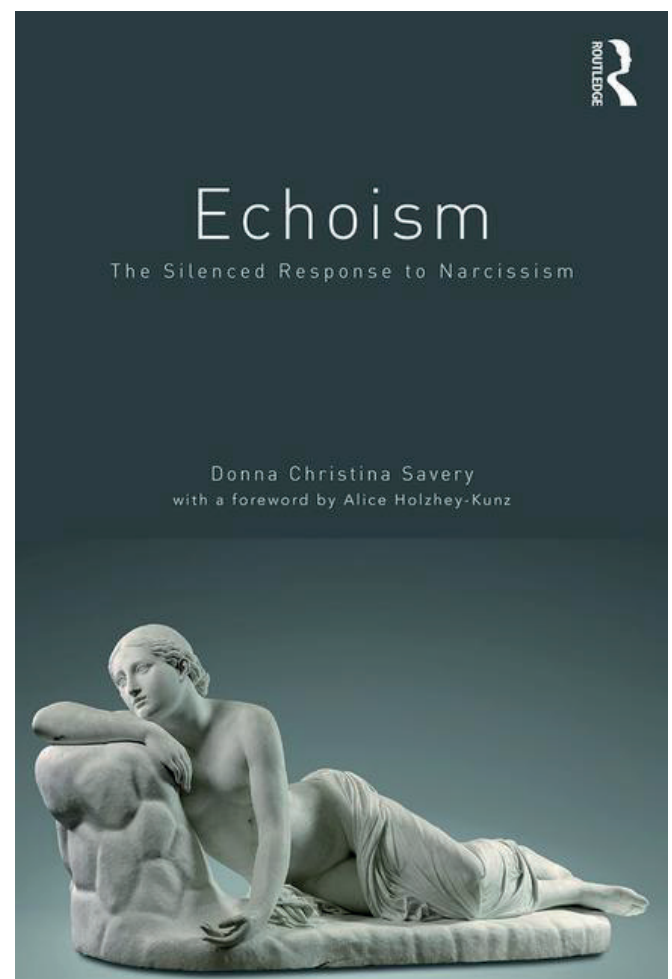
Ovid's story of the myth of Narcissus and Echo relates the tragic love story of Echo, a cursed nymph only able to speak by repeating the words of others, and who perishes and fades away after suffering a cruel rejection at the hands of Narcissus. While both mythical figures receive equal attention in Ovid's story, only the character of Narcissus – a depiction that is widely recognised today as a personality trait and a clinical disorder termed Narcissism - has

prevailed in the theoretical and clinical literature, whereas Echo, somewhat ironically, has stayed silent. In her re-visitation of the Greek myth of Narcissus, Savery's *Echoism: The Silenced Response to Narcissism*, contends for a repositioning of the marginalised narrative of Echo, and does so through sharing her experience of working with patients who closely resemble traits similar to that of Echo, thereby introducing the concept Echoism.

Throughout this book, Savery provides clinical case vignettes to exemplify Echo(ists), a term she denotes to refer to those patients as lacking a sense of Being, most apparent in the absence of their own-voice. With a close reading of Ovid's myth, Savery draws on literary and existential-philosophical ideas alongside psychoanalytic writings to illustrate, and splendidly so, the clinical presentation of Echoists in the therapeutic alliance. In explicating her ideas, Savery makes an interesting observation of an Echoist way of Being as representing an individual who is '...unable to be a self, except as a cipher in response to or through another. This has resulted in her [echoist] becoming predisposed to a painfully dependent relationship with a narcissist' (p. 152). Savery purports the necessity for a shift in the existing paradigm of narcissism and a theoretical re-synthesis towards a conceptual dynamic acknowledged as the 'echoistic-narcissistic complex'. That is, in order to fully comprehend the distinct features of the Echoist, 'we cannot separate her relationship from the narcissist' (p. 28).

Whilst Savery's research of Echoism is illuminating, the gendered vocabulary used when articulating (female's) echoism and (male's) narcissism is unavoidable. Although the author acknowledges Echoism through the paradigm of gender - in its equal applicability to females and males - the content of the book almost invariably portrays the concept of Echoism as being a female counterpart to male narcissism. In any reconsideration of existing paradigms of narcissism and Echoism, it may be necessary to recognise the distinctive gender differences in their relative manifestations. After all, preeminent theories of narcissism have emerged from patriarchal and phallogocentric narratives that overshadow feminine voices, and this is traced back to its inception in Greek mythology. While Savery enlightens the reader with meaningful differences between narcissism and Echoism in their clinical presentations, the issue of gender identity would have helped shed greater light on the areas discussed. On a final note, this book contributes significant value to professionals in psychotherapeutic practice, and enriches our understanding of Echoism and human interactions, not only within the clinical realm, but also in considering the vicissitudes between self and other.

Ava Green is an Associate Lecturer in Psychology and a PhD student researching gender differences in narcissism within intimate partner violence at Edinburgh Napier University. She has a BSc (Hons) degree in Psychology, an MSc in Applied Criminology and Forensic Psychology, and is a graduate member of the British Psychological Society.



*Echoism: The silenced response to narcissism* by Donna Christina Savery (2018), London, Routledge, 180 pages.