

Ep #363: Emotional Outsourcing: What It Is, Why It Formed, and Why It's So Hard to Change



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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[Feminist Wellness](#) with Búa Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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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. Oh, I hope this finds you doing so well. So this week, I'm sharing one of my most downloaded and most shared episodes and I want to tell you why. So, last week I was on a call with someone who was interested in working with me and she said, "I've been listening to your podcast for over 2 years. I understand all of this intellectually. Like I know that I'm people pleasing and I am starting to know when I'm people pleasing. I know where it comes from. I can see it happening in real time, but I still can't stop doing it. Oh Bea, what am I missing?"

And I realized she's not like missing anything, she gets it. The problem is that understanding emotional outsourcing and actually healing it are two completely different things. This episode that I'm sharing today explains the what and the why so clearly. How these patterns form, why they made perfect, brilliant, amazing sense, why your nervous system adapted to keep you safe in these ways.

And I love this episode. Like I'm genuinely very proud of it. And I think it does a lot to help folks understand their habits, which is vital because before we can make change, we need to understand the change we need to make and the things we need to change so that we can live life in a different way, in a way that feels more supportive, more grounding, more authentic, more true, more real, a life with more agency, where we're not just living from the neck up, where we're like actually in our bodies connected to our intuition, living life on our terms because that's what we want to do. Right?

And that's what I want to help you do. That's all of that is what's on the other side of ending emotional outsourcing, which we've been talking about in the last few episodes. So, this episode is a really vital, important place to

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start, to understand your emotional outsourcing. And if you've been listening to the show for years, this episode puts a finer point on it.

So please do listen through. It's a good one. And I also want to say that like understanding has its limitations, of course. I mean, awareness is inherently healing and understanding can give your nervous system the felt experience of safety that it needs to actually let go of these patterns. It can't provide the co-regulation and the consistent support your body needs to actually learn, integrate and do new ways of being. That takes time.

Practice, community and expert support, and that takes something more than listening. So this episode is a great place to start. And if you want to actually turn this into action, that's what Anchored is for, right? It's the 6 months of actually doing the thing, not just understanding the thing. So listen to this episode, let it land in your body.

And if you find yourself thinking like, yeah, this is me, I see myself here and then, okay, but now what? Well, the now what is why Anchored exists, right? To give you the tools that we all need to step out of our emotional outsourcing patterns and habits and into lives we actually want to be living. I am only offering Anchored once in 2026, which is a big shift. I've been offering it 2, 3, 4 times in the last many years. This is it. We start February 23rd. Enrollment is open now at BeatrizAlbina.com/anchored. I'd love to have you join us.

The application itself is, it's a whole journey, right? It's short. Like you could finish it in two minutes if you wanted to, but if you wanted to take some time. And treat it like a journal entry and let the questions guide you to doing some work. That's a pretty cool option. So why not apply? I mean, like, why not?

But really, head to BeatrizAlbina.com/anchored, learn more, consider joining us. It's also a lot of fun. We have a lot of fun. I could go on and on about Anchored, but I shan't. I will stop myself because I want you to hear

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this episode. It's wicked good, which is, you know, of course, I always want to be accessible, so I'll translate. That's hella good for the West Coast. All right, my love, that's enough out of me. Let's dive in. Here's more from me. Ciao.

Today, we're deep diving into a pattern that I call emotional outsourcing. And if you've ever found yourself constantly scanning other people's faces for approval, shapeshifting to keep the peace, or feeling completely disconnected from what you actually want, this episode is hopefully going to land for you. Because here's the thing. What you might call people-pleasing or being too sensitive or caring too much about what other people think, I'm going to show you that it's actually something much more profound.

It is an absolutely brilliant, amazing, intelligent survival strategy that your nervous system and little inner children you created to keep you safe and connected in a world that didn't feel safe enough to hold your full authenticity. So get comfy, grab some tea, put on your softies because we're going to trace this pattern all the way back to its roots and by the end, you're going to understand why you do what you do with so much more compassion.

