

Ep #340: Recognizing Functional Freeze: Countdown to End Emotional Outsourcing



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Ep #340: Recognizing Functional Freeze: Countdown to End Emotional Outsourcing

This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, 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. This week we're going to be revisiting one of my favorite topics to talk about here on the show. And that's the nervous system mixed state of functional freeze. It's the nervous system state that I find that most of us who are living in emotional outsourcing are experiencing all the time. Because we find ourselves there so often.

And I know for me, once I realized that this is what was happening, it really changed my way of thinking about myself, my life, my nervous system, and how I habitually relate to self in the world. Because once I had this framework of understanding functional freeze, it helped me step into so much compassion for myself, because it wasn't me under and overreacting, it was my nervous system. And once I was able to understand exactly what was going on, I was able to begin to make real and lasting change. And that's what we're here for, right? To change our lives for the better.

So, I'm really excited to share with you about functional freeze, about this mixed nervous system state. I go into it in-depth in my book *End Emotional Outsourcing*, which is available for pre-order now at my website, BeatrizAlbina.com/book. And I cannot wait to share with you all about this. So, today we're going to be sharing part one. Part two was originally shared as episode 247 and part three, I know it's in depth, was episode 248. I'll be linking to all of that in the show notes, so check that out. You can also find them at BeatrizAlbina.com/247 or 248.

So, thank you for your interest in functional freeze, in ending emotional outsourcing, and living a life you deeply, deeply, deeply enjoy. Let's kick it over to past me.

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This is a topic near and dear to my heart because it is, well, what I'm most passionate about. It's what I've dedicated my life to. It's helping humans, particularly humans socialized as women, to recognize how the state is showing up, when we're in it, while we're in it.

And to use tools like Somatic Experiencing, Cognitive Behavioral Coaching, a whole host of other tools, breathwork, so much more, dance, movement. Using all of my many tools to help us to begin to create another pathway, another option, another choice for experiences in our lives, when our nervous system says, "Oh, this is scary, do that old thing where you totally check out."

We're going to get into a lot of detail about what that checkout looks like, in a second. But when the body and the nervous system say that, I know that my clients have options, they have alternatives. After six months in Anchored people know another way to relate to their nervous systems, to their bodies, to their inner children, to themselves.

That's what I'm excited to begin to talk about with you today, and in the subsequent episodes, about functional freeze. Because it's huge. I mean, it is part and parcel of the emotional outsourcing story, and so deep. It's also a huge part of my own story. I mean, woof, I was living deep in a functional freeze for pretty much most of my life, and only really started coming out of it in the last decade.

Well, I mean, in the last 15, 20 years, since I started doing somatic practice. Really, only in the last 10 years was I applying that to myself and starting to see my somatic-self disconnection. Then it was really only when I got out of... well, this was the work that supported me in getting out of an emotionally abusive relationship.

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It was only getting out of that and really rebuilding myself in the last five to six years, that I am now able to say I do not live in functional freeze. I live largely in ventral vagal, with normal, natural, incredibly human voyages into sympathetic and into dorsal.

That's what nervous systems are supposed to do. Right? They're supposed to run the gamut of human experience, and when we are able to regulate ourselves we are able to call ourselves back home to ventral vagal.

I can now do that, and I could not do that for most of my life because I was so stuck in functional freeze. I had no idea what it was, that I was living in it, that it was my norm, and now that I know, now that I get it, now that I recognize it, that I see it, I can see it in someone's eyes; when the lights are on but nobody's home.

It is my passion to help folks to live differently, when that's what they want to do. Because life is so much more better on the other side of somatic-self disconnection. Let me tell you what, everything is better. I can feel all of the feels. I'm not tap dancing for my lovability. I know my worth. I am not scared of conflict the way I was.

I am so wildly in love with my partner in this really beautiful healthy way, based in a profound respect for each other's autonomy, based in mutuality, based on reciprocity. And none of that was possible from functional freeze.

I have really beautiful friendships... you know who you are, you know I love you... and it's all thanks to this work. It's thanks to the combo of somatics and thought work. So, I feel like such a lucky bunny that I found this stuff. How incredibly privileged am I? Lucky, lucky, lucky bunny, indeed. All right.

