

Ep #193: Codependency vs. 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. A cohort of Anchored, that started earlier this year, just graduated today. My little sailors are leaving the nest, and oh, what a flood of emotions. I mean, happiness, and joy, and gratitude, to have been on this healing path with them. Faith and trust in them, in their skills, in their tools, and their capacity to be compassionate, and loving, and caring with themselves in the world.

Knowing, I taught them thought work, breathwork, somatic practices, so darn well. And really, like trusting that they can fly now, and they've got everything they need to be anchored in themselves and to take care of themselves. And for reals, like a whole lot of sadness.

It's not like I'm never going to talk to them again. I stay in really close contact with the alumni from Anchored, it's really important to me. And, it's really different to be on Slack® with folks every single weekday, for six months. To coach them once or twice a week live, for six months. To just be so intimately connected. And, I'm just gonna miss them; I already do.

So, if you're a recently graduated alum, or any alum of Anchored, and you're listening, know I love you. I think about you so often. I hold you so tight in my heart. I love you, and I mean it.

My darlings, this week, I want to talk about a topic near, and also dear, to my heart, which is codependence and interdependence. In sort of the mile-high broad strokes, sort of way. And next week, I'm going to get into the nitty-gritty of what interdependence means and looks like, in more detail.

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This week, I wanted to give you an overview, and to redefine some terms so we can dive in together, holding hands as always. There is so much confusion about what the term codependency means, and who can benefit from doing the work to overcome codependent thinking. Even what the goal is in overcoming codependent thinking.

I've made it my life's work to bridge that gap, and to help people to see where these habits are playing a part in, and causing suffering in their lives. I'll say, in my own lived experience, it sure did take me a hot minute to understand the role that codependent thinking was having in my life. For so long, I felt like there was no way I could be codependent, because I wasn't living with or enabling a person who uses substances or alcohol.

I was happy overall. I was living an independent life, unless I was in a romantic relationship. Well then, in that case, I was melding with and meshing myself with that person, for sure. Yeah. I mean, I guess I was definitely, for sure, outsourcing my sense of self. Was also definitely trying to fix and change, and save and solve, for the people in my life. I was also chronically stirring up drama, hmm.

And yet, the classic model of the codependent, martyr wife of the wayward no-good alcoholic... Which I don't use the word alcoholic, I'm just using the words people use about codependency. That picture of who the codependent is, oof. I resonated with that somewhere around 0.0%, which is a bit of a quagmire, right?

I didn't resonate with the archetype I was seeing, the definition I was seeing, but wow, did I have all the thoughts and the behaviors. So, as I started to see the patterns in my life and relationships, with friends and at work, as well as romantically, I realized that I wanted and needed to intervene on my own behalf. To start living in a different, and frankly, less painful way.

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And so, as a nerd's nerd, I wanted to start with a framework for thinking about what I was realizing I was up to. Which led me to come up with my own definition of codependent thinking, one that actually resonated for me, as an intersectional, feminist woman.

One that holds the possibility of change and growth. One based in science and psychology, and profound powerfulness, to change our way of thinking, and to attend to our somatic or bodily experience of life in new ways. One that inspires us to create a reality we actually want to be present in. One very different, from the reality we find ourselves in when codependent thinking and behaving is our norm.

And in that process, I came to realize that part of what's wrong with the old model of who a codependent person is, is that it feels very binary; either you are or you aren't. Which, in and of itself, is quite ironic really, because all-or-nothing thinking is such a part of the codependent mindset. I think most of us, especially human socialized as girls and women, in the patriarchy, have some degree of codependent thinking and behavior. We've been trained, or conditioned, and socialized to.

So, it's pretty darn normalized, for women in a system built on us putting others ahead of ourselves, to have some degree of codependent thinking. And, some amount of this way of thinking is common for most humans living in white settler colonialism. A system that demands we live from the neck up, detached from our bodies; detached from deep, interdependent connection with one another. Detached from our true knowing of our worth. Detached from presence.

