

## Chronicles of Eating Disorders from Physician's Notes to Netflix Series: Representations of Eating Disorders in Popular Media

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The earliest medical descriptions of anorexia occurred in 1689 with Richard Morton's *Phthisiologia, Or, A Treatise of Consumptions*, however, it took another century for medical science to accept anorexia nervosa as a medical condition. Later on, it was Hilde Bruch who initiated the first public discussion on anorexia in the latter half of the twentieth century. While the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resorted solely to the verbal medium to narrate their eating disorder experience, the post-millennial era turned to a variety of visual and verbo-visual media. Stylistically differing widely from verbal texts, graphic medicine, a subgenre of comics, provides singular ways of negotiating eating disorders. Accordingly, a concise overview of some of the canonical works on eating disorders from 1970-2018 will be presented. Lastly, graphic medicine and the aptness of the comics medium in representing the subtle layers of eating disorder experience will be examined.

Keywords: Media, Graphic medicine, comics, culture, eating disorders

Having emerged as a form of religious sacrifice in the twelfth century, and been identified after that as a defensive mode of self-starvation, and construed later in the Victorian era as an exclusive feminine malady, eating disorders have never been a part of social discussions in the initial days. Although the earliest medical descriptions of anorexia were brought out in 1689 through Richard Morton's *Phthisiologia, Or, A Treatise of Consumptions*, it took another century for medical science to accept anorexia nervosa as a medical condition. However, eating disorders remained unfamiliar to the common man for yet another century as dialogues on eating disorders were constrained within the limits of psychiatry. Although clinicians and psychiatrists were aware of the destructive impact of eating disorders, they did not give it any exposure. Later on, it was Hilde Bruch who initiated the first public discussion on anorexia in the latter half of the twentieth century with the publication of *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa* in 1978. Following the intrepid steps of Bruch, many sufferers, clinicians, and thinkers contributed to the wealth of eating disorder literature through memoirs, autobiographical narratives, fiction, and theoretical findings, among others. While the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries resorted solely to the verbal medium to narrate their eating disorder experience, the post-millennial era turned to a variety of visual and verbo-visual media such as painting, movies, blogs, cartoons, and comics, to name a few. Stylistically differing widely from verbal texts, graphic medicine, a subgenre of comics, provides singular ways of negotiating eating disorders

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with the self and others. Accordingly, a concise overview of some of the canonical texts on eating disorders from 1970 to 2018 irrespective of the genre will be presented, followed by the representation of eating disorders in various media. Lastly, graphic medicine and the aptness of the comics medium in representing the subtle layers of eating disorder experience will be examined.

## **From Medicine to Multitudes: The Rise of Eating Disorders**

According to Hopton (p.2), “the earliest accounts of self-starvation date back to the Hellenistic period, and were generally associated with a devout adherence to asceticism and mind-body dualism.” The first medical account related to anorexic symptoms dates back to 1689 when Dr. Richard Morton described in his *Phthisiologia, Or, A Treatise of Consumptions* two cases of wasting disease in emaciated girls, aged 18, who lacked the desire to eat in spite of prolonged starvation. Later, it was with Sir William Gull’s publishing of *Anorexia Hysterica* in 1873 that anorexia nervosa became characterized as a disease that was different from hysteria or mere starvation. Similarly, in the same year, Ernest-Charles Lasègue, a French physician, published several similar cases in a research paper entitled *De l’Anorexie Hystérique*. Both works effortlessly took eating disorders to the realm of psychiatry and psychology. Although Gull described anorexia as a nervous disease that led to starvation and stated that it predominantly afflicted young women, his description made no mention of body image disturbance as a motivating principle for continuous fasting.

Although the medical facts regarding anorexia nervosa have been documented since the 1870s, the de-medicalized picture of eating disorders and public awareness of these conditions, particularly of anorexia, were limited until the second half of the twentieth century. Accordingly, it was only in 1974 that the starving disease appeared under an independent heading for the first time in a popular magazine on social issues, titled the *Readers’ Guide to Periodical Literature*. From the beginning of the 1970s, descriptions about anorexia began to be spread among the masses through newspaper articles on related medical facts. In the rise of public awareness about anorexia, the role played by three magazines was crucial *People*, *Mademoiselle*, and *Seventeen* (Brumberg, p.12). Although popular magazines and newspapers included debates on eating disorders, they published with a sense of urgency “without being entirely certain of the data” (Brumberg, p.12). However, due to the rise of death related to starvation, eating disorders continued to be a mounting-subject of concern among the masses. Inevitably, the intellectual chasm between anorexia as a medical secret and anorexia as a common problem was bridged by a host of writers and thinkers who shared their personal experiences and findings through books irrespective of genres. Such narratives were canonical in that they revealed the phenomenological/ontological perspective, a hitherto underexplored dimension of eating disorders. Some of the representative eating disorder narratives from various eras are discussed below.

