

The Psychology Couch Newsletter



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Breaking the Silence: Why We Must Talk About Menstrual Health, Menopause, and Fertility

By: Jenna Butow
BSocSci Hons Psychology Graduate

For generations, women's health has been surrounded by silence, stigma, and taboo. Topics like menstruation, menopause, and fertility are often spoken about in whispers—if at all. Yet these are natural, universal experiences that shape the lives of half the population. This Women's Month, it's time we break the silence and create space for open, honest, and supportive conversations.

Menstrual Health: Beyond the Stigma

Menstruation is still viewed with discomfort in many communities, leading to embarrassment, secrecy, and even school absenteeism among young girls. Normalizing conversations about periods helps dismantle shame and ensures that women and girls have access to the products, healthcare, and dignity they deserve.



Menopause: The Silent Transition

Menopause is a stage that every woman will experience, yet it remains under-discussed in workplaces and social settings. Women often face symptoms—such as hot flashes, mood changes, or sleep disturbances—without adequate support. By talking about menopause openly, we acknowledge its impact and encourage more inclusive policies that respect women's needs in professional and personal spaces.

Fertility: Shifting from Judgment to Support

Struggles with fertility can feel deeply isolating, especially in cultures where motherhood is considered central to a woman's identity. Women facing infertility, miscarriages, or IVF journeys need compassion, not judgment. By fostering supportive conversations, we affirm that womanhood is not defined by fertility alone.

Why Talking Matters

When we break these taboos, we break down barriers. Talking openly:

- Reduces stigma and shame.
- Creates supportive environments in workplaces, homes, and communities.
- Encourages women to seek healthcare without fear.
- Empowers younger generations to embrace their health confidently.

This Women's Month, let's commit to rewriting the narrative. By normalizing conversations around menstrual health, menopause, and fertility, we celebrate women not for enduring silence, but for owning their voices.



Body Politics & Mental Health

— reclaiming women's autonomy —

Women's Month serves as a poignant reminder to reflect on the multifaceted challenges women face, particularly concerning body politics and its profound impact on mental health. Body politics encompasses the societal norms, expectations, and regulations imposed on women's bodies, influencing their autonomy and psychological well-being.

The consistent portrayal of idealized female bodies in media and advertising contributes significantly to body dissatisfaction and dysmorphia among women of colour. Exposure to such unrealistic standards correlates with increased instances of depression, anxiety, and eating disorders. The constant comparison to these ideals can lead to a diminished sense of self-worth and identity (Grogan, 2016).

Historically, women's bodies have been subjected to societal control, dictating standards of beauty, behavior, and reproductive roles. These imposed norms often conflict with individual identities and experiences, leading to internalized oppression and psychological distress. The expectation for women to conform to these standards can result in feelings of inadequacy and alienation (Weitz, 2010).



The internalization of restrictive beauty ideals and societal expectations can manifest in various mental health challenges, including:

- **Eating Disorders:** The pursuit of unattainable body standards often leads to disordered eating behaviors as individuals strive to conform.
- **Depression and Anxiety:** Constant societal scrutiny and the pressure to meet beauty standards can lead to chronic stress, anxiety, and depressive symptoms.
- **Low Self-Esteem:** The emphasis on appearance over abilities or character can erode self-esteem and self-worth (APA, 2018).

Body Politics & Mental Health

— reclaiming women's autonomy —

This Month, we'd like to establish the importance of reclaiming bodily autonomy, moving forward by empowering all women.

Promoting Body Positivity and Diversity

Embracing diverse body types and challenging conventional beauty standards are crucial steps towards fostering a more inclusive society. Celebrating individuality and rejecting homogenized ideals can empower women to accept and appreciate their bodies, leading to improved mental health outcomes (Grogan, 2016).

Advocating for Policy Changes

Implementing policies that promote body autonomy, such as regulations against body shaming in media and workplaces, can mitigate the negative effects of body politics. Supporting initiatives that encourage body diversity and inclusivity can create environments where women feel valued beyond their physical appearance (APA, 2018).

Encouraging Open Dialogue

Facilitating conversations about body image and mental health can reduce stigma and promote understanding. Providing platforms for women to share their experiences and challenges can foster a supportive community and encourage collective action towards change (Weitz, 2010).



As we commemorate Women's Month, it is imperative to acknowledge the profound impact of body politics on women's mental health. By challenging societal norms, promoting body diversity, and advocating for policy reforms, we can pave the way for a future where women are empowered to define their identities and worth beyond physical appearance. Reclaiming body autonomy is not merely a personal endeavor but a collective movement towards a more inclusive and equitable society.





