

Ep #214: Understanding and Reframing Your Attachment Style



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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Ep #214: Understanding and Reframing Your Attachment Style

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. You know those conversations you have, at the end of it, you're like, "Ah, that was so amazing. I loved that conversation. I wish everyone in the world could hear that conversation." And then, you remember that some of your best conversations are recorded for podcasts.

I had just such a conversation very recently with Emma and Cass, the wonderful gals of the *Honeydew Me* podcast. Which is a show all about sex, love, relationships, romance. It's a show that I am on monthly as a regular guest, which is just, come on, that is so fun and cool.

My work around emotional outsourcing is really all about relationships, right? So, at my core, I really am a relationship coach and sex and love; relating. It's all one beautiful thing, that really, at its core, all about significance and belonging, all about the nervous system, all about safety. You know, the things we like to talk about here.

So, my loves, I had this really wonderful conversation all about attachment with the *Honeydew Me* gals, and I wanted to share it with you. I'm going to share that recording. If you enjoy the episode, if you want to hear more of this kind of conversation, more talk about relationships from me here, on *Feminist Wellness*, drop me a little DM over @VictoriaAlbinaWellness on the "Gram", I give good gram.

And if you don't do social media, hats off to you, send me an email, podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com. Let me know what you think of the

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conversation; if you enjoyed it, and, yeah, if you want more of this kind of stuff. Because I'm really out here to give you all the kind of information that is the most supportive and helpful for you. And when I know what that is, then I can meet you. Makes sense, right?

Oh, and just going to say it, not safe to play out loud at work. If you have little kids in the car, and you're like thoughtful about what content, I'm going to be talking about sex, it's a show about sex. I've said that word about 57 times already in this intro. So, here you go, make your own decisions. Maybe this is one for headphones. Without further ado.

Cass: We want to go over attachment styles with you, because not only do you make the complex things more simple in our brain, but you just help bring so much grace to things that feel hard. So, let's start with just defining what the attachment styles are basically.

Victoria: Yeah. As children, we learn about the world, right? We show up not really knowing what's safe, what's not safe, and our nervous systems need to figure it out. So, that they can set the parameters, the boundaries, the limits. So, we know how to behave, who to be, how to show up, so that we can get what humans need most, which is a sense of significance and connection. Those are the two main drivers in the human psyche, in our subconscious. Do I matter? And why? And what will keep me safe?

If we think back to the evolutionary savanna of life, when the marauders come, when the lions come, we need to know that our tiny bodies will be picked up and put on a hip and someone will run out of the village up into the mountains with us to keep us safe, significance and connection.

And so, we learn in childhood, who is safe and who is not. And who we need to be, how we need to show up, in order to feel secure in that safety.

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The goal for the human psyche is safety, right? It's secure connection, secure attachment. Meaning, we can Velcro onto our caregivers, they will Velcro back in a way that is interdependent, that is based on mutuality, reciprocity, respect, connection, safety. And that is the root of attachment, is learning who we can Velcro to and who we probably shouldn't.

The problem is when the who we shouldn't is your primary caregiver, oof, things get complicated real fast. And so, that's when we develop... Let's stick to the sort of two basic branches of insecure connection, because there's lots of sort of sub-Reddits. Let's TLDR this...

Emma: See? making the complicated, simple.

Victoria: Why not? What else are we doing? Yeah, it's really these two branches of anxious attachment and avoidant attachment. There's disorganized, there's complexity, there's variations. Keeping it simple, you're either, anxiously attached. "Will my caregiver come back? Will they love me? Will they be...? Am I okay? What? What? What?"

A sort of a sympathetic nervous system driven attachment system, where the sympathetic nervous system is fight or flight, adrenaline, norepinephrine, eventually cortisol. "Are you coming back? Am I safe?" Think of any given Chihuahua, "Hi. Hi. Hi, I'm here. I'm here. I'm here. Love me, make me safe. I am just a small Chihuahua."

The other, is avoidant attachment. Where, let's say, a Labrador is secure attachment, "I'm here. I know you love me. I'm a Labrador. I'm loyal. You're loyal. We're good." The avoidant attachment is, "I am only safe when there's distance between us. I avoid Velcroing on to others, because Velcroing didn't work out so well for me in the past. And so, if I let you in, or I let myself into your energetic field, I'm not trusting this."

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So, that's a cat. Avoidant attachment is cats. It's, "You can pet me, but I might scratch. You can pet me, but I might run away. You can pet me, but I am going to change my mind halfway." Meaning, "I'm not going to answer your texts in a timely manner." You might say, "I love you." And I might say, "Really, hanging out with you is pretty okay. Like, it's all right, but I've got to go do cat shit. I'm out of here. I might pee on your bed."

Emma: I've got to go pee on your bed. I'll be back though.

Cass: But maybe not.

Victoria: Yeah, "You can't really count on me to be back. But I'm definitely peeing on your bed."

Cass: That's one thing you absolutely can count on.

Victoria: And so, when we live life from either of those insecure attachments, there's this tenuousness to all of our relationships. Our attachment styles can bleed out into our friendships, into our work connections. But they predominantly show up in our romantic relationships because that's where our nervous systems are doing something called "reenactment".

Reenactment is when our minds, our bodies, our nervous systems, our inner children, seek to replicate our early childhood experience with the hope of it turning out differently. And so, we live from reenactment until we realize that that's what we're doing and we decide to make different choices. To move towards secure attachment, healthy Velcroing, Labrador Retriever, within ourselves, and from there live that way in connection with others.

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Emma: The reenacting part that was a different take.

Victoria: Yeah.

Emma: It's a different feeling in my body.

Victoria: Yeah, tell me about that feeling. What did it feel like to hear that?

Emma: Everything you just said, these little memories of me throughout my life have been popping up in my head. So, when you started talking about the anxious attachment, and 'when are you coming back?'

I still, to this day, when somebody I love leaves, whether it's my mom or my husband, when they leave the house and I'm not with them, I think about, "Are they going to come back? Are they going to come back alive?" I think about all of the different scenarios that could happen and prevent them from coming back.

And then I think about, in friendships, coming home after having an amazing time, and then being like, "Do they still like me? Did I do something wrong? Did I ruin that?" Or we have to have a more difficult conversation, and then I leave that, I'm like, "Well, guess that's over." I heard this thing, it was probably on TikTok, but it was like, "In my head, our friendship is only as secure as our last interaction." And I thought that was really interesting.

Victoria: Yeah, it's the last neural track. It's the last neural groove in the neural map. Right? Our minds have these maps of what the 'what' is: What's safe? What's healthy? What's healthy within the context of our stress, distress, and trauma, right? But what will keep me alive today? And you're right, the last interaction is the last groove.

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And so, it's like water will always run downhill. And our neural maps, our mind, will always go to the last interaction. What we get to do is bolster that last interaction, in the felt safety within, so here's where we bring in embodiment, presence, and somatics. Where somatics means body-based practices.

Where we recognize that the mind is a meaning-making machine that will continue to tell stories. That's its job. Nothing's gone wrong there. There's not a problem. That's just its job. And we get to come back to the body to find the truth that lives therein, right? The truth is that we can create secure attachment with ourselves and model that for ourselves. And from there, bring that to our relating.

Emma: So, are there any, I know we're separated into secure and insecure, but is there any positives to insecure attachments? Or is the goal always to get to the secure attachment?

Victoria: Hmm. I'll say this, there's very little, I think of as actually negative, because I really hold it all within this loving framework of protecting our inner children. I think it's really important... The way I talk about codependent, perfectionist, and people pleasing habits, as emotional outsourcing is very deeply purposeful, right?

So, it's always towards the goal of reducing shame and blame and guilt and that story that, "I'm a fuckup. There's something wrong with me. I'm not doing this right." Like, this is life and relating. We're just working from those childhood scripts.

And so, the positive is that you're keeping your inner children safe. You're right that it doesn't really serve us to be in anxious or avoidant attachment

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because it puts a barrier between us and real love, real connection, real safety. Because from anxious, you cannot be truly authentic.

“The essential human task is to show up in our authenticity, and to live from our big open hearts.” And you can't do that if you're anxiously attached to someone. Because if they like chocolate cake, but you like carrot, and you're like, “Oh no. Well, we'll have the chocolate because that's what you want. Let's have that. Let's have that. I love it. No, no, it's my favorite, chocolate.”

Parlay that into sex, and you're like, “Sure, yeah. Let's doggy style all night long,” but you fucking hate it and it hurts your cervix, but you're doing it. You're doing whatever it is to try to secure that love, that care, that safety.

And avoidance, it's sort of more obvious in the cat model. That you're putting this distance between you and what feels risky, which is being fully seen as your most authentic self. So, they're positive for our sense of safety and our nervous system regulation. But they keep us feeling unsafe and dysregulated. Oof.

Emma: Can you talk a little bit about what secure attachment looks and feels like?

Victoria: It feels so good. It feels so good.

Emma: Sounds nice I'm over there.

Victoria: Yeah, it's really cozy over here. It's about self-trust in this really powerful way. It's about saying, “I trust that I've got my back, no matter what. I can show up in my authenticity, I can be me. I trust that being me is enough to get me love, to get me care, to get me support. And if it doesn't

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get me that from person A, I'll get it from me. And I'll trust that person B is on their way.”

