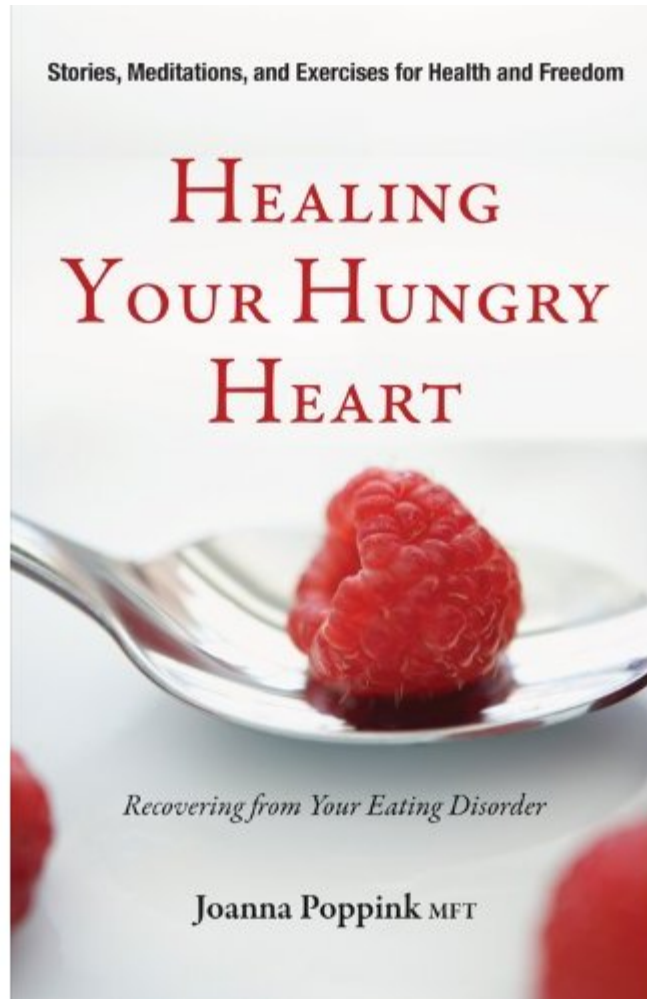




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Healing Your Hungry Heart
Recovering from Your Eating Disorder

Dedicated to the spirit of life, joy, and wisdom in all women

Joanna Poppink, MFT

Book Excerpts



I. How Do I Know If I Have An Eating Disorder?page 2

II Chapter 5 Boundaries: A Challenge in Early Recoverypage 3

III. Chapter 12 Sex, Stalking, and Exploitationpage 4

IV. Chapter 13 Familypage 5

VI. About Joanna Poppink and Contact Informationpage 7

I

How Do I Know If I Have An Eating Disorder?

The following list of experiences may not seem, on the surface, to relate to eating disorders. Most of them are not specifically about food or eating. But they can reveal how you use your eating disorder to live behind a facade. In responding to the list below, please use the words *never, rarely, sometimes, often, or always*.

1. I hide from people.
2. I've thought about suicide.
3. I find it difficult or impossible to make long range commitments.
4. I have emotional meltdowns where I am terrified and feel lost.
5. I have a disappointing—and somewhat shameful and secret—sex life.
6. I feel a low, continuous anger and resentment towards people in my life.
7. My short-term memory doesn't function well.
8. I say to myself "This is the last time I will ____" about certain behaviors but invariably repeat them.
9. I describe my suffering to someone and ask for help, yet reject suggestions offered.
10. I perform relentless exercise routines to ward off caloric consequences.
11. I eat mindlessly when I'm not hungry.



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12. I tell lies at the grocery store checkout stand when buying my binge foods.

13. I weigh myself every day or several times a day.

Your honest response to the questions in the list will alert you to areas in your life that need support, love, care, healing, and encouragement.

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II

Healing Your Hungry Heart Excerpt Chapter 5

Boundaries: A Challenge in Early Recovery

"We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have these because we have acted rightly."

--Aristotle

....."Please," she says. "It will only take a minute." In that request Elsa is asking the employee to let her cross his time boundary. She says, "This is a special circumstance. It's for my special project – just one time." She is asking him to make her concerns and her time more important than his.

Elsa, like many people who don't recognize boundaries has a sense of entitlement. She thinks to herself and sometimes actually says, "But this is *me*. It's okay because it's me. I need more than you do. I'll use it better than you will." Unauthorized boundary crossing hurt relationships, marriages, businesses, and international peace. They cause lawsuits, criminal proceedings, divorce, and job loss. They also contribute to keeping your eating disorder powerful and tenacious.

Disregarding boundaries is not a fundamental aspect of your personality. It is a developmental issue. Elsa's eating disorder kept her from developing respect for how boundaries create safety and make relationships possible. She will override a boundary she doesn't see because she is trying to get what she needs, in the same way that she will eat more than her body can tolerate because she needs the food to quell her anxiety.

If you binge, you must go full speed ahead, filling yourself up with food or merchandise or activity. You try to endlessly fill yourself so you have no room for a thought or insight that might disturb your protective system and illusion of safety.

If you suffer from anorexia, you do the same thing in reverse. Your restriction is endless. You don't eat enough nourishment to sustain a healthy body. You live a life that is noticeable by its sparseness. You allow yourself less than the minimum in safety, intimate relationships, and self care. Using a



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lowercase “I” to identify yourself feels right to you. On occasion you become frantic and plead or demand help from others only to refuse help that’s offered.

