



## Review of *Psychoanalytic Reflections: Training and Practice*

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308 pp.

**ELIZABETH HERMAN MCKAMY, MSW**

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As a recently retired, psychoanalytic psychotherapist trained in the 1970s, it is a pleasure to endorse Sandra Buechler's *Psychoanalytic Reflections Training and Practice*. Buechler's essays, which span the late 1980s to the present, are a generous, evocative exploration of how analytically trained therapists' clinical identity is developed and how well-seasoned clinicians' signature styles get forged over time.

For anyone considering analytic training, those in midcourse practice, or those teaching or consulting with psychotherapists, *Psychoanalytic Reflections* is a go-to, must read resource and reminder, of what goes into making a psychotherapist good at her job, and what she may expect, and learn to tolerate, in the waves and shoals of clinical practice. In addition, *Psychoanalytic Reflections* offers a nostalgic, affirmative, valedictory retrospective for any psychotherapist who has surfed the swells of psychodynamic practice and thinking over the course of the past 50 years.

Exquisitely referenced, and delivered with a poet's knack for choosing just the right words to highlight nuanced concepts, this volume delivers nuggets of wisdom from familiar theorists that smoothly integrate Buechler's well-ripened experiences as clinician, teacher, and supervisor. Elements of a sentimental journey intersect seamlessly with frank discussions about the hopes and ideals candidates bring to the profession, the power and pitfalls of Institute training programs, and the riches and hazards both trainees and mentors encounter along the way. Overall,

Buechler shines a broad beam of light on the highs and lows of pursuing, and practicing, the “subtle art . . . of this glorious, gratifying career.”

*Psychoanalytic Reflections* is divided into two sections: “Training” and “Practice.” In “Training,” Buechler articulates the passion and vulnerability candidates bring to the exceptionally personal, intellectually rigorous training required of analytic work. Idealization of the profession itself, and its partner, intimidation, are explored in the chapter entitled “Joining the Culture of Institutes,” as is her emphasis on the depth and reach, and enduring influence, of the mentor role. In effect, Buechler posits that mentors must validate the promise inherent in the ideals and life experience each rookie analyst brings to supervision while concurrently teaching and exemplifying the infrastructure that supports dedicated engagement and tolerance for what cannot be known or resolved.

With tenderness and respect, Buechler reminds readers of the adjustments novitiates make to the expectations of their institutes. Training programs ask that much habituated orientation toward personal and past experiences be suspended in the service of making room, intentionally and otherwise, for the wisdom of founders, instructors, and supervisors to take hold. Although Buechler notes that discordant and disruptive influences can create an undertow of trouble for a practitioner at any stage of her career, she states that a strong chorus of internalized mentors provides an anchor; a steadfast orientation against disappointments, losses, and “. . . a whole career of [inevitable] conflicting injunctions.”

Buechler reminds readers that most therapists who seek analytic training come relatively late to the profession. Self-appointed to psychoanalysis, most have known losses, or traumas that affected others, that fueled their drive to help and make sense of emotional distress. That said, Buechler extrapolates an interesting perspective on through-lines that birth and sustain this highly personal, particularly selected field of work: curiosity, passion, and a sense of common humanity, and resilience.

Although Buechler (2004), Deutsch (1973), Roazen (1985) , and others, have referred to these “late bloomers” who begin formal analytic training well-ripened and bearing matured determination, she states that teachers and supervisors may lose sight of the fact that trainees are simultaneously, while in training, trying to hold their heads

above water with complex family responsibilities and financial burdens. As they juggle academics, and training analysis, they too, like their instructors and mentors, are also affected by politics and uncertainties that are part and parcel of all contemporary analytic practice. Is the effort worth the sacrifices? Will a livelihood be earned when certification has, at last, been achieved?

In “Stress in the Personal and Professional Development of a Psychoanalyst,” Buechler looks deep into aspects of a candidate’s vulnerability: the expectations that she master evocative academic material, that she share personal reflections and associations in supervision and among peers in seminars, that she process out loud, and regularly, her responses to nuanced, charged material that disturbed and distressed patients bring to their treatments.

