

Ep #314: Why It's Hard to Let Yourself Feel Your Feelings (Part 3)



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 B ea 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 back to part three of why it's challenging or hard to let yourself feel your feelings, to allow your feelings. We took last week off. It was Valentine's Day week. And so my wonderful and amazing wife, Billey, came and joined us. I hope you enjoyed that conversation. She's quite a gem, isn't she? And she teaches meditation in Anchored. Did you know that? That's so cool. I could just go on and on about how amazing she is, but I shan't. I shall spare you.

Meanwhile, let's talk about feelings. My beauties, my tender ravioli, we've been on quite the journey together exploring why it can feel so hard to allow ourselves to feel our feelings and to not judge them, not buffer against them, not block them, not push them away, not be like, blah, all over them.

In the final episode of this first part of the series, we're diving into three more reasons that are deeply tied to how we've been socialized, how our nervous systems work, and how systems of oppression shape the stories we live inside.

One, the belief that emotions are inconvenient or unproductive. Two, perfectionism and the need to hold it together. Three, fear of rejection or disconnection.

As always, my loves, we're here to unpack these habits with gentleness and curiosity, not judgment. So let's dive in and next week we'll start talking about why we sometimes don't let other people have their emotions or why people might not allow you to have yours around them. All too common in emotional outsourcing, our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits of living to try to control all of the feelings around us. We do that, right? Right.

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So let's start with the belief that emotions are inconvenient or unproductive. Let us as always be honest, we live in a world that values doing over being. Capitalism has convinced us that our worth lies in how much we produce, achieve, accomplish by their rubric. And where do emotions fit into that picture? Where does like feeling your feels and being in the sensations in your body, where does it fit? Exactly nowhere.

Emotions are seen as roadblocks, distractions, things to get over so we can get back to work. This belief isn't just cultural, it's physiological. The default mode network in your brain, which kicks in during rest and reflection, is responsible for processing emotions and integrating experiences.

But when you're constantly in go-go-go mode, pushing through, riding that sympathetic activation high, likely feeling pretty frozen to yourself, your emotions, your wants, your needs, because you're staying busy. You're also probably likely in a functional freeze, which we talked all about in episodes 246, 247, and 248.

This part of your brain, my dear friend, the default mode network, it doesn't get a chance to do its job. And if the default mode network isn't doing its job, then you don't actually integrate experiences, right? It's like when we do all the healing things, go to the retreat, read the book, listen to the podcast, journal and journal and journal and don't pause to let it in.

When we keep going to the psychedelic retreat and we keep journeying and journeying and journeying and third cup, third cup, third cup, but we don't just pause. Everything we learn doesn't actually become part of us. It stays uncoupled from who we are and how we're moving through life. It doesn't actually change how we're living. It's just another buffer.

For example, Elena, a client of mine in Anchored, shared that anytime she felt sadness creeping in, she would immediately bury herself in her to-do list. I thought if I could just keep moving, she said, I wouldn't have to deal with it. But instead of making her feel better, she found herself collapsing into exhaustion at the end of the day, completely disconnected from herself,

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TV on, playing a game on her phone, maybe also on Instagram somehow, glass of wine in hand, not demonizing any of those things, but just saying, neck deep in the old buffering.

In Anchored, Elena had started to give herself five minutes to sit with her feelings before diving into her tasks. To be clear, we worked our way up kitten step-wise to five minutes. It really started with, I think, 30 seconds, if I'm right. I think it was 30. No, I think it was shorter. It was like 10 seconds. We worked our way up over the course of six months, right? And in that time, she realized that pausing actually made her more focused, less drained, and helped her to integrate what she was feeling instead of just riding right over it.

When we back up and we look at this whole notion that our emotions are inconvenient, unproductive, get in the way, for those of us who have been socialized as women, this narrative can hit even harder. We're often expected to keep everything running smoothly, whether it's at work, at home, in our relationships, doing all that invisible labor. That definitely includes keeping folks, other people, from having big messy feelings like frustration, annoyance, anger, definitely disappointment, definitely sadness.

When you're exhausted and stressed and tasked with keeping things copacetic, when that's part and parcel of whether you're a good girl and a good wife and, like, laudable, emotions are seen as a liability, something to suppress so we can stay efficient and composed. And also so we can keep the 4,000 plates we're spinning in the air spinning, right? And so of course it's like feel less instead of like do less, which is what I would propose. But we're not there yet.

I worked with Rosario, a mom of two, who said, "I don't have time to cry about feeling overwhelmed. Who's going to make dinner if I fall apart." And I get it, right? But when she started to allow herself even small, small moments of acknowledgement, like naming her frustration as she unloaded the dishwasher, it helped her feel less stuck in the endless cycle of doing as she was able to allow herself to be in the middle of it.

