



Gentle Currents



THE NEWSLETTER FOR PEOPLE RECOVERING FROM SEX AND LOVE ADDICTION

TampaBaySLAA.org

JULY 2020

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The Anorexia Issue

“Some of us have worked the Steps before, perhaps on other issues, but when we tried a similar approach for our anorexic behaviors, we met new pitfalls or resistance. ...In tandem, a sponsor or co-sponsor can serve as invaluable support through the Steps.

We need all the help we can get from others to work through potential pitfalls. ...It is not uncommon to experience overwhelming grief while working these Steps. Many of us have experienced significant loss, including vital relationships, and the grieving process is a healthy part of our recovery.”

SLAA, Anorexia 4-5-6-7

Working the Program and not the Problem Booklet

Step 7: Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings

Tradition 7: Every SLAA group ought to be fully self-supporting, declining outside contributions.

Sign of Recovery 7: We allow ourselves to work through the pain of our low self-esteem and our fears of abandonment and responsibility. We learn to feel comfortable in solitude.

Affirming Signs of Growing Self-Esteem

- Having gratitude for our life as it is today
- No longer beating ourselves up
- Replacing feelings of self loathing with an appreciation of self
- Learning to forgive ourselves and others
- Being able to accept a compliment
- Gaining a realistic view of ourselves as neither the best nor worst person in the world
- Growing to know that we are valuable members of our recovery group and society.
- Developing a feeling of belonging.
- Being able to recognize and acknowledge our accomplishments
- Giving ourselves credit for our efforts

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Write for the Anorexia Project

Anorexia 8-9 Project: *"Anorexia 8-9: Working the Program and Not the Problem"* is the working title of a piece of literature being developed by the Conference Anorexia Committee (CAC) that will focus on anorexia and Steps 8 and 9. The content of the booklet will primarily be anorectic member experiences with these steps, accompanied by discussion ques-



Anorexia 10-11-12 Project: *"Anorexia 10-11-12: Working the Program and Not the Problem"* is the working title of a piece of literature being developed by the Conference Anorexia Committee (CAC) that will focus on anorexia and Steps 10, 11, and 12. The content of the booklet will primarily be anorectic member experiences with these steps, accompanied by discussion questions and meditations.

ANOREXIA: Sexual, Social, Emotional
(published by *The Augustine Fellowship of S.L.A.A.*)

"We know there are very good reasons for our having become anorectic; we also have come to realize that there is nothing to blame ourselves for in being anorexic. But we now want nourishing emotional, sexual, and social lives. Our anorexia may have come out of a precious sense of our own preservation, but still we want to change; we have begun the work of recovery and change in S.L.A.A. We would like to say that your recovery is essential to ours. So each new member brings a fresh understanding and a new possibility for recovery for all. The fellowship of Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous welcomes you!"

TRAUMA IN EARLY FAMILY LIFE

Anorexia is usually rooted in childhood trauma. If a person is traumatized as a child they tend to have no control; in order to lessen the trauma, sexual anorexics may become adverse to sex and their own sexuality. The responders, both men and women, indicated that trauma was present in their childhood histories, including the following:

- Boundary violations
- Sexual shaming
- Emotional neglect and abuse (needs not met)
- Sexual and/or physical abuse
- Deprivation leading to addictive strategies in later life
- Loss (death) of family members

**Available in the SLAAFWS.ORG
online store**

CDs:

<http://store.slaafws.org/ctgy/AUKANXA.html>

AU93-001 Anorexia

AU93-016 Recognizing Sexual Anorexia

AU05-006 Cross Addiction: Sex & Love Addiction, Social Anorexia & Food Issues.

AU05-008 Anorexia-Unlocking the Cage

AU08-003 Recovery from Anorexia

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Does anorexia tie in with your love and sex addiction? If so, how? <https://slaafws.org/anorexia-questionnaire>

What is anorexia? Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous (S.L.A.A.) offers this definition: “As an eating disorder, anorexia is defined as the compulsive avoidance of food. In the area of sex and love, anorexia has a similar definition: Anorexia is the compulsive avoidance of giving or receiving social, sexual, or emotional nourishment.”

Patrick Carnes, the nationally known author on addiction and recovery, describes sexual anorexia as: “an obsessive state in which the physical, mental and emotional task of avoiding sex dominates one’s life. Like self-starvation with food, deprivation with sex can make one feel powerful and defended against all hurts.”

