

Ep #86: Rejection Has Nothing to Do with Your Worth



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Rejection hurts because science. Evolutionarily speaking, my nerds, if you got kicked out of the village, you died. A lion ate your face and it was game over. So if you were vigilant to social rejection, you survived. So if smart you people pleased and upheld your perfectionist standards and you kept the community happy with you, then you would be protected, fed, kept warm, safe.

It is normal and human to want to belong, my darling. And when our fear of not pleasing others, not having everyone on earth enamored with us stands in the way of liking ourselves and living in our authenticity, it's not the rejection that holds us back. It's our fear of it and what we make it mean about us.

Ready to stop hiding your light, your magnificence, your weird, for fear someone won't like it and will reject you? 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. So I've been doing a lot of reflecting and a lot of thinking about how I got to where I am in my life and in my business. For so much of my life, I worked so hard to attempt to keep people happy and pleased with me, thinking that I'm so smart and capable, and that I know so much.

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And I did it as a way to validate my worth, my existence, my value as a human mammal. As a Latinx, as a human socialized as a woman, I learned that my doing was everything and that other people's approval of me was paramount, that I had to be constantly proving myself and that if someone didn't approve of what I did or said, who I am, that that meant something bad about me.

Now, as an adult, I've come to see all of that socialization for what it is. A way to try to keep me small, compliant, getting along to go along, or is it going along to get along? Either way, not ruffling any feathers, maintaining that status quo by being a good girl. And the truth is that narrative never really sat well for me.

I've always felt like a loner, an outsider, a weirdo, and for decades, that felt like a problem to be solved. I bent myself into an emotional pretzel trying to keep people happy with me, to avoid rejection. Because I feared what it would mean about me, my value, my worth, my safety.

And I hear the same experience from my clients so often. And after a recent webinar that I did about people pleasing and indecision, where I asked folks to send me questions, one of the top things I heard was a request for support around learning to manage rejection.

And thus, I wrote this show. So my beauties, let's start how we love to. With a nerd alert. So humans need one another. We're pack animals. We are wired for collective wellness and collective healing, which means putting the safety of the village ahead of everything else.

So if someone was rejected, we assume that meant there was something wrong with them, or why would they be left behind or cast out? And we continue to have that same visceral feeling of thinking that those who don't

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fit in or who are rejected are somehow damaged goods and we certainly do not want to be them.

While nothing could be farther from the truth, those who are rejected are certainly not damaged goods, evolutionarily, it makes so much sense. And as usual, we have evolved as humans and we now see all sorts of things that don't actually mean we'll be left to the woods to die as a rejection.

Things like your boss saying you need to change up something you wrote, your post on the socials not getting likes, getting ghosted by someone after a date, someone not texting you back in the timeframe your brain tells you is appropriate, and all of that creates a lot of internal suffering that you really can start to put down, my beauty.

And listen, I know I totally felt the heavy weight of rejection in school. That worry that the cool and popular kids wouldn't like me or approve of me, which they totally didn't. And while that rejection was super painful at the time, especially to my developing mind and sense of self, eventually, I found the weirdos.

The poetry slam kids, the queer kids, the theatre kids, and I made my home with them. I went where it was warm, to the kids who accepted me for all that I am. And looking back, I am super grateful that the cool and popular kids rejected me, didn't include me. Because it was an important turning point in my young life where I got to decide that I would show up for me with love and acceptance and would take their rejection as redirection.

Though of course, I didn't have any of those words or that understanding at the time. But first, I made them not wanting to include me mean something about me. Oh, how I suffered with it. And then later, I turned all that pain

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into poetry. Sometimes really terrible poetry let's be real, but poetry nonetheless.

And then I found my way to weirdo school where I belonged. And I'm so glad I did. Oberlin College was the most perfect fit for me, where all the things that the popular kids rejected were my greatest assets. And we'll circle back to how you can start to do the same for yourself as we talk about remedies, which you know we always do.

But first, another nerd alert. So let's get all brain science-y on it. Rejection can trigger your amygdala, the fear center of your brain, which is why it can feel so scary. It can shift your nervous system into sympathetic activation, the old fight or flight we've talked about so much here.

So that can be an acute experience when someone rejects you, or when someone says words and your brain interprets it as a rejection. That's how I want to say that. Or when it's a chronic or frequent experience, such as familial rejection, and especially when it's systemic, like the rejection that Black folks, BIPOC folks, queer folks, immigrants experience on the daily in this country, in which the current president does not condemn anti-Blackness and white supremacy and continues to keep brown folks in cages, well, all of that chronic rejection can leave your system so exhausted that you find yourself protectively and smartly in dorsal vagal.

