

## Body Image, Body Scrimmage

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**Body Image, Body Scrimmage** is a touching series of stories and accounts about body image written by middle school students. Project Worker and Editor, Jenni Savigny, defines the term 'body scrimmage' as 'the scrum-like thoughts and feelings we often have about our own bodies'. She believes the term is often more useful than 'body image' because many people take the term literally and think it's simply about 'what you look like or body parts', when the real issues are often related to the negative thoughts and feelings that we associate with our bodies.

This is the core issue that the book deals with—the negative feelings that young people have about their bodies and their body image. Indeed, scrimmage is a perfect term to use when discussing the internal struggles that all of us face when we think negatively and obsessively about our own bodies. It's undeniable that in this century, we have a massive, worldwide problem with body image.

The book is the result of collaboration between **Jenni Savigny, Mental Illness Education ACT, Canberra Youth Theatre, the ACT Writer's Centre and Healthpact**. It was born out of the belief that some healthy ways of dealing with scrimmaging could be found if young people could get together and discuss, write and publish stories about body scrimmaging. It was believed that young people reading such stories would then be able to gain some positive insights into how to better deal with their own body image problems.

There was a unique two-stage process behind the writing of these stories, which were written by **boys and girls aged between 10 and 14 years**, from Gold Creek School and Wanniasa School. Stage one involved a two-hour drama workshop to introduce the body scrimmaging theme, learn some drama techniques and get story ideas. From this, many stories were generated and each scrimmager received individual feedback, which they could use to redraft their story. Stage two was an intensive workshop program that involved each scrimmager undertaking four drama workshops in groups, based on their stories as well as individual story mapping. Many scrimmagers said they really enjoyed the intensive workshop process and felt that their stories were valued by others and listened to without judgement.

While most of the stories are fictional, the seriousness of the themes they deal with is not. Sadly, scrimmaging is prolific and progressively increasing amongst young people. Each story explores a personal journey through body image and scrimmage issues and other related issues including: teasing and harassment inside and outside of school, differing gender rules, popularity, clothes shopping, dating and party etiquette, family and friends, the media's effect on body image and disability.

All 22 stories are poignantly told, with many containing painfully depressing realisations for the reader about the dangerousness of trying to attain unrealistic body images, the power of the peer group and negative body-image or scrimmage self-talk. 'Body Image, Body Scrimmage' is a great example of how collaboration between young people and experienced professionals has the potential to move the body scrimmaging reader to laughter, tears and hopefully, positive change.\*\*\*

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