

Enough Episode 95: Fawning Saved You. Now It's Costing You - with Dr. Ingrid Clayton

Mandy: You're at the hairdresser and it's a new colorist, which is already risky. The foils come off. The round brush is whirling, and then the reveal, which is utterly ghastly, your heart free falls. The hot tears are rising. The colorist is radiant. She's fluffing you up. She's angling the mirror. It's so nice she chirps and you, well, words abandon you.

Your mouth betrays you, and on autopilot you smile, you nod. You even say thank you and tip her generously before hot footing it to your car to scream into the void That dear listener was me as the younger woman feeling the utter displeasure of my now orange hair and being entirely unable to get the words out of my mouth.

I don't like it. Please fix it. I thought I was being nice. You don't make other people uncomfortable. You don't put them on the spot. But this wasn't politeness, it was fawning, and I didn't even know it was a thing. You've heard of fight, flight, and freeze? Well, fawning is a fourth response to a threat in which we merge or mirror with another person's desires, demands, expectations to avoid conflict or those awkward moments, and that's how we try to find safety in a work context.

Maybe a senior person who's known for being sharp and a bit prickly, talks over you in a meeting you might smile and remark. What a good point they made. Or in a personal situation, maybe you go along with a partner's preferences for holiday destinations, dinner plans, even intimate positions. You would prefer myorca, Mexican, and missionary, but you're good with whatever.

If this resonates, maybe you felt like a pushover. A doormat, like you need to grow a backbone. Is fawning a personal failing? Is it a weakness of character? Can't you just cut it out like you'd switch off a switch? Nope. Often it's not even conscious. So today's guest, Dr. Ingrid Clayton, is a clinical psychologist who's written a groundbreaking new book on fawning, and we're gonna bust some myths together, which will hopefully get you to see yourself in a new light.

If you identify as someone who fawns. No new backbone required. You'll learn where fawning comes from, how it shows up day to day, what it's costing you because it is, and how to start unlearning it. Before we dive in, welcome to Enough the podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Mandy Leto. This is a show for high achievers whose lives look shiny and successful on the outside, but inside you're conflicted.

You never. Feel quite good enough in spite of your impressive wins, and you're trying desperately to find peace through relentless self-development and your next achievement. I'm here to help you find a more fulfilling and easeful way of being. So let's get into it with Ingrid who shares how fawning recently showed up in her life, in this case, at her son's baseball game.

Ingrid: I have a 9-year-old and we're on the team, and it's a community of folks I don't really know. And who was I sitting closest to? But the dad who was the tyrant, right? And they eventually left the team. It just, it was not a good fit, but I. Sort of knew that I was doing it, but it also, you know, as fawning is it wasn't this conscious decision that I was like, I'm gonna befriend the asshole.

But I literally was doing that and I kind of noticed myself sidling up to the wife and cozing up to her and noticing she's also a fauna and she's managing his mood. And I sort of just jumped right in line to help out. And the sad thing I think was when I did notice it was. How many opportunities did I miss to connect with

these other parents that could have had reciprocal, genuine relationships while my eyes were focused on the guy who could go off at any moment?

And yet, that's what the Fawn response does. I did think about a client of mine. She's. Kind of a comedian, and she's hilarious anyway, but she told me these times where she didn't really wanna drink, but she couldn't say no. Right? So she has to be like, no, no, no, you wanna party? Of course I wanna party.

Let's go. You know, raise our glasses. And then she'd excuse herself to the bathroom and pour it out. Right? And then pretending that she's either drunk or pretending that she's doing the drugs that everyone is doing because she wants to fit in, you know, we, we, we do some hilarious. Things.

Mandy: Yeah. And there's a difference, which is why I wanna jump right in there.

There's a difference between fawning and being nice or helpful. What is that difference?

Ingrid: I think personal agency, you know, it's, it's a choice. Being nice isn't at my own expense. Right? Being, being helpful isn't at my own expense. It's not helpful if I don't even exist in the equation. So it's that. I have to be helpful.

