

## Ep #154: Secrecy



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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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. It's been a minute since I shared a review of the show and this one just warmed my heart so I wanted to share it. Over on Apple Podcasts, which is the most helpful place to leave a review because it helps more people to find the show on search, you can only see the name.

So a writer called Gracefully Falls shared, "What a graceful, humorous, and kind guide in my healing journey. Finding this podcast has been one of the best moves for my mental health. The light-hearted approach allows me to approach my healing with curiosity, absent of the judgment that was so frequently present. She envelops us in a verbal hug each episode. Do yourself a favor and give this podcast a listen. While this is important work, it doesn't have to always be serious. The space her laughter creates is just as healing as her insight or as fun as her nerding out on the science of it all."

Gracefully Falls, I feel all warm and sweet in my chest. My inner children are smiling and dancing. Thank you. Thank you for your kind words and for taking the time to leave a review. Like I said, it really helps to get this free resource into the ears of as many humans as possible.

I do this show because I've been so privileged to have so much education, so much access to learning, to coaching, to breathwork, to somatic practice, to doing all this stuff. And I want to be of service in the world, so I'm here each week recording *Feminist Wellness* just for you.

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And it really helps to get the show to more people when you head on over to Apple Podcasts. It used to be iTunes. Why do they change things on me? Come on, seriously folks, my nervous system is like, I knew what the thing was and I liked knowing what it was.

But if you head on over there, if you're enjoying the show and you could leave it an honest review please and hit those little stars, it really, really helps. So thank you, my darlings.

This week, I want to touch on something that we've been talking a lot about over in Anchored, my six-month program to reclaim our self-worth. We've been diving deep into all the ways that codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits show up in our lives and how our survival skills from growing up in families where codependency is the norm impact our relationships now.

With ourselves, our dates or partners, our family of origin, chosen family, friends, coworkers. As always, strangers on the street. We can get really co with them too, let's be real.

And a big way our disbelief in our own worth presents itself is around the line between being a private person and being a secretive person. And not knowing whether it's okay to keep some things private and often not even realizing when we're being secretive or lying in an attempt to people please, to protect connection, to attempt to feel safe.

This week, we'll focus on secrecy and why we keep things secret, and how it impact us. And next week, we'll talk about privacy and why it's vital for interdependent relationships, which in my world is always the goal. To step further and further away from codependent relationship styles and into more interdependence, based in mutuality, reciprocity.

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This is a really important issue for us on so many levels. For so many years, I thought that keeping things secret was a smarter, safer way to live because if no one saw the real, true, vulnerable, tender ravioli that is me, then no one could hurt me, right?

I know now that that thought isn't true, but I sure believed it. It kept me in painful shame spirals that I am so glad to be on the other side of now. The more we can lovingly challenge our own habitual thinking, the more freedom and true internal safety we create in our own lives.

This is also a really important topic for us because learning who we are when we are truthful about our lives, about our past, present, and future is key to living an authentic, intentional life. And getting clear on when we're in an old habit of secret-keeping or if the issue at hand is one that calls for sacred privacy is so important to get clear on so we can set boundaries and hold those boundaries as sacred.

So let's back up as we love to do, my sweet perfect nerds. Where does this confusion come from? Well, so growing up, many of us were not allowed privacy. And often, secrecy was the norm in our households.

Perhaps our parents were up in our business or read our journals. Perhaps we were asked either explicitly, like, "Don't tell your mother," or implicitly, as part of the family ethos to keep family secrets.

So as the brilliant children we were, we came to conflate love, safety, and keeping secrets. For those of us who really latched onto perfectionism as part of our people pleasing, we wanted to be the good girl, the good boy, the good child.

And that good child certainly doesn't tell tales. And the reason why this whole framework sticks with us as adults, well, goes back to our limbic

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system which we nerded out about so hard last week. That was a good one, right?

You love it when I say science words. I love it when I say science words. So our limbic system, our inner children, they come to conflate vulnerability, speaking up, sharing what's real in our family homes, and betrayal, abandonment, leaving the family out to dry.

I was talking with a client the other day and she said secrecy doesn't really resonate with her as part of her childhood, that she was never asked or told to keep secrets. But I know her and I know her history. So when I asked her if she went to school to told everyone that her mother drank in excess, or that her parents fought every night, she said no.

