

Ep #241: Feeling Your Feelings Somatically



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. The leaves started changing colors this week, just a few. I'm mostly looking out of my windows at a beautiful countryside tableau of vibrant green. I've got to tell you; my nervous system just loves it.

The air's getting crisp. I went out the other night to meet some friends and wore a leather jacket, which was really nice. I mean, I love leather weather. Let's be real, sweater weather is great, but leather weather that's definitely my preferred weather.

Yeah, there's this little sadness because I'm a summer baby. I love the sunshine. I love getting a tan. I love being on the beach. And, I do love fall and I love the shoosh; the calming, the quiet, the inwardness, that so often comes from me in the fall and winter.

You may have noticed that I've taken a break from offering Anchored, from offering the Somatic Studio, from offering workshops and webinars. I've been in an introspective period. I've also been working on a big project, which is, I have a book coming out. It's going to be a hot minute until it hits the shelves, but I will let you know where to preorder it. I'm so excited about it. It's all about emotional outsourcing, obvi.

I've just, in the last several weeks, been really tuning in to my own body in profound new ways. Really looking inward and feeling a new depth of feeling in my body, a new presence of my emotions. I think part of that is just where I am in life, what's happening in my beautiful relationship. How loving and caring and amazing my partner Billy is.

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How my Somatic Experiencing training... I'm working with a fellow Somatic Experiencing person to really deepen that work. It's been so many things that have led me to really being more present in my body and my life than I really ever have been. My goodness, it just feels amazing.

So, this week, I wanted to talk all about feeling our feelings in our bodies. It's all over the interweb. I feel like everyone on the ground is like, "Feel your feelings. Feel them in your body." As I said, I'm both definitely one of those people, because that's a thing we need to do, or need to. It is a thing that can be supportive and loving to do. Yeah, I like that way, way better.

I also want to, before we dive in, say out loud that I am a big, loud voice, saying that we need to proceed with caution and care when it comes to our bodies and the emotions that live within us.

So, this week, we're going to talk about feeling our feelings in our bodies. Talking about why we don't feel our feels. Some common fears that may arise. Why we want to feel our feels, and how it can be helpful to feel our feelings. What can improve in our lives when we do.

Then, of course, because it's me and this is what we do on *Feminist Wellness*. Because I'm a coach, but your girl's a nurse at the end of the day, we're going to get practical and detail exactly the steps that I take, and that I teach folks in Anchored, my six-month program, in the Somatic Studio, my three-month program, the steps we take to feel our feelings in our body.

To close us out, in classic *Feminist Wellness* style, we're going to talk about when it might not be the most bestest idea to feel those feels in your body, and what to do instead to support yourself in a nervous system thoughtful way. I'll be using the term "somatic" today, which comes from the Greek "Soma," which means the body.

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How can I put this succinctly? It is the collection of modalities and practices that support us in connecting with our bodies in their wholeness. To put it more simply, it's about returning back to a consciousness that's based in the body, our emotions, the energies within us, and not just our brains and our thinking.

Because this is indeed *Feminist Wellness*, we need to start this conversation by naming that humans living in bodies subject to systems of oppression are more likely to suppress our feelings and prioritize the needs of others; be those emotional, physical or otherwise. As always, this conversation doesn't just apply to humans socialized as women.

Sure, we're taught to hold our feelings back in order to be pleasing to others. We are generally taught that our tears are okay, but our anger is not. That can really F a gal up.

Because we need to know that simultaneously, the inverse is true for humans socializes dudes, who are taught that being "emotional" is a sign of weakness. That while anger is totally A-okay, and is laudable in a lot of ways that are so problematic, tears, sadness, grief, oof, no, those are not okay. That can really F a guy up, big time.

All of this F's us all up, by cutting us off from the complexity and richness of our human experience. We can further complicate this along racial lines, noting how literally dangerous it is for BIPOC folks, especially black folks in the U.S. to be angry in public, to have big feelings in public. Or how working-class folks have learned to subsume their emotions in order to keep laboring.

Of course, we need to note that the stress, distress, and trauma that is part and parcel of the human experience is compounded by social location, and can lead so many of us to check out of our bodies. This is just the tip of the

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iceberg, folks. A complex intersectional analysis of emotions and oppression is something we all need to discuss to dive into.

