

theJournal

Issue # 181

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Anorexia and Addiction

Two Sides of the Same Coin

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Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous Preamble

Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous is a Twelve Step, Twelve Tradition-oriented fellowship based on the model pioneered by Alcoholics Anonymous.

The only qualification for S.L.A.A. membership is a desire to stop living out a pattern of sex and love addiction. S.L.A.A. is supported entirely through contributions of its membership, and is free to all who need it.

To counter the destructive consequences of sex and love addiction we draw on five major resources:

1. **Sobriety.** Our willingness to stop acting out in our own personal bottom-line addictive behavior on a daily basis.
2. **Sponsorship/Meetings.** Our capacity to reach out for the supportive fellowship within S.L.A.A.
3. **Steps.** Our practice of the Twelve Step program of recovery to achieve sexual and emotional sobriety.
4. **Service.** Our giving back to the S.L.A.A. community what we continue to freely receive.
5. **Spirituality.** Our developing a relationship with a Power greater than ourselves, which can guide and sustain us in recovery.

As a fellowship S.L.A.A. has no opinion on outside issues and seeks no controversy. S.L.A.A. is not affiliated with any other organizations, movements, or causes, either religious or secular.

We are, however, united in a common focus: dealing with our addictive sexual and emotional behavior. We find a common denominator in our obsessive/compulsive patterns, which transcends any personal differences of sexual orientation or gender identity.

We need protect with special care the anonymity of every S.L.A.A. member. Additionally we try to avoid drawing undue attention to S.L.A.A. as a whole from the public media.

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The Twelve Steps of S.L.A.A.*

1. We admitted we were powerless over sex and love addiction - that our lives had become unmanageable.
2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.
3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as we understood God.
4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.
5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs.
6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.
7. Humbly asked God to remove our shortcomings.
8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all.
9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.
10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it.
11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with a Power greater than ourselves, praying only for knowledge of God's will for us and the power to carry that out.
12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to sex and love addicts, and to practice these principles in all areas of our lives.

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THE TWELVE STEPS OF ALCOHOLICS ANONYMOUS 1. We admitted we were powerless over alcohol — that our lives had become unmanageable. 2. Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity. 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God as *we understood Him*. 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves. 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being the exact nature of our wrongs. 6. Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character. 7. Humbly asked Him to remove our shortcomings. 8. Made a list of all persons we had harmed, and became willing to make amends to them all. 9. Made direct amends to such people wherever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others. 10. Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong promptly admitted it. 11. Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God as *we understood Him*, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and the power to carry that out. 12. Having had a spiritual awakening as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to alcoholics, and to practice these principles in all our affairs.

The Conference Journal Committee, a service body within Sex and Love Addicts Anonymous, publishes the Journal for the good of the international S.L.A.A. membership. Oversight and policy is provided in accordance with the Ninth Tradition.

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In submitting such content to S.L.A.A, the member releases S.L.A.A., any other members of S.L.A.A. and S.L.A.A.'s officers, directors, employees and agents (collectively, the "Releasees") from any and all claims which the member may have against any of the Releasees in connection with the member's submission of content to *the Journal*.

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Letter From the Editor

Dear Reader,

As I read the articles in this issue, I was truly grateful for the support and encouragement they gave me. I really wanted to slip into my anorexia today. My sponsee who I've been with for 19 years in S.L.A.A. called me the other day to ask how I dealt with fear when my husband goes away on business trips. I've always had painful fear that he's going to die when he goes away for long periods of time. Meetings, outreach and lots of prayer have helped. The fear has lessened over the years. But mostly I wait for the fear to pass. I hung up the phone feeling that maybe I helped a little. I got a text yesterday that my sponsee was feeling a little better about her boyfriend going away.

I got a call from her today. Her boyfriend was in an accident, she was at the hospital and didn't know if he would make it. I sat in my car and talked with her instead of going into my morning meeting. I felt so far away and wanted to run to the hospital. (She moved out of state last year so realistically this wasn't a possibility.)

When I hung up, all I could do was cry. My anorexia tried to tell me I was bad for giving her advice that was wrong. She knew something was bad about her boyfriend going away. She had intuition. I shouldn't have told her the fear would pass. I went in to the meeting to catch the last part of the meeting. I cried through the whole meeting. I couldn't shake the feeling of dread. I came home and started reading the stories in this issue about anorexia. I realized that I'm not alone. I also realized that I'm human. I give the wrong advice because I don't have knowledge of the future. I love my sponsee and her boyfriend (I'm crying as I write this.) I have fellows and a Program and a Higher Power.

I'm grateful for you all.

Lisa C., Managing Editor, *the Journal*

Question of the Day & Answers from Yesterday

The Question of the Day from the last issue was, “Anorexia and acting out: Please describe any experiences that have shown you that anorexia and acting out can be regarded as two parts of

the same thing (sex and love addiction). These problems may seem unrelated but they are really two sides of the same coin.” Here are some wonderful responses for your enjoyment. They are not presented in any particular order. The next two themes are: #182 — Jan./Feb. . — “Thank You A.A. Please take this opportunity to express gratitude for what the founders and foundresses of A.A./Al-Anon have gifted to the planet, as adapted by S.L.A.A.”— Deadline for submissions is Nov. 15, 2019. And #183 — March/April — Extreme Self-Care: “Has the Program helped you learn to love and take care of yourself? Please share stories of how you learned to and /or how you engage in self-care for your recovery.” — Deadline for submissions is Jan. 15, 2019. Please send answers to www.slaafws.org.

“Anorexia and acting out: Please describe any experiences that have shown you that anorexia and acting out can be regarded as two parts of the same thing (sex and love addiction). These problems may seem unrelated but they are really two sides of the same coin.”

Correct. Amazing but true. In my active addiction, I appeared very social and busy, but this was and still can be a mask to avoid intimacy. After more than 18 years I may be sober but now I continue to struggle with emotional, social and sexual anorexia.

