

The Therapist, the Patient, and the Therapeutic Setting: Mutual Construction of the Setting as a Therapeutic Factor

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Among analytic thinkers, the therapeutic setting has traditionally been perceived as maintained only by the therapist. I propose an alternative perspective, which sees the setting as constructed and maintained by both partners in the therapeutic interaction—the therapist and the patient—and proposes that the process of mutual construction, and not its end product only, is of central importance in the therapeutic endeavor. This article stems from the intersubjective approach, which, in Aron's (1996) words, views the therapeutic process as a mutual but not symmetrical process brought into existence by both partners in the therapeutic interaction. In this paper I present thoughts on the mutual construction not only of the therapeutic process but of the therapeutic setting. I describe how this occurs and is expressed, accompanied by presentation and discussion of clinical illustrations.

THE THERAPEUTIC SETTING IS THE STRUCTURE, THE SPACE, THE walls, the conditions under which therapy takes place. Who is supposed to construct them? Traditionally, psychoanalytic thinkers have regarded the setting¹ as constructed and maintained by the therapist only, whether his or her role be to maintain it for the patient (Freud, 1913; Langs, 1989; Etchegoyen, 1991; Quinidoz, 1992) or to adapt it to the patient (Winnicott, 1965; Kurtz, 1988; Lindon, 1994). I propose a different perspective, which views mutual construction of the setting, by both the

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¹In this article, the terms *setting* and *frame* are used interchangeably.