These systems need us to live this way for their own survival. So, they have trained us in codependent ways of thinking and behaving quite well, indeed. And so, taking all of this into account, my definition of codependent thinking is different from what most folks are used to hearing.

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That starts with me purposefully, thoughtfully, saying, “Codependent thinking and behaving, not codependency, and much less codependent people.” I don't believe that anyone is a codependent; I profoundly reject the label. I don't think it serves us to believe that we are some way. That it's our identity. That we're stagnant in it. That we're diseased, or broken, or defective, and we'll always be this way because it's who we are.

Nah, that's some oppressive and reductionist thinking, and I'm just not down with it. Believing that we are inherently codependent, or living with the disease of codependency, continues to let systems of oppression off the hook. Continues to let our families of origin, and our ancestral suffering and lineage, out of the picture.

It's like saying; it's not the patriarchy, it's that you're simply a broken, bad, codependent person. Yikes. I also think, that disease model and labeling, glosses over the painful role of trauma and the settings in our nervous system from our childhood. And all of that, is why I am so dedicated to rewriting the story of what codependency and codependent thinking are. And in that, in changing the name to emotional outsourcing.

Because that's a verb. Outsourcing is about what we think and do, not who we are. So, I define emotional outsourcing as; when we chronically source or look to find our sense of worth, value, significance, and emotional wellness, from everyone and everything outside of ourselves. Instead of believing, in our own beings, that we are inherently worthy of love and care, exactly as we are.

We have this outlook and habit because of our socialization, conditioning, training, in our families, societies, cultures. And the impact on our nervous system from those early life lessons and experiences, is part and parcel of living in an emotionally outsourcing way.

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This definition, this shift, matters. Because it holds space for your emotional outsourcing to not be your fault. This is so key, my perfect, little squash blossom; we are champions at making everything about us. At taking on blame, shame, and guilt, for things that are so not our fault. Or, even our responsibility. Or, ours to fix. Or, ours to have an opinion or advice around.

While also, because we do these funny flip-flop things, right, we take on all the blame. But we also gloss over the places where taking personal responsibility for our impact in the world, would help improve our lives and relationships. And so, what this new way of thinking about codependency does, is remind us, in its very definition, as emotional outsourcing that we learn to be this way. It's not some truth about us.

It's all learned as part of our childhood survival skills. We think, feel, and act these ways because at some point, it was modeled for us. And being this way helped us to get through, to stay safer, which is what our bodies and nervous systems want, above all.

When we can pause and can sit with this, perhaps, new truth in our minds, and can simultaneously feel into it in our bodies, we can experience how powerful, and indeed, liberatory it is to not believe we're broken. To not think we need to be fixed. But rather, to recognize that we got taught what we got taught. And, here we are. Behaving, so many years later, in ways we don't like. And, that's what it is.

No shame needed, no blame or guilt. Instead, we can recognize how we've been behaving, and can start to move towards our own healing. By reconnecting with our bodies through somatic practices, and letting them guide us in all their wisdom. While, simultaneously, rewriting our stories in our mind.

Rewiring the neural grooves in our minds that say, put them first, and resent them for it at the same time. Pretend you have no needs, and then

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be sad your needs didn't get met. Hey, why don't you get on that self-abandonment cycle, merry-go-round? Tell them you're fine, push down your feelings, do more and more and more for them. While pretending it's all okay.

And then, then, explode at them when you hit your limit and your nervous system can't take it anymore. And then, feel guilt and shame, and apologize and do more. Then, start that cycle all over again.

And so, the work we do, this work of overcoming codependency, is recognizing those patterns are in our mind. Once again, because we were taught to think them, and they made us feel safer. And we can take responsibility, not for having the original thought, not for having the original nervous system reaction, but for our response.

Now, as our adult selves, we get to take responsibility for how we move forward in to the world, without blaming or beating ourselves up for what has been. And as we seek to create a new worldview, a new way of being, it can be so useful to ask ourselves what the opposite of codependent relating is? And the answer is, interdependent.

Not independence, not being all on your own, a rock, or an island. Not doing it all yourself, because higher resentment is right around the corner when you do that. And it's certainly not thinking 'you don't need' anyone; because, my darling, you do. Because, science.

We all need each other. We're human mammals, mammaling along, and our nervous systems need each other, to feel safe, to survive, and to thrive. So, independence is not the answer. Because you're not getting what you need there. And, you're not giving to anyone else.

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The answer is not swinging from the outsourcing extreme, of doing all the things for everyone, to doing nothing for no one. It's not going from trying to solve everyone's life for them, to never showing up for your people. It's not about going from having no boundaries, to having rock-hard, inflexible boundaries that are actually walls against the world. It's not going from taking everything personally and making everything about you, to taking no responsibility for your impact on others.

My love, when you're only taking care of you and aren't in healthy relating, then you aren't healing your codependent or outsourcing thinking, at all. Instead, you're buffering against those thoughts, from your codependent training, that continue to live in your mind.

You're not shifting the way you're actually thinking and believing about the world. Instead, you're buffering against your old thoughts, by setting strict rules about what's okay and what's not okay. Instead of shifting your thinking to recognize our interdependence.

So, the answer, my love, is not to become an uncaring jerk. Not to say 'no' to anyone needing anything from you. And to not ask for help, because you're worried that will be seen as needy and bad. No, no, no, my darling love. The healing is found in the opposite of that. The healing is in presence, care, balance.

It's about interdependence, which is a way of relating based in mutuality, and reciprocity, on a loving and balanced exchange of energy. And to talk about interdependence, we need to start by debunking the myth that we are inherently separate selves. Which is a lesson taught to us by white settler colonialism, that we can start to get right out of our minds and our bodies.

So, my love, yes, we each have our own lives, our bodies, our needs, our names, our shoes. And at our core, we are not separate. Our lives intersect

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with other lives. Our bodies take their cues for everything, from our heartbeats to our breathing, to the state of our nervous system, from one another. And yes, we each have needs, and those needs have an impact on others. There's nothing wrong with any of that. In fact, it's a beautiful thing.

Your heartbeat impacts mine. There are studies on that, you can look it up; it's super magical. If I'm calm and in ventral vagus, my nervous system will slow the heart rate and breathing of those around me. We do this for each other every day in Anchored. We hold loving space to co-regulate each other's nervous systems, and it's truly magical. We are all interconnected.

And yes, your individual wants, needs, and desires, matter. They matter so deeply. In interdependence, we do what we want and need for ourselves. We consider the impact on others. We take care of each other. We do it because cooperation is gorgeous and glorious, and key for building a society, and culture, and collective, built on love, lifting all of us up.

We take care of each other, not from the old emotional outsourcing or codependent script that says; you must give away all of you to feel worthy of love and care. You must abandon yourself to gain their validation. To make them feel good about you, which matters more than how you feel about you.

All of this is to say, we can live inside ourselves. Attuned to ourselves and our needs. And in the world, attuned to others simultaneously; we can take care of ourselves, and others. It never has to be either/or, for realies. We can learn to balance living our own lives, and supporting and loving others. Can shift our perspective to make being of service a gratifying thing.

And can stop giving to others from annoyance and obligation, which are such draining and exhausting emotions, that how can you help but be resentful about doing whatever you did for them. The way to get to there, is

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by living from your heart, from presence. Not just from your mind, where your old outsourcing scripts live.

And when we pause, particularly in a country, in a world, that's so rushed and rushing, so urgent and right now, so go-go-go, and come back into ourselves. So, we can pause to ask ourselves this really vital question, which is; where are you located in this moment?

So, you may be asking yourself; how will I know if I'm giving from presence, from an open heart, or from those old scripts? How do I know what I'm up to? That's a perfectly normal and understandable question to ask, particularly when you're new to this work?

And the answer, well, there are so many answers, and the first that comes to me is this: To pause, and to ask yourself where you, you, are located in the moment? Are you in your own body? Are you present in and with and to yourself? Or, are you projecting yourself and your energy into and onto someone else? Are you minding someone else's business? Looking for something to prove your worth, or make you feel better, because you can take care of someone else at a cost to you?

Or, are you present and at home in your own body and life? Are you giving from the depths of your heart, your compassion, your care? Or, are you giving to get validation? Where are you located? Once you know where you and your energy are, you can make more loving choices for everyone involved.

To take a step back and to pause, and to evaluate, or reevaluate, why you want to interject yourself. Why you want to give. Why you want to ask for something. Or, you can move forward towards more care, by doing whatever you've chosen to do. Trusting that you're taking care of someone else while located within yourself.

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And in this, I do want to pause to say, that it's important to recognize that our emotional outsourcing came from a deep desire to feel truly worthy, and lovable, and to show others love and care. We give and give, in that emotional outsourcing way, because we want to show others the love and care we didn't get as kids. The love and care we want to receive. The love and care we're worried we're not worthy of.

From that desire to be truly wonderful in the world, we learn a suboptimal, yeah, let's say that, a suboptimal way of showing that love and care, right? We became the codependent archetypes of the fixer, the savior, martyr, saint, from that misguided notion that we must earn love, respect, kindness. And that it's only in fixing others, rescuing them, doing for them, that we stand a chance of getting love.

And so, we do it because we have so much love to give. And this is the only way we learn how to show it. And I'm here to say this, as always, another way is so very possible. One in which you are connected with yourself, mind, body, and spirit, and you know what you want and need. Something we've talked about here so many times, because it's so important.

Once you know what you want and need, you're able to give, while also taking care of yourself. You're able to give to others, to take care of others, for reasons you like, reasons that lift everyone up. Instead of you drowning, while holding other people up above the waves, your feet firmly underwater, sinking in the sand.

So, what does this look like in real life? What does being located within you and being located in someone else's energetic field look like? Let's look at an example. A friend called the other day, and she said, "Do you have time to help me figure out these labs? I just got back from my primary care. I'm so confused."

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And so, I paused. I checked in with my body, my capacity, with my priority, since it was during the work day, and felt into my heart for the answer. When I pictured myself picking up the phone and dialing this beloved hermana, this human I love so much, I felt joy rush through my body at being able to support her.

And then, I asked myself, does this come at a cost to me, other than this hour of my life and a little bit of my energy? I listened in to my body, and I heard it say, “No. No.” So, I called her and we spent an hour on the phone. I felt happy the whole way through, as I was explaining her lab values, how they connect with other labs, her family history, her personal history, I recommended supplements, on and on.

That whole time, I was awash in the joy of giving, of being of service, of being interdependent, with this beautiful, amazing friend. I didn't feel like she was taking from me or taking advantage of me. Or, like I was doing the call out of obligation to make her like me or appreciate me. None of that.

Instead, I was giving from my emotional overflow, and felt a fullness and connection after our call. It felt truly, deeply interdependent. And it was really beautiful to support her, and to feel our mutual love and respect for one another. Meanwhile, had she called on a day when I was busy with the zooms, and the meetings, and the deadlines, and the writing, then that would have been something else altogether.

Not a like, hell no, I'm absolutely not doing this. But definitely, a not right now. And had I said yes from obligation, then, the answer to “Where am I located?” would have been 100% in her space. I would have been projecting my sense of self, my worth, my value, onto her. And answering her immediately, with urgency, right, which is such a cultural norm these days.

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That would have meant something about me, whether I'd shown up and done the thing, and abandoned myself to take care of her, would have been like a badge of honor, of just how giving I can be. Had I done that, had I gotten on the phone while me, myself, my presence, was located outside of me, then I couldn't have been present on the call. Because physics, remember? Can't be in two places at once: that whole jam.

From a lack of presence, I maybe would have been short or curt with her on the phone. Because part of me wouldn't have wanted to be there. I would have been rushed and stressed throughout, and would likely have finished the call anxious and resentful.

Because I had said 'yes' not from a desire for the highest and best good for all, but from a manipulative, controlling desire to outsource my emotional wellness onto her. To try to get more than give. And that would have been a super codependent, emotionally outsourcing choice, for sure. And is not what I'm trying to make anymore.