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Here's the thing. Emotions aren't obstacles to productivity. They're vital data. They tell us when something's off, when we need to rest, when we're out of alignment with our values. Ignoring them does not make us stronger. It disconnects us from ourselves.

And while I would never tell someone that the goal of feeling their feelings or doing more somatic practice is to be a more like productive person, as though that were the most important thing in life. When you listen to your feelings and your body and honor what's going on, you are less likely to burn out and to be collapsed on the couch or to get sick and to be completely unproductive by that same rubric.

So just saying, if you are still tied to like, no, my productivity, my overfunctioning for everyone else, that's the marker of my goodness, cool. Keep that thought for now. I don't think it serves you long-term, but for now, hold on to it. Let's not like yank the rug out from under your nervous system too much, but hold on to it and remember that feeling your feelings is going to help you and support you to be even more productive. And then come back and let's change that productivity story. Sound like a deal? It's a really good deal.

Two, perfectionism and the need to hold it all together. Oh, God, perfectionism. That belief that if we're just good enough, kind enough, competent enough, nothing will hurt. No one will ever abandon or leave us. Everything will be fine. We will feel safe. We will feel belonging. We will feel connection. We will feel valued, valid, important, safe.

Oh gosh, perfectionism. It is such a tender human attempt to protect ourselves that of course we know goes so awry, right, and hurts us in such deep ways. But oh, it's such a beautiful attempt to try to source love and care when we're really not feeling safe.

Perfectionism is deeply tied to the prefrontal cortex, that executive part of the brain we talk about so much that plans, organizes, and manages self-control. When perfectionism takes over, this part of the brain works

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overtime, trying to micromanage every thought, feeling, action to avoid the vulnerability of being human.

Take Amanda, who came to Anchored saying, if I let myself cry it feels like I'll fall apart and I don't know if I can put myself back together. Amanda shared that she always pushed herself to be the best at everything. At work, in friendships, even in her yoga class, that's right, competitive yoga. Through our work together, she started to notice how her body was holding this tension. Her shoulders were constantly tight, her jaw was clenched and always hurt, and her stomach felt knotted.

Over time, Amanda learned to release some of this pressure by letting herself have imperfect, messy moments to do. We started with A minus work and finally, like ended anchored with Amanda doing B plus work and she's been in the alumni community for like two years now.

And I think she's doing solid B work and she keeps getting raises and promotions, right? Right. Because by the way, her 50% is like everyone else's 200,000%, right? You know what I mean, babe. Come on, we work too hard.

What's really amazing, and this was surprising for Amanda, is how her relationships deepened because of this desire not to micromanage, not control, and instead have those imperfect messy moments, meaning she was letting herself be more present. That's the work, right? That's the beauty of it.

And of course, I will always say perfectionism doesn't happen in a vacuum. It's shaped by familial and societal pressures. The patriarchy, white supremacy, capitalism all tell us that our worth is conditional. We're valuable only if we meet impossible standards of beauty, behavior, and success.

Luana, one of my clients, described perfectionism as, the mask I wear to make sure no one knows how scared I am underneath. She'd learned

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growing up that being perfect was the only way to avoid criticism or rejection, especially as the eldest daughter in a South Asian family.

By learning to notice the stories her body carried about safety and perfection, she began to gently let go of the need to always be on. This isn't, as always, just a cognitive issue. It's somatic. Your body holds the tension of trying to hold it together. Tight shoulders, clenched jaw, shallow breaths, tummy ache, constipation, period pain. I mean, we clench so tightly.

It's your nervous system and your body bracing against the fear of failure, rejection, imperfection. But here's the truth. Your humanity, your emotions, and even your messiness are what make you lovable, not the illusion of perfection you're attempting to project, Care Bear Stare style, onto everyone and everything in your life. Real people who really love you, love you for being really you.

Three, fear of rejection or disconnection. Finally, let's talk about rejection. The fear that if we express our emotions, if we let ourselves be fully seen, we'll be too much, too needy, too dramatic, too emotional. This fear is wired into us.

As humans, we're wired for connection. The anterior cingulate cortex, a part of the brain that processes social pain, lights up when we experience rejection in the same way it does for physical pain. In other words, your brain treats disconnection as a real, tangible threat.

Stephanie told me, "I don't let myself cry in front of my friends because I don't want to be the emotional one." She had been called dramatic so many times as a teenager that her nervous system had learned to suppress tears before they even started. By reconnecting with her body, Stephanie began to create safety within herself for those tears to flow, first in private, and then with the community in Anchored, and eventually with trusted people beyond that tight-knit supportive community.

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If you grew up in an environment where expressing emotions led to punishment, ridicule, abandonment, your nervous system likely learned to suppress those feelings to stay safe. This is where attachment theory comes in. If you've ever heard of anxious or avoidant attachment style, they're just strategies your body developed to protect you from rejection. And for more on attachment styles, check out episodes 183, 184, and 185. That's a series. I would start there, and then episode 135, and finally, episode 214.