So, it really feels like this powerful internal hug. Right? It's like the most delicious bear hug you've ever gotten, but it comes from inside. And it allows you to say things like, “I was with a new date this weekend. And she said something, and I felt like a zap in my belly, a little catch. I was able to say, ‘Hey, I felt a little avoidant attachment right there.’”

I was a little anxious and then turned avoidant. And I felt like I didn't matter for a second. And then I felt this force inside me that was like, ‘You know what, forget about it. That's fine. I'll just go. I'm out of here.’ And so, I was able to say that because I trust that I will have my back. Regardless of her response, I have me. I'm safe because I'm safe with me.” Right?

And in my experience, the more we're able to show up that way for ourselves, the more we're attracting people who say, “Oh, thank you so much for saying that. The way I said that I hear you, that that landed the way you're experiencing. Let's restore this safe container for us in this moment.”

That's the work of it. Right? Is showing up for us, trusting us, and then trusting others and discerning when our trust is not a gift we'll be giving to someone else. Discerning that. Where discernment is the direction that our intuition gives us. It's really beautiful.

Cass: It really is. And with your example, are you also saying that you could have this secure attachment, while still going through phases of feeling anxious and avoidant? But that doesn't mean you don't have secure attachment within yourself?

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Victoria: Absolutely, absolutely. It's an ebb. It's a flow. When we talk about the nervous system, our goal is to be able to sit with what is. The nervous system life if we want to go a spritz Buddhist. I'm always in for a spritz of Buddhism. We're able to roll with our nervous systems, roll with life, and to recognize that we can bring ourselves back to ventral vagal, the safe and social part of the nervous system, which is where secure attachment lives.

And that it's throughout any given day, to stay with the nervous system for a second, we need sympathetic activation. It's not a bad thing. Having a little adrenaline is what? The alarm goes off, you get up and you put on your pants and you go put the kettle on and you have a life, right?

And then dorsal, which is the freeze. Which both get maligned, particularly in this hashtag nervous system talk kind of world. Neither is bad, it's a normal ebb and flow. If there was no dorsal, the extreme of which is freeze, then there'd be no Savasana. There'd be no, let's put on a record and just listen to this music and just be calm, and relaxed, but grounded in ventral vagal.

The same goes for attachment. I trust that I have really been doing the work to build secure attachment. So, when anxious or avoidant show up, I can befriend them, and treat them as visitors. Again, a spritz of Buddhism in the Shambala tradition, you learn in meditation that when a thought arises, you just label it "thinking" and let it pass.

And so too, when I felt a little anxious, a little avoidant, I got to just label it like it's a "passing visitor". And in naming it, in befriending it, in recognizing it, I honor it, because I honor all feelings. Even the ones that, frankly...

Because you know me, right? No bullshit, more nonsense. This is one of my favorite mottos. Because I love the nonsense, let's be real. I'm here for

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all assortment of nonsense, but no bullshit. It's just a little nonsense. It's just my brain, my inner children being like, "Are you being abandoned? Protect yourself."

But I don't need to protect myself anymore. I just get to honor what is, speak what is, see if it's received or not, make thoughtful choices from how I am received or not, and take care of myself from there. And I think that brings us to like a really important point.

The difference between self-protection, which is this outward force. It's this outward pushing energy that isolates us from the world. "I have to protect myself." Versus taking care of ourselves. Which is a flow of energy inward, from your heart inward, even deeper of, "Hey, I shared what was coming up with my attachment, you weren't able to honor it, you weren't able to hold it. So instead of protecting myself from you, I'm going to honor me. I'm going to take care of me. I'm going to soothe me. I'm going to befriend me and my complex human emotions and my inner children, and really, just do what is most in service of my heart and my wellness and my authenticity."

Cass: When you're describing that, it feels amazing, first of all. How do you know... I think you've mentioned before, when we've talked about intrusive thoughts or something, that your knowing is quiet and those intrusive is really loud.

So, how do you know when you're securely attached to the fact that you're honoring yourself? Or you're telling yourself, "I have this secure attachment so I'm on a run," but that's like, avoided? How do you know when you're there?

Victoria: Such a great question. It's a felt sensation. So, it comes back to somatics, it comes back to presence, it comes back to feeling into that

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difference. This is a thing I do with my clients all the time, is getting into our safer container, getting really present and grounded in our bodies, in this really deep and powerful way. And then feeling into the difference, right?

