

## Ep #278: Embodiment (Part 3)



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine expert, and life coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome, my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. I'm excited to keep talking all about embodiment, it's really been such a life changing thing for me. And I feel like saying that's gotten really kind of cliché and trite, but somatic practice has been the thing in my life... I was about to say in my adult life, but in my whole life... that has changed my life the most.

Though, as I say that, I'm like, I didn't really need embodiment as a practice as a kid because I just was it. You know what I mean? You're just lying in the grass on your belly talking to bugs, you know, like you do. Oh my God, I was so obsessed with pill bugs, those little Roly Poly guys. I still think it's so magical how they're just crawling, and then oh, they're a little ball! God, I loved those. Still do.

So much of embodiment as a practice is really about returning to that state, where you're just in your body and you're just in what you're doing, and you're there. You're not thinking about being in your body. You know how sometimes if you're at a really challenging yoga class, and you're more focused on *doing* the posture than *being* it, than being in your body in it? You're doing something that could be called a somatic practice, but you're not embodying it.

And so, yeah, this whole journey of embodiment... Sidenote, I was on someone else's podcast the other week, and it was like five minutes before the end when one of us said the word "journeying". And I was like, "Oh my God, it wouldn't officially count as a wellness podcast if we didn't say the word "journey". "My journey to wellness."

I'm laughing because it's me, too. Yeah, this whole process to get back into my embodiment, after so many years of functional freeze, when I stop and

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think about it , really so much of it is about connecting with that childhood glee and that childhood presence.

So, before I continue to ramble, hello, welcome back. This is part three; all about embodiment. This is one of my favorite things to talk about. It is one of the core things we do in Anchored, is return to embodiment. And it is specifically what we talk about and work on in The Somatic Studio. It's a thing I get to nerd about really frequently, which is good because it wouldn't be *Feminist Wellness* without some nerding, so nerd alert. I haven't said that in a hot minute.

I feel like at the beginning of the show, I said it every two seconds. I moved away from it. Let's go back. Pendulum swing. Nerd alerts every two seconds, my angels.

Your powerful, wonderful, amazing nervous system plays a pivotal role in embodiment. It's the primary interface through which we negotiate our interactions with the world. This system, especially the autonomic or automatic nervous system, which is yield, sympathetic fight or flight, and parasympathetic rest and digest; those are the two main branches. Then parasympathetic has ventral vagal, which is safe and social. And dorsal disconnect, which is our shutdown, disconnect, freeze.

This whole system is fundamental in regulating our bodily states in response to both internal and external stimuli. AKA if you move... ahem... I move just like that. But also, in the, 'Oh my God, is that a lion?' kind of way. And also like, "Ouch! That pan on the stove was still hot. Pull your hand away," right? The autonomic nervous system handles all of that.

And so, a deeper understanding of how the nervous system operates not only illuminates our capacity for embodiment, but also connects profoundly to our psychological and emotional health. And I would posit our physical health, as well.

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Stephen Porges' concept of neuroception helps us understand how our nervous system is constantly and continuously scanning the environment, and inside our bodies, to determine if we're safe or not. This process is called "neuroception", a term that comes from Dr. Stephen Porges, PhD, and it influences both how we respond as a body, as a mammal, and how embodied we feel.

When the environment is perceived as safe, the parasympathetic nervous system is engaged, the ventral vagal. That helps us to feel calm, relaxed, to allow for a more integrated and coherent sense of embodiment. It's easier to be chill, and so the nervous system does the things it can do when we're chill; digestion, growth, reproduction, healing. They happen more betterly.

Social engagement and connectivity, which are critical for maintaining mental and physical health, come more easily in ventral vagal. When it's 'all clear', you can sit back.

Conversely, perception of threat activates the sympathetic nervous system, fight or flight. And while that's incredibly vital for acute survival situations, chronic activation can lead to disconnection from our bodies, and an impaired sense of embodiment. Which, if you pause and think about it, totally makes sense.

If you're in fight or flight a lot, you're going to be flooded with adrenaline, norepinephrine, and eventually, cortisol. Of course, you're going to be anxious, hyper vigilant, and in chronic stress. And all of that disrupts the body's natural rhythms, and can lead us to feel disconnected from the body that's vibrating. The body that's never really chill, that can make us feel really detached or alienated from our own body.

