

# Balance365 Episode 29 Transcript

Annie: Welcome back to another episode of Balance 365 radio, this is your host, Annie Brees and I am so excited because we have an amazing guest for you today. We have Vienna Pharaon. Vienna is a licensed marriage and family therapist and owner of Mindful Marriage And Family Therapy. She is one of the most sought after therapists in New York City. She also happens to be the fiancée to Connor Beaton who we had on our podcast a few episodes back. Vienna has a way of leading people back home though, she is able to connect deeply to their needs and she's helps people connect to their voice in order to create the change they wish to see in themselves, and their relationships.

Vienna has worked with thousands of couples and, let me tell you, Jen, Lauren and I have all experienced major Aha moments following her on Instagram. If you don't already, check her out and follow her on Instagram at @mindfulmft or you can check out her website at [newyorkcouplescounseling.com](http://newyorkcouplescounseling.com). On today's podcast, Vienna, Jen and myself dive into how to cultivate the self-worth required to ask for what you need in your relationships and how to use conflict as a tool for information. We had a wonderful time recording this episode. Vienna offers so many valuable insights into the dynamics of relationships. And if you're up for it, we think this could be a great episode to listen to with your partner.

As always, if you like what you hear today, we would love an amazing rating on itunes so we can continue to bring you valuable podcast episodes with amazing guests like Vienna. Enjoy!

Vienna, thank you so much for joining us, how are you?

Vienna: Good, thank you so much for having me, I'm so excited about this podcast.

Annie: I am excited about this as well because you have made quite an impact on, I know, Jen and I, via your Instagram profile which is huge and if you aren't following her on Instagram, please make sure you do so it's wonderful, wonderful compelling quotes with amazing context and captions. But that's not all you do. Can you share a little bit about how to you got into the field of relationships and families and marriage and therapy?

Vienna: Yeah, absolutely. So I am a licensed marriage and family therapist out here in New York City. And so I went to school for marriage and family therapy. For me, it's, people always ask how did you get into that and why?

For me, it goes back to my own parents' divorce and wanting to understand relationships and why certain relationships and why others fail and probably from a pretty unevolved state and fear-based place wanting to make sure that I had the tools so that the same thing didn't happen in my own experience and so I became really fascinated with relationships and I wanted to learn that stuff because it's not something that's generally taught outside of our own family of origin who are flawed individuals who are trying to teach us even if they're not consciously aware of it that they are teaching us what it looks like to be in communication, what intimacy is, how we deal with conflict etc, etc.

I became really fascinated with it and now ever since getting into the field the work has evolved and it's not from a fear based place it's more from wanting to do the work with others to just like stand alongside of them as they work through their own stuff in understanding their relationship dynamics and the patterns. I love the work so much.

Annie: And, fun fact, you are engaged to Connor who was, we were just discussing, I think our first official podcast guest, if you haven't listened to that episode we discuss with Connor how to talk to your partner about your health and your body and how to really like develop some really good communication strategies and as a man coming onto our female podcast he just killed it. It was so insightful and respectful and I imagine the two of you together have some amazing conversations.

Vienna: Yeah, we definitely do. And he's so good at articulating really honestly both the masculine and the feminine energies so it's so nice to be able to have him grounded in his energy and being able to communicate from that space. So, yeah, we definitely some great conversations and we get to work together a little bit now too which is so nice to be able to bring that forward together.

Annie: Which I want you to share some of the projects you're doing before we leave here today at the end because I know you've got some stuff in the works that's exciting. So what we wanted to talk to you in particular which I know we could probably spend hours on this but how to ask for what you need in a relationship and we deal with a lot of discussion about marriages, about more intimate relationships, with this I was also thinking about how to ask for what you need just in general in a relationship whether it be a friendship, a coworker, a family member, it could be a spouse or a partner because what we've learned in working with women is that asking for what you need often time requires a minimum baseline amount of self-respect and a belief that you're worthy of getting your needs met.

And that's something that mothers in particular who we work a large part with struggle with. How do you go about beginning cultivating that self-worth to even get the courage to ask for what you need?

Vienna: I think one of the places we have to start is understanding the constraints to the self-worth, what it is that actually blocks us from that. We all have needs

and some of us greater access to bringing that forward. You're right, it has a lot to do with our ability to connect to our deservingness of that, that self-worth, that worthiness and the story that we tell ourselves about that. So I think it's important to understand what blocks it, what it is that can get in the way and what are the stories that we tell ourselves about why this should or should not happen. I always give the prompt, "The story I tell myself is-" And I think for your listeners that's a great prompt to ask yourself. Like, what's the story that I'm telling myself about having needs and having those needs be met.

