



**Jamie D. Feusner, M.D.'99** - I am an Associate Professor in Residence in the Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences, Director of the Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder Intensive Treatment Program, and Director of the Body Dysmorphic Disorder (BDD) Research Program.

I began conducting research on BDD seven years ago at UCLA. It is a psychiatric disorder in which individuals are preoccupied with perceived defects in their appearance that are not noticeable or appear slight to others.

To better understand the nature of their perceptual distortions, we have studied their visual processing, using functional and structural neuroimaging. We have tested how the brains of those with BDD react to local (details) and global (holistic and configural) elements of their own and others' faces, bodies, and inanimate objects, and how those reactions relate to their symptoms. In addition, we have studied their neural correlates of emotions, such as anxiety and disgust, and how they interact with their visual processing. More recently, we extended our research to differences in perception and emotion between BDD patients and sufferers of anorexia nervosa, a related disorder of body image. To achieve this objective, we are collaborating with Dr. Michael Strober, Director of the UCLA Eating Disorders Program, and Dr. Cara Bohon, postdoctoral fellow at the Jane and Terry Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior at UCLA.

### **Biggest Challenge**

One of the biggest challenges recently has been recruiting individuals with anorexia nervosa whose weight has been restored to normal (usually as the result of treatment) and who are not taking psychiatric medications. To overcome this challenge, we have networked with the eating-disorders community and treatment providers in the greater Los Angeles area, given lectures on BDD and anorexia to the community, and made use of social media.

### **Highlight of the Project**

The highlight has been discovering that BDD patients' brains handle visual information abnormally. They demonstrate unusually low brain activity when viewing holistic and configural visual elements of their faces. Their brains may not be able to adequately contextualize the details of what they are seeing into a whole visual concept. We have observed this phenomenon not only for own-face viewing, but also for other-face viewing and even for inanimate objects (houses), suggesting the patients have more general visual-processing abnormalities. These findings have provided an important insight into the pathophysiology of BDD, from which we may be able to eventually develop novel treatments to improve the symptoms.

For more information, please visit [www.semel.ucla.edu/bdd](http://www.semel.ucla.edu/bdd) and/or contact me at [jfeusner@mednet.ucla.edu](mailto:jfeusner@mednet.ucla.edu).