I used to hear this in clinic all the time, "My anxious body feels like my enemy." It always hurt my tender heart. I get it. I've totally been there with my own digestive stuff, but that still hurts my heart. I bring this up both as a way to talk about remedies, which we're going to get to in a jiff, and to say,

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if your environment growing up or now doesn't feel or isn't safe most of the time, or often enough, that you don't feel safe, emotionally, physically, energetically, whatever.

It makes so much sense, my beautiful, tender, fuzzy little chipmunk, that embodiment, being present in your human body, would not be your go-to state. I say that because it's important you hear me say you're not broken, messed up, or perma-effed.

It's challenging for you to drop into your body because your body loves you too much to let you do such a silly thing when your body is under attack; whether that's actual in this moment, or projected by your nervous system, your inner children, and your history.

Let's talk about what this disconnecting from self process looks like for us in emotional outsourcing, aka codependent, perfectionist and peoplepleasing habits. Which, by the way, those habits are a normal, natural and understandable response to growing up without reliable connection with the three fundamental human needs: safety, belonging and a sense of worthiness.

All of that leads the habitual patterns of seeking external validation and relying on others for emotional regulation, rather than turning inward and trusting our own inner experience.

So, having laid that out, losing touch with embodiment, especially in the context of emotional outsourcing, is a super common experience. So, you are in good company, my perfect, little tender ravioli. Let's look at why this happened and how it manifests.

One: Over-reliance on external validation. In emotional outsourcing there is a strong tendency to look outside oneself for approval and affirmation. This external focus diverts attention away from internal bodily sensations and experiences.

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When our sense of self-worth is tied to others perceptions, the capacity to tune into and trust our own bodily signals diminishes. Which makes sense, you are not your focal point anymore. What you think they're thinking about you is. So, it makes sense that our grasping for external validation can overshadow the internal signals that are essential for embodied awareness.

Two: Suppression of emotions. Emotional outsourcing, often... some might say always, but we'll leave a little wiggle room... involves suppressing our own emotions to cater to others' needs or expectations as a way to source belonging, connection, and safety.

Which can lead to a numbing or disconnection from bodily sensations, because emotions are intimately tied to physical experiences. For example, feeling tension in your chest when anxious or not. In your tummy-tum when fearful; our bodily experiences of emotions. Suppressing emotions can lead to a disconnection from those physical sensations.

Three: Hyper vigilance and stress. Emotional outsourcing is often rooted in a state of hyper vigilance, where we are constantly attuned to others' emotional states and needs, as chronic stress activates a sympathetic nervous system, leading to a heightened state of alertness and tension. Over time, this can dull our sensitivity to more subtle bodily sensations and signals, and only the big old "kaboom" gets your attention.

The body remains in a constant state of readiness, making it difficult to tune into quieter, more nuanced, embodied experiences. Remember, intuition can often be a whisper.

Four: Societal and cultural conditioning. Societal and cultural norms often reinforce the pattern of emotional outsourcing particularly, for humans socializes women in the patriarchy. Expectations to be nurturing, self-sacrificing, emotionally available to others, can lead to a neglect of one's own needs and embodied experience, because the day only has so many frickin' hours. Am I right?

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When our attention is directed outward rather than inward, we lose track of inward sensation. Beyond emotional outsourcing, it bears saying that for women, QTBIPOC folks and all those living in marginalized bodies, the constant onslaught of micro/macro aggressions can make it feel like a very not smart idea at all to actually be present in your body.

Five: Trauma. Speaking of 'not smart to be in your body', trauma, whether from acute events or chronic relational dynamics, like growing up with labile or unreliable, emotionally immature meanie-pants, demanding parents, or any other flavor of emotional outsourcing, can significantly impact our ability to stay embodied, or intentionally return to embodiment.

Traumatic experiences can cause us to dissociate, or disconnect from our body, as a pretty darn smart protective mechanism. In the context of emotional outsourcing, past traumas related to relational dynamics may perpetuate patterns of seeking safety and validation externally, further distancing us from our embodied experience and leaving us primed for feeling abandoned, rejected, on and on. Which can shoot us right out of ventral vagal presence, and thus out of embodiment.

