Many of us have those days when we’re concerned about some aspect of our appearance. Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD), however, is characterized by a preoccupation with one or more perceived defects or flaws in appearance which usually lasts for at least one hour a day and causes significant distress and/or interferes with at least one aspect of life. Oftentimes the perceived flaw in appearance is unnoticeable to others or the flaw is noticeable but is a normal variation (e.g. acne, male pattern baldness). BDD usually begins in late adolescence (16-18 years) but milder symptoms may start around the age of 12-14.

People with BDD may avoid certain places, people, or activities because of concerns over their appearance (e.g. bright lights, mirrors, dating, social situations, being seen close-up). Additional behaviors people with BDD may feel compelled to repeat include:

- Being extremely preoccupied with a perceived flaw in appearance that to others can't be seen or appears minor
- Strong belief that you have a defect in your appearance that makes you ugly or deformed
- Belief that others take special notice of your appearance in a negative way or mock you
- Engage in behaviors aimed at fixing or hiding the perceived flaw that are difficult to resist or control, such as frequently checking the mirror, grooming or skin picking
- Attempting to hide perceived flaws with styling, makeup or clothes
- Constantly comparing your appearance with others
- Frequently seeking reassurance about your appearance from others
- Having perfectionist tendencies
- Seeking cosmetic procedures with little satisfaction
- Avoiding social situations

Though negative body image and BDD share some characteristics, they are not the same and should not be used interchangeably.

### Negative Body Image vs. Body Dysmorphic Disorder

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Negative Body Image</th>
<th>Body Dysmorphic Disorder</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not a diagnosis on its own</td>
<td>Categorized under Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and Related Disorders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly prevalent—86% of college women and 80% of college men</td>
<td>Thought to affect 1-2% of the population in men and women equally</td>
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<tr>
<td>Body image is a representation you have of your physical appearance</td>
<td>Intense preoccupation with a perceived flaw in one’s physical appearance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Some preoccupation or discomfort</td>
<td>Significant time spent worrying, evaluating and checking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generally concerned with weight/shape</td>
<td>Often focused on skin, eyes, breasts, teeth/smile, chin/jaw, genitals, nose, stomach and/or scars</td>
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<tr>
<td>May or may not occur as part of an eating disorder but can increase risk for developing an eating disorder</td>
<td>A person may go to great lengths to camouflage the perceived flaw, including plastic surgery/surgeries, repeatedly visiting a dermatologist, hairdresser, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Resources

Both BDD and negative body image can significantly impact your physical and psychological well-being. BDD especially requires working with a healthcare professional to treat the mental health disorder. Consider utilizing these resources:

- Counseling and Consultation Service offers individual and group counseling.
- The Body Project is an evidence-based program that encourages college students to challenge the body image ideals through discussion and activities. The Body Project has been shown to improve body satisfaction and acceptance, and reduce risks for developing disordered eating and eating disorders.

References

Body Dysmorphic Disorder Foundation: https://bddfoundation.org/helping-you/about-bdd/#how-common-is-bdd