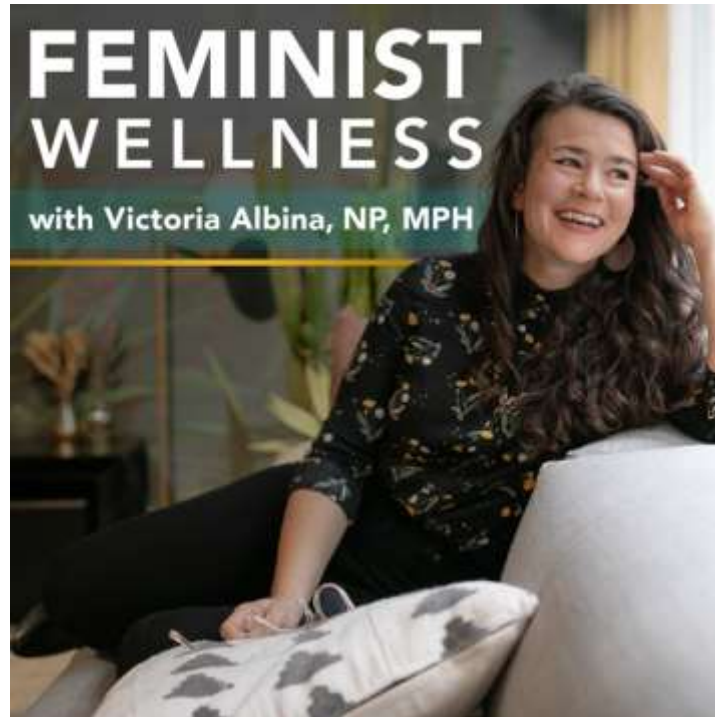


Ep #66: Compare and Despair



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #66: Compare and Despair

Do you ever hear about a friend's achievements and your heart sinks? You're totally happy for them, but something within you starts wondering why you didn't get that job, that engagement proposal, why you didn't reach that goal or milestone in the same timeframe that they did.

Your brain starts to compare your insides to your friend's outsides. To put you down and call you a failure in a bad way, to begin to ask dead-end questions in a mean way. Does this mean I need more school? To gain or lose some lbs? To do my whole life differently if I want what this friend, family member, stranger on the internet has?

Does your brain start to get all "poor me" about it and to question all your life's work and success, your worth? Yeah, I've been there too, my darling, and it's a dead-end street for sure. One I often traversed alone in the dark. And this thought habit known as compare and despair does nothing to move your perfect life forward.

If this way of viewing yourself, other people's success and the world at large is part of your thinking, you're going to want to keep listening. It's going to be a good one.

You're listening to Feminist Wellness, the only podcast that combines functional medicine, life coaching, and feminism to teach smart women how to reclaim their power and restore their health! Here's your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, Herbalist and Life Coach, Victoria Albina.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. Things are good here in Brooklyn. You know, as good as they can be what with a global pandemic. We are getting ready to go upstate for a little minute in two weeks. And we are being really thoughtful and careful about making sure that we get groceries now, fill the gas tank now so we can have a solid two weeks of not leaving the house. Like full quarantine before we go upstate.

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

We are both really cognizant of not taking our New York City cooties up there. So we're in it and I'm really excited. The thing that I've been missing the most, other than of course, seeing friends, being out in the world and enjoying the New York City that was is nature.

I talk to my plants an awful lot and that's been really grounding and supportive. We have beautiful trees outside our windows, and we've started little farm - farm seems a little grandiose. We are growing some vegetables on the roof and that's really lovely. We do that every year.

But I miss nature. I miss lying down on a forest floor and there are a lot of folks in our neighborhood not wearing masks, particularly bikers and runners, and it doesn't feel super wise to be out in the parks right now. So we are headed upstate and I'm so excited.

So for most of us who are safe at home right now, we have a lot of time on our hands while we're not commuting. And yes, I know, a lot of us are really busy working from home and full-time parenting without any school to send the kiddos to. And regardless of what's going on, what your schedule looks like, I think most of us are buffering.

And we're buffering using things like social media, scrolling the Instagram, and so often, we see all these glamour shots, which it's funny. These days, glamour shots are either like, throwback Thursday or it's a story of weight loss. It's a story of making sourdough. It's a story of a closet deep clean. It's a story about production.

