

Ep #240: Overexplaining



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. This week, we're going to play a game called "Let's see if you can guess today's topic." I'm going to bet that the process is going to be pretty darn cringy for many of us, as we see ourselves in the following states. So, let's start with the work context.

"Hey, I finished that report you asked for. I know I had a bit of a delay, because my computer was acting up. And then I had to do these other tasks during lunch. And then I got all caught up with another project I didn't anticipate. And then I was almost done when Angela, you know Angela? She sits behind me. Her dog died. And so she like got this phone call. And she was really disturbed and like really upset. I mean, obviously, her dog died. And I like talked to her about it a bunch.

But like anyway, so I hope it's okay that I'm just now getting it to you. I really tried my best, and I'm sorry if it's not up to your expectations. I'm sure it's like nowhere near good enough. But like, I really put a lot of myself into it and worked really hard on it. I stayed late several nights. Anyway, just let me know if you like totally hate it and want me to rewrite it." Okay, that one was like, extra-extra. We're starting extra-extra, folks.

Example two: "Hey, I thought maybe we could hang out this weekend, if that works for you. I mean, I know you're probably busy and you probably have other plans. I totally understand if you can't, but I just thought it might be nice to catch up since we haven't seen each other in a while. But seriously, if it's not a good time, or if you're not interested, or like you totally think I'm boring, that's totally fine. Like, just like don't even worry about it."

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Example three: “Hey, I bought this new outfit, and I wasn't sure if it looks good on me. I mean, like, it's not super expensive or anything. And it actually, it was on sale. But I just I wanted your opinion, you know, just like to get an idea of whether you think I should keep it or return it or like doesn't even look good on me? Does it flatter me like? I don't even know like, are you even available? Could you just like, do you mind if I like slip it on real quick?”

Example four: “Hey, so I decided to change my major. I know, it might seem sudden, but I did research, I talked to my advisor and I talked to like my roommates, a couple of different professors. And like I really actually like I did like a lot of research. And I totally get that you might think it is risky, or that I should have stuck with my original plan. But it just like it wasn't working for me. It just like didn't feel fulfilling. It just like wasn't really what I wanted to do.

And I just wanted to let you know, both that I'm doing this, that like I'm changing my major. But also that like I have thought about a lot. And I do believe that this is the right decision for me, even though I like totally imagine and like understand if you have concerns or like doubts or like worries, or like whatever. Like, that totally makes sense. You know? Like, I get that.”

Example five: “Hey, I'm really sorry for not responding to your texts right away. I know you probably needed an answer quickly, and I just should have been more attentive to my phone. I was doing some errands and I was trying to get the baby fed and get dinner ready. And then, I got caught up in a meeting and I totally lost track of time. And I understand if you're frustrated. I'll make sure to be more responsive in the future. I'm so, so sorry. Oh my God, I'm the worst.”

And finally, example six. This one can be such a doozy for us, because it's about directly addressing someone else's behavior and setting a boundary,

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asking for a change in behavior. All of those moments can get particularly sticky: “Hey, so I realized that you were using my food, that was in the communal fridge. Like, I had labeled it; I put like a piece of duct tape on it. It had my name on it; it said Maria Victoria. And like, I saw you using it.

But like I'd really like to ask that you don't use it. Because like, you know, we're in grad school and I'm on this budget and I'm really trying to stick to it. And so, I'm just being like really thoughtful about what I spend my money on and how I use things. And like, I really kind of plan out my meals, and like think a lot about like food and money and like you know, really just like, I don't know. Just I really want to not have other people eat my food, if that's okay with you.

So, I would just like really appreciate it if you would just not eat my food, and just like leave it in the fridge when you see it. And like, I know, we all get hungry, right? It's like, oh, I want a snack. But like, really please try not to like eat my food. That'd just be really great. Thank you.”

So, did you guess it? That's right, this week we're talking about the admittedly super cringe feeling experience of over explaining oneself. It actually felt really super cringy and weird and like, blech in my body to even say those phrases out loud, right? Largely because I used to do that. And because it's a “me” that I have grown so much from being. I used to really over explain myself all of the time.

