

## Ep #170: Do I Stay or Do I Go? (Part 2)



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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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. Welcome, welcome to Part 2 of our relationship mini-series in Do I Stay or Do I Go Now? If you didn't listen to Part 1, go give it a listen. In that episode, I shared that, alas, I have no relationship crystal ball and can't actually tell you if you should stay or go when the going gets tough in your relationship.

What I can do is give you some information on the science behind relationships and attachment, can ask questions to spark some good old-fashioned self-reflection and can send you lots of self-love and self-trust energy as you ask your own mind, body, nervous system, and inner children what the best path forward is for you. Because at the end of the day, all the relationship experts only know their own stories. And only you know what's right for you.

So above all, that is my invitation to you. To really take these questions to your body. To ask your body, what's up? What's going on? And to situate whatever you hear within what we know: Our socialization, our conditioning, our family blueprint, and how all of that impacts our relationship with our own selves.

And at the end of the day, that quiet voice inside knows what you should do. So today, I wanted to do things a little differently, and I wanted to share the story of a client of mine. Everyone's situation is different, but you may hear bits and pieces of your own experience in this one. Or you may listen and think, "Wow, that's so different from my relationship either right now or relationships in the past."

Either way, when we hear other people's stories, it helps us to better understand our own experiences. And if this doesn't resonate as your own story, perhaps listening in will bring you some compassion, some care,

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some love, some curiosity, some empathy for folks in your life, maybe your parents for example, who have lived a life similar to this or with some similarities.

So my client, and let's call her Julia, was in one of my Anchored overcoming codependency groups, and in getting to know her, what came to light was that she was very unhappy in her marriage. After 24 years, she felt stuck. She was resentful of and annoyed by her spouse who himself, per her report, was emotionally unavailable and focused on his own needs. The story she told herself was that she had stayed in it for the kids, but with her three kids graduated and out of the house, grandkids rolling in, that excuse was starting to ring hollow.

What we came to understand together through coaching was that she was living in what she came to call a prison of my own creation. She had through her own thoughts and behaviors contributed to the situation in which she found herself married but feeling completely alone and like she didn't really have a partner.

And of course she did that. Of course she made those choices and had those nervous system responses, those thoughts, those feelings based on her experience growing up, it would only make sense that she would follow the patterns of her own lived experiences and would live life based on the lives and relationships that were modeled for her growing up. She was raised by an emotionally unavailable father, and a mother who was critical and harsh, and made it clear that she preferred her older siblings to Julia.

Communication in her childhood home was indirect and largely passive-aggressive, and achievement in the work world was the thing most praised. Grades mattered above all, and Julia never felt safe in her body to show up as her authentic self because she felt judged as a child because, well, per her report, she was. Her size, her looks, her weight, her grades, her chore achievements, chore accomplishments maybe, those were the things that mattered. Not her own dreams and desires.

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And her parents' relationship was the model for her own. Layer in all the messages she received from the patriarchy about a women's role, what makes one a good girl, a girl worthy of love and care, and my darling, of course she did.

Given those life experiences, it makes sense that she would seek something familiar because even harmful or challenging experiences that are familiar will feel safer in the nervous system via limbic system programming, than the great unknown that is living in your truth, authenticity, honesty, and self-love. Marrying someone emotionally shut down was on brand for someone with her background who hadn't yet done the work to uncover her own needs and desires.

And to be clear, she hadn't done that work because it wasn't available to her in her younger adulthood. We're not throwing any shame, blame, or judgment. Just saying she was doing what she was taught until she learned another way is possible and so are you and so is your partner, and so are your parents, so are your kids, so are your coworkers and your friends.

We all behave the way we do as adults because of our conditioning from a young age as well as in our conditioning in the patriarchy and white settler colonialism in our family blueprint, and at some point, when we are ready, we get to decide that we want to live differently.

And we get to take ownership over what we can control, which is often more than we realize, starting of course with our own thoughts and our capacity to regulate our nervous system, our ability to reparent our inner children, and to start to rewrite the stories we tell about ourselves, our self-concept, the people we love, about our lives, about what's possible for us.

And we get to make decisions about how we want to live, which again can be scary if it's not a thing you've ever done, but what's scarier? To stay in a relationship where there's just no joy, or to find a new way forward? When Julia found her way to Anchored, it was a sign that she was ready to start

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looking inward and to take back control of her life. When we start to step out of our habitual, unintentional conditioned thought patterns, we get to see, and more importantly to feel in our bodies that joy and peace and calm are available. Pleasure is available.

And we have a right to access those things, and it takes work. Breathwork, thought work, somatic work. These practices are called work for a reason. They take time, energy, and commitment. And once we are ready, willing, and able to put in the time and effort to really see ourselves clearly and decide to move forward differently, the world and our lives open to us in ways we never may have imagined before.

