

# Ep #137: The Inner Critic: 3 Steps to Manage Your Gremlins



**Full Episode Transcript**

**With Your Host**

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

## Ep #137: The Inner Critic: 3 Steps to Manage Your Gremlins

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, and Life Coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. I myself am on the mend, but I bet you can hear in my voice that I got a cold. I've had four days of negative at-home Covid tests, and a negative PCR, and thank goodness, it's just a cold.

And it's been such a strange and fascinating experience because I haven't had a cold since a pandemic ago, and it's just fascinating. It used to make sense that I was on the subway every day, I was in buildings full of people, elevators full of people, restaurants, et cetera, et cetera. And I've been super duper cautious and wear double masks inside, and whatever, life happens, right?

Sometimes you get a cold. And as the fatigue set in this week, as I canceled calls and put off projects, one of the things that I was very aware of and frankly, fascinated by, was the negative self-talk that came marching on in like a perfectionist Mardi Gras band, throwing baubles of self-doubt and shiny plastic necklaces of self-recrimination and self-judgment at me.

Thoughts that sounded like, "I should be able to work through this. I should be able to focus for at least a few hours a day. Vic, what is wrong with you? Why can't you just focus?" As I say that, I remember that I mostly wear clear glasses and six different times today I took them off and put them down somewhere and then couldn't find them because I didn't have my glasses on to help me find my clear glasses I had taken off and lost in my very small kitchen.

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And yet, that inner critic was so loud. And it was a moment where I got to remember to practice what I preach. Allowing and holding non-judgmental space for challenging feelings and inner conversations, for that mean gremlin of a voice that comes out when we aren't meeting our own perfectionist thought fantasies about what we should be able to accomplish, change, think, feel, do in a given moment.

My thoughts from that inner critic part were not kind, my darling. And the difference between now and the time before thought work and somatics is that I was mostly able to stay in the place of being my own watcher. To recognize my unkind thoughts as the thoughts of my inner critic, and to use our tools to honor that part and to also let them know that I'm not interested in being mean to me anymore.

It used to serve such a purpose in my life. It kept me feeling small, it kept me on tenterhooks, it kept me always hyper-vigilant. It kept me feeling less than, which in this fascinating way, kept me feeling not completely responsible when I would mess up, and mess up I did because turns out I'm a human. And I'm just not interested in being in that internal vortex anymore.

So I'm really excited to share three tools I use when my inner gremlin comes out to eat emotional pizza after dark. And if you're a regular listener, you'll be nodding along here as I say those tools are awareness, acceptance, and then action.

So first, awareness. It used to be that when I would hear those mean thoughts in my head, I thought it was me talking to me. I didn't realize that that mean voice was a voice on an internal TV set, yapping away at me. I didn't know about internal family systems work yet, which is the work of

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recognizing that we have many voices and parts within ourselves, and each has a different and vital role to play in maintaining our inner landscape.

By raising my awareness of when that critic part was speaking, I was able to spot that voice and to hear the things it was saying as a part of me speaking. Not me speaking. Not the whole of me.

And it was really important for me to begin to differentiate. Because it's one thing if it's like, okay, that's a part of me, I could get a little space, a little cognitive distance. But when it felt like, "Oh gosh, this is me being so mean to me," it felt devastating.

And what was really helpful in recognizing this is just a part of me was to recognize that I would never consciously say things like, "You totally messed that up. You're a failure. Oh my God, how could you be so dumb? You should have known it would work out that way."

I love me too much now to speak to me that way. To say things like that in my own ear that just aren't true. When we hear those kinds of thoughts and don't realize that we do have the capacity to raise our awareness of them as simply being a part of us and to therefore disidentify with them, well, of course we believe what they're saying.

We think this is just us making observations about ourselves and our choices when really, it's this critic part beating us up. What helped me to tease apart the voice of my inner critic from my own voice is to ask, would I say these things, these mean and cruel things to someone I love? To a coaching client? To a friend? Even to a stranger?

