

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts



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.

My love, I've been hard at work writing a book for you. And so I've been recording the podcast in advance to give myself lots of focus time, lots of margin within which to work. So, at the time of recording this particular podcast, the outcome of the 2024 election is unknown, and I just want to acknowledge that many of us, in particular *Feminist Wellness* listeners, might be feeling really big feelings.

We might be feeling scared, hopeless, upset, worried. We're hopefully, fingers crossed, hopefully, not like the entire world is ending. Either way, I want to remind you of your skills because this election season has been newsy.

As a listener of *Feminist Wellness*, I know you have the skills and the tools to ground your nervous system, to come back towards embodied safety, like we talked about in episode 275, in the embodiment series, 276 to 279, to step out of catastrophizing like we talked about in 285. And regardless of the outcomes, I think most of our nervous systems are wicked fried, especially if you've been paying attention.

And so I want to invite you to listen to the special series I released earlier in the pandemic, right after episode 57. The tools in there are super helpful in times like these. Most of all, I'll say this; we need each other. We need community care and mutual aid, collective thinking, collective support to have our own backs and each other's.

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

And to remember what Audre Lorde taught us about self-care, that it is a radical act. And it is a radical act when the goal is to increase our capacity to be with ourselves, and to be with and for each other is an act of rebellion and resistance.

And so right now, it's more important than ever to lean into the practices that help us find solid ground in uncertain times. As we navigate these moments together, I invite you to think of your nervous system like a lighthouse in a storm. Sure, the waves are crashing, the wind is fierce, and there's so much beyond our control. But that light, your inner sense of safety, of calm, it's something you can return to, even just in little flashes.

That doesn't make the storm disappear but it gives you a place to orient, a way to keep moving forward, step by step. And let's remember my loves, none of us can do this alone. I say it so often but it feels especially true today. We human mammals are wired for connection.

Community care, mutual aid aren't just words. They're lifelines. Whether you're reaching out to family, friends, neighbors, or this community here, find ways to remind yourself and each other that you're not alone in this. We're navigating this uncertainty together and we're learning to hold space for each other's fears, hopes, and resilience.

Most importantly, give yourself permission to rest, to process, to turn what nourishes you. In times like these, even small acts of grounding and self-care are profound. As we go into today's episode, know that I'm holding this space for you, rooting for you to feel safe and held, however you need to be. Let's dig into this together, and most importantly, let's have our own backs and one another's.

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

Hello, hello, my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. So one of my favorite parts of Anchored is to watch people's amazing transformations over the course of the six-month program, how they come home to themselves and their authenticity in such beautiful ways.

One of my favorite things is when someone comes to our first call and says something like, "Oh, I mean, I don't know, my therapist said I was codependent or whatever, but I don't think I even qualify for Anchored or whatever. It's because I'm not that codependent that I need a whole program." It's one of my favorite parts because invariably about four seconds later, they'll say something like, "Wait, oh my god, am I taking up way too much of your time? I don't want to take up your time talking about me. I mean, I don't even have it that bad."

And that moment is sweet and tender and revealing because, oh my darling, what a deeply codependently-minded thing to say on a call with me that's all about you and you living your life the way you most want to as your most intentional, authentic self. There's a part of that statement that's also just considerate and lovely. And like, sure, of course, there's a part of that statement that's just like, considerate and lovely, like, cool, cool, cool.

The little like, flag for me is that this way of thinking is often part of two very codependent ways of thinking. One, I don't matter. You do. You matter more than me. And two, real confusion. When we grow up parentified with emotionally immature parents, we lose connection with the role that's ours to play, that of kiddo in that family system. And we step into being parent, grown-up, caretaker, often to the same adults that should, per their role, be taking care of us.

And there's a little projection of that onto me in these moments. Instead of getting comfy in the client role, the role of the person being taken care of,

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

folks will pop out of that discomfort of having the attention, the care, the love, the gaze on them.

