



How to Disappear Completely: On Modern Anorexia

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She devoured their memoirs and magazine articles, committing the most salacious details of their cautionary tales to memory--how little they ate, their lowest weights, and their merciless exercise regimes--to learn what it would take to be the very best anorectic. When she was hospitalized for anorexia at fifteen, she found herself in an existential wormhole: how can one suffer from something one has actively sought out? Through her own decade-long battle with anorexia, which included three lengthy hospitalizations, Osgood harrowingly describes the haunting and competitive world of inpatient facilities populated with other adolescents, some as young as ten years old.

With attuned storytelling and unflinching introspection, Kelsey Osgood unpacks the modern myths of anorexia, examining the cult-like underbelly of eating disorders in the young, as she chronicles her own rehabilitation. *How to Disappear Completely* is a brave, candid and emotionally wrenching memoir that explores the physical, internal, and social ramifications of eating disorders and subverts many of the popularly held notions of the illness and, most hopefully, the path to recovery.

How to Disappear Completely: On Modern Anorexia Details

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From Reader Review How to Disappear Completely: On Modern Anorexia for online ebook

Julie Ehlers says

If you're just looking at the back-cover copy or various other blurbs, it's very hard to tell what this book is about, so I'll try to summarize briefly. This book is about the culture of anorexia—not just about the disease itself, but about how the many books, movies, articles, websites, and TV shows about it affect and even harm women and girls in the name of education and awareness. It's also about how the culture of inpatient eating disorder programs can actually lead to competition and comparisons among patients, possibly making them worse instead of better, and about the language we use concerning those who suffer from eating disorders and how detrimental it can be. Finally, the book is a memoir of the author's own anorexia, although she tries valiantly not to give any "triggering" information—i.e., information about her lowest weight, or her eating plan(s) when she was sick.

I don't have any personal experience with full-blown eating disorders, so perhaps I'm not the best person to comment on this, but I thought this book was unique and quite valuable. I've read some of the more famous eating-disorder books (*Wasted*, by Marya Hornbacher, being the most famous), and I've seen Lauren Greenfield's documentary, but until recently it had never occurred to me that texts like these would be absorbed by patients and become an actual part of their experience with their disease. Osgood also frames the addiction aspect of anorexia in a thought-provoking way—what other addict, besides an anorexic person, actively strives to become the "best" addict they can be? These are only some of the issues the book addresses—there's a lot going on here. The book is also entertaining, in the best possible sense; it moves swiftly and gives you a lot to think about.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the book is also problematic in some ways. As I said, Osgood tries not to be triggering, but there's really no way avoid that pitfall entirely. When she names famous anorexic women—not famous in the Mary-Kate Olsen sense, but famous *among other anorexic women*, I couldn't help but be curious and Google them. I quickly realized that this led down a rabbit hole, where Google images of one anorexic woman engendered images of others, some painful to look at. Could be very triggering to a different type of reader, no? Then, too, Osgood admits late in the book that, although she considers herself recovered from anorexia, she still struggles with the issues sometimes. But by then I already knew this, just based on how she depicted the few overweight women portrayed in the book—always with revolting imagery that made it clear Osgood still has some issues surrounding weight. This is a very small part of the book, but it was very telling for me. Other reviewers have complained that Osgood seems to see her own experiences as universal when they aren't, although this particular aspect didn't bother me—it comes with the territory of writing a memoir, in my opinion. Why do we write autobiographically at all if we don't think there's something universal about what we've been through?

So yes, this book is complicated, but it's a complicated subject and wouldn't be served by a simplistic treatment, even if such a treatment were possible. But I think this is a necessary book, and it's one I would particularly recommend for people who've absorbed a lot of the cultural artifacts addressing eating disorders up to this point—and that's many of us.