## **An Overview of the Literary Milestones in Eating Disorder Literature**

### **The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa**

An American psychoanalyst of German origin, Hilde Bruch was one of the noteworthy contributors to the vast literature on eating disorders. As a professor of psychiatry at Baylor College of Medicine (Houston) from 1964, Bruch’s researches were anchored on topics related to obesity, anorexia, and eating disorders. With three decades of medical experience in treating eating disorders, Bruch published *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of*

*Anorexia Nervosa* in 1978 as a collection of seventy case histories on eating disorders for the common man to understand. Bruch identifies anorexia as a disease with a “rapidly increasing rate” (qtd in Brumberg, p.13). The book adroitly melds her profound understanding of eating disorders with “a sense of urgency about the disease” (Brumberg 13). Although originally published more than twenty years ago, *The Golden Cage* continues to be a classic in the canon of eating disorder literature catering to medical professionals, patients, and caregivers like. Her other important works include *Eating Disorders: Obesity, Anorexia Nervosa, and the Person Within* (1973), *Don't Be Afraid of Your Child* (1952) and *The Importance of Overweight* (1957), among others.

It was during a time when diagnostic reports conveyed very little about the experiential hurdles of anorexia that Bruch published *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa* in 1978. Written in straight diction devoid of medical jargons, the book describes, through Bruch's patients, the adversities of the society's unrelenting quest for thinness. As is evident from the jacket cover, the monograph was addressed to all those who were capable of helping in preventing the younger generation from developing an eating disorder. With words that reflect an imminent crisis, Bruch dedicates the book “to physicians, teachers, school counselors and parents—to all who are in a position of observing these youngsters before a chronic and often irreversible state develops” (p. xxiii) Characterizing the female population suffering from anorexia nervosa as a young girl living in a golden cage built by the society, Bruch “attributes increased frequency of diagnosis to society's demands for slimness, to greater pressures of accomplishment, and the current sexual revolution” (Hodgman, p. 728). Although the book created a wider awareness of anorexia nervosa among lay readers, Brumberg (p.13) observes that by the time the book was published, anorexia was “so common” that it was a “real problem in high schools and colleges.”

## Fat is a Feminist Issue

A psychoanalyst, social critic, and writer from Britain, Susie Orbach is an eminent theorist of feminist criticism. Orbach has written a variety of articles and books related to the topic of food, bodies, and body troubles. Theorizing the inextricability of obesity as a trigger for eating disorders, Orbach (p.v) identified it as “the price of modernity.” *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, published by Penguin Random House in 1978, is Orbach's first book. Analyzing sexual politics and the feminine psychology of dieting and excessive eating, Orbach also takes a stance against media in *Fat is a Feminist Issue* for propagating insensitive beauty standards and for thus creating psychosocial duress in women. Naomi Wolf, in appreciation of Orbach's first book, has noted that “virtually all feminist debate on body image and beauty imagery owes its existence to Susie Orbach's enduring formulation” (n.p.). Orbach's other significant contributions include *Fat is a Feminist Issue II* (1982), *Hunger Strike, What's Going on Here* (1994), *Towards Emotional Literacy* (1999), *Susie Orbach On Eating* (2002), *The Impossibility of Sex* (2005) and *Bodies* (2009).

Interlacing theoretical findings with real-life examples, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* is “an examination of the symbolic meanings of fat” as Orbach (p.22) contends in the Prologue. With several case studies of compulsive overeaters and practical ideas for lifestyle changes, the book provides psychological reasons for overeating and offers a critique of the beauty and diet industries as well as contemporary thinking on the “obesity” crisis. Anchoring the discussion of fat on gender and power, she proposes that it is gender inequality that makes women fat. “Fat is a way of saying ‘no’ to powerlessness and self-denial,” says Orbach (p. 21). It was Orbach who brought the problems of women's relationships with their bodies and

their eating to public consciousness for the first time in a theoretical manner in an anti-diet guide. Essentially, *Fat is a Feminist Issue* analyses the cultural meanings of fat, thin, and the politics of hunger. As a victim of ten years of dieting, bingeing, and self-hatred, Orbach presents the book as a self-help handbook for women with severe body issues caused by dieting and bingeing.