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When the answer is of course not, then I know that that voice is my inner critic, and I label it as such in my mind. Those are thoughts I don't need to borrow or believe. They're inner critic thoughts. It's just a voice in my head saying words. Words that I was taught to think about me that I don't need to believe. Old patterns and habits, old neural pathways getting activated. No need to give it more weight than that in the moment, right?

You are and can ever be your own watcher. Not your thoughts, but the consciousness watching and hearing them. And you can decide that it's totally okay that you have an inner critic because we literally all do. And it's not a problem. It's just another voice in your mind that you get to be present with.

As always, I also want to call out that so many of our critical and inner thoughts come straight out of the mouth of the patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and capitalism. Thoughts like, "I'll be happier when I lose the last five pounds, I'd be prettier if my nose was thinner, or I can feel better about my life when I'm married or get that promotion or get that raise or get to that level of credentialing."

These are thoughts that most of us humans, particularly those of us socialized as girls and women were taught rather directly. And those thoughts that are conditioned and socialized into us are so insidious because they're baked into the fabric of most things around us.

The advertising we see, the stories we hear, the expectations that the people we love hold for us, and it's so important to remind ourselves when these thoughts come up, you don't ever have to borrow those thoughts either, ever.

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You don't have to believe these kinds of thoughts. You didn't make them up. You're not a bad feminist if you hear these thoughts. They were literally trained into you. So the more we can raise our awareness, "Oh right, that's capitalism telling me that I need to do that, that is white settle colonialism, the patriarchy leading me to judge my one perfect amazing human body," the more we can raise our awareness and see those thoughts, the more we can do that process of disidentifying with them, creating some space where we can choose our own next thought.

When our thought habits are based in codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, we often have the habit of being mean to ourselves, being overly exigent or pushing ourselves way too hard and not letting ourselves rest.

We fear failure or not measuring up to external expectations deeply because there is this core wound around worthiness from which we think we are failures. Not worth of love or care unless someone else validates us, so it can feel challenging at first to discern which voice is a critic and which voice is our wise self, our higher self. What I think of as the voice of true, unconditional self-love, our intuition.

And the difference for me, the way I discern between those two voices is all about the tone and the energy. So my inner critic has a harsh tone, rushed, urgent energy, a frenetic feel to it, a loud energy or volume even. It screams in my ear, it's demanding of my attention, my energy, it's curt.

It has this mean thing to say and it's going to say it mean. Meanwhile, the voice of my intuition, of my deepest, kindest self-love is so gentle and kind. So tender and soft, so calm and compassionate. Like a kind and loving guide. Honestly makes me think of a preschool teacher. Just tenderoni. Not a taskmaster.

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Somatically, my body feels soft when self-love is speaking. There's a softness in my muscles, my belly feels soft, like I'm not contracted. I'm not holding anything in, I'm not bracing against anything. Meanwhile, when my inner critic is speaking, I feel tight, I feel braced, I feel ready for the next blow, like that boxer in the ring. My jaw just tightened. Ouch.

My belly feels like there's lava in it, my hips feel tight. My breathing feels more shallow. Yikes. My body does not love tuning in to my inner critic. And as always, it has been important for me, I'll share that, to tune in to my critic, even when it's super duper uncomfortable, when I know that I am in a calm, safe, grounded place.

Because from there, when I feel anchored in myself, when my nervous system feels regulated, when I have a plan for coregulation, resources, like we talked about recently on the show, nervous system resources, when I have those, really tuned in, and I know that I can lean on myself and my own support, it is helpful for me to get in touch with my inner critic so that I can know what the beginnings of that feeling are like in my body.

Sometimes now I can feel that tightening, that tension, there's actually a spot in my right upper back that sort of clenches up when the inner critic is sort of rearing up to come for me. And I can feel it in my body before I even hear the thoughts or the voice in my mind.