If that's your professional jam, and you want to come on the show to talk more about it, come on the show. Let's talk. Email a pitch to podcast@VictoriaAlbina.com. Let's talk about it. Obviously, QTBIPOC folks to the front, in a major way. So, yeah, let's do it. Let's have that convo.

Today, we're going to start way more 101, by recognizing that there are so many factors leading so many of us to disconnect from our bodies and numb our emotions for our own survival in this world. What most of us are unwittingly taught is that our feelings are our enemies; something to apologize for, to squash down, push away, negate, apologize for some more.

Especially if you were socialized a woman, or a Canadian; “soaree.” Mostly a problem to be managed, and not a source of wisdom, guidance, and authentic self-connection, self-love. Which is confusing, because that's what emotions truly are. You know?

I hear this from people all the time, “I don't know how to feel my feelings. I just can't. It's me. I'm broken. I'm a uniquely messed up mammal, and I don't know how. I am incapable.” What I want to remind you of is, of course, you feel that way. I know why, in my own body, I felt that way. I can imagine why you do.

We are all born knowing how to feel all of our feelings. If you've ever met or seen a toddler, you know this to be an indisputable fact, because those little Gremlins sure do, big feels, all the time.

So, why don't we grownups know how to feel our feels? Well, first, as discussed, so many of us were taught not to, both in implicit and explicit

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ways. Perhaps we were shamed for our feelings or big emotions. Perhaps we were made to feel some kind of lousy way for being our emotional selves. Or heard total b.s. like, "You want to cry? I'll give you something to cry about."

All of that happens so young that sometimes we don't even consciously remember it. That unhealed hurt keeps driving the proverbial bus of our lives through our inner children and our limbic system. Many of us grew up in cultures and societies where feelings weren't okay to have or express. We may have experienced our adults not feeling their feelings, or being uncomfortable with feels in their own body, in other adults or in us.

As we talk about so often here, our kiddo brains, bodies, nervous systems, seek safety above all else. Which means not doing things our caregivers don't like or approve of. So, if having our feels, expressing them, being present to them, feeling them, is something our caregivers are like, "No," then we learn not to do that as a way to protect ourselves.

It's smart, in its child wisdom, it totally works. Until we grow up and want to be adults in relationship and friendship and connection with others, and it just doesn't work anymore.

Two, emotional outsourcing, or our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing worldview and related habits, can really keep us from feeling our feels. This way of thinking and experiencing life leads us to believe that we are responsible for keeping others happy. So, if we are unhappy, we swallow our feels. We put others and their emotions ahead of ourselves. We need to look perfect and like we have it all together.

Because perfectionism tells us that we must be infallible in every aspect of our lives to be safe and lovable. Admitting vulnerability, by having big emotions, can feel like failure. People pleasing has taught us that

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prioritizing the needs and desires of others is virtuous, morally superior, laudable, and a really good thing to do.

So, we often disregard our feelings in an attempt to make others comfortable, happy, and to have them be pleased with us and our easy, mellow, go-with-the-flow, nothing really ruffles me, I'm just chill, kind of persona.

Codependent thinking teaches us that we are responsible for other people's feelings, and it's on us to keep them happy. So, we should never ever, ever be a burden on others by having feels. Instead, we negate our truth because we believe we are safer if we manage other people's feelings. Which keeps us trapped in the same, old emotional outsourcing quandary.

Three, through so many years of cultural conditioning Western society has expected and demanded that women be caregivers, nurturers, peacekeepers. Expressing our true feelings often conflicts with those roles. So, we don't tell the people we love just how overwhelmed, sad, angry, et cetera, we really feel.

Four, fear of vulnerability. Feeling our feelings means being, well, vulnerable. Revealing who we really are and what's really going on for us. So often, especially as emotional outsources, we're afraid of judgment, rejection, or appearing problematically "too emotional" for just being a mammal with regular old feels.

I'll sing it from the mountaintops at the slightest provocation, my darling love, we've been taught that vulnerability is a weakness. But in reality, it's a courageous act of self-compassion. It's vital not just for our own healing, but for the healing of the collective. Vulnerability, when held by those we trust, and who hold our vulnerability as sacred, is a key to radical transformation.