She certainly did not tell those tales. She kept those secrets close. Didn't invite friends home after school, always made sure to meet people out. Her childhood was more secretive than she had imagined because she always got straight As, there was always food on the table, ballet lessons, the whole nine.

But she kept those secrets close. Often when we grow up protecting the family secrets, we can come to believe that it is our job as children and later as adults to keep everything secret, which teaches us that being open, honest, real, vulnerable is not safe and we are not safe if people know our business.

As a result, we block ourselves from being in our realness, of speaking our truth. And because we learn to block ourselves from revealing too much, we lose touch with our somatic or bodily capacity to feel into whether someone else feels safe to be honest and open with or not because we've cut ourselves off at the past and don't even let ourselves feel into it.

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So of course we just decide everyone is dangerous whether they really are or not. If there weren't good boundaries at home, we may not really understand that our role as a child was to be a child. Not to keep family secrets.

And we come into adulthood with this confusion about what is okay to say and what isn't. And for so many of us, there were lots of reasons to keep secrets and why sharing information felt unsafe, unwise, downright foolish.

So we end up with a lot of confusion as adults about what to keep private and what to keep secret, what to have boundaries around, and what even is the difference. So what is the actual difference?

Well, secrecy is about intentionally hiding things. And secrecy generally comes from a place of shame, and fear, and worry, and a whole lot of catastrophizing about what will happen if your secret or your family secret gets out.

We feel shame because we feel bad about ourselves or our families because of what we've done or what they've done or what they've failed to do. And we feel shame about other people's lives because we don't feel clear about what we're responsible for. What's ours and what's other peoples' to own and for them to be responsible for because we're often so wildly enmeshed.

We feel fear because we're afraid that if our secret gets out, we will lose our external validation, our sense of safety, that we will lose the love, respect, care, loyalty of our family, friends, partners, society, our religious groups.

We keep secrets because we're afraid that someone will be upset if they find out, so we lie to ourselves and we tell the story that we are protecting

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them. We're the martyr after all, when we're really obfuscating or hiding our truth in an attempt to keep ourselves feeling safe by going along to get along.

And before we go any further, it's important to pause here to say when we're talking about fear, what I do mean is fear of judgment. Fear of other people having thoughts. Not fear of being physically unsafe.

That is if you're creating a plan to leave an abusive situation, that is a very smart thing to not tell your abusive partner, parent, or whomever because the fear there, it's a different thing. And that plan can still be held in your heart as something private.

To be shared with trusted people only, and not secret, meaning you don't need to carry shame around being in that situation. Because there is nothing shameful about being in an abusive relationship. I myself was in an emotionally abusive relationship for a long time.

And what matters is that you get out. Sharing what's going on in your life with trusted folks can help you to find your way out. So keeping your experience secret, shrouded in shame, only keeps you feeling trapped.

And if this is your current or past experience, know my darling love that I see you. I'm sending you so much love. Feeling shame and worry about others judging you is normal and human, and it's also something you can get to the other side of so you can take care of you.

So we keep secrets often because we believe that other people having thoughts about us is a problem, is something that can hurt us, and is something to be carefully managed because we don't realize that we never, ever, ever have to borrow anyone else's thoughts about us ever.

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And finally, we keep secrets because we believe that our actions create other people's thoughts, feelings, and lived experiences. We believe if I'm honest, they will feel hurt, and that's a problem. And that's not always a fact.

You can be honest and someone can say, "Yeah, I kind of already thought that anyway." You never know. But our inner children believe it to be a real problem. In my own life, when I've shared something that I previously kept secret with someone I felt safe with, sharing that story led us to feeling closer.

It built love, trust, care. Not the opposite. It was a beautiful way to begin to release shame. We can also keep secrets from a perfectionist place to try to control what others think about us so we can maintain that story that we are oh so very perfect and beyond reproach.

We keep secrets about how we really feel to try to please the people in our lives and tell lies to try to keep them happy and happy with us. We tell them the sex was great, we're not annoyed that they're late over and over and over again, that we're happy or okay or, "Yeah, I'm fine, thank you," when we're really not.

Keeping secrets takes up a lot of brain space and energy in our bodies as we worry about what will happen if the secret gets out. And it creates this almost antagonistic experience in the world. Like it's me against the world, I have to protect myself.

So you can't really relax into just living your life and having your authentic experience. Instead, you stay stuck in that story of will they find out? Did they find out? What if they find out? What on earth is going to happen?



