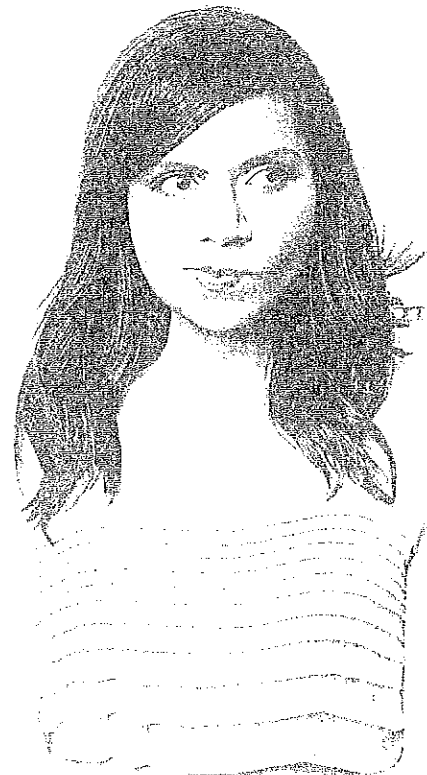


"[Kaling is] like Tina Fey's cool little sister.  
Or perhaps . . . the next Nora Ephron." —NEW YORK TIMES

# IS EVERYONE HANGING OUT WITHOUT ME? (AND OTHER CONCERNS)

NEW YORK  
TIMES  
BESTSELLER



# MINDY KALING

## Chubby for Life

I DON'T REMEMBER a time when I wasn't chubby. Like being Indian, being chubby feels like it is just part of my permanent deal. I remember being in first grade, in Mrs. Gilmore's class at Fiske Elementary School, and seeing that Ashley Kemp, the most popular girl in our class, weighed only thirty-seven pounds. We knew this because we weighed her on the industrial postal scale they kept in the teacher's supply closet. I was so envious. I snuck into the supply closet later that same day to weigh myself. I was a whopping sixty-eight pounds.

Some of the first math I understood was that I was closer to twice Ashley's weight than to her weight.

"Don't be closer to *twice* a friend's weight than to her actual weight," I told myself. This little mantra has helped me strave off obesity for more than two decades.

My mom's a doctor, but because she came from India and then Africa, where childhood obesity was not a problem, she put no premium on having skinny kids. In fact, she and my dad didn't mind having a chubby daughter. Part of me wonders if it even made them feel a little prosperous, like *Have you seen our overweight Indian child? Do you know how statistically rare this is?* It will then not come as a surprise to you that I've never been thin in my life—except the day I was born, when I was six pounds.

It's a small point of pride that I was a six-pound baby, because from my limited understanding of baby weights, that's on the skinnier side. I haun my low baby weight the way really obese people must haun their dainty, small feet. It's my sole claim to skinny fame.



My older brother Vijak and me, interpreted as I was plotting to eat him.

As you can see, from then on, however, it was full-speed-ahead food paradise! In grade school, I would vacillate along the spectrum from chubby to full-on fat until I was about fourteen. Being overweight is so common in America and comes in so many forms that you can't just call someone "fat" and have the reasonable expectation anyone will understand you. Here's the breakdown:

**Chubby:** A regular-size person who could lose a few, for whom you feel affection.

**Chubster:** An overweight, adorable child. That kid from *Two and a Half Men* for the first couple of years.

**Fatso:** An antiquated term, really. In the 1970s, mean sorority girls would call a pledge this. Probably most often used on people who aren't even really fat, but who fear being fat.

**Fatass:** Not usually used to describe weight, actually. This descriptive term is more a reflection of one's laziness. In the writers' room of *The Office*, an upper-level writer might get impatient and yell, "Eric, take your fat ass and those six fatasses and go write this B-story! I don't want to hear any more excuses why the plot doesn't make sense!"

**Jabba the Hut:** *Star Wars* villain. Also, something you can call yourself after a particularly filling Thanksgiving dinner that your aunts and uncles will all laugh really hard at.

