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Mika Brzezinski is at war against obesity. "On Morning Joe," she is often so adamant about improving America's eating habits that some people have dubbed her "the food Nazi." What they don't know is that Mika wages a personal fight against unhealthy eating habits every day, and in this book she describes her history of food obsession and distorted body image, and her lifelong struggle to be thin. She believes it's time we all learned to stop blaming ourselves, and each other, and look at the real culprits--the food we eat and our addiction to it. Mika feels the only way to do this is to break through the walls of silence and shame we've built around obesity and food obsessions. She believes we need to talk openly about how our country became overweight, and what we can do to turn the corner and step firmly onto the path of health. So Mika made a deal with her very close friend Diane: they would work together on this book and on their personal goals, to help Diane drop 75 pounds and to break Mika's obsession with staying superthin. As she did in her bestseller "Knowing Your""Value," Mika has packed each chapter with insights from notable people in medicine, health, business, the arts, and politics. Singer Jennifer Hudson, the late writer and director Nora Ephron, TV host Gayle King, New Jersey governor Chris Christie, and many others open up to Mika about their own challenges and what works for them when it comes to food and diet. It's time we stopped whispering the F-word ("fat") the way we used to shun the C-word ("cancer"). This book--with its trademark Brzezinski smarts, honesty, and courage--launches us into a no-holds-barred conversation with family and friends, in schools and kitchens, in Congress and the food industry, to help us all find ways to tackle one of the biggest problems standing between us and a healthier America.

Obsessed: America's Food Addiction - And My Own Details

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Tammy says

I was bored or offended through most of this book. I realize Mika struggles with a food addiction but I can't tell if she wanted the reader to feel sorry for her or proud of her for being so skinny. Did she want the reader to be happy or shocked when she said she almost always feels hungry or that she exercises obsessively at times? I felt like she came across a bit preachy and I just didn't like this book.

Kristina says

Mika Brzezinski's *Obsessed* is not a book I would have ever picked up on my own. I tend to read mostly fiction, and I'm not too interested in books about nutrition, but my mother very much enjoyed this novel on food addiction and obesity and insisted that I read it. Being the good sport that I am, I gave it a try.

In *Obsessed*, Brzezinski speaks frankly about the obesity epidemic in America and explores various issues surrounding this health crisis, including public perceptions of overweight individuals, eating disorders, food addiction, diets, and what steps we should take as a country to turn things around. She quotes various experts in scientific fields to back up her points, as well as celebrities who were willing to speak plainly about their struggles with weight. She also describes her own problems with food addiction in detail (she is extremely health conscious and skinny, but battles food cravings constantly). At the center of all this information is the personal story of a deal she made with her overweight friend, Diane Smith. They agreed to work on writing *Obsessed* together while trying to become more healthy. Diane would try to lose 75 pounds while Brzezinski would try to loosen up about food and gain 10 without losing control.

My opinion of this book was that it was slightly better than okay. The information Brzezinski presents is very interesting, and I agree with her point that the obesity epidemic in America is a genuine health crisis that needs to be addressed. I enjoyed learning about the science behind food addiction and reading about how toxic sugar-and fat-laden foods are to our bodies. It caused me to think differently about fast food restaurants and junk food. A definite strength of this book is how it dives into several food-related topics and shows the relationships between them. *Obsessed* looks at the scientific, emotional, political and personal elements of how we are eating and does a good job of proving that many of our approaches to food need to change, and quickly.

Where I struggled with this book was with Brzezinski's narration. *Obsessed* is definitely the right name for this novel, because it is very clear from page one that Brzezinski has a serious eating disorder that has led her to have an extremely unhealthy relationship with food. The description she gives of herself paints a disturbing image of a woman that constantly thinks about food, is constantly hungry, constantly exercising and constantly in fear of losing the iron grip she has on her diet. I can't imagine how exhausting it must be to live this way. While she admits to her eating disorder and does attend counseling for these issues in the book, it didn't seem quite right that a person with such big problems with food should be writing a book telling others how to eat. Her damaged point of view poisons her talking points.

