

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria Albina, NP, MPH

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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. Last week, we talked about living with a sense of chronic dissatisfaction. Feeling like the world is against you, life is never measuring up, when you are walking around with what scientists and experts in the field refer to as "persistent grumpy-pants". We talked about the why and how, and of course, some remedies to start working with this energy within you.

And so, this week, we're going to do what we love to do, which is look at the other side of it. If you find yourself in a relationship with someone with chronic grumpers, for whom your best efforts or those of others are simply never enough, then this show is for you. And as always, relationship here doesn't just mean romantic. Come on now. The grumper could be your mama, your best friend, your sibling, your work spouse, your kiddo, anyone.

Before we dive in, I want to add something about why we might find ourselves living this way, as the chronic grumper, that came to me after recording last week's show. So, I was thinking back on this and I was doing what you do when this is your work. I was talking with my people about this episode, and getting their thoughts and their experiences, and was talking with the Anchored community about it.

I realized that the reason that I found myself chronically complaining for a hot minute there, was because small complaints, small concerns, or ouchies or just saying, "Oh, that hurt my feelings," small problems, got pretty short shrift in my family, growing up. If it wasn't threat level midnight, then it got the old brush off. The, "Well, you're fine. You're okay. Don't worry about it."

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

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

So, when my life felt super out of alignment, when I was in the wrong relationship, job, friendship, etc. and felt stuck there, and like I couldn't leave the situation, the only action... And I felt like I couldn't leave the situation because of this way overinflated sense of obligation to others, right? The only action I felt like I had access to, was to grumble and gripe and express my dissatisfaction. So, I did it.

And I get it. I have tools now that help me to live life differently. Like, thought work, somatics or body-based practices, and breathwork. All the tools we use every single day in Anchored. By applying those tools, I no longer live from obligation anymore. And so, I don't need to focus on what is lousy and what doesn't work.

Because now, it feels safer in my body than it ever did before, to feel happy, to feel okay, to see the positive. Because I trust myself not to negate the negative. And this is a really important point, my darling. I don't spiritually or emotionally bypass anymore, like it was insisted I do in childhood.

So, when I feel annoyance or something isn't right, when something gets me into the grumps, I don't shove it down, I don't buffer against it, I don't turn away from it. Instead, I feel it. I look at right in the snout, I befriend it, and I process it through my body so it doesn't stay stuck within me.

And I trust myself to do that now. Versus back in the day, when I would do what I learned to do as a kiddo, either negate my own feelings, which sounded like, "It's fine. It's not that bad. I'm okay. It's fine. Other people have it worse," right?

Or when things felt intractable and I didn't know how to change my experience of life, I didn't have thought work or somatic practices yet, I would complain and complain, and try to make myself feel better by involving others in my suffering.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

We talked about these themes in several episodes, because golly gee, they are central to the emotional outsourcing experience. So, I'd take a look, if you're finding yourself wearing complainy pants, at Episode 89 "Why Complaining Never Helps"; Episode 187 "Drama, Drama, Drama"; and Episode 188, "Stop Taking Things Personally".

With that little addendum said, let's discuss the 'why' and the what to do when you truly love someone whose chronic stance on life appears to be Eeyore. What we're talking about here is the habit, in the mind and nervous system, of really leaning in on the negativity bias we all have as human mammals, for all sorts of reasons, largely self-protective ones.

There are those of us who really believe the story that things don't go our way. That the world and the things in it are out to get us. That there is a bully around every corner; AKA, we are the victims of life on a pretty continual basis.

Thus, we are constantly taking things personally and walk around offended and ready to get offended. Hypervigilant in our nervous system, often because something terrible did happen at some point. Like, yes. And we are so expecting that now, we live by the story, subconsciously, that we are not destined to be happy. So, of course, nothing is ever good enough or even moderately okay; not for long anyway.

Along with that, is the sense that you can do nothing to change your circumstances. Or that when you do change your circumstances, you're still unhappy. While also telling the story, if I change the job, the relationship, lose the weight, gain the weight, then I will be happy as discussed in detail last week.

If you haven't listened, go do that. You're an adult, do whatever you want. But I highly recommend you go listen to last week, to get more in depth on this. Then come on back. I'll be here, I'll wait. I'm not going anywhere.

