

Ep #361: You Don't Need Trauma to Have Codependent, Perfectionist, or People-Pleasing Habits



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, somatics and nervous system nerd, and life coach B  a 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. So, when I talk about emotional outsourcing, when I define it and share its roots with folks, I often hear what I'm going to call a quiet flinch in people. Sometimes it's explicit and sometimes it's just a tightening, a sense of, okay, I hear what you're saying. I get it. I do a lot of those behaviors you're describing, but man, there's no way I'm living from emotional outsourcing because, well, I didn't have that kind of childhood.

Or they immediately get really defensive of their parents, right? They're like, my parents were doing the best they could. I mean, I didn't have a terrible childhood or anything, so I don't know that I could be living in emotional outsourcing. They tell me they have no obvious trauma or what's often referred to as big-T trauma. Episode 199 dives into this. No obvious catastrophe, no singular story that makes sense as an origin myth that explains it all.

And right there, before we even get anywhere, a lot of folks decide that they're disqualified from this conversation and probably don't need help because, well, I mean, they don't come by codependent perfectionist or people-pleasing habits, honestly. There was no substance use or messy crises. So what then? They just have to suffer in silence and not get help because, I don't know, their pain doesn't measure up to some imaginary pain scale somewhere? Hmm.

What I want to talk about today is that there doesn't have to be some big, big ol' boom, bang, bop trauma for you to qualify for emotional outsourcing. And there is no qualifying for emotional outsourcing. That's not something someone else bestows on you. It's just something you experience in your life and know to be true for you, so it's true for you.

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We learn these skills in all sorts of households, even with loving or kind or good enough parents or caregivers. These habits are modeled. These habits are survival skills. So let's slow this way down and stay here together so we can really get some clarity on this because the reason I'm talking about it, as always, is because I worry for the folks who are like, "Oh, it's not me. I guess I don't, I can't, I won't. I'll just stay this way forever." Which is, I mean, I don't like the word codependent. That's why I rephrased it and reframed it and came up with a new term, right? Because it in its way kept me from getting the most help because I was like, oh, but that's not me. Right? And so I want to speak to those folks who are like, yeah, no, I had a good enough childhood. My parents tried really hard given the circumstances and so I just, this isn't me.

And if you know someone like that, forward them this to them, right? If you're like, "Ooh, kitten, you are doing all the codependent perfectionist people-pleasing things, but you're not, something isn't resonating." Right? You're not able to claim it as your truth. That's who I want to talk to. All right, I'm glad you're here.

Hey, let's define terms, my nerds, especially for the nerds who are new here. Hi, I love you. Welcome. Emotional outsourcing is the chronic and habitual pattern of sourcing our sense of the three most vital human needs—safety, belonging, and worth—from everyone and everything outside of ourselves instead of from within at a great cost to self, capital-S Self. And this is the pattern underneath what we commonly call codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing habits.

So it's that reflex to scan the room before you check in with yourself, to look for cues about how to feel, what to want, who to be. It's that drive within you to take on everyone else's feelings, their needs, their wants, their cares, their desires, their dreams, while abandoning your own. It's that push that makes you apologize for everything constantly when you, A,

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number one, haven't done anything wrong, and B, number two, aren't even Canadian.

It's what leads you to calibrate your internal world based on someone else's mood, approval, disappointment, or their withdrawal. Now, nowhere in that definition, which I wrote when I coined the term, does it say that you need to have survived something catastrophic or have a parent with substance use concerns. Actually, many have noted that my work specifically doesn't touch on that.

My definition focuses quite specifically and thoughtfully on how we are living, not on other people and their behavior. Not for one moment to negate the complex things that have happened in our lives, but because I find it more fruitful to focus on how you are being you right now, how you're thinking about yourself and relating to others in this present moment. What got you here matters. Of course, it matters. But in my world, it's not our focus as much as what we're doing and how we're being now and what we want to be doing tomorrow to live the lives we actually love.

So, now back to talk of trauma, because this is where trauma discourse has gotten like a little clumsy and can honestly be a little harmful. So trauma has become all too synonymous for many people, not always, but in many settings, with extremes, with horror, with obvious violence or neglect. And those experiences absolutely matter. Come on now. They shape nervous systems and communities and cultures in profound ways. But when trauma gets narrowed down to only the most biggest of events, we miss the far more common ways nervous systems learn to adapt to the world.

