

Ep #106: Self-Sacrifice



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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. Today I want to dive right in to talk about a habit that I see all day long in my clients in my six-month program, Anchored: Overcoming Codependency. So what I've come to understand is that many of us learned growing up that the best or only way to get love was to sacrifice ourselves, to put our needs last, to put ourselves last, which is a foundational codependent and people-pleasing habit.

I know all about it because I did it for years. It made me feel so good about myself in this fascinating way and because I was so often in that put upon martyr place. That place of being the fixer, of making everything so great for everyone else, I could use that suffering as a buffer against feeling my own real feelings because I was busy being the martyr instead of looking inward, instead of looking to see what I was really thinking, feeling, and needed to process through my body.

See how that sneaky brain thing happens? It's like, wow, brain, you are so amazing. Look what you did to protect me. In its way, it is so beautiful. All those hoops my brain jumped through to try to keep me from doing something it worried would kill me, or make me suffer, which was feeling my feelings.

I mean, it didn't work in any sustainable kind of way and now that I know how to feel my feelings, to process them somatically, which means through my body, now that I have this whole toolbox of somatic ways to interact with my feelings, to process them, and I've changed my thoughts around having feelings, life is so much better.

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I no longer need to be in that martyr role. I no longer need to self-sacrifice to feel good about me. But wow, did my mind and body try to protect me from my deep fear of being wrong or not measuring up or having big feelings I didn't know how to process by keeping me in that self-sacrificing place.

All I can say is that is amazing. What a gift my body-mind gave me for all of those years and what a gift that I can give my adult self and my inner children a different way of relating to ourselves and the world. So maybe my story is resonating for you, maybe not. Let's talk about what this concept of self-sacrifice can look like in our lives.

And if you don't see yourself in this, maybe you'll see someone you love and can bring more compassion to your interactions with that human. So for some of us in childhood, this concept of self-sacrifice looked like doing things we didn't want to do, like stepping into a parental role and taking care of parents or caregivers or siblings, instead of doing what we actually wanted to do as kids, which was playing and reading and drawing, individuating. Living our own kiddo lives for ourselves.

For some of us, this looked like being a de facto therapist to a parent who didn't know how to manage their own emotions or who is high need, who dumped on us and we didn't know how to say I'm a kid, please stop, I can't carry your emotional burdens for you. A parent who was in constant emotional upset, always stressed or worried.

For some of us, this looked like changing who we are to attempt to keep the people around us happy with us, to fit their story about how we should be, who we should be, what we should like, what we should want, what our lives should look like.

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For some of us, this looked like always being the good girl, getting the straight As, and interestingly, for some of us, this looked like getting on our skateboard or our bike and getting out of dodge. Not being home.

Sacrificing our connection with family and self because it was the healthier, safer, better thing for us in that moment.

And as adults, this can look like more of the same. Sacrificing our need for rest in order to do what's asked of us, whether it's housework, parenting, meeting partnership requests when we want something different, and sometimes it's sacrificing our rest to do what is not asked of us by anyone else, but we self-impose.

Stories like the house always has to look perfect, the kids need to look perfect, life needs to look and be in function a specific, perfect way for us to feel okay. We need to exert control, to feel safe, and we martyr ourselves in the middle.

This can also look like doing our job at work to some perfectionist standard that often no one is asking for us because we believe that pleasing other people, keeping them happy with us is more important than taking care of ourselves because again, that was the safer, smarter choice in childhood and got us the love, attention, praise, validation that we wanted and needed.

As adults, this can also look like sacrificing our desires in order to people-please instead. And what's key here to remember is that the quotidian everyday business of being a human is where we often choose self-sacrifice instead of self-love and being true to ourselves.

And this runs the gamut from choosing a restaurant that we think will make our partner happy, even when it's not what we want, to choosing a career

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that we think will make our parents or the community members happy, impressed with us, proud, when it's not what we actually want in our life.

These big and little decisions, these everyday things matter because our life is made up of the small everyday things. The small ways that we show up for our own lives and make decisions for ourselves. Not to keep anyone else happy.

The complexity of our lives is made up in how we spend our days, how often we say without pausing to question it, from that non-intentional, not checked in place, you, my partner, my parent, child, sister, boss, you matter. Your opinion, your wants, your needs matter more than my own.

An example of this from a client of mine is Tara who's been in an on again, off again unfulfilling relationship for years and doesn't want to break it off because she both loves this person and because she doesn't want to let them down. She doesn't want them to feel abandoned, and so she accepts crumbs and was telling herself it was her only option.

She couldn't see what was happening in her own mind because her vision was understandably clouded by a lifetime of thinking this way. And what she wasn't seeing until we coached on it was that she was sacrificing her own joy, her own passion, her own pleasure in this codependent way to try to protect someone else's feelings.

And so of course she wasn't showing up for her partnership in a connected way and she wasn't getting her own needs met by herself, first and foremost, and definitely not by this dude. And that's the rub there. When we sacrifice ourselves to try to create someone else's experience, it always backfires eventually.

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Maybe not at first, but eventually, slowly we grow distant. The connection fizzles out when we are sacrificing ourselves to try to maintain the connection. We slowly, sometimes without even realizing it, shut down and withdraw as the weight of that self-sacrifice erodes our sense of self and joy more and more each day.

Being a martyr is not an easy thing to live under. And it feels lousy for everyone involved. When we've lived a life in which we prioritize sacrificing ourselves for others, of course we feel anxious. Of course we feel chronically worried, of course we have a chronic belly ache and neck ache. There is tension in our bodies as we are not expressing ourselves in our real way.

Of course feeling depressed or sad is normal. When we feel so out of touch with ourselves and our own wants and needs because we never learned it was okay to prioritize them. Because we learned that it was not the right, or a smart way to get love from our adults growing up, and for many of us, self-sacrifice was what was modeled for us, especially by the humans socialized as women because women are taught this in the patriarchy.

To put kids, partner, home life, career before their own needs. And this often sounds like, "I would do anything for my family," and, "I'm only happy if my kids are happy." And so in our adult relationships, we continue these patterns until we wake up to them. Until we start to see how putting ourselves last keeps us trapped. Not really ever knowing what we want or need.

And so logically, we come to believe that it's okay to not get our needs met and to not know how to meet them ourselves because we've lost touch with what that is. And I hear this day in and day out from my fellow codependent, people-pleasing, perfectionists.

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So often we don't know what we want in a relationship, in bed, for dinner, or we do know, and we have come to fear conflict. We fear someone will judge us or mock us for our desires. We fear we won't get it anyway, so why even try and risk failing? We don't believe that it's possible or likely or even okay for us to get what we want so we don't voice it. We don't get started. We don't take courageous action. We don't risk failure.

And my love, you know how I feel about failure. I want it for you so much. I want you to fail. And if you're new to the show and you're like, wow, she's a jerk, she wants me to fail, we may have a different definition of failure. If so, please check out episodes 38, 39, and 40 where I teach you how awesome failure is because it means that you tried and have the opportunity to learn what works and what doesn't in this life.

And what better way to find out what you want and need than by trying, failing, and trying again. So in this belief spiral, we don't believe that we are worthy of getting what we want, particularly when we don't have clarity around what that is.

So the remedy here is to start to learn what you want and need in any given moment. To ask yourself in a real way what you value. What's important to you? Not what does he want, not what she wants, what would make them happy. No, no, no, my beauty.

The key is to turn inward and to get real about what brings you joy in your own life and to start working on the belief that it does not serve you to sacrifice your own desires in the hope that that will make other people happy. Don't make me go all hospice nurse on you because you know I will.

At the end of the day, at the end of the road, at the end of life, do you want to be on your deathbed saying, "Well, at least I made everyone else

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happy?" So let's talk about the thought errors that keep us in these painful cycles.

First, there's the cognitive fallacy, the thought error, this story that when we are self-sacrificing, others will be happy. And sure, of course they may be happy in the short-term, but someone who truly loves you, who really loves the core essence of you wants you to be happy also. And if somebody wants you to be happy, they don't want you to sacrifice yourself.

