

Ep #328: Knowing What You Want vs. What Others Expect



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 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. My darling, as I've been talking with folks who are interested in joining me in Anchored, one of the things that comes up 473 times a day is indecision. And this tension between knowing what you actually want and what others want, what others expect, what others might possibly, maybe want, and how much dizzying disconnection it creates for us.

My darling, I want to know, have you ever stood in front of your fridge, full on door open, cold air blasting your shins, stared, and realized you don't even know what you're hungry for? You're not deciding between sushi and soup. You're standing there asking, what did the nutritionist tell me to eat? What would a more put together version of me eat? Maybe I should have a salad right now. I should always have a salad, always a salad, but I'm really hungry, but a good girl has a salad, right? God, what would someone who has it all together eat on a Tuesday at 3:00 PM? Oh my god, it's 3:00 PM. I should have eaten at noon. Ugh. And somehow, that same old dried out freezer burrito ends up in the microwave again, not because it's what you want to eat, because really, who wants to eat that? But because it requires the very least internal negotiation.

And that disconnection from what you actually want, it doesn't stop in the kitchen. Maybe next it's the toothpaste aisle. You're holding the whitening one with the red stripe, and suddenly your thoughts are, what would someone else—there's always a named someone else for us—but would they think that there's a better choice? Oh my god, is this toxic? We don't hear that word around enough with absolutely no meaning. Is this the kind a grown woman would buy? Is this the most mature choice? Oh my god, does this mean I'm an old lady? Is this what someone else would pick?

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You're not just choosing toothpaste. You're choosing optics. You're choosing based on how you want to be seen by others and how you want to see yourself. And all of that is what we're actually talking about today when we're talking about decisions. Not toothpaste, not dinner, but the deeper pattern beneath it all. That quiet, chronic ache of not knowing what you want. Not because you're flaky or a mess, but because emotional outsourcing has trained you to attune so tightly to everyone else that your own desire feels like a foreign language, made confusing by our chronic and habitual codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing ways.

So today on *Feminist Wellness*, we're going in deep, as usual, with stories, science, and somatics or body-based practices. We're talking about how emotional outsourcing, our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, makes it feel impossible to actually know what you want and actually take action to get what you actually want without checking with the peanut gallery. And why it's not your fault and how you can take responsibility to start reclaiming your own voice, with, of course, a whole lot of love, compassion, care, kindness, and gentleness along the way, because that's how we do.

So let's start with the why. Why does something as basic as desire, what do I want to eat, wear, say, feel, need, feel like a trick question? Well, perchance because if you, like so many of us, grew up being rewarded for self-erasure, your nervous system learned that clarity can be dangerous. Wanting can feel like a liability. Having a preference can feel like a risk. Because what if it's the wrong want? What if it rocks the boat? What if someone doesn't like your choice and doesn't like you anymore? What if you end up abandoned, rejected? What if you die cold and alone on a mountaintop because you picked the wrong place for dinner? What if?

So, with all of that behind us, instead of turning and tuning inward for guidance, you tune outward for cues and clues. Like a bat using echolocation, you bounce your decision-making off of everyone around you, as though they knew what's best for you, as if they could somehow surmise what truly brings you pleasure.

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And listen, as always, this isn't some quirky personality quirk. It's a survival strategy. What I call emotional outsourcing is the thought habit of chronically and habitually prioritizing other people's emotions, needs, and preferences above your own, often without even realizing it. Because for many of us, this habit started so early. Maybe your caregivers only praised you when you were helpful, quiet, polite. You know, children are meant to be seen and not heard. Maybe your safety depended on being invisible or endlessly adaptable, super resilient. Or maybe you learned to suck it up, buttercup, and not rock the boat. Maybe you learned that peace in the house meant swallowing your needs whole.

I learned that my caregivers had really rock-solid ideas about the best way to be, to think, to feel. Well, not feeling was the best way. And that if I did something outside of that, risky choice. And so, when that happens again and again, your internal compass gets knocked off true north. So instead of asking, what do I want, and having the capacity to stay present, to stay attuned, to authentically know yourself, to have the capacity to hold your truth, to hear it, to feel it, to be it, to enact it, your brain reflexively bypasses all of that scary business and asks, what do they expect of me?

