

## Ep #312: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (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. If you're new to the show, or if you're just tuning in after a minute away, we're in the middle of a series. So I'm going to recommend that you go back a couple episodes, situate yourself in this whole conversation about feeling your feelings, come on back to here, episode 312. Also, if you've been with me since the start, how are we on episode 312? Time is so weird.

Anyway, we are talking about feelings and feeling our feelings and why sometimes it can be challenging to feel our feelings, what the what is beneath that. As always, my goal here is to support us in stepping into our authenticity, our intentionality, into presence, into those tools, those states of being that allow us to step out of our codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing habits, to begin to heal trauma, to step back into our power, to not emotionally outsource, and to step into true lasting healing, somatic, body-based healing.

Healing of our mindsets, healing of our relationships, healing of – I mean, I kind of want to say everything seems a bit grandiose, but at the same time, when we've lived a life where we're blocking our feelings for smart reasons we're about to get into, everything in life, I mean, I was about to say feels better, but it feels worse for a while, but then feels better when we're able to allow our feelings because we're able to map our nervous systems and know what's happening before we go Vesuvius on someone.

We're able to support ourselves and build strong relationships, first of all, with ourselves and with everyone else in our life, when we are more present, more embodied, more here and now in the here and now. Makes sense to me. We also can feel a lot safer when we know what's going on. And when we don't have this story inside us that some feelings are scary, some feelings are bad, some feelings should not be felt, and so we need to

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push them away, buffer against them, have another drink or smoke something or over exercise or overeat or avoid conflict or do things we don't want to do so that other people won't be upset because then we'll be upset because they're upset because codependent thinking.

It's so many layers of our growth can be unlocked in a real way when we allow ourselves to feel our feelings. And so in True *Feminist Wellness* style, I want to continue to look at the reasons why we don't let ourselves feel our feelings, particularly right now in this moment of really heightened anger, despair, worry, frustration in the US and globally since the inauguration, because it's really, really important that we feel our feelings if we are to be a part of interdependent mutual aid to support ourselves and those in our communities who may be more impacted by everything that will come in the next four years with this administration.

So I share the why, like why you might not be letting yourself feel your feelings, towards the goal of supporting you to bring in more compassion, more empathy, more care for yourself, your inner children, the parts of you who say feelings are a no thank you, so that you can release any self-judgment that may be keeping you from actually feeling your feels, or just that keeps you revved up in sympathetic activation.

So we're continuing our series on why it can feel so hard, so challenging, to allow ourselves to fully feel all of our feelings. Last time we talked about fear of being overwhelmed by big feelings, not having the tools to process emotions, and we touched on the role of trauma in shaping these patterns.

Today, we're diving into three more reasons that hit close to home for so many of us. One, shame about having negative emotions or negatives in air quotes, she says while recording a podcast. Two, cultural and gendered expectations. Three, hyper-focus on the needs of others, I would say to our own detriment, which is part and parcel, of course, of the definition of emotional outsourcing, which is when we chronically and habitually source our sense of safety, belonging and worth from everyone and everything outside of ourselves instead of from within to our own detriment.

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These reasons are deeply interconnected and each one is shaped by the stories we've absorbed from our family, society, culture, religion, and of course, our nervous systems. So let's get into it. One, shame about negative emotions. You know, the show's called *Feminist Wellness*, and I should do a whole critique of like the wellness industrial complex because a lot of it was creepy for a long time and it's getting worse.

And I want to particularly speak to those of us who are on a spiritual journey, who are doing like spiritual work. So often there's this like stigma against negative emotions, right? That I think is just such garbage. And the number of times that I see the like, hashtag positive vibes only, I mean, y'all, all vibes only, right? We need it all.

So let's pause and I'll ask you, how often have you caught yourself labeling feelings like anger, sadness, frustration, resentment, fear as bad or negative? Maybe you think, I shouldn't feel this way. I should be more evolved than this. I should be more enlightened than this. Or why can't I just be grateful? Why am I always criticizing? Why do I have such big emotions?

My beauty. All these critiques and criticisms, when they're in that energy of like claws out against yourself versus the like, I hear that I'm having this feeling of resentment and anger and I want to allow the feeling and then find some gratitude. That's a different thing. Put that aside. But the like, basically whining at yourself or poking at yourself or jabbing yourself, my angel, my angel, my love, my beautiful love, that is shame talking. And it is sneaky and insidious. Like codependent thinking itself.