**Obese:** A serious, nonpejorative way to describe someone who is unhealthily overweight.

**Obeseatron:** A nickname you give to someone you adore who has just stepped on your foot accidentally, and it hurts. Alternatively, a fat robot.

**Overweight:** When someone is roughly thirty pounds too heavy for his or her frame.

**Pudgy:** See "Chubby."

**Pudgo:** See "Chubster."

**Tab o' Lard:** A huge compliment given by Depression-era people to other, less skinny people.

*Whales: A really, really mean way that teen boys target teen girls. See the following anecdote.*

### DUANTE: THE WHALES

These have been two times in my life—ages fourteen and nineteen—when I lost a ton of weight over a short period of time. At fourteen, I lost the weight because of Duante Diallo.

In ninth grade, my class was made up mostly of the same kids with whom I had gone to middle school, with the exception of about twenty splashy new students. One of those students was Duante.

Duante Diallo was a handsome kid from Senegal who'd moved to Boston to play basketball for our school. He was immediately the star forward of our varsity basketball team. We had a not-great artsy-private-school basketball team, the kind made up of slender boys whose primary goal was to seem well-rounded for college applications. But you could tell Duante would've been the star of even a really good team. He was beloved by teachers because he was a brave kid for being so far away from his parents, and beloved by students because he was good-looking, a jock, and had an interesting African accent. Also, people couldn't believe the stuff he had done in Senegal. Like smoke, drive a car, have sex, live in a village, and hold a gun. When he was introduced at a student assembly, he chose to give a short speech where he taught us a sports cheer in Senegalese. In the hallways, small crowds would form around Duante as he shared stories from his past. Once he shot a cow with an AK-47. He was so popular you could barely look at him without being blinded by cool.

Duante was also, unfortunately, a dynamical asshole. Maybe I should have gleaned this from the joy with which he told the story about murdering a cow with a massive gun. He fixated on

me early in the year as being overweight and was open with his observations. At first it had the veneer of niceness. For example, once I was getting a drink of water in the hallway where he and his friends were standing.

DUANTE: You would actually be really pretty if you lost weight.

His face was gentle and earnest, as though what he had really said was, "You remind me of a sunset in my native Senegal." It was confusing. All I could muster as a reply to this insulting comment was "thank you." I was hurt, but I rationalized that maybe Duante had been around only extremely thin African girls his whole third-world life and didn't know American girls had access to refrigeration, and that we didn't have to divide up UN food parcels with our neighbors. (This may have been a tad racist an assumption on my part. Look, we were both in the wrong.)

By winter, I had not lost any weight, and in fact had gained about ten more pounds. This really bothered Duante. I think he felt he had gone out of his way to give me some valuable advice and I had chosen not to follow it, therefore insulting him. One day in February, I walked into the freshmen center, he stopped mid-conversation with his friends and gestured to me.

DUANTE: Speaking of whales . . .

I don't even think they'd been talking about whales. The guys all laughed, but even I could tell some felt guilty doing it. I had been friends with most of them since we were kids. Danny Feinstein, who was my Latin study buddy, came up to me later that afternoon and told me that "What Duante said wasn't cool." He had a stoic look of noble do-gooder, although he had said nothing at the time of the insult. Again, I was forced to say thank

you. How I continually found myself in situations where I felt I had to say thank you to mean guys, I'm not sure.

It was a tough winter. I had gone from competitive, bookish nerd to nervous target. If this was *Heathers*, I was Martha Dumphruck and this mean African kid was all three Heathers. I turned my obsessive teenage energy away from reading *Mad* magazine and focused on my diet. I didn't have access to a lot of weight-loss resources, because this was pre-Internet. There was one Weight Watchers near us, but it shared a mini-mall parking lot with a sketchy Salvation Army, and my parents didn't like the idea of taking me there for meetings. So I invented a makeshift diet formula: I would eat exactly half of what was put in front of me, and no dessert. Without exercising, I lost thirty pounds in about two months. A janitor at school whom I liked, Mrs. Carington, would see me and say, "Damn, you've got a metabolism on you, don't you girl?" The janitors were always in my corner.

