

When Shame Shapes Sexual Identity:
*Shame Containment Theory, Attachment Injury, and the Hidden
Architecture of Intimacy*

An online webinar over 2 evenings with
Lisa Etherson

Zoom Webinar
15 & 22 July 2026, Wednesdays
Times on both days:
6:00 pm – 9:00 pm, London UK
1:00 pm – 4:00 pm, New York, USA

CPD hours: 6



Location: Online streaming only
(all our webinar tickets now include complimentary access to a video recorded version for 1 year or 3 years, depending on the ticket type)

There is a particular kind of clinical impasse that does not announce itself dramatically.

The client is articulate. Insightful. Able to trace the emotional distance of their childhood with precision. They understand the neglect, the misattunement, the subtle conditionality of love. They have done the attachment work. They can name the patterns.

And yet, in their sexual and intimate life, something remains immovable.

Desire intensifies and then collapses. Closeness deepens and then abruptly withdraws. Sexual behaviour oscillates between urgency and self-disgust, or between longing and shutdown.

In some cases, this oscillation takes the form of compulsive sexual behaviour — cycles of intensity and collapse that appear resistant to both insight and behavioural regulation.

The client knows where it comes from — and still cannot shift it.

At this point, many experienced clinicians feel the familiar tension: the insight is present, the therapeutic alliance is strong, and yet the pattern persists. What appears to be progress dissolves into repetition.



Something structural is operating beneath the level of understanding.

Until that structure is recognised, insight may clarify the narrative without altering the underlying organisation.

This two-evening training with Lisa Etherson explores that structure.

Drawing on Shame Containment Theory (SCT) and her original doctoral research on childhood shame and adult sexual difficulty, Lisa traces how early attachment injury can crystallise into a form of shame that no longer registers as emotion, but becomes part of the organising architecture of identity — shaping sexual relating long into adulthood.

When Shame Becomes Structural

Within Shame Containment Theory, shame is not conceptualised merely as an affective state that rises and falls. It is understood as a developmental survival adaptation.

In early relational environments marked by misattunement, neglect, emotional coldness, or rupture, shame may emerge as a strategy for preserving attachment. The child reorganises in order to remain connected. Desire contracts. Spontaneity narrows. Authentic impulse is modified to reduce the risk of further rejection.

If this shame is recognised and metabolised within attuned caregiving, it can integrate.

If it is not, it becomes contained.

Contained shame does not present as “I feel ashamed.”
It presents as “There is something fundamentally wrong with me.”

Over time, this structural shame shapes:

- Self-concept and self-worth
- Expectations of intimacy
- Sexual identity and expression
- Tolerance for pleasure and vulnerability
- Patterns of pursuit and withdrawal

It may look like competence. Like control. Like high sexual intensity. Like chronic avoidance.

What appears to be desire may, in some cases, function as an attempt to override identity-level shame. What appears to be avoidance may be an effort to prevent its exposure.

When shame has become structural, the clinical task shifts from explanation to reorganisation.

The Two-Evening Arc

These two evenings are designed as an integrated whole. The first establishes the developmental and conceptual map. The second applies that map directly to sexual and psychosexual presentation.

Participants who attend both will leave not with a collection of techniques, but with a coherent way of seeing.

Evening One



Attachment Injury and the Structure of Shame Containment

15 July 2026 | 6:00–9:00 PM UK

If shame shapes sexual identity, the clinical task begins with understanding how that structure was formed.

The first evening explores how early attachment injury generates vulnerability to structural shame. For children required to modify themselves to preserve connection, shame becomes more than emotion — it becomes organisation.

When that shame is neither named nor co-regulated by caregivers, it internalises as part of the developing self. Not something the child feels, but something the child becomes.

Lisa introduces SCT's five-component framework, examining how contained shame persists beneath ordinary insight — shaping relational patterns, agency, and sexual development long into adulthood.