For me as a marriage and family therapist, so much of the work is us going back into our family systems, it's us going back into the space where we understand some of the programming and what wounding we have, was I in a family system where I was not heard? Did I bring certain needs forward and were they overlooked? Was my role in the family system to be a caretaker? Maybe I was a part of a divorce and I lived with mom and I needed to be the caretaker to her emotional needs so my needs got overlooked.

There's a lot of wounding that can happen in that space where we take this backseat and if we don't have access to that story and to the wounding around that it'll run our lives for us. It will keep us quiet, it will keep us from bringing things forward because we don't feel like we have permission to do that, we feel like if we bring certain things forward maybe it will turn into conflict or that it's too much for the system to hold.

A lot of times we grow up in a system that's already pretty shaky and so there can be this belief system that if we bring something forward then it's going to crash and burn the system and it's going to be too much and so we hold it back and I'm just giving a few examples of what the storyline could be based on I think a lot of familiar wounding themes for people. So my invitation would be for people to really think about, what's my story around having needs? How did I present those needs as a child? What was the reaction? How was that responded to in that way?

And so to just tap into that space to maybe start to connect to this underlying story that could still be with you today and could actually be a constraint to you bringing your voice forward and having those needs be heard.

Annie: Absolutely. Jennifer, you're here and you're kind of quiet over there. We haven't talked to you. Hi. First of all.

Jen: Hi. I'm actually really connecting with this.

Annie: I'm thinking you might have something to add here.

Jen: I'm almost emotional right now. Well, I just wanted to say that I grew up in a home where my parents were divorced and there was a lot of conflict and I've done lots of therapy as an adult and identified that I felt like my mother's caretaker and I did feel like I had to be as quiet and chaos-free as possible to make my mom's life easier because she had a hard life. And so I'm just really connecting with what you are saying here and I'm having my own personal epiphany as we speak because I, like many women, I struggled to speak up to say what my needs are.

I feel like I have to soldier on at all times and take care of everything and not inconvenience anybody around me. And I've spoken about this on social media inside of our community and a lot of women connect with what I'm saying as far as not wanting to inconvenience anybody and I feel like you're just kind of providing us with a reason why that is.

Vienna: It's so important to be able to acknowledge it and then the next part of it is the expansion phase of it. It's good to be able to realize and connect to what the story might be and it can't stop there. We have to also give ourselves permission to shake the system. And that's scary because there are threats to it. It doesn't feel entirely safe because our system doesn't actually know that it's going to be okay to do this. In fact, it believes that it's not going to be okay because of the data and the evidence that we have stored in our system. And so to override that takes so much courage and bravery and vulnerability to do that and that's the invitation. It is actually what we need to do. It's scary and I'm going to do it anyways. It's frightening for me and my palms will sweat and I might think that this is going to be a disaster and I still need to do it anyway.

And I say that with the caveat that of course, if you're in a relationship that doesn't feel safe or if there are very significant threats then you do need to be careful and I just want to acknowledge that that sometimes people will say, "Yeah, I hear you, and I get that the expansion does need to happen and I also don't feel safe." And so this is not about putting yourself into harm's way but if you have a relationship where you're just scared, this is something that is just unusual for you, you have to push yourself to the edge and move through that and make that leap.

I love using the difference between being injured vs being hurt. I was an athlete and I remember just tweaking things constantly and my coach was like "Push through it, girl, keep going, keep going here." And you have pulled hamstrings or you have this and you keep going vs I tore my ACL in college, and it's like, "Okay, that's an injury." And I can't push through that and knowing the difference between "This doesn't feel good for me and it's tweaked and I still have to push through" vs "This is actually a dangerous space for me and I have to be very aware of that." So I just want to put that out there just to make sure that people are safe in that space but you do need to push through.

It cannot just be "Oh, I have this great reflection and insight about myself. This is why I stay quiet." And like, period, that's where I stay. No, you do need to

recognize that and voice that and say, "You know, this is the story that I grew up and it's really hard for me to bring this forward and I'm trying to expand into this space where I can actually use my voice to be heard and start to change that story and narrative out.

Annie: I love that because. I love that you say "This is hard and I'm going to do it anyways." Because this is speaking as a 35 year old, I shy away from emotional discomfort, anything that feels like confrontation or I need to be a little bit more bold in how I'm asserting myself, has been really scary for me up until like the past year and it's been a practice. Sometimes I ebb and flow through being a little bit more bold and then I maybe take a step back and then I take two steps forward and then a step back. It wasn't like I just was like "Okay, I'm doing this now and I've moved on forever and ever and I'm perfect."

