

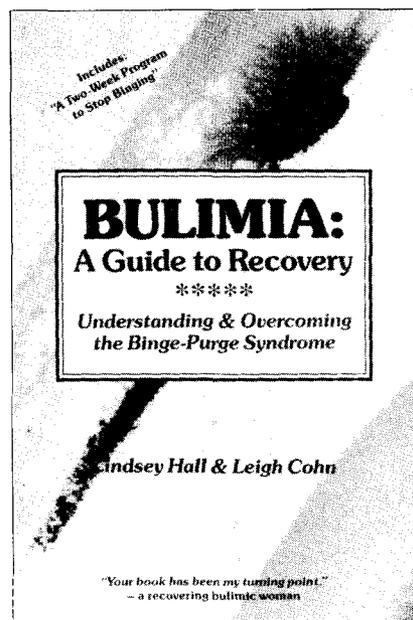
BULIMIA: A GUIDE TO RECOVERY

Lindsey Hall & Leigh Cohn. Santa Barbara: Gurze Books, 1986.

Leslie Langdon

This is primarily a self-help book co-written by a recovered bulimic and her supportive husband. In providing a guide to understanding the so-called "binge-purge" syndrome, the authors have successfully integrated the personal experience of Ms Hall and over two hundred female respondents to their survey to examine the salient themes of the illness and the diversity of techniques which can be used in confronting it.

The book is divided into three major parts. The first section, presented in a very readable question-and-answer format, provides a wealth of accurate medical information regarding the physiological aspects of bulimia. Included is an excellent discussion of set-point theory of weight regulation, where body size and type are seen to be biologically and genetically determined. The authors condemn "normal dieting" and advocate regular eating of an adequate caloric intake. Unfortunately, they fail to describe the almost predictable cycle of bulimia which begins with women dieting to enhance self-esteem; which results in weight loss, hunger, physical and psychological deprivation; which is followed by bingeing, causing guilt; which leads to purging which results in guilt which returns back again to dieting to enhance self-esteem. Also included in this first section is an important examination of predisposing and perpetuating factors in bulimia, which considers such issues as cultural pressures to be thin, role expectations, and the struggle between control and connection. The authors examine the complex tie between food and nurturance, and consider the way many bulimics use food as an expression of ambivalence about relationships, femininity, and sexuality. However, the similarities between bulimic, anorexic and "normal" women are underplayed.



Ms Hall also provides a personal account of her history of bulimia; how it developed, how it affected her health, how it affected her sense of self and her relationships, and how she endeavoured to free herself from the serious and chronic course of the disease. Her story is informative, inspirational, and supportive. She neither sensationalizes the disorder, nor oversimplifies the cure. However, the implication of her successful self-treatment and, in fact, many parts of the entire book (e.g., the section on self-help groups) is that people with bulimia can overcome their illness in a relatively short time through their own determined, well organized efforts. While the authors do refer to the need for professional counselling, they do not provide a current overview of the more recent advances in the multidimensional treatment of bulimia. Nor do they discuss the importance of considering factors in therapist selection such as theoretical orientation, sex/gender difference, knowledge of, and sensitivity to, women's issues.

The second section of the book offers a series of creative and practical suggestions that Ms Hall and respondents to her survey have found helpful in their attempts to overcome bulimia. Included is a checklist of alternative behaviours or

"diversions" to bingeing and purging such as journal writing and relaxation exercises. The authors take the reader through each step of the recovery process including how to make the decision to stop bingeing, how to set realistic goals, how to get past food fears and acknowledge that overcoming bulimia is a gradual process. There is a heartwarming emphasis on self-love and self-affirmation.

The third part of the book contains several appendices which address topics such as advice for family and friends, a guide for forming and running a support group, results of the bulimia survey, and a reading list. Also included is a two week program to stop bingeing primarily through behaviour and stress management techniques. While this appears to be a well organized and potentially useful plan, of concern is the author's suggestion to confront food fears through an all day binge while refraining from all forms of purging. This technique seems very risky and would almost certainly lead to an overwhelming sense of panic and guilt. I also have extreme reservations about the recommendations to use friends and lovers to "police" the behaviour of women who have often experienced excessive control in their pasts.

Overall, this book is a good introductory resource for women with bulimia or for any lay person attempting to understand this prevalent problem. It could be well utilized as an adjunct to professional counselling as it offers accurate information, sound advice and genuine hope for women who suffer greatly from this chronic, disabling, secret disease. As Kim Chernin suggests in *The Obsession*, women's preoccupation with food is really a spiritual hunger for a state of being. The honest, personal testimony of Lindsey Hall's successful self-recovery is a celebration of the possibility of new growth.

Reference

Chernin, Kim. *The Obsession: Reflections on the Tyranny of Slenderness*. New York: Harper & Row, 1981.

A GUIDE TO DYNAMICS OF FEMINIST THERAPY

Edited by Doris Howard. New York: Haworth Press, 1986.

By S.W. Pyke

This compendium of twenty-seven articles is a collection of papers read at the

Tenth National Conference of the Association for Women in Psychology. They have also been published in *Women & Therapy*, Volume 5, Numbers 2/3, 1986. Unlike many edited books, the articles are models of clarity, exhibiting a uniformity of style that suggests exceptionally thorough and conscientious editing. Inevitably, a certain chopiness is experienced as

the reader journeys from one topic to the next and some unevenness is evident in the specificity and scope of the issues addressed. Typically the articles provide brief surveys or overviews of the topic in question so readers searching for substantive, in-depth coverage of any particular issue would be well-advised to look elsewhere. Nevertheless, the text