And I recognize it's uncomfortable for sure, but they'll pop out to try to take care of me, which doesn't serve them, isn't theirs to do, implies we're not just looking at a moment of being considerate here, but rather more of a long-standing pattern. And it's something I do not want or need, right? So it's imposing something on me too.

And so this whole wild morass, this is us. This is what we do from our emotional outsourcing, from our lack of embodiment. I'm talking about the habitual, unintentional pattern of putting ourselves last last and taking on everyone else's everything, including their role, in a phone call.

And so I thought it's smart to talk about some of the most common sneaky pants, emotional outsourcing thoughts I hear us having, where emotional outsourcing is my term for our codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits, which I think are all the same thing in their way. And of course, we'll do what we always do. We'll talk about remedies.

And if you're new to the show, it's important you understand that this conversation here on episode almost 300, which is wild, is set within a context of nervous system thoughtfulness, trauma thoughtfulness, and intersectional feminism, where we are pro personal responsibility while always situating ourselves and our habitual unintentional thought, feeling, and behavioral habits within our social location as folks who grew up in emotional outsourcing and in the shadow of the patriarchy, white settler colonialism, and white supremacy, along with late-stage capitalism.

So if you feel personally attacked, it'll hopefully be in that like calling me in kind of way because That's all I ever mean. I want you to know I see you, I

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

hear you, I love you, and I invite you to remember that we never indict people here, only institutions and systems, while wrapping us up in the love and care we all need to be able to make real, lasting and sustainable change.

Okay, let's go. Number one. I'd rather they decide so I won't mess it up. I don't really know what I want anyway. I don't know, they're just better at these things than I am. If they choose, they'll be happier with the outcome. Oh, I don't know where I want to have dinner. What do you want to have for dinner?

I mean, like, I'll just eat whatever. I mean, totally. Or does this look good on me? I don't know. Should I wear this tonight? I don't know if this looks good on me. I just, I don't know. What do you think I should wear?

This is the sneaky maneuver of dodging responsibility by letting someone else take the reins. This isn't the laid back move or even the confused and unsure move that it pretends to be on the surface. It's emotional outsourcing in a comfy cardigan, quietly convincing us that if we don't choose, we're safe from any blame if things go sideways. Which is what we're always kind of expecting and definitely hedging against.

We tell ourselves it's because we're easygoing or I just don't care. I'm just an indecisive person, you know, and well, someone else knows better, actually. But really, it's a retreat. And so where does that leave us? Stranded without a map. Resenting the folks who are always in charge while still clinging to the illusion that we're just being flexible.

Over time, people start to see us as passive, unwilling to participate, leading to strained relationships where trust falters. It's disempowering for us and exhausting for them, especially when we end up secretly resenting

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

them for holding the wheel we didn't want to touch. Extra especially when that bus they're driving, because we insisted they drive it, goes to a place we don't want to go.

It's also super lousy when we evade decision-making, let or finagle someone else to make our choices for us, and then get wicked mad at them, resentful of them, or grumpy in that like, ugh, man, I wish I hadn't done XYZ. I mean, I shouldn't have done that. Where X is the thing they told you to do after you harangued them to make your decision for you.

So it's like you're mad at you, but you're making it clear sotto voce that you're mad at them. Oof. That's a cluster cuss. And it's one I used to do all the time. I mean, I had no clue I was being kind of sneaky, sideways, manipulative, and like doing a thing. I thought I was just confused and didn't know what I wanted.

I thought I just felt overwhelmed by decision-making. And yes, my nervous system was going into sympathetic activation, as yours probably is. Lots of love for that. When I really sat with this and investigated it and did thought work on it, brought it to my body, It turns out I was looking for someone to blame when everything went pear-shaped. And that is a real bummer because it puts the onus on someone who deserves no onus. They should be onus-free. And so apologies from here if I ever did that to you, I did it a lot. And it's a behavior that makes sense when you've been taught implicitly or explicitly that your mistakes are unacceptable or could lead to criticism, rejection, or worse. Oof. That one.

