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Transference and Countertransference Today. Robert Oelsner (Editor). London and New York: Routledge, 2013, 361 pages, \$54.95 paper.

Reviewed by William Fried, Private Practice, New York City

Of considerable salience among the contents of this book is the publication in English, for the first time, of Racker's "Observations on Countertransference as a Technical Instrument" [pp. 18–29].¹ It is the first and keynote paper. The 16 papers that follow it are to a greater or lesser degree, responses to and elaborations on Racker's ideas. Either because of difficulties with the translation or conceptual flaws, however, the paper falls short of other works by Racker, principally those collected in his book, *Transference and Countertransference*, that has been available in English since 1968.

Consider the statement, "If the analyst can use his negative transference reactions in favor of the treatment, he is usually able to overcome them" [Racker, p. 19]. Surely, the obverse is true: if the analyst can overcome his negative transference reactions, he can use them in favor of the treatment. If the translation is accurate, and Racker actually said the former, then his concept is flawed; if he meant the latter, then the translation is flawed.

Another illustration of a problem inherent in the translation is the following passage:

Thus, the analyst's feelings of guilt — which on the one hand were inappropriate to the aggression committed, but on the other were appropriate to Bertha's depression — became a guide to the aggression of Bertha's moral superego against the ego where she had introjected the seductive and frustrating primary objects (the "primary persecutors"). [Racker, p. 22]

The passage is unnecessarily difficult to decipher because it agglomerates too many ideas into an inordinately long sentence. Greater clarity would be achieved by the use of shorter sentences.

The book begins with a forward by Claudio Laks Eizirik, followed immediately by Robert Oelsner's introduction. Together, the two might constitute an excellent review of the volume as a whole, with appreciative references to the contents of most or all of

Correspondence concerning this review should be addressed to William Fried, Ph.D., FIPA, 29 West 64th Street, New York, New York 10023. Email: billfried9@gmail.com

¹Quotations from and references to the papers in this book will be bracketed to differentiate them from quotations and references from other sources. The latter will be enclosed in parentheses.

the papers included. It was therefore alarming to me that my own impressions of the works diverged from theirs in quite significant ways, as witness the examples above, for mere openers. The conclusion I drew from this discrepancy was that both Eizirik and Oelsner are fluent in Spanish, and therefore less limited in their comprehension of these materials than a reader restricted to English syntax and vocabulary.

One idea that is central to most of the papers in this book is that transference consists of unconscious fantasies about crucial objects (people), that the patient projects into the analyst; that is, he believes that the attributes of these objects belong to the analyst and behaves as though this were so. Another idea shared by most of the authors of these papers is that countertransference is the analyst's experience of and response to having these fantasies attributed to him. A third focus of many of the papers is the phenomenon of enactment, the tendency or inclination for the analyst to engage in overt behaviors that express the qualities of the patient's objects. When the patient exhibits behavior under the influence of the object or self representations to which he attributes unconscious fantasies, this too is defined as an enactment, the term having replaced "acting out," the word that was used for this purpose in the past.

Some of the papers raise and discuss the important issue of the analyst's transference and/or countertransference to psychoanalysis itself; to the specific version(s) of it she has been taught and acquired in the course of her education, training, personal analysis and experience; and to particular technical procedures or interventions. Lemma, for example, points out that there are institutes and supervisors that promote the value of the transference interpretation as though it, alone, is the element that distinguishes psychoanalysis from psychotherapy and is therefore the definitive intervention in psychoanalysis, beside which all others are regarded as subordinate [Lemma, pp. 129–130].

It is noteworthy that, though some of the authors hint at the influence on the analyst's approach of early childhood and pre-training experiences, none mentions the impact of the implicit theory of personality that the analyst develops from earliest infancy, the strength of which is often undetected throughout training, an oversight that may result in its later emergence in the form of obstructive countertransference reactions.

Another relevant phenomenon that elicits no criticism in these pages is the analyst's naive inclination to use questions as interventions, as illustrated in several of the case descriptions. It is as though the necessary alertness to unconscious meaning and defensive operations is turned off when the analyst finds herself asking a question in response to some unclarity or obscurity in the analysand's discourse. That is, rather than regard it as a possible resistance, an unconsciously determined omission or obfuscation, the analyst will ask for clarification by means of a straightforward question. This is an excellent example of the most common form of enactment; it is a verbal one that may occur several times in the course of a single session, and become integral to a defensive fabric across many sessions, with no awareness of its existence or function either by the analyst or, for that matter, her supervisor. If analysts are encouraged, as they are by all of the authors in the current volume, to examine their own in-session behavior for evidence of countertransference, how is it that the interrogative inclination eludes this process?