I've had to cultivate that in me to be like, "No, this is what I need and I'm worthy of doing this and I'm going to ask you even if it's a bit more uncomfortable, or I'm worried about how it may make you feel if I ask for this." Which I think is something we see a lot in our community, especially when we're talking about roles in the home, if women need help, or assistance that they know that by asking for a shift in that, whatever that may be, it affects their partner. And where is that line between "I don't want to upset them but I need something different."

Jen: I would also add that typically the women we work with are in a partnership and it's really hard to separate your own journey in this regard from your partner's journey because when you want to bring your story forward, you kind of need them to bring their story forward as well especially when it comes to gender roles within a family and household so it doesn't feel right to not be getting what we need and I see this scenario over and over and over again.

We're not getting what we need and our male partners are taking what they need unapologetically and that sort of kind of can feed back into how women were raised and what we are "allowed to ask for" especially from men and what our

roles are inside of a family and so in order for me to bring my story forward I need these things. I think it could where the tension where women actually don't feel safe is their partner's story is different, but women take care of these things, but I do these things which comes from their own story what they may have seen role modelled in their homes and so I've talked to this too about several girlfriends where I see a lot of disconnect in relationships today where women were raised to be strong, so like I, for example, was raised in the 80s and 90s and I was going to be strong, stand on my own, all these things, that came from my mom's story where she was raised through the 60s and didn't have that kind of encouragement.

But then some of us have partnered with people who were still sort of, their parents were still raising them to not have strong women or independent women or in the household and there's just kind of a disconnect there and you have to examine your whole belief system around basically gender roles and it's really interesting but it can make things really tough and I think that's where a lot of women don't feel safe bringing it forward. It actually requires us asking our partners to dig in and examine their story and what they tell themselves.

Vienna: Yeah. It absolute does. We talk a lot about having partners who will stand shoulder to shoulder with us. It's very hard to be doing your own work without your partner leaning into that space and doing theirs and sometimes partners are more resistant to that and I don't know if that's a lot of the community that listens to you but I think we have to continue to create that invitation to bring it forward to actually ask our partners to consider exactly what you were saying - consider the belief systems, the programming that they've had to. Because what we're seeing is that we have these different sets of beliefs, these different sets of program that are coming together that do create conflict.

We have these expectations that are just in our belief systems and so you might have a partner who does expect X, Y and Z from you and maybe you did grow up believing that but you've got to a point in your life where you're starting to shift that expectation or you start to feel like, "I don't like this, this doesn't feel good to

me. And so now I am starting to push back on that expectation because I'm breaking free from some of these beliefs or some of these programs that have been set in place." And I think that this is one of the greatest shifts in our time to see the separation for women. I find that I certainly see so many women having tremendous conflict with their mothers and that there's this huge gap in our history, I think, where the difference between women is so great.

It's maybe one of the greatest gaps that we've really seen between generation to generation and I think that that conflict sort of in the feminine is really interesting to pay attention to too because I think as women when I work with women I always say, let's check our judgments of women, let's chuck our judgments of the feminine and what are the stories that we have and where is it that we roll our eyes and where is it where we're like, "That's crap." or "I would never be that way." How do we judge the feminine? Because we often confuse women for the feminine energy and that to me is a spectrum that we all slide up and down but I think it's so important to be in that space. Unfortunately, you might be partnered with someone who has a block there.

It's why, thank God, I'm slightly biased, but I think it's why I think therapy is so incredible and so important to do this couples work to be able to really dive into that space and I think you were getting to this before, Jen, about this systemic nature of this work is that I can't just do my work on my own. Great, I have these revelations and I'm going to bring my voice forward but if my partner is not able to hear it.

Does it really actually do anything? Yes, it's great that we're able to honor ourselves but if the outcome is conflict or the outcome is something is actually doesn't budge us forward in any way that can feel pretty difficult for us and it doesn't create that positive feedback loop of "I want to keep doing this because it's successful and feels rewarding and helpful for us as a couple."

Annie: Right. So on that note. What if you're in that space where you're willing to put in the work and you've got a spouse or partner that maybe isn't sure or is resisting a little bit. Do you have any suggestions or thoughts on that?

Vienna: Yeah, I think it's important to just speak from your own experience and the emotion that you had around it. Trying to force somebody into the work when they're resisting it is hard. There is something that feels threatening about that to the other person and so being able to drop into that space to try to be able to understand it to try to have this experiential conversation with them to understand, "Why are you resisting it? Help me understand what it is that you are pushing away from."

Because sometimes people have really strong stories about what therapy is. Or what "getting help" is and to connect to that for someone might help us understand where they're resistance is and then the other part is just bringing your own emotion forward. Sharing why this is important to you.