Now that I have such a more streamlined, but also such a more grounded, sense of self that I no longer feel the need to do it or the desire to do it, it feels really weird in my body. It's such an emotional outsourcing fave-sy, that over explaining.

And so, today, we're going to delve into some common origin stories, talk about some of the science behind it, how it affects our nervous system, and

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how to begin to liberate ourselves and support others to break free from this pattern.

So, my loves, let's start, as we are wont to do around here, by understanding why folks with emotional outsourcing habits, us mammals with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing ways of surviving and thriving, often find ourselves all wrapped up in the cycle of over explanation.

At its heart, it's a coping mechanism rooted in the core human need for validation and approval; to be liked by the herd, because we are no fool. We know that the mammals most liked by the collective are those that will be saved when the lions and marauders come to destroy the village. Right? Right. So, we seek to be understood because we know that it's safer.

Sometimes, we over explain because we have a history of feeling chronically unsafe, that we are attempting to make up for. See, to explain ourselves as often loving and kind makes sense. To let those in our lives know where we're coming from, what our truth is, why we did what we did, and how we're feeling. It's okay, and often important, to explain ourselves to our people.

We cross the line into over explaining when we thrust excessive details on others, generally in an attempt to anticipate and avoid potential criticisms, to unwittingly attempt to manipulate others feelings, and to seek validation because we don't believe we can validate ourselves.

Explaining is part of healthy relating, and over explaining is something we do to try to manage our anxiety around who and what we are, and our capacity to be ourselves in the world in a safe way. So, how did we ended up here doing this thing so often and on such deep autopilot that we probably don't even notice it?

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As is often the case with human habit, it starts when we're kiddos, teens, or young adults. When your brain is forming its understanding of you and the world. If you didn't feel understood or your thoughts, experiences, needs, wants, truly mattered, you're going to learn to do whatever you need to do to get heard. Especially if you felt invalidated or ignored.

If a more needy sibling or parent got the attention that you're growing self needed. If a parent was emotionally immature, like we talked about in Episode 167, or just emotionally vacant; there, but not present in a really real way; you may have learned to believe that you need to earn being heard, believed, trusted, or listened to.

I felt like I had to tell fantastical stories to be heard. I felt like I always had to justify and over explain pretty much everything. I can see where that habit arose, from not feeling like my parents were emotionally present, when I was a kiddo. While also having two physically present parents; food, shelter classes, summer camp, et cetera. Emotionally, it kind of felt like I was on my own.

I also grew up in a household where judgment and criticism were pretty much the norm, and my kiddo brain learned to over explain as a defense mechanism, with a goal of preemptively addressing any potential criticism or rejection that might, and I felt like was likely to, come my way.

The underlying belief in this habit is that if we explain ourselves thoroughly, we can avoid judgment and can maintain the fragile balance of external approval that we believe we need, in order to survive as folks with emotional outsourcing habits.

Nerd alert, my darling. What's happening in the nervous system that leads to over explaining and what does it do to the nervous system? Why, I thought you'd never ask.

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Our nervous system has a remarkable ability to adapt to our environment, and to dictate future and current reactions to life based on past experience. With a constant goal of maintaining social engagement, being connected with the village, with your social milieu, while also being ready to hit that old amygdala alarm when your brain and your nervous system perceive a threat that could lead to danger. When it hits the amygdala alarm, that leads you to freak out and hopefully evade danger. Pretty smart, right?

Over explanation is often linked to a hypoactive social engagement system. That's a topic that deserves its own show, so that's coming soon. It is linked to a very responsive, some might say, hair trigger, sympathetic nervous system that is keenly attuned to possible rejection, and really takes it to "10" when it feels slighted or ignored.

This setup can come from repeated experiences of actually seeking approval or stating your needs and experiences, and either actually being rejected, or can be part of what's called "rejection sensitivity." I'm just putting a little caveat, hat tip, to my ADHD fam out there; rejection sensitivity is a big one for us.

Rejection hits really different in our brains. We'll talk about that in a whole future episode too, because it also deserves its own thing. But I just want to caveat, rejection sensitivity is a huge thing for us.