Shame thrives on judgment. It convinces us that certain feelings aren't just uncomfortable, they're wrong, and by extension, we're wrong for feeling them. This isn't random, it's rooted in the brain. The insula, which tracks internal sensations, and the anterior cingulate cortex, which processes emotional pain, work together with the default mode network to create stories about who we are, identity stories.

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If we've learned to judge and thereby eschew or push away, buffer against our emotions, these brain systems spin up a narrative of shame. I'm broken for feeling this. Good girls don't feel angry. Fill in the blanks for you that means there's something wrong with me for feeling this feeling.

And when you're spinning in that belief, when that's the story, what's your nervous system going to do? Spike right up into sympathetic, fight or flight, and then you've lost so much of your cognitive capacity, your ability to really tap into sensation in your body's map where you're at and be present for yourself? Out the window, my sweet little chicken nugget. Right out the window.

For example, I once worked with a client, Sophia, who struggled so much with anger. She grew up hearing things like, good girls don't get mad. So whenever anger bubbled up, she'd push it down and she would smile through gritted teeth. She also told me she would take her nails and kind of push on her hand to keep herself from talking, to keep herself from getting visibly angry. I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine. That became her endless mantra.

In Anchored, we worked on reframing anger as a signal, her body's way of saying, something here isn't working for me. Over time and building that self-trust to actually believe what she was hearing from her body and to believe that she was worth speaking up for and that she and her joy was worth maybe having some conflict over. Over time, Sophia started to recognize her anger as an ally, not an enemy.

And as I alluded to before, it really doesn't help that we live in a world obsessed with toxic positivity. The idea that if you're not happy all the time, if you're not finding the gratitude or silver lining, I think especially as human socialized as women, there's something wrong with you. But my beauty, we need to pause and really remember that emotions are not moral. Anger isn't bad. Sadness isn't a failure. They're messages, not verdicts.

Imagine your emotions instead as little children, tugging on your sleeve and saying, hey, pay attention to me. Shame tells you to swat their hands away.

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But what if you kneeled down, looked them in the eye, and said, I hear you. I'm with you. I'm paying attention. And by my being by your side, we can step into safety. We can embody safety. I can remind you that you're worthy of care and you have belonging. Isn't that so much more powerful?

Two, cultural and gendered expectations. Now let's zoom out to the bigger picture of society. For centuries, women have been taught that their worth lies in being agreeable, pleasant, and selfless. Crying too much? You're hysterical. Feeling anger? You're unladylike. So too, for dudes, boys don't cry, right? It's a real problem. You're - I'm not even going to say the stinky mean words, but boys who cry, boys who feel their feelings? Pfft, not acceptable.

So my beauty, regardless of which of the multitudinous genders you find yourself aligning with, or aligning with none, these cultural messages impact you. They don't just stay in our minds, my beauty, they get embedded in our bodies. That's how being a human mammal works.

The vagus nerve, which helps regulate emotional responses and reactions, picks up on cues of safety or danger from the people and systems around us. If expressing anger once led to punishment or rejection, your nervous system might decide it's safer to suppress that feeling entirely. Same with sadness, same with resentment, same with telling your parents you want therapy. If it led them to say like, no you don't, you're fine.

Take my client Liz for example. She grew up in a household where any sign of sadness was met with, stop crying or I'll give you something to cry about. Ugh, gives me the ickies to even just say it in like a chill, neutral voice. As an adult, Liz found herself smiling through meetings, even when she felt crushed inside. Her body had learned, for very good reason, that showing emotion could lead to punishment.

But I would actually say that her body believed that showing emotion, having emotion, probably having wants and needs as well, would lead to punishment. And so it carried that belief into every interaction, obviously

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with her parents, but with her own kids, with her partner who was loving and gentle and sweet, definitely at work, everywhere.

Through somatic work, Liz started to notice and release the tension she carried in her jaw whenever she suppressed tears. She slowly taught her nervous system that it was safe to feel and that she could make really good choices to surround herself with folks who love her and her feelings.