That immobilization shutdown, sad, sit at the back of the cave part of the nervous system, which makes sense. Both sympathetic and dorsal are well meaning protective mechanisms, but neither prepares you to take a no or rejection in stride, or to get the support you need and deserve when the rejection is familial, systemic, and touches deep in your tenderness.

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So my beauties, that is the backdrop. Let us continue to look at the science, my nerdy little nerdlette loves. So there's some fascinating research about rejection. Functional MRI studies, a kind of brain scan that uses magnets, how cool is that, show that rejection activates the same part of the brain as physical pain.

So like walking into a table, which I did about an hour ago, and feeling rejection light up the brain in similar ways. And this is why rejection hurts so much, neurologically and nerdfactly speaking. What is also fascinating is that studies have found that the analgesic or pain-reducer Tylenol, which is acetaminophen, reduces both our empathy and the pain associated with rejection. Isn't that fascinating?

The functional medicine world went bananas about this finding some years ago. It's really interesting. So reducing your physiologic pain response reduces the emotional pain of rejection, which totally tracks.

Now, I am not out here being like, oh yeah, you should take Tylenol to reduce your emotional pain before an audition, a job interview because A, number one, your liver would not be thrilled if you did that. Acetaminophen is rough on the old liver. And B, number two, that buffering or attempt to push the feelings away doesn't actually help you in the long run.

All of this nerdiness about how rejection impacts us on so many levels is an important backdrop to say rejection can feel enormous in our bodies, like something that means something real and terrible about us as humans. And so we live with this powerful fear of it.

Vital caveat my beauties, if rejection, particularly early childhood or familiar rejection is keeping you feeling stuck, the following will hopefully be helpful for you as a framework and can give you some tools to help yourself. And I

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want to encourage you to see if working with a skilled and experienced therapist to help you address and unravel the tight old knots of rejection in our mind and body may be a good path for you.

Therapy can be so magical and it sure has been for me. Highly recommend it. And coaching and therapy can go hand in hand, excavating and making peace with the past while learning how to manage your mind today and to move forward to create the intentional life of your dreams.

So rejection happens to all of us in all sorts of ways. And you staying in that feeling, letting it swirl within you, that fear of someone disapproving of you or not liking what you offer, which is what a rejection is, can keep you from taking courageous action - the topic of episode 38 - for your life.

Because if you see failure as a rejection of your plans and attempts to succeed, you will fear it. Because of course you will. If as a kiddo you decided the best way to be safe was to have everyone from your parents, your caregivers, to your teachers, to the bus driver adore you and approve of you, then risking failure is antithetical to your goal of being safe and liked.

Again, makes a total ton of sense, and we talked all about how to reframe failure and how I personally now seek to fail ahead of time and on purpose. And we talked about it in episodes 39 and 40. But the train of thought of seeking to avoid rejection keeps us in inaction, keeps us from taking risks, from building the life of our dreams on our own terms, lest someone say no, it's no good, I'm not interested.

And baby, baby, baby, that's no way to live. That's certainly not a life built and lived with intention, which we talked about in 84, just a few minutes ago. For me, rejection has felt like a combination of anxiety and shame. I'm

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nervous, anxious, worried someone won't like what I've done. But really, the anxiety is that they won't like me, so shame comes in.

We make someone else not wanting what we have to offer mean something about us and our worth, our value. And that's part of why it's such a painful emotion. And we're going to talk about rejection as emotion because through that framework, we can work to shift our relationship to the very concept of what rejection is.

And thus, it's really important to get clear on the difference between hearing a no and being rejected, which I for sure conflated in my mind. I made them mean the same thing, and maybe you are too.

What's interesting is we don't often make a no mean something about us, unless it touches a deep tenderness. We talked a lot about this in the episode about resentment, number 64. It's when your loving ego gets involved and takes it personally, which is its job after all.

I want to invite you to feel into the difference between saying, hey, can I borrow your socks? And your buddy says nah, I need my socks. Or when you say, hey, can you pass the ketchup? And your sibling's holding their hotdog aloft and says, no, I don't want to put this down, go get it yourself.

So the difference between that, just like, a no, I won't do a thing, you can't have my thing, and when you ask someone to hold you when you're crying and they say no. Or you ask someone on a date, and they say no.

