

Julie: The Love Food podcast is brought to you in partnership with my PCOS and Food Peace course. Finally free yourself from endless PCOS, fatigue, frustration, shame, and guilt. For PCOS sufferers who are tired of ineffective diets and unhelpful advice, join me on a PCOS and food peace journey that will change your life forever. Grab all the details at pcosandfoodpeace.com. Say goodbye to the food police and hello to peace.

Julie: Welcome to the Love Food podcast, hosted by dietitian and food behavior expert, Julie Duffy Dillon. This authentically engineered series is in the form of a love letter, welcoming you to reconnect with food. Now pour a cup of coffee or a margarita, and let's begin.

Julie: Hi and welcome to episode 239 of the Love Food podcast. I'm Julie Duffy Dillon, registered dietitian and partner on your food peace journey, and I'm so glad you're here. Thank you for connecting today. Those of you who have been along your food peace journey for a while, you may have noticed that at times it can feel isolating. So many people in this world have these diet culture scripts and are really not even aware that they're following a script. I think it's really important to acknowledge that it is isolating at times, and how much easier it would be to have people like at home with you or on your side rejecting diet culture. I often talk about how recovering from diet culture and eating disorders is not something to do alone. This is something that we all need to rally together to take away the burden of these oppressive systems that are hurting more people than others, and hurting all of us at the same time. So, since the food peace journey is meant to be with others, how do you get people in your life to reject diet culture too? To examine their own fat phobia, to acknowledge how much they are being like, driven and ruled by diets? How do you get them to stop making some comments about what you're eating or your body? Well, if you can relate to any of those desires, then this show is for you. I have a letter from someone who is wanting to challenge her partner's food beliefs as she's doing her own rejecting diet culture. And we get to hear from Ashlee Bennett, who is a body image therapist and has so much wisdom on the subject. But before we get to hear from Ashlee, and hear this episode's letter, a quick word from our sponsor.

Julie (ad break): Early on as a dietitian, I learned that PCOS carb cravings were not like anything else when it comes to cravings. Cravings already can be complicated, but when you have PCOS, they can be so much more intense, with every cell in your body screaming to eat that plate of brownies. But yet, you're also told you have to cut out the very foods you crave. It's really complicated. And I know you're told that you're supposed to just ignore them or trick them, but I have something different for you. What if you said hello to the cravings and goodbye to the shame? If you're puzzled on how this even can work, or you want to know more, check out my pop up PCOS podcast. It's going to have a limited run, the end of April 2021, you can get to it at juliedillonrd.com/popup. What's a pop up podcast? Well, it's a podcast that's still free, and you can get to it on the same app that you're listening to right now. But you just need to sign up for it first and get a very special link so just you can subscribe to it. So, if you want to get to it, and I hope you will, go to juliedillonrd.com/popup. There, you will get access to the link, and you will get five special um, private episodes, just for your ears and everybody else who signs up, delivered right to your app when they are live. They are going to be just around for the week of April 24th, so as they come up in your feed, make sure you listen to them. They will be quick, informative podcasts. But you need to listen to them that week in order to get to them. So again, if you want to check it out and get access to this podcast, go to juliedillonrd.com/popup.

Julie (as letter writer): Dear food, Wow. Where to begin. I guess would be first telling the story of how you've been such a huge part of my life. My first memory of you taking over my head was when I was nine, wanting desperately for my pre-pubescent body to be flat like my friends, restricting my food because I thought that would make me better, but then binging on sleeves of cookies before school and flushing down the evidence so my parents wouldn't see, and thus what feels like a lifetime of disordered eating began. Restricting, binging, purging. I've tried it all. From the age of nine to twenty-two. And food, I gotta tell you, I love you just as much as I hate you. I mean, you taste so damn good, but I'm obsessed with thinking of you and how you affect my mind and body. Now, every day I work so hard to eat a balanced three meals, let myself indulge here and again, all while you're constantly on my mind. Added in a diagnosis of PCOS and a constant weight gain, even though I eat healthier than pretty much anyone I know? This is hard. Something else that is hard: communicating all this to my partner. My incredibly loving and supportive partner. The smallest phrase of "wow, you eat that so fast" or "I need a salad tomorrow after the pizza we ate today" can throw me off the handle. The shame placement on you, food, means so little to others, but so much to me. The diagnosis of PCOS makes me feel so out of control of my body that I have to work every day to like, notice I didn't say love, his offering of help sometimes feel like an intrusion on my own efforts. How do I keep my eating disorder recovery strong, my nutrition as a top priority, without grieving my PCOS diagnosis and symptoms, my ability to eat a huge juicy burger and communicate all this funk to my partner without making him feel like he's harming me? It feels like it's all just so much. My eating disorder history is mine, not his. But how can he best support me through this? Oh, and food, did I mention that I love and hate you? Sincerely, craving partner support.