If your partner feels that you're trying to control them in this way, they might be resistant to it but if they feel like you are hurting or that there is a functionality to why we're going to lean into this space they might feel less resistant to that. It can be hard and I don't think that there's a simple, easy answer to this other than voicing why it's important to you and creating that invitation and trying to have the conversation that has both of you sharing why you either want or don't want this to happen to try to connect in that space.

Jen: The tough thing is that therapy often comes from a result of conflict inside the relationship so people, their defences are up and so I imagine if you come at your partner saying, "There's something wrong with you. We have to go to therapy." Of course they're going to be resistant. Right? Rather than a conversation of "We need help. I need help and you need help and we need help together to meet each other in the middle" type thing.

Vienna: Yeah, there's definitely gentler language that we can use with it and I think it's also important probably to bring some of that forward when you're not actually in conflict, when you're not in the thick of it. When you're actually in an okay space. We know that, the research shows that couples come to couple's therapy on average 4 years too late. And so we wait, we wait and we wait until we get to this point where we're just so fed up which is hard to come in from that space and when you can start to look at therapy as something that can be preventative or just informative or explorative.

Those are the things that make it less threatening to us, but a lot of people think like, "This is the end of it. If I'm going to therapy this is the end. Or if I'm not even married isn't that a bad situation that we're going to therapy before we're even tying the knot." And those are just such crap stories. They're just these stories that have nothing to do with what the work is. And so we have to challenge some of the things that we're telling ourselves about this. Because the truth is when you have that great connection with a therapist or someone, a coach, or whomever that work can be some of the most transformative work that you'll ever do in your life.

And to understand why it is you would want to resist transformative work is a good question. Oh, I am going to have to change, I am going to have to look at some of the hard stuff in my life, that's usually what people are resisting is their shadow, is the stuff that they don't want to look at.

Jen: It's tough. I mean it's big emotional labor, right. To go into therapy and do that work. So I know when I was first married my partner asked me to go to therapy. We had a rough first year and I was very resistant to it and sort of how you're talking about bringing blocks to the surface.

So we have so many blocks that are coming to surface and we're just sort of reacting to our feelings in the situation and we're not really exploring where that resistance is coming from but when I did explore that resistance it was because I had been to so many therapists as a child and we moved a lot so I was always starting with a new therapist and it was just very, for me the connection to therapy was, "This is going to be exhausting. I'm going to tell my whole story to a new therapist and that's going to take several sessions." To me it just had such a, I remember feeling like just the energy, I didn't feel like I had that energy. But it really just took bringing to the surface to go, "Hey. Okay. Yeah I can handle this. That's where my block is coming from. We can push through."

Annie: And I think, Vienna, I have heard you talk about, I think it was conflict, how your kind of, I don't want to say a fan of it, but you kind of look at it as information, as a tool to maybe help you make some improvements or changes that enhance your relationship vs like "Oh my gosh, hunker down. This is the beginning of the end. We're doomed" sort of thing. You actually think it's useful.

Vienna: Yeah. I see conflict as one of the greatest gateways to connection, intimacy, closeness with our partners. No, that doesn't mean we should be seeking out conflict to create intimacy, but it's recognizing that when there is conflict there, exactly what you said, I always say, "Conflict is information." And it's some of the most important information we will ever come to understand about ourselves and about our partners so I like to think of putting that flag into the sand to be like, "Okay. There is something so worth understanding here."

Because when we are in conflict it means there is a trigger, it means there are certain things that are happening underground and in our system that we don't really know what to do with and it's coming out in this chaotic way because we don't know how to articulate it. We don't know what's happening to us but we feel under attack and there's a threat and we're going to fight or we're going to flee or we're going to freeze or whatever it is. Like you said, we're going to hunker down or we're going to do this. And it's not easy to necessarily do it in the moment but I think it's so important to start to shift our story around what conflict is.

Because most people want to avoid, most people see it as a threat, most people see it as something that's bad and that's because the story that we have around conflict is that we saw conflict lead to anger and yelling and fighting. Or we saw conflict lead to divorce or we saw conflict lead to people brushing things under the rug and it becoming something that turned into sort of a passive aggressive energy. Or maybe conflict was behind closed doors so we actually never even saw a resolution or repair happen. Or maybe we had family systems where everything was "perfect" and so if we're always perfect there must be something so bad about conflict that we can't even go there.