Jasmine, for instance, grew up with an avoidant attachment style with her caregivers. "If I didn't cry, my dad didn't yell," she explained. In adulthood, this pattern showed up as withdrawing from her partner whenever she felt upset, fearing that her emotions would push him away. Throughout work, Jasmine practiced voicing small feelings, like sharing when she was tired or overwhelmed, which helped her nervous system learn that vulnerability could actually deepen connection.

Here's the thing, my love, avoiding your emotions to avoid rejection doesn't create true connection. It creates relationships where you're not fully seen or known. And my beauty, you deserve better. You deserve nothing less than to feel all of your feelings and share your life, your love, your heart with people who will hold your emotions as sacred as they are.

So let's talk about building capacity, and I'd love to share a somatic or body-based remedy. So how do we begin to untangle ourselves from these stories and build the capacity to feel? Well, it starts with reconnecting to the body and rewriting the narratives we've internalized about emotions. Here's a practice to try.

One, first, before anything else, remind your nervous system that you're safe. Orient, look around your space, name what you see. Feel your feet on the ground, wiggle your toes. These small acts ground you in the present moment where you're safe to explore your feelings. So we orient and ground.

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Two, notice the edges of the emotion. So when you're new to this work, I want to invite you, the kitten step is instead of diving into the center of a big feeling and like making a big messy splash, see if you can notice the edges of the emotion. Where does it start and stop? Is it a wave in your chest, a vibration in your stomach? You're not trying to change it. Just map the edges of it with gentle curiosity.

If the emotions feel stuck, try adding a little movement. Wiggle your fingers, roll your shoulders, sway gently, rock back and forth. If sounds feel safe, try letting out a soft sigh, a hum, or even whisper what you're feeling. This can help your body to metabolize the energy of the emotion as it were. That's a metaphor.

Next, imagine wrapping the emotion in a safe, supportive container. Give it some shape and space and boundaries. One of the things that's super common in households with emotional outsourcing is that roles are really messed up. Who's the parent? Who's the child? Who's the parent? Who's the parent's therapist who is also the child? Or you know what I mean? There's parentification, there's emotionally immature adults in the role of parent, it can feel complicated.

And so one of the things that we're often missing out on is really healthy boundaries, honest boundaries, thoughtful boundaries. We may have like harsh rules or like nobody is saying no to us, and neither one is good for developing minds, developing hearts. Boundaries, gentle, loving, properly voiced and carried out boundaries create a safe container, not just for children, but for all of us.

And so, as you're getting to know these emotions and working to support them to feel safer with you, create a little cocoon, a container, a bounded area for this feeling in your mind's eye. You could also draw it, you could also make it out of Fimo or Sculpey or clay, you could knit it, you could crochet it, you could – right?

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It can be as literal and physical or metaphorical visual as you want it to. Maybe it could be a soft blanket or the emotion could have a glowing light surrounding it. This isn't about locking it away. It's about holding it with care so it doesn't overwhelm you. And you're creating a little cognitive distance between you and it.

So you can remember I am not my feeling. I am not my emotion. I am the body and the consciousness. I am the consciousness watching this mind and body have this emotion. So that one, so it doesn't overwhelm you, so you can create a little distance, so you can disidentify with it. And so you can snuggle it, so you can help it to feel safe, right? So you can create this loving connection with yourself and your emotions.

Finally, end with gratitude. When you spent a few minutes, starting with a few seconds, building up to a few minutes with the emotion, thank your body for holding it. You might say, thank you body for letting me feel this and for keeping me safe. This small act of gratitude reinforces trust and connection with yourself.

All right, my darlings, We're going to pause there. That brings us to the end of the first part of this series on why it can feel challenging to let yourself feel your feelings in their entirety and not like, buffer against them endlessly or judge them or be mean to yourself about them. There's so much that we do.

Today, we explored how capitalism, perfectionism, and the fear of rejection shape our relationship with emotions, and how reconnecting with our bodies can help us unlearn these patterns. Remember, your feelings aren't too much. You are not too much. You're learning little by little to come home to yourself.

If this work resonates with you my love and you want to take it deeper, don't forget to check out my programs like Anchored and The Somatic Studio. I'm also putting together a really powerful new program all about

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the enteric nervous system I cannot wait to share it with you so make sure that you are on my mailing list.

Go to my website, victoriaalbina.com, at the top there's a little teal bar where you can click it to get meditations. Click, put your email in, get my meditations. They are free. Get on my mailing list. Stay connected. Yeah? Let's keep doing this work. Let's take it deeper. I'm really excited too.

All right, until next time, take gentle care of yourself, you tender ravioli. You are doing brave and beautiful work. 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 beauty. Mwah! Ciao! Talk to you soon.

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 BeatrizAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao