

## Ep #205: Holding On to What Doesn't Serve Us



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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## Ep #205: Holding On to What Doesn't Serve Us

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 want to start by thanking everyone who entered the contest, the giveaway, that we did to celebrate the momentous occasion of the 200th episode of the *Feminist Wellness* podcast.

There were some pretty darn fantastic prizes. The first of which, was a 50-minute coaching session with me. Which is a pretty darn big deal, I only coach within Anchored, my six-month program. So, if you want to coach with me, that's the only way.

Unless you happen to be Brooke Shatner. Brooke Shatner, you, my love, have won a coaching session with me. My team is going to reach out with all of the details. Let's get that on the books. I'm so excited.

The next prize is a seat in my next breathwork meditation session. These are beautiful 90-minute sessions, in which we go deep with this beautiful pranayama-based breathwork method, that really helps us to connect in deeply with our nervous systems, our inner children. It can be pretty psychedelic, sometimes. I have definitely tasted colors and seen the proverbial "rainbow" and often, a literal one. Talk to my dead. It's a beautiful practice, and I love it. We do it every single month, in Anchored.

And Paula Brett, you have won that seat in breathwork. So excited to share this beautiful practice with you. And don't worry, I'll teach you how to do it first; don't worry.

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And finally, Rachel Square has won a pep talk. So, in Anchored, one of the things I share with the community are these pep talks. Because we move through life and we learn all these lessons, and we grow, and we change. And then, we have one of those days where life gets lifey, and things just feel blah. And, we forget. We forget how amazing we are, how incredible we are, how far we've come.

And so, these pep talks are available to the folks in Anchored, to help them reset, to ground, to anchor themselves in themselves, once more. And Rachel, we're going to be in touch because I'm going to make a pep talk just for you, about whatever topic you need reminding about.

So, we're going to be doing another giveaway soon. Because there's another milestone coming up, which is pretty exciting. To enter the giveaways, you head on over to where you get the show; subscribe, rate (put the little star rating), and write a written review. Take a screenshot of that written review, and email it to [podcast@victoriaaalbina.com](mailto:podcast@victoriaaalbina.com). My team will put your name in the hat for the next giveaway adventure. Yay. So fun.

So, it's the new year. And it's pretty darn cold up here, on occupied Muncie-Lenape territory, also known as the Hudson Valley, of this great New York State. And I've been really getting into embracing the winter here, in the Northern Hemisphere. The chance to slow down, to reflect, to gather, and find comfort while Mother Nature does her thing. To meditate on all the change that's a foot, and all the slowing down that's all around me.

This deep, rooting moment is a time for what no longer serves in nature, and in us, to die back, so we can make room for new growth in the spring. With that in mind, I want to take today to look at the 'how' and 'why' we, yes, we, complicated and amazing human beings, hold on to things that don't serve us.

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And how we can use this invitation that winter brings to prune back, to let go, to discard, so that we can have room for the next season in our lives. Of course, this work can happen any time of year, but today, I want to move with the rhythm of the Earth, our great Pachamama, Earth Mother, to discuss the wisdom the winter months have to bring.

Many of us have a tendency to hold on to old stories, old thought patterns, old habits of mind and body, that just don't serve us any longer. And often, live with a resonance of regrets; which we talked about in Episode 168, "Regret is Self-Abandonment". This habit is particularly common for us, as emotional outsourcers. Our term, here at *Feminist Wellness*, for folks with codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing thought habits.

Because when life got lifey in childhood... When we did what kids do developmentally, and we took all the blame for whatever was happening in our lives or our families... The ways we were disappointing the people who loved us... Our parents, who may have lived with their own perfectionism, and the ways that they were disappointing us.

We took all that blame onto ourselves, because frankly, it was a smarter move than to blame the people who put food on the table and a roof over our heads. We also can have the habit of seeing ourselves as life's victims. Often because life has not been kind to us, and sometimes from a sense of unworthiness.

We worry, as emotional outsourcers, that we don't matter at all in the world. So, we make everything about ourselves as a way to attempt to find significance in the world, to get folks to pay attention to us; which we'll circle back to.

And these stories can sound like: I wish I would have broken up with my ex sooner. Well, I missed my calling to be an actress, it can never happen now that I have kids. It was foolish of me to tell my coworker the truth about my

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insecurities. I'm so dumb for letting my family walk all over me, again. I never should have married that person. I'm just not smart enough to be successful in the ways I want to be.

Versions of these thoughts, these narratives we tell on repeat, about our past, about our lives, about ourselves, can take up so much free real estate in our minds and bodies, and erode our sense of self. And yet, so many of us believe that we just can't shake them. So, they rattle around in our brains.