And so often, we look at these pictures, we look at these stories, and we think, "Ugh, why isn't my life like that? Why aren't I doing all these amazing, magnificent, productive things in quarantine? Why am I not hitting all these goals?" And that, my love, comparing your perfect insides to someone else's outsides, is called compare and despair. And it's a time, energy, and

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

vital life force suck for sure, and it's one I'd love to help you begin to shift through starting now.

One of the things I hear so much from my clients who are actively working to shift their codependent and perfectionist thought habits is this same habit of comparing themselves to others and despairing about the ways they see others living, judging themselves against a friend who communicates directly, who doesn't seem to take things personally, who sets healthy boundaries, who doesn't procrastinate, who lives into their weirdness, their authenticity, who is unapologetically themselves.

These comparisons come with this story that you are supposed to be somewhere other than where you are in your growth. A whole bunch of shoulds. I should be more healed, I should be less reactive, I should know what my life's driving purpose is, I should be able to set up goals and keep them, I should be able to take care of myself first, I should be able to say no when I mean it, and yes when I do. I should be able to not answer my mom's phone call without endless guilt.

And my love, you can do and live into all of these things, and doing them from that should place is a recipe for breaking your own heart and will keep you spinning in the old compare and despair. And as I love to say, the way you do anything is the way you do everything. And if you're judging yourself against other people in one area of your life, you're likely doing it in every area of your life.

Though perhaps in more subtle, or less conscious ways. And my beauty, I get it. I've been there too. Comparing my journey to other people's journey. My healing to theirs. My success or perceived lack thereof to theirs and beating myself up for it.

What this habit does is it reinforces a narrative that most of us learned in childhood that we are alone in life, that we have to be everyone to

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

everyone else, everything to everyone else, and everyone to ourselves. That we are uniquely messed up and have to prove our lovability, value, and worth. That deep loneliness within that codependency and perfectionism can lead to.

Whether you completely feel this or not, get curious about it. Are there undertones of this thought habit in your life? I know there were in mine for sure, and it kept me comparing and despairing. And it feels so amazing to not have that be my knee-jerk reaction anymore.

The term compare and despair means to compare yourself to someone else, to see how you measure up, and to feel bad about yourself in the process. As with thought habits like perfectionism and codependency, your comparison is not based in any kind of objective reality, but rather, it's a projection of your own inner worry, fear, and insecurity. Your thoughts.

And as always, it's a form of protection. It's a beautiful self-loving reflex to attempt to keep yourself safe from well, yourself, from the ways you've learned to beat yourself up for being you, on your own path, developing, learning, growing. And sure, not measuring up to where you think someone else is on their path, or where you think you should be on your path.

And therein lies the problem. Not accepting your perfect self where you are, and thinking you should be at some other place on a trajectory of healing and growth that you've decided you're not measuring up on. Ouch. So let's do what we do. Let's talk about where this habit comes from and what to start to do about it.

So I want to start by addressing the popular narrative around this issue, which I think is not a helpful narrative. So something I hear a lot on this topic is talk like, "Other people are just showing the best parts. Everyone is suffering underneath. You never know what's going on for other people."

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

And while yeah, that's totally true for sure, you never know someone else's truth, what's really going on for them under the shiny Instagram pictures, what doesn't matter is whether what other people share online or tell you about is real. Whether it's real or not, whether there's more to the story or not is immaterial.

Because if your thought habit is to compare yourself to what they're presenting, you're going to do it all the same, whether you know about the underlying depression, anxiety, loss, fear, et cetera. In fact, your brain may still say, "Yeah, she may be depressed or have eczema, whatever, but look at all she's doing under quarantine or while depressed or whatever."

And that's because when your mindset is still based on externalizing your self-worth, people-pleasing and seeking outside approval, no matter what the outside truths are, you'll keep holding yourself up as less than, if that's your thought habit.

This goes back to a core story in codependency and perfectionism, which goes they have to like me for me to be worthy of love. Hits you in the gut that one, doesn't it? And again, I don't think most of us are conscious that that's our story. But when we do what we do in this family and we pull back with love and gentleness, we start to see the patterns.

The places this engrained and insidious thought habit shows up in our day to day. So let's talk about why this habit gets engrained in us. Let's start of course with socialization. So this habit may have to do with the earliest stories put in your head about what makes you worthy of love and celebrating.