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

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

So, my darling, let's start with the \$473 billion question: Why do we, as emotional outsourcers, choose these folks? Why do we choose them? Why do we stay with them? Well, quite simply, because like attracts like. And we are often chronically dissatisfied in our own lives, or some area of our lives, whether we see and recognize and voice it or not.

Often because we have unresolved issues with our own happiness and self-worth. Which makes sense when we are emotional outsourcers. We might feel this, I kind of want to use the word compulsion, but I don't, at the same time. It almost feels like a need to "fix", to "fix" this person in our lives.

Which is a very common experience for us who grew up with emotionally immature parents, or feeling like it was our job to fix or take care of our families. Fixing is what we're used to, as discussed in Episode 71 "The Fixer Thought Fantasy". And when our parents didn't exactly act like adults, as discussed in Episode 167.

An Eeyore is a phenomenal foil, for sure, and keeps us chronically busy trying to cheer them up and on, so our own lives and problems take a backseat, sometimes for decades, while we attend to them time and again, as we learned was our job in childhood. Being with someone who's never satisfied can sometimes feel like a challenge that we need to rise to. Or again, it might feel familiar if we grew up with a parent who was never satisfied.

Remember our definition of emotional outsourcing, in which we recognize that codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits are just the outward experience of chronically and habitually sourcing our sense of safety, worth, and value in the world, from everyone and everything outside of ourselves. Instead of just believing and knowing and acting from a real understanding of the facts. Where the facts, the truth, about you and your life is that you are so worthy of love and care. You are so perfect. You were born that way.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

So, from that framework for looking at the world, we can understand the deep desire to prove our value and our lovability by trying to make the grumper happy. We look for an accomplice, someone who makes us feel valuable because they seem to need us; what with everything being a disaster for them all the darn time.

We may also stay in a relationship like this because we don't think we deserve better. Or because we believe them, that something is terrible, when they tell us it is. And because we might not have confidence in our own truth and experience of life being pretty darn good. So, we go with their story because it's louder, more intense, or more frequently voiced. And because we don't trust our own voice, our own story.

When someone key in your world is chronically dissatisfied, it can be challenging for them to show up and support you as a friend, parent, partner, et cetera. For many of us who live in emotional outsourcing, taking care of ourselves and our own needs while taking care of others is super normalized from our childhoods.

And living in one-way codependent relationships is normal, too. We often weren't attuned to emotionally. Weren't met or seen in our authenticity and wholeness, and so we're used to being someone else's one-way mirror. Many of us felt either, so not taken care of growing up, or so helicopter parented, that we feel like we have to control everything or we are doomed.

And so, we believe it is our job to control the uncontrollable. Here, in this case, it's controlling other people's thoughts and feelings. Because of our overinflated sense of responsibility, we stay with partners who we believe need us. And Grumpy Pants are good at needing us because their 'everything' is the worst.

Add on to this, if you've got a case of the old anxious attachment; Episodes 129, 135, and so many more. Being the savior? Ooh, come on, that feels

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

so good, because it makes us feel safe to feel needed. And here's where things get sticky, right? We can believe it's our job to cheer up the Grumpy Pants, to change their circumstances, manage their thoughts, change their feelings, and so we do handstands and cartwheels and somersaults.

Because if they are not happy; that fixer part of us, right? That part of us that felt like life would be a disaster if we didn't micromanage it. That part tells us it's probably because we are doing something wrong. We failed to measure up. We need to change their landscape for them. This is classically emotional outsourcing. This is the definition of it.

And it has deep cultural and familial roots, linguistic ones, too. We teach kids that they create other kids' feelings and parents' feelings, aka "You made Jenny angry. You made Mikey sad." And in family structures, this is compounded. Such as, "Sweet, good daughter, you're the only person that makes me feel good when your dad is in such a bad mood." Which leaves a kid feeling like they're responsible for their parent's feelings and those of everyone around them if they're to feel safe.

And so, our sense of worth comes to rest on that ability to manage other people's feelings. And perfectionism, people pleasing, martyrdom, becomes an easily trodden path through life, deepening our codependent neural grooves and stories. We believe that if *they* are not happy, and they can come to mean pretty much anyone in our world, then we have failed. Often, failed as humans.

