

Transcript of interview with Stephen Finn by Mette Kyung Reacroft, Japan 2025

Shame – Part 1

Q: Why do you think shame is such an important issue for mental health professionals to be aware of and get better at identifying?

A: Shame is highly related to many of the problems that people have in life that bring them to psychotherapy and psychological assessment. And I don't know about you, Danish psychologist, but when I was in school learning about psychology, we learned nothing about shame.

So, I think, first of all, it's just really important for us to know about it because it's so involved in people's problems.

Then second, over the years what I've noticed is people don't recognize shame when it occurs in their clients in the therapy room and they mistake it sometimes for something else. So, you might ask your client a question and the client looks at the ground and doesn't answer. And that, not surely, but probably, is a sign of the client experiencing shame at that moment. And some people see it as resistance or as the client being obstinate or the client not cooperating and can react in all kinds of ways that actually make the situation worse. So, I've really taken it on myself to try to help people recognize the signs of shame, so they don't misinterpret them. And I believe they have some understanding of what's going on.

And then third, the research is now pretty clear that unrecognized shame is one of the biggest factors in treatments that don't succeed. Some therapeutic methods actually increase shame and then people get in very stuck places. And so, I think understanding shame and knowing how to help clients with shame really make sure that our treatments are successful.

And my experience is if you help a client with shame, if they have some problem, they're ashamed of, like a mental disorder, and they're very ashamed of it. If you can just help them with the shame about having that problem, then things start to get better. The eating disorder, just by itself, will start to get better, just by addressing the shame that they have about that.