So, I will also say up front, this is another... and I said this a couple of weeks ago... but I am shocked that I have not already talked about functional freeze. It is legit my bread and butter. It's not nothing that the

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thing that most changed my life was realizing this and working with this. But also in Anchored, my six-month program, this is what we do.

We focus on our functional freeze and how it's showing up and how it's effing our lives, and we shift it, we change it. We use Somatic Experiencing, we use sensorimotor psychotherapy, we use dance and five rhythms, and breath work and, and, and, and to see this, to shift this, to move through.

It's wild to me that I haven't talked about on the show. And frankly, what happened is, I thought I talked about it and so I just kept moving. Obviously I have a list of all the show topics, and someone DM'ed me asking about feeling like they were revved up but shut down at the same time, tired but wired. I was like, "Oh, of course I have an episode about that. I probably have like 25," and found I have zero. So, we are rectifying this problem right now.

Okay, so, one more little preamble before we dive in. It's a nerd alert for my deep nervous system nerds. As you're listening and you're like, "Wait, functional freeze," and my term somatic-self disconnection, "This sounds an awful lot like Kathy Kain's faux window of tolerance."

"And that has a lot of resonance with coupling dynamics, like over- and under-coupling. But hold on, that also sounds like global high activation;" over-coupled everything. When someone's in global high activation and freeze at the same time, "So, wait, I'm confused."

My darling, my tender nerd, you've been reading an awful lot. I know. I've been at the same trainings, reading the same books, and working with the same mentors. These are all lenses on the same kind of thing. Right? Kathy Kain brings a slightly different texture to it. So does Judith Blackstone. So does Peter Levine. So does Pat Ogden.

We all bring our own slightly different lens on it, and I add to that discourse around this by bringing in emotional outsourcing. Which, for folks who are

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new, emotional outsourcing is the umbrella term that I coined to talk about codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits, and survival skills. We don't use those words as labels around here. We're doing ourselves dirty when we do.

And so, I talk about functional freeze and codependency and how one begets the other and keeps the other rocking and rolling. So, that's my addition. But yeah, we're all kind of talking about a lot of the same things in slightly different languages, that resonates for different people in different ways.

I think that's absolutely beautiful. I think we need it. We need all of it so that all of us can learn. Because if you read Pat Ogden, and you're like, "Oh, um...", just read Kathy Kain. Come here and listen to me. Keep learning until it lands in your body, right?

Obviously, this is a podcast not just a somatic practice, but listen to my words, and listen to your body, and how your body reacts and responds and talks to you as you hear me talk. Just be present. Just see what happens. Just get curious, so you can start to move this work from the cognitive sphere, from the mind, into the body.

Okay, so let's talk about what functional freeze or somatic-self disconnection is. It is a state of chronic dysregulation or imbalance between the sympathetic, fight or flight, and parasympathetic, rest and digest, branches within the ANS; the autonomic or automatic nervous system.

That nervous system is responsible for regulating bodily functions not under conscious control; heart rate, thyroid, digestion, reproductive function, stress. Along with having a really important impact on mood, emotion, sensation, feelings.

This is when you hear about Polyvagal Theory, the work of Dr. Stephen Porges, and of course, the goddess Deb Deena. Polyvagal Theory is

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talking about how the vagus nerve, which has three branches, is part and parcel of the autonomic nervous system, and is the thing that makes the magic happen. The magic is, being a human with feelings and emotions, and also digestion and thyroid.

So, we've got sympathetic, fight or flight, freakout. We've got parasympathetic. Within that we have ventral vagal, the safe and social part of the nervous system. We've also got dorsal shutdown, which is the frozen, checked out, 'I'm not home. I'm not here. I'm not present in my body.'

This is the nervous system state of last, last, last regard. Last response. You're toast when your body goes into this state. We're going to get into a lot of detail about what it feels like, in just a moment.

