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English 102

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Marvel's First Deaf Superhero

In December of 1999, Marvel first introduced their first deaf superhero going by the name of Echo in the comic *Daredevil* Vol.2 #9. Echo or alias name Maya Lopez is a Native American born girl who was born with the disability of hearing loss. Later in her story her father is killed by Wilson Fisk also known as the Kingpin who was her fathers partner in crime. Fisk adopts his daughter and raises her into the woman she is now. But the way he raised her was actually training her in order to counter and defeat the superhero the Daredevil, another superhero with a disability of blindness. Later on in the story she finds love with a man named Matt Murdock, a blind man who later in the story she finds out that he is the Daredevil and the man she loves. She finally realizes the lies she grew up with and summons hatred and defeats her adopted father the Kingpin. She then later becomes fond with Wolverine and adopts a new identity as a superhero named Ronin. The way Marvel employs their inspiration from the character Echo is by using her as a super cripple in order to inspire and create a role model for kids and adults with disabilities all over the world and in the Marvel Universe.

Superheroes with disabilities are often given other heightened senses and abilities if they are lacking one, which Echo is capable of. Echo is capable of seeing very clearly and even reading lips from videos or in person in which she can transcribe every conversation as if she could hear the whole conversation. Paul Dakin, a GP trainer from London who studies deaf characters in books and pop culture states that, "some aspects of Echo's character are arguable

not representative of the deaf community because the assumption is made that most deaf people can read lips well, whereas in fact most of them can't." He basically says that most deaf people cannot read lips at all, unlike Echo who Marvel has gifted her the ability with making her into the super crip description that she was created with. I agree that some aspects of her character is not representative of the community, a point that needs emphasizing since so many people believe that they can read lips since we see it all the time in pop culture and it is a common belief that deaf people adapt to the world by reading lips but in reality they do not all.

Her character and story while also being associated with the Daredevil a blind superhero gives inspiration to people with disabilities around the world. Tyrone Woolfe, a deputy director for children and youth at the National Deaf Children's Society states that, "with the right support, deaf children can do anything any other child can do, deaf children and young people can achieve at school, play musical instruments, write poetry or play football, we would like to see more of this creativity and determination in deaf characters, and more deaf characters portrayed in mainstream literature, with deafness not being the leading theme." He explains that her story and character alone would be able to inspire kids that they are able to do anything a normal person can do and they (Marvel and others) should create more heroes with other disabilities in order to inspire even more kids with different disabilities. Although I agree with Woolfe up to a point, I cannot accept his overall conclusion that they should create more content with kids with disabilities but his statement is exactly what the metaphor or Inspiration Porn comes from and most people with disabilities don't want them to be a person's inspiration just by doing normal day to day things.

Not only is Echo able to perfectly read lips and transcribe every single detail that a person is saying, she also possesses the power to perfectly imitate any action a different person does

whether it being movement, dancing, but in her case imitating one's fighting style perfectly. Possessing this ability is one of the heightened senses (sight) she was given since she is lacking the sense of hearing. Lydia Callis, a nationally certified sign language interpreter, advocate, and all to the deaf community writes that, "because she is deaf, she pays acute attention to visual details, allowing her to learn new abilities simply by watching another person perform the task, this is a great representation of deafness, and the way her supposed disability works to her advantage." She writes this explaining how her ability shows great representation of the deaf community by giving her heightened sight abilities that allow her to interpret almost anything. By focusing on her increased sight ability and imitation powers, Callis overlooks the deeper problem of people who are deaf do not actually gain heightened senses such as improving their sight and it kind of does not show good representation of deafness since most deaf people do not have the actual ability of imitating anything perfectly or even at all. The way Callis thinks of Echo is exactly what the metaphor of Inspiration Porn and "super-crip" is defining by giving the character these heightened abilities.

Although the character Echo fits in well with many categories of the stereotypes of people with disabilities in pop culture she definitely breaks the stereotype of non-sexual or incapable of a worthwhile relationship. In the Marvel universe she started off as the lover of Matt Murdock or the blind super hero the Daredevil which breaks the stereotype of being in a good relationship. Her character and Matt Murdock were lovers throughout her young years of life until she found out that he was actually the Daredevil then she ran off but for a good while they were in a nice and long relationship breaking that stereotype. Another stereotype Echo breaks is the stereotype of being incapable of fully participating in everyday life. Her background apart from being a running around saving the city in a costume at night, she is an avid dancer who can

imitate all sorts of dance styles. She also learned and mastered the art of playing the piano which is surprising because she is deaf, and to no surprise she is a great boxer who can defeat almost anyone who challenges her since she has the ability to imitate fighting styles and patterns.

Introducing Echo to the Marvel universe was a very bold and good move by her creators. Her story and character provides inspiration to many kids and adults who are fans of the Marvel universe to able to live their life to fullest since even a superhero can save the day with a disability. But, the only problem with her existence is that she falls into many categories of stereotypes that characters in pop culture with disabilities own that give them the status of being inspiration porn.

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