Julie: Letter writer, thank you so much for this note. Do you know how often people ask me about how to better connect with partners and family members and friends to just support them on their food peace journey? Well, it's probably the number one question I get these days. And you know, reading your note, I knew I needed to find the right person to help me answer this. And I am so glad that we get a chance to talk to Ashlee Bennett. She's a body image therapist out of Australia, and she's going to have some amazing insight for you. Let's go ahead and give Ashlee a call.

Ashlee: Hello?

Julie: Hey Ashley, it's Julie Duffy Dillon, how are you?

Ashlee: Hi Julie. I'm great. How are you doing?

Julie: I'm really good. It's so nice to talk to you. Um, it's nice to have like, I've never spoken to you before, so selfishly I'm really excited to talk to you. And um, I sent over a letter to you. Did you get a chance to read it?

Ashlee: Yeah. Yeah. I've had a little look.

Julie: Nice. Well, are you ready to dive in?

Ashlee: Absolutely, yes. I had more than a little look. I have honestly dissected it.

Julie: Ooo, I can't wait for this dissection. So when you read through it, you know, what's the bird's eye view? What, you know, what's this, what's your general impression about what this letter writer is experiencing?

Ashlee: Yeah. Well, I think overall um, it's literally her redefining her narrative, I think, around food, and a really large narrative. Um, when I noticed that from age nine to twenty two, I thought about, you know, how defining this narrative has likely been in her life. So we're not talking about anything super simple here. And the other thing that I was thinking about is, it's like redefining that narrative but then thinking about, well, how does this narrative now fit in with my life more generally because I don't live in a vacuum?

Julie: Mm hmm. Yeah. Like it's, it's super messy to do this work. And then adding relationships to it as well. Especially like, special relationships. How complicated. I didn't think about that, like how this person is redefining all these things that had certain meaning for so long, from nine to twenty two. That is a really long time. So thanks for bringing that part up. Yeah, that's a really um important, that's why I love talking to people about letters, because if I was answering this on my own, I may have gone down a certain path, and even hearing that framing like oh, this brings up different paths. Yeah, that's really important.

Ashlee: Yeah, I mean, and it does contextualize the other part of the letter which is like, you know, how do I communicate to this partner? Um, knowing that this is hard, that part of that, that you know, very short sentence, this is hard, really stood out for me, and I really feel that. And it is a great question, you know, how do you communicate something like that to someone who is so significant to you um, and without knowing how long these two have been together um, yeah, it's challenging to do that, it's like pushing against someone else's narrative so to speak.

Julie: Oh, that's even deeper. Yeah, like because obviously the partner is going to have their own narrative too whether, whether they're aware of it or not, right? Like, people who haven't defined their relationship with food to be complicated may never have examined it, but they still have their own narrative with food and body. Well, so this, this person, you know, um well even thinking outside the letter writer. So either the letter writer or someone who can really identify with this letter, what would you recommend to them as some first few steps forward?

Ashlee: So it's something I'd be thinking about is before you, you're even approaching someone else is sitting with it yourself for a little bit and you know, really owning that this is difficult. You know, I'm, I'm redefining my narrative, and now I'm almost backing it enough and believing in it enough to want to then communicate some boundaries to someone who is significant. So I think it's really owning that with yourself, forced and- first and foremost, and recognizing that it's it's not a simple thing to do. Um I think it's a very vulnerable thing to do.

Julie: What do you, what do you see as, like, what makes it so hard for us to communicate these things to special people? Like why, why is it so complicated?

