**Body Image:**

* **Body Image Definition-** The perception that a person has of their physical self and the thoughts and feelings that result from that perception (McShirley 2015). ***\*\*Repeat***
* **Factors Determining Body Image:**
  1. How you SEE your body. This is called your perceptual body image, which is not always a correct representation of how you actually look (McShirley 2015).
  2. The way that you FEEL about your body. This is your affective body image, relating to the amount of satisfaction or dissatisfaction that you feel about your shape, weight, body part, etc. (McShirley 2015).
  3. The way that you THINK about your body. This is your cognitive body image, relating to preoccupation of body shape and/or weight (McShirley 2015).
  4. The way that you BEHAVE and/or behaviors that you engage in as a result of your body image. This is called your behavioral body image. This pertains to isolation, purging, excessive exercising, restricting, cutting, etc. (McShirley 2015).
* **Signs of Negative Body Image (McShirley 2015):**
  1. Focuses excessive attention on a minor flaw in appearance.
  2. Views oneself as unattractive, even ugly.
  3. Fears other people can see the so-called deformity.
  4. Might be a perfectionist.
  5. Avoids social engagements.
  6. Constantly grooms and looks at oneself in the mirror.
  7. Constantly hides the perceived flaw with makeup or clothes.
  8. Constantly compares one’s appearance with other peoples.
  9. Pursues excessive cosmetic procedures or surgery.
  10. Needs reassurance from others.
  11. Is never satisfied with their appearance.
* *Severe form of poor body image is Body Dysmorphic Disorder (PT Body Image 2020).*
* **Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD):** A form of obsessive-compulsive disorder that causes one to be overly preoccupied with what are perceived as gross imperfections in their appearance and spends an hour or more every day thinking about the way they look. These imperfections can pertain to, but are not limited to face or head, weight, body shape (PT Body Dysmorphic Disorder 2020).
* **Symptoms of BDD:** Often begins in early teens, or even childhood (PT Body Dysmorphic Disorder 2020).
  1. Preoccupation with one or more perceived defects in physical appearance that are not observable to others.
  2. Performance of repetitive behaviors such as mirror checking, excessive grooming, skin picking, reassurance-seeking, hair plucking, and/or comparing oneself to others.
  3. Clinically significant distress or impairment in functioning caused by the preoccupation.
  4. Major depression and suicidal thoughts are also very common with BDD.
* BDD is not an eating disorder, though both conditions exhibit similarly severe and abnormal body image concerns and self-esteem issues and can be present together (PT Body Dysmorphic Disorder 2020).
* Men and women are equally affected by this disorder (PT Body Dysmorphic Disorder 2020).
* **Body Image in Men:** A neglected area of research. From what I could find however, typically men are worried about but are not limited to their body weight, height, size of their wanker, muscularity, head and/or body hair, and masculinity (BDD Foundation 2019).
* **Dominant Preoccupations in Male Body Image:**
  1. Muscle Dysmorphic Disorder (MDD) – Type of BDD, popularly known as “Reverse Anorexia” or “Bigorexia”. A preoccupation with not being sufficiently muscular or lean when that is not the case (BDD Foundation 2019). A disruptive obsession with musculature and physique (Admissions at Breath LHC 2020).
  2. Male Pattern Baldness (MPB) – Progressive thinning of the scalp due to genetic variation. Typically, not the sole concern of the individual’s BDD, usually part of a bigger picture of multiple concerns about masculinity (BDD Foundation 2019).
  3. Height – Does not commonly present as a sole concern, typically part of a bigger picture also (BDD Foundation 2019).
* **Treatment for BDD** – Often includes a combination of cognitive behavioral therapy and medications (Mayo Clinic 2020). This type of therapy for BDD focuses on but are not limited to four main areas and they are as follows:
  1. Helping you to learn how negative thoughts, emotional reactions and behaviors maintain problems over time (Mayo Clinic 2020).
  2. Challenging automatic negative thoughts about your body image and learning more flexible ways to think (Mayo Clinic 2020).
  3. Learning alternative ways to handle urges and/or rituals to help reduce mirror checking or reassurance seeking (Mayo Clinic 2020).
  4. Teaching you other behaviors to improve your mental health, such as addressing social avoidance (Mayo Clinic 2020).
* **Home Strategies to Keep You on Track:** BDD warrants treatment from a mental health professional. But you can do some things to build your treatment plan (Mayo Clinic 2020), such as:
  1. Stick to your treatment plan. This means, not skipping therapy sessions, continuing to take your medication(s).
  2. Pay attention to your warning signs.
  3. Practice your learned strategies from therapy.
  4. Avoid drugs and alcohol.
  5. Be Very Mindful While Doing These:
     + Getting Active`
     + Learning about your disorder
* **Coping and Support:** Talk with your doctor and/or therapist about improving your coping skills, and ways to focus on identifying, monitoring, and changing the negative thoughts and behaviors about your appearance (Mayo Clinic 2020). Some coping skills include:
  1. Writing/keeping a journal.
  2. DO NOT isolate yourself.
  3. Take care of yourself.
  4. Join a support group.
  5. Stay focused on your goals.
  6. Learn relaxation and stress management.
  7. Do not try to make any important decisions when you are feeling distressed or in despair.
* **Strategies for coping with negative body image:**
  1. Cover and/or remove all mirrors in the beginning if you have to so you are not tempted to over-analyze yourself and you can focus on your thoughts. Use affirmations to getchya through!
  2. Do a full body check-in, practice being self-aware, and try to explain your feelings from your check-in in physical sensations only, as if you were explaining it to an alien or a toddler.
  3. Sit in front of your mirror when you feel comfortable (I CANNOT STRESS THIS ENOUGH) and note each part of your body/physical characteristics that you feel negatively about. Also note all of the negative thoughts associated with those physical characteristics. Now create a neutral reframe for each of those negative thoughts that makes you feel even just a little bit better. Build on that neutral thought and continue to reframe until you feel positively about that characteristic.
* Reiterate that this is not medical advice, I am not a medical professional, and that they should seek medical help if this is a serious issue for them. This is just to bring attention to it, and help you to try and cope with it if you are noticing a difference in yourself that is negative pertaining to body image on a minute scale.

**Reference List:**

Admissions at Breath LHC. (2020). *All 12 Types of Eating Disorders Explained.* Breathe Life Healing Centers. Web. Retrieved from <https://breathelifehealingcenters.com/13-types-eating-disorders-explained/>

Body Dysmorphic Disorder Foundation. (2019). *Muscle Dysmorphia & Body Image in Men.* BDD Foundation. Retrieved from <https://bddfoundation.org/muscle-dysmorphia-body-image-in-men/>

Mayo Clinic. (1998-2020). *Body Dysmorphic Disorder.* Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research. Retrieved from <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/body-dysmorphic-disorder/diagnosis-treatment/drc-20353944>

McShirley, Collin. (2015). *What is Body Image?.* PsychAlive. Retrieved from <https://www.psychalive.org/what-is-body-image/#:~:text=Body%20image%20is%20the%20perception,by%20individual%20and%20environmental%20factors>.

Psychology Today. (2020). *Body Dysmorphic Disorder.* Sussex Publishers, LLC. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/conditions/body-dysmorphic-disorder>

Psychology Today. (2020). *Body Image.* Sussex Publishers, LLC. Retrieved from <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/basics/body-image>