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And secrecy can lead us to act outside of our values and integrity because lying is often required to keep the act, to not let the secret out, especially when we're working on building a loving connection or relationship. The lying necessitated to maintain secrets builds a further wall of distance between ourselves and the people we want to love and whose love we want to feel, and takes us further away from living with intention and authenticity.

Further away from living our lives out loud, as the fullest expression of ourselves, which to me is the most essential human task. To live into and from our full open hearts and our proud authenticity.

So to recap, secret-keeping is marked by fear, shame, and an attempt to not upset others. To caretake them at your own expense in an attempt to manage how others think and feel about you.

When you're awash in shame or fear about something and that's what's driving you to not share about it with the people in your lives, then it's likely that you're keeping that thing to yourself as a secret and not from a healthy sense of privacy.

Let's say for example that when you were a teenager, you shoplifted with some friends or told some big huge lie. And you have a lot of shame about it. So you never share it with anyone because you don't want them to think less of you. That's a secret, my darling.

Let's say, like so many humans on this planet, you had an abortion in your 20s. If you don't want to tell your current partner because it feels shameful and you're worried they'll judge you, then that's a secret, my sweet lamb.

If you're in a relationship that your partner believes is mutually monogamous and you're seeing someone else on the side, then that would

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be a secret if you were hiding that, for fear of losing or upsetting your current partner.

But what if your partner was totally down with non-monogamy? Or held no judgment that you stole when you were 13 or told a lie when you were 16 or had an abortion when you were 27? Would you then feel that same drive towards secrecy or would you want to share those things? Or would you want certain things to be private, just yours?

If you drop the shame for yourself, regardless of how another person might respond to hearing about it, what would you do with these stories? So the difference between a secret and something that's just private is generally the weight we give it and what we make it mean about ourselves and our relationships.

So are secrets bad? Well, I don't love that language. I really just don't like to label things good and bad. I don't find it helpful. Instead, I would ask, does it serve me to keep secrets?

Well, if you're planning an uprising, and I certainly hope you are, then keeping your plans secret from the fuzz is vital, while sharing it openly with trusted comrades. Same goes if you're planning a surprise party, and you know this Leo has thrown many a surprise party, let me tell you what.

Of course you keep it surprise from the birthday person. And you tell those who need to know. And like I said before, if you're making your way out of an abusive situation, keep those plans hush hush from the abusive person or people while letting those you trust in.

So in that situation, you're just not telling something, it's not a secret in that it's not all wrapped up in shame and fear and worry. It's just keeping something to yourself.

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My clients often say things like, “Well, I don’t like to talk about me, I don’t like to share. I’m just a private person,” which, okay, fine when it’s the truth. But sometimes that story, this is just who I am, can be a cover-up for actually being secretive, for actually holding an awful lot of shame.

So that’s when I would invite you to ask yourself, am I holding a lousy story about me around this situation? Am I holding shame around this? It’s a great way to see what’s really going on.

Meanwhile, I often hear, “I don’t trust people with my details,” which goes along with, “They’re going to throw it in my face and use it against me.” Both of which can be cover-ups for, “I’ve been hurt in the past and I’m scared to be vulnerable now.”

And my darling, I get it. When we show our tenderoni side in the past and that trust was broken or disrespected, especially if it happened in a time when we weren’t resourced in our nervous systems or were young and didn’t have the developmental skills to have our own backs, then it makes sense that we’d have this story in our minds that sharing is dangerous and we cling to secrecy as a false protection against life’s hurts.

But my darling, when you believe this line of thinking, you’re telling yourself that other people create your feelings. And it’s just not true. I know, I know, I can hear you from here because I can hear younger me from here.

Having someone break your trust or share info that wasn’t theirs to share, it hurts. And that’s so real, that feeling is so real. I know it firsthand. It also hurts when you tell someone something in confidence and that leads them to change the relationship, step out of relationship, not want to date you, not want to be your friend. It totally sucks.

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For example, when I was 19, I had some eating disorder behaviors. I told my girlfriend at the time and it was too much for her to handle. She broke up with me. That is what people fear when we share, when we get vulnerable.

That they're going to be honest with someone and it will be "used against them." And I want to say this; what may hurt for sure may hurt. You get to decide what you're going to make that moment of someone breaking your confidence, that betrayal, what you're going to make it mean for and about you and your future choices to live from secrecy or from vulnerability.

You can decide that they used that information against you, or you can choose to feel the pain, to process it through your body, to give it the space, the grieving it needs, and to then make the choice to shift your thinking.

