

Ep #218: Somatics and Interdependence



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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 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. I'm really hoping you can hear the birds in the background. It has been absolutely luscious and incredible to wake up here in the woods on occupied Munsee Lenape territory, the Hudson Valley of New York, to the sound of all these birds. It is just magnificent. I'm just so grateful. My nervous system rejoices each and every day to wake up to seeing the trees starting to bud all around the house and hearing all this gorgeous bird song.

We have several bird feeders around the house, and I'm turning into like one of those birding ladies. You know what I got to tell you? I'm not mad about it. That's pretty dope. I want to get us going today with a quote from Carla McLaren. This is in talking about somatics, our topic for today.

“I began to see the upwelling of powerful emotions as the human version of the kicking, trembling, and struggling animal do when they come back to their bodies after a trauma. Gingerly, I began to include the furies, depressions, griefs, and accelerations in my work. I watched in awe as people became whole again. The emotions taught me more than anyone or anything else ever has or could.”

Oof, isn't that beautiful? I watched in awe as people became whole again. That's been my experience in somatics as well. It has been the most powerful modality for my own return to my wholeness. So today we're going to explore this topic, one near and dear to my heart, somatics. From there we will explore the connection between the body and the mind and how somatic practices can play a role in supporting us, in liberating ourselves from emotional outsourcing.

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Those old codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing survival skills and thought habits that so many of us carry throughout our lives and might feel really stuck in, or might feel like define who we are. I'm here, as always, before we even dive in to call complete BS on that, on you labeling yourself a codependent person, a people pleaser, a perfectionist.

Oh, my darling, I'm here to remind you you're not broken. You don't need to be fixed. You just have habits from your socialization and conditioning, from your family of origin, yes, even if you had a darn good childhood, that may have left you looking outside of yourself for validation, for proof of your worthiness, for safety.

Somatic practices help us to return home to ourselves, to truly experience our emotions as an energetic within our body, and to let them move through us instead of being stagnant, which they so often are when we are trying to perform being good and lovable and exactly what other people want us to be from our emotional outsourcing.

Through somatic practices, we can experience giving ourselves that which we seek from others in a deeply grounded, centered, embodied way. Not just by changing the stories in our brain, not just from the neck on up. Through somatic practices, we get to remember what it feels like to be whole and to feel your own power, agency, and capacity in your whole body. I would like to testify that feels so good. So very, very good.

So let's back up. If you don't know what somatics are, then I bet you're like, what is she prattling on about? So soma means body in Greek because it wouldn't be a show run by a nerd for nerds all about nerding if we didn't start with the etymology, which is different from the entanmenzology, that's the study crumb cake. Delicious. Soma means body in Greek. Somatics are the constellation of modalities that support us in reconnecting with our bodies.

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Through somatic practice, we come to regard the body as the seat of the self and disavow the false dichotomy of mind and body, instead seeing mind and body as one whole, operating together with our feelings and emotions being created within the body as felt sensation and interpreted by the brain as stories about how we feel. Stories that are run through the lens of our socialization, our conditioning, what we learned in our families and our religious communities, the shame, the blame, the guilt, the stories.

So our felt experience runs through the stories as we do what humans are built to do, which is engage in meaning making. Somatics help us return to the meaning the body makes of the body's lived experience. Do you see how different that is? One is someone else's stories, a society's story, stories you learned outside of yourself. The somatic experience of your stories, of your emotions, is your very own and no one else's.

Somatics in a study of sensation movement experience holds that many of us humans, especially in our postindustrial, late stage capitalist societies, have come to deeply mistrust our bodies, our physical self. We've really been taught to put our everything into our thinking. So we walk around in that split state in which we have a body but don't realize that we are bodies. We forget that we're part of life, that we are, at the end of the day, animals.

So that we are, as I talked about in episode 190, actually just taller toddlers. Toddlers who've been on this planet for longer, and have basic biological needs, impulses, imperatives that must be attended to. Instead we burn the candle at both ends. We burn ourselves out, we work ourselves to the bone, and we forget to rest. We say there's no time, there's no energy, there's no capacity. That's the demand of our postindustrial, late stage capitalist society under white settler colonialism and the patriarchy, right?

Add to that trauma, stress, distress, trauma, pressures, stories, imperatives from our personal history about what makes one good and lovable, what the role of a good girl, a good boy in this world is. These stories split us

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further from ourselves. Our experiences, particularly those that are stress, distress, and trauma, can also leave us feeling quite unsafe in our bodies, distrustful of our bodies.

In the past, we may have learned, adopted, created, lived into, for many of us, created an identity, such as I am codependent around survival strategies that may have totally, once upon a time, saved our lives in really, really, really important ways.

Those habits, those survival skills, they live in our bodies as emotional ways of reacting to the world, especially when we're under stress, that may not actually be the reaction of our integrated self. They may not be you as adult you reacting, but an inner child driving a bus, an old, wounded, in pain part directing how you react.