### The Best Little Girl in the World

Published by Warner Books in September 1978 in New York, Steven Levenkron's *The Best Little Girl in the World* is the first semi-fictional narrative on anorexia. With an element of surprise in it, *The Best Little Girl in the World* aims to create awareness about eating disorders during a time when eating disorders had just started to gain public attention. Besides being a psychotherapist who specialized in eating disorders, Levenkron has been a clinical consultant at many major institutes. Set in 1979, New York, *The Best Little Girl in the World* presents a perfect case study of anorexia. It consists of four main characters, namely Kessa (protagonist), Grace, Lila (Kessa's room-mate in hospital) and Harold (Kessa's father). Narrated in a third-person omniscient style, the book puts forward a story of multiple struggles vis-à-vis the interpersonal struggle, the intrapersonal struggle, the struggle between man and nature, and ultimately the struggle between man and society.

Hinged on the popular ideal of "the thinner is the winner" (p. 25), *The Best Little Girl in the World* is the story of Francesca, a shy, self-conscious girl of fifteen who has a debilitating lack of self-acceptance as she aims to become a ballet dancer. Feeling neglected and uncared for by her family, she believes that she doesn't belong in the same way as her siblings, and it affects her life to a larger extent. One day at dance class, Francesca's dance teacher tells her that she would be perfect if she reduced her body weight by a few pounds from her already tiny body. In the act of self-defiance, Francesca creates "Kessa," an alter ego who doesn't need food, friends, or anything that might jeopardize her self-control and efforts to become perfect. Kessa thinks that the thinner she is, the better and denies herself food to lose weight to become perfect as her teacher said. Pushing herself into a mode of self-starvation, Kessa becomes anorexic as she rapidly loses weight and becomes distant and indifferent. The changes in Kessa quickly become apparent to her bewildered parents. She is apathetic when she isn't chosen for the ballet school's summer session. Francesca has become detached from everything that was once important to her. At a crucial moment, Kessa meets the doctor that will finally set her on the road to recovery. After nearly forty years in print, *The Best Little Girl in the World* remains one of the best anorexia narratives and provides a definitive insight into the psychosomatic mayhem of an anorexic. Appreciated for its realistic portrayal of the destructive impact of an eating disorder, the book was an inspiration for Marya Hornbacher's *Wasted: A Memoir*, yet another classic in the eating disorder canon.

### Solitaire

Acclaimed as America's first memoir on anorexia, Aimee Liu's *Solitaire* was originally published in 1979. Chronicling her life events that lead to the development of an eating disorder in her, Liu also comments on the grim realities of living with anorexia during a time when even medical science was not so clear about dealing with eating disorders. Liu is the author of other novels such as *Cloud Mountain* and *Face*, and she has co-authored seven medical and psychological non-fictional titles. Depicting the American middle-class adolescence of the 1970s, *Solitaire* offers a unique experiential account of a young girl's tryst with anorexia nervosa.



Liu begins her narrative with extensive prologue revealing details about her sexually abused childhood. From the age of nine, Liu recalls that she was extremely conscious of her body image. Feeling that she is obese, Liu resorts to strict dieting routines and considerably reduces her weight. Liu also explores the aspect of menstruation as a cause for the rise of eating disorders in young girls. In the course of her war with her adolescent self, she started to hate her body and developed binge eating habits in her search for a thinner body. Liu grew up to be an uptown honors student from Connecticut and a part-time model in New York. Although she became a fashion model at Wilhelmina, one of the top-notch modeling agencies in the world, Liu failed to continue in the field as she was gradually becoming emaciated. For over seven years, Liu struggled with eating disorders, and she decided to recover her lost self later on. Although published thirty-eight years ago, *Solitaire* remains one of the most inspiring and honest accounts of an eating disorder experience.

### Fasting Girls: The History of Anorexia Nervosa

An interdisciplinary researcher, gender theorist, and writer, Joan Jacobs Brumberg is a social historian from America. Widely appreciated for its contribution towards female medical history from the cultural perspective, her *Fasting Girls: The Emergence of Anorexia Nervosa* was originally published in 1988 and was reprinted in 2000. When anorexia and eating disorders began to be misunderstood as modern-day diseases, it was Brumberg who exposed the relatively unknown history of women starving themselves to death from as early as the thirteenth century. Analysing the social construction of feminine eating disorders through the prism of cultural history and medical history, Brumberg observes (p. 6) that “the birth of the disease in the Victorian era was related not only to the new authority of medicine but also to changes in the larger society that had consequences for young women.” Brumberg presents a variety of realistic examples ranging from religious martyrs to present-day celebrities to prove the origin, prevalence, and demographics of anorexia.

### Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia

Marya Justine Hornbacher is an American writer and journalist who received widespread acclaim with the publication of her first book *Wasted: A Memoir of Anorexia and Bulimia* in 1999. Hornbacher's honest experiential account of her tussle with eating disorders was written when she was twenty-three. Beginning with an insightful introduction, Hornbacher reveals that the authorial imperative behind the creation of the memoir was her dissatisfaction with the existing literature on eating disorders. Displaying an array of personal and sociocultural reasons, Hornbacher states that she wrote *Wasted* “because I disagree with much of what is generally believed about eating disorders, and wanted to put in my two cents, for whatever it's worth. I wrote it because people often dismiss eating disorders as manifestations of vanity, immaturity, madness. It is, in some ways, all of these things. . . It is a response, albeit a rather twisted one, to a culture, a family, a self. I wrote this because I want to dispel two common and contradictory myths about eating disorders: that they are an insignificant problem, solved by a little therapy and a little pill and a pat on the head” (p. 5). Balancing well the personal and clinical details, *Wasted* is an eloquent memoir that was inspired by Steven Levenkron's *The Best Little Girl in the World* and has set the standard for all future eating disorder memoirs. Appreciated for its finest autobiographical qualities, the memoir was nominated for a *Pulitzer Prize* and has been translated into sixteen languages.

## Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain

Perhaps one of the earliest and most popular celebrities eating disorder memoirs is the Australian-American actress Portia de Rossi's *Unbearable Lightness: A Story of Loss and Gain*. Published by Atria in 2010, *Unbearable Lightness* is Portia's autobiographical account of her four-year-long struggle with anorexia and bulimia. Similarly to any other anorexia memoir, Portia's account also exposes her vulnerable self. Starting from the age of twelve when she began modeling, eating disorders were a part of her being. Stepping aside from the glamour of her successful acting and modeling career, Portia presents herself as an unfortunate example of all the classic symptoms of eating disorder, such as self-absorption, self-competition, self-hatred, obsession, secrecy, starving, purging and bingeing, to name but a few. By providing a comprehensive insider's account of an anorexic's life, the memoir provides immense hope for sufferers of coming out of the eating disorder vicious circle.

## The Girl Inside: Silent No More

Lindsay Ensor's *The Girl Inside: Silent No More* published by WestBow Press (2015) is essentially a narrative of survivorship. The memoir chronicles Lindsay's struggle with bulimia, bipolar disorder, alcohol addiction, laxative abuse, anxiety, addiction, and suicidal thoughts. Lindsay's childhood was traumatically punctuated by her father's death when she was eight years old. Lindsay's father's death left her feeling guilty because just before he died, Lindsay was asked to help him with gardening, but she ran away to play with her friends. Soon, her mother remarried, and Lindsay became aloof, reticent, and silent. She spent almost five months in treatment and tried various medicines; however, she had difficulty in recovering. Later she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and eating disorder. Eventually, Lindsay recovered from the traumatic grip of various illnesses, and the memoir alerts sufferers to the fact that shame and stigma should not hinder anyone from seeking help at the right time.

## Tales of a Bulimic Babe: Simple Wisdom to Live the Life You Crave

An acclaimed speaker and columnist Iris Ruth Pastor's *Tales of a Bulimic Babe: Simple Wisdom to Live the Life You Crave* (2017) is a sober and honest account of her forty-five-year battle with bulimia. The memoir depicts how she became a bulimic, which disturbed her natural relationship with food, how it affected her life, and how she recovered. Pastor offers a candid depiction of how, as a nineteen-year-old, she was captivated by Ed (personification of "eating disorder") and she 'enjoyed' the disorder for forty-five years until she was sixty-six. Although Iris had a seemingly perfect life with popularity, wealth, a loving husband and kids, she was obsessed with body weight. While outside she was a successful motivational speaker, she was a secretive and compulsive bulimic on the inside. Over time, Iris fails to strike a balance between the two and seeks medical help. As a result of the treatment, Iris understands how anger and lethargy were the triggers of her bulimia. Gradually, Iris can embrace her imperfect self and move towards recovery.