Functional freeze is the mixed nervous system state where your foot is all up on the proverbial nervous system gas. You are all revved up in sympathetic fight or flight. You're full of adrenaline. You're full of norepinephrine. Eventually, you're full of cortisol. You're buzzing.

You've got majillion shots of espresso of buzzing anxiety in you about the world, other people and things. Everything feels maybe a little bit kind of dangerous, right? Because that's what sympathetic is. Sympathetic is, 'I'm in danger and I need to flight or fight.' So, that's happening.

Meanwhile, your self-same nervous system, also has a foot firmly on the brakes, and is saying, "Shut this party down. There is no way I can survive this experience. Put this animal into dorsal shutdown. Freeze. Disconnect."

You're in sympathetic about the world, and you're in freeze about your inner life, your emotions, your true desires, your inner voice, your wants, your needs, your authenticity.

Let's feel into it. Revved up and shut down. Revved up, anxious, worried, what's happening? Shut down to feelings, thank you very much. Oof, at the

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same time, worried and anxious and stressed about all the things outside you.

Whether other people like you, if they're happy with you, if you're producing enough and well enough, if they're going to reject you and abandon you? If, if, anxious, if-if-if. While shut down to yourself. Shut down to your feelings. "I don't need feelings. I'm fine. I don't have feelings. It's okay."

If I had a shiny little nickel for every time, especially in my teenage years, I said, "I'm fine. I'm fine. I don't have feelings. I'm fine. I don't need feelings. I'm fine." I can laugh now, but man that sucked. Whoo, that's functional freeze; jacked up about the world, shut down to you.

This dysregulation or imbalance in your nervous system can keep your body reacting as though there is imminent danger, when there really just isn't. You're jacked up on freakout hormones in moments that are actually not truly scary or dangerous, in any way, to grown up you.

Moments like when your partner wants to talk. Like when a loving kind partner's like, "Hey, babe, let's talk." And you're like, eek. I didn't mean to make a full-on donkey or Eeyore noise, but I think that's the sound that my soul made for like 20 years. When someone would be like, "Maria Beatriz Victoria, I need to speak with you," it made that donkey noise.

I'd get all anxious about them, and what they were going to say, what was going to happen externally. But my feelings? Steel trap around them. Yeah. Or this could happen when you need to make a decision, and you're worried that someone will be upset with you if you make the wrong call. Or if you need to call a doctor's office and before you've even picked up the phone, you're braced against them being mean or rude or cold.

I could go on with examples, but the point is this, you are so disconnected from yourself you don't even realize or recognize the emotions within you.

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You couldn't name them if someone really insisted that you do. The fear, worry, frustration, disappointment, anger, oof, those are untouchable.

They're hidden away because expressing them, feeling them, especially in a family awash with codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, that was not safe. That was not smart. And you, my love, are no fool. You're not an idiot. What are you going to feelings for? So you can get negated, isolated, shut down, treated like crap, told, "Oh, honey, get over it, you're fine. Your fall wasn't that bad, you just have a little scrape. Get up?"

Or, the opposite side of the spectrum here, if you fell off the monkey bars and your parents super hyper overreacted. My ex-mother-in-law was like this. Someone would get the tiniest scrape, and it was as though they had had a field amputation during the American Civil War, while biting on a bullet. Everything was catastrophic.

We talk about catastrophizing in Episode 134. And so, if that's your parent, would you want to say that you had a feeling? I would keep all those feelings very close to the chest, thank you very much. And I think I would actually, eventually, stop feeling them. Right? Because, why bother, if you're going to get negated or it's going to lead to a crisis moment?

Don't be the kid causing the crisis, in either direction. That is not a safe and smart decision for a very small animal that is physically, energetically, emotionally, financially, where-does-the-food-come-ly dependent on their humans.

And so, what happens? Well, the anxiety, the sympathetic, ends up driving the bus, clouding your vision of your actual true feelings, and disconnecting you more and more and more from your somatic or bodily experience of yourself.

So many of us who live this way are so used to this that we're not even conscious of being anxious. Your leg is jittering, you speak, move and walk,

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and get it all done really fast. You think at the speed of light, and maybe you bang into walls or corners because you're moving so fast through the world.