And instead of managing our minds and attending to our bodies, where the somatic residence of these stories live, we distract ourselves with buffering. We try to rationalize with ourselves about why these beliefs just aren't true.

But, at the end of the day, there's something oddly alluring about these stories of our supposed failures that are so hard to resist, and feel nearly impossible to let go of. And one reason, is because these meanie-pants stories are, in their way, a cousin of the old negativity bias. A self-protective mental trick, that our brilliant human brains evolved over hundreds of thousands of years.

An amazing adaptation that has helped us survive, quite literally. This bias makes us remember the bad or threatening things that happen to us, in an extra, extra kind of way. Because over the course of human history, bad and threatening things were likely to, you know, kill us for realsies. So, our brains learned to remember those potentially life threatening experiences.

That plant makes me sick. Big predators live in that part of the forest. That river has a super strong current. You get the idea. While our physical environments have generally gotten much safer, particularly in the industrialized north. As I've mentioned before, and I'm likely to mention again, studies show that the average American is rarely chased by a lion in the course of their everyday life.

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And yet, our brains haven't evolved at the same pace as our environments. So, we tend to remember the bad, so that we can avoid death at the teeth of the aforementioned wild cats.

Let's pause for a nerd alert. I love saying, "Nerd alert". A bunch of wicked smart scientists used one of my favorite tools, functional magnetic resonance imaging, fMRI, to do research about regret and meanie-pants stories. And I'm sure, when they were writing their IRB, they called it, *Meanie-Pants Stories*. I love my ADHD brain. Like, I really, truly, do. ADHD is my superpower. And I find myself distracted by my own funniness, sometimes. And, it makes me laugh.

Refocusing to say, functional-MRI is a super cool tool that shows how different parts of the brain light up, and get activated by different inputs. So, they got a bunch of volunteers. And yes, I was very much the first kid in line to make like, 10 bucks and a slice of pizza, by doing these kinds of studies when I was in college, and then in grad school, and then the other grad school.

So, they got these students, probably, and they had them make a choice about investing money, and they watched their brains do their magic. When the participants were told, "You did a really good job. But actually, you could have made better choices," check this out.

There was decreased activity in the ventral striatum. Which is an area associated with processing rewards. So, even though they were told they made good choices and made money, being told that they could have done even better, took the reward out of doing well.

There was also increased activity in the amygdala, in the limbic system; that ancient lizard brain part that freaks out when there's a threat and sounds the alarm bells of doom, activating our nervous system into sympathetic activation, or fight-or-flight. Isn't that fascinating?

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Even more interesting is this, when a computer decided where to invest, their brains did not light up when they were told, “The computer did okay, but could have done better for you.” That is to say, we only feel regret about a choice when we take personal responsibility for that decision. When we make it all about us, our ego, our sense of self, and decide that we are the one that messed up.

There's no larger social context or personal context like, oh, I don't know, growing up in a codependent family or living under the patriarchy, white settler colonialism, late-stage capitalism that could have at all influenced our capacity to make the decisions we made, in the moment. Interesting, right?

So, it makes sense that, as humans, we tend to hold on to the cautionary tales from our past, because to some degree, we're telling ourselves, “Watch out for this. Don't do that, again. You're the one that messed it all up. It's on you, if it happens again.”

We make ourselves the cause of all doom, so that we can tell ourselves we have control. Like, all the control. In a kind of magical thinking way that leads us to believe that if we beat ourselves up with, “If only I hadn't... If only I had...,” enough, then we won't do that same thing or anything like it ever, ever again.

And in so doing, we pull ourselves out of the present moment, and either live in past “mistakes”, or worry about future potential missteps. Because in some way, it feels like we're doing something. Like, we're protecting ourselves. Like, we're ensuring our survival by focusing on the things we've done wrong and the mistakes we've made.

But these stories, they don't actually serve us. When we tell ourselves that, “We are the worst. We're always the victim,” we are basically littering the path of healing with boulders. When we hold on to old stories in the old,

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negative light, saying, "This thing I did in the past, was bad. I regret it. It was terrible, I'm terrible."

What we are doing, is closing ourselves off to the possibility that whatever road we chose, whatever path we walked along, was actually, potentially, for our best and highest good. And we thereby negate any possibility of seeing those choices as potentially beneficial, by deciding now, that the story is over.

So, a key remedy, and you know, me, there's many more remedies to come, is to not let your heart get stagnant in those old stories that XYZ choice can only be negative, instead of opening your heart and your mind to the possibility that you just can't see yet, how very right on or helpful that decision was, because you don't yet have the skills to see it that way.

