

2021

## Book Review: What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know About Sex, 2nd ed., by Stephanie Buehler

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### Recommended Citation

Haddock, L. R. (2021). Book Review: What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know About Sex, 2nd ed., by Stephanie Buehler. *Journal of Counseling Sexology & Sexual Wellness: Research, Practice, and Education*, 3 (1), 25-26. <https://doi.org/10.34296/03011035>

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# Book Review: *What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know About Sex*, 2nd ed., by Stephanie Buehler

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The ability to understand and address sexuality issues is a critical skill set for all mental health professionals. This comprehensive review of the second edition of *What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know About Sex* includes an overview of the contents with emphasis on the strengths and weaknesses of the text. Written by Stephanie Buehler, a licensed psychologist and AASECT certified sex therapist and supervisor, the contents are educational, promote increased self-awareness for the reader, and facilitate insight into the lived experiences of clients while also providing practical and useful exercises and resources that are valuable regardless of a clinician's depth of experience. The book is highly recommended for inclusion in counseling and sexual wellness education at the master's and doctoral level.

*Keywords:* book review, mental health professionals, sex education, textbook

## Review

The ability to understand and address sexuality issues is a critical skill set for all mental health professionals. The second edition of *What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know About Sex* (Buehler, 2017) is an informative and comprehensive text that provides information, tools, and exercises to facilitate comfort and skills related to sexuality within the therapeutic process. Written by Stephanie Buehler, a licensed psychologist and AASECT certified sex therapist and supervisor, the contents are educational, promote increased self-awareness for the reader, and facilitate insight into the lived experiences of clients while also providing practical and useful exercises that are valuable regardless of a clinician's depth of experience.

Divided into three parts, the text opens with dialog intended to lay a groundwork of conceptual understanding. Part I, entitled *The Courage to Treat Sexual Problems*, sets a tone of encouragement to speak openly on the topic of sexuality. Buehler promotes addressing physical and psychological sexual development with candidness and acceptance while also giving voice to societal influences that have impacted the stigma associated with talking about sexuality. She calls out professional literature that has highlighted the trends of sexually conservative views in mental health practitioners and, from the beginning, readers are challenged to honestly reflect on their current perceptions and opinions about sex and set aside existing beliefs in an effort to expand their worldview. Four chapters comprise Part I, including an entire chapter dedicated to developing comfort with the topic, before moving into a review of sexual anatomy, psychosexual development, and the evolution of the field of sexology and sexual health. Buehler literally gives voice to the topic with

an offering of language including terms and definitions. The content is easy to read and grounded in research.

Part II moves into the assessment and treatment of sexual concerns. The largest portion of the book, the content in Part II is expansive and includes 15 chapters addressing sexuality in relation to a variety of topics including trauma, reproduction, relationships, and mental illness. Practitioners who work with families will appreciate the section dedicated to answering parents' questions about children's sexual development across the lifespan and learning to address sexual issues with their children. Other chapters include content dedicated to the specific sexual health problems of men and women as well as sexual minorities and transgender clients. The book includes education and guidelines for application of strategies to promote sexual wellness and decrease sexual dysfunction that are useful to educators, supervisors, and clinicians. A great element included in this section of the book is the "Step into my Office" portion of each chapter, which offers a case study to promote clinical conceptualization. Every chapter creates a framework for exploring attitudes, gaining knowledge, and growing skill. While there is

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no doubt that Buehler promotes affirmative treatment, more information or case studies related to clients who are gender non-binary or post-transition transgender would be useful. What is superb, however, is the practical information on issues common to clinical practice such as STIs, sexuality and aging, and sexuality and medical problems. The content is aligned with the DSM-5 (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), addresses theoretical approaches, new pharmacological treatments, and sex addiction making it a great choice for educators and supervisors to use in training curriculum. What is threaded throughout the book is the reminder to all treatment providers that they have an obligation to expand their knowledge and maintain open attitudes in order to be effective in their clinical practice. These reminders become especially relevant in the sections dedicated to alternate sex practices and out of control sexual behavior.

Finally, in Part III, the book transitions into ethics and practice of sex therapy. All clinicians, regardless of practice setting or years of experience can benefit from the useful review of maintaining appropriate boundaries and issues of transference and countertransference. Those considering or participating in work with couples will certainly appreciate the exploration of managing secrets in conjoint therapy. The book concludes with discussion on the ethical management of sex therapy casework and further directions in the field.

Overall, this book is a great tool for mental health professionals who are motivated to address sex in a comfortable and effective manner in clinical practice. The variety and depth of information included in this book sets it apart from other texts. It is highly recommended as an excellent choice for use in counseling and sexual wellness education at the master's or doctoral level. The content is thought provoking and encourages readers to reflect on personal beliefs and biases about treating sexual health. Included are downloadable templates such as worksheets and client handouts, a glossary, and resources to promote access to more in-depth information and collaboration with other health professionals. The sample vignettes, diagrams, and case studies have educational value for clinicians and clients alike. *What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know about Sex* is a comprehensive text designed to expand the reader's fund of knowledge related to sexual issues with diverse populations and serves as a guide filled with practical tools and techniques for professionals to utilize in their clinical work.

#### References

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