You're racing through it. Trying to get through, trying to push through life as if moving fast would somehow burn up all that anxious energy. But that call is coming from within, and so it's not going to stop till you collapse.

Or maybe you're not the jittery sort. Maybe you look steady, still functional, dependable on the outside, but you're buzzing inside. And either way you're applauded, you're lauded. "Oh my god, you get so much done. You're a superwoman. Look at supermom over here."

You're just out there being functional, or even highly functional by external capitalist standards; getting advanced degrees, getting married, buying cars and houses, and having kids, and getting promotions. You're functional, and likely over-functioning in the world.

You maybe wouldn't call yourself anxious, or maybe you would but in the like 'Isn't everyone' kind of way? So, you're not anxious, but your leg jiggles and shakes a whole ton, and you're pretty darn fast, and your brain is racing a mile a minute. You get more done in an hour than most people do in a month, because you race around your house or your office like a whirling dervish.

Wait, sitting down and resting? "No, what? Me? No, I'm fine. No, no, seriously, I'm good. I'm good. I would rest if I needed to, but I don't need the rest. I'm fine. I mean, let's be honest. I'm always fine." That's the freeze part. "Always fine," is the freeze part.

"No, I'm totally cool. Sit down. Watch the movie. Does anyone need popcorn, drinks? Can I get you anything? I'm actually just going to run the vacuum real quick because this is during the previews or whatever. I don't need to watch the trailer. I'm just going to do..." "But also, the dog, she

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needs to get her hair crimped. Because who wants a dog with just straight hair, right? I'm just going to do that real quick." You see where we're going?

Or maybe it's just you learning how to adapt to looking like you're chillin.' So, you're watching TV while Instagram is on your phone. But also, you have the computer open or maybe working on a spreadsheet, while also texting. But maybe knitting, too. But you're good. You're totally good. You're fine, you're good. Right?

I'm exhausted just talking about how I used to be. Oh my God, I never rested. I really have only learned how to rest in the last few years. It's a really stunning. And unshocking news, while I was in an abusive situation, I never could rest. I would never sit. I mean, I was constantly criticized for everything, always. So, sitting, no.

But it's really only now that I've found all this somatic safety within myself, and have called in a partner who meets me in such a healing safe way, I'm like a champion at resting now. I'm deeply proud of it. I'm being profoundly earnest.

I'm so proud of my capacity to rest, as someone who lived in functional freeze and somatic self-disconnection, and had really profound codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits for decades.

While you're moving through the world at the speed of childhood trauma and codependency-laden upbringing, long repressed, at the same time, you and me are wicked shut down to our own inner world. Numb to things like feelings, wants, needs, preferences, even.

You go with the flow so hard you don't even know you're in a river anymore. You can't even tell that your feet are wet; you're just appeasing everyone. And you are so not present in your own life, your own world, your own

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body, and why would you be? It's never been a smart thing to be in the past, why start now?

That's the point to focus on. Our nervous system stay revved up and we're just chilling, living life, and it's not even being life. We stay in that chronic alert and also find ourselves deeply frozen, checked out. Not present to ourselves, our emotions, and in many ways, the world around us.

Running from old scripts through a life that we don't hate, but we don't know that we really like. Because to be honest, we aren't present and really in it. The lights are on but no one is home. This is functional freeze.

So, my nerds, let's pause for Nervous System 101: Nerding on what freeze is. It's one of the three primary stress responses regulated by the ANS, alongside what we've been talking about; fight-or-flight sympathetic, and ventral vagal, the human steady state, safe and social setting.

When a human perceives a threat, whether it's physical, emotional, psychological, the ANS will shoot us into fight-or-flight sympathetic. We will do our best to get away from danger. But should it become clear that we cannot escape, the ANS will activate the freeze response as a last ditch survival mechanism, when death seems imminent.

So, let's talk for a moment about how freeze feels. It's this profound lack of presence. You're never actually really where you are when you're in freeze. Your body is, but you aren't. It feels like being numb, being frozen, stuck. Listen, I'm a chatterbox's chatterbox, and in freeze, I have no clue what to say or what I'm feeling or, frankly, even what's happening.