Next, two. Whatever you want, dear. Oh, I'll just go along with what they want, you know, to keep the peace. You know, it's just not worth making a big deal about it. Why does it matter so much to me anyway? Right? Like, I don't care. We should do what he wants. Honey, it's probably better if I just

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

keep things smooth. Okay? Let's just keep it smooth. Let's keep it easy. It's alright.

Oh, my opinion? I don't want to seem selfish or demanding. Yeah. They'll be so hard to deal with if I have an opinion. Best to keep my mouth shut. I have a lot of experience with and thoughts on that last one in particular.

So here's where emotional outsourcing cozies up as the martyr for the greater good. Going along with others' plans, shrinking your voice down to a whisper, convincing yourself it's just easier this way. This pattern is stealthy because it frames itself as harmonious, sacrificing your needs for a moment of peace. And sure, as with all these thoughts, if it was just one moment in a lifetime or once a year, whatever, then fine. But when this is the pattern, it's usually the regular pattern, meaning it's what's happening often. And in truth, these moments of negating our truth, our voice, our capacity, They are additive. Each of those little sacrifices builds resentment, like a slow leak in a tire.

One day we feel disconnected from ourselves and realize we have no idea who we are, what we want, what we desire, what we need, and the people in our lives, they also are at a complete loss. They don't know what we want or like or prefer because how could they? We've trained them and inadvertently ourselves to expect our compliance to see us as the easygoing one, which often just means we're choosing others' comfort over our truth.

As always for our very smart self-protective nervous system, in time this eats away at the relationship's depth because true intimacy cannot exist without all parties bringing their full selves to the table. In time, this eats away at the relationship's depth because true intimacy cannot exist without all parties bringing their full selves to the table. In time, this eats away at the relationship's depth because true intimacy cannot exist without all

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

parties bringing their full selves to the table and trusting themselves to have their own back enough to say, this is the real me.

This pattern makes perfect sense if you grew up in an environment where peacekeeping was survival and asserting your wants, your needs, came at a cost.

Three, I need to make sure they're okay with it first. I should check in and see what they think. It's probably best if I get their opinion first. I'll feel better if I have their sign off. Oop, I don't want to do something that could cause tension or conflict.

So this one's subtle, looking like thoughtfulness but leaning hard into emotional outsourcing territory. By letting others be the litmus test for our own choices, we trade autonomy for a false sense of security. It's a setup. We start to believe that we can only make choices when we have a green light from someone else. We tell ourselves we're just checking in, being respectful, but really we're outsourcing our own confidence and capacity to make decisions.

Eventually our self-trust fades and we begin to rely more and more on external opinions instead of our own. The damage shows up in our relationships when people sense we're constantly deferring, setting up a dynamic where our voice starts to feel irrelevant even to us. And without grounding in our own choices, we lose our authenticity and struggle to be fully seen. Yes, by others and also by ourselves. My love, this habit is often survival-based, rooted in the idea that our value is somehow earned through approval rather than from within.

Next up, I should be able to handle this on my own. Oh, I don't need anyone's help. I'm fine. Yeah, no, I just, I don't like to ask for help. It's totally

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

fine. No, asking for help makes me seem weak or incapable. I got this. Other people have real problems. Like I'm not like starving somewhere in a ditch. I can manage this. I'm fine. I don't matter. I'm fine. I don't matter. That's the real thread through under this one, huh?

So the classic emotional outsourcing habit of isolation under the guise of independence shows up this way. We convince ourselves that asking for help is a weakness, it's a problem, I'm fine, I got it, I got it, I got it, I got it, while we're collapsing. So instead of putting ourselves in this emotionally vulnerable state, we manage it alone because it's not that big of a deal.

This thought pattern disconnects us from our need for support and connection, creating a self-made island, which of course nothing's self-made, right? We're always part and parcel of our social location, but the world puts us there and we keep us there. How's that, right? And it's this island where we're weighed down by all the things we haven't had the capacity to share.