We have a stretch of storytelling around what conflict is and my invitation is to open that story up to at least allow us to start to tinker around with this idea that conflict is information and it isn't something that is bad or something that we have to avoid, that conflict is something that allows us to get in there with our partners and say, "Something really serious is happening right now." And I want to learn about it. And maybe we're in a high flooded energy place right now but when we come down from this, I do want to understand what's going on for you because this is where the gold is. I always say, "when we're getting along and having fun and connected, that's great, of course, you're together hopefully because you like each other on some level and that's wonderful but you don't actually learn these new parts of each other in the good. You learn these new parts in the conflict, in the rawness when you're starting to learn more stuff about yourself."

And I actually think it's part of how desire stays in long lasting relationships. It's like the novelty of the relationship can happen in learning about these new parts of ourselves that we didn't even have access to before. So conflict can actually maintain our relationship because it's allowing us to connect to new stories, new wounds, new traumas, new pain stories that we maybe didn't have access to before.

Jen: There's this amazing quote you have on your page, I just scrolled back to find it because I will remember it forever when you posted it, it says, "Avoiding your triggers isn't healing. Healing happens when you're triggered and you're able to move through the pain, the patter and the story and walk your way to a different ending." And I found that so powerful and that's kind of what you're saying here is to not run, which a lot of people do, avoiding triggers is a very common behavior pattern and you're saying, "Lean in. Move through it. Write a new story."

Vienna: I think a lot of people think that the healing is like, "If I choose someone who doesn't trigger me. That's the way that I stay in a happy, secure and healthy place" and I actually don't think that that's the work. I think that the work and the beauty is not so much that we avoid this stuff it's that it's put into the light, it's that we have access to our wounds and our pain and our trauma and that story and it's not in our shadow, it's in our conscious mind, we have access to it, we can feel it, we can touch it, we can be with it and that when we get triggered, because we inevitably do, that's just the reality of it and it's part of the human connection is that we have it in our hands and that with each other we can say, "Okay. This is what's going on." or "This is the experience that I just had."

And we can dive into it with each other. And not have the wounding go to the same story, the same wounding story that we have from the original wound. But that "Oh" with you, you can acknowledge it, you can hear it with me, we can hold it together. And maybe it's not totally pretty, the entire way through but we can create this new story around the wound where it was heard. It was understood. It was loved. It was acknowledged and that is what I see as some of the most rewarding feeling work. It's not about the avoidance of. It's about the acknowledgement and recognition and making it a priority when it's happening so that' s a feeling can come through.

Annie: I wonder if our listener's minds are blowing like mine is. Like, so much gold here.

Jen: I would say with this podcast and we recommended this with Connor's as well, is they're podcasts you need to listen to with your partner. So you might listen to it alone but then take it to your partner and listen to it together because that is going to be what can stimulate that conversation and get everything going.

Annie: So we've talked a little bit about how to kind of start cultivating that self-worth and examining what your needs are and where they come from and what stories you're telling yourself about who you are and what you're doing but what we see happen in our community it seems like is sometimes we let these needs go unmet that it starts to build and build and build and that can end up with women feeling frustrated.

I mean, men, too, but we work mostly with women. Feeling frustrated and that can lead to criticism and resentment, arguments and I've heard you talk about unpacking messages. And I think you shared this on the mantalks podcast that you did with Connor, you see people exploding about the toothpaste cap being left off and it's really not about the toothpaste cap, I mean, I've heard of friends doing this. I would never do that.

Vienna: Right.

Annie: No, no. But that's kind of how it manifests. All of a sudden you just cannot take any more and can you just talk a little bit more about what you mean by unpacking messages. How do you get down to what's really going on?

Vienna: And just really fast touch onto once we get to this explosion place. We know, I talk a lot about low negativity thresholds and the research shows us actually that the healthiest couples are the ones who have these low negativity thresholds. Where the threshold for negativity to rise is very low. So once you

experience something that we code as negative, we actually bring it forward. The healthiest couples bring it forward faster. A lot of times people think it's healthier to actually have this high negativity threshold where some of the narratives and stories might be, "Well, we pick and choose our battles. Or we don't fight a lot. Yeah, you gotta let some of this stuff slide, you know."

Yes, it's not about criticizing the color blue that you're wearing. That's not about being nitpicky in that way. It's about if I'm feeling hurt, or if I'm feeling frustrated or disappointed or betrayed that the threshold before I bring it forward is really really low, so I think what winds up happening is we allow all these experiences to build and build and build and then eventually we actually just blow and then we're blowing about things that we don't even have understanding of. But going back to your question of sort of unpacking the messages. We are programmed beings, period. Dr. Bruce Lipton's research shows us we operate from our non-conscious mind 95-99% of the time.

Jen: Oh my gosh.