For many of us, it starts at home. If your parents or other family members compared you and siblings, cousins, whatever, which is a thing I hear a lot, that parents said things like, "Well, Claudia got straight As," or, "Well, Maria keeps her room clean."

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

And I'm not saying there's anything malicious there, that your parents were trying to set up compare and despair in your brain. It's just what happened. But it does set your brain up to value you and your worth and accomplishments against someone else. So too, it teaches us to compete against ourselves, as though that were even a thing, right?

Why be in competition with yourself versus gently, lovingly holding yourself up and encouraging yourself to do your best every day? School is also set up to teach us to compare ourselves to others. Workplaces do this too. Evaluating people in relation to each other, grades, deadlines met, work produced, et cetera.

The patriarchy and capitalism also teach us to compare ourselves to others and what we view them as having. We're taught that to get ahead, we need to compete, versus being cooperative and celebrating other people's success. That to get ahead, we need to take things personally, which is also a hallmark of codependent and perfectionist thinking, to take things personally.

And that we need to make someone else's success or failure mean something about yourself, which it never does. It's like there's a system wide scarcity mentality. Like there's only so much success to go around and it's just not true. It's just marketing.

And humans socialized as women are taught especially to compare our weight, figures, fashion, hair, et cetera, to others in these constant and ubiquitous ways, and it seeps in so deeply that we may not even know we're doing it. And yet, we suck in our tummies when we walk by any reflective surface.

Capitalism wants you to feel bad about yourself, to feel scarcity. That's how it thrives. And you thinking that you're not perfect and amazing, and thus, you spend money on the latest serum or waxing trend or fashion item or

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

whatever. And don't get me wrong, this fem loves having a well-moistured visage. Not because I think it'll make me more lovable. Just because it feels good to not have tight, dry skin.

Next my angel, we will declare a nerd alert. So as humans, we generally prefer being told what to do rather than doing what we want because it can feel less scary, because then you are not to blame if you fail. You were just doing what you were told, what is expected of you. Toeing the line. Doing what everyone else is doing. Comparing yourself to others and holding tight to the story that you're always a failure if you don't measure up.

Evolutionarily speaking, we privilege fitting in with a crowd, whatever that crowd is, because it feels safer in the moment. Fitting in feels good in this deep biological way. It feels like belonging. So of course, we compare and despair because it's a measurement of that belonging.

Comparing ourselves to anything feeds that, keeps us trying to fit in, versus creating space to be our authentic selves, to own our weirdness. Few things have been as phenomenally liberating in my own life as coming to deeply love my own weirdness, my authenticity, and to embrace it.

Remember my beauty, that stepping out of step with your community back in the cave human days was super risky. Rejection by the village meant death. Being left cold and alone on the mountainside to die, no food or water or shelter for you. So evolutionarily, your beautiful, magnificent brain wants to avoid rejection at all cost, which makes sense as a nervous system response. Totally going to give that some love.

But believing that story, if you don't stay in lockstep with the others, it's death for you, just doesn't serve you in 2020. It's no longer as dangerous as our brains think it is. But still, we work to avoid rejection, to be seen as an acceptable, lovable, accomplished and worthy human by some standard we were taught, or sort of cobbled together in our brains.

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

And this is where the comparing and the despairing come in, touching on that way old story that if you're not measuring up, no dinner for you. And for those of us with codependent and perfectionist thought habits, with that internal barometer of our own worthiness set squarely on other people and what they think of you, then comparing yourself to others is what your brain will be focused on doing.

Telling those same old stories about you not being smart enough, not getting paid enough, not being thin enough, not being fashionable enough. And so your brain will continue to collect more evidence. And my nerd, we love evidence. But here, we use it against ourselves as evidence of how you're not worthy, how you're obviously less than.

And the problem is if you base how you feel about yourself by external rewards, you have no choice. No choice but to measure yourself against others because it's the thought habit you know. And the problem is that as long as you do this, you will always, always find someone who is doing better than you, who is succeeding more than you, who is effectively of greater worth, value, and lovability than you on some kind of measure.

And meanwhile, your brain will do what it's supposed to. Fixate on comparing yourself to them and despairing at what a failure you are. I'll also say that celebrating ourselves, especially as women, is seen as selfish or arrogant, or somehow just not okay. Not the right thing to do.