Your nervous system is not a courtroom. It doesn't require evidence beyond a reasonable doubt. It doesn't care whether something was objectively bad enough. It only cares, as it were, about what was patterned, repeated, and adaptive at the time.

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Most emotional outsourcing habits are not born from terror. They're born from subtlety, from consistency, from the quiet math a child or a young person's body does over and over again. Things like, when I'm easy, things go smoother. When I don't need much, people stay close. When I anticipate others, I don't get in trouble. When I perform well, I get warmth. When I disappear a little, there's less tension. When I don't have feelings, they don't get mad. When I stay very still and quiet, they don't yell at me. When I don't have preferences and wants, needs, or desires, they are gentler with me.

And of course, the inverse. If I use my voice, I lose love. If I don't get straight A's and stay thin and be quiet and win at mock trial, I lose love. If I am me, I don't get my caregiver's positive attention, on and on. None of that requires tons of trauma. It requires a nervous system doing its job in a relational environment that had limits, where a kiddo wasn't feeling met or attuned to in the ways they wanted and needed.

Let's talk about developmental reality for a moment to contextualize this, my nerds. So, as humans, we are born utterly dependent. We need caregivers not just for food and shelter, but for regulation. A baby cannot calm themselves. Their nervous system comes online and learns what's possible through co-regulation, through being held, mirrored, soothed, responded to, cooed at. Over time, those experiences get internalized. The body learns, I can come back to myself. I can settle. I can feel safe enough.

In an ideal world, that co-regulation would be consistent, attuned, secure, specific to the child in front of you. But hey, we don't live in an ideal world. Most caregivers are doing the very best they can inside their own unexamined patterns, inside their own struggles, inside their own history of stress, distress, and trauma. Also, inside patriarchy, inside late-stage capitalism, yeah, inside a racist and white supremacist culture, inside intergenerational stress, racism, misogyny, scarcity, exhaustion.

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That means even in loving homes, homes where people genuinely care, there are often unspoken rules about what's safe to feel, express, or need. Don't rock the boat, don't be too much. Be grateful, be good, be impressive, be low maintenance, be strong, be quiet, speak up, be helpful. Be all of that, the way you were taught to be, and be all of that instead of being your most authentic self.

Most of us learned emotional outsourcing at home from caregivers who learned it in their homes. It's a set of modeled survival skills from our society, our culture, our relationships, and our families, passed down, enacted, reinforced, which is another reason why it doesn't require a big wow trauma to exist. You just see it happen over and over until it becomes how you think you're supposed to move through the world.

And again, none of that is dramatic. It's ambient. It's the soup people are swimming in. So a child does what a smart little munchkin pants does and adapts, not consciously, but somatically, meaning through the body. The nervous system learns where the edges are. It learns what brings connection and what threatens it. And because belonging is survival for a child, the body prioritizes connection over authenticity every single time.

And so that is not trauma in the sensationalized news at 6 sense. It's development under constraint. And then we grow up. The problem is not that these habits existed. The problem is that no one helped us to upgrade them. So now you're a grownup. You're an adult with agency, resources, and choices within systems, but your nervous system is still running an old relational operating system.

You might be wildly competent, successful, insightful. You might have done years of talk-only therapy or mindset-only coaching, read all the books. You might even know exactly why you do exactly what you do and what you learned from which parent. And still your body tightens when someone's disappointed. Still you over-explain. Still you abandon your own preferences when there's friction. Let me make this easier. Still you feel

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untethered when you're not being mirrored or wanted or approved of. Still you struggle to make a decision and take action to live the life you actually want to live because you're rolling around in the things we were taught to roll around in. Over-functioning, self-abandoning, living from obligation instead of agency, instead of desire.

And that doesn't necessarily mean something terrible happened to you. It means something formative happened without enough repair. Another piece that gets missed here is that emotional outsourcing is socially reinforced, especially for women, especially for anyone socialized to prioritize harmony, caretaking, likeability, emotional labor. Patriarchy rewards self-abandonment. Capitalism rewards over-functioning. White supremacy rewards compliance and self-erasure in very specific bodies. So when someone develops these habits, they often get praised for them.

