**Existential Analysis - BEING ONESELF**

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Being Oneself and understanding the histrionic personality is about the ability to exist as an autonomous and unique person and the blocks that can inhibit this.

**Being More Oneself - A Theme for Everyone**

Who am I? This is a question for everyone. It is human to strive for our true essential self. But it is not easy to know the answer. We usually begin to describe what we like, what our interests are, or what roles we have. This does help us to be more knowable and it is true that some of who we are is reflected in the things we like and the things we participate in. We identify with these things. We get located by these external things we tend to describe.

But who we are when we talk about me, who also has an inner side. There is a person inside who is me. I am there. I refer to myself. Inwardly, we know we have a person, a "me" because existentially we make decisions, have a will, have feelings, and have inner dialogue. All of these show evidence of our inner world, our person.

It is a rich valuable relationship with which we are entrusted, our relationship with our inner person. It is the source of our inner consent, our authenticity and our uniqueness. We also depend on our inner person to have good genuine encounter with others.

It becomes difficult to be oneself when we become occupied with a problem, when we become blocked, when we feel forced, when we are confused. Anxieties, depression and other problems at times make it difficult to be in dialogue with self, as a result we are not present with self, or able to be in meaningful contact with others. But usually after a time, we can process and integrate our experiences and re-orient ourselves back to connection with our inner selves.

But there is a specifc kind suffering that arises when relationship to one’s inner person cannot be found. The theme of hysteria/histrionic personality is about the undiscovered “personal being”.

**Intro to Histrionic Disorder**

Histrionic stems from the term / condition called Hysteria. In common speech, we tend to see it as negative: “don’t be so hysterical”, we reduce it to refer to someone being unpleasantly over-dramatic, we have prejudice against it.

Existentially, hysteria is a real suffering. It can be as painful and as severe as anxiety or depression can be.

In EA, we understand hysteria as a common experience that to a degree all people experience (just like anxiety and depression). However, when it becomes fixed or rigid it forms the basis for personality disorders. We understand it as the root for Borderline, Narcissism, and Anti-Social Personality Disorders.

**Basic Existential Theme of Hysteria**

Hysteria is related to the existential theme of being a person. The development of a person is about finding oneself and being oneself, about learning how to be I-with-oneself and I-with-others. It is concerned with setting one’s boundaries, but still needing the encounter with others. Finding and being oneself is conceivable only in a social context. It is about how one can be oneself as an individual, in a community and in a society.

The location of hysteria is in this interchange with others. Unlike anxiety or depression, histrionic expression always happens with others (it is expressed in public).

Existentially, the theme of a histrionic person is one who cannot find their inner person, true self. They feel rightly that they need the other, but they cannot really be reached by the other. The suffering is, therefore, from a blocked development to becoming oneself. Hysteria is a futile, ineffective attempt to overcome this.

**Description of Hysteria**

Characteristics of the Histrionic Personality:

(what we experience in these relationships)

* Hysteria is like a tornado. In the centre it is empty, but on the outside there is lots of activity.
* Attractiveness - chameleon like - show themselves in what is fashionable, what is attractive in each situation. Great appearance. They do not say the truth, but rather what impacts the listener (not what they really like or think but what will please or entertain or be shocking or fashionable). Whatever has great effect.
* Overactivity - never sticking to one theme, jumping from one thing to another, starting to say something and then losing their way because they are following another track now. There are lots of words to try to be interesting, but really saying nothing. Keeping the other at a distance where they can’t understand. They use a lot of words, but say nothing graspable. It’s very hard to follow them, as it has the appearance of being interesting and enlivening and entertaining, but leads to numbness.
* Mightiness - we can feel overpowered as listeners. No borders/boundaries. We can feel pressure, manipulated. They know how to make their ideas override. Always judging, always having strong opinions.
* Extreme - laugh and a minute later cry. Exaggerating for impression.

Main Two Traits:

1) Paradoxical (double bind):

The hysterical person draws attention to themselves with all kinds of tactics, but at the same time distracts from themselves (look to me, but don’t see me - give me attention, but don’t look at me) as they are afraid that people will see that nothing is there. Fear of of being hurt or rejected. This double message (see me, but don’t see me) only confuses, but what remains is the unheard message of hysteria...the quiet cry of desperation.

2) Two Poles:

The hysterical personality changes all the time from being easy-going, likeable, entertaining, inspiring, stimulating, and adaptive. To the other side of them where they are asserting power, and being overruling, oppressive, subjecting, manipulating, blackmailing, and suffocating. They can be lecturing, accusatory, pressuring, suggestive, and overly expressive. The person goes back and forth between these two poles.

**Central Motif of Histrionic Behaviour**

In all this over-activity, the central motif = they want freedom. This is a search their personhood, their essence, so their desire for freedom is in right direction (we all want to be free). However, theirs is a boundless desire for freedom, wanting to be completely unhindered, independent, with almost an instinctive compulsion to be freeat any price (a seeming freedom).The dynamic is all about having a unrestricted life; it is not about values or contents.

**Typical Responses to a Histrionic Person**

The hysterical personality will always lead us to our limits. If we don’t know how to create a safe environment for ourselves, we will be brought to our borders of being able to bear it. It’s very important to get a feel for the many ways we may react to someone with hysteria.

In the beginning:

* We may feel charmed and amazed by them. Drawn in and attracted.
* We may feel a part of a competition needing to be stronger and better.
* Another form is to let it go/let it run, not want to challenge. Get caught in it. After a time and with more experience:
* Response would be to fight, or to defend. Anger is growing here.
* One may come off strong and may confront.

As a stronger reaction:

* We may keep a distance and cut ourselves off from the relationship out of

fear or hurt (which happens regularly to them and re-inforces the abandonment that is a common theme underlying their suffering).

**The Healing Response to a Histrionic Person**

There is an attitude that breaks the cycle of the histrionic dynamic and that is the attitude of personal dialogue with oneself. When we run into this tornado of activity, instead of following it or succumbing to it, we pay careful attention to ourselves. What do I want to do or say? How do I feel? Implement my values and speak up about it. When I encounter their behaviour, to stay with myself and my inner person. Make use of my own center, my authenticity as the other needs it. If we do not, they will override and get lost (we get lost with them!). A histrionic person needs me, who I really am.

The essential challenge is to remain your own “person” in their presence. It’s talking and living from your centre, and being at peace with yourself. You can let the person “be” as they are while continuing to relate to yourself. One existential question to help us with this: *How well anchored am I in myself?*