Participants will examine:

- The developmental pathway from attachment misattunement to shame containment
- The distinction between contained and uncontained shame
- How shame reorganises the developing self
- Why insight-oriented therapy may leave structural shame intact
- How containment strategies appear within relational and therapeutic dynamics

Learning Objectives — Evening One

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Describe the developmental conditions under which shame becomes structurally contained
2. Differentiate contained from uncontained shame in clinical presentation
3. Articulate SCT's five-component framework and apply it to case formulation
4. Recognise how shame operates beneath verbal insight
5. Identify containment strategies in client behaviour and therapeutic process
6. Reflect on the implications of structural shame for their clinical stance

Evening Two

Sexual Shame, Research Findings, and Clinical Application

22 July 2026 | 6:00–9:00 PM UK

The second evening moves into territory that is often difficult to name.

Sexual shame rarely announces itself directly. It may appear instead as compulsive sexual behaviour, intimacy shutdown, performance anxiety, secrecy, or oscillation between pursuit and withdrawal. Clients can articulate their attachment history with clarity and still find that nothing shifts in their sexual lives.

Drawing directly on her doctoral research, Lisa presents findings linking childhood shame to adult compulsive sexual behaviour (CSB) in men — not as isolated impulse dysregulation, but as one of the clearest illustrations of structurally contained shame.

Her research suggests something clinically significant.



When shame is structurally contained, sexual behaviour may function simultaneously as escape and punishment. Intensity can temporarily override a deeply embedded sense of defectiveness — only to collapse into renewed self-disgust once the act is over.

What appears to be compulsivity may be less about impulse dysregulation and more about an attempt to outrun identity-level shame.

If therapy focuses solely on behavioural containment without recognising the structure beneath it, the cycle may tighten rather than loosen.

Participants will explore:

- The relationship between childhood shame and adult CSB
- How containment strategies manifest within sexual dynamics
- The oscillation between desire and repudiation
- The role of secrecy, perfectionism, and disconnection in maintaining shame
- Re-containment approaches that restore relational agency rather than reinforce shame dynamics

Case material will illuminate the theory in practice, without offering simplistic resolution.

Learning Objectives — Evening Two

By the end of this session, participants will be able to:

1. Apply SCT to sexual and psychosexual case formulation
2. Understand key research findings linking childhood shame and adult CSB
3. Identify structural shame within sexual avoidance and compulsive cycles
4. Adapt clinical strategy when insight-based approaches stall
5. Implement re-containment interventions in psychosexual work
6. Recognise how therapeutic strategies may inadvertently intensify structural shame

What This Training Is — and Is Not

This is not a general trauma workshop.

It is not a technique-driven sex therapy course.

It is not a behavioural intervention programme for compulsive sexual behaviour.

It offers a structural, relational understanding of how shame becomes embedded within early attachment experience and re-emerges as the organising force beneath sexual difficulty.

Shame Containment Theory is presented not as a final doctrine, but as a research-grounded and evolving framework. Its value lies in the clinical clarity it offers in territory where clinicians often feel disoriented.

Who This Training Is For

This programme is designed for experienced practitioners, including:

- Psychosexual therapists
- Trauma and attachment clinicians
- Relationship therapists encountering persistent sexual impasse
- Clinicians working with compulsive sexual behaviour



- Practitioners working with insight-rich clients who remain relationally stuck

No prior knowledge of Shame Containment Theory is required.

Shame does not always look like shame.

Sometimes it looks like desire.
Sometimes it looks like avoidance.
Sometimes it looks like competence.

And sometimes it shapes sexual identity so quietly that neither client nor therapist recognises its reach.

If you work with clients who understand their history yet remain caught in patterns that feel immovable — particularly in the sexual domain — this training offers a deeper clinical map.

About Lisa Etherson

Lisa Etherson, psychosexual therapist and PhD researcher, brings over a decade of clinical experience and academic insight to her work. As the co-founder of The Shame Training Company, **Lisa has spent eight years developing Shame Containment Theory, a groundbreaking framework that equips therapists to understand and manage shame effectively.** Her teaching blends compassion, expertise, and practical strategies, empowering therapists to transform their practice and support clients in profound ways.

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There is no known commercial support for this program

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