Feeling into secure and then mapping that in our bodies. Really letting that land. And what it is, is self-intimacy. It's allowing yourself to have a really intimate awareness of and connection with self. Because from there, you can feel the difference.

Yeah, so the voice that says "leave", for me, like I'm thinking of leaving relationships, that voice is just this powerful, solid, rounded knowing. And the "run" is up here. The "run" is, "Get out." It's flittery, it's flighty. It's not solid in my heart. It's not feet on the ground, it's taken to the sky.

So, it really is about spending time to really get to know the different felt sensations in your body. And that can be a meditative practice. That can be a mindfulness practice. Definitely the somatic practices that I do with my clients, really bring us back into the body. So that you know, yeah.

It comes back to tone. We've talked about this before together. That it's not what you say, it's how you say it, especially in the nervous system. Right? That anxious tone, woof. That flat affect, ooh no thank you. But the place in between, that rounded, that's the voice to listen to. And it takes time. It takes patience. It takes practice, you know?

And then, okay, you ready? Let's nerd. Memory consolidation window. What are you talking about weirdo? Well, thanks for asking. This is such a cool nervous system thing. In the approximately five hours after a new procedural memory has been established in the body, meaning you're telling a new story.

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So, let's say you fear the eight-leggeds or the no-leggeds. Everybody knows what we're talking about, we're not going to freak anybody out, right? Too much legs, not enough legs; classic human fears. So, you have a really nice experience with one or the other. You create a new memory track in the psyche, in your mind, and in your body, that says 'that thing's not so bad.'

In those next approximately five hours, if you're able to stay with the felt sensation, the bodily somatic experience, that new memory track will consolidate and will become the new water running downhill. The new path of least psyche-based resistance. It's your go-to, it becomes your go-to.

And so, we tap in, we get present, we feel into secure attachment, and that's the work of the day, is to continue to come back to, "Okay. It's an hour since coaching, going to pause, feel into secure attachment." So, I'll feel into it right now; two feet on the floor.

For me in this moment, it's this weight in my pelvis. In a beautiful way, this grounding in my sits bone that travels up my spine. And is this, in a beautiful way, dense, heavy, landed feeling in my chest that lets me know I'm safe. That I'm safe with me.

And now, it's sort of glittering out through my chest and it's filling my back body. It feels luscious. It feels expansive. It connects me with spirit and self. So, you stay with it. You come back to it. Right? You ground into it, and you let the memory consolidate and rewrite the old neural pathway that said, "Humans, dangerous," You've got to go Chihuahua, or you've got to go angry rescue cat. Right?

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I mean, have you ever met a Labrador Retriever that doesn't think everyone loves it all the time? Like it's just what is. "I'm always welcome. I'm always loved." Come on. So you ground into that.

And you can go visit, from that new consolidated memory and sensation, go visit the other ones, pay 'em a little visit. And really welcome them in and befriend them. Because, again, that's the issue. We learn about a thing, "Oh, anxious attachment, so bad. Avoidant attachment, so bad." We demonize it.

Okay, let's, once again, Buddhist-lite, "Tea with Mara". So, I'm going to TLDR this, but the Buddhist is giving a talk... The Buddha, not the Buddhist. I mean, he's the original Buddhist because he's the Buddha. The Buddha is giving a talk. This demon, Mara, comes to visit and is like effing everything up, like knocking over chairs, spilling the tea. And the Buddha is like, "Dudes." His crew is like, "Yo, you want us to get rid of Mara?" And he's like, "No, come on. Invite Mara in for tea."

They sit and they talk, and they hang out. Maybe they watch a show. Maybe they share their favorite TikToks. And he has tea with Mara. That is nervous system work. Right? That is attachment work. It's don't just label the demon 'bad' and get rid of it. Invite it, pour it a goddamn cup of tea. I'm really loving a little throat coat right now, this time of year. A little Breathe Easy.

Cass: Just arguably the dirtiest tea; throat coat? Are you kidding me?

Victoria: You like that?

Cass: It's at work and every time I see it, I'm like, "Wink. I see you, get a nice throat coat before I go to lunch.

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Victoria: Yeah, I have a pearl necklace that goes great with your throat coat. Snap! We went from full nerd to full perv in like two seconds. Because it's how we do, every month. Absolutely. Oh, honeydew me.

Cass: So funny. But that makes so much sense. When you were talking about identifying it in your body, I know my avoidant feeling now, I don't know if I know my anxious one because she's so familiar. But my avoidant one, I know that she's wrong, usually. So, I can feel when she pops up. And it's right here in my chest. I do fast things that I apologize for within three minutes, because I know that what I just did was an asshole move.

Emma: Wait, can I pause you though?

Cass: I know you're going to get mad at me for...