So, if she had reached out when I didn't have the bandwidth, from interdependence, I would have said, "Ay, mi amor, I love you and I'm so glad to hear from you. But I'm not available in this moment, or today. I can talk to you tomorrow at lunchtime, and I'm looking forward to it." Instead of trying to manage her experience and fix her life, while abandoning my own, and launching myself out of presence with me, and into codependence all over her.

I want to bring us back to this main tool, that I want to invite you to try on, as you tap into your own discernment or capacity to know what is right for you in any given moment or situation. Which is, to ask yourself this: Where am I located, right now? Am I outside myself seeking care, because I don't think I can give it to myself? Am I outside myself thinking about others, and not balancing that with thinking about me?

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Am I outside myself giving other people advice, or ceaselessly doing for them? Am I outside myself making my move away from codependent thinking, into the stalwart move towards independence? Where I focus on my self-care? No one can eff with it. Where I don't give to others because that's bad? Where I'm living a life in opposition to codependence, chronically outside of myself in another way?

Or, am I present within myself, and giving interdependently from there? And the thing to remember is this, we can live inside ourselves, in presence, and present to the world, simultaneously. We can take care of ourselves and others in a balanced, gentle, compassionate way. And it never has to be the absolute either/or.

We don't need to swing from no self-care to all self-care, all the time. We don't need to have boundaries like steel cages that don't let anyone in, or don't let us out to be of service. We can take time for ourselves and can also help those we love, when we can. We can volunteer and be of service when we have space for that. And can focus on our own growth when that's the moment we're in.

We can learn to go from the rigid, all-or-nothing worldview, that is part of codependent or emotionally outsourcing thinking, and can learn to live in the ebb and flow that is what life actually is all about. Asking for what we want and need. Honoring when other people say 'no' and not taking it personally. Saying 'no' to others, when that's what's right for us. And honoring their capacity as adults, to not take it personally unless they want to.

Also saying 'yes' to being of support, of help, of assistance, when we can. Because it's beautiful to care for others. To be loving and kind without expecting anything from them. Trusting that there is a give-and-take, a cosmic balance. And that it's not up to you to keep score or to give till it

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hurts. You can give to it feels good, instead. And, let yourself love and be loved.

To cultivate an intimate relationship with the world, in which you have permission to exist as your whole self, and others do, too. Cultivate a relationship with your own capacity to be present. And to live from your heart, and have faith and trust that others can do the same for them. They can fix, and mend, and manage their lives.

When you have the capacity to, when you've taken care of yourself, and are feeling good in the world, offer a hand and step into greater interdependence with the people you love. As I share next week, I'm going to get into some more nitty-gritty of what interdependence means and looks like, in detail. So, make sure you're subscribed to the show, so you don't miss a thing.

And if you're ready to make that leap from codependent thinking to interdependent living... If you're ready to step into greater self-love, self-care, in a way that is balanced and based in somatic or bodily presence... If you're done living from the neck up, and are ready to live in your whole, beautiful, expansive self, then Anchored is the place for you.

Anchored is my six-month somatics coaching and breath work program. It is a community-based program, where a small group of dedicated humans gathers to support one another, to grow interdependently, and to live the lives we've all dreamt of living.

We're starting soon, so if you've been hearing about the program, if you're loving the show, and everything you're learning from it, and you're ready to take that learning to the next level, you're not going to want to miss this opportunity to join us now. Head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/anchored to learn more and to apply today.

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If you take a moment and apply now, you will get a very special treat along with your application, and I'm not going to ruin what it is. Okay, it's a workshop; you're gonna get it. I love surprises, and I'm sometimes bad at surprises because I get so excited. I'm a Leo, what can you do? I'm full of love.

You will get a copy of a recent paid workshop that I gave, for \$0.0 if you apply to Anchored right now; so why not, right? It literally can't hurt, and you get some good stuff for free. So, go check it out.

VictoriaAlbina.com/anchored.

Thanks for listening, my love. 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. Thanks for listening, my darling. 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, 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 VictoriaAlbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there; it's gonna be a good one!