## What Goes Down: The End of an Eating Disorder

Callie Bowld's *What Goes Down: The End of an Eating Disorder* relates her ten-year-long battle with anorexia, binge eating, and bulimia. Although the author has used the pen name Callie Bowld to preserve confidentiality, the eating disorder experiences of the author are truthfully depicted in the memoir. Bowld was a lawyer who was affected by eating disorders at a very young age. As she observes in the memoir, "[a]n eating disorder starts

with a tiny seed. It is packed lightly just beneath the soil. It just sits dormant. Then there is some culmination of stressors, changes in your life that find you stretched thin, overly stressed, and worried until you start to build a coping mechanism in your mind. And that mechanism may be food – a perverse deprivation of or overindulgence” (2018, n.p.). After ten years of struggle, Bowld decides to break the eating disorder vicious circle. Among the major reasons that influenced her to make a positive change was a devastating sense of shame, realizing how horrendous her addiction was after seeing a bulimic friend, severe bleeding as a result of vomiting and the fear of being found out by her partner. Thus, the memoir is an extensive account of Bowld’s struggle with eating disorders and also a raw description of an eating disorder sufferer’s psychological trauma.

As well as these, a variety of eating disorder memoirs and books are available. However, it is nearly impossible to present all of them here. This brief list of books can be considered milestones in the eating disorder literary canon, and they inevitably set the ground for further development of studies on controlling and understanding the specificities of various eating disorders. In line with the popularity of the mass media, eating disorders crossed the boundaries of the verbal medium. An important event that prompted the widespread, ongoing media coverage of eating disorders was the death of Karen Carpenter, a popular American singer, and drummer, in 1983 due to anorexia. Karen Carpenter’s death at a very young age (32) coupled with her fame as an entertainer captured public attention and eating disorders received extensive media coverage. The sympathetic reporting of her illness prompted other celebrities, such as Jane Fonda and Lynn Redgrave, to come forward and share their experiences. This led to a rise in the number of memoirs and public discussions and expressions about eating disorders through various media.

## Representation of Eating Disorders in Other Popular Media

Although the media creates, cultivates and perpetuates the Western beauty ideal of thinness, presenting the pseudo conviction that it is the culturally appreciated image of perfection, the impact of mass media in propagating awareness about eating disorders is immense. Among the important movie representations of eating disorders are *The Best Little Girl in the World* (1981), *The Karen Carpenter Story* (1989), Douglas Barr’s *Perfect Body* (1997), *For the Love of Nancy* (1994), *Girl Interrupted* (1999), *Sharing the Secret* (2000), *Thin* (2006), and *To the Bone* (2017), a Netflix series written and directed by Marti Noxon.

With the advent of the Internet, eating disorder blogs and vlogs also started to appear. Among the most popular blogs is *Adios Barbie*, *Forever Going*, *And Then She Recovered*, *Laura’s Soapbox*, *Make Peace with Food* and *Running with Spoons*. In a similar vein, various anorexia and bulimia sufferers have resorted to painting and drawing to narrate their experience of an eating disorder. The most popular among them are the works of Judith Shaw and Lee Price, among others.

## Comics: The Ideal Medium to Map Body Politics

The convergence of both word and image in a fine balance makes comics an ideal medium to encapsulate subjective psychosomatic experiences related to eating disorders. Exploiting its stylistic and structural affordances vis-à-vis temporality, gesture, speech balloons, light and color, the comics medium provides profound verbo-visual statements about the subjectification/objectification of eating disorder sufferers. According to Drew Leder, the ability of comics to visually represent the “disappearance and dys-appearance” (qtd. in

Refaie, p. 52) of the body facilitates the embodied representation of subjects. Similarly, the multiple self-portraits and avatars of anorexic subjects in autobiographical comics help them to depict the desires of a diseased body. Spiegelman (2005, p. 4) contends that temporality enables patients to “choreograph and shape time.” Unlike in any other medium, comics can simultaneously present different temporalities in a single frame. There is peculiar freedom that the medium of comics provides to the artist in experimenting with the size and shape of panels for effective narration. Accordingly, compressed panels can depict the isolation and inadequacies of anorexia, and inflated panels can demonstrate the excessiveness of obesity. Another aspect that adds to the narration of eating disorder experience is the interplay of light and darkness as well as the choice of colors. Apart from the structural aspects of free-sized panels, the presence or absence of borders, certain techniques such as emanates and figural drawings compound the effect of the narration. Lastly, the style of inking and penciling also adds to the narration. While sparse penciling underscores the emaciation related to anorexia, heavy brushstrokes could easily depict the excesses of bulimia. Thus, the intensity of every single stroke manifests the superlative features of comics in depicting bodily disorders. Therefore, comics are singularly capable of depicting the largely unacknowledged physical and psychological aspects of eating disorders.