And what I have seen time after time is that while the people in our lives may not change when we do, because we change our relationship to ourselves, our experience of those relationships changes. When life gets challenging, it can be easy to point the fingers at others, and much more challenging to lovingly tune into ourselves and to see how we may have been contributing to where we are now, and what we can start to do differently to shift our reality.

Am I saying that all relationship problems can be resolved by looking within? Absolutely not. Sometimes our partners are abusive or demeaning. Sometimes they use words to cut and actions to dismiss us. Sometimes things just aren't working anymore, but the thing is that we can only truly control ourselves.

And if we get out of a painful relationship without doing the work of self-reflection, which, by the way, is not self-flagellation, we may find ourselves right back in a similar relationship the next time. Why? Because our super advanced human brains love to stay in their patterns whether they support us, whether they serve us or not. And as the old saying goes, wherever you go, there you are.

Through coaching conversations in the Anchored group work, Julia came to see that yes, there were challenges in connecting with and communicating

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with her partner, and in parallel, just as important, the call was coming from inside the house. It was time for her to look within and to commit to doing things differently.

When we started to peel back the layers of why she was still married, when she had told herself it was for the kids, another aspect of her fear of leaving the relationship came out. She felt like she couldn't leave because she had put in so much time. She felt like it was too late to leave. Now, there's a name for this train of thought, and it's called the sunk-cost fallacy. Any of you in business may be familiar with this one.

The sunk-cost fallacy describes the phenomenon whereby people don't want to change a course of action because they've already made an investment. In this case, an investment of time and energy, even though it would have been clear to anyone else within a 30-million-mile radius that changing course may be beneficial, it's challenging for us to see it when we feel mired in it. In Julia's mind, she had put in so many years, and so logically to her, before coaching, she couldn't walk away now.

But note that the idea of sunk cost is a fallacy. It's a mistaken way of thinking, and one that ought to be teased apart if you want to grow. And some of the questions to help you, are, "So what if I've already put in 28 years or one year? I may live another 40 or 60. Do I want to continue being predictably miserable, or risk making change? What could be possible in my life if I stopped believing that I've put too much time in to back out now?"

And finally, "What is my relationship with regret?" We talked about this recently in an episode where I talked about how regret is self-abandonment. And so are you making decisions now because you fear that you may regret making them? Well, that saying, "I fear that I may abandon myself in the future, so I'm going to continue to abandon me now," what we came to see was that part of what informed Julia's hesitancy to

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leave her spouse was fear that if she did, she would also be admitting that she had made a mistake, that she had failed at marriage.

This line of thinking was a direct offshoot of the codependent thinking that we had uncovered previously. She was so profoundly worried that other people would be upset with her if she ended the marriage, that she let the potential of other people's upset justify her staying upset and unhappy. Now, as always, there's some truth here, right, that people may be upset if you end a 28-year marriage or a two-year relationship. You may get pitying looks from the neighbors or at the PTA or whatever. It may be uncomfortable for a while. Truth. Fair.

But my darling, my perfect, tender ravioli, whose life do you want to be living? Would you rather protect the feelings of others and stay in your misery, or risk upsetting the apple cart to potentially find your joy? When we suppress our own human birthright of happiness, joy, and fulfilling companionship in order to try to please others, we rob ourselves of so much, and then have less to give back to the world.

So many of us were taught that being selfish is a problem, and yes, there's a whole episode on this coming out so soon, I take umbrage with that. I think it's important to have a sense of self. It's important to be thoughtful of the people you love and care about, and living their lives for them, living your life for them, staying in something that's not working to try to keep them from having a feeling, well, I don't think that serves anyone. Because in that process, we engage a whole lot of projection.

My client was so concerned about what others might think, and far less concerned about what she thought and felt, and that's co-dependent living in a nutshell. Her own thoughts and feelings were clear. Those of others were pure conjecture. When we make our lives about guessing how other people might think or feel, we give away our power and turn it over to what we imagine others may think.

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Many of you may know my sister taught elementary school for almost ten years, Genie's so amazing, and when her students started to worry about who thought what about whom, she would remind them, the people who mind don't matter, and the people who matter don't mind. Did her students think it was super cheesy? Of course they did. And there's truth in it.

When we stay in our lane and allow others to stay in theirs, we can meet each other openly, honestly, and nonjudgmentally with wild and radical acceptance through this wild ride that is life. As we uncovered more and more of Julia's story, what came to light was that her experience of being parented fostered an anxious attachment style. She desperately wanted emotional closeness but felt deep fear that the love or affection would be taken away at any moment.

This strengthened the codependent thinking that Julia learned in her childhood home, her fear of abandonment fed into a lifelong narrative of victimhood and rejection that made it hard for her to approach and really connect with others, and kept her trapped in emotional childhood.

So much in Julia's life is driven by this fear of rejections, so the neural grooves in her mind, my nerds, that worked to keep her safe led her to shape-shift, to chameleon, to get enmeshed with others in an attempt to foster a more secure connection. But because she wasn't doing what she wanted for herself, everything felt risky. Speaking up, stating a want, a need, a preference, everything for her was about, how can I not be abandoned? Instead of, what do I really want?

