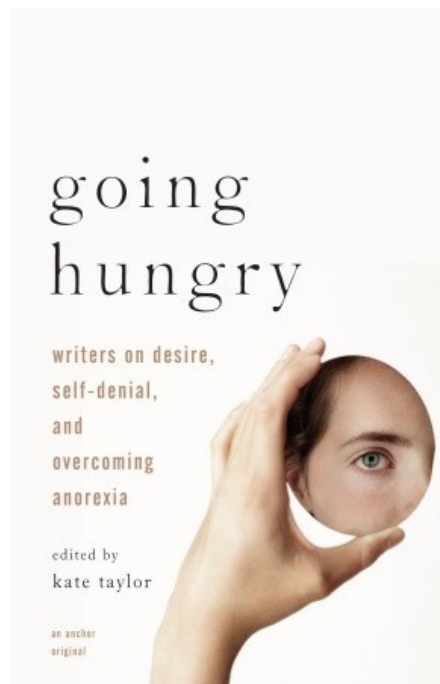




Going Hungry: Writers on Desire, Self-Denial, and Overcoming Anorexia

Kate M. Taylor

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Here, collected for the first time, 19 writers describe their eating disorders from the distance of recovery, exposing as never before the anorexic's self-enclosed world. Taking up issues including depression, genetics, sexuality, sports, religion, fashion and family, these essays examine the role anorexia plays in a young person's search for direction. Powerful and immensely informative, this collection makes accessible the mindset of a disease that has long been misunderstood.

With essays by Priscilla Becker, Francesca Lia Block, Maya Browne, Jennifer Egan, Clara Elliot, Amanda Fortini, Louise Glück, Latria Graham, Francine du Plessix Gray, Trisha Gura, Sarah Haight, Lisa Halliday, Elizabeth Kadetsky, Maura Kelly, Ilana Kurshan, Joyce Maynard, John Nolan, Rudy Ruiz, and Kate Taylor.

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Going Hungry: Writers on Desire, Self-Denial, and Overcoming Anorexia Details

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Liana says

One of the better, more comprehensive anthologies on eating disorders that I've ever read. The editor took the effort to include a diverse range of writers--old, young, male, female, black, latin, recovered, "maintaining." There are all kinds of eating disorders represented here, and all kinds of idea of what "overcoming anorexia" and "desire" mean. The kind of book I wish we could latch onto instead of "Wasted" and "Wintergirls," perpetuating the mythos of the tortured teen-aged middle-class white girl.

Jess says

I still haven't formulated my review for this one. If you are eating disordered - stay away. mentions habits, numbers, and rituals in often great detail. Many of the essays romanticise the disease. Some essays take a "then one day i decided not to be eating disordered and I wasn't" approach. Competitive - perpetuating notions if you weren't hospitalised you weren't really sick. lacks insight and often lacks reflection. Some essays are near on unreadable (I actually skipped one by a poet because... She seemed more interested in her romance with words than delivering any kind of insightful reflection on her disease).

Kudos though for including a variety of ages, races, genders, and sexualities.

Rachel says

I am always leery of picking up first-hand accounts of experiences with disorders. I don't know why because I'm a qualitative researcher who does Participatory Action Research but hey, we're all full of contradictions right. Anyway, I decided to check this out. so many books about Anorexia are admiring the problem, or they're written at the start of recovery. It's often one person's story and I have a tendency to assume someone who has written a book is the arbiter of what it means to have X disorder. But this book is about recovery, and it has hard truths and lessons that aren't preachy or self-important. It's just people telling their truth and the reader can choose what to do with it.

Something that meant a lot to me about this book is that the authors range in age. Some of them (when the book was published) were still in university, others had long since graduated. Through the sample, the book challenged the idea that Anorexia is ultimate First World Problem that privileged white girls just get. It showed that even though everyone's experience and origins are different, there are common threads, everyone in the book has anorexia.

I do want to bring up that this is the book that led me to say "Screw Diagnostic Criteria" because authors would point out that they "hadn't gotten scary thin", not all of them lost their periods for example or met the necessary weight percentage. And yet they still identified as anorexics. That's because the disorder is more than a set of check boxes, it's a label that can help people give voice and face to their experiences. And the authors are fearless, not shying away from even the darkest depths of the disorder. And in every story there's hope, like Pandora's box. Some people have the huge going to the hospital wake up calls, but for many it's a different experience. What stood out to me is how almost every person could point to a "small" act of

decency or kindness from a loved one that broke through, and that is huge.

It's a collection of life stories and yes, there were some that were not as compelling to me as others, but not because of writing. Some stories were very emotionally intense for me so having stories that didn't leave me almost sobbing on the El was a welcome break. It would feel like coming up for air rather than something that made me disengage as a reader. I cannot recommend this book highly enough to anyone who wants to know more about the human face of Anorexia and develop something other than pity for those on that journey.

Sarah Dahl says

The different experiences and perspectives in this book helped me gain a lot of insight in to what people may experience with eating disorders.

Jimmy says

We can always learn by reading about the stories of others. A few seemed to not totally fit the topic, but they all told me something about the person. The two most common words throughout the book: control and perfection.

Deb says

*Starving for life *

On the surface, anorexia is a tragic disease of self-starvation. Underneath, however, lies an individual with a voracious hunger for life, meaning, purpose, connection, and validation. *_Going Hungry_* is an illuminating collection of essays from 19 writers whose personal experiences shed light on this highly misunderstood disease, and offer a deeper look into the mindset of this body-destructive disorder. Informative, fascinating, poignant, touching, and eye-opening, *_Going Hungry_* offers a much-needed course to the growing menu of eating disorder publications.