Meanwhile, somatic practices involve paying attention to bodily sensations and using them to understand and transform our mental and emotional patterns so we can understand what we're actually doing in life, how we're feeling, how we're living, what our bodily experience of life is, and how that has been shaped by our habitual, unintentional default patterns.

As we gain more facility and more understanding of self as it was written by the world, like what is the story? I am this person, right? What is the identity that you wrote because it's what you learned to write? You can then step into choicefulness. You can start to ask questions like do I still want to live this way? Do I still want to live this way, to react this way, to feel this way?

If yes and you're like yeah, actually, this is dope. Then somatic practices can support you in stepping into that more, to stepping in to all the glimmers, right, which we talked out in episode 62. If when asked, your body says no, living this way sucks. I don't want to be reactive. I don't want to always get angry. I don't want to lash out at the people I love and then feel guilty about it and feel like I have to apologize. I don't like how I'm

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showing up. Then you can ask your body what it needs so you can begin to live life in a really different way.

The only way I have learned to truly do that is through somatic practices that put me into ever greater touch with my own body, my own authenticity. Through those practices... Here, you know what? Actually, let me pause and share an example from just the other day.

So someone who I love very deeply and previous to this moment felt a lot of trust with was less than careful with my heart. I feel like that's how I want to say that. There's definitely a teenage part of me that wants to be like oh, they were a butthead, but I'm not going to do that.

I'm going to honor that teenage part of me. But adult, whole, integrated me says that person was in their own triggers, and they were not kind to me. They were not careful with my tender raviolis, and they know I'm a tender ravioli. I trusted them to come towards me with interdependence, love, caring, kindness, and they did not. It was incredibly painful, incredibly hurtful.

In that moment, I absorbed what they said. I let them know that I was not available for them to speak to me in that way any further, and that I would be getting off the phone. I did not yell. I did not scream. I did not throw the phone. Five years ago me would have like thrown the phone across the room or called them a name or been like wham, wham, wham.

Instead, I leaned into all my somatic capacity to regulate my nervous system, to ground myself, to center myself in me, to be choiceful. I made an adult decision, a challenging one, let me tell you what, right. It's not that it was a challenging decision. It was that it required the mobilization of a lot of years of skill and practice to stay grounded in my wholeness. That's what it was. I was able to do it. I feel very proud of myself for that.

Then when I got home, I was able to stay with myself instead of buffering. I felt the urge to buffer. Come on now, I'm a human. But I didn't, right? I

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didn't pour a drink. I didn't start doom scrolling. I didn't call someone to tell them how terrible this person is. I didn't buffer. I went to my room, my office. I put on music, and I cried. I cried a lot, and I danced, and I moved, and I cried, and I moved the feelings through my body. That's the power of somatic practice.

Later in the day, when my partner was here and I was telling Billy all about this moment, I felt this desire as I was telling her about it. It just like welled up in me, this like anger, this sympathetic activation, this like rage. Old me, five and ten years ago me, would have thrown something, would have broken something, would have completed that stress activation cycle and let that rage out.

In that moment, I didn't. I took a deep breath. I had my own back in a powerful way. I trusted myself to show up how I want to as adult me and not from default. I showed up in an interdependent way for my partner by managing my own emotions, my mind, and by resourcing my nervous system instead of letting old defaults drive the bus. I smashed zero things, I want to tell you.

Instead, I voiced it. I said babe, I'm feeling the sympathetic activation. I'm feeling like there's a part of me that wants to do these things to get the energy out. She said what's your resource here? I said fast movement. She said what can that look like right now? I said sprinting in our driveway. She said cool. Let's put on our sneakers. Right?

So we put on our sneakers and our sports bras, and we sprinted and ran, and I got it out instead of attacking it out, aggressing it out. I stayed in sacred anger, right? I guess just realized that, right? Like I stayed in the sacredness of the anger instead of aggressing. We talked about healthy, sacred anger in episodes 206 and 207. My darlings, it felt amazing. I mean, I wish that person had like managed themselves and not come at me, but the way I was able to respond felt amazing. I know it was the result of all the years of nervous system and somatic work I've done.

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So let's zoom out to ask how can somatic practices play a role in supporting us stepping out of the three components of emotional outsourcing, codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing thinking? So we're going to start by defining terms because nerds are going to nerd.

Codependent thinking is a pattern of beliefs and behaviors where you prioritize the needs of others over your own in an attempt to source safety, validation, and worthiness from other people, places, and things because you are somatically disconnected from your capacity to do that, to create safety, validation, and worth for yourself.

This often leads to a lack of boundaries, difficulty saying no, and a feeling of being responsible for other people's happiness because, again, if they aren't happy with you, your whole nervous system gets really freaked out because it believes others create your safety. Somatic practices can help you become more aware of your bodily sensations and emotions and thoughts that arise in response to other people's needs.