— RITA, MONTREAL

I have had many such experiences. I used to habitually seek relationships with emotionally unavailable women so my vulnerability would not be threatened. This was an expression of both my anorexia and my acting out.

— SAM E., NYC/NJ

Question of the day

They both keep me from intimacy, which is the core of my disease. I avoid intimacy from fear and lack of knowing how to participate in it because avoidance and acting out keep me from experiencing and learning how.

— ANNE K, TAMPA BAY

In my experience, I found myself acting out and then falling into anorexia. Once I started my recovery and committed to being sober, it felt like I fell into an anorexic mode. I do find it to be 2 sides of the same coin as I continue in my recovery.

— JULIA, LOS ANGELES, CA

I avoided intimacy by acting out while alone and living a life where acting out secretly was most important.

— JACK, TAMPA BAY

If I'm not able to get my needs met due to fear of rejection (anorexia), I will obsess and get in pain by which I will feel as if I need to act out to relieve that pain.

— JACK H., KATY, TX

In my relationship experience, I have learned that anorexia and acting out are about going after what I "want" and running away from what I don't. It's showing up for the good feelings addictively from sex and the fluffiness of a new relationship and wanting to run from them when the painful feelings come up.

— DAVID G., LOS ANGELES, CA

Please describe any experiences that have shown you that anorexia and acting out can be regarded as two parts of sex and love addiction.

For me, anorexia is an avoidance of sexual/emotional interaction, and acting out is an uncontrolled indulgence in sex and unrestrained emotional attachment or enmeshment. Anorexia and acting out are not just two sides of the same coin, but opposite sides of the same road, and recovery is staying in the middle of the road, heading in the right direction without going to either extreme.

CHRIS M., SAN ANTONIO, TX

In my sex addiction years, my urge to only have casual sex was coming from a fear of intimacy. In my love addiction years, my urge to fall in love with the first person who would come my way was coming from a fear of intimacy and to be truly seen by my partner. Every aspect of my addiction has been a new way to avoid connecting with others, avoiding letting others see me, and avoiding taking place and accepting myself just the way I am. I truly believe that anorexia is at the core of my addiction, no matter what shape it takes.

— MATHILDE, LONDON, UK

Anorexia and acting out were two parts of the same thing, in my experience, when I was being promiscuous without having any real intimacy with any of my lovers. Sometimes, the acting out was different and I was sexually anorectic. Sometimes, I am simply socially anorectic and don't want to see or talk to anyone. I started going to an anorexia focus meeting recently and I am feeling a lot of love and support from fellows which is helping with my happiness, gratitude, and my recovery.

— MICHELLE

More Was Revealed in Sobriety



When I entered program in fall of 2015 I immediately associated with the term and happily called myself a sex and love addict. I could see how my acting out by having affairs in my marriage was ruining my life. However, at that time I would not have considered myself sexually anorexic. The only part of my

addiction I saw was the acting out part, which to be fair was glaringly obvious and destructive. Not until I finally got sober in spring of 2016 was I able to start to see how sexually anorexic I was as well. Although I had love addiction throughout my life, I had never enjoyed or let myself enjoy sex. I did it to draw the other person in. I

was in my late twenties before I even realized how to have an orgasm because I had never invested time in sexual pleasure for myself, it was all about the chase and the high and what my partner wanted. I also hadn't realized while I was acting out with my affair partners, I was anorexic in my marriage.

As I am now a little over 3 years sober, I realize that acting out and anorexia are truly sides of the same coin. And for me, having a healthy balance of sexuality is key to my sobriety. I can have true intimacy in my marriage without sexually depriving myself. I can be

present and sexual with my husband in a way that I couldn't while acting out. I now enjoy sex with him physically and emotionally. I have boundaries around sex that prevent me from engaging in it when I am not in a healthy place. I also work a vigorous program and follow my top-line behaviors to prevent myself from acting out in bottom-line behaviors. Finding the middle of the boat is key for me. If I am on either side of this disease — acting out or anorexic — I cannot be truly happy, joyous, and free.

— COURTNEY

Claiming My Seat in Our Program

My name is Susan G., I'm a sex and love addict. My sobriety date is 4/18/06, I have a sponsor in this program, and I'm actively working the Steps. I say all this so as to claim my seat in this program.

Looking back, I can see that I became a sex and love addict as early as nine years old when I fell in love with a boy at school. I

didn't even know what sex was then, but I adored this boy, and told him I wanted to have his baby (I didn't even know how to go about this!).

My first kiss was when I was 11, with a 16 year old boy in the haystacks of an Austrian Inn. My grandfather had to lock me in my room so I wouldn't see this boy again.

When I was 14, I experienced unrequited love for the first time. I was so depressed I could hardly focus on my school work. My mom and dad called me boy-crazy. When I turned 16, I had my next big crush. I lost my innocence with him and this addiction began to take a toll on me. I ran away from home when I was 16, then permanently when I was 17. There were a string of lovers from this point on.

I got married for the first time when I was 18, after only knowing him 10 days. This began a pattern of lusting after a man, not knowing anything about him, and getting married nevertheless. Shortly thereafter I would find out who this person really was; then the fighting would set in (a struggle for control). I became resentful, bitter, complaining, at other times silent behind a wall of stony disapproval. To my dismay, I realized I didn't even like the man I married, and usually left the relationship around 4 years in. This was my pattern thru 7 marriages. It was all so romantic in the beginning, but it quickly disintegrated and I was miserable. As I approached my bottom, I did things I never thought I would do; I left one husband for another, running off to the Caribbean so I could get a quickie divorce one day, and marry again the next.

I had affairs with men who I didn't respect, who really needed a

mother more than a wife, men who were not emotionally available. But...the common thread through all of this madness was me! I picked them. I was the one who was emotionally unavailable; I was stunned to realize: I was incapable of intimacy, and I picked partners who I could not possibly become intimate with (later leading to the discovery that I was actually anorectic).

