

Disfigured and Dismorphic

Shanae Gianni

Intense emotion and unusual, distorted shapes. At the centre sits an eye, a tear rolling down their cheek. You can see, almost feel the same anguish and misery. A girl holds her face anxiously, her eye glistening with angst. A man's back, his hands outstretched behind him. He seems uncomfortable, his hands are out of place. Two bodies aside one another one oddly warped, the other completely 'normal'. A girl's face positioned at the top, melting away into her hair which flows around the piece. And a person's back, completely 'normal'. Yet, you see that some of them don't align with the traditional 'normal'. Some seem to be stretched, twisted and morphed.

This collection of images echoes the emotion and perception of *Body Dysmorphia*. Through editing and warping various body parts to act as flaws and defects of one's body, they appear odd and bizarre compared to if they were not distorted; which in comparison would be seen as beautiful and 'normal'.

Body dysmorphia is a mental health condition where a person spends an excessive time worrying about their appearance and flaws. This may lead to other mental health conditions including depression and anxiety. Through my collection, I sought to reflect this emotion and mentality, where without any colour, simply tonal difference, I communicated the ideas behind this tormenting condition. Only recently has this condition become widely known and recognised, which can be related to the fact that through social media, younger generations have easier, more regular opportunity to compare themselves to others worldwide. Just like many people my age, I often compare my own body to the people around me and those I see online.

I scrutinise my own flaws, simply because someone I follow on social media doesn't have them, so I feel I'm not 'normal'. Despite this, I'm not affected by this condition, where from the small fragment of shame I may feel about my own body, it is unfathomable for me to understand the same emotion and attitude those affected feel towards their own body. Inspired by the detailed linear drawings of American artist Alphonso Dunn, I recreated his strong tonal style using a different media. Creating artworks using scratchboard is something I have attempted in the past, yet never with human faces or bodies, only animals. I found it difficult to depict a realistic appearance due to the small scratches, which when used to create animal fur are effective, yet for skin appear stylistic. From creating these pieces, I found I have developed my own unique style of scratchboard art which is stylistic, and both abstract and realistic unanimously.

After gathering a collection of reference images, I intended to use, I felt they did not convey the message as strongly when left as they were. It was only after I distorted the first images that I made the connection myself, that these warped body parts embody body dysmorphia. I was inspired by my own struggles with body image and the fact that it is such a growing issue in society, thus I wanted to create a piece which brings this to light. I found it explicitly ironic to morph the body parts in relation to the name of the condition, body *dysmorphia*, however this helped me to convey the complexities of such an issue effectively.