Kyla says

It's definitely time for me to give up on this genre. Again I really started out wanting to like this book, and I was interested in reading a candid analysis of the eating disorder treatment subculture. In the end the author does what I find so frustrating in all the other memoirs--generalizes her experiences as THE universal recovery experience. I can appreciate that she is trying to remove the glamor of illness and provide criticism, but she does so without complexity or nuance (let alone compassion), essentially ascribing all eating disorders to cases of "wannarexia" gone too far, inspired by memoirs with tips and "thinspiration," and the vanity of overprivileged teen girls who intentionally cultivate the illness and love being hospitalized. Her "research" consists of reading the memoirs that inspired her to become ill rather than anything peer-reviewed or so much as an interview. She eventually admits that she is "writing out of a desire to illuminate a subset of a problem," but this doesn't come across in the manuscript. We are left with the implication that this is how it is for most everyone with "modern anorexia."

Toward the end I was trying figure out what the author was getting at, and this seems to sum up the book: "Perhaps what we need to do is actually *restore* some of the myths about anorexia, namely, that it's a problem of vanity, or resurrect some of the stigma that surrounds it, in hopes that we move away from radically accepting it."

That might be useful for the particular subset Osgood is writing about, but in failing to present a more diverse, multicausal portrait of eating disorders, this falls very, very short of ideas that are applicable beyond her chosen archetype. She focuses on exhibitionist and (dare I say) borderline traits. But where are the people who work real jobs, hide their illness, or weren't raised in nice families who can finance multiple hospital stays? She acknowledges toward the end that we've all heard there is diversity in eating disorders, yet her memoir lists page after page of rich teenage girls throwing temper tantrums (in contrast to the "pathetic" older patients. And predisposing risk factors and traits are completely out of the discussion, I imagine because this would "legitimize" the illness... Not to mention how hospital culture could influence behavior inside them, while outside there may be people with different stories.

The above statement, among many others, may be gutsy--if not audacious--but sounding edgy or bold doesn't do anything to support an argument. Frankly, statements like this are downright damaging. It's nothing groundbreaking to back up old stigmas and myths. Why we'd like to take a big leap backward in mental health education, and counter the uphill efforts in recent years to reduce harmful stigmatized attitudes, is beyond me. Studies have shown again and again that stigma does nothing but make psychological problems, their treatments, and public education far worse.

I was initially hopeful to see some intelligent criticism of the general discourse in recovery memoirs, and there are some really great insights here and there. But in the end this seemed like just another entirely simplistic reading. Osgood criticizes memoir writers as she tries to set the record straight--not exactly an unworthy cause, if not self-important--but in the end she falls into the trap of, yet again, universalizing her experience and presenting an egocentric view of the "essence" of an entire diagnosis, as if a trivial explanation can be generalized. I like that she wants to deglamorize anorexia and is willing to call out some bullshit, but I don't think a return to old stereotypes or reducing the problem to dramatic displays and adolescent whims is the way to do it.

I also find the premise unnerving. Osgood sets out to overturn all the other memoirs out there, but what exactly is compelling about her book on its own? It seems to only be written as a rebuttal, which is fine enough I guess; but for a compelling literary piece that would stick with me longer, I want to see something

new here, not just a rejection of other ideas (and, perhaps worse, a call for a return to the old). If she is writing to young girls who are reading memoirs for tips, or writing to her former self, then she does what she sets out to do. But I imagine there are many others with diverging stories, and her generalizations serve to stigmatize, shame, and silence. It downright invalidates other narratives. I also think this book could be potentially damaging if friends or family members are reading for understanding or education.

On the surface, this reads like a reasonable reply to "pro anorexia" forums, but I'm concerned that it also reduces eating disorders to no more than these attitudes. Pop media articles are already all over how terrible websites are converting our children to illness; this just reads as a more sophisticated version of that old diatribe. There is a lot more going on, but we get the opposite message as we read each decry against other writers and each description of yet another exemplary fitful teen (and I can't help but wonder if any of their stories were more complex, or if these displays were a product of the hospital environment or anorexia; although the complexity is what the author is arguing against). Perhaps if the author had better defined the scope of her work (and its limits), I would have had more patience as a reader.