I have to be nice, quote unquote or caretaking in order to safely exist in this relationship in order for my needs to be met in order to mitigate relational harm. So it might look nice, it might look helpful, but the origins are about relational safety. That's the point.

Mandy: So let's go deeper into where it comes from, because I know with a lot of the very senior, super successful people who I'm coaching, they're struggling with this.

I must be nice. I must hold back what it is that I'm saying. And a lot of the spaghetti trail in our conversations often goes back to conversations they've had potentially with a therapist or not. Yeah. So where does fawning come from?

Ingrid: Well, I imagine for some of your clients, right, that fawning and professionalism there, it can sort of be this fine line.

Well, where are you just being appropriate in a work environment in particular? And where does it feel like you literally don't have a choice? You can't use your voice, you can't really have an opinion. Uh, you have to be conflict avoidant because conflict is terrifying and it feels like you're gonna be steamrolled.

And so. Fawning is a very common trauma response to childhood trauma, and we know that that's true because there's this built-in hierarchy, right? Human beings are more reliant on their caregivers than any other species for a longer period of time. So when you think about the other trauma responses, fight, flight, and freeze the kid.

Largely can't fight back. They're not gonna win. It's gonna make it worse. That was certainly my experience, you know, flight, where are they gonna run? They're gonna be brought right back. Right? So ultimately fawning, I think is this genius adaptation where you're still acting on your own behalf by managing the states and the moods of the other people and being generous and gracious or whatever the behavior.

Calls for in that moment, right? There's this appeasing that you're doing. It's still very active in that way, but it's not going to put you in greater harm. So often it shows up where there are structures of power, and this goes beyond childhood to thinking about, you know, racism and patriarchy. And you can think of a million different environments, you know, corporations and religions and politics, that there's a pecking order and the body. Knows where it exists in that pecking order, and it will reflexively, intuitively respond in a way that doesn't invite greater harm. It will always privilege, safety and survival. That's what the body is to do. It doesn't care about our opinions. It doesn't care really about our career goals. It's like, nope.

I'm not gonna be safe here. And so to go back to this idea where the origins are often in childhood, if you think about the day in, day out experience of having to fall in order to stay safe, these patterns are coming online as your body and brain are developing. So what we're basically talking about relational trauma is complex trauma.

Fawning is a complex trauma response, and as these things become so repetitive, you can see how. Ongoing traumatic experiences invite ongoing trauma responses where we don't know that we're doing it. It feels like it's our personality. Most of my clients come to me like, Ingrid, I just thought I was being nice.

Or they think I don't have trauma in my background. Because complex trauma looks and presents so differently than the trauma that most of us understand of a car crash or a sexual assault, or a single acute event. So as these things became so necessary to navigate your daily lives, they, they become your only blueprint, right?

So now we're walking out into the world and we're fawning even when no danger is present. And this is what we know about trauma, that the body sort of says, I'm not gonna put myself in that position again. Right. It's perpetually guarding against even potential harm. And this is where it gets really, really tricky.

And I say where it moves from what is wholly genius and adaptive to what ultimately becomes maladaptive because it's happening, like I said all the time without our conscious consent. Here's where we're losing out on the opportunity, like the example I gave at my son's baseball game for healthy reciprocal relationships with other people because my fond response sees a threat, and that's all that I can focus on.

Mandy: So I'm curious for somebody who's. Listening and they're not quite sure whether or not they have symptoms of fawning. What are the tells that somebody is using this adaptive coping mechanism?

Ingrid: I think fear of conflict. Conflict avoidance generally is one of the biggest signs. Right? Again, because if your fight response either was not available.

Or it made things worse. It's like our fight response, which is healthy aggression, the ability to stand up for yourself, to tolerate conflict. It's essentially snuffed out. So you can see, particularly in a workplace, right, of sort of being able to have a difference of opinion, even it can feel like a life or death experience in your body, and this is why people go well.

Of course I wanna set healthier boundaries, and of course I wanna have self-esteem. It makes so much sense. It sounds so obvious, but these things do not feel available to that person because they are essentially triggered and their body says, those are not available to me. It's going to make things worse.

