

ABSTRACT

During the late 20th century, feminist writers redefined menopause as a 'normal' stage in a woman's life rather than a pathological event requiring management and medication. However there is relatively little research that describes women's actual experiences of menopause and its impact on wellbeing.

This small-scale qualitative study focuses on the lived experience of menopause. Conducted by a trainee integrative psychotherapist it uses heuristic inquiry to investigate the menopause experience, specifically to discover how it impacts a woman's sense of self and to examine the relevance of these findings for integrative psychotherapy.

Data was collected in semi-structured interviews from five counsellors/psychotherapists who identified as 'going through the menopause'. Four overarching themes were identified: (i) developmental perspectives; (ii) emotional meanings; (iii) relational perspectives; (iv) potential and transformation. The findings show menopause is best understood from a range of perspectives along a normal-pathological continuum, paying attention to the self in relation to the wider world. It is seen as a time of emotional upheaval and existential challenge and also an opportunity for healing and transformation.

The implications for integrative psychotherapy suggest that research around the development of the self is extended into areas that are gender, age and culture specific. It also highlights the particular issues therapists might face when working with clients experiencing menopause. Specifically, the potential for

problematic countertransference responses, dysregulated affect and dissociated self-states connected with shame and existential anxiety. The need for safety, secure attachment and validation are also emphasized.