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**Re-negotiating Meanings:  
A grounded theory of core factors in healing shame  
in adult survivors of sexual abuse**

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the degree of Master of Arts in Psychology at Massey  
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## ABSTRACT

Shame is an issue for survivors of sexual abuse that has received little attention in the literature. Eight experienced therapists following different therapeutic orientations were interviewed about their conceptualisations of shame in sexual abuse survivors and the process of healing from shame. The interview data was analysed using the grounded theory method of qualitative analysis and a theory of core factors in the healing process across therapeutic orientations was derived. Findings suggest that the child victim of sexual abuse makes meaning of their experiences, a process influenced by a number of contextual domains. The key meanings of being responsible for the abuse or being somehow defective as a consequence of abuse were found to be central to the development of shame, and were linked to a number of sequelae by respondents. The core factors in the respondents' conceptualisations of the process of healing shame involved *re-negotiating the meanings* the child had formed, and this process was made up of five key areas; developing trust in the therapeutic relationship, building a positive sense of self, facing the shamed self, contextualisation and integration. Attention was also given to gender issues in order to discover similarities or differences in the experiences and healing process for male survivors of sexual abuse. Findings suggest that respondents' saw shame in sexual abuse and the healing process as being the same for males and females, with differences being largely the result of socialisation practices. Implications of findings are discussed.

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