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*Sadly, women commonly feel shame about their body and its female functions, which can manifest as health issues. Julia Rossmanith reports.*  
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# Embrace your body

**S**HAME can be toxic and is one of the most destructive of human emotions. Feelings of shame limit us and keep us small because they shrink feelings of self-worth and block us from recognising and taking up opportunities. There can be many causes for feelings of shame in women: the shape or size of their body in a culture that celebrates a limited view of feminine beauty; sexual expression, particularly if it has been shut down in childhood because of the anxiety and discomfort of adults; inherited negative beliefs; a disinterest in what family or culture define as feminine behaviour or occupations. These feelings can cause women to disconnect from the feminine, which in turn can manifest as health issues around the pelvic area, the feminine centre. In my years of practice, there are four recurring origins of shame: shame around menstruation, childbirth, fertility challenges, and shame around sexual abuse.

### Menstruation

Shame and embarrassment may be felt upon the onset of a woman's menarche and her monthly flow. Shame may manifest because of family discomfort about a child's development into womanhood, fears about sexual expression, or the child's awareness of her mother's anxiety about her own difficult menstrual history. One client expressed a sense of betrayal when, as a young teenager, menstrual blood stained her school uniform. Feeling horribly exposed and humiliated, from that time on she dreaded menses because for her it meant a loss of control.

Childbirth can trigger old sexual traumas to resurface that have been stored in the pelvic space.

### Childbirth

Despite the joy that accompanies the birth of a child, many women suffer from shame after childbirth. They may have had clear intentions about how they wanted to give birth; they may have created birth plans, organised music, candles, and support people for welcoming their little one. But birth is unpredictable, and plans can come unstuck. Feelings of shame can overwhelm women who question what went wrong, why a C-section has to be performed,

or the presence of postpartum bleeding. If not addressed, this shame can manifest as pelvic disconnection and postpartum depression.

Childbirth can trigger traumas to resurface that have been stored in the pelvic space, leading to a woman's decreased presence in the root of her body, which in turn affects the mother/baby bond. One client spoke to me of her disconnected relationship with her five year-old daughter. Old traumas had resurfaced during her daughter's birth, and the mother had disconnected from her pelvic area which had set up disruptions in the flow of their relationship. Together, we worked on restoring the birth field and flow between mother and daughter, opening space for reconnection.

### Fertility challenges

Women who have fertility challenges frequently blame themselves for not conceiving. Clients have often expressed to me that they felt they were being 'punished'. Shame and grief attend the onset of menstruation each month, the signal that yet another cycle has not produced a pregnancy. This shame can also block energy in the pelvic area, inhibiting creativity.

### Sexual abuse

Brene Brown, a researcher into human connection, says, "For shame to grow, it needs secrecy, silence, and judgement." Nowhere is this more true than in the case of sexual abuse, whether experienced during childhood or later. Feelings of shame and self-loathing are common in women who've suffered such abuse, and they can struggle to find self-worth for years - if not their whole lives. They may engage in addictive behaviours to numb out the pain, living in their head, focusing obsessively on work, finding ways to busy themselves, using relationships to avoid addressing the shame in their body. They may excessively seek approval from others in an attempt to feel whole again.

"Shame effectively maintains a separation between a woman and the root of her body; but honouring the root is a potent antidote," says Tami Lynn Kent from Wild Feminine. For whatever reason shame is experienced, there is a numbing of the body, and for women, especially around the pelvic area. The result is that they build walls around themselves, and have little if any pelvic presence because it doesn't feel safe for them to occupy that space. But when they are supported in attending to this pelvic space, when the energy of shame is cleared from the pelvis and they feel the beautiful presence of the pelvic bowl, they can reclaim their strength and power.

## What you can do

- Talk to someone, preferably a practitioner or therapist, about the shame you feel. Remember that shame is fuelled by secrecy, and speaking about it is a good start to releasing it.
- Challenge negative beliefs, replacing them with beliefs that honour the feminine principle. For example, celebrate your womb as a place where life is held and nurtured, from which your creations are birthed. Work harmoniously with the rhythm of your body, building projects as the uterine lining builds, and then releasing all that is no longer needed as the lining releases.
- Role model to a daughter the view that monthly bleeding is a symbol of fertility and a blessing, giving her the opportunity to create life. Set up a pattern with your daughter of love and respect for her body and of the sacred nature of the feminine and her bodily functions. See [www.celebrationdayforgirls.com](http://www.celebrationdayforgirls.com).
- Work with a Holistic Pelvic Care practitioner to heal fractures that may have appeared throughout a woman's life and to release armouring from the pelvic area.
- Focus on building love and respect for yourself despite what is going on around you. This is where you will find your strength and power, and feelings of shame will diminish.

For more info visit [www.thenurturedwomb.com.au](http://www.thenurturedwomb.com.au).