To recognize that that person just told you a whole lot about them and their capacity and they actually told you nothing at all about you. That is to say, someone making a choice such as breaking up with you because they learned something true about you that you have shame around doesn't actually have to feel any different than another person breaking up with you because they all of a sudden don't like dating people who are 5'3 and three quarters, which is a fantastic height, or they just don't like dating people who have noses.

I'm being silly, but I'm also being so serious. It doesn't mean anything about you when you take the shame out of the story, when you take the secrecy out of it. Sure, I was hurt that that woman broke up with me after I told her I had eating disordered behavior because I was holding that thinking and resulting behavior in shame-laden secrecy.

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So it was not just like, oh, now I'm single again and full of codependency, I need to figure out dealing with that. But it was the shame. It was the shame. My relationship with this behavior is one that I find shameful, where shame means there's something wrong with me because I do this thing.

As long as I was holding that shame, someone else even mentioning it, much less making a decision because of it, though of course it wasn't because of it. It was because of her thoughts about it. But you get my point.

Someone making that decision felt earth-shattering. And now these days, I've taken the shame out of it. I can talk about it openly now because it doesn't carry that weight of meaning something about me as a human. And now, no one could use that information against me.

Because here I am, telling thousands of people about it, and I'm not feeling shameful. I'm standing in my agency to decide how things make me feel, instead of leaving that to others to decide for me.

No one can use my history, my information against me because when I take the shame out of it, I stand proud and tall in my truth. I don't love everything I've done in the past but I own it. It's my past. And I just decline to live in shame about it anymore. I'm just not interested. Not available.

So where do vulnerability and intimacy fit into this? Secrecy in relationships blocks our personal and collective growth. And when vulnerability and intimacy feel scary, we don't have safe experiences of those things, we believe that we need to continue to keep things secreted away in a shroud of shame and worry as a way to protect our tender underbellies.

When in fact, we may want to share them, or to keep them private. And this is when we can remember that we can take the same action with wildly different feelings and create different results. That is to say if your thought

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is, “This is shameful, I cannot share it because they’ll reject or abandon me,” you will create an experience of more secrecy for yourself and you’ll feel more shame when that is the driving energy in your mind and body.

The thought is, “Someone is going to have thoughts about me, to judge me, and that is a problem. Someone is going to question or reject me and that is a problem.” Forgetting that other people’s thoughts don’t mean that you are a problem. And it’s just evidence that they are in fact the one with the problem, my darling.

So when your thought is that there’s nothing shameful about me, my life, and my past, that’s when you can pause, attune to your breath, remember that you can be your own best friend, your own most loving internal adult parent, you can have your own back, and you can own what you are experiencing now and can be present with it and for yourself, and can give yourself more perspective about your past and present choices.

When we detach our experiences and choices from shame, then we can make a conscious, intentional decision about keeping it secret, private, or sharing. Because we’ve freed it from that story.

And then you can make decisions for yourself from the energy of self-love and self-worth and not from believing that your past or present thoughts, feelings, or actions mean anything about you and your worth intrinsically, which is the root of shame.

And that decision is a beautiful departure from the old codependent story that other people’s thoughts and feelings matter more than your own do. This is a lot of information, my darlings. I’m going to pause here to let this soak on into your mind and body.

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And next week, we'll be picking up right where we left off to talk about the importance of privacy in intimate relationships, enmeshment, remedies of course, and so much more. So make sure you're following, or are subscribed to the show so you don't miss a thing.

If you are ready to increase your capacity to sit with vulnerability, to bring in more self-love and self-worth so you can drop the shame and thus the secrecy, it's time to join us in Anchored, my six-month program, where a small intimate group of humans socialized as women gather to work through our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits together with weekly lessons, thought work, somatic or body-based practices, one-on-one coaching, breathwork, dance parties, special guest speakers, and so much more.

All within a loving, caring community of people who get you. People who have kept secrets from shame, fear, and worry just like you, and who are ready to step out into the sunshine of a life with less anxiety, stress, and overwhelm.

The February group is almost full. So if you want in, now is your chance. Learn more at [victoriaalbina.com/anchored](http://victoriaalbina.com/anchored). I look forward to meeting you so soon. Alright my beauties, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart if that feels supportive, closing your beautiful eyes if that feels safe and you're not driving, or simply lower your gaze.

And 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.

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

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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.