For example, she lays into her poor friend Diane in the beginning of the book, telling her that she is fat, that she is obese and that she needs to lose a significant amount of weight. She also tells Diane that her weight is

holding her back from being as successful as she could be. Now, to put things in perspective, at that point in her life, Diane was an Emmy-winning TV journalist, radio talk show host and author. How much more successful did Brzezinski want her friend to be? It was as if all those accomplishments weren't good enough because Diane was fat when she achieved them. Her point of view came across so skewed in instances like this that I had trouble taking her seriously throughout the book. I felt like her eating disorder was causing her to project her own problems on everyone around her.

Another problem I had with the book was the physical layout of the pages. For some reason, multiple quotes are pulled out the text, bolded, and placed in the middle of the pages. There are a LOT of these quotes throughout the book, and most of the time, the featured quote came from the sentence that ended the paragraph directly above it. I don't need to read the exact same line twice in a row. It was incredibly disruptive to the reading process. I'm assuming that the featured quotes were placed there to catch the eye of potential buyers flipping through the book in the book store, but the tactic was very annoying while trying to read. I don't like to call things stupid, but this was honestly the stupidest use of quotes I've ever seen in a book.

While Obsessed contains some great points and interesting information, I found that my enjoyment of the novel was limited by the influence of Brzezinski's eating disorder. When combined with the awful and intrusive bolded quotes, my reading experience ended up being only okay. I do believe that more education and effort are needed to help pull America out of the downward spiral we are in with regard to unhealthy food. This book is a good effort towards starting a dialogue about obesity and working towards change, I just wish it had been presented by an author with a healthier viewpoint.

Angela says

Really, Mika? Not sure your book adds anything new to the conversation about weight loss. There's no box-cutter answer to get some one to lose weight. You called your bff "fat," but is that the real reason she the weight? After reading the book, I think she lost the weight because she knew her health was at stake. There's no cookie cutter plan for losing weight. It starts with "wanting" to lose the weight and can take a myriad number of paths from there. After all, there are an infinite number of reasons why the weight was put on in the first place. to try and simplify it in a 185 page book doesn't do anybody any justice, and makes for a boring conversation.

Jill says

I am going through a food crisis right now and need some sanity. I really hope this gives it to me.

I read this book at the perfect time. While I only gave it 3 stars, I felt that it was an important read. I really enjoyed and got a lot out of the personal stories, However Mika became bogged down in facts and figures and the book lost a lot of interest. there were definite points where I was vigorously nodding in agreement with the way Mika described her obsession with food. It's scary close to me. However her genetics save her, and mine do not. We both realize, however, that fat or thin, it's not healthy, sane behavior. Hopefully I'm strong enough to win my battle.

Alissa says

This book kept me interested. I generally agreed with much of what was said about the food industry, and the obesity epidemic - but that wasn't really news to me. In the end I was left feeling a little angry at the author. She tells her own story and in it she readily admits to having had a binge eating disorder in her teens and early adulthood. I would call it (but not her), exercise bulimia (binge, run, starve repeat). However in her attempt to derail the binging, she ultimately ended up with a disorder much closer to Anorexia Nervosa and Orthorexia. In the book, she sorts of admits to it after mentioning a conversation with a therapist, but by the end of the book I am still left with the feeling this woman does not intend nor fully want to recover and she still feels superior to people who don't want to live their lives hungry all the time. She wants to do everything she can to prevent passing the ED along to her daughters, except fully recover herself. As someone who HAS fully recovered, I found this book mildly triggering. Perhaps Mika just needed to wait a few more years to publish this book when her recovery journey was more complete.

Cassi Paslick says

The individual stories of Mika and Diane's battle with a healthy body and a healthy body image were interesting, and it was interesting to read of other well-known people who have also fought and won this battle. However, the chapter where she discusses how to change the current American culture of food and body image was really poor. Just lots of ideas that others have been fighting hard to put in place for years, with no real mention of all the very real problems that stand in the way, both politically and culturally.

Darlene says

I have been a fan of 'Morning Joe's co-host, Mika Brzezinski for many years. Over the last couple of years, she has been very outspoken about the problem of obesity in the United States... especially how this health epidemic affects our children. I have to admit that there have been times when I felt that perhaps Ms. Brzezinski had gone a little too far and had become obsessed. I was aware that Ms. Brzezinski had collaborated with a friend and fellow journalist, Diane Smith, and had done a great deal of research and had honestly told their own personal stories in this very interesting book, Obsessed.