## Eating Disorders and Graphic Medicine

As a creative means that values the affective truths of patients, physicians, and caregivers, graphic medicine offers numerous ways of representing traumatic experiences related to illness and suffering. Although trauma and suffering are experiences that are often beyond the linguistic capacities of any sufferer, graphic medicine has the unique potential to restore the fractured self of the person through a realistic depiction of such experiences. With its multiple representational techniques, graphic medicine offers possibilities for visually narrating chaotic psychosomatic experiences. Essentially, comics enable graphic photographers to revisit their experience, recreate it, and process the emotions.

### Major Graphic Medical Narratives on Eating Disorders

Among the well-received graphic anorexic narratives are Nadia Shivack's *Inside Out: Portrait of an Eating Disorder* (2007), Carol Lay's *The Big Skinny: How I Changed My Fattitude* (2008), Lesley Fairfield's *Tyranny* (2009), Ludovic Debeurme's *Lucille* (2011), Karrie Fransman's *The House That Groaned* (2012), Katie Green's *Lighter Than My Shadow* (2013), and *Ink in Water: An Illustrated Memoir (Or, How I Kicked Anorexia's Ass and Embraced Body Positivity)* by Lacy J. Davis and Jim Kettner (2016).

### Inside Out: Portrait of an Eating Disorder

*Inside Out: Portrait of an Eating Disorder* is Nadia Shivack's graphic memoir on her thirty-year-long struggle with anorexia and bulimia. Published by Athenium Books for Young Readers (2007), *Inside Out* offers a raw look at the author's strife with anorexia and bulimia from her teenage years to her forties. The memoir, narrated through a melange of raw cartoon sketches and scribbles, creatively traces the origin and prognosis of her disordered eating. Using Nadia/Nad as her narrative avatar, Shivack recounts that her preoccupation with calorie control began as a result of familial coercion. As a teenager, Nadia was severely criticized by her mother, a Holocaust survivor, for not dressing like a girl and for not having a slender, feminine body. Further, Nadia gets scolded by her swimming coach at

school for having a fat body. Swimming makes her realize the importance of having the right body weight/size and shape. While the coach praises the slender girls for their perfect bodies, kids like Nadia with chunky bodies are humiliated. As a cumulative effect of both the incidents, Nadia starts to feel that she is obese and unattractive. Consequently, she begins to overindulge in exercise and calorie restriction and later binges. Nadia develops a dangerous affair with the eating disorder monster, and she experiences a constant uncontrollable desire to binge and purge. Although this continued throughout her twenties and thirties, eventually, with the help of art therapy and medication, she managed to overpower the obsession with food control.

Shivack's portrayal of an eating disorder through various verbo-visual metaphors is insightful and interesting. Often, her eating disorders are portrayed as Nadia's boyfriend, Ed, sometimes like a fire-spitting dragon and as a ghoulish alien inside her body. Deploying a relationship metaphor, Shivack depicts Nadia as a fourteen-year-old teenager who falls in love with Ed, a control freak to whom she surrenders her life. Personifying eating disorder as her lover, Ed, Shivack skilfully depicts the tenacious relationship that eating disorder sufferers develop with their obsessions. Although *Inside Out* is not a comic in the strictest sense, Shivack creatively deploys various elements of comics, such as verbo-visual metaphors, captions, emanates, thought balloons and speech bubbles. *Inside Out* is mostly an interesting assemblage of sketches and scribbles drawn on napkins by Shivack after meals during her hospitalization. Shivack says that drawing helped to calm her mind after eating. Interestingly, Shivack also provides bits and pieces of clinical information and statistics about eating disorders throughout the memoir. Also, towards the end of the memoir, she offers a list of references and resources for readers who require help. Essentially, Shivack's memoir is an honest and raw account of an eating disorder survivor that offers a glimpse into the emotional quagmire of low body esteem and control issues related to eating disorders.