In some cases, our beloved Grumpy Pants may even reinforce this by telling you that you are the source of your happiness and their unhappiness. And if you just 'fill in the blank', then they would be happy. Effectively, that their mood and experience of life is your responsibility, not theirs.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

And it's important to recognize that they might believe it. They might be emotionally outsourcing so hard in their own way, that they truly look to you to create their emotions for them.

Again, we also stay with the Grumpy Pants because it's an amazing buffer. When you are completely focused on someone else, their pain, their struggle, their upset, there is legit no space for you to think about your own problems or yourself.

For many of us, who do not know how to regulate our nervous systems or to be present in our bodies in a real way, having a partner who is a Chaos Monkey is such a gift; in a gift that actually sucks, kind of way, you know what I mean? Because it keeps us from looking at our own pain. And if we don't know how to feel our feelings safely in our bodies, it keeps us from feeling all the ouchies that we imagine is just going to, like a tidal wave, take over and drown us.

Tara, a client in Anchored, was talking about this recently. She was saying that her ex, who she left during Anchored, was a grumper pants like this. He said that everyone treated him poorly, he was never respected. No job or town or friend group made him happy. So, they moved from town to town, job to job, uprooting time and again.

She even supported her spouse to open his dream business, using her money, her time, her effort. And yet, he was never satisfied. It was never enough; it was never good enough. He could only see the negative. She can see now that staying with him kept her from having the bandwidth and energy to look at her own life, to go for her own dreams to find self-love.

She had been using her husband's saltiness as a shield, and it served her she said, until it didn't any longer. She got clear on her desire to leave him, about after like a month and a half-ish or so in Anchored, by applying

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

thought work, somatics, and working through it in breathwork and conversation in the loving community.

It was wild to see Tara's transformation after she got some space and reclaimed the energy to actually work on herself and her wants for her. No longer pouring her energy into him and his endless needs and struggle. I recently asked her why she stayed. And she said it was largely out of an inflated sense of obligation.

That she came to see, through the Anchored process, that her mom had been a long-suffering martyr, staying with her dad, who didn't treat her well, because she felt it was her obligation. She'd married him anyway, right? So, she had to stay. She also felt it was the best thing to do for her kids. Her mom had tolerated all kinds of b.s., and Tara learned to do the same.

She felt deeply obliged, responsible, to put up with whatever came her way and beyond that. To fix and solve her whatever her husband didn't like in his life. Like a good girl and a good wife does, right? And to see her living her life from her desire, her wants, letting her wants be her guiding North Star, and not living from obligation now, a year after her Anchored experience, is just mind blowing.

It's such a beautiful model of what's possible, right? When we do the thought work. When we take a really good look in the mirror and ask ourselves how we're living and why.

So, with Tara as this amazing model of what's possible, let's talk about what a human is to do when you realize you are trapped in the Grumpy Pants, emotional outsourcing swirl. Let's talk remedies. And as always, this is just the start. We dive deep and personalize the remedies to your actual life and situation in Anchored.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

Say you now realize that it's you. You've been trying to fix your person, you've been taking on persons to fix, and it's not working, because it can't, and you want off the ride. But you still love that person, and you don't want to leave them, maybe not quite yet. And also, BT Dubs, I know your brain is probably saying, "I don't want to abandon them," in some overly wrought Victorian hand-on-head kind of dramatic way; I see you. I know how we do.

So, let's say we're not talking about a situation where you've decided to leave, you just want to step out of the cycle of being in this Grumpy Pants morass of them complaining and you jumping in to fix and save, and rinse and repeat.

A #1, it starts with agency. It starts with choicefulness. It starts with remembering the think-feel-act cycle. And understanding that their thoughts, feelings, and outlook on life, the actions they take, the results they create for them, those are *theirs*, not yours. Subsequently it's not *you* creating their lived experience, it's them choosing their thoughts, their nervous system running the show.

And at the end of the day, if they aren't available, or aren't choosing to regulate their nervous system, to pick different thoughts, to intervene on their own behalf, there is legit, nothing you can do. And that's both a hard realization and one that carries quite a bit of freedom.

There's space for you to reclaim what you want to listen to, what you want to be a party to, what you want to engage with, and when you want to lovingly, kindly, change the subject, or invite your person to work with on their own. And from remembering to trust yourself that you are a person who does not intentionally hurt people, right? We're talking about loving conversation here, with the goal of creating more love.

