

Ep #323: Relationship Magical Realism



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With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach Béa 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. Today we're diving into a concept that I first started using in my coaching work all the way back in like 2013 or 2014, which feels like about 600 lifetimes ago, and that is relationship magical realism.

So I first fell in love with the concept of magical realism, like the classic kind, in undergrad at Oberlin, where I studied Latin American studies and spent an inordinate amount of time obsessing over the works of Gabriel García Márquez, Isabel Allende, and all the writers who wove the fantastical into the mundane as if it were the most natural thing in the world, which I think it is.

But really, I think this love was inevitable. I am, after all, a Latina from South America. So magical realism isn't just a literary genre to me. It's something in my bones, in my blood. It's the way I was raised, the way stories were told around me, the way life itself feels when you grow up in a culture where the veil between the possible and the impossible is just a little thinner.

And as it turns out, this way of seeing the world, the blending of the real, as it were, and the imagined, has a funny way of showing up in the way we think about relationships too. Which brings us to today's topic, relationship magical realism. This phrase first came to me so many years ago, when I was working with people who were struggling to reconcile the relationships they had with the relationships they wished they had. And let me tell you, my love, that gap is where so much suffering lives.

It's the place where emotional outsourcing, our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits thrive. Where we gaslight ourselves into believing that maybe, if we just say the right words, if we're patient enough,

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if we love them hard enough, this person will finally see our worth, meet our needs, and love us the way we long to be loved.

And I get it. Just like in those novelas where the impossible happens in the middle of the everyday, our brains craft narratives to make the unbearable feel survivable. It's Remedios, the beauty in *100 Years of Solitude*, drinking hot cocoa and levitating, untouched by the weight of reality.

It's Clara in *The House of the Spirits*, moving through life with one foot in the spirit world, believing that knowing the future will somehow protect her from it. It's Tita in *Like Water for Chocolate*, pouring all her unspoken longing into a dish so powerful it makes those who eat it weep, as if love itself could be conjured through sheer will and a little time in the kitchen.

The human nervous system is wired for connection, for safety in belonging. And when we grow up in dynamics where love was inconsistent, unconditional, immature, or required us to contort ourselves to receive it, our minds and bodies learn to explain away that inconsistency, to believe in the magic rather than face the truth.

Just like the characters in these stories move through a world where the extraordinary is just part of the air they breathe, we convince ourselves that if we just love hard enough, wait long enough, sacrifice enough, the impossible might finally become real.

Today we're going to break that down. What relationship magical realism is, how it plays out in our nervous systems, thoughts, and behaviors, the cost of staying in this fantasy, and how to start seeing relationships for what they are, not just what we wish they could be.

And before we dive in, this way of blending the real as it were and the imagined, it isn't always a bad thing. It's also how we dream, create, and find meaning. It's how we hold on to hope, how we weave resilience out of struggle, and when the same habit, tendency, way of relating to life gets applied to relationships. When we rewrite reality not as an act of creativity, but as a way to avoid pain, it can keep us painfully, deeply, deeply stuck.

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So grab a cup of tea or better yet fantastical hot cocoa, snuggle up with a cozy blanket, take me on your daily walk. Let's get into it. So let's start with the term itself. What is relationship magical realism? If you've ever read Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Isabel Allende, you know that magical realism is a world where ghosts give advice over breakfast, lovers weep so profoundly that their tears flood entire towns, and people levitate mid-conversation, but no one bats an eye. The extraordinary is woven into the ordinary, and reality bends just enough to make the impossible feel not only plausible, but inevitable.

Now, take that concept and apply it to relationships. Just like in those novels where the fantastical feels ordinary, we do the same in our relationships. Turning what is deeply unlikely into something that we can believe is inevitable. And this isn't just some random quirk of human nature. Our brains are wired for predictability just as much as they're wired for connection.

If someone's love is inconsistent, if they pull close and then push away, if their words and their actions don't match, our brains scramble to make sense of it. Instead of sitting with the raw discomfort of not knowing where we stand, we fill in the gaps. We create explanations that smooth over the contradictions, just like magical realism takes what most of us would believe is impossible and make it feel natural, quotidian, mundane even.

Relationship magical realism is what happens when we convince ourselves that something wildly unlikely will happen in a relationship, despite all evidence to the contrary. It's when we tell ourselves a love story that exists in potential rather than reality. A story where transformation is always just right around the corner, where if we just love harder, wait longer, or explain ourselves better, the other person will finally see, change, and love us the way we long to be loved.

It's believing that a partner who's never been emotionally available will suddenly become attuned and affectionate if we just find the right approach. It's thinking that someone who's always dismissed our feelings

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will one day wake up and cherish our emotional depth. It's hoping that a friend who constantly cancels plans will finally prioritize us, even though they never have, even though they never text back.

It's assuming that a family member who has never respected our boundaries will magically start doing so, if we can just explain it better. It's a survival strategy where the onus is on us, and of course it's unwitting and subconscious for most of us most of the time. It's a way our nervous system shields us from the unbearable grief of acknowledging certain realities.