I found my way to SLAAOnline when my 7th marriage ended. It took around 3 years before the program sank in. When I first started to go to meetings, I wasn't done yet. My worst bottom was yet to come. I had an affair with someone I supervised, someone who was actively planning his wedding to another woman. I had put my career in jeopardy, and I had become the laughing stock of my workplace when people realized what I was doing. In the end, I was on the verge of losing everything, my job, my career, my standing in the community, my place to live and worst of all my sanity.

I had zero relationship with God by this time. But I cried out to Him just the same. I pleaded with Him to save me. At that moment, I surrendered control. I had to, it was either that or death or insanity.

I believe today, at that moment in time, I was on the verge of doing something so awful it would have

made the news. Instead, I let my Higher Power catch me. What I am still in awe of to this day, is the peace that came over me.

A few days before my bottom, I had done a spiritual exercise at my church which involved dragging behind me a large sack of heavy rocks. I realized then, this was a metaphor for what I was doing in my life, dragging around my problems behind me, all day long. An old A.A. slogan came to mind: "drop the rock." This is why I still come to meetings, I get reminded of this nearly every day in meetings. The day I finally let go of that sack was the day I worked Steps One, Two and Three. The peace that came over me I cannot describe other than to say that I felt a surety, a surety that if I didn't want to act out again, I didn't ever have to. As long as I kept working the Steps and moving forward towards my God, I believed I could stay sober, and I still believe this.

I've come to know that the Steps strip away everything that stands between me and my Higher Power. All of my self-involvement, self-will, self-centeredness, pride, fear, and all of the things that put up a barrier that I wouldn't let God get past. He gave me free will, or choice. He would not breach the wall I was behind unless I was/am okay with it. I am always at choice. I can choose to ignore Him, choose to reject Him, or choose to keep a wall up (and nothing will change if

I do). Conversely, I can let down my guard, let Him all the way in where I really live.

I didn't know that I had to cultivate a relationship with my God. You see, I had never had a healthy relationship with anyone - let alone God. I had no idea how to have one. In order to "come to believe" (Step Two). I realized I needed to learn more about my Higher Power. Who was I trying to become intimate with? Who was I trying to love, and trust? Why should I believe? It scared me to death! I had to learn how to become intimate with my Higher Power, before I could have true intimacy with a man.

I needed to know what I believed deep down inside. So I started doing research, I took classes, talked to my sponsor, I talked to recovery partners, I watched shows, I read books all in trying to figure out how to know my Higher Power better and to let Him be intimate with me. I came to believe He could restore me to sanity. I also discovered that intimacy involved letting someone know me too (into-me-see).

As time went on, I really cemented the belief that my God wasn't just smoke and mirrors, or a magic genie to call on in times of trouble. In Step Three I came to realize what I had with my God was a real relationship. I could talk to Him about everything and anything. I asked Him to take care

of me, and do whatever He thought was best. And instead of feeling like I'd lost control of the car, I've begun to feel like I had been rescued right before making a fatal turn. My Higher Power encourages me to sit back and enjoy the ride :)

Step Four was looking at all the "yuck" I'd carried around all my life, (like that sack of rocks). I took this Step with a sponsor who helped me to see my part in the dance, to see the worst of me, and the best of me; and look at all of my instincts that had gone catawampus in response to a wrong someone else had done me. I could now see how it had been blocking me from a relationship with my God.

I began discarding the resentments I had built up over my lifetime. I was able to see now how I had harmed others and myself. In Steps 6&7 I took a closer look at my defects of character, and in Step Seven (the miracle Step), I asked God to right my instincts which had gone awry, and help me be useful to Him and to my Fellows. In Steps Eight and Nine I began looking at ways I could make things right, and live in balance and peace with the help of my Higher Power.

As the program sank in more and more, and my life began to change for the better, I began to

see that if I was going to stay on in recovery, I would have to work the maintenance Steps: 10, 11, 12.

I do mini inventories of my behavior and any new or unresolved resentments and deal with them.

I also need to continue in my quest to know God better by praying and meditating so that I can better do His will — i.e., working with others — aka, "giving it away to keep it" (another A.A. slogan).

As one old timer in program once said: "I've never had it so good!" I've learned that "it works if you work it". I've learned that if I "do the do" I will stay sober.

The Big Book of A.A. says, "Rarely have we seen a person fail, who has thoroughly followed our path."

Thoroughness is the watch word. Since that first time around, I've worked the Steps a few times, and I learn and grow each time. I don't think I can ever know too much about this program. There is enough here to keep me on a quest for continued recovery for the rest of my life. If you are new, or nearly new, I am glad you're here with me on this white-water rafting adventure! Please keep coming back, I love all of your shares in *the Journal!* I need you - together...we can!

—SUSAN

I Thought I Was Different



When I first came to S.L.A.A. I was bottoming out on sex and love addiction - multiple partners and qualifiers, STDs, a wild international mission to rescue an ailing, mafia-entangled lover. I could not relate to the anorexic who was reluctant to share, who when finally speaking, mumbled that their life was too quiet. It almost seemed like they

belonged in a different fellowship, they seemed so different from me. I feared that hearing the details of my wild life caused them pain in some way. Today, thirteen years into my S.L.A.A. recovery, with twelve years sober, there are no qualifiers, no partners, no wild international trips. I wonder if in some ways my life is like the Chernobyl exclusion zone. Sealed off. Limited access. I had a deep

romantic partner during my thirteen years in S.L.A.A. - and he broke my heart. Am I willing to unseal the area? Am I willing to risk a new open era? I think so. And the truth is I have "unsealed the area." But have I deeply removed all of the toxic materials in the area? Is there radioactive ruins somewhere deep down? (Sorry. Just watched a show about Chernobyl). Maybe. How to get rid of them? I think the issue that really resonates with me is this social anorexia concept. Maybe if I start to build my social life, my love life can sit healthily on top of that.

Bottom-line work

What I'm powerless over, in the realm of anorexia:

- coming home and shutting my bedroom door
- not wanting to interact with my roommate or have her see me watching TV in bed
- fear of initiating plans with friends, looking for events in the city, inviting them to the events
- wearing my noise-canceling headphones at almost all times, wanting to block out city noise - maybe this is topline?? Ha
- fear of losing weight and being 135 pounds, fear of men finding me attractive, it would leave me too vulnerable
- cleaning my house, making it presentable, then others might see it, I'd have to let people into my life
- going to 12-Step meetings

instead of going to meet ups or city events where I would have to interact with strangers and reveal myself

- thinking I'm less than others, because I don't go out to Montauk or the woods regularly, because I'm in recovery, because I have anger, because... because... because.

- fully decluttering my house, my clothing collection - it would cause too much serenity

- not reaching out to family members, fear of this - they are too much, I can't handle them - and for the cousins and wider circle, I don't feel good enough, I feel deformed because of my addictions, my history, my narcissism

- maybe: having stressful jobs. They wear me out, trigger my PTSD, and then I get to "close the drapes." It's a cycle of drama and recovery. How can I build a life on this?

Top Lines:

- once a week look for a city event, invite a friend
- go without headphones on the subway one day a week
- work my O.A. program
- work a D.A./U.A. program deeply so that I declutter more and get an abundant house and get income that does not cause a cycle of trauma and numbing out
- once a week call a family member?

Thank you!

- KARA

Anorexia Discovered

Hopefully, the below article will help someone connect their acting “out” or “in” with what is going on and why. I am attempting to deal with my anorexia and finally realizing that the dynamic underlying all my choices regarding my treatment of all the women to whom I have been attracted, has been my decision to not allow any personal, intimate nourishment into my life from any of them. This was because if they attracted me, I didn’t trust them. And in those efforts to protect myself, I have starved myself.

Four and a half years ago, I had been attending A.A. meetings almost daily for the preceding five years, with never a relapse and I considered myself “sober”.

I then became deeply involved with a professional dominatrix (dom), who specialized in bondage, discipline, dominance and submission (BDSM). It lasted for approximately 2 ½ years. Initially it was “great” and as I acted out with her, I felt that I had finally found a satisfying relationship. I served her regularly for two years (approximately 50 sessions) and she became my higher power. I endured a lot of

physical pain in her dungeon, but I realize only now that the intensity of the pain I was willing to suffer in BDSM was an indication of how much I wanted to feel “something”. I just didn’t know what it was.

I did trust that my mistress - if only because of the symbiotic nature of our relationship – and I knew that she had a substantial investment in not injuring me and in being discrete; this, so as not to kill the “golden goose.”

Because I realized that I could never have a healthy relationship with a woman if I was involved with a professional mistress, I stopped for 3 months to find a “normal” relationship. But eventually I returned to her because ours had been the closest relationship I had ever had with a woman to whom I was attracted, and I was convinced that it was the closest thing to intimacy I ever would experience. It lasted for an additional (and final) six months.

And I cannot think of a better example of (S.L.A.A. Characteristic #9) “...*attaching myself to someone who was emotionally unavailable*” than purchasing the services a professional dominatrix/mistress for whom the “love relationship” was simply a

financial transaction. Until I was approximately 10 years old, I experienced as safe, trustworthy and stable a relationship with my parents as I can imagine.

Then, one night after “lights out” I was in my bed secretly reading a book under the covers with a flashlight.

Out of the blue, my mother burst into my room, ripped off the blanket and started beating me with a leather belt, screaming hysterically that I had “defied” her.

I never mentioned this (single) beating to my father because I felt I had deserved to be punished for having broken a rule.

In fact, I never mentioned it to anyone until 20 years later when it came up in therapy.

At my therapist’s suggestion, I confronted my mother with what had occurred.

It turns out that it had little, if anything, to do with me. At that time, she had been acting out because of her own problems.

But after that experience, I never again fully trusted on an intimate level her or any other woman to whom I was attracted.

Although, I am intellectually clear that my mother’s actions that night were completely irrational, until I spent the last few years working on myself in S.L.A.A., whenever I met a woman who attracted me, in the back of my mind, I “knew” that she would “out of nowhere,” turn into a monster.

And it didn’t matter that in reality, she might be a kind and loving person. That “self-fulfilling prophecy” has, over my lifetime, played out with every woman to whom I had been attracted.

Now, having attended S.L.A.A. meetings for the last 3 years, I have heard the stories of some of the participants who were sexually molested and how traumatic that breach of trust by someone in authority was to them. For a time, I downplayed my own trauma because I had never suffered what I considered more serious trauma.

But I have learned that what I, a trusting 10-year-old boy, had experienced was just as traumatic TO ME as what they had experienced. And I can no longer minimize the impact of that breach of trust I experienced because of how clearly it has played out in my life in the way I have perceived women.

One of the other characteristics of S.L.A.A. I only recently identified with was (#12):

We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.”

Initially, I didn’t resonate with the above characteristic. I had earlier decided in A.A. to stop “playing victim” and I tried to no longer blame other people for my mistakes.

Although I did, indeed, treat my dom/mistress as “magical” - she and the sexual stimulation she offered seemed awesome because the feelings were so intense - I never blamed her for not “fulfilling my ... expectations”. I only lately realized that this was because the only “expectations” that I had of any woman to whom I was attracted, was that she would eventually betray me, like I had perceived that my mother had.

In A.A. I had done what I considered (at the time) a thorough 4th Step. And sex had never surfaced. It was only after I had terminated my relationship with my dom/mistress (because it had become impossible to ignore that I was little more than a “cash cow”), that it occurred to me that I would benefit from doing a 4th Step regarding my sexual activity. But I realized that I could do this in only one place where it would be appropriate and safe to discuss it – in S.L.A.A., not A.A.

After about 5 years in A.A., I learned of a support group for personal relationships and

intimacy called “Sex & Love Addicts Anonymous” (S.L.A.A.) It sounded so salacious to me that I doubted its validity until I actually attended an S.L.A.A. meeting.

After about 2 years in S.L.A.A., I 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.

The S.L.A.A. Basic Text eBook
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Anorexia: An Interview



Lisa: What is your understanding of the concept of Anorexia in S.L.A.A.?

Becca: My understanding of anorexia is pretty simple and basically, it's the avoidance of emotional social and sexual intimacy.

Lisa: What are your anorexic patterns and/or characteristics?

Becca: So, I looked at the 50 questions for self-diagnosis asking myself the question, "Am I anorexic?" I feel really grateful that I'm in S.L.A.A. There are a few that I definitely can relate to. So, the first is that I go without social activities for extended periods of

time. While in relationships, I find that I'll go for periods of time without experiencing romance, sexuality, intimacy and friendship. I tend to stay aloof when in groups. I try to withdraw from and control my emotions.

Sometimes it's difficult for me to set healthy boundaries with others so I'll tend to withdraw completely. I tend to envy people who are more outgoing. Shame about my life causes me to avoid relationships. And lastly, I tend to drive others away by being cold toward them.

Lisa: Did you ever binge (have a period of acting out or acting in a

lot) and then purge (acting in or out a lot). If so, how did you overcome it?

Becca: When I came into S.L.A.A., I was coming off a sex addiction binge where I was acting out for a long period of time. When I got into the program, I experienced a purge where I was in anorexia for a period of time while getting sober from my sex addiction. That's how it worked for me. I feel that I overcame that period of anorexia by going to meetings in S.L.A.A., working the Steps with a sponsor, through my faith and through counseling.

Lisa: It has been said in S.L.A.A. that if you scratch the surface of sex addiction you find an anorexic or vice versa. Did you come into S.L.A.A. (choose one): 1. To heal sex addiction only to find that you were anorexic or 2. To heal anorexia only to find that you are also a sex/love addict?

Becca: Yes. I came in to heal from sex addiction and found out that I was anorexic. I think my sex addiction at that point in my life was really masking my emotional anorexia.

Lisa: Can you tell us a little about what triggers acting out or acting in for you?

Becca: For me right now with anorexia some of my triggers are when I'm being rigid with my thinking, judgmental towards myself or others and when I'm experiencing shame. I tend to run into memories or reminders of

people, situations or places from the time in my life when I was acting out and it can be a trigger for my anorexia.

Lisa: Share your experience, strength and hope with anorexia in recovery. Do you have any methods of keeping balance (not going into anorexic behaviors or accessory addict behaviors that could lead to acting out)?

Becca: I'd say my biggest piece of experience, strength and hope that I have with anorexia is the success that I've had with my marriage. It's been the longest most fulfilling romantic relationship in my life. We're going on 7 years and it just keeps getting better and better. And also, I have much healthier relationships with family members and friends. The Program helps me to do all these things. A big part of the strength that I find to heal from anorexia is through service in the program as well.

Lisa: What are specific top-line behaviors you use to counteract anorexia?

Becca: When I think to reach out to others, I try to do so as soon as I think of it. That helps me to be more social. Now when I really need help, I try asking for that help rather than pushing others away. I try to be of service when I can and help others. I work on trying to make friendships and relationships within my faith community and within S.L.A.A.

Lisa: How are anorexia and acting out related? How are they different?

Becca: I think one of the big things that connect anorexia and acting out for me are the underlying fears about sex and intimacy. Engaging in both anorexic and acting out behaviors has been about fears of true intimacy. The two are different in the way they are expressed. I don't think that one is more or less harmful than the other. I think they can be destructive in their own ways. But they are different in the way they are expressed. That's all I have.

Lisa: Thank you. You know when I was looking at the questions, I thought about a discussion I had recently. We talked about how when we first were sober and started dating, we felt there were all these dangers out there. Dating is taking a risk which anorexics don't like to do and change is very difficult for us.

Did your addiction ever speak to you when you were trying to do sober actions for yourself and tell you not to go there because it's too risky?

Becca: Yeah. I relate to that happening when I was getting sober. I simultaneously started getting sober, got married, gave birth to my daughter, and became a step mom in a short period of time and the changes in my life were overwhelming. I started

doubting whether getting married was the right decision for me and whether I was good enough for these new roles of wife and mom. I can see now that the fears of commitment and love were very strong at that point in my life and could have led to divorce.

Lisa: How did you overcome that?

Becca: My relationship with my sponsor was really critical at that time. I was really honest with her about what I was going through. Through working the Steps, I was able to look at my part in that and look at my history and all of my fears. Ultimately through my faith in Higher Power, I found the strength to choose to stay committed to my family and eventually those fears subsided. Day by day I learned to embrace those roles of wife and mom more wholeheartedly.

Lisa: Yes. We need that support system. When you were talking, it brought to mind my husband and I on our wedding day. My husband and I were 39 and 40 years old when we got married (our first marriage for both of us). My husband and I were anorexic our whole lives. He had always said he's not the marrying kind. I was the first person he ever wanted to marry. That's going to make me cry. Sorry. And so, the day of the wedding, I had all of my S.L.A.A. and Twelve-Step fellows as

bridesmaids. We were all getting ready in the dressing room and I put my dress on and I couldn't breathe. I was having a panic attack. I felt like I was dying. I felt like my dress was strangling me. I know that it was anorexia, fear of commitment and fear of what lies ahead. I told my bridesmaids that I was spiraling and one of my bridesmaids screamed out, "Serenity Prayer!"

Everybody just rushed into a circle and held hands. We were squeezing each other's hands really tight and screaming the Serenity Prayer.