WOMEN'S MONTH edition

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A DREAM DEFERRED: THE WOMEN WE COULD HAVE BEEN

When we think of Women's Month, we often celebrate resilience, strength and the visible achievements of women. However, beneath these celebrations lies a quieter story of deferred dreams, the "what if?" and the unseen sacrifices women carry. Behind every woman, there is often another version of herself that she might have been.

A version she dreamed of before life happened. Maybe, it was the young woman who wanted to study further, but her family needed her to work instead. The girls who dreamt of becoming a singer but her voice was drowned by responsibilities. The woman who wanted to create, travel or lead, but chose stability because the cost of chasing a dream felt too heavy.

These are not failures. They are choices made in the context of survival, duty and love. They still leave echoes behind, the quiet moments when we look at our lives and wonder "*Who would I be if the world had made space for that other version of me?*". This is the unseen load of womanhood: carrying both the lives we live, and the ghost of the life we did not.

For many African women, sacrifice is not just personal but cultural. Ubuntu teaches us that "*I am because we are*". It reminds us of our deep interconnectedness, but also that a woman's individual dreams often bend under the weight of family and community responsibilities.

She becomes the anchor, the caretaker, the provider: pouring into generations, sometimes at the expense of herself.

Deferred dreams don't always mean dead dreams, some simply take new forms. The woman who couldn't study law becomes the fiercest advocate in her community. The girl who gave up painting, finds joy in teaching her child to draw. The woman who stayed when she longed to go, still finds small freedoms in her writing, her friendships, her laughter.

Honouring Women's Month is not only about applauding what women have achieved, but also about recognising the unseen grief of what they set aside. It is about creating spaces where women are reminded that it is never too late to reclaim their dreams. At 30, 50 or even at 70, a woman is still allowed to begin again.

The women we could have been still live within us. They do not ask to be erased, only remembered. And perhaps, the greatest act of healing is to look inward and whisper: "*I still see you. It is not too late.*"

• Phindile Xulu
BA (Hons) in Psychology

REST AS A RADICAL ACT

WOMEN TAKING CONTROL



I am sick and tired of being sick and tired- Fannie Lou Hamer

Written by Zandile Tshuma BA (Hons) Psychology

The term self-care has become a prominent phrase used to educate people on taking care of their physical and mental health. Often promoting walks, meditation and journaling, self-care is has been used to remind people to slow-down and focus on themselves instead. However, when self-care serves to challenge social inequalities, it becomes a source of power, a way of advocating, a radical act.

Rest is a powerful act that enables women to prioritise themselves more by challenging the societal expectations placed on them. It serves a community of women that are work long-hours, serve as caregivers, are underpaid, and those who face stigma. Rest a radical act reminds women of their agency and challenge misogynies.



For generations, women have been conditioned to believe that their value lies in how much they can give, serve, and sacrifice. The more they do for others, the more worthy they are seen to be. In that context, rest has been twisted into something shameful, even selfish — a sign of weakness or lack of ambition. Rest is not about laziness, it is about resistance. It is saying: I refuse to let a system that profits from my exhaustion define my worth.

By resting, women make space for healing, creativity, and strength. They set boundaries that protect their mental health and model a new way of being for others around them. Rest, then, becomes a ripple effect: when one woman chooses to pause, she gives silent permission for others to do the same. When a woman allows herself to pause, she disrupts the cycle of burnout and reminds herself that her worth is not measured by constant sacrifice or productivity.

“We must believe we are worthy of rest. We don't have to earn it. It is our birthright. It is one of our most ancient and primal needs.”

-Tricia Hersey

Let us remember: every time a woman chooses rest, she is not stepping back, she is stepping into her power. She is rewriting the story of what it means to live fully, with dignity and wholeness. Rest is not the absence of strength; it is the very source of it. And when women honour their need to pause, they light the way for future generations to live free from the chains of burnout and self-sacrifice.

THE IMPACT OF ACNE ON SELF-IMAGE AND MENTAL HEALTH ACROSS AGE GROUPS

BY: Khanyisile Msibi
BPsy Student, SACAP

Acne, particularly during adolescence and adulthood, can have profound effects on an individual's self-image and mental health. The onset of acne often coincides with significant life transitions, such as puberty and young adulthood, exacerbating its psychological impact. This article explores how acne influences self-esteem, mental well-being, and the unique challenges faced by teenagers and adults.

Psychological Impact of Acne

Acne is not merely a dermatological condition; it is a psychosomatic condition that affects both the body and the psyche. The psychological distress associated with acne includes low self-esteem, social withdrawal, stress, anxiety, and depression. For many, acne is more than just a physical condition; it can lead to emotional distress, social anxiety, and decreased self-esteem.

Teenagers are particularly vulnerable to the psychological effects of acne due to the heightened sensitivity of this life stage.