Emma: Girl, [cross talk].

Cass: You're going to love me out of my mean talk.

Victoria: Welcome to compassionstationUSA.com. Come on, now. You are perfect and amazing. And, she's never wrong. She's just living from a different script, always and forever. I get it. I get it. You do asshole shit. I do asshole shit. We do stuff we don't want to do, but it's coming from love. Right? She's not wrong. It's just her actions don't align with the current goal, which is to be love. Be kindness.

Emma: Fuck. When she's not wrong...

Victoria: She's not wrong.

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Emma: So, when somebody tells me I'm wrong. Like, no, you don't need to be... like, no, you're wrong. They're going to come back. They're going to be fine. You're wrong. Or you should, whatever, this that or the other. But it feels right in my body, in a way, it feels right to a part of me. So, when somebody just tells me it's wrong, it's like, that makes it worse.

Cass: Right? So, this is just the one that we've identified with up until this point?

Victoria: Yeah, exactly. It's the script that kept us from dying when we were little babies, right? Because remember, a giraffe is born and it's like up walking around, selling shit at Toys-R-Us, within minutes.

Cass: It's employed immediately.

Victoria: Immediately, or sooner. Meanwhile, I mean, we're adorable, but we're pretty useless for a really long time. Right? We can't, you know, can't sell anything.

Cass: We can't sell a goddamn... We are a failure to capitalism. Let's just call that out. So, get on it, children.

Victoria: Yeah, we can't do nothing. We are meaning-making machines, so we need to start telling stories. And we will continue to work from those scripts because, memory consolidation window. When we didn't know what that was, circa 12 minutes ago, we were living in it. And we were strengthening the neural grooves that say, "I'm not safe unless I cling to you. I'm not safe unless I push you away. I'm not safe. I'm not safe."

We just didn't know what we were doing. Right? Yeah. But now we're learning, now we know. And so, we can even reframe, "That was an

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asshole thing to do,” as “That behavior, those words, that choice, was not me in my dignity. Was not me in my integrity. Was not me in my values. But it was a part of me trying to love me the best it can.” That's the one; bookmark that one.

Cass: Yeah, star that. I'm going to sell T-shirts.

Emma: I'm wondering if we could talk about some of the other ways that avoidant and anxious attachments show up that we might not even realize are that. And that we say, “Oh, I'm just an asshole.” Are there any other common ways that those can come up in our life?

Victoria: The one I see the most with my clients, who are working through their emotional outsourcing and working to source love from within, is the “I'm fine.” That's a huge one. I did that forever. “I'm fine. I'm fine. I'm fine.” And what it is, is that shut down, that dorsal freeze, that disconnect within, aligning with avoidant attachment to say, “No one can and will show up for me. I have to do and be everything, for and by myself. I'm fine. I'm fine. It's fine. Don't worry about it. It's fine. I don't care. It's fine.”

The next thing, in a dating, romantic, or with your friends, too, is not having opinions when you have opinions. “Hey, where do you want to go to dinner? I don't care, whatever.”

And we always need to be thoughtful. You know, I'm always out here being like, “The Instagram is teaching you that everything's a trauma response, everything's terrible, everything's bad.” Sometimes you're just a person who doesn't have an opinion because you're tired, or you have your period, or your period's late or whatever, your shoes are too tight, and you just can't be bothered. You know what I mean? So again, discernment.

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Sometimes it's, "I don't want you to ever think poorly of me, or to think I'm wrong, or to think I messed up. So, if I don't have an opinion, then there's nothing you can hold against me. You can't ever tell me I picked a bad restaurant. You can never be disappointed in me. You can never think poorly of me or think less of me. So, I will subsume me in service of what I believe and imagine you will think of me, towards the goal of safety."

Cass: And that's anxious attachment?

Victoria: It can come from either, really. "Yeah, I'm going to avoid having an opinion, and then you don't have nothing on me. You can't come for me." Because when we're not securely attached within ourselves, someone naming our vulnerabilities, naming things that are close to the quick, it can feel like an attack, and can feel very dangerous when we're not grounded in self. Makes sense.

So, that self-protective desire comes from there. Comes from that "I need to keep myself from being wounded by you. Because I don't know how to, again, protect or take care." And when we don't actually know how to do either, all we do is, claws out or soft underbelly. "I have no opinion. I don't exist. I'm not real. I'm not authentic. I'm not a person with preferences and ideas and thoughts, and you have it all for us."

Which leads to some really problematic power issues in relationships, not the sexy kind. I'm out here from a sexy power play.

Cass: Yeah, exactly. That was the next question that was coming up for me. How do our relationships tend to look in each of these types of attachment, including secure?

