Charlotte Markey,
Daniel Hart & Douglas N. Zacher

Illustrated by @DanTheScribbler

BEING YOU

THE BODY IMAGE BOOK FOR BOYS

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For Charlie

ENDORSEMENTS

"With suicide rates surging for preteen and teenage boys – yet another painful sign of their feeling trapped by impossible pressures – and the top 15 causes of premature mortality predominantly male, how they relate to their bodies plainly matters. In their colorful, evidence-based, and wonderfully accessible book, the authors bring wisdom, compassion, and even humor to a subject that has been shrouded in myth for generations. For parents, educators, and coaches who understand that integrity begins with how well a child cares for himself, an attitude learned – or not – early in life, I heartily recommend this book."

Michael C. Reichert, PhD, *Executive Director, Center for the Study of Boys' and Girls' Lives, University of Pennsylvania*

"Parents who have been asking for ways to support their sons' body image have a new resource to share with their adolescents. *Being You* meets boys where they are and offers research, personal stories, and practical guidance for navigating the confusing messages young men receive from the culture. This book also serves as a much-needed conversation-starter for families about what it means to take care of your authentic self, inside and out."

Oona Hanson, *Educator and Parent Coach*

"Dr. Markey has done it again! *Being You: The Body Image Book for Boys* is an excellent companion book to her body image book for girls. The chapters cover critical body image issues that boys would want to know: puberty, how they can take care of their bodies, and eating. The coverage of related mental health issues like bullying and self-compassion makes for a well-rounded volume of how boys can learn to be their best selves. Body image and eating issues are increasing for boys, and need more attention from researchers, parents, and media. A book like this is necessary to help guide boys through body image issues in a way that is fun, engaging, and specific to boys' needs and concerns. It's beautifully illustrated and highly readable, and features real-life stories from boys and expert advice. Give the boys in your life a gift they deserve—buy this book!"

Dr Meghan Gillen, *Associate Professor of Psychology, Penn State Abington*

"Teen boys face immense body image pressures from social media and peers now more than ever, but these important issues are rarely acknowledged or discussed. *Being You: The Body Image Book for Boys* is an invaluable resource designed for boys to promote a positive body image based on the latest scientific evidence, expert advice, and real-life stories."

Jason Nagata, MD, *University of California, San Francisco*

"This is a terrific book. *Being You* frankly and kindly guides adolescent boys to develop a positive body image in terms of what they can't change, what they can indeed learn to do, and the wisdom and self-compassion to learn the difference. With a skillful blend of definitions and explanations, plus advice from experts and a diverse set of adolescent boys and young men, the authors deftly transform scientific research findings into practical advice that respects the desires, needs, stressors, and appearance concerns of adolescent boys. Parents, grandparents, pediatricians, teachers, clergy, and others would also do well to read this book – if only to study the sensible chapters on puberty and nutrition and to be prepared to challenge the many sociocultural messages that make it all too easy for boys to use the petri dish of toxic masculinity to cultivate a negative body image and other unhealthy habits."

Michael P. Levine, PhD, FAED, *Emeritus Professor of Psychology, Kenyon College*

"*The Body Image Book for Boys* contains every single piece of information that doctors and experts want teenage boys to know- but rarely get the chance to tell them…

Delivered with a thoughtful, empathetic, and intelligent tone, and filled with detailed, evidence-based content, this book is ideal for boys who are hungry for knowledge about what is happening in their bodies, and how best to look after their physical and mental health.

The authors communicate complex issues and information in interesting and detailed ways. They dispel the myths, and share the stories of numerous adolescent boys with a range of different attitudes toward, or experiences of, their bodies. This book covers such a wide range of topics - the physical, the emotional, and everything in between. Strongly recommend."

Dr Zali Yager, *Executive Director, The Body Confident Collective*

"The ultimate handbook to help boys navigate puberty and develop a healthy body image. Packed full of practical and evidence-based advice on diet, fitness, and mental health, it addresses boys' body image concerns head-on.

A must read. *Being You* will help boys appreciate they have more to offer the world than how they look."

Judi Craddock, Author of *The Little Book of Body Confidence*

"While reading *Being You: The Body Image Book for Boys*, I kept thinking, "finally!" Finally, we publicly recognize that boys are just as privy to societal standards for unrealistic, perfect bodies and the pressure to still try to conform. Finally, we give boys the tools to recognize these problems and find solutions for themselves and peers. This book is jam-packed with the basics boys need to know about their physical and mental health as well as the red flag behaviors and conditions to watch out for. The writing style translates research and terminology into understandable concepts, along with quotes from professionals and stories from older adolescents. As I read, I reflected on the patients I've seen in my Pediatrics and Adolescent Medicine training who would have greatly benefited from this book and am excited for the boys I get to recommend it to very soon."

