

Desyree Dixon, LCSW-C
Founder, CEO, Psychotherapist
Bolton Therapy & Wellness LLC

Biography:

Desyree Dixon works with individuals and couples who want to make changes that move their lives forward. Her practice addresses anxiety, depression, stress, grief and loss, with a special emphasis on trauma. Desyree utilizes scientifically proven therapeutic modalities including Brainspotting, EMDR, Gottman Couples Relationship Therapy, Psychodynamic, CBT, EFT and Solutions-Focused Therapy. She received her undergraduate degree from Georgetown University and her graduate degree from University of Maryland. She trained as a family trauma specialist with the Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine affiliate Kennedy Krieger Institute. Desyree is a regular contributing psychological consultant to local Baltimore TV and radio stations.

Presentation Title:

Brown Bodies In Dysmorphia: Manifestation of Trauma in People of Color as Anger and Disordered Eating

Learning Objectives:

- (i) Understand how trauma impacts people of color's comfort with their own bodies, e.g., "post traumatic slave disorder"
- (ii) Understand gender differences in manifestation of body dysmorphia
- (iii) Understand how the "strong black woman" stereotype hinders black women's therapeutic success
- (iv) Understand how the "star athlete" stereotype hinders black men's therapeutic success
- (v) Understand the differences in language used by people of color versus non-people of color to describe body dysmorphia

Presenter Requirements:

This would be a 110-minute presentation. Speaker would use her own laptop and connect to conference-provided projector.

Teaching Methods: Lecture

Abstract (Discussion and Results):

Body dysmorphia is associated with "skinny, white women" suffering from anorexia and bulimia. The clinical language and understanding of body dysmorphia are viewed through this lens. My experience in treating people of color reveals the presence of body dysmorphia stemming from a history of trauma. This trauma is often racial and

multigenerational, i.e., “post traumatic slave disorder,” a unique kind of PTSD. (Degruy, 2017). Body dysmorphia in people of color may not be directly related to weight, but rather the discomfort of being in a brown body. This feeling of discomfort is often at odds with cultural demands, e.g., “strong black women” (Ross, 2019) or “athletic black man.” (Underwood, 2019).

The cultural pressure to feel proud and aspirational about black women’s full figures (“thickness”) or black men’s athleticism can be a barrier to exploring dysmorphia and trauma in a therapeutic environment. (Ross, 2019). Like a fish trying to understand water, people of color may be so steeped in these cultural norms and expectations that they lack the awareness or even the language to come to an understanding of their own dysmorphia (women’s disordered eating for soothing and pleasure or men’s lifting weights to get rid of “bird chest” (Underwood, 2019)) and its relationship to trauma. Instead, they discuss racial microaggressions, poverty, code switching, or the weariness of moving daily through white spaces. (The Emily Program, 2019). Brainspotting is an effective modality for helping clients identify the relationship between trauma and the dysmorphia of sometimes wanting a body that’s other than brown.

Cited Material:

Degruy, J. (2017). *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, Revised Edition: America’s Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing*. Portland: Joy Degruy Publications.

The Emily Program. (2019). *How Healthcare Providers Can Identify Eating Disorders in Non-White Patients*. <https://emilyprogram.com/blog/how-healthcare-providers-can-identify-eating-disorders-in-non-white-patients/>.

Ross, C. (2019). African-American Women and Eating Disorders: Depression, and the Strong Black Woman Stereotype. *Eating Disorders Review*. [eatingdisordersreview.com. https://eatingdisordersreview.com/african-american-women-and-eating-disorders-depression-and-the-strong-black-woman-archetype/](https://eatingdisordersreview.com/african-american-women-and-eating-disorders-depression-and-the-strong-black-woman-archetype/), 30(5) *citing* Offutt MR. (2013). The Strong Black Woman, Depression, and Emotional Eating. *Scholar Commons: University of Southern Florida*, 1-113. (<http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=5935&context=etd>)

Underwood, S. (2019). Black boys and Bird-Chests, or the Racialized Legacy of Body-Dysmorphia in African-American Men. Medium. <https://medium.com/@stevenunderwoodjr/black-boys-and-body-dysmorphia-b85cf97dd32c>.