Grace Gordon says

Kelsey Osgood's eating disorder memoir a special one, because it is not only a commentary on eating disorder memoirs themselves, but it is a genuinely good criticism of recovery culture and modern anorexic life. Osgood strays as far from "triggers" as she can, making a point to never list her sick weight or caloric intake. Yes, one could say that the book is still upsetting to those with eating disorders, but I would argue that any eating disorder book is going to inevitably trigger the brain of someone with a pre-diagnosed condition. Still, this book is extremely moving at parts, and a MUCH safer read than the infamous (though beautifully written) *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* by Marya Hornbacher. I applaud Kelsey Osgood on an honest portrayal of her life with anorexia and also her well-researched, meticulously analyzed commentary on the culture of this disease.

Kim says

Never having suffered an eating disorder (I love food way too much to abuse it), I have however read quite a few books on the subject. This author goes out of her way (many, many times) to explain why *HER* anorexia book is different than all the others. Obsessed with the book *Wasted*, she refers to it throughout the book (along with *Prozac Nation*, which, okay??) and explains how detrimental the other books are (unlike hers). She claims to not want to glamorize the disease and by never giving her weight or calorie intake, her book is helpful rather than harmful. Yet the title of the book? Is meant to grab an anorexic's attention like no other. She spends the majority of the time talking about her hospital stays and whether or not she felt like a "real" anorexic and the result is like an unsatisfying nap. I've never been so thankful to have passed up buying the Kindle version for getting it at the library.

Molly says

I read this book a couple of weeks ago and am still thinking about it. I usually steer away from memoirs but this book is so much more than that. The author, a recovering anorexic, spends more time writing about the

why people become anorexic than rehashing her experience. Yes, she ended up in therapy and in the hospital, but it was her decision to be anorexic that I think brings out the "why this book is different" and makes it well worth reading. Osgood says she just decided one day as a preteen that the way to feel special was to stop eating. This is apparently very prevalent in the Ana community, especially when they're together in therapy or the hospital. She makes a point that, unlike other addictions, and yes, she classifies anorexia as an addiction, other addictions do not have this same competitive sense. Alcoholics don't look at other alcoholics and try to be a better drinker. Interesting point and one that I'd never considered. The writing kept me involved and wanting to know and understand more. While "enjoyable" is not exactly the right word for this book, it was fascinating and informative.

Rebecca Cameron says

TW: As far as trigger warnings go there are no numbers but it is important to pace yourself and possibly take a step back for a breather if you feel triggered or distressed.

How To Disappear Completely: On Modern Anorexia is just that, a memoir of modern anorexia with all the tricky bits - touching, for example, on the explosion of pro-anorexia, subsequent wannanorexia and what they mean for sufferers in all stages of sickness and recovery.

Osgood is frank about the formulation and lifespan of her anorexia; a young bookworm hoodwinked by the glamour of sad memoirs, seduced by the mysterious magnetism of eating disorders. There is adequate and informative discussion of diagnosis, treatment and the cycle of relapse and recovery, but the focus falls more on interaction and relationships between patients. The friendship between whom is delicate and often short-lived. Osgood says "I wasn't surprised that we had grown apart. What had brought us together, after all, was our diagnosis, and our bond was based on something appropriately thin and brittle".

What was refreshing about *How To Disappear Completely* was not only what was in the memoir, but what wasn't. Unlike Portia De Rossi's *Unbearable Lightness* we don't see emaciation on glossed paper, calorie counts and burn totals. No, Osgood's approach was scientific, at times more an essay of restraint, setting out clear hypotheses. The most poignant idea of the memoir, for me, was this

"To destroy anorexia, we must devalue its currency. We must refuse to speak its language, to play its game. Leave the salacious and profitable details for the medical professionals. By doing this we cut anorexia's legs from beneath it... Perhaps what we need to do is actually restore some of the myths about anorexia... resurrect some of the stigma that surrounds it, in hopes that we move away from radically accepting it."

And the author is right. Somewhere between the wide-spread publication of eating disorders and now, a vulnerable population fell to its knees, lovesick with the idea of a tragic illness too frequently boxed in as a pitfall of intelligence. Creating an unnecessarily sweet association most can't help but sympathize and attempt to understand.