So that work, that somatic work of getting in touch with that part and allowing it to have a somatic, a felt voice, has been so helpful for me. So this awareness for you of the inner critic voice can happen in your body, your mind, or both.

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And if it feels challenging at first to discern which voice is which, highest self, most loving self, wise self, critic, ask yourself, would I say this, whatever this statement is, to a child, or to someone I love dearly? If not, it's your critic and not you, my darling.

The next step is acceptance. You have this part, I have this part, we all have this part. And this step has been so deeply supportive for me because I used to get mad at my protector parts, my defender parts, my inner critic, which is like when you yell at the dog for barking and she's like, oh wait, what? Oh okay, so there really is something to freak out about, okay, beloved human, okay, I will bark louder.

When you get mad at your critic, trust and believe it will get louder as you effectively tell it yes indeed, there is a reason to go into sympathetic activation, into fight or flight, those are needed here, there is a problem.

So instead of yelling at that pup, we work to meet it with love. And I know, I know, it's so challenging when it's a voice that's being mean to you, but I don't know another way, my darling. Also, let's pause and remember this is a part of you.

The core wound in codependent thinking is rejection. We feel rejected in childhood and adolescence, we don't feel fully seen, cared for, accepted. The way to heal a part that believes that is not to reject it, right? So I seek to love and accept and bring on board, get in connection with all of my parts, even when I don't like what they're saying.

So I work to meet it with love. Just like how my beloved dog, Francis Bacon, who went by Frankie, that was her preferred name, she would bark



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at things that she thought were dangerous. I recognize that my inner critic is doing the same thing.

It wants to protect me from things like feeling too much joy or peace or calm or success, which can be scary if they're not what you're used to feeling, or things my critic deems dangerous like trying something new and risking failure because it knows that it is going to be so extra harsh with me then.

So instead of telling it to F off or shut up, I approach it like I did Frankie. With love, gratitude, compassion, and always curiosity. My darling inner critic, hello, thanks for joining us today. I'm so curious, what's up for you? What is it that you want me to know? What are you trying to protect me from?

And I do this, I literally talk to myself and my critic and all my parts this way because developing intimacy with myself is one of the most important things I can continue doing to keep my codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thoughts a thing of the past.

Because those habits only thrive when we are not sure of our worth and value, when we doubt that we are perfect and worthy just as we are, and we live life trying to prove it. So I speak to myself, all of my inner parts from the assumption and belief that they are perfect, just like me.

And they just want to let me know something, they just want to protect me because they value me. And as someone with a history of intrusive thoughts, my darlings, I know I know, this can be so challenging. Listen, I'm never out here saying this work is not challenging.

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And for me, meeting my critic and my intrusive thoughts with love and care feels so much better than being mean to me ever did. And let's be real, it's so much more effective and efficient too. So that speaks to my nurse's heart for sure. We love efficiency.

Another useful remedy in the vein of acceptance is to continue to disidentify with that critic as being you, to accept it as being a part of you by naming it. And an old therapist of mine taught me this one and it's been so helpful over the years.

So you could give it a name, you could create a whole character that you can see outside of yourself and not identify with, like mean Mike, or mean Magdalena. Whatever comes to you. No, it doesn't have to be an alliteration but you do get extra nerd points for alliteration always.

So it was super helpful for me for years and helped me to accept that this critic part is just a part of me. It's not going anywhere, it's here to stay. And I have the power to lower the volume and to make choices around my relationship to it, like I can with all my human relationships, which brings us perfectly to step three, action.

This is the step in which you get to take courageous action for your own life and to make a conscious, thoughtful, self-loving choice about how you will relate and respond to your inner critic, this part of you that loves you, in a way that doesn't feel helpful or kind.

I like to think about you know that aunt that always points out your pimples at a family dinner? It's like you walk in and she's like, "What an ugly pimple you have." And you're like, yeah, no, okay, I knew that was there, thanks.