Rebekah Fenton, MD, *Pediatrician and Adolescent Health Advocate, Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago*

"What a great resource for boys! As a society, we don't spend enough time talking to boys about positive body image and healthy development. This book provides boys and their families with powerful, evidence-based information and advice about how to take care of themselves and their bodies physically and psychologically during the teen years. It is engaging and fun and provides stories from real boys and young men as well as advice from experts. I wholeheartedly recommend it!"

Elizabeth Daniels, PhD, *Associate Professor, Director of the MA Program in Psychological Science, Director of the Undergraduate Honors Program, University of Colorado Colorado Springs*

"*Being You* dispels the myth of body image only being a concern for girls and provides an excellent, insightful analysis of the nature of body image concerns among boys, as well as what causes these concerns. It also discusses when body image concerns are likely to cause significant problems for boys and what can be done to address these concerns.

Dr Markey and her colleagues have provided a well-informed, engaging and thoughtful analysis of the above issues. The book adopts a positive approach to body, exploring how boys can engage in healthy physical activity and eating so that they experience physical and mental health.

I love the engaging layout of the book – from boy's stories to expert advice, to useful tips to address concerns that are unique to boys. The book is clearly well researched by the authors, who are experts in the field, but is also written in an accessible way for boys, their parents, teachers and others who work with boys. A wonderful book that will be a central resource to all who are interested in ensuring that boys grow up to be healthy and well-adjusted men."

Professor Marita McCabe PhD, FAPS, FCCLP, FCHP, *Research Professor and Team Leader, Health and Ageing Research Group, Swinburne University*

"A big shout out to *Being You!* This is the book we need right now to help boys navigate the increasingly difficult terrain of maturing into men. The punchy, graphical format makes it a good fit for today's adolescent attention spans. The authors wisely place body image in wider contexts, ranging from unrealistic social media images of ripped men to the perils of diet fads to the need to challenge confined definitions of masculinity itself. Boys will be better boys thanks to this book!"

Ed Frauenheim, co-author of *Reinventing Masculinity: The Liberating Power of Compassion and Connection*

"Finally, a book dedicated to the experience of boys and body image. It's not just an issue that impacts girls, in fact, anyone with a body has a sense of their own body image. Drs Markey, Hart and Zacher write about the unique experiences of boys and men and their relationship with their bodies such as feeling the pressure to be lean and muscular. The scientific research presented in each chapter is supported by the stories of real boys and men in their own voices which makes the content highly relatable. There is also a range of great tips to help boys improve their sense of body image as well as encouragement for boys to become the changemakers in promoting positive body image in society more generally. This book is a highly useful resource for boys and everyone who supports them."

Dr Gemma Sharp, *Senior Research Fellow & Clinical Psychologist, Leader, Body Image Research Unit, Department of Psychiatry, Monash University*

"This book gives boys the crucial skills and language to talk about – and hopefully improve – the relationship they have with their bodies. These conversations are often taboo for both men and boys, but this book provides the necessary roadmap to tackle them in a compassionate and productive way. In short, this book is a must for anyone trying to support the young boys and men in their lives."

Jeffrey Hunger, PhD, *Assistant Professor of Social Psychology, Department of Psychology, Miami University, Ohio*

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Dr. Charlotte Markey is a world-leading expert in body image research, having studied all things body image, eating behavior, and weight management for her entire adult life (about 25 years!). She is passionate about understanding what makes us feel good about our bodies and helping people to develop a healthy body image. Charlotte loves to share her body image wisdom with others, and is an experienced book author, blogger, and Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University, Camden. She currently lives in Pennsylvania with her son, Charlie, her daughter, Grace, her husband, Dan, and their dog, Lexi. For fun, she likes to run, travel, and read, but often spends her free time nagging her kids to brush their teeth or remove the cups and dishes from their rooms.

To learn more about Charlotte Markey, you can visit her website at www.CharlotteMarkey.com or connect with her on Facebook (Dr. Charlotte Markey), Twitter (@char_markey), Instagram (@char_markey), or YouTube (Body Positivity).