Over time, we start to feel like we're carrying an invisible load, because we are, all while no one around us realizes we're struggling. This dynamic makes it difficult for others to truly be there for us, and it chips away at trust, both with ourselves and others. Relationships obviously become lopsided, with us feeling isolated, lonely, and unseen.

This thought often comes from a household where help was actually not available, where you were made to feel like a burden or a bother, where you heard things like, oh, you don't even know how I suffered for you children. God, I've heard that from so many clients. I heard that myself growing up, constantly.

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

This thought is also common in people raised to believe that self-reliance is strength and that dependence is dangerous, dumb weakness, a belief deeply rooted in individualistic values, often embedded in colonial and capitalist narratives, part and parcel of white supremacy, which seeks to make us individual, right? Rugged individualism, that's where it came from.

It's a system that seeks to separate as opposed to indigeneity writ large, which is collectivist. Yeah? And finally, the thought that prompted this whole episode, "I don't want to take up too much of your time. They're busy with other people who probably need way more help than I do. Oh, I don't want to be a burden on them. It's probably fine. I'm probably fine. It's fine. I should be able to figure this out on my own anyway. They'll think I'm needy if I ask too many questions."

So this one is a slight shift from the one above, which was all about, "I've got it." Like, listen to the tone between, like, "Oh, it's fine. It's probably fine. I can figure it out. I don't want them to think I'm needy." It's about projecting your worry that others are going to think you're selfish for asking for support, often onto someone who is like legit offering or is even delighted to give us support, especially folks like coaches, therapists, nurse practitioners, doctors.

We rationalize that their time is better spent on someone else, assuming that our needs are somehow less valid or even annoying, which is different from it being like a burden and individualism being held up, it's really just like, "I'm not worthy of care." Right? So this one's about worth.

And so, "Oh my God, I'm so sorry to bother you with this, this broken femur, this serious medical need," is what comes out of our mouth instead of advocating for ourselves. And we shrink. Dismissing our own needs is unimportant because we don't want to take up too much space.

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

And in the moment, it might feel like being considerate, but this pattern ultimately devalues our own needs and erodes our self-worth. It signals that we think our concerns are trivial, that maybe we don't deserve the same care as others.

This not only impacts our mental and physical health, but it also reinforces our emotional outsourcing behaviors, teaching us that our role is always to put ourselves last, which is one of the key things that ties together codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing habits. True self, authenticity, dead last.

The relationship with a professional or someone else who wants to help us becomes one-sided. We pay or invest, yet we hesitate to actually receive fully, keeping us in an invisible cycle of lack. This behavior also subtly reinforces the belief that other people's needs are in fact more important than our own, which is central to emotional outsourcing and keeps us from ever truly taking up the space we need.

This tendency to shrink our needs in professional settings, when we're like going to be taken care of, or with a friend who's like, hey, I love you, lay it on me. Often comes from a lifetime of absorbing messages that our needs are less important, making it challenging to see that we're actually worthy of full support and care.

And if we grow up in emotional outsourcing with emotionally unavailable or immature parents, we may have learned that people aren't honest because they weren't. So when we think about our own people pleasing habits, we came by them honestly. We probably learned them from our parents who learned them from theirs and theirs and theirs within their social milieu.

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

And so we pick up on those messages, right? When someone is saying, yeah, yeah, yeah, tell me all about it. But they're like staring off into the distance, or they make it about themselves, or they don't allow you to have your feelings. They interject to tell you how it's not that bad, or so and so had it worse, or whatever. We learn to keep it to ourselves instead of feeling like we've been kind of double-crossed.

This is a thing that's happened with a couple of friends of mine lately that's not really allowing me to have my feelings and sort of convincing me to feel some other way. So I'm going to do a whole show about it.

And here I want to say, if you are loathe to take up space to trust people when they say, tell me all about it, trust that that's coming from a reasonable, understandable, explainable, logical place in your history. And we can start to shift that now to allow ourselves to get the love and care and support we actually need.