I remember waking up in the morning and looking down at my fingers and seeing they had shrunk overnight. Suddenly I was freezing all the time, like those skinny girls in movie theaters are always complaining about, and needed to sleep with an extra wool blanket. My face thinned out, and my belly went away. I stopped wearing oversize college sweatshirts and corduroy pants with elastic waists. Light brown lines appeared on my upper inner arms that looked like little rivers headed to my shoulder blades. I actually thought they looked pretty, until my mom told me they were stretch marks from losing so much weight so fast. It was like a Disney sci-fi movie. Mom was impressed but didn't want me to go overboard, which was impossible, because I was still eating a lot. I just had taken a break from eating like a professional football player. I loved all the side effects of losing the weight, but the reason I did it was so that Duante would stop making fun of me, so I could hang out in

the freshmen center again, and not where I had been: across the street in the Fairy Woods.\*

I thought Duante would finally leave me alone, but he didn't. One day I was walking down the hallway to class and passed Duante and his group of friends.

DUANTE: Remember when Mindy was like (blowing out his cheeks to make a fat face) a whale?

They all laughed. Come on, dude. *Remember when?* I'm getting made fun of because I *used* to be fat? The laws of bullying allow you to be cruel even when the victim had made strides for improvement? This is when I realized that bullies have no code of conduct.

Lucky for me, Duante was a bad student. English was his second language and that made everything harder for him. I delighted in the fact that he had to go to the middle school to take some of his classes. Sophomore year he broke his leg when he slipped during practice and collided with another student. For a short time he was even more popular, as sports injuries tend to make people, but then soon enough his crutches were tedious to people when he was slow-moving and hard to get around in the hallway. He didn't play that season, and was never as good at basketball after the injury. He dropped out junior year, and I heard he got a girl pregnant. Part of me now feels a little bad for Duante Diallo, but not at the time. I was so happy. That fucking mean Songealese kid.

\* The Fairy Woods was a small forestry area by the Charles River. This was where bad kids and frustrated teachers went to smoke. It was rumored to be a place where gay men had anonymous sex. This is why it had maturely been dubbed the Fairy Woods. I did not put this together until I was twenty-five.

## AN INTERVIEW WITH

I stayed at a pretty normal weight until college, when I put on the freshman thirty-five in the first six months. What's that? You've never heard of the freshman thirty-five? That's funny, because neither had my parents, who welcomed me home on spring vacation with mild horror. I was a vaguely familiar food monster who had eaten their daughter.

When I lost weight at nineteen, it was significant because that is when I first started exercising; I had always successfully avoided exercise as a kid, by being an extra in school plays, or signing up for fake-y sports like Tai Chi, or manipulating gym teachers into letting me read books in the bleachers. So it was at Dartmouth College, in 1999, that I discovered exercise when my best friend, Brenda, taught me how to run. I was a sloth upon whom Brenda took pity, and she saved me from near-obesity with the patience and tenacity of Annie Sullivan, the Miracle Worker.

Our workout routine was simple and mind-numbingly repetitive, an atmosphere in which I flourished, oddly. I started out walking for twenty minutes, and then Bren would make me do little spurts of running between lampposts or street signs. (For the record, Bren, a natural athlete, runs, like, a six-minute mile. This was an absolute waste of time for her. She was just doing this out of her well-brought-up Catholic kindness.) Then we'd come back to our apartment and do *Abs of Steel* together. Even though we mercilessly made fun of the video, which was from the deep eighties and included Tamilee Webb wearing aqua bike shorts and a pink thong leotard, we did it religiously. Tamilee had a rock-hard butt, and there was nothing ironic about it. The whole experience was surprisingly fun and cemented a friendship between Brenda and me for life. How can you not make a best friend out of a girl who has seen the sweat-soaked pelvis area of your gym pants, daily, and who still chooses to spend

time with you? In this safe and friendly setting, I lost thirty pounds in a semester.