When you don’t recognize the natural limits of your body, you can wind up in the hospital after starving too thoroughly and then bingeing out of control. Your body can’t handle the extremes. You spontaneously throw up food and blood and pass out. Your own body and gravity stops you. When you can’t set and honor boundaries, you are at the mercy of natural limits you can’t control. At the tragic extremes endlessly losing or gaining weight ends with death.

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III

Healing Your Hungry Heart Excerpt Chapter 12

Sex, Stalking, and Exploitation

“As long as you have certain desires about how it ought to be you can’t see how it is.”
--Ram Dass

The topic of sexuality is near the end of this book because, if you have been working the exercises in previous chapters, by now you are more equipped to look at this highly charged issue. I invite you to look at your sexual life through the lens of eating disorder recovery work. My intention is not to discuss sexual addiction, orgasmic dysfunction, or morality but rather to introduce a subject that is not discussed fully and openly as it relates to people with eating disorders.

What I know from my own personal experience and hear in my practice is this: The lived sexual experiences of women with eating disorders are acutely troublesome and remain largely unspoken in public discourse and consulting rooms. They are characterized by many of the experiences described in the following list. Some of them may be familiar to you.

Please do your breathing exercises and look at this list without judgment. Follow the principles we look at in Chapter 9, “Spiritual Depth.”

- Become aroused during foreplay but lose all sexual desire at penetration.
- Enjoy cuddling and simple foreplay but get frightened or numb when your partner’s sexual energy becomes more intense.
- Become aroused by receiving or inflicting pain and humiliation.



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- Have been harassed by a stalker.
- Have been a stalker in varying degrees in person or by phone.
- Have multiple affairs with married men, men in power, and men unavailable for committed relationship because of addictions or secrets.
- Have been faithful, loyal, and deferential to a man you thought was committed but who had a secret sexual life.
- Felt special while knowingly having sexual relations with a man who had many lovers yet you believed you were his favorite and that eventually you would be together.
- Have fled to bars looking for attention, flattery, and sex.
- Have repeatedly been disappointed when a brief encounter did not mean the beginning of a relationship.

If one or more of these experiences are part of your history or current life, looking at them can open emotionally loaded secrets. Please do not go into harsh judgment of yourself. Stay present, and look, perhaps for the first time, not at should or should not, but simply at what is.

If you have different items to add to this list, please do so. Anything about your sexual life that brings up shame, guilt, thrills, or disappointments belongs on this list.

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IV

Healing Your Hungry Heart Excerpt Chapter 13

Family

“The last of the human freedoms is to choose one’s attitude in any given set of circumstances.”
--Victor Frankl

Expectations and assumptions, fantasies and reality, love and anger, disappointment and hope, all crash together when you consider your family. In or out of your eating disorder, family visits, communications, and memories may be your most challenging experiences. The family you grew up with is made up of the people who were part of your environment while you were developing your



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eating disorder. You may have spent years relating to them with an eating disorder as part of your coping mechanism.

If you are married with a family of your own now, you have been living a life with them, too, as a woman with an eating disorder. In ways you and they know and don't know, everyone has adapted, for good or ill, to the psychological dynamics created by the eating disorder.

This doesn't mean you are at fault. You were or still are living in an environment where you need to develop or maintain an eating disorder to survive. That doesn't mean your family is to blame. It means the conditions necessary for your eating disorder to develop were and may still be present. Often the family doesn't change. In recovery you take the lead. You change because you are going for freedom, health, and a better life. Nowhere will your commitment be more tested than with your family.

Part of recovery is tolerating complex feelings. When you are with your family and not bingeing or purging or starving, you can feel an inner roar when anger, guilt, fear, and resentment mix with love, duty, respect, and hope. Especially in early recovery, you expect the members of your family to understand your challenges and be supportive. This is complicated.

Sometimes you want them to give you room to practice your eating disorder, and sometimes you want them to give you room to be the healthy, more outspoken, free woman you're becoming. Emotions can run high. You need to be able to sort the challenges inherent in your family relationships.

Your mother and father, your brothers and sisters, without knowledge or intention, sorely test you by their predictable habits. You are learning to use your new-found strengths and resources to help you care for yourself. You work to withstand the fore of eating disorder triggers, and they abound when you are with your family.

You need to be kind to yourself, forgiving of yourself, and at the same time, search out and discover what triggers your eating disorder.

Your family does not know or understand your struggles or the specific nature of your healing work. Your new ways jar their expectations. They may feel hurt or angry by your unexpected behavior. Even if everyone in the home of your childhood behaved with great respect toward you, as a healthy adult woman simply being with them in old familiar settings can trigger you.

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VI.

About Joanna Poppink and Contact Information

Joanna Poppink, MFT, is a licensed psychotherapist specializing in treating adults with eating disorders. She has a private practice in Los Angeles, is a speaker and author. She studied psychology at UCLA and the Saybrook Institute and received her Masters degree from Antioch University. She lives in Los Angeles.

Visit her at www.eatingdisorderrecovery.com

(Photo credit: Lori Dorn)

Contact information: joanna@eatingdisorderrecovery.com



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Joanna Poppink, MFT

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MEDIA CONTACT – BOOK REQUESTS, EXCERPT PERMISSIONS, INTERVIEW SCHEDULING:

Pat Rose 415-978-2665 x101 prose@rwwbooks.com

ALL OTHER INQUIRIES:

Bonni Hamilton, 978-465-0504 x1112 bhamilton@rwwbooks.com

Lisa Trudeau, 978-465-0504 x1110 ltrudeau@rwwbooks.com



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