



BODY DYSMORPHIC DISORDER IN AN (ALMOST) POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

Managing Body Dysmorphic Disorder in an (Almost) Post-Covid World

In today's world of social media and dating apps, it is hard to escape our preconceived beliefs of the "ideal" body. For a population of men raised on "G.I. Joe" action figures and professional wrestling, this can reign especially true.

It is ingrained in the minds of boys that men must physically look a certain way to obtain success and happiness. The image of 'six-packs and bulging biceps' is often portrayed on posters in young boys' rooms as an image to 'look up to' and strive to achieve.

A result of this viewpoint can be dangerous. It can often lead to something called Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). Those who suffer from BDD have an unhealthy obsession with believing that their body's physical appearance should differ from its current state. The obsession often includes over-analyzing and attempts at fixing any defects or flaws (perceived or real) in one's physical appearance. People that have BDD are convinced that they do not possess the "ideal" physical appearance that they believe they "should" have. BDD causes significant stress and anxiety and typically interferes with living a normal lifestyle.

This extreme level of dissatisfaction is due to the often unrealistic standards that males set for themselves due to social expectations. According to research conducted by Dr. Phillipa Diedrichs of *the Centre of Appearance Research at the University of the West of England*, over 80% of men (four in five) talk about their body image in ways that illustrate feelings of distress and dissatisfaction, indicating it is an area of weakness and is flawed.

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The lack of social gatherings during the Covid-19 pandemic may have made BDD seemingly more manageable for some. But with the return to "normalcy," BDD has the potential to loom more superior than ever. According to Healthline, sixty-one percent of U.S. adults report undesired weight changes since the COVID-19 pandemic began. It is now more critical than ever for men to establish a game plan to combat body dysmorphia.

A Game Plan for Managing BDD

BDD is difficult for those who suffer from it. Here are three tips to help yourself or to suggest to someone with BDD:

- Seek help from a mental health professional. Specifically, select someone with a specialty or focus in BDD.
- Be kind to yourself: In combating BDD, self-care is a valuable tool in your toolbox. In addition to a healthy diet and a priority for sufficient sleep, make time to relax and enjoy hobbies or activities as ways to de-stress.
- Practice mindfulness: Slowly enjoy parts of your day as a way to decompress. Yoga, meditation, and stretching are mindful ways to calm the nervous system.

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