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## Turn This World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture

**Nora Samaran**

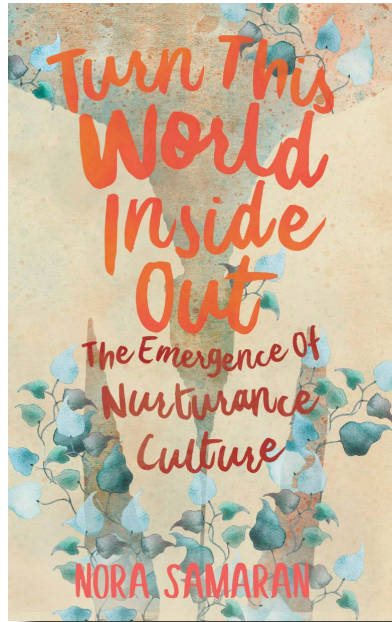
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**Reviewed by Erin Schaefer**

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In *Turn this World Inside Out: The Emergence of Nurturance Culture*, Nora Samaran asks us to reconsider western views of violence, justice, and healing. She suggests that by looking at these things through a holistic, compassionate lens, we could bring about radical changes which would allow for the birth of cultural norms that enhance the welfare of everyone. The book grew out of the author's essay, "The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture," which went viral in 2016 and came from a desire "to make sense out of several bewildering forms of harm that [she] observed in [her] life and in the lives of people around [her]" (11). This essay examines violence through the lens of attachment theory, arguing that violence arises from early conditioning that teaches us to feel ashamed of our desires to connect. This shame manifests as self-hate and violence towards others. Samaran argues that ". . . we need . . . a model for slow self-love that brings shame into the light and finds reality checks with those who accept you unconditionally, hold you accountable, and aren't going anywhere" (35). In turn, she offers a holistic exploration of self- and community care, allowing the book's dialogue chapters to offer diverse and nuanced examples of its practice.

The book is organized into three nurturance chapters and six dialogue chapters. The dialogue chapters "hold together, expand upon, and connect [the] . . . nurturance culture essays: 'The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture,' 'On Gaslighting,' and 'Own, Apologize, Repair: Coming Back to Integrity'" (13). The dialogues not only create a space for individuals to describe their individual lived experiences from their own viewpoint, but also a space for us to "learn from and listen to directly affected people who know most about these systems of harm, who are producing theory and analysis as they organize" (10). This book, then, allows readers to take part (to the extent that written words allow) in these conversations, while also providing a model for readers to do the same in their own local communities. Chapter one, "The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture," argues that "Violence is nurturance



turned backward” (18). This chapter joins those scholars who argue that care of society and care of self are inseparable, as stated in the book’s core thesis: “Compassion for self and compassion for others grow together and are connected” (18). She argues further that,

This means that men finding and recuperating the lost parts of themselves will heal everyone. If a lot of men grow up learning not to love their true selves, learning that their own healthy attachment needs (emotional safety, nurturance, connection, love, trust) are weak and wrong—that anyone’s attachment or emotional safety needs are weak and wrong—this can lead to two things: 1) They may be less able to experience women as whole people with intelligible needs and feelings. . . . 2) They may be less able to make sense of their own needs for connection, transmuted instead into distorted but more socially mirrored forms. (18)

In order for men<sup>1</sup> to stop being violent, then, they need to learn how to love both themselves and others (18). She calls for a holistic approach to transform misogynist rape culture, one that moves beyond a simple call for men to ‘not assault,’ and instead works through fostering men’s nurturance skills (19). The problem, however, is that men have few if any models from which to learn these skills. Cultural norms make men afraid to express nurturance because it is believed to be antithetical to masculinity, and thus spaces where men can teach one another how to develop these skills are very rare (21). As a result, men are unaware that they have the capacity—the “deep gift”—to care for and even heal others (19).