Becca: Oh my God, so cool!

Lisa: And it was so powerful! After that, every wedding I went

to, I had a prayer circle before the wedding (if the person wanted to participate).

We did it for a couple of weddings and now it's become a S.L.A.A. tradition for everyone we're close to. Sorry to take up time in your interview with that story.

Becca: No, I love that story!

Lisa: So, are there any other questions that you think would be pertinent to the topic or anything you want to add?

Becca: I don't think so. I think we pretty much covered it.

Lisa: Cool. Thank you for doing this.

Becca: No problem.

Anorexia and Acting Out = Fear

Anorexia and acting out is fear that is stuffed and not healed. Fears can be buried deep in the subconscious and it requires effort to dig it out and look it in the eye.

Fears may come from as far back as childhood and they can be stuffed in a person's mind, body, or heart. There are many techniques to access the fears, open the wounds, feel the pain, and release them. One may use meditation, yoga, or psychotherapy. The main point is

to access it, open it, feel it, and release it. Stuffed and unreleased fears can wreak havoc in one's life.

They can manifest on a spectrum ranging from anorexia to acting out, a complete shutdown to complete self-destruction. The program is a path to surrender and admitting that handling those tremendous fears would be too much for any human being alone.

A better approach is to give it up to God and ask for help. The program is a way to deal with fears and the damage they caused in

one's life. Anorexia and acting out are symptoms of the spiritual disease in full bloom on the inside of a person. Symptoms are reminders that help is needed and that a person is on a recovery journey. There is the hope of sober dating and having healthy relationships once the fears have been confronted and released in a healthy way.

It is important to not settle for anorexia or acting out in S.L.A.A. I have witnessed people pitching tents or building houses in the swamps of the disease. This is not the hope of the program. The hope is a healthy and happy life because that is what the Creator intended for us: to be precious and free.

—ANONYMOUS

My Recovery Journey

As I peel back the layers of my onion, I find that my anorexia becomes addiction. Yes, as the Anorexia 1-2-3 booklet says, "Addiction and anorexia are two sides of the same coin."

As a youngster I chased boys, so desperately wanting the love I couldn't really get from my father and love that my mother could rarely show. I didn't think my mother loved or liked me. I thought my father didn't love me either but at times I was liked, and on average I felt like he tolerated me.

But most times, I felt like I was a burden. As a teenager, I found it best to stay away from my father and my mother so I isolated myself

in my room. I have learned not just to fear my parents but also people in general. I was extremely anxious around people and didn't want to make friends, so I focused on schoolwork. With no close friends, I read and fantasized a lot.

I have been able to stop masturbating for 76 days as of today. But fantasizing I have not stopped, though I do it less. After a year and almost six months into the program, I have a sponsor. I believe I wouldn't have held those two bottom lines without her.

What is my second bottom line? It is avoiding unnecessary contact with my parents, which recently turned into a 3 month no contact with them.

I think it is for the best for my growth and healing that I don't engage in any conversation with them for at least 3 months. Socially, and emotionally, it's funny to be around people who actually listen and don't want to pick, prod, or try to fix me and who actually show concern for my feelings, but I'm getting used to it. And I'm opening up my feelings more, crying more.

I'm hopeful I can be courageous enough to heal sexually, too, with God's help.

Though sometimes I feel my thoughts take over and become horny, as if I'm going through puberty all over again.

I know that's the other side of anorexia - addiction. A man, any man looks good on the subway, and sometimes when I sit next to a man, it is a high for me.

I'm attending a meeting almost every day and keeping in contact with my sponsor. I'm glad that some of those feelings have simmered down over the last several days, but I sure look forward to finding a balance.

I look forward to not running away from all of mankind, nor wanting to grab a cute man on the street or subway and make him hug me. But somehow in between, I will be able to smile at a person, even a man and keep moving.

Yes, I feel better about who I am. I chair meetings and that helps to curb the social anorexia as well as going to fellowship sometimes. I am able to show up for myself a little bit more all the time.

I went to an all women's retreat. I got panicky, and cried while I was there. Nevertheless, I didn't run. I was able to connect with a few people there. I'm slowly opening up and my life is slowly getting bigger. And I'm happier and less lonely and alone.

— RENE

To Do List:

- #1. Subscribe to the *Journal*
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- #3. Enjoy reading the *Journal*



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Practicing Principles Over Personalities



To me, the Tradition of practicing principles over personalities means placing priority on getting along with members of S.L.A.A. (or anybody

for that matter) over needing to be right. It means trying my best to be on good terms with people no matter how much their personal characteristics may get under my

skin. It means putting unity of purpose in our Fellowship over individual difference in opinions or lifestyles. This perspective has guided me in navigating polarizing climates.

I'm not saying it's been easy for me to do. For much of my life before I became active in the S.L.A.A. Fellowship through service, I preferred retreat rather than showing up if I knew I was going to be interacting with people I found difficult.

Mostly I retreated because my life was so weak, like a leaf blowing in the wind. If someone with a stronger personality came into the room, I often felt crushed under their feet.

At some point, I made a decision that I wanted to be a leader and not hide in the shadows. So, I had to become stronger. What that meant, as I discovered through working the 12 Steps with my sponsors, is that I needed to develop a stronger, healthier relationship with myself. I needed self-confidence, which meant I needed to know myself, to like myself, and to believe in myself.

This process of developing positive self-regard has been instrumental in helping me let go of ego. Because I have more self-confidence, I am less threatened

by other people's point of view and more willing to listen and work together with them for a common cause.

I am also less afraid to interact with people with extreme political views on either end of the spectrum. I've always claimed an individual perspective on the world, rarely aligning myself with a particular group's worldview. Yet these days it's still hard not to be labeled or pigeon-holed by people who assume you have a certain perspective based on your affiliations. I find myself speaking up more if I'm with a group of people I'm getting to know, and someone makes a thoughtless remark about one side of the spectrum. Depending on the situation, I'll try to remind them that many different viewpoints are represented in the room.