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Five, from that fear of vulnerability can come a fear of overwhelm, when being present for the complexity of human emotions has become foreign to us. Emotions can be intense. I mean, that's for realies. We fear that if we allow ourselves to feel them, we'll be overwhelmed. Often, because we have been.

Because when we don't have a healthy, loving roadmap to guide us as we get present with our feels, they can overwhelm our nervous system. That's what happens, we get flooded. That's when we get activated. That's when we get dysregulated. So, it makes total sense that we can fear that overwhelm.

I'll remind those sweet, scared, little parts of you, both that emotions are meant to be felt and released, not bottled up, and that the emotions we actually feel and get present with will pass through us way faster, and with less of a chance to overwhelm us and dysregulated our nervous system, than those we shove down and ruminate on. Yes, of course, there are studies to back this up, my nerds.

Six, lack of awareness and habit. In our busy, modern lives, we often forget to check in with ourselves. Especially when we're not in the habit of doing body scans, talking to our inner children, and the parts of ourselves. When being somatically present isn't the thing we grew up doing, was never modelled for us, it isn't what we're habituated to. It's just, I don't know, I just don't think to do it.

Especially if you're working full time, maybe going to school, maybe raising kids, taking care of elders, trying to go to the gym, trying to eat healthy, doing all of the bajillion things. Thanks to late-stage capitalism and white settler colonialism, most of us are so focused on doing that it legit slips our mind to hold space for our bodies.

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We forget about being. We talked about this way back in the day, in Episode 21 “You're a Human Being Not a Human Doing.” This understandable, and changeable, lack in awareness keeps us disconnected from our bodies and emotions. So, those are some reasons why we may *not* habitually and regularly feel our feels in our bodies.

Why might we want to remember how to feel our feels in our bodies? By the way, listen to Mama's languaging really carefully. Remember how. You don't need to learn how. You don't need to be taught. You were born knowing how to feel your feels. You forgot because of all the reasons we've been talking about. We're here to remember.

My nerds, numerous studies have shown that somatic awareness, or feeling emotions in the body, can have profound and positive effects on our mental and physical health. Yes, as previously mentioned, there is a caveat we shall return to in just a hot little moment.

A study, published in the Journal of Psychological Science, found that labeling emotions reduces their intensity. This is a practice called “affect labeling.” When you feel and name your feelings, they become more manageable. Your brain chemistry changes. The nerds that evidenced this used functional MRI, magnetic resonance imaging. Maybe I'll do a whole show about this because it's so friggin' cool.

But parts of our brain that were feeling fear and upset and stress were lighting up; because in functional MRI you actually look at the brain light up in response to different stimuli. These researchers, they were looking at photos, I'm ruining the whole follow up podcast, aren't I? But fine.

They, in a way, sort of induced an emotion. Like, showing them a picture of a train wreck, or whatever. Then had them label the feeling, the affect, and it reduced the stress in the brain. Gah, so cool!

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Research from Harvard Medical School suggests that emotional suppression can lead to increased stress and knock on effects of dysregulation in the nervous system. Like, cardiovascular issues, metabolic issues like diabetes, digestive issues, especially the podcast favorite, irritable bowel syndrome, and so much more.

I say the podcast favorite, if you're new to the show, we don't actually love IBS. I had wicker IBS. So many of the people I work with have IBS, because it's often a manifestation of dysregulation in the nervous system. Feeling our feelings can have a positive impact on our wellbeing.

Again, there's a wicker lot of science to back that up, studies in the field of somatic therapy; Kathy Kain, Peter Levine, Pat Ogden, Minton. So many of my fave-z's, who I've been so honored to study from and with, show that connecting with your body and emotions can lead to improved trauma healing, self-esteem, greater emotional resilience, day-to-day and moment-to-moment nervous system regulation skills, and an overall deeper sense of wellbeing.

My beauty, I talk often about emotional outsourcing as a relationship issue. It's all about how we relate to ourselves and the people in our lives. Being somatically present, and feeling our feels in our bodies, is a vital part of healthy, loving, relating, and communicating. It supports us to, one, have enhanced emotional regulation.