I am so checked out of the world and myself, it's like my entire body is a block of ice, and especially my brains. I can't feel my feels. I've lost connection with true empathy. My brain is in auto drive of 'Danger, danger, danger, danger, danger, danger.' But not like the panicky danger, just, 'Danger,

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danger, danger.' It wants to just shut the situation down so I can get out of it. So, I can escape to safety.

For me, fun is generally activated when I'm in freeze; lots about that in Episodes 208 and 209. So, when freeze gets activated, especially functional freeze, I seek to appease from fawn. This happened an awful lot in the aforementioned super lousy marriage with a person with major anger control issues.

I would go into freeze quickly, and often, when I made terrible mistakes, like asking them to help clean up after the dinner I would cook. What would generally happen, should I make such a mistake, is that they would start to scream and berate me. I'd find myself completely frozen inside. They were also a lot taller than me, and had like 100 pounds on me, so it was scary in several levels.

And so, I'd be frozen inside. Meanwhile, I would feel this racing, revving energy to make it stop while fawning. My language would come from fawn and would sound like, "You know what? You're totally right. It was totally my fault for asking you to do the dishes. I know you worked all day."

Meanwhile, I had seen like 20 patients, as a primary care provider. "I'm so sorry. I shouldn't have done that. You're right. You're right." You see the tones of freeze here? "You're right, I'm fine. You're right. I'm fine." Whatever it takes to make the onslaught stop.

So, that was my experience of functional freeze. Just one experience. I want to be very clear here, that it doesn't require an intense moment or an abusive or dangerous, scary moment for functional freeze to come to the surface, or to be just how we get through. It's often activated by everyday interactions at work, with our parents, with our kids, even with our friends.

A similar flavor of freeze can happen when we get called out, called on to give an opinion out of nowhere, when meeting new people and they do that

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rapid fire personal questions thing. By the way, I really don't do well with that. Please, stop doing that to people. No one likes the Spanish Inquisition.

You know what I mean? When you just meet someone and they're like, "Okay, where are you from? Are your parents still together? Are they still alive? What do they do for work? What do you do for work?" You know what I mean?

This functional freeze can also arise in a host of other moments when your particular individual, magical, just-for-you nervous system says, "That crosses a line into danger to self." Based on experiences from your childhood, your ancestral line, or another previous challenging time in your nervous system.

So, your nervous system freezes your inside experience, and puts on a brave face; a good girl or good boy face on the outside. You get to work functioning and overfunctioning, to make sure your tender middle is protected, and your reputation at work too.

What does freeze look like? Well, it looks like immobilization. The freeze response is characterized by a temporary state of shutdown, reducing unnecessary movements and conserving energy. Muscles can become tense as we brace for impact. Which is a super challenging, stuck feeling in the body.

It's feeling like we can't move our limbs, can't get up from a chair, definitely can't talk or defend ourselves. We lose access to our smarts, to our logic, to explaining ourselves. I often felt stuck in the fetal position on the bed. Or like I was weighed down in my chair and couldn't stand or move, and my brain and thinking was also immobile.

Again, chatterbox that I generally am, I had no access to my words. My body would go into the stock-still kind of energy and attempt to save my

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life. And so, here's where I want to remind us of our favorite metáfora. T-Rexes could only see you if you were moving. So, if you're not moving you're less likely to be lunch.

If you're worried that you're about to become a T-Rex snack, immobilization is your best friend. Your heart rate and blood pressure are reduced, which makes sense if you think about lion attacks. If you get bit you won't bleed out as fast; isn't that wild?

It's as if time slows down in freeze to help you to conserve energy, but also making life feel really surreal. Pain sensation is decreased. Endogenous endorphins and cannabinoids are released into the body in freeze, and contemporarily reduce the perception of physical pain.

So again, if you're bit by a lion it won't hurt so much as you try to escape, which is absolutely genius. It also reduces our amount of empathy towards ourself and others, which can make interpersonal relating while we're in a functional freeze pretty challenging.