So conflict avoidance is a biggie. We tend to. Be the people that are riding in the sidecar, right? We're sort of like, not the alpha person, but the person who's gonna support that person and run circles around them and, uh, devote a lot of time and attention to raising other people up. We're really good at that.

Uh, we tend to be hypervigilant. There's this sense of, I can sort of peg how everyone's feeling in the room just by looking in their direction. We can sense moods. A lot of times Faers, they identify with that term of being an empath or being very emotionally sensitive, and the truth is that they are. But I think the origins of those things often lie in childhood trauma where you had to be on guard, where you had to know how people were feeling so that you could sort of step in and lighten the mood.

We often are very. Funny. I have a lot of performers in my practice, right? There is this performative aspect to, hi, how are you? Right? This higher pitched tone. Often we get really small in relationships. Other people's needs matter and. Like I said, we're sort of the support characters in the story oftentimes, and yet we're resentful about that.

We're kind of waiting for our turn. We're sort of like, well, when are people gonna show up for me? And why am I the one who's always volunteering? Right? So it's not that we're. Not mad about these patterns and roles that we have in our lives, it's that we can't attend to them directly. We might think that we're patient and we might think that we're caring, but really we're kind of putting ourselves perpetually in the situations where our needs aren't ever gonna be met.

Mandy: So this. Conflict avoidance, for example, coming up with that specific example, that's a classic case. That conflict doesn't need to look like aggression. It can look like, I hate my hair color, but I'm gonna tip you and I'm gonna sit in my car and I'm gonna cry my eyes out because I don't want to say, this is awful.

Can you please do it again? That moment of short term discomfort is worth. Shoving down what your current experience is to avoid that discomfort, and I'm gonna go to the supermarket instead and buy three bottles of sun in and spray my hair to a crisp to get that terracotta tone out of it and go to great lengths to avoid saying the thing because it feels so dangerous in that moment.

Ingrid: So unavailable while you're also speaking to, we don't want to be a burden. We don't wanna hurt anyone's feelings. We don't want you to be mad at us. We don't wanna be a burden. Again, because think you gotta think about it in terms of relational hierarchies, right? If I'm a burden, if you're mad at me, well then there's potential for greater harm.

And so even though we can think such an example of like tipping a hairdresser who did a horrible job, it's kind of a silly example actually. It's a perfect example, right? Because it really points to why. Speaking up feels so impossible because speaking up was impossible at one point in your life, probably for long term, pervasive experiences of not being able to speak up or at making things worse, and so the body adapts, it adapts in this way, and ultimately it points to another sign and symptom, which is hyper independent.

I am gonna go and I'm gonna buy the three boxes of color. I'm just gonna do it myself because I cannot wholly rely on anybody else. Right. It's this idea that you could actually be seen and valued and taken care of and respected. We don't really have a blueprint of that in our nervous system, so we just pivot and go, no, it's all good.

I got it. I got it. Hmm.

Mandy: Interesting. And as you were talking this idea of like really reading the room and the hyper vigilance, which can be a great life skill. But on the other hand, there's so many people who I've spoken to that say they're in a romantic relationship. And if the other person pulls away slightly or they're distracted or quiet or in their own thoughts, the first thought that might come up is, what have I done wrong?

Yeah. Have I done something? Yeah. Yeah, I'm just trying to get a, a bit of texture, what this actually looks like in real life.

Ingrid: Yeah, yeah. Well I think, you know, to your point, there's a lot of gray area in between, like, uh, overtly aggressive and you know, I have a difference of opinion or I would prefer Mexican food to Italian food.

Right? There's a lot of gray area in between there, so depending on the. The depth and breadth of one's particular fond response, everything across that spectrum can feel wholly unavailable. And for so other people, they can go, well, no, I can voice my opinion over here, but as I move a little bit closer to where it feels even just a little bit threatening, it's intolerable.

It's intolerable. And we go into how do I fix it, make it better, make sure the other person is okay.

Mandy: So there's payoffs to using fawning, whether we're aware of it or not. There's definitely payoffs. Let's talk through what some of those are, because we don't do anything unless there's a payoff. So by putting ourselves in proximity to power, if we feel like we don't have access to power ourselves, if we sle up to power.