Because facing that truth, realizing that someone may never give us the love, care, reciprocity, mutuality, interdependent, relating we deserve, we can feel like too much to bear. And my love that grief. That grief is so real. So let's talk about why we do this. At its core, relationship magical realism, as I am positing, is a trauma response.

And note, if you're new to the show, hi, I don't call everything a trauma response. I'm way too steeped in actually understanding the science of the nervous system and of trauma to like most things aren't a trauma response. But I do believe this kind of magical realism really can be, because it's a product of emotional outsourcing, of fawning, of a nervous system that learned to prioritize keeping the connection over keeping the capital S self.

Because here's the thing, when we're wee young ones, our nervous systems are like little sponges, absorbing what love feels like in our earliest relationships. And if love felt like inconsistency, emotional unavailability, walking on eggshells, then our brains, in their attempt to make sense of that pain, will weave stories to justify it.

Well, you know, they're just, they're really stressed right now. They do love me. They do. They tell me all the time, oh, I love you the most, but they just don't know how to show it, you know? If I'm patient, if I'm quiet, if I'm good, if I'm whatever it is they tell me they want me to be, they'll change. Oh, I

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just need to be less needy and they'll stay. Well, you know, it hurts, but they're doing the best they can.

With these narratives, they don't just live in our minds, they live in our bodies. When we're faced with someone's emotional distance or neglect, our nervous systems light up like code red danger. But instead of letting ourselves feel that rejection, especially when we're young, we rationalize. We rewrite reality into something that feels safer or we dissociate.

Listen, this habit isn't just wishful thinking. It's something deeper. Something wired into how we process relating. It's not just habit, it's neuroscience. Our brains have something called confirmation bias, which means we look for evidence that supports the story we want to believe and we filter out the rest.

If someone shows us inconsistent love, we latch onto the one time they came through, the one deep conversation, the one moment of tenderness, and we tell ourselves, see, they care. Meanwhile, we ignore the 10 times they didn't show up, didn't listen, didn't choose us. We ignore the 10 times we had hurt feelings.

And the more we do this, the deeper we dig into the illusion, reinforcing our own false hope instead of facing the truth that's right in front of us. Because admitting that someone won't love us the way we long to be loved, that can feel unbearable. So what happens when we live inside this fantasy?

Well, one, we stay in relationships that don't serve us. When we believe the fantasy over the reality, we keep investing in relationships that deplete us. We keep waiting for the moment when they'll finally change. So if accepting the data right in front of us.

Two, we blame ourselves for other people's failings. So we tell ourselves that if only we were different, if only we could find the perfect way to love them, then they would show up the way we need. And that, that is a recipe for self-abandonment. And we talk about that in depth in episodes 163 and 164.

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Three, we delay our own healing. So when we're stuck in relationship magical realism, we aren't really present in the relationship. We're in a fictionalized version of it. And as long as we're in that story, we can't begin the real work of grieving, healing, and moving towards relationships that actually meet us where we are.

Four, it keeps us from recognizing real available love. So when we're consumed by the hope that this person will change, that this relationship will finally become what we want it to be, we miss what's actually available to us out there. We overlook the friendships, the love, the connection that's already here. The people who do show up, who do see us, who do meet us where we are because we're too busy scanning the horizon, waiting for someone else to finally become who we wish they would be.

Real love might already be in front of you, but as long as you're waiting for someone to change in order for you to see it, you're unlikely to recognize it for what it is.

So, my love, Let's talk remedies. How do we wake up from the fantasy? Step one, name the fantasy. What are you hoping will happen? Before we can untangle ourselves from relationship magical realism, we have to name the story we've been telling. What exactly is the fantasy? What are you waiting for this person to do, wanting them to do? Write it down.

Don't just like write it in your head. Pen to paper. You can destroy it afterwards if you're scared of them finding it. Fine, fine. But write it down and be specific. I want them to finally prioritize me the way I prioritize them. I want them to recognize how much I've given and show up for me in the same way. I want them to be more affectionate, to express love in the way I need.

I want them to stop disappearing when things get hard and actually stay. I want them to meet me with a full open heart and to love me in that way. This is the dream your brain is holding onto. It makes sense. Your nervous

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system is wired for connection. Of course you want to feel safe, reciprocal, fulfilling.

But now, let's look at what's actually happening. I'll add to this to say, towards the end of my abusive first marriage, I turned to a mentor at the time and said, I just want them to show me respect. And he said, are you showing you respect by staying in this? I mean full dagger to the heart, but like homeboy had a point, right? I wasn't. So that's - I'll do another whole show on that, right? But it's a really interesting way to see what you actually want for yourself, to get curious about what you want them to give you.