Dr. Daniel Hart is a developmental psychologist and distinguished Professor of Psychology at Rutgers University, Camden, who has studied and worked with adolescents and young adults for more than 30 years. He has written several books, including *Becoming Men*. Dan is passionate about understanding factors that lead to healthy development, especially when young people experience disadvantaged upbringings. Dan likes to visit his daughter and her partner and his son, daughter-in-law, and granddaughters as much as possible. He enjoys teasing Charlie and Grace and hiking, reading, and playing basketball in his free time. To learn more about Daniel Hart, you can visit his website at www.hart.camden.rutgers.edu.



Douglas Zacher, MA, has a long-standing interest in issues pertaining to mental health, eating, education, and public policy. He is currently a doctoral student in the Department of Public Affairs/Community Development at Rutgers University, Camden, where he is also a part-time lecturer teaching classes including Introduction to Psychology. Doug conducted many of the interviews that appear in this book and made sure that his (somewhat) older collaborators didn't sound completely out of touch. In his free time, he enjoys working on computers, reading and watching comics, hiking and camping, and playing video games. You can connect with Doug on Twitter at @ZacherDouglas.



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Is this book for you? We think there is important information for *all* boys in *Being You*. Chapter 1 offers a definition of body image, explains why it's good to care about your body image, and presents the organization of this book.



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Developing a positive body image is so important for your own well-being and for the positive change you can contribute to the world around you.



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CHAPTER ONE

WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

#BodyImageIsForBoys

"IT TAKES COURAGE TO GROW UP AND BECOME WHO YOU REALLY ARE."

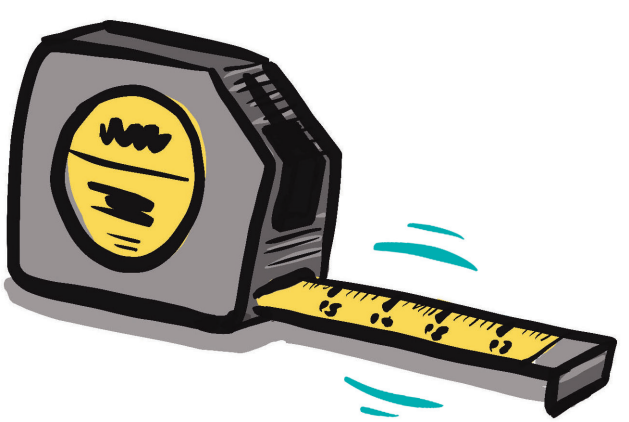
E.E. Cummings, American poet

You're probably wondering why your mom (or dad, or teacher, or aunt) bought you this book. You've heard the term "**body image**" before, but you've never thought of it as particularly relevant to you. In fact, maybe you aren't even sure exactly what it is. If you've ever wished that you were taller, leaner, had different hair, bigger muscles, or you were different in some other way, this book is for you.

In this chapter you'll learn

- how body image is defined,
- why it's important to have a **positive body image**, and
- why reading this book and developing a positive body image will improve your life.

In the past, many thought that only girls had concerns about body image. No longer! The latest research suggests that boys and men are concerned about the appearances of their bodies and related issues just about as much as girls and women are. You'll learn about boys' bodies and body images in this book, and how to protect your health. Perhaps most importantly, **you'll learn about being *you*—accepting who you are and growing into the best version of yourself**. Some days, growing up may feel easy; other days, it may feel really difficult. On the next page, Thomas describes how he's learning to feel comfortable with who he is and to focus his **energy** on what he thinks is most important in his life.



This book addresses the issues that Thomas faced and the many questions and concerns that boys like you may have about body image. It will offer you **healthy** and effective ways to be happy with your body and yourself.



THOMAS DAVID, 16 YEARS OLD

Toward the end of middle school (8th grade), some kids at school started to say stuff to me about my weight. They acted like they were just joking around, but I knew better. By that time, I was a bit **overweight** and already uncomfortable about how I looked. The teasing only made me want to lose some weight and start working out more. Sometimes I go to the gym with my friends and that can be motivating. I can't say that I've fully gotten into good **exercise** habits quite yet.

I wish I felt more comfortable in my body and felt less self-conscious. I have nice eyes and I guess my face is the best part of my body. I suppose it could be worse! But I can't say I particularly like the rest of my appearance.

If I could offer advice to younger boys, I'd say two things. First, don't pick on each other. It's hard enough to feel good in your own skin; no one needs to be getting negative feedback from others. And two, don't feel **self-conscious**. I wish I wasn't so self-conscious when I was younger. Kids shouldn't be scared of what their bodies are. There are so many more important things in the world.