They want you to be doing what you want and need. Not just what they want you to want, or what you believe they want you to want, or what you're taught by your socialization, your culture, the media to want. Really loving someone means wanting them to have what they want for themselves. To go for it, to get it, and not to sacrifice for anyone else.

And really loving yourself means doing the same darn thing for you. Learning what you want and need and prioritizing that which brings you joy and wellness and peace in your heart over that thought error that tells you that being a martyr is a way to be seen as a good, moral, upstanding, amazing person because it's just not. Stop measuring your goodness by the number of times you put you last. Let's let that one soak in.

For us codependent thinkers, this cuts both ways. We sacrifice for others, sometimes because they ask, but often without them asking. And then we get resentful when they don't sacrifice for us. It's like we're shocked when other people have healthy self-care and boundaries and respect themselves in a way we would never even think of from our self-sacrificing place.

And then we're pissed off because it's like - and I hear this one day in and day out - how dare you, other human in my life, not bend yourself up like a

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human pretzel and make yourself miserable to meet my needs? I do that for you without your asking all of the time. And I'm so mad at you about it.

It's funny, right? It's funny to hear these things out loud. It's like, oh right, I totally do that. And then there's this other part of it. From codependency, we've spent a lifetime thinking that we can read other people's minds and believe that we know what they want us to want. What they want that we have to give them in order to be loved and lovable.

For example, we may have the story in our minds that they want us to agree with them all the time. That they want us to go along with their idea, they want us to be in lockstep with their desires, but I have found in a decade of doing this work that it's just often not true. We just don't pause to ask and to find out.

I can remember back pretty easily to when I believed that my being self-sacrificing was the way to show the people I love that I love them, that I'm there for them and I'll support them. And thereby, that I am worthy of love and care, and I will prove it. I will be easy to work with, easy to be with, that I'm pleasant and a good girl who says yes and prioritizes others.

And I can think back to being a yes woman, to saying yes when I meant no, and it brought up so much anxiety. So much anxious energy and tension within my body because I was out of alignment with myself, with my own resonance. Because I wasn't being true to me. And it makes sense that that would create this anxious energy.

Because when we're not being true to ourselves, it's like having two competing voices within us. One, that speaks from our heart, from our spirit, that says I don't want to do this. And there's another part that believes that we have to for survival, to prove our worthiness and be loved. And that part's a logical part. It believes that other people's wants and

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needs are more important than our own, but that's where that part is wrong. It is simply wrong. It's misguided.

And its origin, once more, in keeping you safe as a kiddo makes so much sense. I have so much compassion for these parts. And you get to recognize as an adult is that it is not loving to you or anyone else to be dishonest and not speaking your wants and needs to attempt to be seen in a specific way or to attempt to get someone to be pleased with you is not honest.

It is not living in radical honesty. It is not my integrity to live that way, though I did it for years. It is not honest to be in a relationship and not be your whole real self. And if a relationship requires that you show up as a false version of yourself for that relationship to survive or thrive, you get to ask yourself, is that the kind of relationship, whether it be friendship, work, partner, parent, spouse, date, whatever, is that relationship one I really want to be in? Is that a relationship that truly serves your growth and healing as a human?

I know it's not for me anymore. I'm so done with self-sacrifice, with attempting to change myself, to make me palatable or acceptable for anyone else. This is me. You get what you get. If it works for you, come on over. I'm really fun to be around and I'm also silly and weird and I'm not apologizing for any of it.

But it felt like I needed to for quite a while. I needed to shape shift to be loved but now I see that I am not my most kind, loving, empathetic, caring, whole self when I am not being my whole self. When I'm not saying this works for me and this doesn't. When I am being truthful with myself and the people I love, that's when I'm my best self.

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And I know, I know, I know, I know my love, I get it. This can sound like a massive and radical shift because for many of us, from that place of codependent relating, from having had the codependent experience our whole lives, when it is what was modeled for us growing up at home and our culture and our society, it is a huge shift.