Step two, before I go way astray, because I could like go on that. Step two, gather the data. What has this person actually done? Not what you hope they'll do, not what they could do if they finally realized your worth and value, but what they have consistently shown you through their actions. Do they consistently show up for you or do they cancel, withdraw, or flake?

Have they respected your limits, your boundaries, or do they push back, ignore, or dismiss them? Do they meet your emotional needs or do you feel chronically unseen, unheard, or unimportant? Do they honor your emotional labor, your invisible household labor, or is the weight of everything constantly and chronically on you? Patterns tell the real story. And when you put pen to paper, you give yourself the gift of clarity. Something relationship magical realism works hard to blur.

Step three, notice your nervous system response. What happens in your body when you start to see the truth? Take a breath, scan for sensations. Does your chest tighten? Does your stomach drop? Do you feel a wave of sadness, panic, or anger?

That is your nervous system beginning to process the reality that the fantasy is not coming true. That's painful and it's real. Instead of pushing those feelings away, I'd like to invite you to meet yourself with compassion. You're grieving something you deeply wanted, and that grief deserves space.

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Step four, particularly if there's been gaslighting in your relationship or you grew up not believing yourself, not trusting yourself. You don't really have your own back yet. I'd say most people coming to Anchored do not have the experience of having their own back, really trusting themselves and their story of life and understanding of life.

Step four is to crowdsource. We've talked about this before. I don't mean like post this writing on social media and like see what people say, but talk to one, two, three really trusted people in your life. So this could be your best friends, this could be a therapist, a counselor, a coach, a sibling, someone who really, really has your back. Get their input.

So when I was in that pretty awful marriage, I was being gaslit so intensely to believe that I was the 100% full problem, which no one's ever the full problem. But I believed it, hook, line and sinker, because they were such a careful, thoughtful manipulator. And so my therapist at the time recommended that I literally write down the literal words they literally said and run those by a friend.

So I would talk to my friend Andrea, who's a trauma therapist, and I would go over what they said and did, and she would give me her open honest real opinion, and that's part of what helped me. She named it as abuse first and foremost, and that's what helped me to start moving out of it.

If you're having trouble believing your own writing, your own thinking, your own narration, bring someone in to support you. But just make sure that it's someone that you trust, because it's really important as we're learning to have our own backs.

So once that's in motion, you probably need to sit with it for a while, right? Really allow yourself to sit with what's real before you move on to step five, which is rewriting the narrative, shifting the story. Instead of telling yourself, if I try hard enough, they'll change. Start to try on thoughts like, I deserve love that is present, consistent, mutual, reciprocal. I don't have to work this

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hard for love. I am worthy of relationships that feel good in reality, not just in my hopes.

And then, so I would start first with yourself, right, with I statements and really stepping into what is best for you. And then you can also get some clarity. Right? This person has shown me time and time again that they are not available to change. This person has made it clear to me that they do not want to grow with me in this way. This person has shown me in these ways that this is what they believe being in a relationship is, and I am clear that that's not what I'm looking for in a friendship, in a parent-child relationship, in a sibling relationship, in a romantic relationship, in a work-friend relationship. Yeah?

Because you know, whenever I'm talking about relationships here, I'm talking about all relationships, because emotional outsourcing, our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits impacts all kinds of relating. So really spend some time getting real about what is. Your brain has been clinging to the fairy tale because it feels safer than facing the truth. But what if the real magic, the real transformation, comes not from waiting for them to change, but from changing the way you see yourself and your life.

Finally, take action and choose you. What comes next? I mean, really, that's up to you. Maybe it's having an open, honest conversation with this person. Maybe it's grieving what will never be. Maybe it's naming your limits, setting a boundary, stepping back, or walking away. Whatever it is, let it be an act of self-love. A declaration that your needs, your feelings, and your well-being matter. Because my love, you deserve a relationship that exists in reality, not just in your imagination.

So my love in closing, Relationship Magical Realism is a survival strategy. One born out of longing, out of the deep human desire to be loved, seen, honored. If this is you, I want you to know that nothing is wrong with you. You aren't broken for wanting love, but you do deserve love that is real. And I want you to know that trying to force someone else to fit into the mold that

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you have for them is also not a kindness. So you deserve love that is real and that other person deserves to be loved for who they are, not for who you wish that they were.

If this is a pattern you're ready to shift, if you want to learn how to regulate your nervous system, to stop outsourcing your worth to relationships that drain you, and to start truly choosing yourself, I invite you to apply for Anchored, my six-month program where we do this deep dive work together. You can head over to my website, Beatriz, B-E-A-T-R-I-Z, BeatrizAlbina.com/Anchored to apply.

All right, That's it for today, my darling. If this episode resonated with you, please share it with a friend. And as always, take gentle care of you, be kind to your tender heart, and remember, you are the cake. Everything else is just icing. And if you're new to the show and you're like, wait, what? Episode 166, that's for you. Be the cake.

All right, my love, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so mu. 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. I'll talk to you soon. Ciao, ciao, ciao, 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 BeatrizAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.