And when you open yourself up to another story, another story can possibly unfold for you. A participant in Anchored, who I'll call Sarah, shared one of the stories that she tells herself, on repeat. Which is, that she's just no good at romance, love, dating. She just keeps dating the wrong person. Keeps messing things up. Can never succeed, no matter what.

So, one of the things we do in Anchor, this is a cornerstone of my coaching, is to always look for the way your brain and your inner children are actually trying to help you, when they're doing something that you just don't like. What does this story do for Sarah? Well, in a way, it does protect her from the hard parts of being in an intimate, romantic relationship.

Because if she doesn't get close, she can't get hurt. I mean, that's true. But what this story also does, is A, number one, makes it harder for her to have that human connection and intimacy she really does want. And B, number two, keeps a large part of her precious mind ruminating on the past, rather than working to chart a new future for herself.



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That keeps her believing these old stories, and believing that all those past relationships that ended, were inherently wrong, bad, she messed up. Instead of seeing them as opportunities to learn, to evolve, to grow. To see what does and doesn't work for her.

And to talk about the cultural context once more, another reason these stories are so tempting to hold on to, is because our larger media culture feeds into this penchant for self-flagellation. For making our “negative” tendencies and experiences things that define us. For rolling around in the things we think we've done wrong, or that have been done wrong to us.

We see it on TV and in movies. We hear it in songs. It's all around us. It's in the cultural zeitgeist. Now, we have to acknowledge that. We need to acknowledge that. Part of how we unravel the threads of negative, harmful self-talk and thought patterns, is to know where they come from, so that we can hold them at arm's length. And with time, can learn to let them go.

When we see that our media and larger cultural influences feed us a steady diet of blame and negativity, we can start to see through that veil. Then, we can get under it, around it, and through it, and can decide what we want to expose ourselves to. And, what we want to do with the ideas we're exposed to.

Also, to be real, negative, self-depreciating, dramatic stories get us attention. And if we grew up with emotionally immature parents or caretakers who turned to negativity and drama to get attention, like we talked about in Episode 167, we learned that that's how life is lived, and it becomes our norm. Written into our nervous systems as the “right” way to relate to self and others.

So, of course, your nervous system goes right into sympathetic, revved up in fight-or-flight, the second life gets lifey. And drama just seems to magically find its way to your doorstep and into your prefrontal cortex, too.

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Maybe, you're holding on to old stories about how you've always been the victim in every relationship and aspect of your life. Or, how every wrong thing you've experienced is your fault, because you're terrible.

You repeat those stories with a bitter, graspy tone, in order to get attention. Real talk? Especially if that's what was modeled for you. Of course, you do. For reals, though, what's a smart thing to do if you have no other means of getting attention and care? Right? We talked all about this in Episodes 113 and 133? Of course, you did. And of course, they did.

Because listen, as human mammals, we all need attention, literally, to survive. So, no shade hath been thrown, none at all. If this whole concept of creating drama, rolling around in the bitter, old story, resonates with you... If you're like, "Yeah, I do keep telling these stories about how terrible that ex was to me. How no one respects me," how you always thought you were stupid growing up, or whatever.

May this moment be an invitation to get curious. To step into an inquiry as to why you're continuing to choose to seek attention, through either drama or negative stories, about yourself? About what was, what is, or what might be? My beauty, what's your psyche up to? What are your perfect inner children trying to do with all that kind of talk?

Remember, the stories you tell about your life, create your lived experience. So, I'll ask you, in earnest, once more, do you want to keep telling it that way? Does that serve you in a real way, to repeat those negative and self-destructive stories?

And of course, if you're new to the show, then welcome to me. There are no hashtag positive vibes only, here. It's all vibes, only. I'm not saying to negate the hard stuff, or to ignore the challenges, or pretend the struggles aren't there.

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But rather, you get to decide if you want to hang on to the sting of it. If you want to keep picking up the rope and playing tug-of-war with the past. If you want to continue to let others and their choices create your lived experience of the now. Or, if you want to let past you, the you that you no longer are, the you you've evolved from, grown from. If you want to let that version of you create the story of your life.

When I hear my clients in Anchored talk about regret or an old hurt, one of the things that so often feels present, is a subconscious belief that if they keep replaying the old story enough, they'll somehow fix it. In the nervous system world, we call it “reenactment”. And it's when you play out your past, with a new person or a new situation, with the hope of the outcome being different.