Yeah. And we make ourselves cute. Agreeable, funny, irresistible. We kind of velcro ourselves onto power, hoping that we'll avoid punishment criticism. Maybe we'll get a few pats on the head. What other payoffs do you see of why someone might fa.

Ingrid: I mean, I think you just spelled it out so perfectly. It's we, we've long talked about these behaviors, but we've talked about them in a more stigmatizing way, and I think for me anyway, and a lot of my clients, the language of codependency or even people pleasing, seem to kind of blame the person for like, well, why would you do that?

They seem like conscious choices, but when I look at it through this. Trauma informed lens of what's happening in my nervous system and what's happening in the context that necessitates fawning. Uh, it allowed me to make sense to myself and the way that you just described it, of sort of my intentions were never to please right or to care take, they were to find power and powerless situations.

Mandy: And when you are disempowered and it's very clear that this person or this group of people has the power to affiliate with them makes a lot of sense. Right. Uh, in terms of reducing your own potential for harm, it's so easy for somebody who doesn't identify as a fauna. Mm-hmm. It's not part of their experience to, yeah.

Be quite harsh and say, well just stop doing that. And I think the way you look at it in your work, which is so unique and refreshing and needed, it helps to remove that. Easy fixedness about it, that it's just like, oh, it's some kind of a character flaw, or you just need to toughen up or get more confident that it's not that straightforward.

I like that you take us into the gray. I think we need to be here so that somebody who doesn't identify as a fauna, when they just like, just get over it. Stop doing it. Stop, you know, a, a flavor of that could be people pleasing or just like speak your mind. It's not that straightforward is what I'm hearing you say.

Ingrid: Yes. And, and actually I think there are some other examples that do a better job of showing how not so straightforward it is. Things like code switching, you know, where we talk about a person of color is in a largely a. White space and suddenly they start speaking like a white person, right? They might even dress that way.

They change their mannerisms because their body knows it will be safer if they can connect in a way that the dominant community expects them to, they feel like they're less of a threat if they start to blend in. So we're less likely to turn to the person of color and be like, why would you do that?

Like, just raise your self-esteem. Like just be who you are. It makes sense. Similarly with the term like masking for the neurodivergent community, right? We absolutely live in a world that is not built for neuro diver. It's completely built for neurotypical brains. And so neurodivergent people have had to figure out, well, how am I going to navigate this and fit in?

And it makes perfect sense that they would, but for some reason when, you know, the origins of the fond response have been deeply pathologized. Right. When, when it's for similar reasons. I guess here's the other thing I would say is that those ideas. The, the people that push back on fawning as though stop being so ridiculous, grow up, stop manipulating.

All of those ideas are based on. A peer-to-peer relationship where every relationship is reciprocal, where everyone has the same access and agency and power, and we just know that that's bullshit.

Mandy: Yeah. Where does that happen?

Ingrid: Where does that exist exactly. So all that says to me when someone is sort of criticizing the fauna is that to your point, they have no personal experience.

And, and to that, I say, well, good for you. I'm so glad that you've been that privileged and, and, and held that much power that you would never in a million years even. Imagine what this could feel like in your body to feel like, and this is where I get emotional about it. In order to keep yourself safe, you have to self abandon to a degree in order to do it.

I'm so glad that person has never had that experience. But I know it so intimately, my clients know it so intimately, and quite frankly, with this level of like, it can't really be happening, right? Like it's so painful that we dissociate at the same time. And I'm grateful that, that those people have no experience of it.

But for those of us that have, which is quite frankly, a lot of us, most of us aren't living at the top of the food chain. We're somewhere underneath it. And most, I think every maybe woman that I've ever talked to is like, I know what you're talking about with fawning. Right? They know what it's like to be told day in and day out that your attractiveness or your. Uh, ability to be sexy, but not too sexy, right? Like present just perfectly in between these, you know, two poles that we've deemed as like, you know, where you belong. We all know what that feels like to be told you don't have any power, but here's where a little bit of power resides for you. Here's where a little bit of currency resides for you and for the body to kind of reflexively go towards where it's gonna feel a little bit safer.

Mandy: Mm-hmm. So I think there's, there's some challenges. Like one of the problems is we don't know ourselves. What else are you seeing as some of the challenges, either for yourself or for your clients that come up with people who are using fawning?

Ingrid: Well, when you think about the nature of this trauma response, it means all my safety and security resides outside my own body.

In your hands in an ideology's hands, in a culture's hands, right? So yes, we're shape shifting for either an individual or these groups for our safety. But because safety and security resides outside of the self, we're not building a sense of self. At all. We're not building a sense of internal safety and security where I know who I am and I know what my opinions are, and I can assert myself and have a voice and lean into maybe something quirky and offbeat or whatever it is, unless it's sort of sanctioned by the external environment.

And so a big part then of coming to Anfa. Is redirecting all of our attention, right? That hypervigilant, that sort of, what do you need? Who's the bully? How do I befriend them? We take all of that focus, that external focus, and we have to maybe for the first time in our lives, start to bring it back to self and bring it internal.

So, in other words, I say un fawning isn't about moving directly into conflict or relationship or setting boundaries because that's terrifying. Un fawning starts with growing our internal capacity, which is starting to build this sense of if it did feel safe. For me to feel how I feel about X, Y, and Z, how would I feel about it?

Right? I have this client that I share in the book, and she's a solo climber. She's like a force, and one day we're in session and she goes, I think I know why I wanted to be a solo climber. Right? Not with groups, not with someone else holding the rope, but for her to do it all by herself. She said, it's the only time in my life I didn't have to fawn.

She could do it on the side of a mountain all by herself. And knowing that I say, well, where can we start to take some space? This often becomes a vital thing for my clients is to disengage from the systems that automatically elicit that need to fawn and go, well, when was the last time you spent some time alone?

Or if you were going to do something by yourself, what. Might it be? And could you start to be curious, even curious about what am I experiencing internally? Am I aware of what I'm feeling right now? And this is the thing that starts to build our ability. It's the foundation that we can start to lean on as we take ourselves back into the world, into these relationships to start to try and do things a little bit differently because now I have more sense of a self.

The cost is self abandonment. But what I say is it's not because I didn't love myself or have self-esteem, it's because I did. It's because if I didn't fawn, my whole self was going to be so completely steamrolled in my family that there would be nothing of me at all. And so this was the way for me to hold on to at least a shred of self in the fond response.

And yet. Over time, it leads to my chronically abandoning myself when I don't want to, when I don't have to.

Mandy: For me, it also meant I lost the wifi signal to my body. Yes. And therefore ended up in a cataclysmic burnout, fibromyalgia, weird digestive stuff, chronic peri oral dermatitis. Like just the body has tried to send up a series of red flares, like enough.

Slow down. Stop. Down tools go on an interior journey, and I think that's also, as you said, it's building that connection back to oneself and learning like what do I desire? What do I hunger for? What do I long for? What do I want to do? Not only with. My life, but what do I wanna eat for dinner? Where would I like to go on holiday?

What kind of clothes would I like to wear if I wasn't trying to conform and fit in? And I think there's the realization there has to be this aha moment, first of all to realize that this has even been happening. That can be like a real scales fall from your eyes and you think, oh my goodness, I have actually been doing that.

Was there a moment like that for you where you just realized what had been happening and you know, when you just said enough?

Ingrid: I think there are lots of them. I wanna hold that question 'cause I wanna say one other thing that feels important to this piece that you're talking about, where we have to grow these parts of ourselves that never got to come online, right?

So what do I want and who would I be if I could be myself? But also what we start to attend to when we, when we go, uh, internal, is where are the parts of me that are still deeply afraid? Right? And this is where I think parts work can be so effective when we're talking about coming out of a chronic fond response because it's the terrified ones who've been in the driver's seat.

Like, don't worry, I'm not gonna let us be, you know, in that experience again. So not only are we growing these parts that have never had a voice, we have to turn to the ones that have been the only ones with a voice. The ones who are terrified and we have to be in relationship to these parts ourselves.