These thought patterns made it really hard for her to be present in the now, to let go and take responsibility or even to know what she wanted for dinner. And at the core of it, what Julia most wanted and needed and learned to live into and embody through Anchored was a secure connection with self. She needed to learn, she wanted to learn, she did learn how to have her own back, how to be her own best friend, to how to build emotional intimacy with herself.



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And from there, she was able to connect more securely with her partner, with her kids, with everyone in her life. Now, the beautiful thing in all of this is that hard truth gives us a chance to grow and change. An anxious attachment style is something that may follow us through life and bubble up in moments of stress, but as we can see for Julia, it's not a life sentence.

She started to see that she can choose to shine a light on her own thought patterns. She could get in touch with her nervous system, could map it, could understand it, could reparent her inner children and make change. In coaching Julia we also came to understand that her spouse has an avoidant attachment style, which is common that an avoidant and anxious will find each other, and in him it manifested as emotional distance, and the need to feel independent and self-sufficient at all times.

No vulnerability thank you very much. He was not and is not some demon determined to make her miserable, but rather he had suffered his own stress, distress, and trauma, and had a very limited emotional toolkit for unpacking and processing his life experiences, and from that avoidant attachment style, what felt safest to his nervous system was to shut down, to do it all himself, to detach from his body and his feelings, and to stay a rock on an island.

So where did Julia land? Did she stay or did she go? Well, my kittens, I'm going to leave you with a cliffhanger here, because in a way, the outcome isn't what matters. I mean, it matters to Julia, but for you, dear listener, what really matters is where you do and don't hear yourself in this story, and then what you choose to do with that awareness.

Speaking of awareness, that means it's time for some remedies. And I'm happy to be a broken record here and to say that the first and most important thing is to get to know yourself. Your history, your attachment style, your emotional needs, your love language, your chronic thoughts, your habitual thoughts, where your brain automatically goes on autopilot.

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You can ask yourself some questions to help you to get to know yourself, to build that self-intimacy, such as what helps me to feel loved and seen? What are the ways that I can help myself feel loved and seen before turning to a partner to coregulate? Because at the end of the day, it's you with you of course. But there are certain ways of being in relationship that help bolster and support self-love, and nervous system regulation in life. Does your partner show love and affection in ways that are compatible with what you want from a partner?

If they don't, are you willing to tell them what you want in a relationship and to hold yourself in high enough regard to be clear, honest, and direct? Once you've gotten more clarity around yourself, your history, wants and needs, it can also help to get curious about your partner. Not in a way that searches for excuses, and not in a way that seeks out blame or villainy, but coming from an honest place, can you see your partner for all of who they are.

Can you see them holistically? Can you see the full human? Their traumas, their hurts, their struggles, their limitations? We talk so much about understanding why we do what we do. Can you give them that same grace? Can you see why they do what they do, and can you have empathy, compassion, and love for them?

Can you be curious about their responses and reactions now in the present, instead of rolling around in your collective past or future forecast in continued doom? Can you find acceptance and love for them in your heart for the fullness of their human experience the same way I encourage you each week to do that for yourself?

All of this is not to say that you have to stay with someone if things aren't working, but before you pack your bags or emotionally leave the relationship, I'll encourage you to remember that your partner is there for you to unconditionally love without judgment or criticism, without wishing they were someone different, without wishing they would change or be

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someone they're not, because as long as you stay with them while wishing they were not themselves, the longer you'll both stay in struggle and pain.

Once you have a clear view of who they are, then you can start to ask some of the more challenging questions of them and of yourself. Are you both committed to self-development, change and growth? Are you willing to stay if they're not committed to that? Can that work for you? Is that workable? Is there enough good there?

Are you filling your own cup, and are they filling their cup enough that you can move on together? Are you both capable of communicating with one another and working towards more honest and open communication over time? Do your values overlap enough to really build or repair the foundation of your relationship?

These can be challenging questions, my sweet one, but important ones when you're wondering if your relationship is right for you. If you don't know where to start, start with you. Look in a that metaphorical mirror, or a real one if you want to check your look first and take the time to get to know you.

Once you can stand on your own two feet, knowing who you are and what you're all about, then you can start to see how you show up in your relationship, and what each partner brings to the table. You've got this, my tender ravioli. Thanks for listening. I hope this was supportive.

If you haven't left a rating and a review on Apple podcasts or Spotify or wherever you hear this show, I would be so grateful if you could leave a 5-star review or a written review, it really helps get the show into more ears, and this is a free resource that I want spread the world over. So thank you in advance for taking a moment to do that. I really appreciate it, my love.

Oh, and share on social media. It's so fun when you post a screen shot of listening to the show. Oh, such a delight. Oh, you can hear the smile in my voice, right? All right, my beauties. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on

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your heart if you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one was healed, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. 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 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.