EXPERT ADVICE

Hayden Cedric Dawes, *counselor, USA*

"I fear, in our visually driven society, that boys and men increasingly struggle with body acceptance. We need to open up our conversations about these issues to boys and men so that they can love their bodies as they are."

WHAT IS BODY IMAGE?

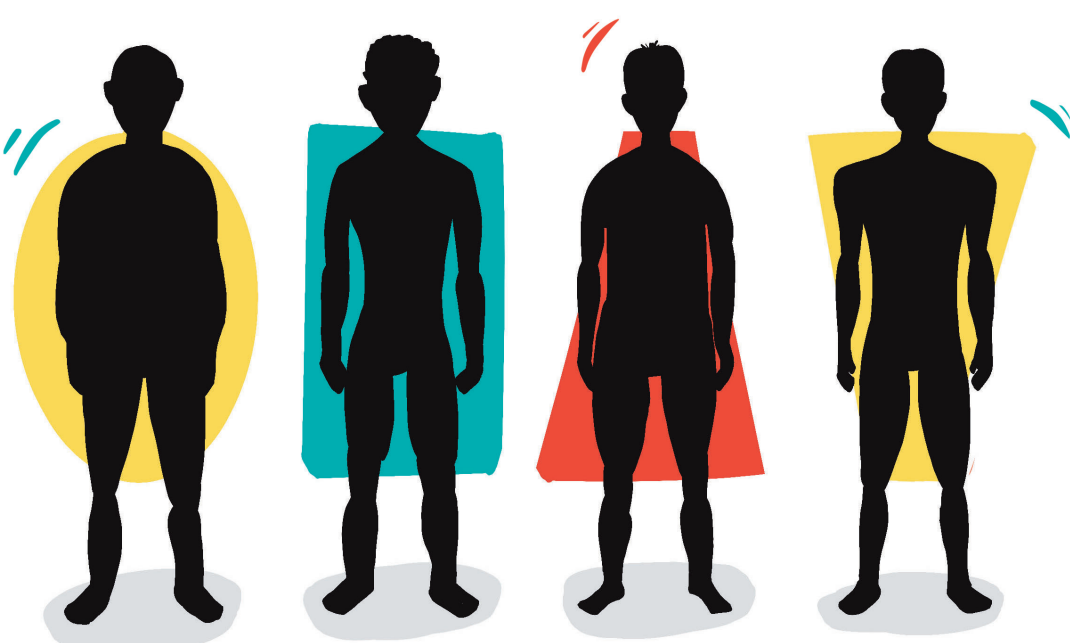
Body image is how you think and feel about your body. The way you think and feel about your body—your body image—matters. For example, if you wish you had bigger biceps, you may spend a lot of time in the gym lifting weights. If you want to be thinner, you may try to remove carbs from your **diet** (see Chapter 6 for all the reasons this is not a good idea!). If you wish that your ears didn't stick out as much as they do, you may consider getting surgery to change them.

But what if there are better ways to address your concerns about your appearance? Maybe changing how you look to fit in or to look a certain way isn't the answer. Maybe there is an easier way. **This book is full of information and advice about body image that will help you understand your body and develop positive feelings about it.**

Still not convinced that this book is for you? Take the quiz on the opposite page and then read how to score it.

These questions come from surveys that **researchers** have used to study body image, eating **behaviors**, and disordered eating among boys and men. If you answered "yes" to any of these questions, this book is definitely for you. Even if you came close to answering "yes" to any of these questions, read on!

There is nothing wrong with you if you pay attention to what you eat or care about how you look. Most people do. However, some of these thoughts may be healthy and some of them may not be. This book will help you stay on the path toward health and avoid problems that many boys and men experience when it comes to their body images, self-esteem, eating behaviors, and mental and physical health. **We want you to love being *you*.**



Boy's eating, weight, and body image survey		
	YES	NO
I worry about how I look.		
I don't always feel very good about myself.		
I am currently trying to change my weight.		
I am trying to gain weight or build muscle.		
What I eat has influenced how I think about myself as a person.		
If I break any of my food rules, I attempt to make up for it at my next meal.		
I don't feel like other people accept me as I am.		
I have continued eating despite feeling full, in an attempt to influence my muscularity.		
I have used meal-replacement supplements.		
I have added protein-based supplements to my diet.		
Other people do not seem to understand my food choices.		
I wish I could have more **respect** for myself.		
There are definitely foods I have avoided eating due to worry about how they might affect my shape or weight.		