Somatic awareness helps us recognize and acknowledge our emotions as they manifest physically in our bodies. This can, as we've been talking about, prevent emotional suppression or denial. Which can lead to unresolved conflicts and emotional baggage.

Aka, coming in hot to fight with your partner, yell at your kid or your dog, when the real issue at hand is that you're pissed at your boss and couldn't feel it or be present with it. By identifying physical sensations associated

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with different emotions, for example, tension in the chest for anxiety, a sinking feeling in the stomach for sadness, we can gain a different way of relating to our emotions. Less as something that's happening to us, and more as a guide to what we actually need.

Two, feeling our feels can lead to improved communication. Because when we're in touch with our bodily sensations, we can communicate our feelings more effectively. We can use specific and accurate language to express ourselves, which reduces the likelihood of misunderstandings.

I know this definitely has been a huge thing in my life. Where I can really pinpoint the feeling I'm having, the sensation of it, instead of just being like, "Argh, I'm not worried." I had my go-to feels; mad, sad, glad, and a couple of derivations thereof. But now, I can get super specific, "I was disappointed. And it felt like..." let's see, I'm making this up on the spot. "It was evocative of when I was a girl, and..."

I can really get in there and help the person with whom I'm talking to really see what's up in a powerful way. Really feeling my feels really has enabled me to convey my emotions with greater authenticity and vulnerability, and that leads to such a deeper connection with self and others.

Three, feeling our feels increases our empathy because it helps us to not only understand our own emotions, but makes us more attuned to the physical and emotional states of others. Which makes sense, my poly vagal nervous system nerds.

When you're in ventral vagal you pick up dysregulation and are able to co-regulate the people you're in contact with. By sensing subtle changes in someone's body language, tone of voice, facial expression, we can pick up on their emotions and can respond with empathy and compassion. The more often we're in ventral vagal and sort of more grounded in ventral vagal we are, the easier that is.

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And, this is so important, the less we are projecting our b.s. onto them. So, if my partner looks to the side and sighs, if I am grounded in my nervous system, if I am feeling my feelings, if I am present and ventral vagal for me, I could get curious. I could be like, "Babe, what just happened there?"

Whereas, five and 10 years ago, I would have applied meaning to that, right? The meaning-maker in my brain would have turned on, and I would have been like, "There you go disrespecting. Are you even listening? What is that sigh?" I would have been way more likely to go defensive. Whereas, feeling my feels helps me step into more compassion.

And so, that leads us to number four. Feeling our feels supports a healthy, balanced conflict resolution, because it can help us to stay grounded, to manage our emotional reactions, and to be more constructive and less reactive. Instead, we can pause, reflect, and choose more thoughtful responses, instead of reacting impulsively in the heat of the moment.

Because, in a way, we're not letting ourselves be pulled off our mooring by the heat of the moment. We're anchored in ourselves and ventral vagal. We are showing up to feel our feelings without over identifying with them.

And so, feeling our feelings, number five, builds trust. Trust is a fundamental aspect of healthy, loving relationships. When we are in tune with our bodies and emotions, we present to the world as more authentic and trustworthy to others because we are being our more authentic self.

We are showing ourselves that we are trustworthy, thereby others are more likely to trust someone who's self-aware, emotionally open, capable of manning their own feelings effectively, and who shows up with love and kindness.

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That brings us to number six, feeling our feelings promote sustainable and regular self-care. When we are in touch with the feelings in our body with this felt sensation... I guess I'll just speak to my own experience... Well, yeah, I'll speak to my experience. But also, I've had hundreds of clients in Anchored and the Somatic Studio reflect this back to me.

The more we show up for ourselves, the more we want to show up for ourselves. Deep breathing, meditation, mindfulness movement, relaxation techniques, the things that reduce stress and increase emotional resilience, and equip us to handle relationship challenges better, are things we want to do more when we're more aligned with ourselves. When we're actually feeling our feelings in our body.

Seven, feeling our feels supports healthy boundaries and self-respect, which are two really vital parts of overcoming emotional outsourcing. When we're attuned to our bodily sensations that can help us to recognize when our boundaries are being crossed, or when we need to assert ourselves in a relationship.