A pervasive difficulty with the thematic trope of this book is its language. To begin with, much confusion and needless exposition might have been averted had Racker and his successors not chosen to name the process by which the analyst becomes aware of the effects of being treated as the object(s) of the patient's unconscious fantasies, *countertransference*. The term had already been coined for a similar but crucially divergent

entity, the analyst's residue of unanalyzed, poorly analyzed, or incompletely analyzed unconscious conflict, defense, fantasy, affects, etc. that interfered with her ability to analyze. This residue would affect her work with each analysand in a different way, depending on the degree to which it might match aspects of the analysand's personality structure. The processes are sufficiently distinct to have required different names. The separation thus achieved would have been salutary.

The problem to which I have just referred is one side of something even more troubling. The use of an already saturated term to name a new discovery is paralleled by the invention of neologisms to name processes for which adequate nomenclature already exists. The authors of this book do this in abundance, contributing to further obscurity and difficulties of understanding. Here, for example, is a short list of such ad hoc words or phrases:

"The countertransference position" [Faimberg, p. 51]; "The analyst's negativization of himself," "calculated vacillation of neutrality," "symbolizing historicization," "rechannel the cure" [Fainstein, pp. 77, 78]; "misconceptions" [Weiss, p. 122]; "the mindful object," "the objectivation of subjectivity" [Lemma, pp. 127, 145]; "tragic ethics," "spectral non-structural models, non linear and non-hermeneutic," "ethical aesthetics" [Chuster, pp. 317, 220, 225]; "mishmashed," "mestizo," "terrorism of suffering" [Borgogno and Vigna-Taglianti, pp. 294, 296].

The specialized use to which the authors put many of these terms renders them less comprehensible to readers familiar with their generally accepted connotations. This tends to be the case even in the rare instances where the author attempts to define the novel sense and context for which the term has been recruited. Even if I were ignorant of more recent psychoanalytic coinage, I would remain concerned that a significant number of my colleagues might approach the task under the same handicap and I am reasonably certain that the editor and publishers would not wish deliberately to limit the size of the book's prospective readership.

My principal criticism of this volume as-a-whole is that each author tends to take the concepts of transference and countertransference in the direction that the author finds congenial to his or her own practice, experience and understanding of these terms. Each selects and quotes ideas from the works of certain earlier or contemporary writers, and ignores those of others that may have equal relevance. This selection is rendered possible by the absence of criteria for the validity of any particular set of ideas or its superiority over others for explanatory or therapeutic purposes. Indeed, the extant outcome research tends to confirm that no one psychodynamic approach is superior to others (Shedler, 2010).

In psychoanalysis, the concepts of theorists whose prominence tends to be a complex function of their writing, teaching, theorizing, and charisma, are likely to gain currency. But once they enter the circulatory system of the profession, they undergo changes and transformations that are significant. This volume illustrates the process well. Examples are Haydee Faimberg's [pp. 53–54] redefinition of Racker's concept of complementary identification; Racker's (1968) and Paula Heimann's (1950) assertion, contrary to Freud, of ". . . countertransference as not being synonymous with the analyst's neurosis on the basis that countertransference is triggered by the patient" [Faimberg, p. 55]; and Fainstein's [pp. 68–87] focus on the reformulation of the clinical implementation of countertransference based on Lacan's contributions.

Having registered my reservations about *Transference and Countertransference Today* in the foregoing paragraphs, it remains for me to commend the book for the ability of

most of its authors to provoke thinking about the uses of analysts' inner experiences as these experiences evolve in the clinical metier. These texts, despite the stylistic and semantic obstacles to which I earlier referred, are intellectually and psychologically challenging and will reward the reader willing to struggle with the prose. The discussions that stimulated me most were in Lemma's [pp. 127–149] paper on the uses and misuses of transference interpretations; Berman–Oelsner's [pp. 177–195] contemporary Kleinian view of psychoanalysis with children; Faimberg's [pp. 49–67] sensitive, though often occluded clinical observations; and Robert Oelsner's [pp. 236–255] more lucidly explicated case material. The book also renders an inadvertent service to the cause of improved psychoanalytic writing and dialogue by demonstrating the need for greater attention to a shared and versatile language in which to give voice to the slowly developing convergence of ideas from heretofore disparate analytic perspectives.

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