Finally, heightened sensory awareness. Paradoxically, and this is so fascinating, the freeze response can lead to heightened sensory awareness. We shut down to ourselves, while also becoming hyper vigilant externally and have increased perception of our surroundings. Because fool me once, I'm on high alert to detect any further potential threat that maybe coming my way.

So, in the context of functional freeze, those freeze responses become chronic. Adaptive to your past and your history, though, maybe not your current reality. I just want to make sure that's clear. Something that led you to shut down and go into freeze in the past can get projected onto your current reality.

Even if it's not the same thing, and it really isn't in the ballpark of the same thing, your nervous system can just shut down. Because it feels a lot safer

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to just assume something's a lion and figure it out later, than to be like, "Oh, it's probably a tabby cat," and then you're lunch, right? Make sense. So, functional freeze, or somatic self-disconnection, can manifest in a host of ways, both physically and psychologically.

When I started piecing these things together, as I was doing my trainings and learned about it, I was really shocked at how many of my own physical experiences and those of my patients were pretty direct evidence of functional freeze being part of their picture. Again, maybe not the whole picture, but definitely part of it for sure.

So, on the physical plane, folks in functional freeze often have chronic muscle tension from all that bracing we were just talking about. All that cortisol is exhausting, leading to fatigue and sleep disturbances like feeling tired but wired at night. Which also tracks with what's called "adrenal fatigue." Which is often really just functional freeze. We talked about that in Episode 7.

Gastrointestinal problems like IBS, SIBO, chronic heartburn, and to brag I've had all of them. I no longer have any of them on the other side of functional freeze, which is pretty dope. It can lead to allergies and food sensitivities, histamine issues, MCAS (Mast Cell Activation Syndrome), autoimmune issues, chronic pain and so much more. Resulting from prolonged stress and the body's inability to return to ventral vagal, much less to a state of relaxation.

When you're in functional freeze, it's like relaxation "Never met her." Am I right? Common psychological signs of functional freeze include what you would expect; anxiety and depression, along with emotional numbness, reduced capacity for joy or excitement, difficulty forming and maintaining relationships.

Feeling hyper alert or hyper vigilant but unable to take action, to move or change your situation is super common. Dysregulated nervous system

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function can lead to emotional instability and impaired emotional regulation, and just general flatness.

Sometimes with bouts of big emotions, like really big, mad, sad, glad, overly excited. It's like if you hold a beach ball under the water for a really, really long time, and when you release it, it's going to explode out into the air. That's what happens in functional freeze.

You hold the feels down and down and stay out of presence to your own lived experience, and when you do finally have a full human feeling it can be so huge, after so long of emotions being frozen inside.

Now listen, and this is important to ask, those of us good at masking, particularly us neurodivergent folks who know how to look good on the outside no matter what we can feel on the inside. We can fake it pretty darn well and can appear to have the gamut of human emotions, which might lead us to think that we do, but we're rarely actually feeling our feelings, as discussed in Episodes 241 and 242, when we're also living in functional freeze.

So, this is just something to get curious about. Just using compassion and curiosity and care for self. Just start to ask yourself: Am I really feeling this feeling or am I putting on a mask that lets others think I'm having the feelings? Am I just thinking my way through the feelings or am I really feeling them and processing them through my body? Meaning, once I've given them space, have they moved through in a real way?

It's a beautiful thing to get curious about. Not to pathologize yourself, but just to get curious. Furthermore, functional freeze can show up as perfectionism, list-doing but never progressing, feeling wicked challenged around decision making; see the aforementioned perfectionism. Poor listening skills, which is not because you don't care, but because you aren't actually fully in the room.

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So, you might think, “Dammit, people talk and I don't really hear it. What's wrong with me?” Nothing's wrong with you, you're just in functional freeze. You aren't present. Which can lead you to come across as flaky, unable to follow through or keep commitments. Again, because of ‘not there.’ Feeling numb, unmotivated, helpless, hopeless. Again, because you're not there. Having what appears to be poor memory.

