

BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER

In a world where many people are going under the knife to improve their physical looks, one must wonder why these people would risk their lives for simply their looks. It is not uncommon to come across a person who has a nose job, breast enlargement or lift, a face-lift, or collagen injected into their lips. I am sure that there are “average” people who do such a thing for simply reasons of vanity. But, one must wonder how many of these people suffer from a disorder known as Body Dimorphic Disorder. It is common for the average individual to be displeased with some aspect of their appearance but in my clinical opinion I would venture to say that some of these individuals suffer from BDD. So what is Body Dimorphic Disorder? BDD is an anxiety disorder that is on the Obsessive Compulsive Spectrum of disorder. The disorder consists of an individual becoming “obsessed” or overly concerned about an imagined flaw in one’s appearance. As well, an individual might become overly focused on a part of their body that presents a slight “defect” to their appearance. Usually, the center of the “obsession” will be a “flaw” of the individual that is not recognizable to other people. It should be noted that a lot of individuals focus in on whether their nose is a too big, slight blemish on their skin, or the way that their body is proportioned. A common compulsion is for an individual to ask for reassurance from people about their “questioned” flaw. It is also common for an individual to stand in front of a mirror for hours at a time looking or observing their perceived flaw. BDD is not simply an unhappiness with one’s appearance but a person struggles with their “imperfection” that causes a great deal of anxiety for the individual. Individuals with BDD become stuck with a part of their body that they are displeased with and they psychologically can’t break free from their obsession. Many times individuals with BDD believe that if a change could be made to their body that their preoccupation will be solved. But, this is not the case. Individuals with BDD sometimes don’t recognize the psychological aspect of their disorder and only believe that it is physical. BDD composes of two components that drive the obsessions and compulsions. The obsession usually centers on the body part that the individual is not pleased with. The individual get intrusive and unwanted thought about their appearance. At first, it is hard for individuals with BDD to distinguish between what is “real” and what goes beyond the concern that an average individual. One case involved a male who was preoccupied with the shape of his nose. He constantly asked people if his nose looked awkward or disproportionate to his face. Every day thoughts would come into his mind about his nose. He even shied away from playing contact sports due to the risk that his nose would get injured further. The issue of his nose became even apparent to his friends and loved ones. They knew not to mention anything negative about it. He came to a point where he thought the only way for success is through a nose job. But I pointed out to him that it wasn’t his nose that needed to be fixed but rather he had to embrace his obsession with his nose and begin doing exposure response prevention. Individuals with BDD tend to have low-self esteem and self-worth. Individuals with BDD do not consider themselves to be attractive. However, BDD makes an individual feel awkward and uncomfortable with their appearance. Due to the nature of the disorder individual stay away from social events or occasions where they feel people will look and “examine” them. Another aspect is that individuals with BDD might spend hours getting ready to go out, checking and rechecking their “flaws” and thus it can have an impact on

an individual's social life and work life. BDD can certainly be intrusive into a person's life. Individuals with BDD might be reluctant to go to the gym, not have enough courage to ask an individual out on a date, or shy away from family gatherings. It is common that individuals with BDD view themselves as "ugly" and "deformed". Thus, for them an average day is filled with displeasure and intrusive thoughts. The same technique that is used for OCD is implemented in the treatment of BDD.