I want to remind you that you are not responsible for anyone else's thoughts or feelings. Everyone is ultimately responsible for their own lived

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

experience, which is wicked, good news. And as you remind yourself to not take other people's thoughts and feelings on, you can remind yourself not to take their experience of the world as fact, as dictum, of how you should be feeling, and to not take it personally.

You get to pause and not make their experience about you. And you get to make your life about you, and to bring your full, open, loving heart to all of your relations.

Two, boundaries and honest direct communication. So, you can't control how anyone else thinks and feels, and you can control what you can take on. Remembering that when we don't have boundaries, we are signing up for resentment. Setting healthy limits is very much an act of love and compassion for that other person.

It's important to establish clear boundaries about what you are willing and able to do to support your partner. This might include saying no to requests or demands that you find unreasonable. You might set limits around how much time and energy you're willing to devote to try to make them happy. And can start to let them know, using direct communication and 'I statements'... There's like a four-episode arc all around direct communication.

You can let them know that you love them, and you're not available to hear just what sucks, just what's hard, who offended or hurt their feelings, or whatever it is, today. You can model a more positive outlook, and can let them know that you honor their experience, you honor it, you recognize that they see the world through the lens they do. And not to negate them at all, you want to focus on what *is* working, not just what isn't.

And by the way, when we do that, when we focus on the good and what we're grateful for, without negating or bypassing the challenging, duh, of course. We're all about #allvibesonly here; come on now, right? And when

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

we focus on the good and what we're grateful for, we create more neural grooves for the good stuff, and can slowly elevate our mood and energy; because science.

Three, on that tip, if you always jump to save and fix, do yourself the favor of learning how to map and regulate your own nervous system, so that you are less reactive and more responsive to their nervous system roller coaster ride through yours. So, their ebbs and flows take you off center less and less, as you ground you in 'you' instead of them. Right?

Because in emotional outsourcing, we ground our nervous systems in others. And in interdependence, we come into our autonomy, we ground in us, and we coregulate with others. And these are skills and tools I teach you how to do in my three-month program, The Somatic Studio and in Anchor. It's the core of what we do, because it's vital for healing emotional outsourcing.

Four, practice self-care. Taking care of your own needs is crucial when you're in a relationship of any kind with someone who is chronically dissatisfied. Make sure you're getting enough sleep and good sleep, eating well for your body, engaging in activities that bring you joy and fulfillment. Remembering that you are, in fact, a taller toddler; Episode 190.

Five, mindfulness, or meditation, if it's your jam. It is my jam, and my jelly. It's a powerful way to build your capacity to be with yourself. To hold space for yourself. To carve out some time during which you're not focused on caretaking your partner, your person, or solving their life for them.

Tara talks about how, after just a few weeks of meditating with the group in Anchored, in our bi-weekly meditation classes, "I started to be able to see more clearly. It was like little cracks appeared in my story about my marriage and my husband's chronic upset. I started to see how it was

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

turning myself inside out to try to make an unhappy man, happy. Just like I had done with my mother.” Yikes.

“Meditation helped me to see that I was doing it to not look at myself. And you helped me to see that everything I brought to coaching, week after week, was about him and never me. Because his constant upsets had become my whole life. And through the meditations we did, I was able to begin to see it, and to bring it to our somatic practices, so I could turn the beat around, as you love to say.” And I do like to say that. I love to say, “Turn the beat around. Come on, you can do it.”

Six, like we discussed last week, chronic Eeyore can be a sign of mental health concerns like depression, anxiety, mood disorders, etc. that can really benefit from some professional help. And so, that can be from a therapist or a coach like me, who specializes in the nervous system and regulation, depending on the severity of concern.

Now, suggesting to your partner that they seek professional support can be a challenging conversation; I don't see the lie there. And it might be unnecessary and eventually helpful one, if their dissatisfaction is impacting their quality of life and your relationship.

Finally, I want to invite you to consider the future. Ultimately, you need to decide whether being in a relationship with someone who is chronically dissatisfied is worth the emotional toll it takes on you.

