

Reflections on Learning from the Germans

Debra Mowat, MA, PhD

In 2019 philosopher Susan Neiman published a book called *Learning from the Germans: Race and the Memory of Evil*. Germany's reckoning with the Third Reich was a long, winding road that took decades of work and is still going on-but Neiman argues that Germany's experience might give us hope by example for our reckoning with racism in the United States. After the war Germany entered into a period of decades of amnesia, which it later managed to come out of. German psychoanalysts Marguerite and Alexander Mitscherlich documented the early dissociation from reality in their book (1967) *The Inability to Mourn*. The work in Germany is known as *vergangenheitsbewaltesung*, translated as working through the past. The United States, I argue, has a more difficult task than Germany has had. I use Robert J. Lifton's concept of malignant normality to describe the racism of the Third Reich as well as the racism of the United States. Malignant normality is a condition where what is constructive for human functioning is turned upside down. What is unlawful becomes lawful, lies are seen as truths. Many citizens lose connection with reality. I emphasize that we have a long history of malignant normality in the United States regarding racism and white superiority. I describe some projects that are helping Americans with the process of reckoning with racism.

Debra Mowat MA PhD-I am a psychoanalytic psychotherapist in the Seattle area. Prior to clinical training, I was a college professor in the field of communication, and I taught in the area of media studies and interpersonal communication. After leaving academia I worked as a facilitator of group conversation for alternative schools and their boards, in Seattle-often consulting with leadership. More recently, as part of a several year study group with colleagues on the work of Robert J. Lifton (and more) I am reflecting on my role as a "witnessing professional" a phrase coined by Lifton. As analytic therapists we see a great deal about the historical and political world around us. How can we bring what we notice to our patients and to other venues? That question is daily on my mind.

The illusion in the void:

Extremist political movements and the mirroring of the mind's hateful parts

Carolina Franco da Silva and Isabel Mesquita

Within the scope of extremist political movements that have been globally rising, hate speech legitimization seems to be no more than the acceptance and encouragement of the human being's most primary and destructive nucleus. Suddenly, it is acceptable to publicly and destructively reject others and their differences, overthrowing the existence of a progressively fairer and more humane society. In the absence of room for

proper discussion over discontentment, in an open and wholesome manner, while coming into contact with this malignancy without getting destroyed by it, the other who rejects is also rejected. Not only does this allow but it also encourages the strengthening of groups who share a bond over the absence of thought and the rebuttal of what is different, all while reinforcing what unites them – their common ideal being the annihilation of others and their differences. From the beginning, we need someone who, with their alpha function, can contain and work beta content. We hypothesize that some individuals with early developmental flaws feel like they didn't have the possibility to transform them, and they finally find in charismatic extremist leaders a continent where their least tolerable parts (because they are, indeed, underdeveloped and unintegrated parts, non-acknowledging of alterity and individuality) can finally be mirrored. However, this is a hollow and barren mirror, since it inhibits reflexive abilities and healthy autonomy, which would allow the individual to think differently and evolve. For this tendency to be inverted, we believe that there must be, for example, early education actions, consistent cultural promotion, given its absolutely vital contribution to a more evolved social conscience, and complex discussions involving psychodynamic contributions to understanding human behaviour.

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Curiosity and its Vicissitudes

Samoan Barish PhD

I am curious about curiosity!

To this end, I will review some of Freud's ideas about curiosity and its etiology, as he put forth both in his "*Three Essays on The Theory of Sexuality*" and in his monograph "*Leonardo da Vinci and a Memory of His Childhood*." We all know how Freud linked curiosity with infantile sexuality, but he and others have other ideas and elaboration to consider. Indeed, there are rich nuances worth exploring. For example, Winnicott has suggested that curiosity flowers in the arena of potential space, and flounders, and can die if potential space is collapsed. Further, I would like us to confront the question of how intrinsic curiosity is to human nature.

Let's play with the concept and think together about curiosity and its vicissitudes. What makes some of us more curious than others? What makes some people direct their curiosity outwards to the external worlds, and

other people direct their curiosity inwards, to their own and others internal worlds? Where does curiosity come from, what multiple functions does it serve? How does it get nourished and elaborated through the years, or does it? When can we lay claim to our curiosity and when can't we? Can curiosity ever be dangerous, as in the familiar trope, "Curiosity killed a cat?"

Let's look at the role of curiosity within the clinical enterprise, both from the point of view of the analyst and the patients. How do each engage in and express their curiosity, and how does curiosity inform the overall analytic endeavor? So many questions to pursue.

Samoan Barish - Career Highlights

Education: BA – City University New York
MSW – University of California, Berkeley DSW –
University of Southern California
PhD -- The New Center (formerly, Southern California Psychoanalytic Institute)

Social Work Practice: Training at the VA in Palo Alto and the Oakland Naval Center.
Positions in Service Agencies, Islip State Hospital, the Pasadena Child Guidance Clinic;
Glendale Guidance Clinic, and the Caltech Student Counseling Center. Private Practice;
Pasadena and Santa Monica, CA for more than 40 years

Contributions to Education: One of a small group of founders, including Jean Sanville, who developed Philosophy, concept and curriculum for the Sanville Institute (formerly the California Institute for Clinical Social Work) a PhD program for Clinical Social Work. It is a school 'without walls' in California for independent learners.
Samoan served as Dean of the school for nine years. She has taught a course on epistemology and a dissertation tutorial seminar as well as served on students' doctoral committees.

Contributions to Social Service: Samoan served for more than a decade as a Social Service Commissioner for the City of Santa Monica, overseeing all the social services for the city. Samoan was particularly involved in programs for the homeless, and consulted for several years at Chrysalis, a special agency that trains and helps homeless people find paying jobs.

Contributions to IFPE: Samoan has been a longtime member of the International Forum for Psychoanalytic Education (IFPE). Has frequently presented at the yearly conferences, has served on the Board for ten years and is presently chair of the Awards Committee

Contributions to AAPCSW: Samoan has been a member of AAPSW for 20+ years having presented at many conferences. She has served as a member of the Board, a member of the organizing committee for a number of the conferences and has been President of AAPCSW from 2007 to 2009. While serving as president she created a number of new Committees, including the social responsibility committee and the research committee. Samoan was a plenary speaker at the 2018 AAPSW Conference. She is presently co-chair for the Los Angeles area.

Professional Contributions: Samoan's publications include the Clinical Social Work Journal, the American Journal of Psychoanalysis and Other/Wise (an online journal of IFPE). and has contributed chapters to the AAPCSW sponsored books.