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Victoria: Yeah, in secure there's interdependence. True interdependence requires secure attachment. Or building towards interdependence, enables secure attachment. Secure attachment with self, enables a deeper interdependence. They are in fact, interdependent.

Meanwhile, avoidant, or anxious, can be a more codependent framework. Where again, our definition of codependency is chronically and habitually sourcing our sense of worth, validation, and wellness, from everyone and everything outside of ourselves instead of from within.

So, they're both not self stances. Secure attachment, that's a self-stance. Avoidant or anxious, not self. The locus of your experience is not within you, it's within someone else. That's the pushing away, or the grasping. That is what creates your felt sense of self.

Yuck, right? Because then, what happens when there's conflict? What happens when there's disagreement? What happens when someone leaves? Yikes. So, anxious looks like that grasping, "When are you coming home? When can we hang out? What do you want to do? Do you want to go on vacation? What do you want to do?" They'll leave. "I don't trust that I'm safe if you leave."

And avoidant is, "Yeah, that's fine. Whatever. We could hang out on Friday, but..." Even when a little voice inside you is like, "I really like this person, and I'd really like to hang out." When they move towards you, that protective stance is like, "I mean, sure, we could hang out. I mean, I might actually be busy Friday."

You're not busy. You don't have... There's a pandemic. You're home alone watching Disney+, don't fuck with me. I know what you're doing. I can see

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your Google Calendar and it says gluten-free frozen pizza, Disney+ on Friday night.

But instead, you're like, "Oh, I mean, I don't know I might be busy." Because you don't want to look too available because available is an unprotected stance in your nervous system. Because then, you make the plans, and they don't show up. They make the plans, and they don't praise you.

So, it's safer to just not make the plans, not connect, not show up, ghost someone, not text back. Like, have an amazing date and amazing sex and an amazing... And then, you go to put a little heart on their last text message and something inside you goes, "Don't you dare."

Whereas anxious is like, "all the hearts, all the Hi Hi Hi."

And secure, is like, "Oh, why do I want to...?" Okay, so right. This is just coming to me. Part of the intentionality of secure attachment is asking, is a conceptualization of self and the world based in deep, grounded curiosity. Why do I want to put a heart on the message? Why do I want to reach out? Not in a... Again, the internet encourages us to be way too navel gazing. Not that. Not the self-flagellation of, why am I doing it?

Rather, the gentle, loving, curious question asking. "Hey, babe, what's your intention here? What's your 'why'?" And then my favorite question, "Do I like my 'why'?" Love that question. I asked it a thousand times a day. Do I like my reason why?

And if you don't, you don't like your reason why, "Oh, I want to reach out because I want to make sure they're there." Or "I don't want to reach out

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because I don't want to seem like I'm too there." Then, make a different choice.

I think the other thing that we can sort of track on top of this, is how we were met as newborns and toddlers. So, anxious tends to track with folks who have a nourishment gap. Yeah, we didn't get the kind of nourishment we needed as children; we weren't met. And so, we're always seeking.

Before doing this work, I was constantly seeking a solid object to ground me, to push against, to help me feel like it was safe and okay for me to be alive and on the planet. And like, here, present. And so, that's what all the grasping was for. "Reassure me that I'm alive. That I'm okay. That I can land." Does that make English?

Cass: Yeah.

Victoria: And then the flip, the avoidant, all the things can come from all the experiences, right? It's like, trauma is not what happened, it's how your nervous system processed it. Some people go to war, they come back totally fine. And then some don't, right?

Or, like siblings in the same household. One will be super dramatized, and one's like, "Okay, whatever. Aw, man, that sucked." Not in a trauma response, but the same thing.

So, what tends to track, is avoidant attachment often will track with smothering, with enmeshment. With that angle of codependency, where a parent or caregiver figure is too much in your shit or making you their therapist. Triangulating, which is when... Just picture a triangle. You're at the top and two people, who should have their own relationship, for example, two parental caregivers, put you in the middle.

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And so, being too connected, being too much interrelating is too much. So yeah, I mean, that too, is like the experience I had this weekend of like, “Oh, are you not in connection the same way I am? That made me anxious. And now, I'm going to withdraw myself for my protection.”

But I'll also own there was this slight hint of, “Well, fuck you then. I just gave you all this vulnerability, all this open heart. If you're not going to hold it, then,” honestly, a touch of va fangool. You know what I mean? Yeah, but luckily just a whisper, now, a whisper.

Cass: A drizzle.

Victoria: Just a drizzle, of fuck off.

Cass: A glaze on top

Victoria: Oh, my God, I love it. The donut of your experience, a glaze of avoidance.