Ashlee: Yeah, well, I mean, it's coming into thinking about, you know, the dynamics of relationships and especially like in this one, I'm assuming we're talking about a romantic relationship here is that over time, you know, even if it hasn't been years, you do fall into a particular dynamic and, you know, we all bring our attachment styles and things like that um, that you're actually challenging the other person to shift. And that's what happens when people go to therapy in general or they start changing something about themselves in general, is that it can challenge the other person to make shifts, and that might not be something that the other person thought they signed up for. So yeah, it can be difficult in that sense. It can feel also like, you know, like you're doing something wrong as well when you're challenging this sort of stuff.

Julie: Yeah, that's what I would imagine too, and and um, for the partner who is saying, I'm assuming um, is saying things that are just meant to be observations and um, you know, wow you ate that so fast, or making these kind of, these observations that um, for those who are recovering or people who are, have done work and awareness of their relationship with food can see how yeah, that's like crossing a boundary, but this person probably never even knew it was a boundary that was not supposed to be crossed, you know? And I think that's gonna feel so, it's going to feel probably wrong for the person setting the boundary and then also like, awkward I would assume too for this person's partner, I could see that how that would be so complicated. Yeah. What do you think about that?

Ashlee: Yeah. Well, you know, the part that stood out to me is when they mentioned my incredibly loving and supporting partner, so we're making the assumption here that there, you know, there is a healthy alliance and there's a kindness between these two. Um, and those little phrases, you know, those diet cultur-y phrases that a lot of people parrot, I sort of see it as parroting, you know, we just say these things out of nowhere. It's like a script. Something I think about is like, has the script been challenged? Has she said to her partner um you know, I, this isn't quite helpful for me when you say that, I understand why you would say that, but it's not quite helpful for me. So I wonder does the partner even know that those phrases um, you know, aren't helpful for her to hear?

Julie: Do you have any um, suggestions or insights on how to say that for the first time? You know, to say that that's really hard for me or that's uncomfortable or that's crossing a boundary. Um, do you have any insight?

Ashlee: Yeah, like I think especially if, if the partnership has involved them doing that together in the past, potentially. So if you've been in a long term relationship and you've been, you know, you were once in diet culture and now you're on this body acceptance journey and like making peace with food. Um, you could have also been a part of that. So I think, you know, there's a couple of angles to look at it, but I think in a simplistic way it's just saying like, you know, when you said blah blah blah, I felt blah blah blah, and then you can pop in the boundary of um, you know, it's not quite helpful for me to hear that kind of language around food at the moment, so it's almost like keeping it back to relationship basics of I statements, you know, how does that make you feel when you're actually communicating this?

Julie: Yeah, I would imagine it's going to take time too.

Ashlee: You don't want to be like that's so annoying when you do that.

Julie: [Laughs] It's like you're seeing in my house, no, I'm just playing, but like but, but it can be hard, especially something so charged, and in a relationship that's so important um, to be able to frame it in that way, so it may take some practice. And something I was also thinking about is it may take a number of conversations for this to happen and to kind of stick, you know?

Ashlee: Yeah, something I noticed at the end of this letter is uh, where are we? Um, you know, her fear around harming him or harming them. I'm also not sure on this person's pronouns either or this relationship dynamics, so I'm sorry about that. Um, but just thinking about the harm aspect and that when we're implementing boundaries for the first time, and sometimes if we've been doing it for a while, if our tendency has to be, has been to be more passive in relationships, perhaps, boundaries will feel like you're harming. You know? So it's okay, and I say this with integrity and obviously there's elements of grey here: causing harm to someone isn't the worst thing in the world. Sometimes we have to put in these boundaries that may harm someone. We can't control how it's going to land for that other person. So take that with nuance, also, and make sure you've got your integrity, integrity when doing it. But I think in this context, putting in a boundary is probably, you know, really appropriate here, even if they don't take it well. And that needs to be okay.