By becoming more in tune with your own bodily signals, you can start to feel into the ways your biology, body, felt experience of being alive is shifted in relation to others. Osho, that is, you can start to understand what are your own endogenous or self-generated emotional experiences, and which are the result of you taking on other people's emotions, wants, needs and making them your problem, your responsibility?

Through somatic practices you can start to identify that's my own feeling, and that's how I want to respond. Versus that's her emotions vibrating through my body because I have a history of taking those on. Or oh, that is them trying to guilt me, and I am not available for that. From there, from recognizing that, you can step into your own choicefulness, an agency from which you can begin to set boundaries. Saying no when you want and take care of your own needs in an interdependent way versus the old codependent way.

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Perfectionist thinking is a tendency to set high standards, kind of often like ridiculously, not humanly high standards for yourself and others, often leading to feelings of inadequacy and self-criticism, self-doubt, and often comes from a fear that you're not worthy of love or care unless you are constantly performing your perfection, also known as your loveability. That's a thing I sure learned in childhood was that I had to constantly evidence my worth through actions, or I felt like I was never seen and certainly didn't matter.

I'll also just add to that the flip of that perfectionism for me was after so many years of trying and trying and trying to be seen, trying to be recognized and understood by being perfect and playing by someone else's game I realized it was not going to happen. So I started to sort of disappear into myself. I'm just going to put that down because I think it's important, and we'll come back to that in another show. It's called functional freeze. It's one of my favorite things to talk about.

So somatic practices can help us to tune into the bodily sensations that arise when we are striving for perfection. We can notice how they impact our thoughts, emotions, our digestion, our energy levels, our mood, our sleep, our everything. Through that process, by recognizing what's happening in the body, it can help us to step into curiosity around those impulses instead of old blame and shame.

The old worry and fear that may have arisen when you thought about maybe not being perfect, when you contemplated the possibility of failure or something terrible happening like getting an A minus instead of that big A plus. I say it like it sounds like a joke, but like wow, it's really real in our bodies and our minds, right? Feels devastating. Oh for when we think about something even worse, like potentially letting someone down.

Which makes me think of a client of mine in Anchored, which is my six month program. She shared recently on our weekly coaching calls that she started having panic attacks when she started dating in early college. This

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was something that she realized through the somatics we do every week in Anchored and we do in Somatic Studio, my new Somatics offering. She realized that those panic attacks were pretty much 100% linked to worrying that she would disappoint her partner who would then leave her. Then her limbic or lizard brain would immediately fast forward to our favorite place to go, you guessed it, dying cold and alone on a mountainside, right?

So by becoming aware of these patterns here that she had to be perfect or she would die cold and alone, and that was held in her body, in her limbic system, in her nervous system. By becoming aware of those patterns within each of our own selves, we can begin to develop a more compassionate and accepting relationship with ourselves. To cultivate the three C's of compassion, curiosity, and care.

We can put a little more felt space between ourselves and that old urge to strive for a perfectionist fantasy around your life. Or the flip side that many of us don't even realize we're living from, which is demand perfection of others from a place of fear and control. Acceptance, meanwhile, feels really different in the body and so much better than those old perfectionist experiences, I got to say.

Knowing the felt difference between them has been life changing for me and has allowed me to bring the feeling of acceptance online in my body when I want and need it for myself and others. That has been wow. Ten years ago me is like wait, you can just cultivate acceptance? You can just decide you're going to accept a thing and then you're no longer ruminating about it and judgmental of it and like in a tizzy about it? What? What? It's really true. That shift couldn't have happened if I was just working with my cognition, with my brain, with my mindset. It really had to happen through my body.

People pleasing is a habit in which one prioritizes the needs and desires of others over your own, often leading to a lack of authenticity and a feeling of being disconnected from your own desires and needs, your own life, while

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also filling you up with resentment and generalized grumps because you're living for others instead of you. That just sucks.

Somatic practices can help you to become more in touch with your own bodily sensations and desires. Through that, you can learn to express them in a clear and authentic way by learning to trust yourself and your own truth in your body by developing your intuition and your discernment.

Through somatic practices, recognizing that your wants, what you desire for your life, it's not just a story in your head. It can be a felt experience in your body. Not just a story that can sway in the wind. Your desires become your conviction, your driver in a deep way, and that happens when their resonance is bodily.

By developing a stronger sense of self, you can begin to step out of people pleasing and into you pleasing, and from there can create more fulfilling and authentic relationships with less stress, annoyance, and resentment, which is pretty cute, I'd say.

So let's chat remedies. What are some examples of somatic practices? Well, anything we do to open a conversation with our bodies, ourselves can be a somatic practice. Any movement or moment of stillness whose goal is to be present with self and to come into greater understanding of what your body wants, needs, and is available to communicate can be a somatic practice.

