

Beating BDD Episode 24 – Simon Antony

Simon describes how the brutal bullying he suffered at school set him on a long journey with BDD, which culminated in a transformative stay in psychiatric hospital and writing a book about his experiences. (See Resources, below.)

“In the last five years, I don’t remember a day that BDD has stopped me from doing something.”

Why Simon wrote his book and what he got from it

[00:00.52] He wrote the book to leave for his kids, but it became therapy.

[00:02.49] The book has taken away the shame for him. He can now talk openly about, and accept, what’s happened to him.

[00:36.05] Having BDD didn’t stop him from having children, but he still wouldn’t want to talk to them about it.

How being bullied kickstarted the BDD

[00:04.57] From day of senior school Simon and his friend got mercilessly bullied.

[00:08.20] His feelings turned into BDD behaviours, like staring in the mirror until he saw things that weren’t there. He once scrubbed his face with a towel until it bled.

[00:09.56] BDD wasn’t known at the time so neither Simon nor his parents knew what was wrong. And a doctor he saw dismissed his concerns.

Why leaving school didn’t change anything

[00:11.46] At college, Simon stopped being bullied but he didn’t feel any different.

[00:12.28] The main fixation was his hair, but even the slightest spot felt like a volcano. Everything was out of proportion and every day was a struggle.

[00:13.25] Even his best friend didn’t know about the BDD until he read the book recently. The mother of his children still doesn’t know.

Surgery solved one problem but the BDD continued

[00:14.57] Simon became obsessed by changes to his chest area and eventually had surgery, which he was pleased with. But the BDD just moved elsewhere.

[00:18.31] After lots of online research, he decided the time was right to seek help. He told his girlfriend, who was very supportive.

[00:22.45] He needed to ask the doctor for a referral but couldn’t talk about it. So he printed out all the information and gave it to her. He got the referral and started treatment at The Maudsley Hospital in London.

In-patient treatment turned out to be the most effective for Simon

[00:25.02] Simon struggled with the stress of making it to the weekly sessions so was recommended for inpatient care at The Bethlem Royal Hospital in Beckenham.

[00:29.40] The programme was three months long initially. He had to do some really difficult exposures but it changed everything for him.

[00:33.35] He came out of hospital with lots of coping mechanisms and the ability to do things he wanted to, like join a band and a gym.

How he copes with difficult days now

[00:34.38] He tells himself how far he’s come and that the thoughts aren’t reality. And he makes himself go and do something.

[00:38.01] Simon's experience of having BDD has made him more empathetic and interested in people. He has a radar for BDD behaviours.

[00:39.24] If he could relive things now, he'd try to find the strength to walk away from mirrors.

[00:41.51] He'd like to people who are suffering, "It isn't always going to be like this – it will change, and you're not on your own."

Resources

- The BDD Foundation: bddfoundation.org
- Stranger in the Mirror by Simon Antony, available on Amazon and at foyles.co.uk