We also want to increase thoughtful conversations about boys' and men's health. Unfortunately, boys and men tend to talk about health issues less often than girls and women do. It has sometimes been viewed as more macho or manly for boys and men not to talk about their (emotional) feelings or how they feel physically. Communication about health issues is critically important in order for all people—regardless of their gender identification—to feel good! We want this book to help answer all sorts of questions that you may have about your health, and also to increase your awareness of issues that may affect other people you know. By being educated about the issues we discuss in this book, you will be in a position to improve not only your own health, but others' health as well.

EXPERT ADVICE

Oona Hanson, *educator and health advocate, USA*

"When it comes to body image, many boys feel competing pressures—not wanting to be 'too small' while also being afraid of being 'too fat.' Because our culture links appearance concerns with girls, many boys wonder if something is wrong with them simply for caring about how they look. It's normal to feel self-conscious at times and to be aware of how others perceive you. But be careful about comparing your unique self to images you see—not only celebrities, athletes, and others in the media, but also your peers. And here's a secret: even those people who seem 'perfect' on the outside often struggle with anxiety about their looks. Shifting your focus to respecting and caring for your own body will improve your well-being and leave you with more energy for the things that matter most."

In each chapter of this book, be on the lookout for different features. We've designed this book so you don't have to read it from cover to cover for it to make sense. You can skip around (the index in the back of the book will tell you where to find certain topics) and read the features that you enjoy the most and find the most helpful.

In each chapter, you'll find:

- **Reliable information:** We summarize the latest science on the topic. If you see a word you don't know, check the glossary in the back of this book. As you read, remember you're a member of a large community that cares about these issues. We don't know many people who haven't given these issues some thought or had concerns about them.
- **Q & A:** During our careers, we've talked with hundreds of boys. For this book, we've asked them what questions they have about their bodies, eating, exercising, and all the other topics in this book. We provide factual answers to their questions—which are probably the ones you have, too. Below is an example.



Most of my friends are a lot taller than me. I hope that I catch up at some point. How do I know when I am done growing taller?

Many boys will notice that they grow fastest during middle school (10–14 years, approximately) as they enter puberty and experience a growth spurt. However, boys often continue to get taller throughout high school (14–18 years, approximately) and even after high school. It is possible that you will keep growing until you are 20 years old. As we'll discuss in Chapter 3, boys' experiences of puberty, which includes a growth spurt, vary a lot. The timing of the growth spurt varies from person to person; you may have friends who grow a lot in 6th grade, and others who get taller most quickly in 10th grade. One final thought: differences in height between people are largely determined by our genes. In other words, the majority of differences in height are due to our biology. Height is like shoe size—it's not something you can change. And what is the "perfect height" anyway?

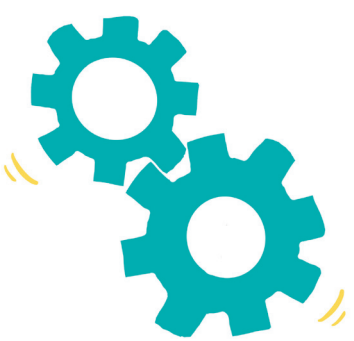
- **Myths and misbeliefs:** In each chapter, we share "**myths** and **misbeliefs**" about body image and related topics and explain why they aren't true. Here is an example:



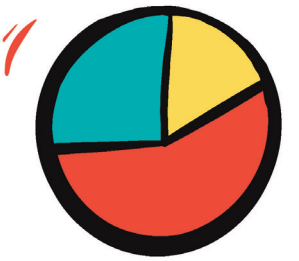
Boys don't—or shouldn't—cry. Being emotionally sensitive is a sign of weakness.

Boys often feel they're getting the message that it's really important to look strong (for example, **muscular**) and also that they are strong (for example, not emotional or sensitive). However, it is perfectly normal to have strong emotions; expressing your feelings is completely normal and healthy. In fact, some scientific research suggests that people who believe they must inhibit their emotions are **vulnerable** to health problems. Writing and talking about emotional experiences may improve how you feel physically and psychologically, and may even help to improve your immune functioning (your ability to fight off infections and maintain health).

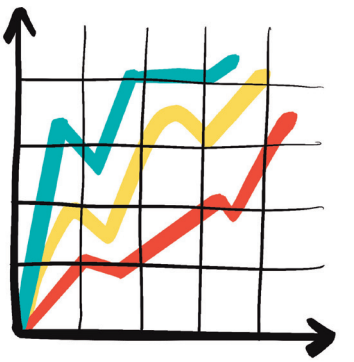
Being "masculine" does not mean that you can't be sensitive. If another boy or man ever **teases** you for being emotional it is most likely because *he* feels uncomfortable. Resist suggestions from others that you shouldn't express sadness and other strong emotions.