Which of course is another beautiful segue to talking remedies. So I'm going to share some things that you can start doing today to move closer to more relational honesty, to not live from such deep emotional outsourcing, and instead to live as your most whole and most interdependent self.

So now, as always, if you're saying some BS to get through while you're living in an abusive or just not really great situation, please keep saying exactly what BS you've been saying to keep yourself safe while you simultaneously make a plan to get out. Okay.

One, identify the emotional GPS behind every thought. So each time an emotional outsourcing thought arises, so when you feel yourself, you know, like it's not your full honesty, right? Maybe your back goes up, maybe there's a tightening in your chest or your throat, and you're like going from

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

the script, and you're saying, I don't want to take up too much of your time, or they'll be disappointed if I say no and keep my own plans, better change it so they don't feel frustrated.

Pause to breathe, to take a moment, and to see if you can identify the specific feeling you're trying to avoid. We talked about this in the episode about building emotional safety with ourselves. The more we avoid our feelings, the more they feel like something smart to avoid. Right?

So think of this as tuning into your emotional GPS, asking where is this thought taking me and why this process isn't just intellectual. It's about locating the emotional target that you're trying to hit by pleasing, accommodating, shrinking back. Often these targets are things like avoiding rejection, fearing abandonment, seeking approval. They make a lot of sense and they no longer serve us.

So start to get your little antenna up. This is your homework for the next week. And start to listen for the times when you make these statements, these habitual thoughts come out of your mouth and feel into what the motivating feeling beneath it is.

Let's talk nerd. The nervous system drives these responses, often tying past experiences to current emotions. So what we're doing here is called affect labeling. There's all these amazing functional MRI studies about it. I've talked about affect labeling before. I can do a whole show about it. Why not, my nerds?

But by naming the feeling behind the thought, such as I feel nervous about rejection, I want them to approve of me so that I'm in that self-doubt, right? I'm in fear. You transform these unconscious patterns into conscious workable data. What are we doing, my nerds?

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

We're moving out of the limbic system, out of the amygdala, into the prefrontal cortex, bada bing, bada boom. You've got a little more space, right? To come into presence, to come into consciousness to actually make change in your life. This creates a wedge between your habitual reaction and your conscious response, opening space to act from a place of choice, rather than reactivity.

Two, the 2% permission practice. For those of us with emotional outsourcing habits, radical self-care, radical always meaning from the roots, can feel overwhelming or selfish. So start small. We're going to kitten step this, babies. Give yourself just 2% more permission to act in ways that prioritize you. Instead of aiming for 100% self-assertion, which is banana pants, like that's too much to ask. It's too big a step. Try 2%. Speak up in a small way, say no I'm not available to a minor favor, or share one honest feeling.

This will slowly over time build your permission muscle, showing your nervous system that it's safe to begin to choose yourself, even if just very little, tiny little at first. So how does it work? Well, my nerds, small acts of permission gently rewire the nervous system to tolerate, then embrace self-focused actions. The word tolerate here I'm always, when I'm talking about the science, I'm using it in the scientific term of like system capacity. How much can you tolerate is how much before the system shifts states, right?

So this incremental approach reduces resistance by presenting manageable, less threatening shifts, which grow over time into a wider capacity for self-advocacy. When applied consistently, it nurtures a sense of worth and builds evidence that advocating for yourself won't lead to disaster. It can be safe and it can be valuable. And you can trust your own discernment and wisdom to know exactly when and where to apply this and to give yourself a little more permission. Meaning, like, maybe you start where it's warm, start where it's easy, start with that gentle friend who's

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

most likely to be like, oh, okay, well, you don't want to do it for me, that's fine, don't worry about it. And actually mean it.