Julie: Yeah, yeah. These are important boundaries, you know, these are, and, and it's causing a lot of stress on this person who wrote the letter, and it's important. So it's not, it's also not an outrageous boundary, you know, it's like, yeah, so we support you, letter writer, and yeah, it may feel wrong and it may feel weird and like a risk, and it's important and um, we hope that you find that, you know, you find a way for you to do this, maybe your own kind of script or your own kind of way of communicating it. Um, and good luck. And so, we have something as a part of the show, Ashlee, called the food peace syllabus. And if you're new to the Love Food podcast, the food peace syllabus is a collection of resources that we have gathered over the years to help your food peace journey, and you can get to the most recent food peace syllabus at juliedillonrd.com/foodpeacesyllabus. And Ashlee, would you like to add anything to it?

Ashlee: So, I'm going to do a shameless plug for my book that's coming up in April. So it's called *The Art of Body Acceptance*. Um, and it's a blend of a bit of a, you know, there's education and there's, there's writing, but there's also some how tos and some art based journaling practices. So, if you're interested in, you know, exploring some of this content in a less conventional way, in a more creative way, absolutely check that, that book out. It's coming out on 27th of April.

Julie: Fabulous. I just know it, and I have a feeling many listeners are going to get a lot from it. Just even how you described it there, it has a different way of connecting and working towards um, the relationship with body. I cannot wait to see it and get my hands on it. So, thank you for putting that in the, in the syllabus, I appreciate it. And um, if someone wants to know more about you, maybe want to work with you or just learn more about your work, what's the, where should they go?

Ashlee: Sure. So, my website is bodyimage-therapist.com. Um, but if you want a really great overview of the type of work that I do and the way that I hold this kind of content, um, definitely

check out my Instagram, which is @bodyimage_therapist. There's lots of content there that will keep you busy probably for days.

Julie: Yes. And you know on Instagram, which is probably where I have met you Ashlee, is also where I found your art and your sculptures. And there was one I put on my Instagram, I put the one I purchased from you, I love so much. So the person listening is like, what are you talking about Julie? So like, the sculpture that you made of a person with their hand on their heart. And it just, it made me cry when I saw it and I'm like, oh my gosh, that has to be in my office. And so I always end up putting on my stories at some point. It's like right in my office where I can see it all the time and people are always like, where did you get that? So, um.

Ashlee: That's so wonderful to hear.

Julie: Oh my gosh, yeah, it touches so many people just by me even showing it in a quick like Instagram story. So I love the art you do and what you're bringing to the body image conversation. Thank you so much. I will put all of those um, websites and um ways for people to connect with you in the show notes. So thank you so much for your time and your expertise. I really appreciate it.

Ashlee: Thanks so much Julie.

Julie: So there you have it. Letter writer, I hope my conversation with Ashley gave you some direction for possible steps forward as you communicate this part of your recovery. Anyone who can relate to this letter writer, and I know there are many, I hope it also helped you with some different ways to move forward on your food peace journey.

Julie (ad break): So I see food is written back. But before we get to food's letter, this episode of the Love Food podcast was brought to you by my PCOS and food peace course. Also keep in mind that I have a very special pop up PCOS podcast happening very soon. It's a private podcast that you need a special link for. You can get to it at juliedillonrd.com/popup, and you'll get an email to sign up to get the link when it goes live.

Julie: If you enjoyed this episode of the Love Food podcast, I would love it if you left a rating, a review, subscribed, or shared an episode. Doing any of those four acts of kindness really helps the show grow. So I thank you in advance.

Julie: Alright, so like I said, food has written back, but until next time, take care.

Julie (as food): Dear Craving partner support, Our relationship has definitely been complicated. So many ups and downs over the years that we've lost count, yet we are making amends, and it's been so worth all this tough work. We see you needing support. Of course having a partner aligning with your recovery and really getting it will help things feel more at ease. Are you ready to challenge your partner's diet culture script? I know that these steps will probably feel awkward. Boundaries often do when they're new. They may even feel wrong. Practice a few "I feel" statements and give yourself extra compassion and time. This will be hard work and good work. You're worth this work to bring you to a place feeling more at home. Love, food.

Julie: Thank you for listening. I am Julie Duffy Dillon, and this is the Love Food podcast. Do you want access to more food peace? Jump on over to my website and join my email list there. I share exclusive content that I don't share anywhere else. Get access to these tips and strategies by going to juliedillonrd.com/signup. And I look forward to seeing you here next week for another episode of the Love Food podcast. Take care.