Ms. Brzezinski, a woman who appears neither overweight nor unhealthy, talks about how her obsession with remaining a particular size has come into conflict throughout her life with her obsession.. her craving... with all of the foods that aren't healthy... foods full of salt, sugar and fat. Her collaborator on this book, Diane Smith, has fought a different... and yet, in many ways it seems a similar battle . She has always struggled with her weight.. always trying the latest diet fad and frequently losing the battle against those same foods Ms. Brzezinski struggles with.

This book seems to start with the premise that there is something inherently 'bad' in these foods which cause people to become 'addicted' to them. She believes (and there is some new research which seems to support her to an extent), that these foods are engineered to create a craving, making many people unable to stop eating them... consequently leading to the constant struggles with weight which many people face. In this book, Ms. Brzezinski and Ms. Smith also present facts and information collected from the Centers for

Disease Control, the National Institutes of Health, interviews of physicians, nutritionists and also personal accounts of the struggles faced by other public figures in dealing with what types of foods they eat and what quantities of food they consume.

Although I agree with Ms. Brzezinski that obesity is a growing serious problem in our country, I have to say that I was not entirely convinced that the foods themselves are the culprit. I do not think that the science which is currently available is behind her completely... although continued research may change that in the future. I think that perhaps the explanation for the obesity epidemic is more complex than just blaming the quality of the food. Although I would be over-simplifying the problem by saying that people gain weight when the calories they consume are greater than the calories they expend, I do believe that people, in general, have become more sedentary. Consequently they are not using the calories they consume during the course of a day.

I was impressed that Ms. Brzezinski also wrote about body image in this book. I agree that the media presents (especially for girls and women), an unrealistic and mostly unachievable ideal for what a female body 'should' look like. Reading this section reminded me of a great movie I watched years ago called, "Real Women Have Curves". Emphasis for our daughters should be placed on being healthy and energetic. After all, as Ms. Brzezinski points out.. there are many different body types and each of us has a 'set point' for weight that our body naturally seems to gravitate toward.

I was also thrilled that Ms. Brzezinski wrote a bit about 'food deserts' and 'food insecurity'. The truth is that there are many people who would love to eat healthier foods... but either they live in an area where fresh produce cannot be found; or they do not have the money to make healthier choices. After all, healthier foods are more expensive than the unhealthy processed foods.

I cannot say I came away from this book agreeing completely with everything Ms. Brzezinski and Ms. Smith said. I do acknowledge that a portion of this book were Ms. Brzezinski's and Ms. Smith's personal struggles... and both stories were relatable and inspiring. I think both women should be commended for talking about a difficult but very important subject. The health of our country... both physically and economically.. are at stake.

Diane says

Brzezinski repeatedly states that she doesn't want to come off as a narcissist but, unfortunately, she does for most of the book. All in all, I think this book was filled with important information but a lot of what Brzezinski discusses (in regards to starting a healthy conversation) is a bit far fetched and arrogant. I believe her intentions are pure; however, her approach is off.

Kara says

Important information that may benefit a lot of people. Not really a fan of her style as far as repeating "important" quotes in bold right after they are said. Kind of strange, and it really annoyed me when she was quoting herself. It just seemed so preachy.

Margo Kelly says

A size two, tall, gorgeous blonde woman tells a 250 pound woman, “You have a problem.” How would YOU react? ... Wait. What if I told you they were out on the water in a motor boat together? What if that skinny woman went on to say, “You’re not just overweight—you’re fat. You’re OBESE.” What if I told you they were friends?

Well, if I had been the fat woman, and a little size two woman said that to me ... I would toss her over the side of the freaking boat and speed away!

Can a privileged, skinny TV host write a book about obesity in America? Okay, yes, but should she?

Mika Brzezinski, co-host of a popular MSNBC morning show and bestselling author, has lived with an eating disorder that has plagued her mentally and physically, but she’s looks great in a sleeveless size two dress. ... So that makes it okay, right? No.

