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The Puzzling History of Body Dysmorphia

Body Dysmorphia has been quite the center of discussion for mental health in recent years. This mental illness seemingly came up out of nowhere and is now very prevalent in our culture today. The self-image of the body has been a fairly unknown topic for quite some time now. This creates a lot of confusion about Body Dysmorphia and how it has even come about, including many common questions people have. What exactly is Body Dysmorphia? What is its cause? Am I prone to getting it? And is it even curable?

What is Body Dysmorphia?

According to the BetterHealth Channel Body Dysmorphia is, "...a mental illness characterized by constant worrying over a perceived or slight defect in appearance." For example, if someone were to look in the mirror at themselves and notice they have a big nose. They begin to fixate on it and cannot get the thought of how big their nose is out of their mind. It hinders what they do every single day. Their bodily confidence is in a state of decay. This person decides to get a multitude of surgeries done on their nose to try and fix the issue and this still does not seem to truly solve the problem and is more of a band-aid solution to this issue. Body Dysmorphia makes a person go to extreme measures to either hide this feature or change it. These extremes may be surgery, makeup, clothing, covering it up, and many more.

This disorder is a lot more common than most people think. John Hopkins University of Medicine says, “Experts think that about one of every 100 people has BDD. Men and women are equally affected.”

Body Dysmorphia can have many symptoms such as depression, anxiety, suicidal thoughts, trying to hide the area of concern, etc. (John Hopkins Medicine). The time when it is most common for someone to begin to have Body Dysmorphia is during their teenage years (Mind). Body Dysmorphia can go away over time based on circumstance, but more commonly worsens with age (John Hopkins Medicine).

What Type of People Can Get Body Dysmorphia?

Body Dysmorphia comes in all shapes and sizes. It can also affect anyone and everyone. From someone who is considered obese to someone who is in phenomenal shape. The interesting thing with Body Dysmorphia is that no matter what you have a chance of having Body Dysmorphia. For example, someone who goes to the gym every day could be very self-conscious about their back. They feel that it is not defined enough and needs to be better. They will continuously work out their back to a point where it is not good for them. This imperfection they believe that have been way more minor than they think. This specific type of Body Dysmorphia is called Muscle Dysmorphia (International OCD Foundation). There are many types of Body Dysmorphia Disorders. But this shows how almost anyone can have Body Dysmorphia. Many people believe that Body Dysmorphia only comes from someone who is overweight and out of shape when in reality anyone can get it.

What is the Cause of Body Dysmorphia?

The cause of Body Dysmorphia is incredibly confusing with little information. Many experts have stated that the cause of Body Dysmorphia is unknown (Mind). But why is that? The main reason for the unknown origin of Body Dysmorphia is due to the sheer number of things that can play a factor in someone having Body Dysmorphia. Experts at Mind, a charity that specializes in mental health issues, has a long list of what the possible causes for Body Dysmorphia may be. These causes include Abuse, Bullying, Low Self-Esteem, Fear of Being Rejected, Perfectionism, Genetics, and Depression (Mind). These causes have been widely accepted as the main “causes” even though nothing has yet to be confirmed as of yet.

There is one cause that may be the root of the influx of Body Dysmorphia in recent years. That cause is social media. Rush University talked about a project called, “Selfie Harm”. This project was tested on 15 teens as they were asked to take a selfie and then make it into something they would post on their social media (Rush University). They stated that “...the majority of the teens said they actually preferred their original, unretouched photos, every single one chose to digitally alter their image for social media. Many made themselves unrecognizable, even cartoonish, drastically changing the shapes of their noses, eyes, chins and/or lips, as well as adding dramatic makeup and smoothing out their complexions.” All of these teens wanted this picture to look as perfect as possible for the world to see. This is most likely due to famous people on social media posting heavily edited pictures of themselves with fair amounts of plastic surgery (Rush University). The misconception that people develop when they see a large amount of “perfect people” on their social media feeds is that they believe

this is what the average person looks like. If you see a large number of people who seem to have perfect features, then you begin to think those are the standards for a person to look like this and if you do not meet these standards, you are ugly. Social media culture is most likely the front-runner for why Body Dysmorphia has been in the limelight more recently than it has before. All of the possible causes for Body Dysmorphia listed via Rush University can be enhanced through social media. Online culture is a toxic environment and can bring people down. Even though there is no official cause for Body Dysmorphia there are telltale signs of the factors that might increase the odds of someone getting Body Dysmorphia.

Is it Curable?

Body Dysmorphia is not the easiest to treat and has a variety of treatments. A common form of treatment is Cognitive behavior therapy (CBT). The BetterHealth Channel explains what CBT treatment saying, “training in how to change underlying attitudes to think and feel in different ways. This includes learning to tolerate the distress of ‘exposing’ their perceived defect to others and in not performing rituals related to appearance concerns.” This form of treatment also goes hand in hand with coping management skills. This means that they will need to embrace this feature that has been bothering them for so long and learn to cope with it (BetterHealth Channel).

Medication is a very odd cure for Body Dysmorphia. This is because there is no direct medicine to get rid of Body Dysmorphia, but more so to get rid of anxiety and depression (BetterHealth Channel). Medication does not seem to be a very viable cure for Body Dysmorphia due to the causes of it being unknown along with attacking possible symptoms of Body dysmorphia instead of the heart of the issue. This does not

mean that it does not work at all. There are scenarios where this has completely fixed the problem for some people.

Overview

Body Dysmorphia has an incredibly confusing history and overall, many unanswered questions. From the causes and treatments of Body Dysmorphia. Over time with the evolution of medical sciences, there will most likely be a common cause found in someone obtaining Body Dysmorphia. The effects of social media on humans' minds and the contributions that it has to Body Dysmorphia will only become more apparent as time goes on.

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