Osgood says of this, "...so much effort has been expended to save the anorexic from ridicule, to lift his or her image from the depths of silliness, that one can't help but wonder if perhaps we're raising it too high. When, exactly, do we cross the line from condemning the victims to canonizing them?"

The twist, coming 242 pages in, is a resounding and realistic statement, the sort of ending we need to hear but no writer wants to write. Truly, what should be the thesis of all accounts of mental illness:

"While it is important to inspire hope in those suffering it is also important to remind them, and everyone else, that sometimes people don't get better and sometimes what is lost is more than what is gained, that sometimes the struggle really is for naught. And even if one does rise like the phoenix from tragedy, the ashes of what was still scatter on the ground and can never be retrieved... So no, I don't think I am stronger as a result of my struggle. The normal processes of physical and emotional maturation were compromised. My bones and my brain and my heart (the romantic one and the physical one) are weaker than they would have been had I never developed anorexia, and while I can help them to grow now, nurture what is left, they will never be as strong as they could have been"

Ultimately Kelsey Osgood's *How To Disappear Completely: On Modern Anorexia* was a compelling, provocative read, inclusive of new ideas and investigating only the TRUE boring and destructive nature of eating disorders. My one serious critique would be the absence of support. I feel that a list of crisis centres or hotline communication could have gone a long way to establish the link between reader and intervention.

Emma Banbury says

The irony of this book is that Osgood tried so hard to show why her memoir was going to be less triggering/damaging/salacious than the others but she ended up providing me with a fairly comprehensive list of books I would rather read. I immediately bought *Wasted* and am reading it now, finding it both more of a deterrent to disordered behaviour than *How to Disappear Completely*, and more of a compelling read.

It's frustrating to read a book with such an admirable goal - Osgood wanted to deconstruct the culture around thinness and food and how deeply harmful it can be while drawing from her own experiences, without being triggering or using the details of her disorder to quietly brag about how sick she was - fail over and over to be anything other than a bloated, self-centered, scathing dismissal of all other previous sufferers who dared to speak about their disorders. I do think there is a tendency in writing about eating disorders, especially in fiction, especially by authors with no experience with an ED, to try to make it horrible but to only succeed in ticking every horrible box that somebody moving into an ED finds appealing. That's worthy of critique and examination, and unfortunately is something that Osgood doesn't manage to avoid. This book reminded me of the outpouring of well-intentioned documentaries and docu-series in the mid 2000s that unwittingly exposed thousands of people to thinspo, pro ana, and a whole host of resources for tipz n trickz.

I think it would have benefited from some more editing to give it structure and a clearer sense of purpose. You know what she was trying to do, because she tells you... kind of.... I can tell she passionately wants change that will help young people be protected from AN. She is well researched and I definitely agree with her views that our media is hungry for details - like low weights - that take stories meant for awareness and turn them into potential triggers or manuals. But her tone is off putting and she circled her point for much longer than necessary, talking around and around it until about 88% of the way through when she finally started to try to nail down a point. Ultimately I found the first 80% of the book disorganised and unhelpful in terms of where it aimed its criticisms and solutions suggested. Osgood's writing is still reasonably enjoyable. When it lapses into anecdote instead of lecturing and quoting it can be pretty engaging. But she doesn't mesh the two elements together very well. If you read without expectations quite as high as mine were for a book with such a good concept.

I originally had an almost 3000 word list of things that I found frustrating, confusing, and contradictory about this book but in the end I just... give up...

Rachel says

I'd had some great luck recently with reading Anorexia recovery accounts. *Going Hungry* and *Gaining* were life changing. I read the back and was really interested in *How to Disappear Completely*. However, upon reading it I found it difficult to get through, not in that "telling hard truths for personal growth" way but in that "holy crap this is triggering the daylights out of me" kind of way.