Diane Smith, Emmy-Award-Winning Producer and Journalist, has struggled with food and weight her entire life as well, but her struggle was evident on the outside weighing in at 250 pounds. ... So that makes her a failure, right? No.

OBSESSED: AMERICA’S FOOD ADDICTION—AND MY OWN shares both Mika’s and Diane’s personal struggles to overcome their food obsessions and maintain a healthier lifestyle. The juxtaposed stories of an obese person and a skinny person really played to the point of food obsession well. To know that many of Mika’s stories were MY OWN stories, and her feelings were my feelings, really surprised me.

Fat people often think skinny people have no idea how they struggle against food every day. Truth is: many skinny people struggle more with food obsession than their overweight counterparts.

The bottom line is: I couldn’t put the book down. From the opening page where Mika writes, “How does a person who is not overweight write about her lifelong obsession with overeating without sounding like a narcissistic, woe-is-me skinny girl with an overinflated image ... you can’t. No matter what you say or how you say it, you’re going to sound like a privileged skinny bitch with food issues. Oh yeah, and a TV show. And a woman who was born into a wonderful, prominent family and has a blessed life.” ... to the final pages where Mika writes, “I thought all this research and writing would help Diane get her life back on track. But she made me realize that I had lot more work to do on myself ... I am more self-aware and less self-righteous when the topic turns to eating.” ... I was enthralled by the story, by the facts, and by the testimonials.

I dog-eared more pages than I should have, but there were so many things that I wanted to share, address, and debate in not only my review but also in my conversations with other people about the topic, I just couldn’t stop myself from marking the passages in the book that moved me.

The most important pages, that brought me to tears, were the ones about what you should and should not say to your daughters about food related issues. I love my children, and I have struggled to teach them better eating and exercising habits than I’ve practiced myself. I never wanted them to grow up with the same weight and body image issues I’ve had. But as I read Mika’s passages where she expressed her concerns about passing her food obsessions on to her daughter, I shook my head and thought, “Mika, you’re fooling

yourself if you don't realize they are watching your behavior more than listening to your advice." Then Mika went on to write, "Carlie and I ... both weighed ourselves. ... [and Carlie said to me] 'You have an eating disorder, so that's why you weigh less than me.'" (page 230). I started to cry! I chastised myself for judging Mika unfairly. Truth of the matter is, all of our children are smarter and more intuitive than we give them credit for. My children know the truth about my eating habits. So do yours.

I can honestly say I'm not a fan or a follower or a viewer of Mika Brzezinski. I'd never read anything written by her or watched a television program she hosted. It doesn't matter if she's a liberal, and I'm not. It doesn't matter that she's a size two, or four, or six, and I'm not.

The fact is: She's written a great book here, and if it's read and discussed by people it can serve as a useful tool in our society. This would be an excellent choice for a discussion at book club, mothers' groups, parenting classes, nutrition classes, weight-loss programs, school health classes, and more.

Here are the reasons I gave the book four stars instead of five:

1. It seemed to me that Diane Smith had contributed enough content to the book to be given credit as a coauthor rather than just a collaborator.
2. It would have been more dramatic and eye catching to see beginning versions of Mika and Diane on the front cover and final versions on the back cover. ... There is a "final version" picture on the back cover, but only skinny Mika on the front.
3. There was a concluding chapter by Mika, but no concluding thoughts from Diane. This was my main disappointment with the book. I wanted to know how Diane felt at the end of the journey.
4. Since this was a book about body image and appearance, I would have enjoyed a photo section in the center of the book featuring the people interviewed.

Regardless of the above list, I highly recommend this book to all women.

Suzanne says

I have to admit, I didn't want to read this book. My mom gave me this book as I'm struggling with my weight and food addiction, and it was done out of love. But I am not of fan of Mika, nor the show she's on - I think Joe Scarborough is an ass, and I greatly dislike the kind of "journalism" they put forth on this show. But I can't say no to my dear mom, so I read it, but couldn't really put aside my feelings. I'd give this only one star if I read it of my own volition, but gave it a second star because of my preconceived bias.

