Beating BDD Episode 7 – Alex Mummery

Alex’s BDD started at around 13 after a friend made a comment about the shape of his head. After 10 years of growing his hair long to disguise the perceived flaw, he did a course of CBT alongside his own exposure therapy. Now, he exposes his head to the world every day and says his BDD is no longer a problem.

‘Now, I’m always the confident version of me, because I’m not pinning of all my identify on the way I look. So even if I look in the mirror and feel dissatisfied, I still walk away from it a confident person.’

How is Alex now?
[00:00.51] His BDD now causes him next to no anxiety.
[00:03.35] Through studying educational psychology he’s learnt that BDD sufferers process visual data differently, which makes them very detail-focused.
[00:06.27] It’s okay not to be 100% satisfied with the way you look as long as it doesn’t cause you any anxiety or disrupt your everyday existence.
[00:22.22] Recovery has allowed him to make other positive changes in his life.
[00:26.32] He can control any compulsions better now, and 95% of the time, the intrusive thoughts aren’t there at all.

When did his BDD appear and how did it manifest itself?
[00:06.54] A friend told Alex he had a funny-shaped head, which over time became an all-consuming obsession.
[00:08.48] While he was always able to function, for 10 years he had at least a low level of anxiety along with big peaks.
[00:10.50] He did often think about surgery but didn’t go ahead with it.
[00:12.55] He never revealed the extent of his obsession to his family – in fact, they thought he was vain.
[00:25.56] The intrusive thoughts were nearly almost there.

What caused Alex to seek treatment?
[00:15.15] At 25, the end of a long-term relationship caused a big spike in symptoms.
[00:16.14] When he started meeting new people again, he began to realise that others didn’t see him the way he did.
[00:17.00] The experience made Alex think he’d like to get rid of the anxiety. So he went to the GP and was given CBT.

What form did it take?
[00:17.15] It wasn’t BDD-specific CBT but did lead the symptoms to improve.
[00:18.19] Alex did his own exposure therapy by cutting his hair off gradually.
[00:19.37] When he shaved his head completely, and the world didn’t end, it changed how he saw himself. The checking and comparing went away too.

What advice would he give to others?
[00:27.47] No one is stuck with BDD for life. It’s hard to face up to your fears but if you do, you will get better.

Resources
- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org