Cass: A glaze of avoidance. What does it look like if someone is secure, and someone is insecure? What do those relationships look like? And, do they last? Can you bring someone up with you to make a secure attachment? Or is that just...

Victoria: Yeah, there has to be willingness, on the part of the person who has the insecure attachment. They have to be willing to recognize where they're coming from, and to have that desire, and most importantly, the capacity within their nervous system to grow and change.

So, we'll nervous system nerd and then we'll come back to the question. Within the nervous system, there is a term that the literature calls the

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“window of tolerance”. It's how many inputs can your nervous system tolerate and have you stay in ventral vagal, the safe and social part of the nervous system. Where we're chill, we're cool, we're ideating, we're connecting, we're here, we're in presence.

And then, okay, my favorite example is you're driving on I-95, which is just generally a terrible idea because it goes to the great State of Rhode Island, and we can't fucking drive. And so, one Rhode Island asshole cuts you off and you're like, “Rude.” But you're fine, you're grounded, you're in yourself.

The next person cuts you off, you're getting annoyed. The third? You're honking the horn, you're screaming out the window, you're giving them the hand, right? You have left your window of what you can tolerate.

Now, as someone who works with humans socialized as women to overcome codependency, I'm not out here trying to talk to anybody about tolerating nothing, because that's like our whole lives, is tolerating, tolerating, tolerating. We're way too good at it.

So, I like to talk about our window of capacity, or what my teacher Jane Clap calls, “our window of bodily dignity”.

Cass: I love how much we're using the word dignity today, that feels good.

Victoria: Doesn't it feel good? It feels really good. So, what can come into my system, and I will still stay in my dignity with me and with the world, right? That window of capacity, or dignity, it's our comfort zone. It's what is comfortable to our nervous system, and what is expanding the parameters just a bit.

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And notice, mama didn't say push, right? Because in my world, we do not push. We don't push our nervous systems. We don't push our inner children. We meet them lovingly and invite them in for tea. So, doing nervous system work, somatic work, combined with thought work, all of it all together, helps us to expand what can feel safe to our nervous system, and allow us to show up.

My spine just went straight in saying it. I wanted to sit up to say the word "dignity." With our head held high, chest out, grounded in ourselves. And we can expand that capacity. I have. My attachment was wicked insecure, once again, hella insecure for the West Coast. Translation is really important. Accessibility, just honoring our difference.

You know what I'm talking about. You know how it is around here. It's how we do, when *Honeydew Me* and *Feminist Wellness* come together and make sweet podcast love. That's what it is. Yeah, wicked hella insecure.

And so, I got to really ground my nervous system in felt safety of my own creation, and begin to lean into the friends and helpers, and therapists, coaches, and others, who could support me and create a safer container for my own expansion and hours and hours of meditating. Let's also be real right? To expand that capacity.

So, you proposed, Partner A is insecure, Partner B is secure, as their predominant types; is there hope here? I do believe there is if Partner B has the capacity in their nervous system to be patient, to be emotionally generous, to be just willing. To be the solid object, to hold that safer container for Partner A to flail just a little bit.

And Partner A needs the willingness, the attentiveness to self, the desire to do this work. And really, that capacity to put your ego aside just a bit. This

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comes back to the bad asshole. Pause and recognize, “Okay, ego. This is not the whole of myself reacting this way. It's just a part. So, let's honor that part and expand.”

I think as long as everyone's actually dedicated to growth, and dedicated to doing their work, whatever that looks like for them... There's as many paths as there are humans. Then, I think there's hope. I think there absolutely is hope.

Emma: What are some steps that an insecurely attached person, if that's your primary attachment style, could start working towards secure attachment?

Victoria: Awareness, acceptance, action, we're always going to go there. You can't change what you can't see. And so, if you don't realize, “Oh, right, like the way I did last night. Where I was like, oh, okay, I'm having a little deviation from the norm here. I can feel that in my body. So, I can name that out loud.”

But that's like ninja level. That is seminar level, right? So, what's the 101? It's self-awareness. It's coming into an awareness of what your own pathways are, your neural pathways. What is the easy story for your brain to go to? That's a great guiding question. “Suddenly, things don't feel good in this relating. What is the story I'm telling? What is my go-to narrative?”

Next, we can get curious about where it came from. But remember the difference between coaching and therapy. Therapy is amazing for helping us to create the stress, distress, and trauma PowerPoint and to understand where things came from. And I think it's invaluable work.

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The work of coaching is to pick up in the here and now, in the present tense, and move us forward. So, it's a choose your own adventure. If you are really curious about where it came from, the why, go to there. Figure it out, work with it, sit with it.

