

## Abstract

This study explores via qualitative and quantitative analysis, the impact of shame on gay men's sense of identity, and the means by which they can nurture and develop a sense of self-acceptance and pride in relation to their sexuality

The primary methodology employed is that of interpretative phenomenological analysis applied to a sub-sample of seven men, selected from the questionnaire respondents, who participated in semi-structured interviews. Findings are presented from these qualitative interviews, and questionnaire data supplied by fifty gay men who had undergone personal counselling/therapy.

Evidence suggests that shame is core to the formulation of gay identity, but humiliation was reported as significantly more relevant to adult feelings in relation to their sexuality, where shame is seen as being imposed upon them by the environment.

The study highlights barriers to the completion of psychosocial developmental tasks for gay men due to heterosexist oppression, and discusses the emergent themes such as high levels of suicidal ideation and attempts, internalised homophobia, isolation, and fear of rejection. The role of anger, both negatively, and as a positive force in the formation of gay identity, is discussed.

Pride/self-acceptance emerges as an evolution from the healing of shame-binds related to sexuality.

Suggestions are provided as to the issues integrative psychotherapists need to become sensitised to in order to achieve appropriate inquiry, attunement and involvement in relation to gay men's life experience.