Initially it seemed like a solid premise and presents as being overall pro-recovery. She talks about her struggles with the competitiveness of Anorexia, which I very much related to. I approved of her choice not to detail her diets and rituals since I tend to find those triggering. Then she spent a chapter detailing pro-ana websites and their history, quoting directly from them. I know she and I seem to have ideological differences on the desire to develop anorexia but well, it's her point of view and she's entitled to have it. Honestly, she started to lose me at the Wannarexics section. She had just spent a part of the book talking about the problems with labeling and diagnosis, which I also found problematic. She falsely reports that EDNOS was taken out completely, when really it was just changed to OSFED (Other Specified Feeding or Eating Disorders). Then she details a list of people to be called out and judged as wannarexics. I get that her premise deep down may have been that the idea of wannarexia is another construction of anorexic competition but her list and the judgement apparent in the tone directly undermines it. I was also extremely put off by her tone and language choices.

She revisits the idea that she had to prove that she was really sick, or "the best anorexic" and to me this feels like another expression of this. My experience of reading this was a person trying to win a contest for how sick she was and judge others as sicker or less sick. I don't know the author's intent but her tone comes off throughout the book as judgmental, full of scorn for those of us who weren't real anorexics.

I think what really bothered me was that Osgood states her truth as universal in many ways. There's a lack of acknowledgement that her view and relationship with her ED isn't everyone's. I recognize that this is a memoir, her ideas about her life, so I may just be being a rigid jerk. But I couldn't get to the experience and found her writing hard to follow at times. It wasn't as positive a reading experience as I had hoped with would be.

Sarah says

Author Kelsey Osgood actively pursued anorexia. She describes how, at the age of fourteen, mesmerized by books about eating disorders, she set out to become anorexic. Mission accomplished. Bravo! (I'm being snarky people!) In the process she discovered anorexia is not as glamorous as it once seemed. Osgood spends a fair amount of time criticizing other eating disorder centered "literature" for its romanticization of the disease. Her contention being that such fare fosters eating disorders. Although I do think anorexia is often portrayed in an attractive manner, I do not think such fare can cause an eating disorder. My belief is that the disease is biologically based. To be sure, it can be influenced by the media and other such factors; these may even be the catalyst that sets a diet in motion, but one must have a predisposition in order to develop a full-blown eating disorder. The problem is, for the most part, Osgood's own book does exactly what she purports to be against. Despite her stable recovery *How To Disappear Completely* often reads as a love letter to her own battle. The tenderness and even affection she still clearly feels for her years spent cycling through various institutions is evident. To her credit, she never gives the oft "triggering" numbers so sought out/despised numbers in terms of weight or calories. However, the overall

nostalgia she feels permeates her writing.

Scrapz says

The only thing good about this book was how it directed me to not read *Wasted*. I immediately returned the shaming book and bought Hornbacher instead.

Liralen says

Premise-wise, Osgood sets out to do something that is far too uncommon in this type of memoir: she seeks to tell her story without numbers and in a way that will not be triggering, that will not glamorise eating disorders. I've read others that set out to do the same (if less explicitly), but they are unfortunately the exception rather than the rule. (I'll add, since I've read a metric fucktonne of these, that I'm pretty desensitised, but that doesn't mean I don't notice.) So I love that that's what she's trying for.

But does she succeed? I'm not so sure. For someone determined to avoid triggers, Osgood spends a *lot* of time talking about them. For the most part her approach to not sharing triggering details of her own experience seems to translate into limiting *all* details of her own experience. At the same time, a tremendous amount of the research portion of the book is *about* triggers, and triggering books.

Osgood knew about anorexia before she ever became ill, and to her this is apparently a mark against her; even in the book she is struggling with the question of validity. She doesn't measure her illness in terms of weight, but she does measure it in terms of how many times she was in hospital (and where). It feels in places -- and of course I have no way of knowing if there's any truth to this -- that she's still trying to 'prove' her anorexia so that she can let it go (p. 139).

But I'm less concerned with how Osgood portrays her own illness than I am with how she portrays others. She is, by the time of writing, distanced from any desire to relapse or any pro-ana sentiment, but to the extent that she comes off as disgusted by her former fellow patients. Angry, sometimes. Not always, and not in all of her discussions of other patients, but often enough to be noticeable. They seem to be the manifestations of all that is wrong with eating-disorder memoirs and fiction. She questions whether individuals were *anorexic* or *just wannarexic*; she implies a hierarchy of illness.