Right? So here I sit with you today. I'm almost 51 years old, but I have parts that are still five and 10 and 15, and they are terrified. So I now have the privilege and the opportunity when I feel triggered and I feel overwhelmed and I can't say that and I can't do that. And I can't put myself in harm's way.

I can go, oh gosh, it makes so much sense. That you would feel that way, and I'm here now. I'm here now, the adult me is here and online, and I can ask these young parts to look around my life and look at the fact that I'm a mom and that I'm a clinical psychologist. It's like they don't even know, right? So I think that there's, yes, we can look at the parts that we need to grow, but there are also the parts that we need to quell their fear and their terror 'cause nobody ever did.

Mandy: I'm curious where that moment came where. You said enough. And you decide, you were aware that kind of what I referred to as the scales falling from one's eyes, and maybe it's not one moment, maybe it's a series of this. No, this knowing is creeping up on me and I can't unknow it anymore. But feel free to give us a bit of preamble if necessary.

Otherwise just take us to that, that pivot moment.

Ingrid: Well, here's some real truth for me, and I think I, I hope that the reality of this gives other people permission for wherever they are in their process is that even though I was a clinical psychologist who had written a book and had a thriving private practice and was a trauma therapist, none of this really started for me my own real trauma healing journey.

Did not start for me until my stepfather died. He is the one who was the originator of my chronic fond response, and even though I lived hundreds of miles away and it was very limited contact while he was on this earth, my body did not feel safe, and I didn't really know it to this extent until I. Knew the contrast when he was gone and when he died.

I laid down on the floor about two feet from where I'm sitting right now, and I felt the earth beneath me and I put my hand on my heart because I knew I'd never felt this safe my entire life. And we say the body keeps the score. And that's exactly what that means. It did not matter how long and how hard I had tried.

I had decades of sobriety. I'd been to all the programs, I'd been to the retreats. I'd sat on a million therapist couches. I knew my story. I could tell you my story inside and out. But the truth is my body was still holding all this hurt, and it was not safe until he was gone. And in that contrast, I was flooded.

I was flooded with truth and with a depth of feeling that was not available to me prior to that moment, and I could finally start to see all of this connective tissue. And then the excavation began. And for me it happened through riding. For five years, I was riding what now became my memoir. Because I knew if I had complex trauma, what ultimately was complex PTSD as a trauma therapist, and I didn't know it and I couldn't see it. I thought, how many people are living with these same types of symptoms, but also go, well, that word doesn't apply to me. Trauma doesn't apply to me. Right. And in that excavation. I came upon Pete Walker's work. He's the psychotherapist who coined the term the Fawn response, and the more that I understood and reflected on it for myself and brought this lens and language to my clients and started to excavate their story, it was just like I could breathe.

Because I finally made sense to myself, not in a way that was shaming, but in a way that I could see how incredible that I have a body that did whatever it had to do to survive those circumstances, to keep me safe, and I don't have to continue to live that way anymore. So in other words, the point.

Partially of this story. The reality of it is that I don't know if I would be here today if my stepdad was still on this earth, right? So. The body keeps the score, but it also determines our level of safety in terms of being able to do more healing and get more access to a, a healthy fight response. This is not a conscious choice undertaking.

This is not a do these 10 steps and you'll be free. This is a, my body was holding deep, deep. Wounds for decades, and there was a lot of healing that had to be done in order for me to finally have this sense of autonomy and the ability to reflect on, well, who, who am I and, and what do I wanna be in this world?

It's a nervous system. Body-based experience.

Mandy: So I'm curious about menopause. Oh boy. I am curious about menopause and I'll tell you why. Um, I'm wondering if menopause might be the body's way of saying I'm done with fawning. Yeah. And if there's something about this life stage, whether it's emotionally, physically. Spiritually where it makes it harder for us to not be aligned and true to ourselves.

Yeah. I'm curious about that. What are your thoughts?