Anne Green says

As a collection of personal essays, this book is instructive reading on the form. Some of the essays are extremely well written, insightful and strike just the right balance between memoir and reflection on the meaning of life events that shaped the authors. As what is claimed in the introduction to be a "broad, stereotype-defying cross section" of stories of anorexia sufferers, it falls down, in that the backgrounds of the writers are distinctly homogenous. Of the 18 authors, only two are men and only two are African American women. The rest comprise well educated women from affluent backgrounds, who attended prestigious schools, travelled abroad and experienced what might appear to others as glamorous lifestyles. This tends to reinforce the stereotype that anorexia primarily afflicts upper middle class adolescent girls and doesn't take into account the fact that it doesn't discriminate. Older, more ethnically diverse and socio-economically disadvantaged people (not just women) suffer too.

In that sense it was disappointing, despite the quality of writing of the contributors. Nevertheless those who share this eating disorder will find it of value and relate to the tales of progression of the condition and will gain insight from the strategies for recovery described.

Liz says

This is a book perfect for anyone who struggles with an eating disorder and understands that this illness is not a flash in the pan, teenage disturbance. It is a life-struggle, one you have to actively fight against. This book looks at the entire spectrum, including stories from males with anorexia, women of color, and women well, well past their teenage years. I recommend this book for not only survivors of this illness, but for those who are struggling, like myself. Furthermore, if you know someone with an eating disorder, please read this book. Unlike movies like *Thin* and books like *Winter Girls*, this book gives you a holistic image of what it means to have an eating disorder.

Rather than being too heavy or depressing, this book will uplift you.

Ashley says

The most interesting aspect of this collection was the ways in which eating disorders become an aesthetic and a tendency long after the disordered state has been "recovered." These essays may be triggering to some women.

The common strains of attraction between people who suffer or have suffered in the past is not often discussed. My only critique is that at times the disorders seemed glorified- but that's exactly the nature of the cognitive trap that must be recovered from through new ways of viewing life.

Clara says

As with many essay collections, there were plenty of forgettable ones and a few standouts. Kate Taylor's introduction provided a good mix of autobiographical anecdotes and social and cultural history of anorexia. "Hungry Men," by John Nolan, was a well-researched and well-documented exploration of the similarities and differences between the experiences of male and female sufferers of eating disorders. Latria Graham's "Black-and-White Thinking" discussed how racial issues play into eating disorders among black women.

There were also a few truly awful essays, like Louise Gluck's almost romantic portrayal of her eating disorder. In general, though, if you have an interest in this topic, this is a good place to start.

Kay says

Many of these were wonderfully written, heartbreaking stories of individual experiences with eating disorders. These stories are familiar to those of us who have gone through it ourselves, or to those who have read other books on the topic. Many of these authors had wonderful insight, and a handful had a great deal of ambivalence about their disorder. There was one particular chapter that didn't seem to have any relation to the rest, though I don't remember which. I can't say it was enjoyable, because reading about eating disorders is always a painful experience for me, but it was beautifully written and the editor did a great job of pulling together a well balanced collection of voices.

Nihilistic Librarian says

A little dated in terms of what "causes" anorexia, but worth a read. I wished some of the essays were longer for a few of the contributors. Now I know why this is classified as a Teen/YA book. I would recommend Marya Hornbacher's "Wasted" over this book, as well as the companion book to Lauren Greenfield's "Thin."

Alexa Hamilton says

Someone handed me this book and said "it might be good for teens" and instead of sitcking it in some pile to sit on my desk forever, I actually read it. The essays were well-written, not sob stories of eating disorders but discussions of how it felt or how it feels to have those disorders and to pull through it. The strength of the collection lay in the diverse group of authors.

Liralen says

I've read a criticism of this book that argues that it sends mixed messages -- that, yes, the contributors talk about all the negative effects eating disorders have had on their lives, but that they are also all successful people, acclaimed writers, many with degrees from Ivy League or otherwise prestigious institutions. (I wish I could remember where I read that -- what book? What article?) Where are the average people? the criticism asks. Where are the people whose eating disorders had devastating consequences, or who *didn't* become writers?

That particular criticism doesn't resonate with me as much as it might, because I've *read* books and essays about eating disorders that were written by non-writers and, well, there's often a very obvious difference in quality. That is, yes please, I'd love some more balance. But there's also something that a writer, a real *writer*, can bring to the table that a non-writer can't.

No, what struck me as I reread this was that although the subtitle mentions *overcoming anorexia*, that's not entirely accurate. Some of the writers overcame anorexia, yes. Some of them overcame bulimia, or something that might be more accurately described (although not named in this book) as EDNOS. But some of them -- I didn't count, but more than a few -- talk about their eating disorders as ongoing, as something they've learned to live with or work around. I am struck by how many of them, although viewing anorexia as something in the past, mention obsessions with staying under certain weights or maintaining peculiar eating habits.

The writing is all good or better than good, but gosh. So much qualifying.
I was sick but not that sick.

*I'm fine now because I can eat what I want and maintain a very low BMI.
I know I'm better because I finally thought someone was too thin.*

That's not all of them, obviously, or even the majority (again, I didn't count), but I still find it surprising. There's less hope than I remember here, and more concessions presented as hope.

Krystal says

A book of stories by a number of individuals who have suffered from anorexia. I liked that it showed numerous ways that anorexia can be manifest. What I did not like is that many of the authors used numbers, particularly low weights, which I think many people would find triggering. It made me sad to hear the underlying tone in many of the stories thoughts of, "It wasn't that bad for me because I was never that skinny." or "I wasn't skinny for very long, so it wasn't a big deal." I think this could perpetuate people's thoughts that they do not deserve help because their eating disorder "isn't that bad." While noting all of these things, I think it is important to respect that these are people's stories as they see fit to tell them and I'm sure they wrote how they truly felt/feel about having anorexia. Overall, I am conflicted about this book.