And it's one that we need to make in order to return to being anchored in ourselves. And thus being truly honest with ourselves and the people around us. And I say return to because each of us was born knowing our truth, our needs, our wants, knowing who we are in the world. We were born knowing this.

As babies, when we were hungry we cried about it, when we were lonely we cried about it, when our diaper was wet we cried about it, and we sought attention and care. And the challenge came when we didn't get those early needs met, when we weren't attuned to the way we wanted to be and needed to be in infancy or later in our childhood.

And so we can come to understand that having needs is a stupid thing, because if our needs don't get met, then we can feel unsafe and that's understandable. And as an adult, you now get to reparent that part of you that believes that having your wants, needs, and desires is somehow to be back-burnered in favor of attending to other people's wants and needs and desires.

And you get to let that child part of you, that inner child know that they are safe with you, that they are safe with you in a way that child you may not have been, or if your childhood needs did get met but society taught you that to be a good girl, a good woman, to be acceptable, you needed to put your needs last, you get to show up for that wounded part too.

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And the remedy either way is to ask yourself each and every day what it is that you actually want and need. And you start to slowly prioritize that, being so patient with yourself. This is going to take a minute, my love. Don't expect it to work overnight. But it will also work overnight. It's both.

So it can be small, and I always recommend starting small. So I need five minutes in the morning to look over the headlines with no one talking to me. That can be something you say out loud. If your family wants to order pizza but you want sushi, you can say cool, getting two deliveries is totally allowed.

If your partner wants to stay up late watching a movie and you want to go to bed at 10, you can check in with yourself and hear that voice that says, "Baby, I'm tired." And you can put yourself to sleep. Your partner might grumble that they have to watch the movie alone but that's okay. They can have that. They can hold that. They can be in that discomfort for themselves.

You don't have to stay with them and hold their hand through their emotional discomfort and thereby impose discomfort on yourself. You can put your perfect beautiful self to bed, my darling. That's your job as your own most loving parent.

Again, don't start monumental. Start with the small things. Start with learning what you want and need. Start with asking yourself what you want for lunch and start with deciding that it's no longer okay for you to sacrifice yourself at the altar of someone else's love and approval.

Making that decision was profoundly life-changing for me. Profoundly. And was such a key part of building trust in myself. And when we build trust in ourselves, we step further and further out of codependency and people

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pleasing and we step further and further into our own autonomy as humans and our capacity to show up in all of our relationships in a truthful way.

And what more do you want in your life than to show up honestly in your authenticity, in all of your relationships starting with the one with yourself? I can think of no greater gift to give you and the world. Thank you for listening, my beautiful love. I appreciate you being here.

Two things I want to share with you. I am currently enrolling for my six-month program Anchored: Overcoming Codependency. What's what we used to call the masterclass. So if you've been hearing about that the last few months and you've thought, "You know, I want to check it out," this is a great time.

If I offer it again in 2020 - oops, 2021. Hey Vic, don't invoke 2020, alright, we're done with that. But if I do offer it again in 2021, it won't be until the end of the year if at all. So this is your chance. If you've been wanting to work with me, if you've been loving the show and are like, I want that, I want more of that support, you can have it.

Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored. And you can find all the information you need there about the program. You can learn more details about what you get and what you really get is to do this work with me for six months, to come home to yourself, to find that font of profound deep self-love within you that you know is there, to step out of codependency, to put people pleasing behind you and to stop feeling so anxious.

You deserve that, my beauty. Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored. If you want to learn more about codependency on March 1st at 8pm Eastern standard time I will be doing a free live webinar all about it and as always, I will be saving tons of time to answer your questions. So head on

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over to my website, victoriaalbina.com/codependencywebinar and you can get all the details there.

Register now so you'll get all the reminder email. Mark your calendar. March 1st, 8pm Eastern standard time. Free webinar all about codependency. Thank you for listening, my love. Stop sacrificing yourself. Really baby, life is so much better when you take care of you first.

Alright, let's do what we do. Gentle hand on your heart, slow breath in, out. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be 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, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.