So, let me start by painting you a picture. You walk into a room, and immediately, your body starts scanning. How is everyone feeling? Is there tension? Who needs managing? Your nervous system is like a finely tuned radar picking up every micro-expression, every shift in energy, every unspoken need. You find yourself asking, are they okay with me? Did I say the wrong thing? Are they okay?

You've lost touch with the most important question, which is, how am I? What do I want? What do I need? This is emotional outsourcing. It's the unconscious habit of looking outside of yourself for safety, love, approval,

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worth, belonging. It's when your internal emotional barometer gets replaced with an external one. And listen, my love, this didn't happen because you're weak or broken or defective or messed up or too much. This happened exactly because you are so very intelligent. Because your nervous system is exquisitely adaptive. Because at some point, learning to be more attuned to others than to yourself was actually the smartest thing you could do to survive.

So let's go back to the beginning. Not just your beginning, but the beginning of our species. So human babies, oh human babies, they are born more helpless than almost any other mammal. We need years, like years and years of complete dependency on our caregivers to make it through. And your nervous system knows this. From the moment you took your very first breath and had your very first cry, your brain was wired with one primary directive: Stay attached to the people who keep you alive. You're no fool.

And this is our biology. Your survival literally depended on maintaining that connection with the grown-ups that were bigger, smarter, well, not always smarter, but definitely bigger than you. The ones who knew how to find the food, you know? So imagine you're three years old and you're having a very, very big feeling as toddlers often will. Maybe you're angry because your sibling took your toy. Maybe you're sad because you want more attention. You deserve attention. Maybe you're just a lot full of energy and needs and big emotions because you are three. And because you're no fool, you notice. When you express that anger, your caregiver gets tense. When you cry too long, they seem frustrated. When you're too much, meaning joyful, giggly, loud, three, there's this subtle but unmistakable shift in their energy.

You definitely don't have words for it. You're three, but you feel it. It's a pulling back, a cooling off, a turning away, a removal of love. Your little nervous system in all its brilliance registers this as danger. Not the kind of

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danger that makes you run or fight. You can't do that anyway, you're three. But the kind of danger that makes you freeze and assess, how do I make this connection safe again? And as you start to learn, you start to edit yourself. You notice that when you're quieter, they're more relaxed. When you manage your own emotions, generally by shoving them down, they seem happier, they smile more. When you become attuned to their needs instead of your own, you get more connection, more safety, more love.

And this is where emotional outsourcing is born. In that moment when your nervous system makes the calculation, I'll be who you need me to be so you don't leave me. And what makes this so powerful and so hard to change is that emotional outsourcing isn't just a mental habit, it's a somatic or full-body experience. Your nervous system has these beautiful ancient pathways designed to detect safety and danger. And when you're little and learning that your authentic expression might threaten your most important relationships, your body starts to specialize in reading the external world for cues about how to be. Maybe your shoulders learn to carry the tension of everyone around you. Maybe your stomach learned to twist when you sense disapproval. Maybe your throat learned to close when you had something true to say that might rock the boat.

And your nervous system developed these gorgeous, intelligent survival strategies, like the fawn response, which says, let me please you, appease you, become whatever you need me to be. Your body learns to shapeshift, to minimize, to accommodate. Or sympathetic overdrive, which says, let me fix this, perfect this, produce my way to safety, tap dance for my lovability. Your system stays in constant activation, scanning for problems to solve, ways to earn love through deep-pleasing, ways to earn love through doing, forget about being. Or functional freeze. Let me be invisible, quiet, compliant, numb, check out and doing so much. Your body learns to disappear, to take up less space, to need less, while continuing to produce and produce.

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All of these responses have one thing in common. They're looking outside for the regulation that your nervous system needs inside. They're saying, if you're okay with me, then I can feel okay inside. And here's what I want you to understand. This is your body's brilliance. This is a nervous system doing everything it can to preserve both your safety and your connection in a world that felt too dangerous for your full truth.