There's some complexity. We understand that with a history of trauma there's complexity in how memory gets written into the hippocampus. So, we're going to hold that as a truth. But in functional freeze, what appears to be poor memory is that we're just not there. We're not present. So, of course, you can't recall later what you never actually heard in the moment, because you weren't actually in the room.

This happened to me all the time. Where my ex would be like, “Well, what exactly did I say?” And if I couldn't reproduce their words literally, word by word, then I wasn't to be believed. But my brain wouldn't hold on to the words because I was so overwhelmed and slow flooded, that I wasn't registering it.

Functional freeze, right? Nothing wrong with me. This whole functional freeze thing matters to me because I was so gaslit into believing there was something profoundly wrong with me. That I was the identified patient. That it was always my fault. That I needed to do more. Because I was so deep in functional freeze, I believed it and it kept me in functional freeze.

So, once I understood this, and could really see somatic self-disconnection for what it is, I was able to see the rest of the picture and I was able to rescue myself, and get out of that situation and to reclaim my life. Pretty cool, huh?

Functional freeze can show up having a penchant for a buffer. Buffers like alcohol or substance use, TV, scrolling, online shopping, food, drugs, self-help, overthinking, ruminating, feeling stuck in your thoughts, in your habits

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and your behaviors, in your situation. Because, my love, your nervous system is stuck in a lot of ways. You're in freeze. Right?

And if you're curious, "Wait, is this buffering? Or is this like something helpful for me, this thing I'm doing?" Episode 105 "Buffering Vs. Conscious Distraction," is all about it.

Beyond all the physiologic experiences we just detailed, we do a lot of stuff that can often be secondary to living in functional freeze. As always, I'm not saying this is a one to one thing where if you do X and it's because of Y... I'm just so not into that Instagram diagnosing thing.

We are complex animals. What we do is multifactorial; who we are, how we show up. Since we're on the subject, if it doth quacketh like a duck, might a duck not it be?

So, what are some things we do that are super common in functional freeze? Well, we experienced stagnation in our careers. Staying in a dead-end job or never pursuing our truest passions. We choose the monotony of a stable but soul sapping job over risking going for our dream career, paralyzed by the fear of stepping out of our comfort zone.

We struggle to commit or maintain relationships. Like Lisa, who sabotaged her romantic prospects whenever intimacy began to develop because she feared vulnerability, for very smart childhood reasons.

And by the way, everything I'm listing is for an incredibly logical, understandable childhood reason. These things, these habits come from survival skills and are *not* things to be ashamed of. Not on my watch, okay? We don't beat ourselves up. We say, "Of course, I did." Episodes 113 and 134 are all about "Of course, I did. Of course, they did."

Okay, so let's keep going. We're almost done for today, I promise. Struggling to commit or maintain relationships, staying in relationships way too long; that was mine. And it can also lead to what the amazing Dr. Jules

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Netherland, PhD, one of my dearest and bestest friends, what she calls, chain smoking dates, or chain smoking girlfriends.

This is an expression of her creation, which speaks to when we start dating someone when the flames of the last relationship are still smoldering in the proverbial ashtray. Like chronic monogamy, or chronic non-monogamy. But going from date to date, relationship to relationship, without taking a moment to breathe in the middle.

In the midst, we develop a stoic facade to attempt to protect ourselves from emotional pain. Reminiscent of Alex, who rarely expressed emotions, even in the face of joy or sadness. Leading to isolation, first from themselves and then from the people in their life as they had a harder and harder time connecting with their stoic, 'always fine, thank you,' friend Alex.

Because we are so disconnected from our bodies, our physical health is often ignored. We neglect our bodies. We don't go see our clinicians, often because we don't believe anyone can or will help us, even if we ask for help.

There's also some overlap here with rejection sensitivity, which is a big thing in the ADD, ADHD world, and other neurodivergent communities. But I often see it in functional freeze, where we fear rejection. And so, I made casual reference to doctors' offices, clinical offices, the front desk, or the scheduler, as being mean or rude or sharp. Or not gentler or kinder, I don't remember. "Oh, the person on the other end of this phone is scared for their health.