Vienna: That's crazy. So we're in our conscious aware mind 1-5% of the time and so we're operating from this programming and the programming comes from, really from 0-7 is where they say most of the the programming happens and that's family systems, that's society, it's our coaches, it's our teachers, it's anybody in our life that is really meaningful and what it is that we absorb from that space. I talk a lot about explicit and implicit messages. The ones that are spoken to us and the ones that we just observe.

So we have these messages around what conflict looks like and maybe conflict was a, let's just say, an implicit message. We watched our parents fight in a certain way and that becomes part of our programming and so for me, it's so important for us as adults to take responsibility for our programming and for the messages and start to say, "What are the messages that I hold around conflict, around intimacy, around communication, around sex, around gender, around the

roles in the family, around partnership, around religion, around education, around money, what's really important to start to break these things down to say, 'Oh, this is the story that I hold' and then we start to check that. "Do I actually believe this?" and I think that what you guys were saying earlier that so many of your listeners are people who are really challenging maybe their expectations around gender roles, for example, is to really look at the messages that you pack around that.

Some of the implicit ones that are just implied, the ones that you observed and then the explicit ones, and maybe you heard where people said, "Girls are ladylike. A woman is to be desired. Those are the things that we hear whether it's from society or whether it's actually in the household and to really check those stories. Do I actually align with that? Do I believe this because I believe this or do I believe this because this is what I have been told? and I actually think that what you guys are saying is that there are people who are pushing back which is absolutely happening where they're like, "Screw that, I am not going to do that, I don't believe that," but we do it in a way that's reactive and resistant.

It's like, "Nobody's going to control me" or "No, I'm going to be an independent woman" and we don't realize what we might be blocking and protecting. It's so important to consciously be bringing this forward so that we have the tools to be able to set the boundaries in a healthy way without denying other people or rejecting them or pushing them out of their lives or not creating a healthy role or purpose or functionality for them in our life. Because I think sometimes when we get into this, we were talking about that independent woman space, "I can do it and I don't need to rely on somebody else."

And I think how so many women are in that space, I was certainly in that space for a very long time and part of that is coming from the wounding, it's coming from the trauma, it's coming from the judgments that we hold and without unpacking that, what happens is that we actually don't create space or room for another person to actually be needed. We don't create a role for them to have that function or that purpose in our lives. If we're always good, and I don't need this and I could handle all this on my own, which, listen, I believe that you can carry your own bags and you can pay your bills and you can do all that but at the

end of the day, we are humans and we have needs and we have to create room for that.

And so how do I create that space in a healthy way where I'm not rejecting it and pushing back on it because I'm trying to prove a new story and trying to crack through the code, the things that feel like have held us back as women in the past to a healthy space of having that boundary, being able to articulate and have that conversation while also creating the space to still have needs and to still honor that and create that room for there to be reciprocity and a dynamic in your partnerships or your friendships that's actually healthy and loving and inclusive.

Jen: We talk about this a lot in our community in terms of pendulum swings and we see it all the time so you have one belief and once you examine those beliefs and you "wake up" the pendulum often swings way to the other side and where we're sort of encouraging women is to like come back to centre. But it's almost like they need to go through the pendulum swing to fully appreciate where they were perhaps but it can be as damaging to be on the other side. It can be as hurtful to you as self.

I think what happens with women too as far as the independent woman thing goes, you want to be an independent woman and that means you don't need anyone to take care of you. But then, it also starts the story then is you can't have anyone take care of you and that is incredibly hurtful to a lot of women, because we have a lot of women out there, I think Annie and I would include ourselves in this, that are not asking for help and what we need and we are trying to carry the load on our own and we are so tired.

Annie: I think that's one of the things I have on the list to talk about that women just have this, often times this ingrained fear of being too needy. "I don't want to put anyone out." Our culture is, definitely as you noted, shifting towards valuing that independent woman, of course Beyonce comes to mind, but you know like she's talking about making her own money and a part of me is like "Yes! Let's do

all of that." But what's coming to mind when I hear you talk, Vienna, is the difference between connection and attachment.

And I think I've gone through a phase in just growing our business naturally that's like, "Okay, maybe I don't need to be as attached to some people as I thought. I can support myself a little bit more" But I still want to remain connected to people. And that's something that I value, with friends, family, my husband and then ultimately having needs isn't a weakness, isn't a bad thing. We all have needs. Connection, for me, is a really important need.

Vienna: it's such a good distinction. I think connection is something that's so important without it, truly where are we? Without connection, what is it that we're actually doing here? And so to be able to bring that part forward we do start to confuse having needs with neediness. It's like we literally all have needs. We have to accept that. Every single human has needs and not just needs of water and food and shelter and all that, it's like, no, we have emotional needs that certainly some of them we can meet for ourselves but really we need partnership and we need relationships to meet those needs and to be part of the healing for us and how do we balance that?