My love, fret not, all is not lost. I can see that so decisively. Not just because I've walked hundreds of people through processes to get back into more embodiment, through both Anchored and The Somatic Studio. Most importantly, I can say it because I've lived it. Like I was saying, growing up with an emotionally distant parent and an emotionally immature one, I realized early just how not smart it was to be in my body.

And my perfect nervous system adopted the functional freeze state we've talked about so many times here together.

So, you might be saying, "All of this sounds great and all. Cool, cool, cool. How do I actually cultivate embodied safety?" Alright, my nerds, remember how neural pathways work. Neural pathways are the brain path of least



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resistance. It's the easiest thought to think, because it's the one you've thought the most often. Said otherwise, the ones you work, work.

The more often you turn towards practices that promote a sense of safety and connection, you're encouraging the parasympathetic response and enhancing embodied experiences of feeling pretty darn okay. And that's what we're going to aim for to start, pretty darn okay. That's the kitten step here, my darling.

And the beautiful thing, because science, is that those are additive, my darling. Every time you pause and feel your feet... a practice we do constantly in The Somatic Studio... every time you remind your body that in this moment you are safe and sound, the stronger that neural groove of bodily safety gets. Which then expands the capacity in your nervous system to begin to feel the more challenging feelings, which we talked about a few episodes ago in the show about cultivating safety.

Practices, such as deep breathing, mindfulness meditation. And gentle, slow, deliberate physical exercises, like walking or yoga; where the focus isn't getting into some contorted pretzel shape, but rather it's just being in and with your body. Like slow stretching, Tai chi, Qigong. You see where we're going? These can significantly influence the nervous system.

Imagine it as giving your nervous system a warm cup of tea. it helps in modulating the nervous system's response and enhances bodily awareness. You know when you're holding a warm cup of tea, and you can feel your hand warm up and you smell the aroma, you swallow it and just feel the warmth in your chest and tummy's? These kinds of slow movements are what is vital for a nervous system that's been going way too fast, or has been shut down.

They allow us to feel more grounded and present in our bodies in a non-threatening environment, which is like flexing a muscle to strengthen it,



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right? You're going to rock those Michelle Obama arms; but your nervous system. Well, goodness, the things I say.

In a world that often prioritizes intellectual achievements and mental processes, fostering embodiment helps counterbalance this tendency by reminding of the wisdom and presence inherent in our physical selves.

This shift towards a more embodied existence can lead to a more holistic approach to life, where physical, emotional, and mental wellbeing are seen as interconnected and equally important. By prioritizing practices that enhance embodiment, we can create a more balanced and fulfilling life, rooted in the rich dynamic experience of living fully in our bodies.

Some practical tips for enhancing embodiment, beyond the things we sort of talk about here all the time, like mindfulness, somatic movement, breath work, working with a therapist or a coach well trained in somatic approaches... There's a lot of shenanigans out there with people who took a six weeks somatic coach training. Check it out, check credentials, my angel. That's my recommendation, check it out... Journaling, reflecting on the emotion as felt in your body.

Some practical things we can do are grounding techniques, like feeling your feet on the ground. Holding a grounding object, like we just talked about a cup of tea or a crystal. Standing barefoot on the grass is pretty magical. Holding a smooth stone. It's really about anchoring ourself back into our body. So whatever it is that slows you down, and brings you back into sensation in the body, brings you back into embodiment.

One of the things that often happens for folks who work a sedentary job, who work at a desk, who are charting for hours, is that we lose touch of our body as we are being a brain with hands on a keyboard. Setting frequent reminders to stretch, walk, move around, notice your body; both as you sit and as you move; brings you back into embodiment.

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So does engaging your senses deliberately. I keep all sorts of different textures, different scents, all sorts of different things on my desk, so I can just smell some lavender or feel a squishy fidget thingy; things that bring me into my senses, bring me into the now. Right?