The first thing Mika says is "why would you listen to me when I'm a skinny bitch?" - and it really rings true with me, and in the end, it's a big part of why I didn't like this book. She doesn't have a true food addiction, in my mind, because she has successfully kept it at bay practically all her life. She also enjoys exercise way too much for an addict. I'd say she has an unhealthy relationship with food, which is one rung lower than addiction. (Kind of like a "problem drinker" vs. alcoholic.) Also, taking an Ambien once and devouring a tub of cake icing doesn't give weight to your addict assertions.

She's got very basic things to say, and nothing that really resonates as profound or new to the conversation. So lucky Mika got a book deal and got to speak to her passion - great. But there are really no true answers here; she's just saying what we're all saying - let's fix the food system. I'd rather hear it from a government official or an industry insider than a TV personality. I also hated her insistence on bringing the word "fat"

back - as if this one word could hold some kind of power to fix all these problems we have in our society. How inane.

She portrays dieting and losing weight as a very basic activity, and bows to the power of the BMI scale, which is an overly simplistic and bogus tool to assess one's health. She doesn't factor in other health issues that could make weight loss more difficult. What really grated on me was hearing from all her celebrity acquaintances on how they lost the weight. Really? If I made their money, I'd be a helluva lot skinnier too. Try profiling a middle-aged single mother with two jobs and let's see how easy it is for her to drop the weight.

In the end, this book would have fared a lot better if we heard from her friend Diane more. Diane's journey was infinitely more interesting to me and was probably more relatable to people reading this book. But her story was summed up in about 30 pages, max, and it was quite a superficial look at her weight loss journey.

Michele says

Television journalist and author Mika Brzezinski takes on the myriad food issues of the modern American milieu in her new book, *Obsessed: America's Food Obsession—and My Own*. With parts co-authored by her friend and fellow television journalist/author Diane Smith, the book is framed around the pair's struggles to each find a healthy relationship with food. Part confessional, Brzezinski and Smith get honest about their personal troubles with junk food, dieting, and disordered eating; part call-to-arms, Brzezinski draws attention to the state of our modern food industry, how it's contributed to the obesity epidemic, and what that means for all of us in terms of public health. Published in early May, the book features input from others in the public eye, including Jennifer Hudson, Kathleen Turner, Nora Ephron, and Governor Chris Christy, as well as from the medical field.

Since her teenage years, Mika has struggled against the urge to gorge herself on the likes of fast food, greasy pizza, and sweets. However, being in the public eye, she quickly learned that she could not afford to indulge these cravings. She became an avid runner, learned to maintain (for the most part) a diet of "healthy" foods, and has become so outspoken about the obesity epidemic that she was christened "the food Nazi" by her MSNBC Morning Joe co-host, Joe Scarborough. Thus, she managed to remain a size 2 well into middle age, being consumed by thoughts of food every step of the way.

Diane Smith, meanwhile, has almost always been on a diet, but has never been able to keep the weight off. As her weight steadily climbed as she grew older, and she began to struggle with things like getting in and out of her family's boat. Finally, fearing for her friend's health, Mika broached the unpleasant topic. That first painful, candid discussion was the impetus that sparked the writing of this book. Mika issued Diane the challenge to lose 75 pounds, saying she would foot the bill for whatever Diane deemed necessary to take. Diane countered by challenging Mika to gain ten pounds and find her own "healthy thin." Thus, they began to tackle their demons and delve into the convoluted landscape of food and health in the United States. The two women are different sides of the same coin: outwardly their appearances may differ greatly, but they share the same inner struggle, the same expenditure of mental energy over this preoccupation with what to put—or, more often, not to put—into their bodies. Having both perspectives to guide the narrative helps to counterbalance one from the other. They bridge the gap between fat and skinny to unite all those who deal with unhealthy attitudes toward food and their bodies.

Woven into the story of two friends striving to get healthy are insights into why struggles like theirs exist.