How do we balance wanting to set out and set goals for ourselves and feel that sense of autonomy and accomplishment and admiration for the self while also creating this space to say, "I need help. I need you to listen to me. Or I'm feeling really insecure right now and I just want to be close to you." And so when you shame and criticize having a need you're doing such an incredible disservice to you. I hate when women are coded as needy, obviously that's something that's been passed around for a very long time and I think it can be the insecurity from others around not knowing how to actually meet those needs. It's like, "I'm going to be fail you, so it's your fault. Your needs are too great."

And again, if you're listening to this with your partner, I think it's important to see what is actually confronting about my needs. Because a lot of times, and again

it's the spectrum and it's not that men are always in their masculine, they're not, but a lot of times when a man is in their masculine, they want the functionality and the fix it and how do I solve this and when you're bringing emotion forward that can sometimes feel really confronting. Like, I don't know how to fix this. So what you're doing is too chaotic and too messy for me and so you're needy and this is too much and it's not actually "I don't love you and I don't care about you." It's "I'm going to fail and I don't want to fail."

And I think when you can start to shift in that space and change that conversation of "I don't need you to fix this." The masculine communicates from the space of fixing and the functionality and how do we solve this and the feminine communicates and need to be heard from the space of experience, connect to me, hear me, feel me, see me. And again, that's not gender focussed, it's that we're on that spectrum but if we're in one or the other, how are we listening vs how are we communicating what is it that we actually need in that space that can be really helpful to actually let that need come forward.

What you were saying before is like, "If I bring it forward and it's not heard and it's rejected then it builds out the case for doing it on your own" and that's not the case that we're trying to build out here. We're trying to build out the space for relationships to push us forward. We thrive when our relationships thrive.

Annie: And I think what you just said really stood out at me and I think Connor offered some similar advice to acknowledge, "I don't need you to fix this. I might not know how to fix this, I just want you to listen. I just need to express how I'm feeling or just connect with you on that emotional level." Because I'm thinking of my husband, he's like, "okay, what are we going to do? Let's make a plan. What do I need to improve on? How can I fix-" and I'm like, "Just chill. Just chill. Just listen." Absolutely.

Vienna: but it's not that easy. We can have this awareness but they're like, "But why? Why do you want me to listen?" I don't see the function, I don't see the

value in that. And that's part of just the expansion of understanding these pieces and also for us, if we have partners who maybe do want to fix is not saying, "Ugh this is just a disaster and I can never bring this forward." It's the patience and the love in that space, "Oh, I see that this is how you feel and you actually helped me."

This is how you win and succeed and you actually have a purpose and serve something and serve something for me in my life and I so appreciate that and there's another part to it." It's a dance, it's a tango, we're going to get this wrong sometimes and we have to keep coming back to it and breaking down those walls and breaking down the things that keep us from connecting in that space.

Because sometimes having somebody fix it is great and exactly what we need and we're like, "Yeah, give me the pros and cons and give me the full out list here and let's get it going" and then often times it's not and we can recognize the difference and there is purpose and value to both.

Jen: I love there was a word that you said, just a minute ago, Vienna, that I'd like to just circle back to but it was "rejection" and I think that a lot of people aren't bringing their needs forward in their reflection because of that fear of rejection by their partner. And I think this happens to men and women and one thing I've had to explore personally in the last few years is when my partner has needs I resist that and I think women can resist their partners having needs.

They want to be able to bring their needs and they are maybe their partner will reject those and they feel awful about that but I think when we talk about the conditioning women have about their own role, men have the same type of conditioning and I know Connor talks about this a lot as far as their masculine role in the world so women also have that conditioning. Are our male partners allowed to have emotional needs? Do we create that space for them as well?

Because that can be a really vulnerable space for a man to go to to say "Here are my emotional needs" because they were conditioned to suppress their emotional needs and just making sure that it's a complete two way street of saying "I'm going to bring my needs forward and I have these needs and I want us to lean into these needs but I want you to bring your needs forward and you need me. What do you need from me? Or what do you need from the world or from yourself to be a healthy person" and as a woman, to lean into that, to your partner being more vulnerable and asking for things, his needs to be met as well, I think, important.

Vienna: There has to be room for them to bring their needs forward and for us not to create shame around that and a lot of times what some of the feedback is that we do do that, we want this emotional part to come forward but then when it comes forward it gets rejected, right, It's like, "Oh woah, this is too soft, this too something else" and we don't like that. I think it has to become personal to your own experience and to your own story.

