Anxious Eaters shows that fad diets are popular because they fulfill crucial social and psychological needs which is also why they tend to fail. Janet Chrzan and Kima Cargill bring together anthropology, psychology, and nutrition to explore what these programs promise yet rarely fulfill for dieters. They demonstrate how fad diets help people cope with widespread anxieties and offer tantalizing glimpses of attainable self-transformation.—Publisher

From the acknowledgments to the final thoughts of The Anxious Eater: Why We Fall for Fad Diets, the reader can detect a hint of contempt for fad diets in anthropological and psychological contexts. This book debunks fad diets repeatedly while arguing that diets fail because they circumvent social norms, promote pseudobiology, and overlook human behavior by manipulating science and history. This book would suit the overzealous dieter who is always searching for the next magic bullet, nutrition educators and students. The content brings a credible challenge to the unfounded logic of fad diets that anyone in the nutrition, wellness, or physical activity space should understand before making recommendations to students or patients. The 3 main sections point out that fad diets are not designed for success. The first section focuses on eating patterns and the social tendency for inclusion during meals, the second section concentrates on diet books that promote food addiction and food removal theory, and the third describes misconceptions in diets through the example of clean living and paleo diets.

The 3 distinct sections of this volume provide ample evidence that diets are rooted in societal messaging. Using examples of diet interpretations such as good vs bad, fears vs science, and biology vs behavior, the authors demonstrate how psychologically dieters are swayed to believe altered history and science. Section 1 sets the table with research and support for eating patterns rich in social tradition and specific food groups while pointing out how diets fail by removing basic needs at the cost of human nature. In section 2, the authors address food addiction and the elimination of micronutrients in diet books, along with the rhetoric that creates a belief system for people to access these miracle cures for weight loss. Finally, in section 3, 2 specific diets are highlighted, the clean eating method and paleo diets. The final chapters validate inclinations to categorize good and bad or clean vs dirty eating and the behavioral effects of dieting, such as self-identifying as the diet itself, for example, I am gluten-free or paleo.

To address the history and psychology of fad diets, the authors’ overarching theme highlights fear as the reason for acceptance of these modalities—fear of environmental hazards, addiction, and not belonging to societal norms. In addition, the information plays on the illogical ideals of the industry, such as messaging that uses history (paleo) or addiction (strict elimination) as science-based messaging. The essential argument throughout is evident, behavior plays a greater role in weight change than the diet itself and ascertains there is no right way of eating while validating that fad diets are not designed for success.

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