You're gonna think needing help, needing care, needing support is a problem, is dumb, is bad. So are you going to let yourself really feel the profundity of those feelings? My goodness, no. And of course, let's not forget the intersectional layers here. For women of color, queer folks, anyone who exists outside the so-called norm, the stakes are even higher.

Society often tells these groups that their emotions, in particular, are dangerous or unacceptable, reinforcing the need to suppress them just to survive. I mean, the trope of the angry Black woman, for example. Come on now. So, my love, as always, we look at these things right in the snout to remind ourselves, this isn't your fault.

My client Carolina shared that she felt pressure to always stay calm at work as a Latina woman. "If I speak up about unfair treatment, I'm scared they'll call me angry or difficult," she said. Through our work together in Anchored, Caro learned to advocate for herself while also honoring the fear her body carried, a dual approach that let her navigate systemic challenges while naming them for what they are and not taking them on as a just her problem and she was able to navigate them with both strength and self-compassion these patterns were handed to you taught to you ingrained in you, but here's the truth, emotions are human, not gendered, not cultural, and once again, not moral.

Three, hyper-focus on the needs of others. Ah, okay, so let's talk about this old emotional outsourcing habit. You know the one. Putting everyone else's needs before your own because it feels like your needs don't matter. Or worse, they're a burden. This understanding, this way of relating to self and

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our emotions, our feelings, our wants, our needs, our capacity, it often starts in childhood. Especially if you grew up in a family system where you were the caretaker, the peacemaker, or the one who made everything okay, the little jester and joker.

Your brain's mirror neuron system, which helps us understand and empathize with others, likely got a lot of practice, but maybe at the expense of your own self-awareness. When your focus is always outward and that's become your identity. For instance, my client Megan shared that growing up as the eldest of four, she was always the one her mom leaned on during tough times. "I had to be the strong one," she said. "There wasn't space for me to have feelings."

As an adult, Megan found herself automatically jumping in, completely without realizing it, to solve everyone else's problems, even when she felt utterly drained. Through nervous system work, together in Anchored, she started practicing small acts of self-focus, like taking a deep breath before saying yes to someone's request. And then, this was amazing, she started using the 24-hour rule.

Before saying yes to anything, she'd say, "I'm gonna think on it and I'll get back to you tomorrow." God, I remember the first time Megan told me she did that, I like almost started crying. I was so inspired by her. And that like all the growth that it took to say I'm gonna put myself and my wants and my needs before anything else. Wow, right? Because you were the always outward kid, you can lose the ability to notice what's happening inside you.

Your nervous system might even get stuck in fawn mode, a survival response where you prioritize harmony and connection over authenticity. And for more on the fawn response, listen to episodes 208 and 209.

Take Priya, who told me, "I'm so busy making sure my partner's happy that I don't even know what I want anymore." We dove deeper, we did some somatic practices where Priya spoke with her body, talked to her inner children, and through that process realized that it wasn't just her partner.



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She'd spent her whole life caretaking everyone's feelings, keeping them from experiencing conflict, frustration, anger. This had been her lifelong job.

Priya started practicing a simple habit, pausing for 10 seconds, is where we started with her before agreeing to something, and asking herself, "What do I feel about this?" It wasn't easy at first, like for Megan, but over time, Priya started hearing her own voice again and was able to make choices that were most supportive for her.

But let's get clear, abandoning yourself and your feelings to take care of others doesn't actually make relationships better. Instead, it creates resentment, exhaustion, and a deep sense of disconnection from yourself and the people you love. I talk all about this in episodes 163 and 164, all about the self-abandonment cycle, and of course, healing the self-abandonment cycle. Check those out after this series.

So let's talk somatic or body-based remedies. How do we start to unlearn these patterns and allow ourselves to feel? It starts very slowly with bringing your attention back to your body, one small, tiny step at a time. So here is a practice you can try. You're going to hear this same thing in each of these practices because it's essential. First and foremost, we orient to the present moment. I'm going to walk you through a quick orienting practice.

If you want a longer orienting practice, head on over to [victoriaalbina.com/312](http://victoriaalbina.com/312), the episode page for this episode, the page with the show notes, and you can download my free meditations. There's an orienting exercise, an inner child exercise. You get a whole suite of meditations. It's totally free, because this really matters. And I want you to orient if you want to. You're an adult, consent, but you know what I mean? I want to offer you the support you might need to orient.