### The Big Skinny: How I Changed My Fattitude

Published in 2008 by Villard, *The Big Skinny: How I Changed My Fattitude* is Carol Lay's debut graphic memoir and chronicles how Lay managed to break a destructive cycle of yo-yo dieting and achieved an ideal body weight by successfully shedding thirty pounds. Using Carol as the author's alter ego, Lay depicts Carol as a withdrawn and fat teenager who always found solace in food. Although she tried various diets and a variety of medicines and treatments, she was never successful in shedding those extra pounds. Eventually, Carol comes across an old photograph of her with her cat, and she decides to get slim, and Carol realizes that the best and only way to achieve an ideal weight is through severe food restriction, obsessive calorie counting, and exercise. Gradually, Carol acquires a positive attitude towards rejecting certain food habits and attains an ideal body weight. Although *Big Skinny* is loaded with instructions and references to dieting, its episodic style, and conversational nature keep the memoir from becoming a diet manual. Besides describing what worked best for her in her journey towards body positivism, Lay also examines the determinative role of heredity in individuals' body type and size. Rather than wrapping up the memoir with Lay's victory over her fat body, she concludes the memoir with a wealth of information on dieting, calorie charts of various food items and some healthy low-calorie recipes.

### Tyranny

*Tyranny* is Lesley Fairfield's first graphic novel, published by Tundra Books in 2009. Much of the story stems from the personal experiences of author Lesley Fairfield, who struggled through her thirty-year battle with anorexia and bulimia. The book begins by depicting Anna, Fairfield's narrative avatar as a child, with happy dreams of what she will do when she grows up. As a result of the changes that happened to her body during puberty. Gradually, Anna descends into anorexia with the tyrannical impact of her obsession for thinness. However, after a period of crisis, Anna begins her journey towards recovery with the help of her parents. *Tyranny* explicates well the aptness of the medium for the subject because the reader can witness Anna's dysmorphia. Thus, Anna's story recounts her battle with a monstrous tyrant.

## Lucille

Published by Top Shelf Productions in 2011, Ludovic Debeurme's fictional graphic narrative *Lucille* is a story of struggle and resolution. With a primary focus on visual elements, Debeurme draws the story of a young anorexic woman and the difficult relationships she has with others, who have significant problems of their own. The graphic novel follows Lucille, who is a troubled anorexic teen with few friends. She struggles with her relationship with her mother and often feels alone in the world. Her only confidante is an older woman in the geriatric unit of the hospital. At first, it seems that she is just your average conflicted adolescent. However, it becomes clear that she is suffering from numerous issues that are rooted in her unhappiness about herself. The second main character in the graphic novel is Arthur, who is also a troubled youth. Arthur and Lucille meet, and they can find in each other the love and acceptance that no one has shown them. Although Lucille is an anorexic, *Lucille* is more than a story about an eating disorder, alcoholism, and adolescence. Influenced by psychoanalysis and the exploration of dreams, Debeurme explores life and fantasies with elegant, clean graphics and a profound love of the games of childhood.

## The House That Groaned

Published in 2012 by Square Peg, Karrie Fransman's debut graphic narrative, *The House That Groaned*, is a topical elucidation of the subjectification of the female body. Written with the prime objective of sketching out a "good story" (Alderson), the graphic narrative is introduced to the readers from the perspective of Barbara, the new inhabitant in Godfrey's Building at 141 Rottin Road. Identified as a chromosome of the contemporary society, which is beleaguered by eating disorders and other issues pertaining to the cultural incarceration of female bodies, the story revolves around six characters: Barbara, a human Barbie; Janet, a tormented dietician suffering from anorexia; Marion, a hedonist; Durbach, an old widow; Matt, who airbrushes models in a magazine; and Brian, a diseasesophile. Through these characters, the book, which also doubles as an urban gothic narrative, brings relief to the oppression and silencing of the female body specifically by mentioning feminine eating disorders, the societal obsession with beauty and also the ultimate idea of women as objects of pleasure. Stylistically, the dimly lit and visually intense panels, doused in a greenish grey shade, succinctly capture the isolation and powerlessness experienced by women with eating disorders.