During adolescence, self-esteem and identity are being developed, and noticeable skin conditions like acne can lead to interpersonal difficulties. Acne can trigger or aggravate depression in susceptible individuals, especially when breakouts are persistent and leave scars. The pressure to conform to societal beauty standards further exacerbates these issues, as teenagers often feel compelled to meet certain aesthetic norms.

While acne is commonly associated with adolescence, its effects on adults should not be underestimated. Adults experiencing acne may face challenges in maintaining self-confidence, which can interfere with social interactions and lead to social isolation. The stress of daily life, including societal expectations and the pursuit of unattainable beauty standards, can exacerbate mental health issues related to acne. Adults may also experience a resurgence of acne due to stress or hormonal changes, which can be particularly distressing if they have previously achieved clear skin.

Acne's impact on self-image and mental health is multifaceted and affects individuals across different age groups. It is crucial to address acne not just as a dermatological condition but as a psychological and social issue that requires holistic intervention and management. By acknowledging the psychological distress associated with acne and fostering a supportive environment that challenges societal beauty standards, we can promote resilience and improve mental well-being for those affected by acne.

Recommendations for Support

Holistic Treatment Approaches: Dermatologists should adopt comprehensive treatment plans that include psychological support to address the emotional impact of acne.

Challenging Societal Norms: Encourage a shift in societal attitudes towards beauty and appearance to reduce pressure on individuals to conform to unrealistic standards.

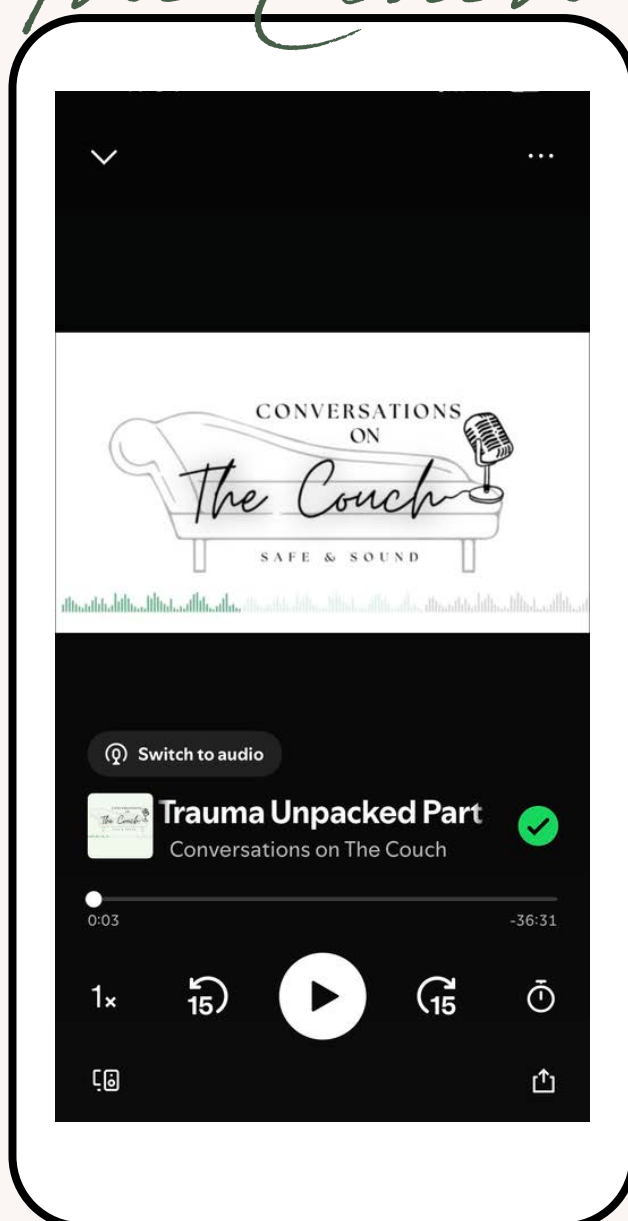
Promoting Self-Compassion: Cultivate self-compassion and resilience by recognising that everyone's journey with acne is unique and that it is okay to experience skin challenges at any age



References available upon request.

Tune into our latest episode of Conversations on

The Couch



In this episode clinical psychologist Deborah Olusola and occupational therapist Emily Makhlouf explore the crucial role of occupational therapy (OT) in understanding and addressing trauma. They discuss how OT helps individuals navigate the effects of trauma on daily life, and practical strategies for fostering resilience.

Thank you for being a part of our Couch Community. Stay tuned for our next newsletter - the September 2025 edition of the Psychology Couch Newsletter.

Until next time, as always, our wish for you is to heal, learn, and grow.

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