

# SHAME AND BULIMIA — A SICKNESS OF THE SOUL

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## ABSTRACT

Where shame plays a central role, as it does in eating disorders, Kaufman (1989) believes that ‘accepted theories and methods of treatment have largely failed’. In this paper I argue that it is likely that the bulimic client has experienced insufficient support in the field for important needs, and consequently, has experienced a significant rupture in the intersubjective field. Bulimic behaviour is their creative adjustment to their current environment, the client’s way of managing ‘unacceptable’ feelings and needs. I conclude that it is *essential* that the therapist understands the dynamics of shame and knows how to work with the client’s shame response in a way that enables the bulimic client to reveal the hidden (messy) part of herself. In this paper I offer an overview of the current thinking on shame from a Gestalt perspective and relate this to the clinical practice or working with bulimic clients, drawing on real case material to illustrate the implications for clinical practice.