And so, over explanations, also a huge thing. That said, that put aside. Not in a dismissive way, obvi. I'm not dismissing my own brain. I'm just saying, let's get back on top. Oh, I love my brain superpower and how easily I go sideways. But I always come back.

Okay, so you're a kid, you get rejected, you don't get paid attention to, you don't get attuned to. And so, in the future, fight-or-flight mode is going to get activated around the *perceived* threat, right? You haven't even gotten ignored or not believed. Your body's just worried, your nervous system is

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worried that you won't be accepted or validated. That the scariness of not belonging to the village, to the collective, that's going to happen again.

Instead of letting that potential scariness happen, your brilliant body and nervous system develop this coping strategy of over explaining as a way to attempt to control the perceptions of others, as a way to attempt to soothe your heightened anxiety.

Meanwhile, when you start over explaining, your body might be signaling a lack of safety in the social interaction. And so, your ventral vagal complex, which is responsible for promoting social engagement; and we talked all about that in Episode 174, if you're new to nervous system language; that ventral vagal safe and social complex might be inhibited due to the perceived risk of rejection.

Which, again, just further jacks up your sympathetic nervous system, leading to heightened stress and anxiety, leading to you wanting to over explain. Quite the morass, isn't it? It's like this catch-22, zero sum game, hot mess.

You see, my nerds, the prefrontal cortex, the thinking and executive function, fancy pants part of your brain, gets activated as you meticulously over explain yourself. Simultaneously, the amygdala, the emotional center in charge of fear and threats and freak outs, goes into action, because of the perceived threat of potentially not being understood or accepted.

This dual activation within the nervous system and the brain creates a cognitive dissonance. A struggle between the need for rational communication and the emotional charge of insecurity, which leads you to ramble and to over explain, and to often do it really, really fast. This push/pull dynamic leads to a cascade of stress hormones being released, including cortisol and adrenaline.

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As we've talked so much about here, when this is your chronic experience of life, the stress hormone slurry can contribute to burnout, anxiety, and downstream physical health issues, from thyroid issues to reproductive issues to irritable bowel syndrome. And so much more, as your nervous system spends less and less time in ventral vagal and more time dysregulated.

So, why on earth do we do this? To be real, it does provide a momentary, super short-term, sense of relief from the discomfort of vulnerability. By offering exhaustive explanations we feel like we are exerting and asserting control over how we're perceived. And as all of us who do this know, this protective shell is fragile and temporary.

The whole experience perpetuates the belief that one's self worth is contingent on external validation, thereby reinforcing the very codependent and emotional outsourcing cycles we're trying to escape over here. Furthermore, this habit hinders authentic self-expression because you're rarely just being your imperfect and messy self and owning it.

Instead, you're jockeying to be seen how you think the other person wants to see you, and so you're not being you. This habit impedes the development of healthy boundaries, because you're most often outside of yourself performing your identity and wanting approval instead of saying what doesn't work for you.

Over explaining is generally bedfellows with over functioning, which means, in short, that you do way too much for everyone else to try to gain their approval, instead of doing what is best for you. As always, the constant need for external approval diverts energy away from self-discovery and healing, because you're focused on them and not on you.

While over explanation generally arises from the intention of preventing misunderstandings, it ironically often leads to both confusion and emotional

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distance. Others might perceive this behavior as insecurity, insincerity, or lack of confidence, which can hinder genuine connection. Over explanation can be overwhelming for the receiver, too.

It floods conversations with unnecessary information, making it difficult for others to truly engage with you. Which can lead to frustration and distance in relationships. Ironically, pushing away the very connections you're trying to preserve.

There's someone in my life who does this in a way really different than the examples I shared. Hers sounds like giving these minute-by-minute details of everything she's been up to during the day. In a way, justifying her existence, right? "And then I did all the kids wash up, and then I did the dishes. And then I cooked a pie. And then I made lunches, and then I..." Every phone call with her is this litany, really, of the tasks and the chores and the doing she's gotten done.