Samaran emphasizes the importance of having role models that can model and embody care, and she uses attachment theory to advance this point. Chapter one continues with an introduction to attachment theory, drawing from Sue Johnson’s *Hold Me Tight: Seven Conversations for a Lifetime of Love* and Thomas Lewis, Fari Amini, and Richard Lannon’s *A General Theory of Love*. Attachment theory holds that humans develop one of several attachment styles formed during the first several years of life that are influenced by whether they have a consistent source of nurturance from an “attuned” parental or guardian figure (22). The ideal attachment style, secure attachment, is what allows individuals to connect and care for others while also giving them space and autonomy (27–28).

Samaran then introduces three insecure attachment styles that, without understanding or awareness, can ultimately contribute to violent interpersonal dynamics: 1) the *anxious* attachment style, in which people “actively seek closeness and are afraid of losing it, and have a harder time knowing and trusting that their partner will be there for them” (24); 2) the *preoccupied-avoidant* style, in which people “crave closeness but are afraid to show it, and will show it instead through sulking or silence, hoping their partner will guess” (25); and 3) the *dismissive-avoidant* attachment style, in which people “have a need for intimacy. . . but at a very early age they complete a transition to a belief that they are autonomous and do not feel their need for intimacy” (25). Importantly, Samaran notes that attachment science estimates that “about 50 percent of the population has an insecure attachment style;” in other words, these

styles—and the difficulties often associated with them—largely influence how humans communicate with one another (24). Readers will likely recognize these styles in those they interact with daily and have interacted with in the past.

Though these attachment styles are formed at a young age, they are not set in stone; over time, and with deliberate effort, individuals can develop an “earned secure attachment” (26). What makes this so difficult, however, is the power of shame, a key dynamic that Samaran continually interrogates. Essentially, people learn to be ashamed of those parts of themselves that they have never known to be accepted by others. Furthermore, they often project this shame of self onto others: “Whatever is in us that does not get mirrored or held in a larger container of acceptance by others becomes a source of shame simply for not being accepted. And if you have shamed something in yourself . . . so early and so completely that you don’t even notice you are doing it, you will interpret that same need as shameful when you see it in others . . .” (28). She then applies this theory to misogynistic culture, explaining, for instance, that “in a culture that does not expect men to show up for their emotions, *women get blamed for unaddressed male shame*” (29).

In this important core chapter Samaran claims that assault is mediated by both embodied/psychological and cultural dimensions. She notes that, “This is all happening in the body, below the conscious level, not in a vague ‘unconscious’ but in a recognizable region of the brain: the limbic brain, which does not have language” (29). Some, however, might fault this chapter for focusing too much on the embodied/psychological dimensions and not enough on the cultural ones. The author acknowledges this issue in a footnote in which she explains that she has come to a more complex understanding of assault after reading Lundy Bancroft’s *Why Does He Do That*. Her new understanding “includes questions of acculturated entitlement, which are explored more fully in the dialogue pieces in this book” (30). Samaran indeed provides a rich understanding of both the embodied and cultural dimensions of violent and nurturance cultures throughout the book, aided by the diverse positionalities of her dialogue participants.

Samaran ends chapter one by calling for readers to create a culture that understands and absorbs shame. Self-love and compassion are necessary because they account for people’s typical relating patterns when shame arises, helping us “respond to the needs of others rather than freeze and become defensive, invasive, or paralyzed” (35). This process is necessarily social. Samaran explains that “This is men’s work to do, and yet it is needed by people of all genders who have men in their lives” (37). She emphasizes the importance of men pulling their weight in this work because women should not have to take primary responsibility for it “while also protecting themselves from male violence and neglect, which is still endemic and thus a daily part of women’s lives” (37-38). She ends by asking men how they might create the kinds of social spaces described in this chapter, as well as encouraging readers to share the book with men and then inviting them for dialogue (38).