Ingrid: I mean, there's a direct correlation for sure as we lose estrogen, which is this sort of bonding connective tissue. The part that makes me wanna sort of care, take and makes us great, you know, caretakers of the whole family. And that's our focus, that's our purpose, right?

Is that. Hormone literally drops in our body. So does this need to only be that? And it's almost like you drop into the self of like, oh, I actually exist in equal yes to, to all of these other people here. And so. I, I 100% see a correlation between perimenopause, menopause. Also, the other piece is that as the estrogen drops, so does our capacity.

You know, a lot of us talk about it, in my experience of it was this rage that sort of came out of nowhere. So for someone who didn't have much of a fight response, I'm suddenly like. You know, get out of my way. It's like I literally had to be quarantined in order to feel safe in, in my home with my son and my husband.

I'm like, I don't know what's going on, but y'all better go out and do something. Leave me here. Leave me be, but the, the combination of all of those things, right? It's sort of like we start to feel that literal heat, like think about hot flashes, right? Yeah. That's, we're restoring our capacity to hold and work with heat, which is.

Anger or healthy aggression. It's all, it's all, it's all a part of it. So I think as women, like I said, everyone I've ever talked to, I think I've yet to find a woman who says she doesn't identify with the fond response. Um, a part of it is because we work conditioned, right? Women are supposed to be sweet and caretaking and docile and all of the rest of it, and part of it is hormonal.

And so as that changes, so does our relationship to fawning.

Mandy: I like this idea of playing with the heat. Yeah. And there's, there's a lot there to be explored in terms of anger as I've been going through un fawning. Mm-hmm. My relationship with my pent up anger has been very interesting. That'll be tell conversation for another day.

'cause we could do a whole episode on that. But you know what else is really interesting that I haven't talked about When you were talking about that heat. The heat that can come up, you know what else is present? I've been talking about some of this with my girlfriends, I've been talking about this, uh, with some of my clients, is the relationship with pent up sexuality and desire.

Mm-hmm. That kind of heat too, because fawning. Also can look a certain way when it comes to sex and performative and, and like the, the shift of what do they want from me versus what do I want for myself. And many people are in their fifties now exploring this together with the, like, the giving way less fox about what's happening because of the, the hormonal shifts.

So it's almost like this deliciousness cluster suck of. Whatever the opposite of a cluster suck is. You know, like a, I don't know, I can't think on the spot in this moment, but like a, a bundle of delights in some way that is freed up by all of a sudden thinking, what happens if I get to explore my desire and my hunger?

And I think this is one of the reasons that Regina Thomas Hauer, who's written the book *Pussy*, which is, you know, mama Gina, and she's like. A huge phenomena of women in their fifties, sixties who are exploring the deliciousness of what lights me up, who have maybe never had the opportunity to do that, and experimenting with what it feels like to be intimate with oneself.

However, one chooses to interpret that, whether it's. Sensually sexually. Some hybrid of, of both. But there's also that flavor of heat to be explored in the un fawning.

Ingrid: I love this topic so much and I think there's so many writers who are exploring this and there's a reason that those books are flying off the shelf.

And I think another aspect of it, right? You sort of look at. So a lot of my clients, younger clients, I had this experience when I was a younger person. If my sort of currency resided in my ability to be sexual or to be sexy, I did lean into that performative role, right? Who do you need me to be? And of course it translated to the bedroom.

And as we go through menopause and sudden our bodies are changing shape a little bit, it's, you know, you sense or a lot object of or a lot. Yeah. Or a lot. Let's be honest. You sense that you're not that same object of desire as you walk out into the world and the freedom actually that comes. That of going, I don't have to dress for the male gaze.

I don't have to make sure that every outfit is slimming and sexy and whatever the case may be. There's this freedom that comes with that to be in our own body in this really juicy way that is not for the sake of other, and in that permission, I think. That it opens up all of those possibilities that you're speaking to.

It's sort of like, how do I feel? To me, like I've talked to so many clients about this, they've, they've thought about their sex lives in the past and, and. Not just how performative it is, but how even in their mind, they're only thinking about what is the other person experiencing to the point where they've gone the next day after they've been intimate with someone and they've put their hands where the other person's hands were to feel what the other person was feeling to go.