And we've talked about this before, when we've talked about intentionality. What are you doing on autopilot that you could be using? Because most of us are really busy. We have jobs or kids or grad school or dogs or life, or all of the above. So, instead of adding things, if you're going to drink coffee first thing in the morning anyway, how can you turn it into a mindful experience? How can you slow down, savor it, add an extra 10 seconds to the process? But come into embodiment instead of chug-and-run.

Speaking of coffee, I want to invite you to pay attention to how different foods and hydration levels affect your bodily sensations and energy levels. Eating mindfully, savoring each bite, and noticing how your body feels in response to different foods can enhance your connection to your body. It wildly has for me.

Finally, ensure you're getting enough rest and quality sleep. My angel, you are a taller toddler; we have a whole episode about this. You are a toddler who has gotten taller, and you need to take naps, you need to sleep at night, you need to have no screens before bed.

Restorative sleep practices are vital for maintaining a balanced and embodied state. Creating a bedtime routine that includes winding down and disconnecting from screens can improve sleep and support overall wellbeing. These things are simple. They are free.

And this is the thing about embodiment practices that is my absolute favorite, it is accessible for all of us. All of us can take a moment to put a hand on our heart, a hand on our belly, should we feel so moved. Let's do it right now. I'm going to do it, you do you.

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I'm going to take a deep breath and push my belly out into my hand. Another deep breath, and a long, slow out. And now, as I breathe in through my nose, I'm feeling the air or feeling the current on the edge of my nostrils, up into through my sinus, and then out through my mouth.

We don't have to complicate it. That was an embodiment process. That was an embodiment practice. And the more we do it, the more we do it. And the more we do it, the more we are it. Yeah? And the more we are it, the more we can be a voice in this world speaking for justice, for equity, for inclusion, for acceptance.

Losing touch with embodiment, in the context of emotional outsourcing, or growing up in communities exposed to social and environmental stressors, such as racial discrimination, poverty, and violence, there's a complex interplay here of psychological, physiological, and social factors that can make it feel like there's a smoke alarm inside our body that goes off at the slightest hint of a vapor, even when there's no real danger.

Addressing these issues at the community and societal level involves not only individual healing practices, but also comprehensive changes in social conditions that perpetuate such stressors. Advocating for environments that enhance safety and social connection can help shift collective neurocepted responses, promoting healing and resilience on a larger scale.

And understanding, within all of that, that so many of us are raised in homes with emotional outsourcing. Which continues to even further disconnect us from our body, our embodied experience, and our community. The journey towards embodiment is about honoring the profound interconnectedness of body, mind, and identity.

By engaging in practices that nurture our physical presence. and acknowledging the broader cultural and social influences of our embodied experiences, we can enhance our ability to live *fully* in our bodies.

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This holistic approach not only supports personal wellbeing, but also fosters a more compassionate and inclusive, loving, kind, gentle society where diverse embodied experiences are valued and celebrated, and we all move towards greater interdependence. What a gift to the world.

My angel, thank you so much for listening. I really hope this three-part series on embodiment, which we started off with an important conversation around safety, I truly and deeply hope it's been so supportive and helpful for you.

If you've been wanting to work with me, and Anchored feels like six months is whoa, too long. Or you really want to focus on the embodiment, somatics, nervous system piece, you want to do a shorter program, I'm really excited to invite you to join The Somatic Studio. We start on July 1st.

It is such an amazing place. It is a community-based program, because all of my work is, and it's a deep dive into somatics, into the nervous system. You will leave with an incredible nervous system education.

And just as important... I mean, I love the cognitive. I love the nerding. I love it so hard... you will finish your time in The Somatic Studio having deeply connected with your body in such powerful new ways. You will have a whole slew of incredible somatic practices to use to calm your body, to step into greater embodiment, to cultivate more safety. I cannot wait to share this program with you.

I am running a Challenge at the end of the month. If you want to learn more about the program, get a taste of what working with me is like, you can head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/challenge](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/challenge) to learn more.

And if you are ready to join The Somatic Studio, I can't wait to have you with us. Head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/tss](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/tss) to learn more and to join now.

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Alright, my beauty. Let's do what we do. 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.

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](https://VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar) for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day my darling and I'll see you next week. Ciao.