I think the most important aspects of practicing principles over personalities is having patience, choosing diplomacy over reactivity and kindness over thoughtlessness. Placing priority on moving together toward a common goal over proving a point or getting the credit for something. As I make these more principled choices, I expand my capacity to work well with diverse personalities.

— ANONYMOUS, ARIZONA

Sharing My Story

Editor's note. This is an edited transcription of a share at the 2019 ABM.

Let's start with a moment of silence followed by the Serenity Prayer.

...(silence)

Serenity Prayer

“God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

Thank you for inviting me to speak. It's humbling to be up here. Someone asked how I was feeling at dinner.

I was like, “Well, I'm nervous and I don't feel prepared. He replied, “Perfect. Those are the best stories.” So, I'm starting at the beginning and then I'm going to try to get into recovery as soon as possible because so much has happened since I came into these rooms.

I came into this Program December 17, 2005 and I consider that my sobriety date.

My bottom lines at the moment are sex outside of a committed partnership, entering or leaving a significant relationship or romantic relationship without consulting with my sponsor, emotional withholding in my significant relationships, and being

sexually intimate without emotional intimacy. I am a sex and love addict and social and emotional anorexic and my name is Austin.

My family of origin did a great job of providing for my physical needs and material needs but not so great with emotional needs. I am the youngest of three. I've learned since I've been in recovery that I'm a highly sensitive person in addition to being an introvert. There were a lot of covert messages in my family that it wasn't OK to rock the boat and make my parents uncomfortable.

As a result of that, I squashed down a lot of my authenticity from a very young age.

My recovery journey has been very much about rediscovering, acknowledging, embracing and learning to celebrate my authentic self and to live fully as my authentic self in the world. What got me here was the blowup of a five-year relationship.

One of my primary patterns is a sort of a mash up of some of the Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction - having few healthy boundaries

I would become emotionally and sexually involved with people without knowing them. I would idealize and pursue them and

blame them for not fulfilling my fantasies and expectations. That generally took about 3 to 5 years for me. I would be in such fantasy about who the other person was, about what the relationship was, that it would really take me about 3 or more years to realize, "Wow, this person and I, we're not really compatible."

I did a lot of things that were outside of my ethics and values. It was very easy for me to lose connection with my ethics, values, and sense of self. My sense of self was not very secure. So, if my partner was a shoplifter, I started shoplifting.

I was seeing someone who sold prescription drugs and pot on the street and I would accompany her on those adventures. I would accompany partners on such varied adventures as quitting my job, buying a 1975 Winnebago and driving across country to California. I was essentially homeless. I'd park near the beach in Santa Monica over the holidays and ask for money on Venice Beach boardwalk. I was involved in the production of pornographic films with my last partner. I was really good at being a chameleon, doing whatever I thought was necessary to maintain a relationship. I did whatever I could to meet the needs of the other person. I got really good at figuring out what other people wanted and how to provide that. I abdicated

my responsibility and power in relationships.

One relationship devolved in the first three months that we were together. We started this addict-avoidant cycle. I would emotionally withhold. My partner would break up with me because she was so frustrated at my inability to be emotionally available. I would do whatever it took to get her back—grovel, make all sorts of promises. And then, months later, I would forget, and that cycle would begin again. During that relationship, there were times that I was questioning my sanity because my partner claimed that some friends of ours had seen me out on a date with someone. I couldn't remember where I was on the date in question, so I went to see a psychiatrist. She floated the idea of 12-Step programs to me.

I don't remember if she mentioned S.L.A.A. Al-Anon came up and that seemed all right. That was palatable to me. I'd heard of S.L.A.A. because I'd had a friend many years ago who had a lot of recovery in this room and other rooms. She actually asked to have no contact with me because I developed a crush on her. I didn't really know what was happening at that time. I started going to Al-Anon and CoDA to save this relationship. It was not about me at all. It was about, "I'm showing up here so that my partner will

think I'm doing something, and the relationship will be OK." When that relationship finally ended, that was when I realized that I was a sex and love addict. I don't really want to go into the details of that sort of epiphany moment. The day we broke up, I was in the bookstore in the relationship self-help section because I was thinking, *I'm sure there's an answer in here somewhere. There's something that I haven't figured out that I need to do.* There was a copy of the S.L.A.A. Basic Text there. I pulled that copy down from the shelf and sat there reading for about three hours.

I was like, "Oh my God, this is me." I found the Austin Intergroup webpage and at that time they weren't publicizing where their meetings were. I had to call, leave a message, and wait for somebody to call me back. It was kind of agonizing those few days because I was: a) in withdrawal from this relationship, and b) knowing that I had a problem and not knowing where to go for help.

I came in to my first meeting with a ton of shame. I wasn't even aware of how much fear was running my life. I was really motivated to get a sponsor early on. I'd already gotten up to my Fifth Step with a sponsor in the other rooms. But I knew from the moment I walked in to S.L.A.A. that I was here for me. It was not

about trying to get my partner back. It was about me knowing I had a problem and needed help.

I grew up with the expectation that I'm supposed to know how to do it all. I'm supposed to figure it all out for myself- not ask for help. I didn't know anything. So, a lot of my work in S.L.A.A. was about asking for help. I need to ask for help. In the beginning, I knew I needed to get a sponsor. I was at a meeting one night where we passed around the S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery. I remember the one that I got to read aloud that night was, "We become willing to ask for help."

It was like, "Alright." I heard that Higher Power speaks in these rooms and if you hear something three times it's your Higher Power trying to tell you something. I finally started asking people and got a sponsor fairly quickly. Within a month of joining the program, I ended up in the emergency room for an appendectomy.