## Lighter Than My Shadow

As Katie Green's debut graphic narrative, *Lighter Than My Shadow* was published by Random House, London in 2013. Deploying Katie as Green's narrative avatar, the memoir foregrounds the cultural and emotional aspects of eating disorders in girls. Further, *Lighter*

is widely appreciated for the intense visual narration of her struggle with anorexia and subsequent recovery. Through potent drawings and forceful verbo-visual metaphors, Green alerts the reader to the centrality of peer pressure, sexual abuse and abjection as prominent causes of eating disorders. Portraying the progressive psychological arc of her illness and the consequent feeling of culpability, the memoir affords a factual and affective narration of the cycles of recovery, relapse and survival. Beginning with elaborate illustrations of young Katie's struggle to express her disparaging relationship with food, the memoir meanders through her adolescent experiences of anorexia, sexual assault and binge eating. While the memoir is a retelling of her harrowing experiences related to eating disorders, it also lauds the significance of art therapy and drawing as a means of self-restoration and healing. Katie was passionate about art and drawing during childhood, but later she stops practising the art of drawing due to the adverse bearing of anorexia on her self-confidence and creative capabilities. However, at a critical juncture, Katie returns to drawing and utilizes its therapeutic potentials to restore her well-being. Art not only provides tactility to Katie's repressed and unapparent emotions but also offers a distinctive voice to communicate with herself and others.

### Ink in Water: An Illustrated Memoir (Or, How I Kicked Anorexia's Ass and Embraced Body Positivity)

Published by New Harbinger Publications (2017), *Ink in Water* is a memoir of Lacy J Davis's long-term struggle with negative body image, eating disorders, and recovery. The narrative begins with the depiction of Lacy as an art student in Portland, Oregon. Although she is a bisexual punk feminist, she eventually gets affected by negative body image and eating disorders followed by breaking up with her boyfriend. Devasted by the break-up, Lacy believes that she was forsaken by her boyfriend due to her unattractive body. The detrimental thoughts of not being good enough pervade her sense of self, and she develops hatred towards her body and therefore abstains from nourishing it in any way. Lacy withdraws from social activities and relationships while harboring animosity towards herself. Over some time, she becomes anorexic and later bulimic too. However, with the help of friends, she joins an overeaters anonymous course, and gradually she dispels her negative thoughts about her body through art, music, friendship, and love irrespective of relapses. *Ink in Water* is an honest narration of how Lacy learned to control her negative body image perception and embrace body acceptance through art and creativity. Jim Kettner's vibrant illustrations adroitly represent the subjective labyrinths of Lacy's experiences that could not be entirely communicated through words. The black and white color, the thick sketching style, and the caricature effect, among others, adequately reflect the memoir's mood. Like many other graphic memoirists, Davis has also provided resources and guidelines for self-help. In essence, *Ink in Water* inspires eating disorder sufferers to surmount their negative body image.

Apart from the above-mentioned graphic narratives, Kevin Budnik's *Dust Motes*, published by Yeti Press (2013), is a graphic medical narrative about eating disorders in men. Similarly, *Thick and Thin* by Bruce Mutard is a webcomic that narrates the prevalence of eating disorders in men. Although eating disorders are popularly believed to be a gender-specific psychological illness that leads to corporeal erosion, these graphic medical narrative comics publicize that they are rampant among men as well. Some of the other popular webcomics on eating disorder experiences are: *I do not Have an Eating Disorder* by Khale McHurst, *Fasting* by Kazuo Umezu and Hisashi Eguchi, *The End of Things* and *The Skinny*.

## Conclusion

Eating disorders have always found representation in popular media ever since Hilde Bruch published *The Golden Cage: The Enigma of Anorexia Nervosa* in 1978. Although eating disorders had been a part of clinical literature since 1689, it was only in the latter half of the twentieth century that they received general attention. Following Bruch's footsteps, many female researchers, physicians, and patients started publishing written accounts on eating disorders. Appropriately, the eighteenth and nineteenth-century witnessed a proliferation of memoirs on eating disorders. Later, in the twentieth century, eating disorders, like all other illness conditions, started gaining representation across various media. From verbal narratives, paintings, cartoons, movies, and comics to webcomics, eating disorders have traversed a long path since the eighteenth century. Among the existing representations, the portrayal of eating disorders in the medium of comics is impressive. While all other depictions deploy one medium, comics utilize the combined energy of both verbal and visual media. As a subset of comics, graphic medicine has allocated an exclusive space for eating disorder narratives, allowing sufferers to externalize their subjective experiences effectively. In this context, along with a brief review of some of the pioneering literary and non-literary representations of eating disorders across various media, this article has briefly introduced seven graphic medical narratives on eating disorders written by women pathographers. In so doing, an attempt is made to create a comprehensive understanding of the unique role of popular media representations in dispelling the aura of unfamiliarity around eating disorders in women.

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