Our labor has been ignored, made less than, made unimportant for so long. And all of that is just BS. My brain just went to the phrase "working mother." Like as though there were any other kind, right? My love, you get to celebrate you exactly where you're at, and that has nothing to do with anyone else. Just you being you. Doing you. Celebrating you.

Finally, comparing and despairing is a side effect of consumption. What we consume in terms of social media, magazines, et cetera, strengthens the

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

story in your head that you need to compare your life, your success to others. And sort of zooming out and recognizing just how wonderful and perfect it is that you are exactly where you are, who you are, and that everything is exactly as it should be.

And whether someone else is married, has kids, is at peace with not having kids, is a size x or y, is “successful,” none of that has anything to do with you, my love. But the more you consume media that tells you that it does matter, that it has so much to do with you, you’ll stay stuck in that thought narrative.

So my darling nerdlet, let’s dive into the remedy. So as always, we start with awareness, acceptance, action. If you’re a new listener, welcome. I share a lot about this framework. So when you’re done with this show, there are tons of mentions of the triple A, awareness, acceptance, action, to sink your teeth into.

Actually, I should do a whole show on that. I’ll do that. I’ll make that for you. It’s a good thing for us to really roll around in. It’s actually where we start in my masterclass, the Feminist Wellness Guide to Overcoming Codependency, because it’s so pivotal and it’s so foundational.

So make sure you’re subscribed to the show so you don’t miss that one. And the first step in all of this work is awareness. And it’s to just begin with asking yourself, am I scanning the world for folks to judge and to judge myself around or against?

Most of us are until we begin to recognize, shift into acceptance around the fact that we do that, and then start to reframe that habit. Bring new thoughts in to create new feelings.

The second remedy is self-love. But that’s no surprise, my darling. Self-love is the key to it all. And part of self-love is valuing yourself. When your

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

opinion of you is the most important one, what you imagine other people think of you, how other people are doing in the world, it all starts to fade into the background and your brain can start to relax when it feels you doing something that may not get you the sort of social accolades it used to want.

Oh, I don't know, for example maybe stepping out of a lucrative and laudable medical practice and becoming a life coach. The only way to feel better about yourself is to lovingly challenge your thought habits, to get really curious about your belief system about your own worthiness, remembering as we do, that a belief is just a thought that you've thought over and over and over again, and to ask yourself where that worthiness statement comes from.

How are you measuring this up and who taught you that that was the way? And as I often tell you, my beauty, you were born completely and utterly perfect. You have nothing to prove. You are the proof, you little star seed, you. It doesn't matter how many times you fail, how many mistakes you make. Those are just your actions.

They aren't indictments of your character or personhood or value as a mammal, truly. And you get to get meta with yourself and to practice minding your thoughts. When you hear your brain saying, "Ugh, Sarah got a raise, a promotion, got married, started her coaching business. What have I done with my life?" I want to invite you to take a deep, slow breath into your belly, expand it wide, wide, wide, and breathe out so slowly.

This is to begin to get you ventral vagal with yourself, and if those words are new to your world, go listen to episode 61 all about polyvagal theory when this is done. We do this to start to connect in with ourselves, to feel all the feels, to feel into all that comparing and despairing and to see where it lives in your perfect human body, so you can give that part of you that

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

feels that, that has this thought habit a lot of love and tenderness. And you can begin to breathe it out.

And we do this gently. We don't jump to changing our thoughts to try to feel better. We do it with love and care, as our own best parent. And only after we've felt all the feels. And as you do this work to believe all of this, to mind your mind and to feel into your feels and to begin to believe that other people's opinions or what you imagine other people think of you becomes so unimportant.

What other people achieve or do, all of it, it matters less and less each day that you prioritize your own opinion of you over anything else in the world. This is a slow and steady process and it's well within your grasp. Start with one tender word to yourself on the daily and build from there.

A good episode to start thinking about this concept is episode six from way back a thousand years ago, and it's called What Other People Think of You is None of Your Business. That statement is still true a thousand years later.

The next step, and I love this step, is celebrating yourself. I literally schedule time into my day every single day to celebrate me. Not just my accomplishments and what I did, but who I am, how I showed up in the world each day. I celebrate being loving, honoring people, being kind, being generous, being of service.

