

## **Celebrity Confessions: Body Dysmorphic Disorder Edition**

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Celebrities wield great social influence. Beyond their talent, they are often known for their own designer fashion, advertisement appearances, and endorsement of cars, makeup, and other products. With a celebrity's seal of approval, consumers flock to sample Roger Federer's endorsed sports equipment, spray Catherine Zeta-Jones' preferred scent, or sip P. Diddy's preferred spirit. Beyond these prominent examples, many celebrities also support charitable causes via their influential voice and generous philanthropy. Think Pamela Anderson's provocative PETA campaign or Elton John's AIDS charity.

Like many citizens, celebrities may choose to publicly advocate for a cause that they believe in due to a personal experience or connection. Brooke Shields published a book relaying her struggles with post-partum depression, and Michael J. Fox started a foundation for Parkinson's research. These efforts may help to reduce stigma or garner support and awareness for a given cause.

It is no secret that some celebrities may suffer from Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD). In fact, mental health experts have alluded to the fact that they have treated celebrities for BDD but could not share any names, mentioning that patients typically opt to keep their disorder a secret.

Although diagnoses have not been confirmed, some speculate that stars like Michael Jackson and Marilyn Monroe suffered from BDD. Obtaining over 30 plastic surgeries and seldom showing his face sans makeup, experts propose that Jackson suffered from the body image disorder. Monroe's stylist believed that her obsessions with the mirror were a form of body dysmorphia through which Monroe sought to constantly examine and change her face. Most recently in the news for undergoing ten cosmetic surgeries within one day, Heidi Montag may also suffer from BDD.

In 2010, singer Lily Allen told Q magazine that she, too, was preoccupied with her body shape and suffered from the disorder. In 2001, Actress Uma Thurman publicly stated that she developed BDD after the birth of her daughter.

Most recently, Sarah Michelle Gellar stated that she suffered from BDD: "I totally have body dysmorphic disorder. I think most women do." It is important that widely circulated generalizations such as these are interpreted with caution. Although the disorder is common – research suggests that BDD affects 1.7-2.4% of the population (about 5-7 million people in the U.S. alone) – it

certainly does not affect all or most women. In addition, BDD doesn't discriminate; both men and women suffer from the disorder.

These celebrity statements may pique the interest of listeners; however, it is important that individuals remain well-informed regarding the true nature of BDD. Given that a celebrity has great influence – both positive and negative, we must keep in mind that not all media representations of BDD are rooted in formal psychiatric diagnoses or backed by evidence.

Although we are neither doubting nor confirming these celebrity cases, we must ensure that celebrity misstatements or cinematic mischaracterizations do not taint or undermine the debilitating reality of disorders like BDD. We can combat these misperceptions by offering fact-based strategies for enhancing awareness and recognizing BDD. In this vein, it is important that individuals are aware of the symptoms and signs to look out for.

Signs of Body Dysmorphic Disorder:

1. Do you find yourself excessively concerned or distressed by appearance flaws that friends, family members, or doctors tell you are minor or nonexistent?
2. Do your appearance concerns interfere with your ability to work, take care of things at home, or socialize?
3. Have you undergone multiple cosmetic procedures (but still feel unsatisfied with your appearance)?
4. Do you believe that receiving plastic surgery will transform your life or fix all of your problems?

If you answered yes to any of the above questions and would like to seek help for your concerns, please contact the Body Dysmorphic Disorder Clinic at 617-726-6766 or e-mail [bdd@partners.org](mailto:bdd@partners.org)

References:

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