## I LOVE DIETS

I wish I could just be one of those French women you read about who stays thin by eating only the most gourmet foods in tiny, ascetic proportions, but I could never do that. First of all, I largely don't *like* gourmet food. I *like* frozen yogurt. I think it tastes better than ice cream. I love diet soda; when I drink juice or regular soda it makes my blood sugar spike and I act like a cracked out Rachael Ray, but without the helpful household tips. I even like margarine, though everyone tells me it's basically poison or whatever. So, that's one thing I have going against me. Another obstacle is that my pattern is to eat exactly as much as whoever is hanging out with me, and between boyfriends and my tall athletic friends, we're a bunch of huge eaters. I really do have a remarkable appetite. I remember when the news reports came out about Michael Phelps's ten-thousand-calorie-a-day diet, and everyone was so shocked. But I just thought, *yep, I could do that, no problem.*

Ultimately, the main reasons why I will be chubby for life are (1) I have virtually no hobbies except dieting. I can't speak any non-English languages, knit, ski, scrapbook, or cook. I have no pets. I don't know how to do drugs. I lost my passport three years ago when I moved into my house and never got it renewed.



Video games scare me because they all seem to simulate situations I'd hate to be in, like war or stealing cars. So if I ever lost weight I would also lose my only hobby; (2) I have no discipline; I'm like if Private Benjamin had never toughened up but, in fact, got worse; (3) Guys I've dared have been into me the way I am; and (4) I'm pretty happy with the way I look, so long as I don't break a beach chair.

My love for dieting is a recent realization. It turns out I have a passion for trying out new eating plans and exercises. Dukan, South Beach, French Women Don't Get Fat, Cavemen Don't Get Fat, Single-Celled Organisms Don't Get Fat, Skinny Birch, Skinny Wretch—after a while on one regimen, I get bored and want to try a new one. It's actually fun for me to read all the material and testimonials of the tan, shabby doctors who stand by the diets medically. It's only a matter of time before the Jane Austen Diet comes out, and I'm really looking forward to spending a spring adhering to that one.

If someone called me chubby, it would no longer be something that kept me up late at night. Duane Djalilo has no power over me anymore, unless he was deported and he's grown up to be an African warlord or something and has a machete. Being called fat is not like being called stupid or unfunny, which is the worst thing you could ever say to me. Do I envy Jennifer Hudson for being able to lose all that weight and look smokin' hot? Of course, yes. Do I sometimes look at Gisele Bündchen and wonder how awesome life would be if I never had to wear Spanx? Duh, of course. That's kind of the point of Gisele Bündchen. I wish I could be like that, and maybe I will, once or twice, for a very short period of time. But on the list of things I want to do in my lifetime, that's not near the top. I mean, it's not near the bottom, either. I'd say it's right above "Learn to drive a Vespa," but several notches below "film a chase scene for a movie."

## I Am Not an Athlete

**I** KNOW, I KNOW. Did you put down this book in surprise?

I've always been *extremely* bad at anything athletic. I know it sounds like hyperbole here, but this isn't like when I exclaim "I love that dress so much I want to kill myself." This is for real.

The strange thing is, I love watching certain sports as much as I detest participating in them myself. In the early 1980s, when my family was fixated on the Celtics-Lakers rivalry, I sat in front of the TV with them, thinking Larry Bird was the handsomest man in the world.\* But if handed an actual basketball, I would instantly begin to cry. For me, doing sports was like meeting the Disney characters at Disney World: On TV I loved Mickey Mouse, but when I met the actual real-life Mickey, or rather, his impersonator, and he tried to hug me in his warm, fuzzy suit, I recoiled in fear.

### PART ONE: BIKES

I learned to ride a bike at age twelve. That was crazy old for my neighborhood. I had been successfully avoiding learning for

\* At the age of six, the criteria for handsome was, simply: "Is he not related to me?" and "Have I seen him on television?" That was it. By this standard, Larry Bird, Dick Clark, Andy Rooney. All handsome guys.