I know when I wasn't tuned into my body... I generally had no idea what boundaries were, I didn't. I can't even find the words. Someone crossing my boundaries, it felt terrible, but that's all I had access to, "That feels bad." I didn't have the language. I didn't have the nuance. I didn't have the complexity.

I definitely, because I wasn't present in my body somatically, and really feeling my feels in my body... There's a complexity here, of course, but I was living outside of self-respect and self-worth. Which is part and parcel of the definition of emotional outsourcing.

And so, I was tolerating all sorts of mistreatment and disrespect from others, that now, that I am present to my feelings, I feel a really deepened

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sense of self-worth. I just don't put up with stuff the way I used to. That's really amazing. I've got to say it's amazing.

Feeling our feelings in our body enhances our emotional intelligence, which is essential for building and maintaining healthy relationships. It allows us to better understand ourselves and others, regulate our emotions, create more fulfilling and harmonious connections with others.

It leads to a richer experience of our authenticity, instead of just doing the same old, same old, and wearing masks to please others. Which, by the way, always backfires. Right? It leads to shallow relating, which stinks.

Feeling our feelings leads to our having less attachment to the constraints of societal expectations, and can help us to release our codependent patterns as we set boundaries and prioritize our wellbeing. As well as reminding us that it's through feeling our imperfections and vulnerabilities that we can embrace a more balanced view of ourselves. Freeing us from the grip of perfectionism.

So, my love, I just looked at the clock on the little recording machine, and this show has gotten to be a lot longer than I expected it to be at this point. My intention when I was working on this show and sat down to record it for you all, was to share all that I've shared, and then to walk you through actually doing this.

Now, my intuition is really telling me to pause, to let you really sit with these questions: How did I learn to negate my feelings? How did I learn that it was safer and smarter? When did I learn that? Why did I learn that?

What I want to invite you to do this week, as homework, is to do some exploration of how things got to be the way they are. To look at what the situations are, where it's easier or more challenging to feel your feelings.

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And, to start to ask why. So, is it with certain people, certain situations around certain topics, in certain settings? When is it easiest to feel your feelings? When is it most challenging?

If you're like, "Oh, my gosh, I don't ever really feel my feelings," I want to invite you to pause, because it's probably not true. When you sit down in front of steak or cake, whatever your favorite food is, I bet you feel a little glee, a little joy.

If you're like, "I don't like eating," I'll hold space for that. Maybe when you see your favorite kind of dog or cat or ferret... You know what I'm saying? Try to find the things in life that make you have a feeling without a lot of work, the thing that's easiest to feel.

If that is intense sorrow and despair, please, maybe steer away from that, right? Don't go down that dark alley alone. Hold the grown-up's hand, right? Take this to therapy or coaching, or whatever work you're doing.

But the work is this, start raising your own awareness of when there is facility in feeling feels, and when there is challenge, so you can start to see your own patterns. If you're like, "No, girl, I'm a champion in feeling my feels. I'm here to support the people I love," I want to invite you to start some conversations with your kid, your partner, whomever it is, you see struggling with their feels. Get some consent, right?

Have a loving conversation around what you're seeing for them in their life, their experience. Why you might think it could be supportive to feel their feels, but most importantly, before diving into telling them what they should do, get some consent. Ask them if this is something they're interested in, and if they'd like your support around this.

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If they say no, then you get to put it down and walk away. Come listen to part two, because it's going to be interesting anyway. But let them live their life, right? That's that. We honor consent around here. But if they're like, "Yeah, I really would love your support," then extra. Come on back for part two. Give it a listen for yourself and the people you love. Okay?

Thank you for tuning in. Next week, we're going to step into a practice where we really feel into what it's like to feel a feeling in our bodies. It's going to be a shorter show. It's going to be really experiential. I'm pretty stoked to record it.

All right, my love. Thank you for listening.

If you're enjoying the show, please share it with your friends. Subscribe or follow wherever you get your podcast. Leave a five-star and a written review. It really, really, helps me out to spread the show all over the globe. I appreciate your support

Alright, my love, let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. 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.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.