The List-serve Discussion About R. Langs

My recent engagement with the work of R. Langs began when one of his devotees, Richard Russell, published, in the Psychoanalytic Review, (2014) a severe criticism of a book I had edited, “Transforming Lives: Analyst and Patient View the Power of Psychoanalytic Treatment”. Russell asserted that a horrendous violation of the “frame” occurred when analytic patients were invited by their previous analysts to write their own personal summaries of their terminated treatment for inclusion in the book alongside of their analysts’ summaries. The title of Russell’s paper included “Revealing Details of Treatments to Third Parties” though all the analysts and all the patients in the book were anonymous; he erroneously concluded that I had treated one of the patients. He also criticized the treatment of a patient, Amalia, reported by Kächele et al. (2009), to which Kächele will respond separately also in the Psychoanalytic Review (2015).

Langs (1992) referred to the “frame” as “the ground rules related to fee, time of session, relative anonymity, privacy, and the like” (p.100). I have not found a single empirical study that tested Lang’s hypothesis about the putatively profound destructive effects upon treatment of breaks in the “frame”. Follow-up provided no evidence that the patients who wrote summaries of their treatment for the book I edited felt traumatized. Rather, they seemed pleased and proud that their contributions were included in the book. I have written a response to Russell, and if you request it, I can send you a PDF, now, but, alternatively, it will appear in the April issue of Psychoanalytic Review which is about to be published.

The many divergent views on the list-serve about Langs’ concepts and contributions are striking! I think they can be understood in terms of J. Greenberg’s (2015) assertion that there is no way of determining whether one intervention is more “correct” than another, or more analytically effective. As I have documented in a Letter to the Editor of JAPA (2015) about Greenberg’s paper, many previous analysts also proposed that it is not possible to determine if a given intervention is “correct” or analytically effective. Hence, disagreements about Langs’ contributions are inevitable. This view, that we cannot determine if an intervention is “correct” or analytically effective, has fundamental implications for whether psychoanalysis is a science, and how to assess analytic competence.

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References