Let's anchor this in the science. Self-determination theory, developed by Deci and Ryan, tells us that we have three core psychological needs: autonomy, the ability to choose for ourselves; competence, the sense that we can handle what life throws at us; relatedness, connection and belonging with others. Emotional outsourcing blocks autonomy at the root. Because if your nervous system believes that your belonging depends on betraying your own preferences, then autonomy?

It starts to feel unsafe is one way to say it, but let's be real, it just seems pretty stupid, right? And you, you're no fool. And when autonomy is squashed, well, we lose motivation, joy, vitality, joie de vivre. Even the stuff we used to love, painting, writing, dancing, being alive, frolicking, it all starts to feel meh.

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A study by Vansteenkiste and colleagues, published in 2006... I know it's an oldie, but it showed that people who lack autonomy experience burnout and decreased well-being, even in areas they used to enjoy. Because when your actions come from pressure, not preference, life starts to feel like a performance instead of a homecoming. And let me tell you what, that performance, it's exhausting.

Let's zoom out. Let's talk about your brain for a minute. So your prefrontal cortex, the smarty-pants executive function hub, is where decision-making, prioritization, and planning happen. I like to think of it as the grown-up in the room. But when your body is living in chronic stress, like the kind created by emotional outsourcing, by constantly scanning and assessing for approval, your nervous system, your body floods with stress hormones, with adrenaline, norepinephrine, and eventually cortisol.

And when stress hormones, cortisol, spikes, prefrontal cortex checks out. Not literally, it doesn't literally turn off, but stick with my metaphor, it checks out. And who takes over? Your limbic system, the emotional alarm bell. Fight, flight, freeze, and fawn. That's where you're going instead of ventral vagal, which we've been talking about here for the last couple years, that steady state of safe, social, connected, presence, fully kicking it with the prefrontal cortex.

What does all that mean? It means you're in your survival brain, your reptilian brain. Your, like, panicked, cornered dog when there's a bear attacking it brain, and not your smarty-pants writing an email. I almost said "computer email." And you know what? That's what I meant. You're not in that smarty-pants part of your brain that can write an email. So what does that mean? Well, it means instead of making choices from clarity, calm, from deep breath, capacity, energy, you're stuck in that reactivity. Instead of tuning inward, you're on high alert, monitoring facial expressions, tone of voice, body language. Am I being too much? Not enough? Did I upset them? Did I make a mistake? Do they like my choice? Ah!

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Research by Amy Arnsten and others shows that even mild stress can impair the prefrontal cortex. When weakened by stress, it becomes harder to make decisions, leading to analysis paralysis or decision fatigue, which we talked about way back in episode 8, April 2019. Isn't that wild? But that was a good one. I mean, I think it was a good one. I can't really remember it, but it was probably a good one, so go check it out.

I bring this up to say, feeling challenged to make decisions, it doesn't mean there's anything wrong with you. You're not defective, you're not messed up. There's nothing wrong with you. It's not a character flaw. It's a real nervous system response. Stress chemicals disrupt the prefrontal cortex's ability to function optimally, making you feel overwhelmed and stuck. I bring this up because recognizing this can help you approach decision-making with more self-compassion, knowing it's a biological reality, not a personal failing.

Now, let's zoom in on the relational piece. Mirror neurons, those brilliant brain cells that help us feel what others feel, are key to empathy and social bonding. They're the reason you flinch when someone stubs their toe or get teary-eyed when your best friend's voice cracks on the phone. But in folks with emotional outsourcing habits, those mirror neurons are on overdrive. You don't just notice someone else's discomfort, you absorb it. You feel it in your body like it's your own. And we talked about this in detail in episode 94, all about empaths, emotional outsourcing, codependent thinking, and boundaries.