Brzezinski brings up the addictive qualities of processed food, the stresses and pressures of a modern lifestyle that doesn't allow time for a healthy food culture of shopping for fresh ingredients and preparing one's own meals to share with a family. She delves into why the unhealthy stuff is so much cheaper than the healthy and how community infrastructures based around pedestrians, rather than cars, can make a big difference. She also talks about our collective denial, how the healthcare field could be more helpful, the way our notions of healthy bodies are shaped through the media, and much more. She really does cover the whole gamut, and I give her credit for tying together the formerly disparate fields of eating disorders, obesity, and the food industry. Along the way, many others who were consulted weigh in on their particular topic of interest. The book really does a great job of sweeping the landscape to give an overview of the food situation as it currently stands.

While parts of it grew repetitive, this quick read was full of both emotional honesty and thought-provoking information. The candid manner in which Mika and Diane held nothing back of their own stories is, in my opinion, courageous. Their vulnerability inspires empathy and sets the stage for the larger issues at play. While each woman did meet her goals for changing her body, the rawness of their narratives lets the reader know that the body image demons of each are not fully conquered. Yet, the telling is optimistic. There is an entire chapter on suggested solutions and actions to take to counter the problems that have been identified. Additionally, the last chapter is entitled "Teach Your Children Well" and talks about how one can set up their children with healthier eating attitudes than those of preceding generations. This book succeeds in that it provides a jumping-off point for a greater conversation about food and health and wellness in this country.

Joseph says

I'm not sure what to make of this book.

It does raise some very important issues especially with regard to our national obesity epidemic. Mika documents very serious issues, for example, the cost of obesity is about \$190 billion a year or 21 percent of all medical spending. Our life spans are now shorter and the current generation will not live as long as preceding generations with one in three kids now being obese or overweight. One in four of seventeen to twenty seven year olds are "too fat to fight." Additionally, students in our schools consume 400 billion junk food calories every year. That is the equivalent of almost 2 billion candy bars. We eat poorly and we eat too much. Documenting the extent of the problem is a real strength of the book.

The book also attempts to explain how we got to this sad state of affairs noting that the fast food industry spends \$4 billion in advertising each year. Supermarkets are also singled out for placing empty calories in candy bars, sweets and sugary cereals where children will see them. This is summed up as follows "the problem is a flood of highly processed, hyper palatable, energy-dense, nutrient diluted, glow-in-the-dark, bet-you-can't-eat-just-one kind of foods." All of this is, of course, true, but hardly news.

There is a key point in the book about halfway through on p. 102 where the possibility that food companies are manipulating consumers is oh so cautiously posited. Mika quotes Zeke Emanuel, a food 'ethicist,' "as an ethicist I'm very careful about the words I use and I try to be careful about manipulation; it tends to be one of the squishier words. But I would say they adjust, modify, test and reforms late the products to increase their palatability." At that point, I thought, yeah, Mika is a wus and heaven forbid that she offend a sponsor. Yup, Mika copped out at that point. She eases around the subject of high fructose corn syrup a few pages later.

In fairness, Mika in her very guarded way does draw attention to some very serious issues. I just wish she had had the courage to go a bit further and the audacity to be a little less politically correct. The book is very well written and can easily be finished in two to three hours.

Don't look for any stunning revelations other than the fact that Mika once binged on Tacos and during an Ambien generated sleep walking episode ate Nutella out of a jar. And, yes I am opinionated but Mika is no Rachel Maddow.

Sklape says

I agree with many of the other reviews about the repetition in this book. Not much new but I do agree that the food giants need their subsidies stopped and the money redirected to the production of whole foods. Through a review I learned about Gary Taubes who challenges the simple physics theory that calories in minus calories expended equals weight loss or weight gain. It much more complicated than that. Not all calories are created equal.

Jenny Demonic says

Mika should write college textbooks for intro courses. Largely, this book covered ground many are already aware of (though most turn a blind eye to), but the personal revelations keep the reader engaged. As someone who struggles more like co-author Diane Smith than Mika Brzezinski, I related more to her personal story, but I find myself thankful that I have never encountered the self-challenging stories Mika openly shares. America has a food and weight problem. It's time for a more open conversation about that, and this book does just that for the people who will crack its spine.

Told from an honest place with little judgment but a big message, "Obsessed" is the kind of book that seeks to move people forward to healthy goals, and shares insights many are too afraid to admit to having. It won't change the world and it won't change you overnight, but it will make you think, and that's the greatest thing a book can do.