Now, let's get specific about how this plays out in families because the patterns are so clear once you see them. Well, in some families, emotions were just ignored. Not actively shamed, but not seen, not validated, definitely not attuned to or attended to. Maybe your parents were overwhelmed or traumatized or emotionally immature. Maybe just never learned how to be with big feelings themselves. So how could they be with them for you? So again, because you're brilliant and amazing, you learn that your internal world, your sadness, your anger, your fear, your joy didn't really matter. Or worse, that it was an inconvenience. And your brilliant little mind made the logical conclusion. If my feelings don't matter here, maybe they probably don't matter anywhere. Maybe what matters is how other people feel and my job is to figure that out and manage it. So you became an expert at reading rooms instead of reading yourself, at managing other people's emotions instead of your own, at becoming so attuned to what everyone else needed that you completely lost touch with what you...

In other families, emotions were very present, but in a way that made you responsible for them. Maybe you had a parent who was overwhelmed, depressed, anxious, or angry, or emotionally immature in a different way, and you became their emotional support system. Maybe you learned that your job was to keep everyone calm, everyone happy, keep everyone okay.

These families often have boundary issues. Your emotions become everyone's emotions. Everyone's emotions become your emotions. This enmeshment means that you can't tell where you end and other people begin. And you learn that love is earned through caretaking. That your

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worth comes from how well you can manage other people's feelings. That being too much, too needy, too emotional, too present with your own experience is selfish. You become the family thermostat, constantly adjusting yourself to keep everyone else at the right temperature.

Sometimes emotional outsourcing develops because you had to grow up too fast. A parentified child who becomes the adult often happens in a family where there were substance use issues, mental illness, sometimes divorce or trauma, or again, parents who are emotionally immature or unavailable. And you stepped into the role of the responsible one, the caretaker, the one who holds everyone and everything together. You learn that your needs came last, if ever at all, that other people's crises were way more important than your own experience, that being strong meant never needing anything from anyone. And your nervous system adapted beautifully to this impossible situation. You became hypervigilant to everyone else's needs because that's what kept your family and therefore your world from falling apart. In all your brilliance, you became a rock and you became an island.

So, now, let's talk about cultural programming and how society reinforces outsourcing because here's where it gets even more complex, my love. Because emotional outsourcing isn't just about what happened in your family, it's about the soup we're all swimming in. In the cultural systems that benefit from keeping people externally focused, self-abandoning and easy to manage.

White supremacy culture teaches us that there is a right way to be, and it's usually white, male, cisgender, straight, neurotypical, and emotionally controlled. It punishes authenticity that doesn't fit the mold. It rewards people for assimilating, for not being too much, for not having super big feelings and not taking up too much space. If you're a person of color, you might have learned early that your survival depended on code-switching, on making white people comfortable, on being the good one who doesn't

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threaten the status quo. If you're neurodivergent, which I like to call neuro magical, you might have learned to mask. I know I sure did. To suppress your natural ways of being, to exhaust yourself trying to appear normal.

This is collective emotional outsourcing. Entire groups of people learning to manage the dominant culture's comfort at the expense of their own authenticity. The patriarchy has some very specific messages for women and fem identifying folks. Be agreeable, be accommodating, be selfless. Your worth comes from how much you give to others, definitely not from who you are. We get praised for being low maintenance, easy to work with, so caring, such a good listener. But what these compliments often really mean is, you take care of me and don't ask for much in return, which is good because I don't plan to give you much. We learn that having needs is selfish, that setting boundaries is so mean, that saying no makes us difficult. That our job is to smooth everyone else's path while making our own needs invisible. And the patriarchy loves this because when half the population is busy managing everyone else's emotions, the other half doesn't have to learn how to manage their own.