In the first two, you may not make those experiences mean something about you. You're less likely to take it personally. Can I have your fries? No dude, fries are sacred, hands off. Those experiences don't feel like

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rejections in my heart. They don't stir up the same protective mechanisms for me as when the request is about something that I am making mean something about me as a human.

Because that's when rejection hurts. When you make it mean that someone is disappointed in you, upset with you, thinks less of you, doesn't like you, doesn't approve of you. When your brain tells you you're unworthy because of that rejection.

When at its core and in truth, someone saying no to whatever the request is is just a human saying no. Much like our conversations about people pleasing and perfectionism, we seek to figure out what someone else is going to think about us. And we interpret the world through the lens of trying to not think that someone else is thinking something bad about us.

And we do that because we're so scared of rejecting ourselves, beating ourselves up, repeating the story that we are not worthy of being treated well. So the rejection stings because you turn it around on you. You call yourself unworthy and less than lovable, and you spin in that. Your brain takes it in so deep and you forget that you can have your own back.

This is a form of confirmation bias. When you reject yourself, your ego looks for experiences that strengthen that belief, that worry about your own unworthiness. And one of the reasons why so many of us are so mean to ourselves ahead of time and at the site of provocation is because our brains feel like it's easier to be mean to ourselves before someone else can be mean, as though that would protect us.

Your brain's like, oh yeah, alright dude, come on, come at me, just try to reject me. You can't hurt me. I already hurt myself all the time by believing I'm not worthy or good enough. Nice try, guy. For us folks with a history of

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protecting our tenderness with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, this line of thinking may be our norm.

And so we take things personally and feel rejection pretty darn frequently, often when we're not actually being rejected. What it comes down to is this; someone saying they don't want what you're offering, whatever that may be, has nothing to do with you. It truly is 100% about them.

And just as important for us as folks who have learned to be vigilant about not hurting others as a way to be liked, safe, protected, us codependent, perfectionist, people-pleasing thought habit havers, is to talk about our fear of rejecting others.

My clients often talk about not wanting to say no because they don't want to hurt someone's feelings. Don't want the other person to feel bad about themselves or about them as the no-sayer. They don't want to reject someone.

If we apply the same logic, when you say, "I don't want to date you, I don't want this job, I don't want cheese on it, I don't want to go to there," you aren't rejecting someone else or their opinions, thoughts, or ideas. You're just stating your side of things.

It's no more about them than them saying, "Let's have tacos," is about you. You don't want their offering. Cool, fine, all good. You get to use this framework to get a little cognitive distance, to support yourself in saying your yes and your no with conviction and self-love without attempting to please anyone, without attempting to shape your will and desires to attempt to protect someone else from a feeling, because my tender, kind, darling love, you can't.

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Other people will have their thoughts and feels, much like you will. Independent of what is said. So the remedy here is to remember that you don't cause anyone else to feel rejected. That's in their mind. And of course, this is always within the context of trusting you, dear listener, to move through the world with love and gentleness, while also speaking what you want and need.

I mean, being like, I don't want to hang out with you because you're a smelly jerk is not what I'm talking about. But rather, I'm not available to continue dating you is exactly what I am talking about. Kindness always. Simple, direct communication always. Self-love, community love always.

So I want to really empower you to speak your truth, to say what you want and need, and to not worry about the other person feeling rejected, trusting in yourself that you're speaking with kindness. Let's go back to you and you feeling rejected and let's look at my favorite remedy, thought work.

We start by getting neutral about it. And we do that so we can really see through our habitual experience of things. The stories we've always been telling about an experience. And when I say get neutral about it, I mean write out the facts without adjectives or subjective data. Just the facts, my darling.

My boss said x, put in the facts, whatever that is. She said she doesn't want to go on a date, they don't laugh at my jokes. And then once I can see the situation as this really neutral thing, I get to recognize that I can make a decision. I get to interpret that, and I can use my prefrontal cortex, my nerds, that smart part of my brain that can do thinking about my thinking, to make a choice.

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And so I'll ask some curious questions. What am I making this set of facts mean? How am I making it about me? Why does this fact, he said words, she said words, they didn't laugh, why does this feel like a rejection of me as a human?

And I do this because it's those thoughts that are leading me and you to judge ourselves, to criticize ourselves, and to continue to seek the false protection of the story that we are being rejected and will always be rejected, so we shouldn't put ourselves out there.