Like, you know, how we all pretty much keep dating our parent-role caregivers until we do the work to heal our attachment wounds? Same thing happens in our minds and nervous systems when we turn an old situation, over and over and over again in our minds. Some part of us thinks that the 473<sup>rd</sup> time we think about it, or tell the story, then, then we can get to some different result for ourselves.

But alas, it's just not true. And doing so robs us of the joy, passion, contentment, and calm, that comes from letting the past be the past, and the present be your focal point.

On that nervous system tip, I'll remind you that you are, in fact, a body. You have a body; you're not just a mind. I know, I know, getting wild over here again. As a human in a body, when we hold on to old hurts and painful stories, we hold them in our bodies as much, if not more, than in our mind. And the presence of those old narratives can be seen in issues with our digestion and our posture, as chronic pain or muscle tension, to name just a few.

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The old nervous system nerd saying, “The issues are in the tissues,” is about this, exactly. Every time we repeat a mean story about ourselves, our past, our bodies, respond because, science. Specifically, because the vagus nerve. And if you want to nerd about that, check out Episode 174, “Polyvagal 101”.

So, you're mean to you. Your nervous system reacts immediately, and sends you into sympathetic fight-or-flight, an adrenaline and cortisol state, which tightens your muscles and revs up your digestion; if you know what I'm saying. You can't think well when you're in that state, because you're not supposed to. And of course, you can't digest your lunch.

After years and years of mean to you-ness, your nervous system might go right to dorsal shutdown, or the freeze response. Which slows everything down; from your cognition to your thyroid, to your digestion and your period. So, continuing to hold on to old tales that don't serve you, negatively impacts both your physical health and your mental wellness.

And having just said all that, it bears repeating every time: Sometimes, it's your thoughts. And sometimes, you just didn't eat enough fiber. And it's not that you're holding on to past hurts in your digestion, it's just physics; know what I mean?

Okay, it bears saying, right? Because, particularly coming from functional medicine, in the holistic medicine world, that's my background. In the white wellness industrial complex, it's so common. In the coaching world, too, for sure, for the narrative to be, “It's all your thoughts. It's all your thoughts. Your thoughts are creating everything.”

And like, mindset and thoughts do impact a lot, but also, have you eaten a salad? You know what I'm saying? You know what I'm saying.

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All right, my perfect peonies, it's your favorite time; remedies. So, how do we take this winter moment to go inward? To look around and to see what serves us, and to let go of the rest? First, we have to start with awareness. We have to acknowledge when we are ruminating, or believing an old story that just isn't true anymore. And in fact, may never have been true, at all.

This can be challenging, and so, we get to slow down. And we get to start by befriending the story, not fighting against it. Not trying to shove it down and buffer against it, make it go away. We make friends with it. We hold our inner child by the hand and say, "My sweet little baby, of course, you think that. You're eight. You're ten. That makes perfect sense. I want to remind you, I was there with you, when we were growing up and got these messages about ourselves and our worth."

"I was there when you were hurt. I was there when your parent made themselves the center of attention, by playing the victim at every turn. I was there when your parent was exigent and demanding, if it wasn't an A+. Of course, you have these stories that don't really serve you. That keep you out of your body, out of connection, out of the present moment. And I'm not mad at you about it, anymore. I get it. Of course, you do."

When we can sit down with our thoughts, with ourselves, with our stories, we can start to pull them apart and understand them, and can soothe and love up on our inner children. Only then, can we start to use thought work and somatic practices to slow down and shift our thinking, and release those issues from our tissues.

Now, the slowing down may feel counterintuitive. Your mind may be saying, "Hasn't moving slowly kept us in the muck and mire of these stories? Aren't we living in the past? Shouldn't we speed up into the future, or at least the present?" Well, in truth, we get stuck in old stories when we're moving through life too fast. When we don't take the time to slow down and get present, and look at ourselves carefully and to evaluate our beliefs.

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So, let's treat this less like a race against our harmful thoughts, and more like a traffic jam. When we're stuck in traffic, that's what is. And getting pissed off about the traffic, getting all road rage-y when you can't move an inch, doesn't change anything. Willing the cars to move, fixating on the other roads we could have chosen, on all the things we could be doing if it weren't for the traffic, won't make the cars move.

Instead, we really serve ourselves best when we relax into the reality; the cars are stuck. And, so are we. We can take in the view, do some breathing, have a dance party in the car, call a friend, or binge the *Feminist Wellness* podcast. But moving the cars with our minds alone, by getting mad at them for being there, not going to happen.

With these stuck feeling-thoughts, these narratives about ourselves and our lives that don't serve us, we need to slow down, and really see them for what they are; they're stories, may have been true, may have some truth today. But we don't have to let them define us.

