

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

Shame – Part 2

Q: What do you think we clinicians and therapists need so we can get better at identifying shame and work with it?

A: The first thing that comes to mind is we all need to know where our own shame lives. As human beings, all of us have shame that we're healing from. But I think back, for example, when I was a beginning therapist, I was very, very uncomfortable with my clients being angry. Sometimes they would tell me about some situation where they had burst out with anger and handled something not in the best way. I actually, I'm ashamed to say, would lecture them about not to do that and here's what you could have done instead. It wasn't helpful to them, and it was really my own issue. So, you know, depending on the families and the cultures we grow up in, many of us have been shaped for different healthy emotions that are really necessary to be able to operate in the world. Each of us needs to learn, were you ashamed about sexuality, anger, showing pride, and to learn those spots, first of all, so that we can begin to work on those and not carry that over to our clients.

I think the other thing that I've learned is that being able to name shame when it occurs and have compassion for our clients in those moments helps us with a lot of behaviors that sometimes clients show, especially clients with personality disorders, that other people experience is kind of obnoxious and difficult. Because clients will sort of act out those behaviors in therapy. And again, if you don't recognize that the client in those moments is surviving or trying to deal with some kind of underlying shame, then I think you really don't know what to do. And so being able to sit with people, understand where they come from, I mean, I've come to believe that all kinds of puzzling, difficult, strange behaviors that other people find very distasteful very often are driven by shame. And by being able to recognize that and get beneath those coping mechanisms, then we can really help our clients heal and get along better in the world.

So those are the things I'll be teaching in the workshop. I'll be teaching not only how to recognize shame, but how to recognize defenses against shame, and how to deal with those defenses in a way that helps get to the underlying shame and then helps people resolve them.