So, with all of that said, all that nerdy because science, of course it's hard to know what you want. Your body is busy digesting other people's feelings. 2009 research by Iacoboni shows that mirror neurons help us tune into others, making social mimicry and emotional attunement possible. But when this system goes into overdrive, it can make it hard to separate your own emotions from those around you. So you're not choosing based on your inner compass; you're choosing based on how someone else might, maybe, perhaps, perchance feel about your choice for your life. It's empathy turned inward like a blade.

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And of course, this is *Feminist Wellness*. We cannot leave out the socialization soup that we are all swimming in. Because let's be honest, this isn't just personal; it's cultural, systemic, generational. We live in a world that trains women, femmes, and other marginalized folks to be pleasing, palatable, selfless. We're taught that our worth is measured in sacrifice, that being nice matters more than being real and authentic. And we talked about this in detail in episode 132: Are you being nice or are you being kind?

Meanwhile, capitalism loves your productivity. Patriarchy adores your compliance. White supremacy lives for your silence. Colonialism just really can't get enough of when you forget your ancestral wisdom, your animal body, and that sovereign gut knowing. So if you've been trained to prioritize group harmony and family first over your own desires, it's no wonder you feel disconnected from them. And that disconnection, it has consequences. You say yes when you mean no. You ghost your own needs. You lose touch with your joy. And maybe... well, not maybe, I see it all day, day in, day out. Every time I talk to someone about Anchored, I hear, I don't know who I am. I have lost touch with myself. And I want you to know that doesn't have to be a permanent state.

That's the most important thing I can offer you here. You can rewire this. If I did, anyone can. Desire? Not gone. It's just buried under years of noise. Self-trust is not broken; it's just rusty from disuse. You are not defective. You are brilliantly adaptive. And you can come home to yourself again. Before we step into the remedies, a quick note.

So, my beauty, let's talk about how to come back to yourself. The remedies, if you will. I mean, I will, always. And we're not going to do this in a magical, one morning you just kind of knew kind of way. Not in a performative #selfcaresunday kind of way. Ugh. But in a living, breathing, nervous system, soul, spirit, mind, body, being kind of way. There are many tools for re-centering your wants after years or decades of emotional outsourcing. But I want to focus on just two today. Two practices that, when done with consistency, compassion, kindness, and in community—because if you're

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doing this all on your own, you're missing a big part of it—can begin to melt the freeze between you and your desire.

One: interoceptive awareness, reclaiming the language of your body. So if you've been living from the neck up, overthinking, overanalyzing, overconsidering others, your connection to your body's signals might feel faint, like a weak radio station just barely coming in through the static. And that's where interoception comes in. Interoception is your body's built-in GPS. It's the felt sense of your internal world: heartbeat, breath, muscle tension, gut flutter, chest compression, that lump in the throat feeling when you're about to override yourself again.

Research from Critchley et al, 2004, shows that people with higher interoceptive awareness have better emotional regulation and decision-making capacity. Why? Because when you can feel your internal cues, you can act from them, rather than defaulting to what will keep everyone else comfortable. This is one of the first things I teach in Anchored. Not because it's fancy, because it's foundational. Let me walk you through it.

Imagine you're faced with a decision, maybe something small. Should I go to this dinner I said yes to, but now I'm dreading? Before you answer, before you run the script of what your friend will think if you cancel, how flaky you'll seem, how you always do this, place one hand on your heart, one on your belly, if self-touch feels okay. Let your body soften as much as it can in this moment. Hands on your body, breathing. Take a moment to orient. Look around. Ground yourself in the when and where you are.

And now gently ask, what does my body feel or say when I imagine saying yes? Take a moment to get present to it. See if there's any changes, any tightening, any lightening, any shifts, anything at all. And when you've given that a moment, shake your little paws. And I like to change the order. So if my left hand was on my heart, my right on my belly, I'll just flip it. What does my body feel when I imagine saying no? You're not looking for a right answer because there isn't one. You're listening for sensation. Maybe there's a tightness in your jaw when you imagine going. Maybe your

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shoulders drop two inches when you imagine canceling. That is your body talking. You might not be fully fluent in the language yet, but baby, you're learning. And that's what matters. Because the body doesn't lie. I mean, your hips don't lie either, right? But your body just waits patiently until you remember it's where your truth has always lived. And it's always there waiting for you to tap in.