For you, Jen, you were saying before that you were your mother's caretaker in some ways and so when someone else brings their needs forward, from a subconscious place, is there a part of you that's like, "No, I don't want that role. I want to reject that. I don't want to have to be that caretaker to you" in some ways.

Jen: Right, absolutely.

Vienna: And so connecting to your own personal story, less about just women and women or the feminine or the masculine, it's those things of course because I think so many women share in a lot of familiar and similar stories and messages for sure, and we are all unique human beings with unique stories with unique constraints, with unique resistances and all of that, and so important for us to connect to why it is I, personally, may be rejecting this or pushing this back.

Why does this feel threatening to me and asking ourselves this question, "Why does this feel threatening to me? What role does it put me in? Is that a role that I don't like that I don't want to be in anymore or is uncomfortable for me for some reason or familiar or unfamiliar or do I think I'm going to fail or do I just hate this role?" And being able to connect to that to understand what it is that's going on in our programming and in our internal systems so that we can challenge that and actually create that space and an environment for both of us to be able to bring these parts forward.

Annie: You offered us a lot of gold. There's a lot of meat in the last 50 minutes of this episode and such a refreshing perspective on conflict and masculine, just a general idea of masculine energy doesn't necessarily belong to a male or a female and feminine and the like, I just think it's a really refreshing perspective so thank you so much and before you hop off here, you have some projects, some workshops coming down the pipe that I would love for you to share with our audience if you don't mind.

Vienna: Yeah, absolutely, we just had an awesome event last night here in New York City but our next big one that we're so excited about is our Couples Retreat which we are doing in the Dominican Republic, we are taking seven couples with us, it's the most beautiful property that's private and we're so excited about it but it's truly a deep dive into this work and we are still taking applications, we still have a few spots left for couples so we would love to invite your listeners to that space.

We'll be talking about communication, conflict and intimacy, those are the three main pieces that we're going to be diving into. It's a luxury retreat, it's a bit of a vacation also, but it's going to be the work, it's going to be the work, and it's going to be bringing the couples together and really doing the transformative work and I just remind people I forget this sometimes but I generally work with individuals, couples and families here, I forget the power of group dynamics and how much we learn from other couples so when I have the privilege of getting to do this I am

so reminded of what it is that we learn from other people and the vulnerability, of course, to bring your relationship forward in a small group setting.

But the value and the transformation that happens there is like none other. So, we're so excited about it, it's [thebestcouplesretreat.com](http://thebestcouplesretreat.com), our domain does not lie, we were like, "How did we get this domain name, that's awesome." But yeah, so if anybody's interested in it, please reach out to us, we're still taking applications and we would love to chat with you about it.

Jen: I think it also can be really helpful to do intensives like that. When you start couples therapy it's like an hour and then you go two weeks later and it's another hour, and even if you plan on continuing couples therapy, which I think is a great idea for every couple, but it's I think having an intensive like that can be so beneficial. You can just start going through these things without having to say, "Okay, times up we'll pick up again in two weeks" kind of thing.

Annie: That sounds like such a small group, that would be so nice and intimate, I would imagine. To get some really quality one on one time with you and together and with others.

Jen: And Connor's going as well, right?

Vienna: Yeah, it's Connor and I who are leading it.

Jen: Who are hosting. Yep.

Vienna: It's a beautiful balance and we're really being selective with who it is that we're choosing to come to to make sure that the group dynamic is a healthy,

good dynamic. So, yeah, I mean we're very excited about it. We also do intensives here in New York City so if people can't make it out to the Dominican Republic then, weekend availability for that is something that Connor and I do too.

Jen: And Connor is amazing at talking to men. He really understands the masculine and he's amazing at talking to and connecting to men and taking them on that journey. Any time I can I'm recommending women, they're asking us, is there anything that exists for men like your community and I'm telling them, "You need to get your man in the Man Talks community."

Vienna: Yeah, he is. He's honestly, I am certainly biased, but I have never seen someone work with men in the way that Connor does, it's something I truly admire about him.

Jen: Yeah, he's fantastic. You're both fantastic. And we're so lucky to have you both as guests.

Annie: I know, I feel like we've just struck gold here.

Jen: I know.

Vienna: We'll have to do a podcast with both of us on it.

Jen: That would be awesome.

Annie: That would be so fun.

Jen: Yes.

Annie: Yeah. Well, thank you so much again for your time, I appreciate it. Have fun on your retreat.

Jen: Thanks, Vienna.

Vienna: Thanks so much, guys.

Annie: Thank you. Bye bye.

Vienna: Bye.