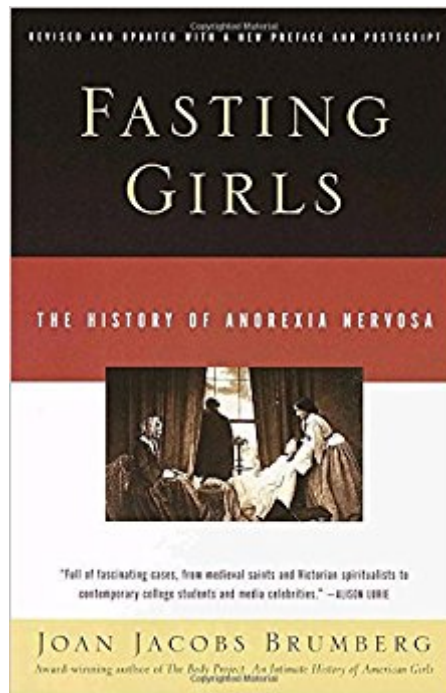




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# Fasting Girls: The History Of Anorexia Nervosa



## Synopsis

Winner of four major awards, this updated edition of Joan Jacobs Brumberg's *Fasting Girls*, presents a history of women's food-refusal dating back as far as the sixteenth century. Here is a tableau of female self-denial: medieval martyrs who used starvation to demonstrate religious devotion, "wonders of science" whose families capitalized on their ability to survive on flower petals and air, silent screen stars whose strict "slimming" regimens inspired a generation. Here, too, is a fascinating look at how the cultural ramifications of the Industrial Revolution produced a disorder that continues to render privileged young women helpless. Incisive, compassionate, illuminating, *Fasting Girls* offers real understanding to victims and their families, clinicians, and all women who are interested in the origins and future of this complex, modern and characteristically female disease.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Full of fascinating cases, from medieval saints and Victorian spiritualists to contemporary college students and media celebrities."--Alison Lurie  
"Brilliant--. A masterful blend of history and contemporary issues."--Journal of Social History

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I read this book for research purposes and found much to support and augment my research. Beyond that however, this was such a compelling read! I love history, especially the 19th and 20th centuries, and found her assessment of women and their bodies through that time fascinating. Anorexia is present in my family so there is a personal connection as well. This is not a clinical medical book but a really interesting study of a disease, how knowledge of it has evolved and how it is influenced by certain times in history plus the influence of society. If you are interested in the history of anorexia or, on a broader scope, a unique history of women, I highly recommend this book.

anticipated more

Informative but overly detailed

If you know someone suffering from an eating disorder and think this problem has only been around since the late 70's, reading this book will be a great eye opener. Very diligent research and well organized information. Gives a great history and background to this troubling issue.

Thanks to the author for such hard work! Anorexia is a disease causing an increased public interest today and, as a result, fanning a variety of rumors. This book sheds light on various aspects of anorexia - both medical and social phenomenon.

I never knew the history of anorexia nervosa, but it would make sense. Throughout history if someone behaved differently than mainstream society, that behavior needed to be studied and possibly cured. Food was not plentiful in the earlier centuries and that would explain why the woman would go without eating. I was very pleased with the detailed insight of anorexia nervosa. I should

not have been surprised though, I have read previous literature from Brumberg and was pleased then.

I am a clinical psychologist who recently finished reading, *Fasting Girls*, and *WOW*, what an awesome book! The author talks about how anorexic-like behavior has been recorded since the middle ages when girls would fast to prove religious devotion. At the time, people thought this "anorexia mirabilis" was a miracle that demonstrated that certain holy individuals could exist without earthly food, simply living on "spiritual nourishment" from God. When it got to the 1800s, when society was embracing both religious and scientific approaches, people (especially those who were medically- or scientifically-minded) would send in professionals to observe the "fasting girls" around the clock to see if it were actually scientifically possible for them to exist without food! Later on, as the societal shift became more medical, the focus turned to describing the condition more thoroughly and getting the girls to eat and regain weight. It was then being assumed that anorexia was related to hysteria or some nervous condition, and the term *anorexia nervosa* (among some other terms, such as *hysterical anorexia*) started being used. The author describes how at that time, fasting was in part a reflection of family dynamics and various aspects of middle class Victorian society. After spending much time talking about anorexia in the Victorian era, the author spoke about the disorder after the turn of the century and how fashion innovations (e.g., ready-made dresses, higher hemlines), increased information about calories and nutrition, attitudes by female athletes and celebrities, and other factors that influenced the more modern version of *anorexia nervosa*. Overall, I found this to be a fascinating book, and I learned a great deal from reading it. I offer this book my highest of recommendations for clinicians and interested laypeople as well.

This book is an interesting rebuttal of the idea that anorexia was "created" by our beauty-obsessed culture. Not true. The idea of withholding food from one's self to reach an ideal has existed for hundreds (if not more) years. But in our previous centuries, doing this was associated not with beauty but with purity and being one with God. Very interesting history of how this human belief that controlling the appetites and restricting something as basic as food intake has not really changed over the years. It is still done in the pursuit of "worshiping an ideal." It is merely what that ideal is that has changed.

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