I meant to say this at the beginning of my share, but you can take what you like and leave the rest. This is my story and it may be a little unconventional, but it's my story. I am a firm believer that my body had somatized all the stress and anxiety around relationships that I'd been carrying with me for my whole adult life. I believe it just landed right there in my appendix. The radiologist said, "I can't confirm

or deny if that's your appendix but if it is, it's the biggest one I've ever seen.

When I came into the Program I felt like I didn't have any kind of support system. I had a few friends from the rooms, but I had no idea of who to call when I was sitting there in the emergency room. A couple of my recovery friends came by, but I ended up calling my ex to come and help me because I had animals at home that needed to be taken care of. It was going to take a couple of days for my mother to come and help. We weren't doing "no contact" at the time but, boy, anytime we spent time together it was really triggering for me. It really stirred up a lot of stuff. I'd heard about this weeklong outpatient intensive at a facility out in Arizona. When I was home recovering from my appendicitis, I called and made an appointment. They couldn't get me in for about six months.

Me and my dog drove out to Arizona. I spent that week staying with an aunt and uncle. I didn't really tell them why I was there. But that week was pretty phenomenal for me. It was like cramming six months of recovery and therapy into seven days. And I'm super grateful for the time that I spent out there. I point to that as the beginning of really rediscovering my authentic self.

For the first couple of years in recovery it was really clear - I had

not been single for more than six months of my adult life- so I needed to stay away from dating. I told my sponsor I needed to stop dating for a year and my sponsor agreed. And then 1 year turned into two and two turned into 12.

Maybe that's not ideal, but it's what I needed. I was working the Steps and going to therapy. I discovered my anorexia pretty quickly. One of the first meetings I went to was an anorexia focus meeting and I saw myself in that literature.

I made a concerted effort to do things differently. One of the things I know about myself is that I don't necessarily make great decisions if I'm only looking at what's in here (pointing to forehead). I started talking things through with my sponsor and with recovery partners and getting current in meetings (in Austin most of our meetings have 30 minutes of getting current where you break into smaller groups of maybe three or four people). I slowly started to get to practice being intimate with people and sharing what was really going on in here (pointing to heart).

I was really good at withholding information in relationships. It was very much a form of negative control or manipulation. I thought that as long as you think I'm OK and as long as I act like nothing's wrong, I'm not upset or bothered and that I don't have any need or

want for you to be anything other than who you are, then everything will be fine. This is a recipe for disaster. A lot of my relationships were really based on a false sense of intimacy. I have top-line behaviors too. I love that anorexia introduced me to that concept, and my primary top lines are self-care, self-care, self-care. Taking today for example- self-care today looked like taking a walk to the park, taking my shoes off, feeling the grass under my feet, sitting under a tree, doing a little writing and feeling sunshine and warmth.

In that whole spirit of doing things differently - I had a bucket list of things I'd wanted to do for years- life goals like travelling,

running a marathon, backpacking across Europe, and all sorts of crazy, fun stuff. I had put all those on the back burner for whatever my partners were pursuing - drug deals and making pornography.

I really committed to doing some of those things on my bucket list. That awareness that I hadn't done any of the things that I wanted to do with my life was pretty sobering. Within that first couple of years, I started doing all of it. I'd always been fairly athletic, but I started doing more triathlons and I made plans to hike the Appalachian Trail.

To be continued in the next issue of the Journal.

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Anorexia and Addiction

Two Sides of the Same Coin

Characteristics of Sex and Love Addiction

1. Having few healthy boundaries, we become sexually involved with and/or emotionally attached to people without knowing them.
2. Fearing abandonment and loneliness, we stay in and return to painful, destructive relationships, concealing our dependency needs from ourselves and others, growing more isolated and alienated from friends and loved ones, ourselves, and God.
3. Fearing emotional and/or sexual deprivation, we compulsively pursue and involve ourselves in one relationship after another, sometimes having more than one sexual or emotional liaison at a time.
4. We confuse love with neediness, physical and sexual attraction, pity and/or the need to rescue or be rescued.
5. We feel empty and incomplete when we are alone. Even though we fear intimacy and commitment, we continually search for relationships and sexual contacts.
6. We sexualize stress, guilt, loneliness, anger, shame, fear and envy. We use sex or emotional dependence as substitutes for nurturing care, and support.
7. We use sex and emotional involvement to manipulate and control others.
8. We become immobilized or seriously distracted by romantic or sexual obsessions or fantasies.
9. We avoid responsibility for ourselves by attaching ourselves to people who are emotionally unavailable.
10. We stay enslaved to emotional dependency, romantic intrigue, or compulsive sexual activities.
11. To avoid feeling vulnerable, we may retreat from all intimate involvement, mistaking sexual and emotional anorexia for recovery.
12. We assign magical qualities to others. We idealize and pursue them, then blame them for not fulfilling our fantasies and expectations.



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S.L.A.A. Signs of Recovery

1. We seek to develop a daily relationship with a Higher Power, knowing that we are not alone in our efforts to heal ourselves from our addiction.
2. We are willing to be vulnerable because the capacity to trust has been restored to us by our faith in a Higher Power.
3. We surrender, one day at a time, our whole life strategy of, and our obsession with the pursuit of romantic and sexual intrigue and emotional dependency.
4. We learn to avoid situations that may put us at risk physically, morally, psychologically or spiritually.
5. We learn to accept and love ourselves, to take responsibility for our own lives, and to take care of our own needs before involving ourselves with others.
6. We become willing to ask for help, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable and learning to trust and accept others.
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.
8. We begin to accept our imperfections and mistakes as part of being human, healing our shame and perfectionism while working on our character defects.
9. We begin to substitute honesty for self-destructive ways of expressing emotions and feelings.
10. We become honest in expressing who we are, developing true intimacy in our relationships with ourselves and others.
11. We learn to value sex as a by-product of sharing, commitment, trust and cooperation in a partnership.
12. We are restored to sanity, on a daily basis, by participating in the process of recovery.



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