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Your inner critic at its core is not that different. You get to acknowledge that your inner critic is no more the voice of your true self than your tia's voice is, pointing out the thing that you're nervous about, that you're worried about because everyone wants to make sure that you're aware of it, so you can protect your tenderoni heart.

In either case, whether it's your tia or your inner critic, you get to accept that both of these voices mean well from their own worldview, their own understanding of what safe looks like. That they honestly just believe they're doing right by you.

And you get to decide that you are going to continue to show up for you and to be your own most loving parent, that you are in fact the adult driving the bus that is your life, not that critic, and that you're not going to ignore, shame, scold the critic or the tia, but you're also not going to give that voice primacy.

You're not going to believe its sneaky siren song, luring your inner ship onto the rocks below. For me, this week, that conversation has sounded like, "Hey critic, thanks for coming to protect me. I hear you that you think I should be doing all these tasks in my business, all these things around the house, I really should get those irises in the ground before it starts to get colder this week.

And while I appreciate you trying to take care of me, I want you to rest easy. I want you to know that adult me has got this. I'm going to keep being my own most amazing parent like I have been. I'm going to rest and hydrate and nap and take Epsom salt baths and fistfuls of supplements and chug all the bone broth and sauerkraut juice. I'm going to give my body what it needs to heal up and feel better, which isn't more labor, which isn't proving my worth through some perfectionist dream that I can push through

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when my body wants rest. Thank you for your input, it's truly appreciated, and I got this."

So try this process on, my tender ravioli, the next time that voice comes up to tell you you're not good enough, you're not worthy of love, that voice that says if I'm not going to do it perfectly, why even try? That voice that says that you will be happy, peaceful, calm when, if, something changes.

You get to recognize that none of those things are true, that you are perfect and worthy of love exactly as you are because you were born that way. And you never have to do a darn thing to prove it.

So raise your awareness. I have an inner critic and so do we all. It's a part of being a human with a human mind. Acceptance; that voice is not me. It's just a part of me. And I can accept that it exists within me. Action; I don't have to be mean to that voice or myself in return. I don't have to exile this part or turn my back on it. I can meet it with love, curiosity, and compassion, while also deciding sometimes 473 times a day, not to believe it, not to borrow its thoughts or turn them into a belief.

I can choose my own thoughts and my own relationship to myself, my capacities, my accomplishments, I can celebrate me each and every day and don't have to believe what a critic says. I can disidentify with it and create space for me to continue to build intimacy with me, to love up on me, and not to fall into the pit of doom and despair the inner critic wants to throw me down.

My darling, I hope this episode has been helpful for you. Sniffly and all, big cheers to my podcast producers Pavel and Angela. I think they probably

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had to do a lot of work to make this one low snuffle. So thanks to them as always, Digital Freedom Productions, they're so amazing.

My sweetesses, I have a gift for you. It's a free one, obviously, or it wouldn't be a gift. And it's text messages sent right to you from me. While carrier rates may apply, there's no cost to get these little messages sent right to your US phone number.

That's right, US. The service I use can't do international yet. Such a wicked bummer. But anyway, there's no cost to get these little messages right to your US phone number and they are things like journal prompts, poems, songs I like, little love messages, and I sure do love sending them.

So you can get them by texting me on 917-540-8447. That number again, 917-540-8447. That's all you need to do is text - doesn't matter if you text like, hello, or - let's make this fun. Send me your favorite five emojis. That's really fun. Send me a bunch of emojis. I love an emoji.

And then boom, done, you get little love notes from me several times a week. It is so fun and so modern and so free for you and such a delight for me and hopefully a delight for you.

Alright my beauties, thanks as always for listening in. That critic is just a part of you. It's not you. You get to embody self-love each and every day, my darling. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart if that feels supportive.

Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

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If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to [victoriaalbina.com/masterclass](https://victoriaalbina.com/masterclass) to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.