At this point in my own growth, I can make you a trauma PowerPoint, right? "And then when I was six..." And it was really interesting for me in my 20s and maybe my early 30s. And at this point, I'm just like, "All right, y'all. Here we are. Let's move forward from here." So, getting into awareness of, what's coming up right now? What is the felt sensation? And what is the story? Where felt sensation, literally means that.

Earlier, I shared what secure attachment feels like in my body. What does anxious attachment feel like in your body? For me, it's being over caffeinated. It's a very similar "I can't ground, I can't settle." It's itchy, it's scratchy, it's graspy. Again, so much Buddhist-lite in here. Versus that secure attachment that's more from acceptance. Grounded acceptance of what is, of life being life and being itself.

So, that's where I would start. It's that felt sensation awareness, combined with curiosity around your narratives. And then starting, I would always start with the body, but we got to bring the mind along for the ride, starting to shift the story, "I don't feel secure or safe here. And instead of focusing outward, first, I'm going to focus inward. How can I take care and be deeply engaged in a process of inner caretaking to support myself?"

And once we feel grounded and secure in ourselves more and more often; you didn't hear me say always, I shan't say always. That's not science. That's not how it works. But when the predominance of our time is felt as a more secure attachment with self, a grounding in self, then we will relate outward the way we relate inward.

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So, that's where I would start. What do you think?

Cass: That's a good place to start.

Emma: I think that's a great place to start. That brought up a little question for me. And I don't know if it's just like a pondering type of question. Do you think that you need to know where it came from to work through it? Do you need to revisit your trauma to work through it?

Victoria: The studies say no. My training is in sensorimotor psychotherapy as a coach, which is Pat Ogden's work. And in somatic experiencing, which is Peter Levine's work. And both Peter and Pat would say no. And the evidence base would say, no. I think we can point to a lot of thought leaders and practice leaders in the study of trauma and its healing; you don't have to tell the story.

Sometimes we want to, and sometimes we want to because we've been told that we should. That sort of Freudian-Jungian, lie on the couch and tell all the tales, kind of story. It's in our mind and bodies, it's in the movies, it's in the shows, the media shapes us, right? The stories we live in and with shape us, and our understanding of self in the world.

But I'm about to go on a whole other tangent. Reining the brain in. I do not believe that we need to tell the story to be able to shift the lived experience. That's what somatics does, it brings us into the here and now and says, from here, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to be about it? And that, for me, has been the most life changing work.

In my own coaching, someone will be telling a story, they'll be in a narrative, there'll be in their head, and I'll say, "Shh, baby. Pause, let's put story aside, come into your body." They'll move their hand in a certain way,

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and I'll say, "Excellent. Come back to that movement. Repeat that movement slowly, and allow yourself to drop in."

And then the tears come, then the felt experience, the emotion comes, with these slow, subtle movements that are the body working out the nervous system dysregulation. And that doesn't require any story. In fact, story, ego, it takes us out of self, and is this outward expression.

Whereas somatics, coming back to the body, allows us to work out what is held in the body and will come out sideways if we don't give it a direct route out. I'm so glad I gave. Yes. It's always our goal around here.

Emma: Is that what you were hoping?

Cass: Yes.

Victoria: Okay, cool. I'm so glad I gave you what you were looking for. It's always our goal around here, huh?

Cass: It really is. Thank you so much for going over all of that. Everything that you say is so groundbreaking to me. Thank you for setting up my day to be, I don't know, just better.

Emma: Yeah, expansive. Dignified, too.

Cass: Yeah. As a reminder, because you expand all of our listeners lives and they all love you just as much as we do, where can they connect with you after this episode?

Victoria: Thank you. So, you can follow me on "the Gram," I give good Gram, @VictoriaAlbinaWellness. You can head over to my website,

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

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VictoriaAlbina.com/Honeydew Me and you can download a whole suite of meditations and nervous system orienting exercises, right there. The price is free-99, just for you and your listeners because I love you.

And I want to support you in grounding yourself and showing up in presence. Which is where our secure attachment comes from and comes back to. It's all about presence. We're doing all these dances out there in the world, it's all about presence.

My podcast is called *Feminist Wellness*. It's for humans of all genders, and it is also free, every single Thursday. So, check it out.

Well, well, well, I hope you enjoyed that conversation just as much as I did. Thanks for listening, my love. It was a delight, as always, to be with you, in your life, on your walks, as you do the dishes or the laundry, as you commute, as you do your life and bring me with you. It is a great honor to be in your ears. And I'm grateful for the opportunity.

Alright, my beauties, 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 beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance, so you can live life with intention. Without the anxiety, 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 going to be a good one!

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