I see that kind of overexplaining as a way to subconsciously, of course, create more distance between us, like as a buffer. Lest, I ask any real questions about real things like, "Hey, darlin, how's your heart? How's your spirit? How's the feeling of being you in the world." All things I don't believe that this person, who I love so much, currently has the capacity to sit with, to be with, to really look at right in the snout.

And so, she tells me the minute by minute, blow by blow of her day. Justifying each and every little thing she's done. Leaving little to no room A-#1 for her to hear about me, and definitely no room for me to actually hear about her. So, when she calls, if I don't have an hour to listen to her monologue, I just don't answer the phone.

This habit of over explaining has really truly put space between us, because there is no space in the conversation for truth, for realness, for actual heart-to-heart connection, when all I'm getting is over explanation.

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So, how can we stop this cycle? Well, it begins with cultivating self-awareness; you need to see the pattern to be able to change it, right? As always, we start with the pause, with taking a breath, connecting in with ourselves in the present moment, perhaps doing a little body scan to check in with your body, and ground yourself in the 'here and now' before responding or reacting.

It can make a huge, huge, huge difference, and can really begin to build your capacity to come at life from ventral vagal. And to do that, we need to cultivate that intentional pause, my darling, as a powerful way to begin to find more nervous system regulation throughout your day.

Eventually, the goal of all of this work of stepping out of emotional outsourcing, is to learn to value our own thoughts, feelings, and lived experience independent of external validation. To say, "I matter because I matter to me, my day, my time, my path, my process. It matters because it matters to me."

That work starts with loving awareness and compassion for the "you" that you are today. So, my love, if you're hearing yourself throughout this whole episode, pause before you get mean to yourself. And remember, that the part of you that is overexplaining habitually is doing it for a really smart reason. It's doing it from self-love and self-care, in an attempt to keep you from dying.

Compassion, care, and curiosity, right? The three C's. We talk about compassion, curiosity, and care for you, and all of your parts. It's the only place to start. And while you're doing that important, long-term nervous system regulation and self-love work, the work we do in Anchored, my six-month program, which we're starting up again in 2024.

Here are some tips and examples of how to practice more concise and direct communication. One, identify your key points, and focus on the main

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points you want to convey. Keep in mind that not every detail is necessary for effective communication, and often, more is less, and less is definitely more.

Two, practice self-validation. Remind yourself that your thoughts and opinions are valid, without needing to justify them extensively. Now, we're not into that gaslighting b.s.ing ourselves around here. You may not believe that your thoughts and opinions are valid, and I want to invite you to bridge to it.

Bridging is a key skill that we learn in The Somatic Studio, my 12-week program, and in Anchored, my six-month program. So, if you don't believe yet that your thoughts and opinions are valid, perhaps try on, "I believe that it's possible that my thoughts and opinions are maybe valid." Create a little space between you and that belief. And slowly, over time, take out one filler word at a time until you truly are, very slowly, coming to believe that you're worth listening to. Which I'll tell you, I believe for sure.

Three, use "I" statements. Express your thoughts and feelings from your own experience. It can really help to take ownership of your perspective, and help make your communication more direct and effective.

Four, be clear and specific. Convey your message clearly. Avoid unnecessary tangents, says the captain of the good ship tangent. I mean, girl, come on, please. I mean, tangent is my actual, legal, middle name. My parents don't know. I haven't let them know, yet. But I did legally change it to tangent. I joke, right?

When I need to let someone know a thing, I'm clear, I'm specific, I'm direct. I don't go off on the tangents. I know when to use them, and when I can allow my brain to do that, because I trust myself that I know when and where to do that. So, as you're practicing not over explaining, stick to the facts, ma'am.

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Five, set boundaries. We've talked about this in a million different ways, in pretty much every episode. Episode 5 and Episode 41, specifically get into how to set boundaries and talking all about boundaries. I will be doing a webinar about boundaries in the coming months. So, if you're on my email list, drop a line to info@VictoriaAlbina.com, ask to get on the mailing list, and you'll hear all about that free boundaries webinar.

Okay, five, breathe and pause. When you feel the urge to overexplain take a slow, deep breath in and a long, slow out, and pause before responding. This not only gives you a moment to gather your thoughts and to respond more concisely, but it also does what? That's right, it brings you back into ventral vagal; that's where your brain works most bestly. Get to there, when you're working to break this habit.