Meanwhile, under capitalism, your value becomes tied to what you produce, not who you are. You learn to earn love through achievement, through being useful, through what you can do for others. This creates a particular kind of emotional outsourcing where you're constantly scanning for ways to prove your worth through productivity. You become hooked in with the power of being needed because being needed feels like being valuable. And you lose touch with your inherent worth, the worth that exists simply because you're alive, because you're here, because you matter regardless of what you contribute.

And finally, we have to mention the impact of intergenerational trauma. Many of our parents and grandparents lived through wars, depression. Mine immigrated during a dirty war while I was just a baby. Many of our parents and grandparents lived through significant depression, experiences

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that required them to prioritize survival over authenticity. They learned to assimilate, to be hypervigilant, to people please, to make themselves small in order to stay safe. And trauma doesn't just affect the person who experiences it directly, it gets passed down through families, through the nervous system, epigenetics, the unconscious patterns we learn about how to be in the world. Your emotional outsourcing might be your inheritance of your family's survival strategies. Your nervous system might well be carrying the wisdom of generations who had to prioritize everyone else's comfort in order to survive.

So, let's talk about reinforcement cycles, because this is the really tricky part. Once you've learned to emotionally outsource, the world keeps rewarding you for it, and this makes it so much harder to recognize that it's actually costing you. Think about it. When you're the person who always says yes, who never complains, who can be counted on to manage everyone else's emotions, you get labeled in really positive ways. You're reliable, emotionally intelligent, ugh, so wise, such a good friend, partner, employee, daughter, clearly an old soul. But underneath those labels is often this reality: you're the person who can be counted on to abandon yourself for others. You're the person who won't rock the boat. You're the person who makes everyone else's life easier by making your own needs invisible. And because this gets rewarded in family systems, in corporate systems, in our world writ large, your nervous system thinks, this is working. The approval feels good temporarily. It meets that deep need for connection and belonging that your system's been seeking all along.

But there are costs that build up over time. Resentment, because you are giving from an empty cup but no one seems to notice or care. Right, because you're the strong one. Exhaustion, because managing everyone else's emotions while ignoring your own is utterly depleting. Disconnection, because you've become so focused on being who others need you to be or that you think others want you to be, that you've lost touch with who you actually are. Chronic anxiety because your nervous system is constantly

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activated, scanning for threats to connection, and dorsal depression because you're living a life that's not actually yours and you can barely remember who you really are, what you really like.

Now, let me get real with you about the hidden costs of this pattern because I think we underestimate the toll it takes on our lives, our relationships, our sense of self, our careers. When you're constantly looking outside yourself for cues about how to be, you lose touch with your own internal guidance system. You can't tell the difference between what you actually want and what you think others want you to want. You might find yourself in a restaurant paralyzed by the menu because you've trained yourself to consider everyone else's preferences before your own. You might struggle to make decisions because you've outsourced your decision making to what you think will make others happy. You lose touch with your values, your preferences, your boundaries, your desires, all the things that make you uniquely you.

And here's something that might surprise you. Emotional outsourcing actually prevents real, true intimacy. When you're constantly shapeshifting to be what you think others need, they never actually get to know the real you because, oh my gosh, who actually knows the real you? And so you never get to experience being loved for who you actually are, only for who you're kind of play-acting to be. And so your relationships become based on your performance rather than your presence.

People might totally love the version of you that you show them, but they don't get to love your full humanity. Your needs, your boundaries, your complexity, your authentic emotional experience. And deep down you know this, which is why even when you're surrounded by people who actually care about you, you can feel profoundly alone.

And of course, there are nervous system consequences. So, living in a constant state of hypervigilance to others while disconnected from yourself can take a serious toll on your body. I know it did for me. Your nervous

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system stays chronically jacked up, chronically activated, always scanning for threats to connection. This can show up as chronic fatigue from emotional labor, anxiety and panic attacks, digestive issues from chronic stress, sleep problems from an overactive mind, autoimmune issues from a dysregulated nervous system, chronic pain from carrying everyone else's emotional tension. My beauty, my darling, my tender ravioli, your body is trying to tell you, this pattern isn't sustainable. But because you've learned to prioritize everyone else's comfort over your own, you might not even notice these signals until they become impossible.