So orienting your nervous system simply means like orienting, like when you get a new job and they're like, here's the water cooler, here's the bathroom, and you're oriented to the space, it's the same thing. You're

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orienting your nervous system to the space you're in to anchor your nervous system in the here and now and to remind your body that you're safe.

So what I wanna invite you to do is literally just look around the room you're in and just look around and take it in. And sometimes I'll do something really simple. We did a longer one in the last episode, but just name all the squares you can see. So painting, poster, door, light switch, iPad, notebook, photo, photo, photo, window. Yeah? Really easy.

You can also just literally just name the things that you're seeing. You don't need to categorize them at all. Trampoline, plant, crystals, lipstick, other microphone, lots of pictures of Billey, more notebooks, a whole stack of earrings, because you know me and the earrings. Yeah?

So orient your nervous system, bring it into the here and now, give it a little like, little moment to really land. And if it's taking a moment for your nervous system to like really ground, just keep naming stuff. And sometimes, honestly, especially if it has not felt safe to be in your body, if your body was the site of trauma, sometimes the whole practice is orienting. And you're like, that's what we're doing today. Or if you've like been really revved up or really shut down, the whole practice can be orienting and that's like legit what you're doing today and nothing's gone wrong. Everything's perfect. That's what you're capable of.

After orienting, we're going to practice dropping into our body again if that feels safe. So I want to invite you to take a deep breath in through your nose, long slow out your mouth. Place one hand on your heart and one on your belly if that feels okay and safe and ask yourself, what do I notice in my body right now?

And I like this phrasing, what do I notice in my body right now? Because it allows a little more space for those of us, again, for whom being in body in a real like in it way doesn't feel safe, you can still be the watcher noticing the body, yeah? Part of the goal of somatics is that shift from I have a body

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to I am a body, right? And if you're not there yet, you're not there yet. So just be the consciousness, the watcher noticing your body.

So maybe there's a tightness in your shoulders, my sternocleidomastoids in my neck are always so tight. Maybe there's a heaviness in your chest, tingling in your hands. Whatever it is, the work here is just to notice. No need to fix it or change it. You don't need to label it or tell stories. Just notice.

And then give yourself permission to feel. Say to yourself, in this moment, right, because we're staying in this oriented grounded moment, it is okay to feel this feeling. It is okay to feel this sensation. Right now in this moment, right, so we're creating that little container for the emotion, right? Because your body's probably unlikely to feel you or to believe you rather if you're like, it's always okay for me to feel anger. Your body's probably gonna be like, or your brain's gonna be like, that's BS, sweet pea.

So in this moment, it's safe to feel this. Repeat it a few times, letting the words settle into your brain, settle into your body. If shame or judgment come up, that's okay. Nothing's gone wrong. I'm not saying it's pleasant, but nothing's gone wrong. Imagine the shame just floating like a cloud through the sky of your mind. That's a Pema Chodron one. Yeah, imagine the judgment. You can put it on a cloud, judgment, and let it just float on by. You don't have to fight it. You can just let it drift. Let it move through.

And then finally, take a tiny action. Ask yourself, what's one small thing, like kitten step size thing, I can do to honor this feeling. Maybe it's writing it down, moving your body, or even just sitting with it for another minute before moving on to the next thing, before grabbing your phone, before whatever. What's one small thing I can do to honor this feeling? You could take a breath with the anger. You could journal. You could go for a walk with the sadness. Yeah? If you're a New Yorker, you could get on the number two train during the day, that's a great train to cry on. What's one small thing I can do to honor this feeling?

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All right, my beauties, that's where we'll pause for today. We've explored shame, cultural and gendered expectations, and that emotional outsourcing, hyper-focus on others can make it feel hard, challenging, to feel our feelings. Remember my beauty, you are not broken for being challenged by this. You're human, living in a world that often teaches us to disconnect from ourselves. And you can reconnect. One breath, one sensation, one oriented, grounded, present moment at a time.

Next time, we'll talk about the beliefs that emotions are inconvenient or unproductive and how capitalism fuels this narrative. Until then, take gentle care of yourselves. You're doing brave, beautiful work. Thank you for being here. I'm so grateful for you and your presence. You're doing brave, beautiful work.

All right, my beauties, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. 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. Ciao!

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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.