



Understanding Shame from the Perspective of a Therapist

Rationale: Shame has been described as the ‘master emotion’ and whilst present in literature, there is proportionally less surrounding its dynamic in therapeutic work. There are no evident studies exploring shame within Person-Centred Theory.

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1 - Aims and Purpose

A qualitative study exploring how Person-Centred therapists understand and experience shame in their counselling practice and how this relates to Person-Centred Theory (PCT).

2 – Design Methodology

- Semi-structured interviews (recorded) with five practicing counsellors who apply PCT in their counselling work.
- Analysed using *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

Ethically approved by Liverpool John Moores University & conducted to BACP guidelines.



3 - Results/Findings

- The Person-Centred approach appeared to have a positive effect on issues around shame in facilitating client process.
- Therapists are not immune to shame affects and findings supported existing commentators where shame could be given more attention in training and development.
- Two superordinate themes were identified.



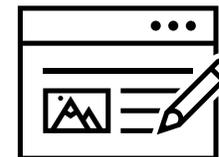
4 - Summary of Themes

Superordinate Theme 1 – Framing Shame

- Shame sources (Origins)
- Knowledge and descriptions of shame (Understanding)

Superordinate Theme 2 – Shame and Counselling Practice

- Impact on Practice
- In supervision
- Therapeutic Keys consisting of:
 - Empathy
 - Unconditional Positive Regard
 - Non-directivity



5 - Conclusions/Implications

- Shame is relevant in therapeutic work, but risks being overlooked in training and development.
- Elevated awareness of shame and reflective practice may contribute positively to client process, whilst enriching therapists in terms of work with clients, self-awareness and personal care.

6 - Limitations

- Findings cannot be generalised from the small sample size.
- Discourse around the topic of shame can be difficult, impacting on what may be disclosed.



*Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research. London: Sage Publications.