Next up is reverse the spotlight effect. When we're in emotional outsourcing mode, we often assume others are hyper-focused on our actions, words, decisions, feelings, everything. And in psychology, this is called the spotlight effect. To start to break this, we actively uno-reverse the spotlight by focusing on what others might need or feel, but without taking responsibility for meeting those needs. And yes, you can do it just in your head or in your journal after the experience or like the moment with people. You don't have to do it actually with them in real time right away. Come on, come on, come on, kitten steps.

So if you're worried about taking too much time, instead of shrinking back, Just imagine that the other person who has told you that they want to be interacting with you actually values the interaction and is open to hearing from you. Just try it on. Imagine it. See it if you're a person who can visualize. See yourself in this conversation. Right?

So we can do it after a moment, a conversation, a scenario, a circumstance, a situation. We can also do it in advance, which I love. This is the magic of the thought work and the somatic practices that we do in Anchored. They're helpful after, but we can also use them beforehand so life can feel a little easier, gentler, more in flow from jump.

So if you're going to see your primary care nurse practitioner tomorrow and you know you tend to clam up and not advocate for yourself and not ask for the tests and not ask and say things like, I don't want to take up your time. Or if you do that on a date, or if you do that with your kid's other parent, right? Wherever you know you tend to go to not the most potent self-advocacy, try the reverse uno on the spotlight effect beforehand.

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

Really, truly, like you're watching a movie, see yourself in the moment with this other person, in the situation, in the location, if you've got that data, and see yourself being listened to, being cared about, being honored, respected. Really, like see their face, really listening, really caring, really present, and let yourself feel what that feels like. And if that's too much and too scary, orient your nervous system, walk away, take a break, take a breath, but come back and keep seeing it.

If even just like five-second increments to build that muscle of being able to tolerate and stay with someone loving up on you or even just being mild to moderately present, which can feel like a lot when you're not used to it. Yeah? Good.

So my nerds, how does it work? Well, redirecting the spotlight teaches the brain that other people aren't watching or judging us nearly as much as we think. If you've never lived in New York City, it is one of the greatest gifts of living there. No one notices you. It doesn't matter if you're on the subway with a boa constrictor around your neck, if you're like carrying a box of live mice, if you're dressed as Santa Claus in June, no one notices. And it is so liberating. So we can show our nervous system like no one's really paying attention in the best way anytime we want to.

And this shift frees us up to act more authentically, reinforcing the idea that we're allowed to take up space and express our needs without constant self-monitoring. Over time, it creates mental freedom and reduces the nervous system's urgency around self-protection in social settings.

So finally my love, create an internal anchor. This is one of the first practices we do in my six-month program Anchored and we are currently enrolling for the November 2024 cohort. I would love to have you join us. The application is short and sweet, just like me, and the process of

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

applying can be life-changing because it invites you to start to put the platitudes aside and to be honest with yourself.

My angel, my baby, my darling, you can apply just for that, for the process of really looking at how long you've been wanting to shift your emotional outsourcing, the steps you've taken, what you want your life to look like, what stands in your way. What a gift really to be given effectively a set of journal questions that you can then send to me. And then if from reading your application, it sounds like it could be a good fit, we'll invite you on to a call with me, which is a whole amazing experience of clarifying your goals and desires, starting to really plot out what you want your own life to look like on your terms.

It is a generative, transformative experience and I will be there on that call to guide and support you every step of the way so you can experience yourself making a strong decision either way. And that is priceless. That is a powerful move away from our sneaky emotional outsourcing thoughts and into our power.

So don't sleep on it. Come join me. victoriaalbina.com/anchored is the place. So if you want that create an internal anchor exercise, come join us in Anchored. It's so powerful and so are you.

Thank you for joining me my love. Let me know if you like this episode, if it's supportive, I'll keep doing more of them. I think it's really powerful to look at the thoughts we don't really realize are emotional outsourcing, the why, and what to do differently.

All right, my beauties, 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

Ep #299: Sneaky Codependent, People-Pleasing, and Perfectionist Thoughts

are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my beauty, I'll talk to you soon. Ciao!

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.