Chapter two, “How Masculine-Identified People Might Use This Book,” provides a dialogue with “John Snow,” an amalgam of conversations with “several readers who have male privilege or experiences of masculine socialization, and who are using ‘The

Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture' in their efforts to reclaim lost parts of themselves and grow their capacity to nurture others" (39). Here, she acknowledges that this John Snow dialogue will not and cannot represent a "finished' position;" it is meant to help those wishing to begin the journey to feel part of a community as well as "shed light on the path . . ." (39). This chapter explores the often difficult, but ultimately rewarding, process of reconnecting the parts of themselves that they were conditioned to be ashamed of, while also "growing their capacity to nurture and show up emotionally in an ethical way with integrity and accountability" (40). The chapter also highlights the pain of coming to terms with the ways in which they have distanced and harmed others (43), as well as the grief of recognizing what is lost when we practice shame (44), including losing "the most beautiful and most powerful aspects of the self. . ." (47). This chapter also helps those wishing to engage in this process recognize that it is a layered process; they may discover parts of themselves that they had desired to connect with for some time.

Chapter three, "Turning Gender Inside Out," is a second dialogue chapter with Serena Bhandar, a Punjabi Sikh/Welsh/Irish gender fluid woman, Community Relations Coordinator with the Anti-Violence Project, "writer, activist, and educator" (49). This chapter "articulat[es] the ways in which any understanding of masculinity, or of gender, will be most effective when it positions transness at the center of the analysis" (13). Here Bhandar notes those parts of "The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture" that resonated with her and offers some criticisms. For example, she feels that it is targeted at a cis audience and re-inscribes a gender binary that assumes one can be either wholly male or wholly female. It also, she thinks, assumes that trans readers can/cannot understand what it is like to be either male or female (e.g., the false assumption that a trans woman can know what it's like to be male, or that a trans woman cannot know what it's like to be a woman) (52-53). Bhandar draws attention to the ways systems of harm affect trans individuals, and notes the importance of integrating these harms into the core argument. To her credit, Samaran listens and validates these concerns, echoing and building upon Bhandar's ideas.

In chapter four, "On Gaslighting," Samaran explains that gaslighting occurs when a person "undermines your trust in your perceptions and you feel crazy because your instincts and intuitions and sometimes even plain old perceptions are telling you one thing, and the words from someone you trust are telling you something different" (59). Here, the author challenges the notion that gaslighting is always an intentional tactic of abusers. She provides numerous reasons why people might unintentionally gaslight, including a lack of emotional intelligence/self-awareness, an overwhelming physiological response to the rise of difficult emotions, and poor role models from their past (61-63). Expanding this definition is helpful because it allows us to see the pervasiveness of gaslighting. She also provides a useful personal example of when she was gaslighted to demonstrate its insidiousness and pervasiveness. Framing gaslighting as either intentional or unintentional is also valuable because she insists that, regardless of intentionality, the effects of gaslighting are the same (63).

This chapter is also useful in that it provides practical advice for those experiencing gaslighting. Samaran explains that since gaslighting is structurally part of misog-

ynistic culture (60, 67–69), it is easy for those experiencing it to ignore, overlook, or dismiss what their intuitions and perceptions of reality are telling them (65). While acknowledging that their perceptions of others and their feelings are not always accurate (i.e., we might read that someone is having an underlying emotion when they may genuinely not be), Samaran encourages those experiencing gaslighting to respect their own intuition, and lay it side by side with what the other person says (66–67).

Samaran directly validates how harmful gaslighting is—for individuals and our society as a whole—while also providing a compelling argument for others to practice listening, believing, and empathizing with those harmed by it. She explains that while men experience it as well, gaslighting of women or femmes “picks up the larger cultural gaslighting of people socially positioned as feminine, as well as the cultural training to center men” (71). To address this dynamic, Samaran encourages us to prioritize and center the experiences of female-identified people (72–73), which is a move supporters of the #MeToo movement should appreciate. Importantly, doing so does not negate space for those who engage in gaslighting to grow (73).