I was talking to a client the other day who called to try to make a primary care appointment because she had this chest pain that was really scary. The woman on the phone was really curt with her and she just hung up crying. It took her weeks to get back on the phone, until the chest pain got really bad. Right?

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So, we have a lot of rejection sensitivity. Just while I'm on a soapbox, if you work front desk at a clinical office, please, please, please be kind or move to billing if you can't be kind. And if you are a clinician, please talk to your front desk. A really kind front desk saves lives. I mean it very literally.

We allow fear to dictate our life decisions. Like my client Marla, who declined a life changing opportunity because she feared the unknown and didn't want to move to another city because, well, scary.

We default to people pleasing. Constantly seeking external validation and becoming a people pleaser and to avoid confrontation. As seen in Carolina, who would never say no, even when she was overwhelmed and stretched to the max. She never wanted to be a burden to someone else, so she would take their burden on her own little shoulders.

We make an identity out of tolerating repetitive patterns that don't serve us. Like staying in healthy or unfulfilling, unenriching relationships, jobs, careers, cities, and friendships because they feel familiar. Or because we want to fix the other person, to rescue them.

Like Lucia, who repeatedly found herself in unsatisfying, but kind of good enough relationships, because that's what she grew up with and saw in her parents' relationship. People who tolerated each other, lived in the same house but definitely weren't a team, and probably didn't even like each other, but stuck with it because they were in it.

Struggling to establish and maintain boundaries, leading to feelings of being taken advantage of. Just like Sam, who felt constantly drained by others demands but never actually said no, or, "I'm not available for that," because that would never have felt safe in their childhood. So, their nervous system just kept them from setting those adult boundaries.

Effing up your own jam preventatively, because you're so used to it happening anyway, is a typical functional freeze move. Sabotaging your

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own success or happiness, as demonstrated by Chris, who always found a way to ruin good opportunities out of deep seated self-doubt. And come on now, who hasn't done this one?

Finally, continuing to live in emotional outsourcing, codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, and to have a relationship with self and others based on a deep belief that you are not inherently worthy of love, thus needing others to prove it to you all the time. Which, let's be frank, is most of us listening, because functional freeze and emotional outsourcing go hand in hand.

Okay, that was a lot. Let's take a collective breath. A nice deep breath in. Long, slow out. Remember, it's the slow out that calms the nervous system. The breath in is cue, but it's the out that lets your body know you're not being chased by a lion. Right? Anything that makes you pause reminds you you're not currently being chased by a lion.

Remember, when we're talking about the nervous system, we need to remember we're talking about a spectrum of experience. So, you can be largely in ventral vagal, with just a little sympathetic or a little dorsal. And you can have a little bit of functional freeze in a moment, or with a specific person or people, at a certain job, or whatever it is in other settings.

For example, back in the day, I felt a lot of ventral vagal when I was at the gym or at yoga with my friends, at work with my patients and my clients, when I was volunteering, walking in Prospect Park, or spending time in nature and traveling.

Then I'd go home to my emotionally abusive relationship, and I would feel my body, my sympathetic activation, just rev as I climb the stairs. I would get anxious the further I went up, and I would also feel like a steel cage clamped down hard around my heart and my feeling.

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So, I felt all the nervous systems states in different extents, in different settings. And that's natural and normal, it's how bodies work. I want to invite you to hold loving, gentle space for all the parts of you.

Next week, we'll be back to talk about how we got this way, how we start to shift out of this nervous system state and back towards ventral vagal. And, we're going to do something fun. We're going to look at several examples of folks, real folks, from my decade of coaching; anonymized, of course.

To help us to really dig into what all of this looks like, IRL, and what it looks like to live differently. I've gotten quite a few emails and DMs saying that you really like it when I share examples. So, here you go. Ask for what you need, and bada-boom, you can have it.

I will also remind you to take a moment, do it right now, to make sure you're subscribed to the show or follow the show, so you don't miss the rest of this really important miniseries. It's super vital information for us as we work to overcome our emotional outsourcing and step into greater self-love and joy.

Okay, my loves, let's do what we do. A 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. I'll 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.