So now let's get specific about how emotional outsourcing shows up in your physical, somatic, body-based experience because this is where the healing really begins in coming back to your body, to your felt sense, to the wisdom that lives in your nervous system. If you're a person living with emotional outsourcing, your body has likely become exquisitely attuned to everyone else's energy. You might walk into a room and immediately feel the tension between two people who had a fight earlier. You might be able to sense someone's mood before they even speak, sometimes just from the sound of their footfalls.

It is a superpower, but it's not a superpower you want to have, my love, because for us coming from emotional outsourcing, it's really a survival strategy. Your nervous system learned to become hypervigilant to external cues because that's where it learned safety from. You might notice tension in your shoulders from carrying everyone else's stress, a tight throat from swallowing your own words, a clenched jaw from not saying what you really think, shallow breathing from chronic anxiety, a racing heart when you sense conflict. And again, stomach issues from chronic stress and people-pleasing.

At the same time, you might be surprisingly disconnected from your own physical experience. And this is often because you've trained yourself to prioritize external information over internal information. So you might not

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even notice when you're hungry, when you're tired, when you need to use the bathroom, when you're in pain, when something isn't working for you. You might push through physical discomfort because you don't want to inconvenience others. You might ignore your body's signals because you've learned that other people's needs matter more than your own. This disconnection from your body is also a disconnection from your emotional truth because emotions live in the body. When you can't feel your physical experience, you also can't access your authentic emotional experience.

Before we go any further, I want to be really clear about something. Emotional outsourcing is not who you are and it is not a character flaw. It's not something to be ashamed of. It's not evidence that you're weak or broken, defective, too much. No, no, no, no, no. It is an absolutely brilliant adaptation to circumstances that did not feel safe enough for your full authenticity. And this is why shame-based approaches to changing this pattern don't work.

When someone tells you to just stop people-pleasing or just put yourself first or just set those boundaries, they're ignoring the very real reasons that your nervous system developed this brilliant strategy in the first place. Your body isn't going to let go of a survival strategy until it feels genuinely safe to do so, until it has evidence that you can be authentic and still maintain connection, until it learns new ways of feeling secure in the world.

This framework, this is trauma-informed, trauma-thoughtful healing. Understanding that symptoms are adaptations, that your nervous system is so intelligent and that healing happens through safety and connection, not force and shame. And here's something beautiful and complex. When you start to heal your own emotional outsourcing patterns, you're not just healing yourself. I truly believe that you're healing lineages.

So many of our ancestors lived in circumstances where prioritizing others' comfort over their own authenticity was literally a matter of survival. Our grandparents may have learned to please authority figures to avoid

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persecution. Our parents might have learned to be small to avoid violence. Enslaved people had no choice. Immigrants had no choice. So many of our ancestors had no choice. And your nervous system carries the wisdom of those survival strategies and while they might have been necessary then, they might not be serving you.

When you learn to come back to yourself, to trust your own experience, to honor your own needs, you're not just reclaiming your own life. You're also modeling a different way of being for the generations that come after you. You're saying, it's safe now to be authentic. It's safe now to have needs. It's safe now to take up space. You are safe enough. So we'll be talking about healing this pattern in just a moment, but first, a quick note.

So my beauty, we always share remedies here. So let's talk about how we heal this pattern. How do we start to come back to ourselves after years, maybe decades, and definitely generations of looking outside of ourselves for safety, worth, and belonging? Well, the journey back to yourself is not about forcing change or shaming yourself into different behavior. It's definitely not about labeling yourself as some kind of codependent perfectionist or people-pleasing person because that's not who you are. Those labels do nothing to help us. They're just more baggage. And the more you can see that these are just the habits that your brilliant self stepped into, the easier it is to step on out. And it really is about creating safety for your nervous system to slowly, gently start trusting your own experience again.