But what if someone saying no doesn't mean anything about you? What if it means everything about them and what they want, like, and need? They don't want what you're offering and that's just fine. Whether it's the thing you wrote for work, dating you, being your friend, paying you for your services, but seriously, it literally means nothing more about you than that they don't want it. It's just about them.

A coaching client of mine, who's a new women's empowerment coach told me she felt terrible. She felt terrible about herself, deeply rejected, questioning herself because she was on a consult call, which is a sales call with a potential new client, and that person didn't want to hire her.

She felt rejected, it was so painful and hard and heartbreaking for her, so I offered, what if you were on a consult call with my dad? He's a great guy but he does not want a six-month women's empowerment coaching program because that's the last thing he would want to invest in or to be a part of. Because it's not what he wants for himself. Jorge wants a lot of other things, but he doesn't want that.

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Just like I don't want to hire someone to paint my house bright purple. No diss to anyone with a bright purple house. Hold the hate mail. There's nothing wrong with it. I just don't want it, thank you very much.

So making it neutral and putting the facts of whatever happened in terms of someone else wants or doesn't want this thing, and that is their preference and nothing more helps me to take the emotional sting out of it, and it's like when we set boundaries.

So remember, healthy self-loving boundaries are not emotional. They're not about guilt or shaming ourselves or others. It's simply about saying what you want and need. If you do x, I'll do y. And someone saying no to you is the literal same. It's just them saying if you offer me a llama, that I can buy a llama, I am going to say no.

And it's not that you're not selling great llamas. It's just that that person doesn't want or need a new llama for their farm. Maybe they're moving their operation from llama farming to hamster farming, which is a perfectly normal thing to do.

And it's something that has nothing to do with you at all. So your brain is telling a story that it's all about you, and you get to reframe that, rewrite that story so you can see it as neutral. I was sitting on the couch at the party and she didn't sit next to me. Neutral. I asked them to go on another date and they didn't text back. Neutral.

So when you hear those plain neutral circumstances, there's no part of that that's about you. And therefore, it's possible for you to reframe any situation as someone making a choice for themselves. And I want you to practice this tool so you can begin to rewire your nervous system like we do by repeating to yourself, she said no because she wanted to say no. They

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didn't text because they didn't want to text. She sat where she sat because that's where she chose.

You get to choose reframes that have nothing to do with you because most things aren't about you. Truly and in the best sense. Your brain just has the habit of making things mean something about you and you can pause before your tenderness gets involved. It takes practice and love and care, and I know you can do it starting today.

The next remedy is to realize that there will always, 110% of the time, be humans who don't see your magnificence. And the truth is that is very sad for them. But it doesn't have to be sad for you.

So you get to shift the experience of your life away from that often not very conscious thought pattern of asking, how can I get this person to like me so I won't feel rejected? Into building your confidence in yourself as someone who can take a no. That's the shift.

And so with that, you can remind yourself that discomfort isn't a problem and you can feel all the pain of it because we don't emotionally bypass in this family. We don't push discomfort away. We practice sitting with it, within our window of dignity, as discussed in episode 81. And we remind ourselves, I can process this emotion through my body and can release it with love and care.

I know it's challenging, or I wouldn't be doing a whole show about it. But the more you can lean into your self-confidence, the more you can feel that deep dedication to valuing your own approval of you over anyone else's. And I want that for you so much, my beauty.

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So in order to not walk around fearing rejection, you get to one, get neutral about it, two, not take it personally or make it about you, three, process the emotion through your body, four, decide it's totally okay to not be liked by every human on the planet if you like you, and four, in that, you can decide that you're no longer going to live in fear of rejection because you know you have a plan and you trust you to have your own back.

Let's pause as we close and imagine together, what if you never had to fear rejection? What if you let other people's choices just be their choices and not have anything at all to do with you? Imagine how beautiful that would be, how different your life could be.

Think as well about all the things you haven't done because you've been afraid of what other people might think or say. When you take the scary out of hearing no and just make it a human saying words, you can grow in such glorious ways, my tender one. What a beautiful gift to give yourself.

Thank you for listening, my darling. I hope this has been supportive. Please do keep sending me any requests you may have for an episode, and I'm going to do a listener Q&A soon enough, so drop an email to podcast@victoriaalbina.com if you'd like to get your question answered by moi.

Alright my sweet beauty, let's do what we do. Nice breath in and out. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us 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.