"Oh, you are so thoughtful. You're so easy. You're so reliable. You're so selfless. What would we do without you?" What would we do? No one pulls you aside and says, "Hey, I notice you don't know what you want unless someone else wants it first." Or, "I notice your body panics when there's no external affirmation." No. Instead, what do you get? You get promoted. You get liked, you get leaned on, you get complimented. "Ah, you are just super mom, aren't you?" Until one day you're exhausted, resentful, numb, or stuck in relationships that don't actually feel mutual, or unable to make decisions without spiraling, or deeply disconnected from your own internal signals. You don't even pee when you need to.

And then you wonder if maybe you're broken or dramatic or making it up because again, nothing obviously terrible happened. And this is where I want to be very precise. You do not need to earn your suffering through trauma credentials. There's no suffering Olympics here. Your nervous system does not need to justify itself to anyone.

What matters is capacity. So capacity in nervous system terms is your ability to be with sensation, emotion, and activation without collapsing,

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numbing out, or spiraling into reactivity without your own consent. What matters is whether your nervous system learned how to source safety, belonging, and worth internally. And so many of us were not taught that. We were taught to earn those things through performance, compliance, caretaking, self-silencing, masking our moods and our energies and our truths. And these aren't personal failures, they're cultural ones.

And this is why cognitive insight alone rarely resolves emotional outsourcing. You can understand all day long that you're allowed to have needs, that you don't need permission, that you are worthy as you are. And your body can still react as though disconnection is imminent if you don't manage the room, because these habits live in procedural memory, where procedural memory is the body's learned how-to system. It's how you ride a bike, tie your shoes, drive a car, reach for your phone without thinking. It's also how you automatically scan a room for approval, collapse your opinion when someone disagrees, or rush to fix someone else's discomfort before you've even registered your own.

These patterns don't live in your conscious mind. They're wired into your autonomic nervous system, the part of you that's moving and responding before thought even arrives. So the work is not about excavating more trauma, it's about building new capacity, new neural pathways. It's about teaching your nervous system slowly and relationally that you can stay connected to yourself and others at the same time, that disappointment is survivable, that you don't have to disappear to belong, that worth is not a transaction.

And this is why community matters so much in this work. Not because you're broken or can't do it alone because you're incapable. Come on. But because these patterns formed in relationship and they unwind in relationship, through being seen without performing, through being held without fixing or obligation to reciprocate, through practicing new responses while your body learns it won't be abandoned. You got your back.

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My beauty, if you recognize yourself here, I want you to hear this clearly. You're not too late, you're not behind, you're not exaggerating your pain, and you don't have to prove your emotional outsourcing bona fides to anyone. Beauty, you adapted brilliantly to the world you were giving. And no, you don't have to have had some huge terrible thing happen to you to be living in a sea of codependent perfectionist and people-pleasing habits, for realzies.

Now, the invitation is to give your nervous system something new, not by forcing change or shaming yourself out of habits that once actually kept you safe, but by building the internal scaffolding for safety, belonging, and worth that you may never have been supported to build before. And you don't need a traumatic origin story to deserve that. This isn't Marvel Comics, this is real life. And you don't need some huge story to make your suffering, your struggle, your desire for a better life, your wants to step into confidence, your desire to make decisions with ease. You get to have all of that. And there doesn't need to be some hot mess express behind you to make that desire, that want, that need anymore valid.

If you're looking for a guide on your way to ending emotional outsourcing, I will be running my flagship six-month coaching and somatics program, Anchored, just once in 2026, and I'm not sure when I'll run it again. So if you want support and community and science and expertise and love and care and compassion and kindness and smart, really smart, good coaching and breathwork and dance parties and nervous system regulation in community, a loving, incredible community in 2026, look no further.

Head on over to BeatrizAlbina.com/anchored to learn more and apply now so you don't miss your chance to be in this year's cohort. We start at the end of February and it would be a delight to have you with us. No trauma sob story is at all required.

All right, my beauty. Thank you for joining me. Let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe.

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You are held. You are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty. Mwah. Ciao, ciao. I'll talk to you soon.