It is in this context that Buechler introduces the topic of *shame*: a potentially toxic sense of insufficiency that rises up “in any season of our work,” but whose roots are often set in early supervision experiences. For those familiar with Buechler’s writings, various iterations of shame (anxious shame, angry shame, regretful or guilty shame) are familiar, but no less importantly reiterated in this volume (Buechler, 2004, 2012)).

In a climate that encourages self-observation and the privileging of truthfulness, exposure to scrutiny is the meat on the bones of analytic theory. Trainees, eager to immerse, yet sometimes quick to take offense, are vulnerable. Learning how to deal with one’s imperfections and idealizations and developing the ability to maintain compassionate neutrality in the presence of another’s suffering is part of the mission of a well-trained clinician.

Within the sphere of assisting trainees to achieve these goals, Buechler underscores the inherent risks teachers and supervisors bring to their tasks: overshadowing trainees by an inclination to indoctrinate, excessive cleverness, or showing off, for example, that, she says, can be a product of the mentor’s anxious shame—about, for example, aging in place in an institute, a senior instructor or supervisor’s own insecurities about her future in the profession.

In “The Legacies of Shaming Psychoanalytic Candidates,” Buechler points out that mentors and supervisors—by virtue of unexamined feelings of insufficiency—may inadvertently evoke humiliation, feelings of falling short, on their students. Readers are reminded that helping

mature, gifted, yet novice psychotherapists chart the course of their professional development demands skill and vigilance.

Mentors, Buechler states, are usually two or three generations older than their candidates. They may develop “a kind of psychological carpal tunnel syndrome” comprised of overworked skills that blind the esteemed position of authority to the impact of excessive criticism. Indulged, unexamined narcissistic inclinations deprive trainees of the “hope for change, interpersonal courage, sense of therapeutic purpose, integrity, and the capacity to bear loss,” all requisites of a well-trained psychotherapist. Though a tall order, Buechler suggests, they are reasonable expectations for an analytic training program.

Patinas hardened by ambition, success, and disappointments may impair an elder analyst’s memories of her own early experiences and vulnerabilities. Senior supervisors, nudging the end stage of their careers, are usually taking stock of (her) professional legacy and wondering about the prospects for their own futures. Unexamined, these deliberations can dovetail with trainees’ needs and expectations: a complex, often unexamined, brew.

Some older mentors, Buechler states, propelled by a need to stay viable, may hold relentlessly to the past and shortchange up-to-date perspectives. Other instructors, she says, may lean precipitously into currently mainstream treatment approaches and inordinately stretch the boundary of core analytic theory and practice guidelines.

Although I understand Buechler’s emphasis on the importance of holding to what is essential to the practice of psychoanalytically informed work, failing to acknowledge and be knowledgeable about alternative modalities deprives contemporary trainees, and their patients, the opportunity to be savvy about other means to treatment goals.

I wondered, as I read “Preparing Candidates for the Challenges of a Globalized World,” if enough has been said, by Buechler or others, about the accessibility and potential complementarity of divergent theories and methods of practice. Like it or not, a smorgasbord of therapeutic cultures is very much a part of the world any clinician, or her patients, inhabit today.

I’m reminded of the drift from psychodynamic work to family systems in the 1980s that pulled many gifted clinicians from analytically informed training and practice. In my experience at the Menninger Clinic during those years, it seemed choices were made—to go in one direction or the other—with little consideration given to the cost (of

perceiving the need to choose one over the other course). Gifted treaters walked away rather than integrated alternative courses of addressing the needs of their clientele.

There was then, and still is in my opinion, a sense that one leaves the fold when, analytically trained, a therapist studies and enlists another direction. Is there shame in acknowledging and embracing alternative methods? Aren't there potential areas for bipartisan agreement?

