

Zit Popping Videos Are Racking Up Serious Likes, Here's What's Beneath the Trend

Nicole Catanese weighs in.



IN THE DARK CORNERS of YouTube and Reddit, acne is having a moment. Type in blackheads and enter

a black hole of extraction videos. Some of these homemade films have racked up several million views. But when Cali-based dermatologist Sandra Lee hit the scene in 2014, amateur hour was clearly over. Known as Dr Pimple Popper, Dr Lee's high-def clips have amassed 1.6 mil Instagram followers. So what's the draw?

Bonding Over Blemishes

Sometimes seeing something icky—but authentic—can make you feel better about yourself. “It’s exciting to see others participate in behaviour that is usually seen as gross,” says Matthew Traube, a psychotherapist who specialises in body-focused repetitive behaviours. “Seeing a doctor popping pimples validates the behaviour and sends the message that you don’t have to be ashamed of it.”

Click Away the Stress

“People tell me that they need my videos to relax,” notes Dr Lee, “and that they help them sleep at night.”

Kriti M., a 29-year-old @DrPimplePopper fan, queues one up every night before bed. “It sounds bizarre, but they help me unwind,” she says. “There’s a sense of accomplishment to a great pop.”

Really, who can’t relate to that feeling of satisfaction after popping a blackhead or bump lurking just beneath your skin? “Most of my patients describe relief while they are picking,” explains Traube. For chronic skin pickers—indicative of a larger mental health issue—these videos may offer an outlet. “Just like watching someone bite a lemon might make your mouth pucker, watching someone get extractions can also produce a physiological or emotional response or release,” says Traube. It sounds odd, but it gives some a clean slate.

By Nicole Catanese

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