Chapter five, “Building Strength through Movement and Afrofuturism,” is a dialogue with Ruby Smith Díaz, an “arts-based anti-oppression facilitator, a multidisciplinary artist, and a personal trainer supporting marginalized communities in feeling powerful and grounded in their bodies” (75). Díaz defines Afrofuturism as a communal and creative practice of Black people imagining their lives in a peaceful future. Díaz explains that Afrofuturism allows Black people to “create a reality that isn’t solely created in resistance to an oppositional force, but is created in a noncoercive way, on our own terms” (75). The conversation then turns to the many creative ways Díaz has found to practice self-love in spaces centered on care. Building from her own journey of coming to love her body for what it is and what it is capable of, Díaz works to create space for people with marginalized identities to do the same (78–79). They discuss the need for such accessible spaces given current western gym culture and health disparities among these populations (78–81). This dialogue reminds readers that care of the body is a critical aspect of both self-love and community care, and that “Nurturance is one of the ways that we reclaim our agency” (83).

Chapter six, “Cultivating Empathy and Shame Resilience,” is a dialogue with Aravinda Ananda, a social ecologist whose “life’s work is supporting a shift in dominant human relationships from linear extractivism. . . to regenerative relationships of mutuality and healing” (85). Building on Ananda’s experiences facilitating white people’s “unlearning white supremacy conditioning” (85), they discuss how they understand and navigate shame. This dialogue helps the reader understand the difference between ego- and performance-based self-love—a common cultural narrative of white people—and love of a core, authentic self (88). Ananda explains that understanding that there is a core, authentic self allows white people to move beyond white fragility<sup>2</sup> responses (89). This chapter provides useful insights for community leaders and/or educators who wish to facilitate discussions about white supremacy. Ananda cautions that even though a facilitator may have carefully created a safe space for growth, white people can quickly resort to “shame-evasion behavior” (94). “Samaran and Ananda

end by reiterating the importance of creating “clear structures in our community for handling harm” (94).

Chapter seven, “Own, Apologize, Repair: Coming Back to Integrity,” is the final cultural nurturance essay. This chapter notes that, when asked to be accountable, men (and white people) often respond with an angry attack and become stuck in a vicious cycle of guilt and anger (100–102). Samaran explains how she practices self-care when she discusses misogyny and racism with her students and others. She does this by creating boundaries and respecting the limits of her engagement with her audience, boundaries she learned to create from her relationship with an abusive father (103–104). She then turns to speak directly to men<sup>3</sup> with a series of questions and steps designed to help them understand how harmful their sense of entitlement is and move towards accountability and listening. Samaran prompts her audience to “own, apologize, and repair,” as well as to “Imagine replacing guilt with curiosity” (111).

Chapter eight, “Free, Prior, and Informed Consent,” is a dialogue chapter with Natalie Knight, a Diné (Navajo) organizer with the Alliance Against Displacement, whose “writing and organizing focuses on urban Indigenous people and Indigenous people who are removed from both [their] territories and our nations” (113). Partly drawing on her own journey as a doubly dispossessed Indigenous woman, Knight discusses the importance of Indigenous people connecting with their cultures and cultural stories to heal the internalized shame caused by Colonial violence (116–120). She describes the complexities of coming to understand the ways that Colonialism causes harm while denying it has done so, including her experiences of both anger and empathy towards those who caused this harm (118–119). They then discuss the importance of the role of “free, prior, and informed consent” for both the body and the land, explaining that “colonialism. . . simultaneously assault[s] our bodies and our lands” (120). For Knight, becoming whole requires decolonization, which necessitates rejecting capitalistic anthropocentrism and “relearn[ing] . . . diverse cultural knowledges that are rooted in land relationships” (121).