Two: the "What if no one else existed?" practice. This one's deceptively simple and wildly illuminating. It's a journal prompt I use all the time with clients. We do this so often in Anchored, and it goes like this: If no one else existed, what would I choose? For me, for my life, for my next step, for my afternoon? If your partner, your mother, your coworker, the guy at the hardware store, if none of them were watching, judging, weighing in, what would you eat? What would you wear? What would you cancel? What would you finally say yes to? Set a timer for—I'm always going to kitten step out with one minute, but I do recommend five—and let the question echo around inside you. And if you're one of my neuro-magical angel bears, and sitting for five minutes feels like you'd rather jump off a bridge, you know what I'm saying? Walk. Go up and down the stairs, pace, walk back and forth, but let the question echo around you. Nobody said you have to sit. Mama didn't say that. Meditation's not for everyone. Move your body.

Then write, without editing, without filtering. I will often close my eyes and write, because it's not about the output; it's about the input. It's not about writing some perfect prose. Don't try to make it make sense because it won't. Don't worry if your answers surprise or confuse you. That's good. Surprise means you're getting underneath the script of your conditioning and your socialization, your good girl training, your being nice, not being kind. Surprise, I'm here for it. I love it.

What this practice does is it gently begins to peel away the layers of performative choice. It removes the imaginary audience. It lets you practice freedom on the page so that over time, you can practice it in your life. Let me give you a real-world example. Elena, one of my long-time clients,

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came into Anchored saying, "I just want someone to tell me what to do. I am so tired of second-guessing everything." We started with the interoception practice.

One afternoon, she was deciding whether to go on a fourth date with someone she wasn't excited about. On paper, perfect. Her friends adored him. But when she imagined going, her stomach clenched. Her shoulders lifted like armor. Her breath got short. Oh. When she imagined not going, she exhaled hard. Her body literally relaxed. Her voice softened when she said, "I'd stay in and order Thai food and take a bath and catch up with my friend from college who I haven't talked to in weeks and weeks." And that was the truth.

And when we layered in the journaling prompt, "What would I choose if no one else existed?" her answer was clear. "I'd stop dating for a while. I'd stop forcing myself. I'd listen to the part of me that's so tired." And that, that was a turning point for her. Not because she made some huge external change right away, not because she deleted the apps, but because she began to trust that her body's knowing was enough, that her body's knowing was all the brilliance, wisdom, and amazing direction she needed. And she didn't need to consult the peanut gallery before deciding how to live her own life. No, thank you.

And my love, that's the work. Coming home to your own yes, your own no, your own deep maybe. Letting your body speak first and letting that voice be valid without needing anyone else to co-sign it. That's the slow, sacred rebuild of self-trust. Not a performance, but a practice.

So if you've been living life on delay, pausing yourself mid-decision to mentally poll your mom, your friends, your imaginary panel of judges. If you've spent years auto-selecting the toothpaste, the dinner plans, the career path that feels smart or safe or what a good, smart person would do, I want you to know you're not alone. And more importantly, you're not broken. There's nothing wrong with you. In fact, quite the opposite, you are adaptive, brilliantly, exquisitely adaptive.

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You learned to shapeshift in response to the world. You learned to attune so finely to others that you forgot how to attune to yourself. But your desire, it's not gone. It's waiting for you, under the noise, under the fear, under the years of outsourcing and over-functioning. And baby, baby, baby, you can come back to it one tiny kitten step at a time.

Maybe today it's pausing before you say yes. Maybe it's noticing your shoulders before you hit send. This is a practice you are doing for you. And you just have to practice doing it from you. Because this world doesn't need another person living someone else's script. No, thank you. It needs you. Messy, honest, whole, wearing what you want, eating what you want, being who you want to be, saying what you need to say, choosing based on your body's wisdom, not someone else's comfort. You matter that much. You matter that much.

And until next time, 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. My beauty, you are allowed to want what you want. Go get 'em, tiger. 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