I dated someone who was chronically, constantly offended. Every two out of three jokes I made, would have them “clutching their pearls”. You know what I mean? Like, their nervous system setting was too offended, too hurt, too upset, too dissatisfied. And that's not an energy that I am available to be around anymore. You do you, and that's me doing me.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

So, I'll invite you to consider what your ideal future looks like for your future self. And whether your current relationship, with whomever this person is, aligns with those goals for yourself. Towards that end, I will invite you to learn and to practice, to remember really, forget learn. Remember how to value yourself and your peace, which is something every baby values, right? And then our conditioning, our socialization, gets in the way, right?

My beauty, I don't let anyone or anything take my peace away anymore. I'm careful about who I keep in my world and what I'm available to listen to. That said, if a loved one has the occasional issue, my goodness, of course, I'm here for it. Lay it on me. Come on now.

And when someone's chronically Eeyore, I take stock and pause. Because I'm just not looking to spend my life wallowing in the mire. When, to go all hospice nurse on it, life is short and precious, and frankly, frigging beautiful. Listen, I've been through some b.s. My body has been the site of trauma. I was in an emotionally abusive relationship. Your girl can go on and on, and I shan't. Because all of that is no longer my focus.

I have processed it through my body and continue to, of course, but it's not my focus. And that feels amazing. I value the time I have left on this planet. I'm planning like 65, 70 more years, and in that time, I'm choosing to focus on the beauty, the love, the joy, the gratitude. I don't have space in my world for folks who are completely outside of the capacity to revel in life. Who have Olympic gold medals in competitive complaining.

Now listen, I'm a New Yorker, adopted New Yorker, right? I've done my decade. Just in case, you're new to the show. I am from Argentina. And I grew up in the greatest state of the union, Rhode Island. I've been in New York for long enough to say, I'm a New Yorker; I think, or close enough. Let's not split hairs here.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

The point is, I know some complainers, that's where I was going. And I'm not out here being like, "You can never complain around me because I am such a delicate flower that like, you can't disturb my peace with your complaints." I find complainy, jokey complaining, or like, oh my god, the traffic on the BQ! Wait, can you even? Like it's fun. It's funny. It's cute, like, cool, right? Queen Latifah just popped into my head. Like, "When we playin', it's cool," right? But it's when we're playing.

When it's your chronic constant outlook, that's just not how I am trying to live, having lived that way, and I am choosing the path of peace, gentleness, beauty, and joy. And I want to remind you that you can choose that, too. It's all up to you, my darling. Right? Pretty magical. So, I could go on and on, always, every topic. I love talking about psychology and the nervous system and how we can make our lives better, and no one wants a 65-hour episode.

So, remember that you can't change someone else's thoughts, feelings, behavior, emotions, mood. And you can control your own responses. And can take steps to support your own wellbeing in your mind, through thought work. In your body, through somatics. In your nervous system with Applied Polyvagal Theory.

By setting boundaries, practicing self-care, encouraging professional help, communicating honestly, and considering the future, you can navigate the challenges of loving someone whose mood is currently set to chronically dissatisfied, Eeyore pants. Not to change them, not to judge them, not to tell them they need to be any way different. But to bring your focus and your energy back home to you. And how you're living and what you want to focus on for you in your life.

Thank you for tuning in, my darling. Be sure to join us next time for more insights on somatics, the nervous system, and healing from emotional outsourcing.

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

As always, if you're loving the show and you want to work with me, you want to dive deep with me, you want personalized remedies that are about you and your life, your marriage, your parent-child relationship, your siblinghood, your work environment, your dating life, join us. Join us for Anchored.

We have a group starting in June of this year, 2023. It is likely the last group for, at least, probably a year. I have many irons in the fire and we'll be taking a pause from Anchored, for a hot minute. So, if you have been wanting to join us.

If you are excited to make the kinds of changes I talk about in my own life, in the folks who have been in Anchored who share their stories with you here on the show, there's one beautiful way to make those changes. And that is to join us for Anchored. Head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/Anchored. Take a chance, change your life for the better, for good.

The Anchored program offers all the tools you need for sustainable life change. Sustainable, long-lasting change, because it happens deep in your nervous system, in your somatics, in your body. It's not just you telling some better story, it's you making real and lasting change. So, my beauty, join us. You're not going to regret it, that's what I say.

So, 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. Very 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, you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive, intimate, group-coaching

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

Ep #222: When Your Partner is Chronically Dissatisfied

program. So, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there, it's gonna be a good one!