We don't have to continue to believe them anymore. Nor, do we need to believe that they are the sum total of who we are, and who we can become. And if you feel like all you are is your supposed missteps and failures, then another great tool when you're stuck in a story that doesn't serve you, is the good 'ole reality check.

Ask your trusted people if your painful thought is actually true. If they see your past, present and future, the same way you're worried brain does. For this, you need people who will be real with you. Who are willing to be honest. And then your job, is to be willing to be vulnerable and hear their feedback.

Be open to what they have to share, and see if it can help you to loosen your grip on the stories you tell that just hold you back. So, when you're in a mental traffic jam, just breathe into being there. Put a good song on, and

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be present with the internal emotional traffic that is. Or, sit in the quiet and check it out. See what it feels like in your body. Let your brain tell you its stories, without interfering or shutting it up or changing the channel.

Practice just being with it before you try to change it. It's sort of like getting a knot out of a string. Rather than running for the scissors to cut it out, a slow massage might do the trick. Sure, it takes some time, but then we haven't destroyed anything. We haven't cut the string in half just to get a knot out.

And so, we can spare ourselves; our gentle hearts and minds; while we work to get out these thought knots. I'll invite you to remember the science. Regret only registers in your mind, when you believe you caused the problem. And sure, you may have made a decision in the past you don't like now, and I'll urge you to pause and to contextualize your decision-making capacity.

Were you taught self-worth, self-love, good, solid decision-making skills, and self-care, at home? At school? In your community? Your religious world? Did you get the attunement and care you needed, to be able to hear and trust your intuition and discernment? I most certainly didn't. Most of us didn't. Or frankly, we wouldn't resonate with being emotional outsourcers.

Before you put all the blame on your own pretty little head, I'll invite you to pause, and to zoom out. You didn't get to where you are all alone, my perfect buttercup.

So, here is some homework for you. Time to do some pattern recognition work. As you work to be your own watcher and pay attention to your thoughts, notice if there is a place where you tend to get stuck. Is it emotional? Mental? A place in your body, like your jaw, neck, hips or calves? A combination plate; all of the above please.



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You start by paying attention. And then, as you start to notice patterns, like stories that keep coming back up at certain times in your menstrual cycle or your moon cycle... When you're around certain people... Before certain events, after certain events... You can start to uncover the source of that stuckness.

You can slowly massage the knots, and can start to remind yourself that believing those stories is optional. And that you can choose to shift what you want to believe about yourself, and can work to shift your nervous system state out of sympathetic, or dorsal, and back to ventral vagal; the safe and social part of the nervous system.

So that you're not just changing your thoughts, you're changing your bodily, somatic, lived, physical experience of your life. The beauty of the somatic practices that we do in Anchored, is that they bring us back to presence. And, focusing on presence brings us back into somatic resonance in a powerful way.

Nerdy research has shown that mindfulness can activate and even change some of the brain parts that are involved in emotional processing and regulation. Namely, the anterior cingulate cortex. And, can be helpful in hitting pause when a painful old story just won't quit.

So, my beauty, come back to the present moment. Feel your feet on the ground. Feel a hot cup of tea in your hands. The cool outside air on your skin. Dig your toes into the rug, and get present to the softness. Mindfulness is a powerful remedy, my darling. Don't forget just how simple it can be to come back home, and to anchor yourself, in you.

If you'd like more support to do this, I have a free offering. If you head over to [VictoriaAlbina.com](http://VictoriaAlbina.com) right at the top of the page, there's a little teal blue bar, and it says "Free Meditations". Click on it, put your information in, and

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you'll get a set of, not just meditations, but a nervous system orienting exercise.

And that exercise helps you to do just this. To call in that mindfulness, that presence. That has that beautiful impact on your brain that helps you to step out of your spinning.

And my beauty, if you're looking for more support, I'll invite you to join us in Anchored. We dive deep on this issue, of exploring the thought and somatic patterns we hold on to. And then, we learn how to loosen their hold on us. It's challenging to do this kind of work on your own. And I know, because I tried to do it for well over a decade. We need each other. We need collective, we need community.

And you deserve a coach who's an expert in matters of the nervous system and working with the soma, working with the body. To help you to really dive deep, in a safer container, where your nervous system can relax. And you can begin to really do this work of stepping into your authenticity and out of those old meanie-pants stories that keep you feeling stuck, unworthy, and less-than. Learn more and join us at [VictoriaAlbina.com/anchor](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/anchor)

Alright, my beauty, let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You are loved. And, when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my 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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/masterclass) to grab your seat now. See you there; it's gonna be a good one!