The final chapter, “Moving into Action, Mapping Terrains of Struggle,” highlights the difficult realities of working to repair harm and create nurturing spaces and cultures. This dialogue is with Alix Johnson. Johnson, a “mixed race (Chinese and White) survivor of sexual violence, she was a core and founding member of the Bay Area Transformative Justice Collective” and past “crisis counselor, first responder, and advocate for survivors of sexual violence. . .” (123). Samaran and Johnson describe how their own familial cultures both did and did not support their work and the hard work, successes, and disappointments involved in creating spaces that nurture care (123–126). This chapter should inspire those wishing to create such spaces in their own communities, as they encourage readers to think small-scale, beginning with just “two people who are going to show up for you,” then two more, etc. (126). The chapter reiterates a recurring theme in the book: a need for boundaries and a recognition of when people are truly ready to collaboratively take part in this kind of radical cultural change (127–131). It closes by reminding readers to prioritize listening to and validating survivors, regardless of how well we know them (130–131).

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Once one reads *Turn this World Inside Out*, it is not difficult apply its many ideas and perspectives to real life. I have found myself looking at people in public spaces, and marveling with both sadness and hope at the power of shame and systems of harm, as well speculating on what it would mean for us to learn and practice a culture of nurturance. The book also offers an incentive for those who have engaged in harmful behaviors to practice nurturance. For instance, chapter three, “How Masculine-Identified People Might Use This Book,” understanding men’s conditioned shame about their inner desire to connect is presented as an enticing “doorway to re-connecting in a more whole way with the self and with others” (45). Those who have experienced harm and/or internalized shame should relate to the remaining dialogue chapters. As I read these chapters, I found myself reflecting on my own internalized shame and desire to connect as I grew up in a largely homophobic culture with lesbian parents. I also recognized the protective mechanisms that arise when one does not feel safe, accepted, and cared for. In this way, I found the book to be both validating and encouraging.

As an emerging scholar of mindfulness and the rhetorics of emotion and the body, I appreciated Samaran’s stress on how quickly shame-evasion and other harmful responses to shame become habitual. However, while she mentions that the limbic part of the brain works much faster than the more conscious parts, she does not offer much instruction on how to calm these emotions and physiological triggers. The dialogue chapters often do a better job of acknowledging the power of emotional dimensions than the cultural nurturance essays. For instance, chapter two emphasizes that the process of (men’s) healing requires an emotional and cognitive connection (41), chapter five describes how toxic behaviors are encoded in the body (83–84), and chapter six discusses the need for an individual’s sense of emotional safety prompted by “unconditional positive regard” in order to practice it (88).

In particular, I wished that chapter seven—“Own, Apologize, Repair”—had incorporated and synthesized the emotion-oriented instruction from the aforementioned dialogue chapters. Samaran describes what an empathetic person might say in terms of emotion, such as, “I’m grateful you took that risk, and I’m taking it to heart,” and describes empathy as a “physiological relating with other human beings” (112). Yet, she seems to address this dynamic from a mostly cognitive stance. For example, she asks men to manage their shame-aversion and shame-attack responses with rational questions such as, “If your focus is more on the fact that harm got named than it is on the harm itself, does that strike you as peculiar?” While chapter one and the chapter six dialogue, especially, argue that accountability necessitates the person knowing that they are loved unconditionally so they can own harmful actions, chapter seven does not directly address how to do this during the reparation process. My concern is that those wishing to be accountable and repair harm might go through the motions on a cognitive level, without being able to empathize on an emotional one because they are still in a physiologically stressed mind/body state. Many scholars on listening have emphasized that empathy requires self-awareness, and while Samaran prompts men to not be self-*conscious*, I wish that she had stressed the necessity of



being self-aware of one's emotions and/or psychological lens as a component of empathy<sup>4</sup> in this important chapter.

