

Boosting my Body Image with Bodybuilding:



A Borderline Experience

Daniela Silva shares how the role of bodybuilding in helping her manage characteristics of Borderline Personality Disorder

I have Borderline Personality Disorder (BPD), which is nowadays quite commonly referred to as Emotionally Unstable Personality Disorder (EUPD) in the UK. BPD is not a disease, it's a way of functioning – being, and acting in the world. It is a very complex disorder, because those who have it show instability in emotions and interpersonal relationships.

Another characteristic of the disorder is self-image disturbance. In practice, that for me works as if I'm shortsighted and wearing the wrong eyeglasses. When I look in the mirror, I see distorted images of myself, body weight and shape. It affects how I feel about my body and what I wear; the discomfort is so great that I'll avoid wearing a dress, fearing it'll draw attention to my belly.

Self-image is not related to what you actually see, but how you feel about what you see – because everything we see and observe in the world is part of the perception we have about it, through our senses. Like going to a museum and asking each person to look at the same painting, at the end of the tour, when we ask each one what they thought and felt about it, we will have different opinions. So, it is not the painting that is different, but the perceptions we have about it.

In this way, body self-image is closely linked to the emotional relationship we have with our bodies. That's why self-esteem is so important, it's like a thermometer that regulates our thoughts and actions. I understand that the more I think there is something wrong with me, the greater my distortion in front of the mirror will be. It may sound pretty simple, but it's not.

Step by Step: Crossing Border Lines

My body's saying let's go, but my heart is saying no (but my heart is saying no)

Christina Aguilera, Genie in a Bottle

A few months ago, everything changed. I started bodybuilding with my husband. I always wanted to do bodybuilding, but I never saw it through because I felt ashamed and afraid to mess with the equipment. I remember spending hours on social media, admiring the women's toned bodies and wondering if, (one day) this could ever be me.

Now it is me in the gym, and I'm admiring myself for the step. Perhaps it seems like the step

of an ant, but the internal changes and impact to my self-esteem are significant – huge.

It wasn't easy to make the changes, in fact, it never is. No pain, no gain? I've caught the essence of sportsmanship in this phrase, and it is from this point that things have started to change shape...

My husband and I moved house last year, to a condo with a fully equipped gym! I was dealing with my insecurity, facing the challenge and crossing the border lines between fear and desire. But with guts, and my husband's guidance in handling gym equipment, I made a step in the right direction and I have been able to exercise. But I still needed the right training plan, so I subscribed to an online app where a personal trainer designed a fitness routine for me based on my height, weight, and goals.

A Body in a Bottle: Come and Let me Out

"I'm a genie in a bottle, baby
Gotta rub me the right way, honey
I'm a genie in a bottle, baby
Come, come, come and let me out".
Christina Aguilera, Genie In a Bottle

Suddenly, there I was, in front of a big gym mirror, saying to myself, "yes, I can!" Despite pain and exhaustion, it's amazing to experience how physical exercise modifies shape and body appearance, as well as changes thinking. Thoughts are the golden rules for all kinds of transformation, they guide every decision we make. Every big change starts with a small idea and a guiding thought. In my case, bodybuilding has awakened my libido and my life energy. I had no idea how much strength I had until I needed it to perform the workout.

Before integrating bodybuilding into my daily practice, I felt like a genie in a bottle; a smart girl, capable of awakening desires, trapped in a lamp, a dark place she called her own. Carefully touched with inspiration and support, my confidence and desire have been ignited, and now I exhale endorphins, and crave the dopamine of hugging, touching, and dancing.

For me, my training routine is dance in the form of an exercise. With each step, and muscles torn and rebuilt, I get free from the lamp that used to imprison me, towards a world without limits to become my dream come true.