Somatics can also support you in completing the stress activation cycle, episode 17, and in really bringing a sense of peace and completion to your autonomic nervous system. We talk all about the autonomic nervous system polyvagal theory in episodes 61, 135, 172, 195, just like pretty much every episode. So there you go.

One example of a simple, accessible somatic practice is body scanning, where you systemically tune into the sensations in different parts of your body and notice any areas of tension, discomfort, or ease. Asking your

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body what it wants to tell you, what it needs, and then giving yourself that as best you're able, in physical form or even just in your mind's eye, which is also a wildly powerful and effective tool. God bless the visual cortex.

Another example breathwork, where you focus on your breath and use it in different patterns and different ways to regulate your nervous system and calm your mind and to move stuck energies through your nervous system. I am a certified breath work meditation facilitator, trained in a modality similar to and derived from a Pranayama Yogic tradition.

I love to share this practice because it is so powerful. We do it every single month in Anchored as a group, and we do it in the Somatic Studio in different ways throughout our time together. Movement practices like yoga or dance can also be somatic. We dance every single week, usually two to three times a week, in Anchored and in the Somatic Studio too.

Dance free movement is a huge part of my own healing, and it's something that can be so joyful, right? Because so much of the mindset work and somatic work, healing, stress, distress, and trauma can get so heavy, so serious, but it doesn't need to be. We can bring in levity. We can bring in lightness. We can bring in love, passion, joy, pleasure. That's what dance based movement does for me.

In the Somatic Studio and Anchored, we move to more hippie songs, right? Like flutes and stuff like that. But trust and believe there's also a lot of Paula Abdul, CNC Music Factory, Whitney. Come on now. Robin, call your girlfriend. That's what I'm telling you.

Again, we move in these ways because daily joy matters and daily pleasure is healing. So movement practices that involve paying attention to bodily sensation and using movement to shift our mental and emotional patterns are a powerful somatic practice. It's free. It's accessible.

If you're in a wheelchair or on crutches or can move all of your limbs, you can dance. You can move just your pinkies and call it a dance. It's free, and

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it's something I recommend checking out, right? You can close the door. You can be shy about it. But see what liberation may come in allowing your body to move.

Finally, one of my favorite somatic practices is orienting. As always, because you know I love presents, if you head over to victorialbina.com/meditations, you can download a suite of meditations, an inner child meditation, boundaries meditation, and a nervous system orienting somatic practice. It's for free. It's for you because I love you. Go get it.

So, in summary and in conclusion, somatic practices can be incredibly helpful for breaking free from codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing habits, to go from emotionally outsourcing to being the source of your own emotional grounding and centering. By becoming more in tune with your bodily sensations, you can develop a stronger sense of self, can practice and learn how to set healthy boundaries without wanting to die so much.

Notice your girl said so much. You might still want to die at first. For me, it's been like 1% less wants to die each and every time until now it's just like what I do. It's pretty dope. Through that, you can cultivate more authentic and fulfilling relationships.

I'll invite you to start with more bodily awareness as a vital first kitten step in incorporating somatic practices into your daily routine, and to pause to check in with your nervous system and your nervous system state. Make that what you do as part of your minimum baseline thinking as we talked about in episode 78. I love a good minimum baseline.

Make it something that becomes not just what you do, a practice, but how you live, a practice. I'll invite you to notice the positive impact these small moments of reflection have on your life over time. It is so incredibly powerful and is what I credit the most with helping me to find healing from

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my own emotional outsourcing and the stress, distress, and trauma that I have experienced in my life and in my body. So powerful.

So, my love, if you're looking for expert guidance, to learn more about somatics, about the nervous system, about different somatic practices, tools, modalities, ways of really stepping into this as a practice, a way of living, of being, and you want to do that in a cohort with other people because community matters. We talk about it here a lot, right? Community matters deeply for the nervous system.

If you're ready for expert guidance and support, I have been studying the nervous system and somatics for over 20 years, which is just wild. I have something new to tell you about. If you head on over to victorialbina.com/somaticstudio, you can learn all about my new program. It is a twelve week program where you get beautiful in depth lessons from me about these topics. It's like a private podcast where we really, really go deep and hard into the nerd tree and then go into the woo, right? Because all the science and all the woo, that's what we do around here.

Of course, because it's me and your girl's a nurse practitioner, hospice nurse at her core, we get practical. We have practicum calls every week, Q and A sessions with me. There's a Slack where you can ask questions and get support. We dive deep into somatics and into the experience of using these modalities to change our lives.

The first cohort of this latest offering, which is the culmination of my 20 plus years, starts soon, and you're not going to want to miss it. Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/somaticstudio to join now. All right, my beauties, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. When one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety,

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overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive, intimate group coaching program. So head on over to victorialbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.