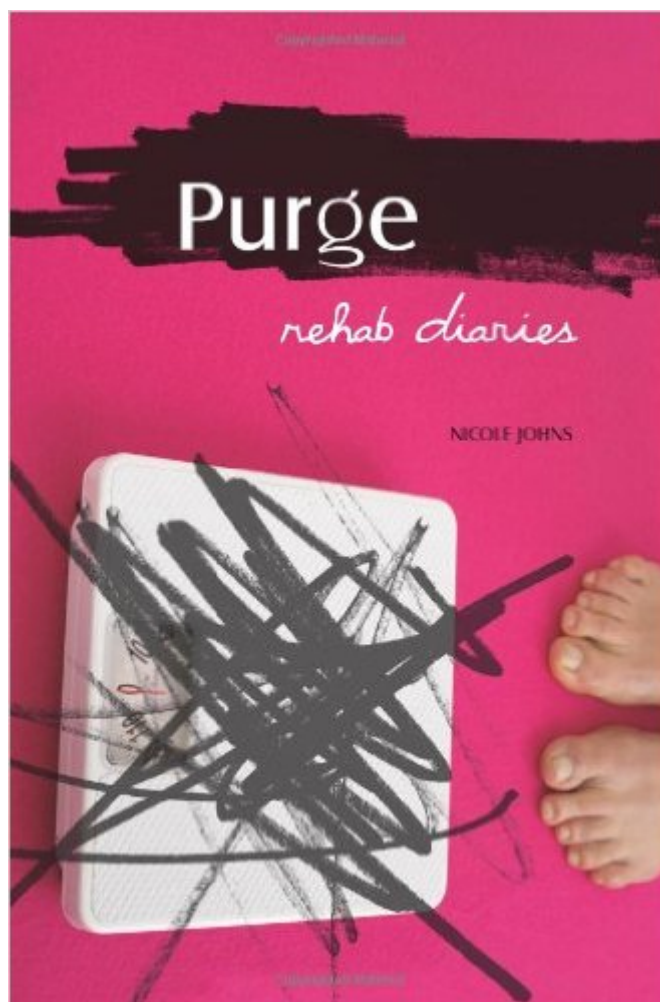


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Purge: Rehab Diaries



Synopsis

Purge is a beautifully crafted memoir that has a *Girl, Interrupted* feel. In this raw and engaging account of her months in rehab, Nicole Johns documents her stay in a residential treatment facility for eating disorders. Her prose is lucid and vivid, as she seamlessly switches verb tenses and moves through time. She unearths several important themes: body image and sexuality, sexual assault and relationships, and the struggle to piece together one's path in life. While other books about eating disorders and treatment may sugarcoat the harsh realities of living with and recovering from an eating disorder, Purge does not hold back. The author presents an honest, detailed account of her experience with treatment, avoiding the clichéd happily-ever-after ending while still offering hope to those who struggle with eating disorders, as well as anyone who has watched a loved one fight to recover from an eating disorder. Purge sends a message: though the road may be rough, ultimately there is hope.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Purge chronicles Nicole Johns' memoir of her time in a eating disorders rehab center in Wisconsin for 88 days in 2004, when she was 23 years old, for EDNOS, a term meaning Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified. The writing is stark, interspersed with clinical documents like her intake documents, guidelines from the clinic, and the \$24,500 bill for her treatment (\$15,500 was covered by her insurance). While anyone who's read any other first-person accounts of eating disorders, or lived with one, will find much that's familiar here--stuffing one's feelings with food, trauma, body

dismorphia--there are several things different about Johns' story. She isn't a stick-thin anorexic, but rather a woman who's a size 9, who struggles with being at the upper end of the weight scale in the clinic. Yet by constantly purging (making herself vomit), she's wound up in the hospital and suffers from heart problems and had a concussion, along with other medical issues that will be with her for a long time, if not forever. She's also bisexual, though that isn't presented as a factor in her diagnosis; in fact, it's treated, refreshingly, as a nonissue, and seems to be a given to Johns. When she writes things like, "My body has lost its integrity," it's something many, many women can relate to. Yet this is not a self-help book or one with a moral lesson per se. Johns is not holding herself up as an example, and in fact alludes to the danger of doing so when she writes that Marya Hornbacher's memoir *Wasted* is considered an "eating disorder bible" to many women suffering from eating disorders, and was banned from the treatment facility she attended.

I finished the majority of this memoir in one night. Powerful book--very easy to read. Most people are only aware of anorexia and bulimia but *Purge* takes the reader inside the experience of a not-so-well-known eating disorder: EDNOS. (Which stands for Eating Disorder Not Otherwise Specified.) The book starts with an introduction by Nicole Johns in which she references *Wasted* by Marya Hornbacher. I wasn't sure how to take this: on one hand, she just referenced my favorite memoir and probably the most intense book out there that deals with the subject of eating disorders. On the other hand, I didn't want *Purge* to be a wannabe-*Wasted*. Turns out I didn't have to worry. The book takes place during Johns' days of recovery in an eating disorder clinic. Not only does she take the reader through the hectic life of a person with EDNOS, she also takes them through the long hard road to recovery. The style has sort of a journal-like feel to it. (This is reflected by the first chapter which contains selected entry from Johns' diary.) This made the book feel a bit more personal, which is one of the things that made this book very powerful. A few chapters after the first were written in second person which I found a little bit annoying, but I won't sit here and complain about something as trivial as that. The book really gets going when Nicole is checked into the clinic. We meet the other residents, as well as the staff, and we're all set to get familiar with the treatment from the moment of arrival. (I knew before that rehab centers had very strict rules--I didn't know the extent until I read this book. Some of the rules just seemed completely random; I would never have thought of half the policies and procedures Johns describes.

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