So the first step is simply noticing the pattern without trying to change it. Start paying attention to when you automatically scan others for cues and clues about how you should be. Start to notice when you shapeshift. Notice when you start to abandon yourself. And when you notice, don't try to change it at first. Practice noticing and saying to yourself, of course I do this. This makes sense. This kept me safe. This helped me belong and this was a brilliant survival skill.

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We start there because so many other schools of thought around emotional outsourcing tell us to be ashamed of these habits that they mean we're sick, we're messed up, there's something wrong with us. And I believe exactly the opposite and the more we can be compassionate, loving, and kind, the more likely we are to actually change.

Step two is somatic awareness. Begin to develop a relationship with your body as a source of information. Start checking in with your physical experience throughout the day. What do you notice in your chest, your stomach, your throat, your shoulders, your jaw, your hips? Your body holds so much wisdom about what you need, what you want, what feels good, what doesn't feel safe. But you can only access this wisdom if you're paying attention.

Three, micro practices of self-attunement. Start small. Begin to practice tiny moments of coming back to yourself. Pause before answering how are you and actually check in with yourself. Listen, there are times we all need to do the socially acceptable polite thing and say fine, thanks. But for your own sake, actually check in. Take three breaths before deciding what you want to eat. What we're doing here is stepping out of the default, right? And into more intentionality and choicefulness. Notice one thing you're feeling in your body right now. Do it right now. Okay. And then set a reminder and ask yourself once a day, what do I want?

And I hear you, these may seem super insignificant in undoing this huge habit of emotional outsourcing, but this is what we need to do. In my world, I talk about kitten steps, which are the tiniest steps a person can take. A baby step is way too big. We take tiny newborn elegant, soft kitten steps because they are revolutionary acts of self-reclamation. We need to start small so we don't freak our nervous system.

Here's what I want to leave you with today, my love. The most beautiful paradox of healing emotional outsourcing is this: when you stop looking outside yourself for safety and worth, when you start to develop genuine

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self-trust and internal regulation, you actually become capable of much more authentic, satisfying relationships. When you know who you are, you can show up as you are. When you're connected to your own needs, you can be genuinely present to others' needs without losing yourself. When you have internal safety, you don't need others to be different in order for you to be okay. This is the journey from external validation to internal validation, from performing for love and tap-dancing for lovability to being loved for who you are by you first. From managing everyone else's emotions to being responsible for your own with compassion, empathy, and care.

And beauty, it's not easy work and it's definitely not quick work. Your nervous system needs slowness. Your nervous system needs time and patience and so much compassion to learn new ways of being in the world. But it is the most important work you'll ever do because your life is waiting for you on the other side of this pattern. Your authentic relationships are waiting. Your creative expression is waiting. Your full aliveness is waiting.

So my beauty, I want to end with this because I think it's what your nervous system maybe most needs to hear. I know it's what mine most needed to hear when I was in the depths of emotional outsourcing. And it's this: My beauty, my tender perfect ravioli, you are not too much. You were never too much. The people and systems that taught you to be shamed for being you, that taught you to be smaller, quieter, less authentic, or taught you to be the clown, the jester, the distractor to earn your love, they were operating from their own limitations, their own fears, their own disconnection, their own lack of capacity.

My sweet, sweet, sweet baby, your sensitivity is not a liability. It is a gift. Your needs are not too much, they're information. Your emotions are not problems to be managed, they're messengers carrying wisdom about what you need to thrive. The world needs who you actually are, not who you think you should be to make others comfortable. And your nervous system,

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this beautiful, intelligent, brilliant system that's been working so hard to keep you safe and connected deserves your appreciation, not your judgment.

So thank you for listening today, my love. Thank you for being brave enough to look at these patterns, to question what you've been taught about how to be in the world, to consider that there might just be another way. My tender chickadee, your authenticity matters. Your healing matters. You matter.

So until next time, be gentle with yourself. You are exactly where you need to be. 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. Be well, my beauty. Mwah. I'll talk to you soon. Ciao, ciao.