

The Body Image Book for Boys

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Book Review

The Body Image Book for Boys

By Markey, C., Hart, D., and Zacher, D. (2022).

Cambridge University Press, 2022, 162 pages (paperback)

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BEING YOU: The Body Image Book for Boys by Dr. Charlotte Markey, Dr. Daniel Hart, and Douglas N. Zacher, is an excellent resource for pre-teen and teenage boys of all backgrounds. The authors have done an exceptional job at breaking down important topics such as diet, exercise, and society's expectations for males and how these factors impact an adolescent boy's body image and self-esteem. From the layout of the book to the personal stories of males who have gone through puberty, Markey et al. have created a resource for both adolescent boys and their caregivers that provides sound information on physical and mental health as well as how to become media-literate in a world that is becoming social media centric in the realm of teenagers.

Markey et al. designed their book with the teenage male brain in mind, and the way they chose to format their book makes this obvious. It is designed "so [the readers] don't have to read it from cover to cover for it to make sense" and boys can "read the features that [they] enjoy the most and find the most helpful" (Markey et al., 2022 p. 7). The layout of *BEING YOU* allows readers to pick and choose what they want to read based on what is relevant to their life and their current interests. The first chapter explains the different sections in the book so that the reader is aware of what to expect while they read.

BEING YOU does an excellent job at explaining what it means to be body-positive as a boy and asks the reader to "focus on functionality" (p. 15). Focusing on what

their bodies can do for them and how their bodies feel is a recurring theme throughout the entire book. As the reader progresses through the book, topics that can be challenging for young males to explore when they do not have a positive male role model to have these conversations with are brought up. Topics such as nutrition, hygiene, puberty, masturbation, and pornography are all covered during various chapters of this book.

In Chapter 3, the authors explain what is going to happen to the male body as it goes through puberty and how to properly take care of and maintain good hygiene. How to manage body odor appropriately and how to maintain new hair growth (pp. 36-37) are examples of topics that adolescent boys may not be taught about unless they ask an adult. Diagrams of the male reproductive organs along with explanations of how the genitals will change take away the mystery of what is or will be happening to their bodies as they go through puberty (pp. 46-47). Markey et al. also discuss the topic of masturbation and how “most boys masturbate and there is nothing unhealthy or wrong about doing so” (p. 47). These difficult conversations that young, developing males need to have are addressed in an appropriate manner that will help to limit the stigma around them.

Media Literacy is another topic that is covered in detail. With the rise of social media influencers and the rise in the number of adolescents who use social media as part of their daily routines, Markey et al. spend chapter 4 discussing how “researchers who study how the media contributes to body image have found, across many different studies, that the media *does* affect body image” (p. 61). In this chapter, the authors also explore video games and how “video games tend to present players as avatars with exaggerated, idealized bodies and big ‘guns’” (p. 67) and bring to light how these characters can negatively impact a person’s self-esteem. This chapter also discusses the negative impact of various media on the adolescent boys’ body image and self-esteem, it also offers suggestions that help to combat these feelings. Markey et al. do an exemplary job at explaining what media literacy is, provide a list of steps for how to become media literate, and explain these steps in language that is accessible to the reader. The authors give boys permission to not engage in behaviours that they see modeled in their day to day lives from their peers, caregivers, and media.

Chapters 6 to 8 focus on the importance of fueling your body with nutrient-dense foods. The authors explain both macronutrients and micronutrients, what eating in moderation looks like, and how to balance meals in a way that allows adolescents the freedom to eat foods that they already enjoy (i.e., fast foods, sweets, sodas, etc.). Markey et al.

also explain the dangers of food fads, explaining that “these fads are likely to cause more harm than good” (p. 134) and provides explanations on how to determine if a celebrity, influencer, or doctor is telling you to try a food fad (p. 141).

The final chapters of *BEING YOU* focus heavily on the importance of taking care of mental health. Markey et al. discuss various ways of practicing mindfulness, self-care, and give boys permission to be compassionate towards themselves and others. Chapter 7 explores topics like depression, anxiety, and substance use disorder in a non-judgemental way and reiterates that “some people need extra self-care because of a physical health condition or disability” (p. 199). Explaining sensitive topics like this helps to break down the idea of *toxic masculinity* and allow young men to be more compassionate towards themselves and other males.

BEING YOU: The Body Image Book for Boys is an exemplary resource for both adolescent boys and their caregivers. Markey et al. have compiled many brilliant resources that are accessible, break down societal norms, and give boys permission to appreciate what their bodies can do for them rather than focusing on how their bodies look. The authors encourage the readers to have a holistic approach to health and question the myths and misconceptions about society’s views on masculinity without bringing judgment to people who may not be ready to question their views of the world around them and their feelings about themselves.