Six, rehearse in advance. If you know you'll be discussing a topic or you tend to over explain or might get anxious and might want to do "the thing," practice your response in advance, to make sure it's clear and succinct. Consider even talking it out with a friend or loved one. Share what you intend to say with them and get their feedback. Make sure, of course, that this is someone you love and trust and care about. Someone whose feedback you actually want.

Finally, seven, practice active listening. Often, we are rehearsing what we are going to say back while someone else is talking, which takes us completely out of presence. Takes us into sympathetic activation. Takes us out of ventral vagal, out of social engagement, out of connection, and takes us out of actually being with the other person.

So, then when it's our turn to talk, all we've been doing is thinking and thinking and thinking and thinking instead of actually being. Give others a space to express themselves. Listen actively, and respond directly to their points without excessive elaboration. Trust yourself to listen, breathe, response. Listen, breathe, response.

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In that process, stopping that cycle of needing to say way too much when it's really not to your benefit. I know, I know, it's to your inner child's benefit. Your nervous system has historically thought it's your benefit. But you know now, it's just not. You get to break that habit.

Let's look at some examples, we'll look at several examples, and I'll share the overexplaining. And then, a more direct way to say what it is you want to say. Now, for those of you who have been over explaining and come from over explainers, this is just what you think is normal, the more succinct or direct version may sound a little too New York, a little too 'cut to the chase.'

I want to remind you that tone is really important. And so, you can use a gentle, loving, kind, direct tone, along with fewer words, to let someone know that you're coming with love here, right? You're coming with care. You're not being rude, you're not being a jerk, you're not being a schmuck, you're just being direct, right? So, let's try these on.

Example one is in a work context. The over explained version might sound like, "I wanted to provide you with an update on the project. So, you see, I encountered a bit of a challenge earlier this week; it wasn't exactly expected. I did do my best to troubleshoot it.

After some research, I found a solution that seemed to work, but it did take some time. I know time is valuable, and you've been waiting for this, and I truly apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you. I really did do my best. Overall, I would say that the project..." on and on.

The direct version sounds like, "Hey, I encountered a challenge with the project earlier this week. I researched, and I found a solution. It took some time; the issue is resolved now. You will have the project on your desk by..." and give a reasonable deadline.

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Do you see how that just cuts to the proverbial 'chase?' It lets the other person know exactly what's up. Lets them know, as well, that you respect and honor them. Like, "Hey, this got effed up, and I needed some time. I took the time; I did fix it." But without going into the kind of detail that makes it sound like you need to justify an otherwise completely normal process.

Example two in a social context. So, hark back to the example I started this episode with. "I was wondering if you might be interested in getting together this weekend? I know we both have busy schedules. I don't want to impose or anything, I just thought it'd be nice to catch up..." on and on.

The more direct version: "Would you like to hang out this weekend and catch up? I'd really enjoy it." That's a really beautiful way to let someone know you'd like to spend time with them without turning it into a thing. And honestly, without making it weird, right? Because what happens when you give all the over explanation, is that your nervous system feels weird and so it projects weird energy.

Remember that our nervous systems co-regulate. So, when your nervous system is doing this weird energy, anxious, dance, that leads other people's nervous systems to mirror that, or to feel that and experience the weirdness on a physiologic, body, level. They might not realize what they're feeling or why they're feeling or what's even going on, but they'll feel it in their bodies.

Often, that can lead to, "Whoa, I need space," kind of energy. In my personal experience, I've cut to the chase even quicker on this 'do you want to hang out?' After I have texted someone three times and have not gotten a response, or they've just not really followed up, I've started texting, "Tag, you're it. I'm here if you want to make plans." So, I'm fully putting that back into their court.

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That one's not about overexplaining, it's just something I started doing last year that has felt really good, instead of chasing people. Because I think over explaining and chasing people are, again, also bedfellows, and because it is a kind of over functioning. It's like, "Do you want to hang out? Do you want to hang out? Do you want to hang out?"