And -- I'm sorry, but it has to be said. I cannot imagine finding myself described, in a book like this, as 'flabby', 'plump' (both p. 110), or 'chubby' (p. 144). (The last is in reference not to someone she knew but to a photo in a book *of a girl in treatment for an eating disorder*; I've read that book, and what the hell? While we're at it, the 'elderly woman' -- from the same book -- she describes in the same breath was 48 when that picture was taken.)

I read this in mid-late 2013 and then again in early-mid 2014 because I wanted to be surer of what I thought about it. It's an interesting book and an interesting take, but most of the good points are lost somewhere in the wandering and in the really problematic points. I wanted to like this a great deal more than I actually did.

Lauren Hopkins says

I don't know how I feel about this one? So let's go on this ride together as I figure it out. I feel things for the author and her journey but at the same time I'm so annoyed by her for so many reasons, I don't even know where to begin. First of all, this is part memoir, part...dissertation about how people develop eating disorders? I guess? Which is weird because she went to school to get an MFA, not any sort of medical/psychology degree, and yet here she is Telling Us What's What.

I think my biggest gripe with this book is the author shitting on other people who have written much better memoirs than hers. She particularly feels the need to tear down Marya Hornbacher and Elizabeth Wurtzel, who wrote two of the most successful, revered books about mental illness that were super popular back in the late 90s/early 2000s when this author was coming of age. She blames Hornbacher for making girls anorexic, and about Wurtzel, she says:

"When I reread Prozac Nation at twenty-five, I was, for lack of a less eloquent phrase, 'grossed out' by Elizabeth Wurtzel's self-obsession."

I mean, says a woman writing a memoir about herself despite her own story being as basic as they come. Because unlike some truly memorable authors who have written about their accounts with anorexia in fascinating, insightful, and gut-wrenching ways, this account is forgettable and yet she sees and writes about herself as some brilliant wunderkind who was the first person to head down this path and write about it.

Her story is as unremarkable and boring as they come for this 'genre' and it's mostly because she refuses to really talk about anything in detail, lest she inspire a new generation of anorexic girls. So you get her babbling on and on about going into various hospitals and shitting on everyone she ever met in treatment, but you don't really get any depth or insight out of her so like...why write this thing?

The answer is because she has this brilliant idea that anorexia is a "communicable disease" that is not so much developed as some underlying pathology that is awakened when triggered by something (including something cultural like a book or movie), but rather that it's something any old person can "get" if they want it simply by reading books about it. ??? Again, she's not any kind of doctor, psychologist, or medical professional, and she clearly has done zero actual research into this aside from reading and pulling quotes from a few articles in the same way I used to pull quotes from books when writing papers in college, picking and choosing what best fit my argument even if they didn't really fit it out of context. So how can she just make these claims?

Oh, because for HER they're true. In HER story, she was a 14-year-old girl who was unsatisfied with her body and so she sought out books about eating disorders to use as guides, eventually helping her develop a full-blown disorder of her own. So because this is how things were for her, according to her book, this is the case for everyone in the world. #SCIENCE

While I do think there are many instances of people with eating disorders who are "inspired" by material they see, actual research has shown that a majority of these people were eating disordered to begin with and naturally gravitate toward these either because they seek them out out of curiosity and want to know more, or because they happen to catch something (in a magazine, on TV, in health class) and find themselves mesmerized and wanting more because they recognize themselves in it in some way.

I absolutely agree with the author's point that people learn tricks and tips from memoirs and TV movies. In

addition to Marya Hornbacher, the author makes references to Kessa, Lori Gottlieb, "For the Love of Nancy," and many others you'd recognize from the ED lexicon if you've ever suffered from a disorder. But I think in many cases, people aren't seeking these things out SOLEY to learn "tricks and tips." If anything, they seek out memoirs and TV movies and novels about eating disorders because they finally find something they can relate to and this kind of media can make them feel like someone out there understands. Through this, yes, it's easy to pick up on habits as well, but I think it's suuuuuuuper rare that someone with no predisposition for anorexia would randomly be like "I wanna be anorexic!" and go out and buy a bunch of memoirs to learn tricks that take her from fully healthy to someone with a full-blown mental illness. There are absolutely people who "want" to be anorexic, but unless they have those underlying personality traits that predispose them to the disorder, they're not going to be successful in "getting" anorexia because anorexia simply isn't something you "get" no matter how this author tries to convince us otherwise.