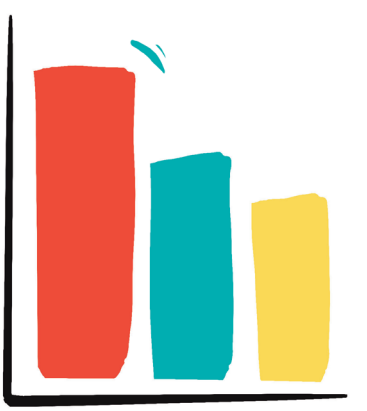
- **My story:** In the process of writing this book, we've relied on scientific research that takes into account hundreds and thousands of boys' experiences. But we've also interviewed individual boys, like Thomas David (his story is earlier in this chapter) and Mateo Carlos (his story is at the end of this chapter). These boys are all in their teens and twenties, and they shared their specific experiences in detail. Each chapter highlights some of these real boys' experiences, in their own voices.



- **Inspiration:** When it comes to feeling good about our bodies, we can all use some inspiration. Each chapter contains quotes, illustrations, and bits of information to help you think about your body and yourself in a **positive** way—and maybe even laugh about some of the issues that you've found stressful.



- **Ask the expert:** In the process of writing this book, we haven't only talked to hundreds of boys like you, we've also talked with experts. Sometimes what they've said is so helpful that we quote their advice. Look for these quotes throughout the chapters. Here's a quote from one of the first scientists to study body image among boys:



EXPERT ADVICE

Professor Marita McCabe, PhD,
Swinburn University, Australia

"When I started my research on male body image concerns in the 1990s, it was generally accepted that boys were not worried about the size and shape of their bodies—this was a girl problem. However, in our research we found that we were asking boys the wrong questions—we were asking questions that were relevant for girls, not boys, things like wanting to be slim or lose weight. Our research, and that of many other researchers, has now shown that even young boys are concerned about their bodies, but they are often focused on having a lean, strong, muscular body, rather than being thin."

- **Find out more:** The information in this book is **evidence-based** and scientific in nature. In other words, the ideas in this book are not based on our opinions, but on the work of thousands of scientists. If you want to read more about a topic, we provide references to this scientific work, which is a good place to start.

We provide you with the latest information so that you can grow up to be passionate, caring, and physically and emotionally healthy. Once you know the facts about the smartest way to develop a positive body image, you will have the tools that will help you to become your best self.





MATEO CARLOS, 20 YEARS OLD

When I was younger, I used to hate my body. I was heavy and I couldn't enjoy myself and I was really out of shape. I would find myself out of breath within 10 seconds of doing any **physical activity**. I also didn't like what I saw when I looked at myself in the mirror. Currently, I am still somewhat heavy, but I am pleased with my body. I don't deprive myself of foods that I enjoy, but I try to not eat too many sweet treats.

The thing that has changed is that I work out, exercise, and play sports as much as I can. I do this because I enjoy it and I know it is good for me. I've also been able to notice myself feeling stronger and I get to spend time with my family and friends while being physically active. I've been able to meet so many people because of sports and I never regret the time I spend playing sports. When I was in middle school, I couldn't run a single mile without completely dying, but by the time I was in high school, I was running 3.5 miles and still feeling good afterwards.

My friends and family have been influential in terms of how I think about my body. I was often bullied about my weight, and my friends and family helped me have a stronger sense of myself. I've come to appreciate that everybody has a different body type. Although some things might work for your friends or family, that doesn't mean it's going to work for you too. And that's okay. Don't beat yourself up over it. Don't let anybody tell you who you are—that's up to you to decide.



Summing Up #BodyImageIsForBoys

- ☑ Body image is defined as how you think and feel about your body.
- ☑ Your body image may affect your physical health, mental and emotional well-being, and your health behaviors.
- ☑ Understanding your body image and knowing how to develop a positive body image will benefit you across your entire life.

Find out more

- Dr. Stuart Murray and Dr. Jason Negata are two of the leading scientists studying body image and eating concerns among boys and men. The questionnaire in this chapter is adapted from some of their research.
- For more scholarly articles and web pages with information about body image, see the companion website to this book: www.theBodyImageBookforBoys.com