Still, no one can cover everything. The fact that *Psychoanalytic Reflections* stirs interest in unexplored areas is testimony to its author's clear writing and the topics that bear most strongly on her areas of interest. The fact that Buechler sparks old curiosities and raises new ones underscores how well this collection has been curated.

That said, in the "Practice" section, Buechler's early studies of literature, poetry, emotion theory, and humanism intimately join and season how she approaches teaching and supervising the ups and downs of actually working with patients. Shakespeare, Wordsworth, and Rilke blend with the voices of Izard, Fromm-Reichman, Mitchell, and Sullivan, and are point-on references to each area of Buechler's editorial attention.

"Hope as Inspiration" and "The Right Stuff: The Analyst's Sensitivity to Emotional Nuance" reflect on her research on emotion theory with Izard (1983) and bring to the fore questions about how emotions engender active hope in psychotherapists and patients in long-term treatment with all its inherent frustrations. What maintains hope in a psychotherapist whose workdays are a series of various iterations of loneliness and uncertainty?

Although admonishing practitioners not to "homogenize away" intense—or low intensity—countertransference reactions to difficult enactments, Buechler states that to sustain enthusiasm for the work, a therapist must have respect for reflection, and a leisurely attitude toward time. To tolerate and maintain hope for change, requires interpersonal courage, a powerful sense of therapeutic purpose, integrity, and a capacity to bear loss.

Citing Mitchell (1993), Buechler reflects on the use of emotions, like anger, as catalysts and organizers of experience. She reminds practitioners of the importance of crediting the emotions that surface for the therapist, in the tumult of clinical practice, that bring relevant references to primary stored material to the surface of clinical understanding.

“Searching for Passionate Neutrality” and “More Simply Human Than Otherwise” highlight aspects of maintaining effectiveness—and hope—while working with particularly difficult diagnostic challenges. Throughout the “Practice” chapters, Buechler studiously avoids pathological labeling of difficult patients or their enactments, countertransference issues, or failures to cure. Rather, she invites courageous introspection and acceptance of an effective therapist’s willingness to experience “the schizoid strategies” that are a part of all of us as a route to engaging with patients’ most troubling manifestations of distress.

“My Personal Interpersonalism: An Essay on Sullivan’s One-Genus Postulate” details Buechler’s essential message to those in training and in practice. The oft-quoted aphorism, “Everyone is much more simply human than otherwise” (Sullivan, 1953) is discussed in detail, and the chapter marries beautifully with “A Letter to My First Analytic Supervisor,” Buechler’s elegant, revelatory response in a special issue of *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, edited by Buechler (2009) which sought to answer the question “what works when supervision goes well.”

“Letter” must be read to do it justice. Exceptional in this volume that offers few examples of Buechler’s personal heartaches or victories in the calms and riptides of practice, this particular essay conveys how right mentorship and a good match inspired her and bolstered and informed her work long after the actual relationship with her supervisor had ended.

That said, however, in its entirety *Psychoanalytic Reflections: Training and Practice* is a thought-provoking read and ongoing reference point for prospective and retrospective students of psychoanalysis, and for any practitioner, whether analytically trained or otherwise. For those who supervise, teach, or consult, Buechler’s work, as always, energizes, validates, and candidly opens portals in which the strengths, and fragile features, of this profession lie.

Prospective students can scope out what they are getting into. New and long-established educators and supervisors can reflect on the long-lasting range to which their influence extends. Older clinicians—retired from clinical practice—can float in a retrospective of ideas, ideals, and validations of the realities that colored their cherished, uniquely challenging, careers.

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Review of *The Enigma of Desire, Sex, Longing, and Belonging in Psychoanalysis*, by Galit Atlas, Ph.D. New York, NY: Routledge, 2016,  
 179 pp.

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SUMRU TUFEKCIOGLU, Ph.D.

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A few months into his four times weekly analysis, my patient Jason came to a Friday session, looking slightly more anxious than usual. He was silent for a moment after which he said: “I had some thoughts after our last session, about some things we touched on, like