Interdisciplinary mindfulness scholarship and literature (provided it presents non-neoliberal versions of mindfulness<sup>5</sup>) on emotional regulation (e.g., Gunnlaugson et al.; Nhat Hanh; Winans), mindful listening (e.g., Rakel), and other methods of enhancing emotional literacy and emotional self-regulation (e.g., Stevenson) might complement Samaran's approach to dealing with people's defensive, stress-driven responses to self-awareness and/or automatic shame-responses. In addition, guided mindfulness exercises that focus on self-compassion could provide more direct instruction for people practicing this work individually, particularly when men might have not yet developed an ability to listen empathetically without centering their ego-driven needs. In turn, those who practice mindfulness, particularly as a part of a social justice practice (e.g., Berila; Sajjad and Shahbaz) should connect with Samaran's holistic understanding of compassion, listening, and social justice.

Indeed, *Turn this World Inside Out* offers a holistic way of understanding misogyny, racism, and other forms of harm, as well as a rich offering of tools, tips, and guidance on how to create nurturance culture. It joins conversations that stress the need to account for and productively respond to shame and guilt in ways that do not result in self-absorption (e.g., Stevenson; Swiencicki; Trainor; Winans), self-absorption that de-centers those who have been harmed by systems of racism, sexism, homophobia, and other systems of hate. The dialogue chapters also show readers the many different ways that we can practice listening and care, from simple, small acts of self-care (77) to forming communities for this work to happen (123–131).

This book should certainly be of interest to educators. The author, an English professor, draws on her experiences teaching, for instance, about Colonialism, illustrating how concepts and theories presented in this book help her navigate students' unequal power dynamics, defensiveness, and vulnerability (102–103). With the book's focus on attachment theory, scholars in the behavioral and social sciences as well as interdisciplinary scholars in the humanities interested in understanding the embodied dimensions of social phenomena, should also find this book helpful.

Ideally, the book should be read more than once. As the amalgam dialogue with 'John Snow' (39–48) stresses, the process of shifting one's orientation towards the shamed parts of one's self, as well as coming to terms with and changing one's habits of disconnecting from and/or harming others, is long and difficult. Samaran's book is designed to promote ongoing dialogue, and asks big and often challenging questions. It is also intended as a starting point for people from a variety of positionalities to create nurturance culture, and I believe it is successful in doing this.

In sum, *Turn This World Inside Out* should be of interest to people in multiple disciplines, sectors, and contexts. It speaks directly to those who—whether intentionally or inadvertently—perpetuate violence, as well as those most harmed by that violence. In addition, it suggests ways of building a culture centered on nurturance and compassion, with emphasis on transforming systems of power built on racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia, and other forms of prejudice and discrimination. While acknowledging how difficult it will be to transform our culture,

this looking forward—as well as acknowledging how various community organizers and leaders are already making meaningful changes—makes this book inspiring and productive.

## Notes

1. The author provides a footnote in chapter one: “The Opposite of Rape Culture is Nurturance Culture,” the original essay that inspired the book, that explains her use of the word “men” is “intended to signify all masculine-identified people, including trans men, and nonbinary people who may only partially identify with the term” (17). In the following chapter, she uses dialogue to interrogate and complicate her use of the word, as I will touch on shortly in my summary of chapter two.

2. White fragility refers to the defensive and sometimes violent responses to being confronted with their own racism, or even the idea that racism exists (90–91).

3. I was uncertain, as I read this chapter, who the intended audience was. It seemed at times that it was geared towards men/masculine-identified individuals, and at other times towards white people. In general, however, her advice seemed applicable to anyone who has caused harm and wants to make reparations.

4. Ivor Goodson and Scherto Gill, for instance, argue that true listening requires both people to practice self-awareness. Chapter seven encourages self-awareness of one’s thoughts/lenses (certainly an important task) but less so of their emotions during the dialogue process. Similarly, Howard C. Stevenson argues, “listening is impossible if fright, flight, and flight reactions are ignited” (141).

5. For more discussion on neoliberalism and mindfulness, see James Reveley’s “Neoliberal Meditations.”

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