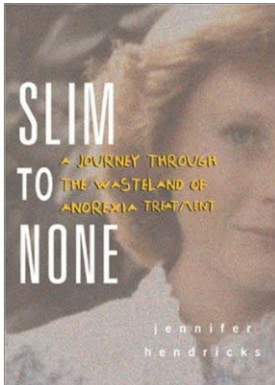


## Book Review

*Slim to None: A Journey Through the Wasteland of Anorexia Treatment*, by “Jennifer Hendricks”, McGraw-Hill, 2003.



*Slim to None*, attributed to “Jennifer Hendricks,” was in fact put together by the father of the girl whose diaries form the basis of it, Graydon “Dee” Hubbard. There are numerous other tales told by sufferers who have recovered from anorexia, but what is striking about it is that it appears to be the first publication of the diaries of an anorexia sufferer who did *not* survive the disorder, which kills 10-15% of its victims. Even more striking is the sceptical viewpoint that is taken towards the hodgepodge of treatments provided to our erstwhile diarist by mental health professionals. Names have been changed to protect both innocent and guilty, however, one wonders at whether or not a very public lawsuit might one day come to light based on some of the descriptions of malpractice in those pages.

While some therapists focus heavily on dealing with the present, the key psychiatrist in the saga pushes to find the childhood causes of her anorexia, and helps her come to the conclusion that it is because she was sexually abused as a child. With help, she “recovers” memories that fit what is expected of her, seemingly to avoid further restriction of privileges and verbal abuse from the psychiatrist. She initially recognises what psychologists term the “confirmatory bias” (i.e., searching for – or even *inventing* - evidence to confirm something and ignoring things that disconfirm it), as well as interpreting ambiguous things to be consistent with a pre-selected hypothesis:

“I’m still not convinced my problem is with Dad. Do I really see questionable things in our relationship or do I contrive them because Dr. Weintraub insists there are abnormal encounters between him and me?”

However, as she goes on, she appears to become engrossed in the swirl of emotion and loses sight of the distinction between fact and fantasy, aided by exercises like scanning old family photos for “indications of abuse.” As happens all too easily, the distinction between historical truth (where something is true because it happened) and narrative truth (where something is regarded as true because it fits a particular storyline and “makes sense”) is lost (Spence, 1984). A session of group therapy where praise is heaped on those who “recover” memories is enough to prompt her to claim “survivor” status as well. Jenny was allegedly molested – not in the past, but in the present, by a

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lesbian nurse (later sacked) who was involved in her treatment. This nurse insists that she is self-harming by cutting her vagina. These 'cuts' seem strangely to coincide with her monthly period, and therefore "needed to be checked." Digitally. Repeatedly.

Jenny is further horrified to find that the psychiatrist has breached confidentiality in discussing her case with the owners of a ranch where her family used to vacation. The humiliation thus experienced merely makes matters worse, and so we watch as Jenny spirals downwards towards her demise. We see nothing at all resembling a treatment that acknowledges her inner thoughts and feelings, save for the Recovered Memory Therapy noted above which seems to create an imaginary scapegoat rather than deal with them realistically. Worse, all treatments seem to focus solely on weight, and define success as restoring a healthy weight without ever addressing the negativity towards herself that precipitates the anorexic behaviours. Discharge, as Jenny points out, occurs irrespective of whether the underlying problem has been solved, i.e., the uncontrollable anorexic thoughts and feelings that lead to further restriction of diet the moment that she steps out of the hospital doors.

Hubbard confesses to some gentle editing of the 707 pages of diary material that his late daughter left behind when she passed away some ten years ago, and uses some literary license to reconstruct scenes from her life. However, the diary material itself, written by Jennifer, is explosive material, and anyone familiar with the problems of so-called "repressed memories," and the "therapy" used to recover them, will find in this book a detailed example of such a construction. It is compelling reading, and should be *required* reading for anyone involved in treating eating disorders. It is an important mirror to the profession, reflecting back perspectives on treatments from the all-too-often disregarded patient's point of view.

### **Reviewers**

Dr. Travis Gee

Director, SigmaX Consulting Pty Ltd.

Clinical Director, *Future Road Eating Disorders Centre*, Brisbane, Australia.

Research Fellow, School of Medicine, University of Queensland.

Kelly Pillinger

Founding Director, *Future Road Eating Disorders Centre*, Brisbane Australia.

Facilitator, *No Weigh! Anorexia & Bulimia Sufferers' Support Group*, Shailer Park, Australia.

### **Reference**

Spence, D. (1984) *Narrative truth and historical truth*, Norton, NY.