I actually picked up this book out of curiosity because it sounded like the author and I had a creepy amount of things in common. We're the same age from small New England towns, we were both morbidly fascinated with (and terrified of) the world ending in 2000, we both found Kessa at a young age (me, to the point where I had an altar ego, Ren, who was my "best little girl" self lol), we both went to Columbia, we were treated at some of the same places, and now, we're both writers who live in Brooklyn. I tend to love picking up books where I can find pieces of myself in the author because even if our journeys aren't identical, I still feel like I am connected with him or her, and that's what I thought this would be in the same way I connected with "Unbearable Lightness" and, back in the day, the way I connected with Kessa.

But instead, I found myself learning almost nothing personal about the author besides these basic facts, as she brought zero insight or understanding into her own personal journey as she attempted to turn her story into an example for some greater point she was trying to make but failed to. And on top of that, I had a hard time staying interested because every other flaw aside, the flow of this book is so disjointed and jarring, one minute you're watching her list everyone she's ever met with anorexia, trying to use their stories to fit her thesis, a minute later you're reading a rant about why Elizabeth Wurtzel sucks, and then after that, you're getting a bare-bones narrative about her time in treatment. It's just bizarre and doesn't work as a book. A series of blogs, maybe, but having read this, I would have zero desire to check that blog out.

J. J. says

Myopic, snooty, and with such a lack of insight that it pained me to see this to the end. I'm in concert with everyone else here who's critiqued Osgood's universalizing and alienating (read: elitist) rhetoric throughout. I'd also add that the extreme binary thinking she displays applies also to the ridiculousness of her referring to certain nurses as "Caribbean," "Asian, and "African American" -- when she never EVER qualifies that all of the other personages are white.

Also, her whirlwind rant on "wannarexics" and demonization of Hornbacher's 'Wasted' (which is an important text for MANY of us in recovery) are completely self-serving and unsubstantiated except through cloistered anecdotal evidence.

Little more than privilege speaking its name over, and over, and over.

Kate says

I found this book to be frustrating. I think Kelsey Osgood makes some good points about how literature about eating disorders can glamorize the illness rather than serve as a "reader beware." Osgood makes the assertion that she will not include specific behaviors that detail the means to which she achieved weight loss, etc. She does this by avoiding talking about what led up to the hospital, but rather focuses on the hospital itself. While I'm sure her intentions were good, this book feels like a long love note to the hospital. She romanticizes the hospital which may not make sense to a person that does not suffer from an eating disorder, but this is alluring to someone who is ill. As I am in a solid recovery, this did not affect me negatively, but I could see how it could make me ache for my illness and the safety of the hospital in earlier days. Mostly, what I found hard to tolerate in the writing, and made me consider not finishing the memoir on more than one occasion, was Osgood's need for validation. Perhaps the intention was to portray how those with eating disorders are good at downplaying the severity of their illness, but after awhile it grew tired. I became so annoyed with constantly reading about how a person was "real" anorexic and she wasn't, how so-and-so was sicker than her, how even though she has all these medical complications she isn't really sick because don't you remember how her eating disorder truly began??? It felt like talking to someone who was still sick. It felt like she wanted the validation that she was a "real" anorexic and was truly sick and not a fake like she still suspects. Also, I would just like to point out that this constant invalidation of her illness seems to perpetuate more than argue what exactly makes a person sick and deserving of treatment.

Bottom line: I think Osgood made some interesting points but it was overshadowed by the narrative of someone who didn't quite believe they were sick.

Pamela says

I try not to give star ratings to books I haven't completely finished, but I think I got enough of the flavor of this one to confidently star it. My review is long and rambling and full of gifs; find it [here](#).