I just got tired of being the one chasing people to hang out. I'm really amazing and awesome, and I'm an incredible friend. If people want to hang out then, tag you're it. Come on, let's do it. Let's go out. Let's get a coffee. Let's go for a hike. Let's have dinner. Let's go bowling. I'm here for it. And, I'm not chasing you. So, slight tangent, after your girl's like "Don't go on tangents." But it's a useful tangent.

Example three, seeking feedback. "I've been working on this project, I wanted to get your opinion on it. I know everyone has their own expertise, and I'm not trying to force my ideas on you, but I do really respect your perspective. If you're not too busy, I thought it would be really helpful to hear your thoughts, even though, I mean, I totally do understand if you're busy, or not interested. Just, like, let me know. Maybe like I could come back at a time that's better..." on and on.

So, the direct version: "Can you give me your feedback on this project? Actually, wait, that's what I had originally thought to say but I want to rewrite that. Are you're ready? Are you available to give me your feedback on this project?" Whoo, I love that. I think so often about availability. Am I available to go to dance class tonight? Am I available to do that errand for my partner? Are you available to give me feedback? I love that. "Are you available?" That's a good way to use that.

Then example for apologizing. So, I'm not even going to do this one. But the 'I'm really sorry, I didn't,' and then going on and on; I'm terrible. I'm bad. Apologies. I'm so sorry. Meow, meow, meow, meow, meow. The direct version is: "I apologize for the delayed response. I apologize I was unable

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to meet the deadline, and I will get it to you by x time. I apologize that I was late to meet up with you.”

We talked all about this. There was a series, it feels like 100,000 years ago, was that in 2019? Who cares? A million years ago, Episode 72, 73, 74, and 75 are all about apologies. So, I'll send you over there to learn all about apologies.

But these days, I'm just about cutting to the chase. “I apologize. I can imagine it made you feel...” and then offering an earnest offer of repair. “How can I make this better? How can I make this up to you?” How can we do repair, right? Because when you focus on the overexplaining, how you effed up, it really can make the other person feel like their experience doesn't matter.

Repair doesn't matter when you're really being self-absorbed. That's really kind of the crux of all of this. It's so funny that I recorded this whole show and thought about this all day. Really, what's happening with overexplaining, is that you're being really self-absorbed. I say that with love, and come on, tender ravioli, come on, with love and care. But you're focused on you and your needs to tell the whole story in all this detail, and not how the other person feels or not what's going on for anyone else.

It's all about you, and that's no way to build connection, right? That's not interdependent, which is all about mutuality, and reciprocity. Oh, I can feel myself going on a tangent; it needs to be another show. So, let's close this one up. There was a whole lot here.

I really want to invite you to pause to breathe, give yourself some love. And if someone you love and care about does this, share this episode with them. Send it right on over to them, get consent first. See if they're available.

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That can sound like, “Hey, I heard an episode of *Feminist Wellness* that I think might resonate for you. Are you available to have me send it your way?” That could be a nice way to say that. You practice direct communication, have love, compassion, and care for those in your life who are still circling and overexplaining. Hopefully, this show has given you a little more empathy for why those of us who do it, do it. And a little more care for yourself and why you do it.

Remember that brevity doesn't diminish the value of your message. It enhances its clarity and impact. I hope the show was helpful, my darling love, my perfect, tender ravioli. As we conclude this episode, please remember that breaking free from overexplaining is a transformative process that takes its time by nurturing self-compassion. By dismantling the belief that external validation defines your worth, you pave the way for more fulfilling relationships and an empowered sense of self.

My darling, if you're not subscribed to the show, or following it, I'd love for you to do so. I'd also love it if you could leave a rating and a written review. It can be wicked short, but hit me up with some of those five stars and a couple, few, words to tell the world why you're enjoying *Feminist Wellness*, why you're coming back to listen in each and every week.

When you do so, it helps improve our rating, which helps people to find the show on search, and it's a free resource I want in as many years as possible. While you're enjoying the show, take a little screenshot, share it on social media; make sure to tag me @VictoriaAlbinaWellness so I can reshare it. I want to thank you once again for listening.

My darling, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. 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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Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling. and I'll see you next week. Ciao.