All of that for the world, but also for myself. For example, this morning, I did what I often do in the morning, which is spill my mate. As an Argentine, that is very upsetting. And this morning, I laughed about it. I just laughed and was like, oh well, that's what happened, instead of berating myself.

And that's a thing that went right on my list of things to celebrate today. So look for the little things. Look for the big. Focus on celebrating who you are

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

in the world, how you're showing up for yourself and the world. And then celebrate your achievements. They're important too, my beauty.

A great episode to listen to about this is number 21, you are a human being, not a human doing. Along with celebrating yourself is also learning to be okay with feeling inadequate, unworthy, less than. With letting that feeling just exist. And instead of attempting to push it away, which you know I never recommend, instead, I'd really encourage you to get into conversation with it, to be curious about it.

It's just a feeling born from a thought. And if you connect in with it and ask yourself what it has to teach you, you could likely learn something about yourself and that's how we evolve and grow. Next, I'll offer you a question that has been so helpful to me. And it is this, what if someone else's success isn't a problem?

What if it has nothing to do with me? It's all about them and where they are energetically, where they are on their own time line. And it has nothing to do with mine. Get curious about that. See if you can take someone else's success as inspiration. Not something to despair about. Get out the pen and paper and write about it.

Next - and once you've done that work, everything we've talked about so far, every remedy, once you are practiced in believing that other people's success is not a problem, that it doesn't mean that you're a failure in a bad way, that there isn't more success to go around because success is endless, there's always abundance and so much goodness and success for us all, is to begin to practice celebrating the success of other people.

Being happy for other people's happiness. Not from a fake place. Not from like, a BS positivity place. We don't do that. But from a real place in your core, in your gut. Like you might applaud a baby for taking its first steps, or a puppy for doing the same.

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

There's a teaching in Buddhism I'll offer you called *mudita*, which means joy. Especially sympathetic or vicarious joy or the pleasure that comes from delighting in other people's wellbeing. And this was first taught to me as being in the mind state of a most loving, generous parent, observing a growing child's accomplishments, successes. Not having any interest or direct income from the accomplishments of that other.

Meaning, you don't stand to gain from their success and you find joy in it. *Mudita* is a pure joy unadulterated by self-interest. That inner well spring of infinite joy that is available to everyone at all times, regardless of circumstances. I love this teaching as a way to encapsulate this.

The more deeply one drinks of this spring, the more secure one becomes in one's own abundant happiness. The more bountiful it becomes to relish the joy of other living creatures. How lovely is that? That was first shared with me way back in the day when I was a hospice nurse at the Zen Hospice in San Francisco. Really stayed with me.

It's so beautiful. And this concept reminds us that celebrating other people feels so good. The freedom to celebrate other people's achievements is just so life-giving. To see someone else's success and not meet it with, "I wish that were me," but with, "That's so beautiful for them and for humanity, and I trust and believe that I am on my own path."

My love, let these messages soak in. Let them move your heart. Pay attention to how you show up in this coming week for yourself and the people in your world, the people on your Instagram, your family members who may be marking these wild successes during quarantine.

But just mark it. Be curious about it. Give yourself wild love about it and drop me a line. I love hearing from you. Send me a DM, drop me an email at podcast@victoriaalbina.com. But let's be in touch. It brings me endless joy to hear from you.

Ep #66: Compare and Despair

And my love, if you're finding this podcast supportive, which I so hope you are, I would be so grateful if you could head on over to Apple Podcasts and leave a review. And as a special thank you, I have a suite of meditations to send your way. They cover boundary setting, inner child healing, and grounding yourself in your body, which is a vital skill for nervous system support.

These meditations are short and sweet, like me, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/freemeditations. Easy peasy. And of course, we'll put a link to that in the show notes. You can always find those at victoriaalbina.com/podcast.

Alright my darling, there are instructions there for you, my love. How you can leave a rating and a review on the Apple Podcasts or wherever you get your shows, but Apple Podcasts is the most helpful because it helps to make the show more accessible. It'll appear in search for folks all over the planet who are looking for ways to heal their codependency and perfectionism.

So it is a gift for me because I want the show to get to so many people and it is a gift to the world, and you'll get a gift in return. So sounds like everyone's winning here. Alright my tender love, remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. I'll talk to you soon.

Thank you for listening to this week's episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you like what you've heard, head to VictoriaAlbina.com to learn more.