The S.L.A.A. members that responded to our survey have spent a lot of time and energy trying to avoid sex and intimate relationships.

One of the responders to our questionnaire identifies herself as a 56-year-old lesbian with sexual, social and emotional anorexia. “I have always pursued relationships with unavailable women who are married, alcoholic or straight; I’ve never sought a sexual relationship with another lesbian.”

A 45-year-old participant is struggling with what she believes is sexual anorexia. She grew up in a sexually repressive family and social system where alcoholism and other dysfunctional behavior existed. “I didn’t have a model of a good healthy sexual relationship growing up,” she explains. “I’ve never had a loving relationship. I can’t be sexually open and free. I have hang-ups.”

‘HANG UPS’ (FEAR)

Many of the participants shared a fear of sexual pleasure and indicated that they were full of fear and sexual self-doubt. The following are some of the fears they expressed in their responses:

- Fear of intimacy of “connection” with others
- Fear of engulfment, “suffocation,” loss of self, or death
- Fear of intense feelings (which have been suppressed)
- Fear of being visible or seen for one’s self
- Fear of one’s sexuality
- Fear of being attracted to someone
- Fear of starting or exiting a relationship

ADDICTIVE and DEPRIVATION BEHAVIORS

Used to decrease pain (numbing out) or increase pleasure (getting a hit)

Sexual anorexia has been described as the flip side of sexual addiction. It’s elusive, often masking itself behind other compulsive and deprivation behaviors. The responders consistently indicated that the fear hides behind avoidance schemes or other self-protective mechanisms. Their responses showed that sexual anorexia can wear many masks; the following are some of the behaviors they use to compensate:

- Isolation strategies for self-comfort
- A vivid fantasy life (in private)
- Pornography, voyeurism, masturbation, etc.
- Cross-addictions – food, money, drugs, alcohol, hoarding, TV, Internet, etc.
- Sexual promiscuity or acting out (with unavailable people)

AVOIDANCE OF INTIMACY

In the S.L.A.A. literature, anorexic members make this observation: “We anorexics begin to realize that we have been living our lives for a long time without love. We observe the absence of closeness in certain areas of our lives and we observe that we engage in dread of others and a strategy to keep them at bay. Having become aware of this we may have tried to change our conduct. If we found we could not change, we may have come to understand we are addicted to it: it was conduct we repeatedly engaged in and could not stop despite the consequences.” These are some of the methods used by the responders to avoid intimacy with themselves and others:

- Intellectualizing (using anorexia as an excuse to act-out sexually, inability to find a balance between need to rejuvenate and wanting to isolate out of fear of being visible, etc.)
 - Distancing strategies (avoidance of dating, avoidance of intimate friendships, behaving in a grandiose or inferior manner, avoidance of the company of others, withdrawal or isolation from partner, etc.)
 - Addictive behavior (masturbating, fantasizing, intrigue, overeating, etc.)
 - Using safety mechanisms, i.e. operating automatically (making oneself “small” and “unseen” in group situations, keeping secrets, pretending to be “to busy” all the time, etc.)
- Addictive obsession with unavailable people

POOR SELF-ESTEEM, DEPRESSION, AND ANXIETY

Like food anorexics, sexual anorexics starve themselves in the midst of plenty. Many of the participants indicated that they feel a sense of acute alienation and loss of self. The following are some of the issues mentioned by the responders:

- Deprivation (sexually, emotionally, etc.)
 - Self-belittling and judgment
 - Perfectionism
 - Grandiosity or inferiority extremes
 - Hiding from life and light
 - Loneliness
 - Stuck emotions
- “Nothing ventured, nothing gained” thinking and acting

An excerpt from *the Journal, Anorexia and Addiction Two Sides of the Same Coin*

“After about 2 years in S.L.A.A., I had stopped “acting out.” But I eventually realized that I had simply morphed into “acting in” (binging and purging, working compulsively, isolating, masturbating, etc.) And it was only after working with a knowledgeable and solid sponsor who understood social and sexual anorexia that it became clear to me that (Characteristic #11) “*to avoid feeling vulnerable, I had retreated from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.*”

I am finally attempting to deal with what intimacy is and how I long for it. And I am consciously attempting to allow in the nurturing and support available to me from all the people who love me and value me, not just the few I trusted because they (my children, only) are of my blood.”

-Fran B