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A critical examination of Bion's concept of containment and Winnicott's concept of holding, and their psychotherapeutic implications

by

Richard Parry

Abstract:

Wilfred Bion's concept of the container/contained and Donald Winnicott's concept of holding are two concepts that have had a profound influence on the development of psychoanalysis over the last half century. They are frequently used interchangeably in the literature and are often seen as denoting essentially the same clinical practice. It is the author's contention that there are substantial differences between the two concepts and the models of mind that underpin them, and how they are translated into clinical practice. The models of mind and developmental trajectories that underpin the concepts of containment and holding are explicated fully, demonstrating some of the clear differences between the foundations of these two concepts. Further, through the use of clinical vignettes, the substantial differences between holding and containment in clinical practice were elucidated.