Was that a pleasurable feeling for them? Oh, they felt this. Maybe next time I should move their hand over here because this is a more pleasing part of my body, right? These are the, this is the extent of what we go through in order to make sure the other person is happy, having a good time and pleased, and to feel like you have this new permission to be like.

I don't give a fuck what your hand is feeling. I wanna know what my hand is feeling. I wanna know what my body is feeling and the ownership of that. I mean, even as I say it right now, there's sort of this heat, this power. That feels incredible just talking about it. Yes. Just thinking about it, envisioning it and this is what we get access to.

And for those that are younger that are listening, you don't have to wait. Please don't me, Todds to start to have this. Which is why I think the fawning and the un fawning conversation is so important because these are the fruits.

Mandy: Yeah.

Ingrid: These are, these are roots of that process.

Mandy: Yeah. The tension we've been talking about in this episode, like fawning offers safety, but it erases, selfhood and un fawning might feel like there's.

A sense that safety is going away. But what I'm hearing you say is doing that foundational work of getting curious what those younger parts, so those parts who have been at the wheel for a long time and understanding that those parts might be very young, those protector parts, getting curious what is here,

being in relationship making those parts feel, felt. Doing that with support, perhaps just understanding what's available to you, understanding that it's not your fault, but it's now your responsibility to do something about it. And actually bring some light to the, to this conversation too, that it's hard deep work and it's non-linear and sometimes it's messy.

A lot of the time it's messy, but there is something exciting, joyful, freeing on the other side of it too. That's what I'm hearing you say. I'm feeling that I a

Ingrid: hundred percent yes, absolutely. I've seen it time and time again, and what we start to discern is the difference between discomfort and real danger.

And let's be real. There are folks that are still in danger. There are folks that pushing back will still invite greater harm, and so I always want to make space for that. I'm not asking people to go out, I am here, hear me roar, right? It's, it just literally might not be safe, but as you build this capacity, you can start to discern, is this a place I can take more of a risk?

And, and do it in say in like very clearly safe places. Initially it might be like, Ugh, is it safe for me to go back to the hairdresser? Right? A lot of times I say, we do this work. At first, in hindsight, not in the moment, it's after you go home and you cry your eyes out and you go, oh my God, I can't believe I gave her 50 bucks and said, thank you.

And then you sit with it and you go, ah. Can I go back? Can I try this again? Can I talk to a safe friend and ask for their support or work with someone to help me go? And then you start to practice these things where you go, you know what? Ugh. I know I said that I liked it, but the truth is I really didn't.

I'm hoping there's a way that we can make this right, you know? Um, then the body starts to gain experience. This blueprint, like I said, we didn't have before. Suddenly you go, I have an example in my own life, in my own body of what healthy conflict and sort of maybe being a burden, but maybe I'm allowed to take up space, what that actually feels like and that it was safe and that there was a more positive outcome.

You start to build these bits. Of new experience, which continues to expand that foundation. Right? And that's why it's a process to your point, sometimes two steps forward, three steps back, whatever. It's all good, right? Like it's, it's all about this enlarging our capacity over time. And you can't probably see me if you're not doing it on camera, but it's this sort of in breath out breath, wave rolls in, wave rolls out, kind of an experience more than this linear.

Mandy: Better and better day by day. What is something you've recently said enough to and been better for it?

Ingrid: Well, this is the one that came to mind, so I'm gonna say it. I mean, in general, it's privileging other people's opinions over my own that I have a wisdom in my body, and even if no one else is co-signing it, the more that I listen and I attend to it and I put it in the world.

The more I continue to grow and I validate myself. Right? Again, it's that shift of going, you validate me, you give me permission. No, I validate me. I give me permission, and I had to do that with this book, right? I had to do that in terms of holding onto the depth of my client's experiences. There were pieces of this book and the way that I wanted to write it, that the publisher was a little bit like, well, you know.

Can't we do it this way? And I knew in my body that that way was going to continue to shame people for having a fond response. And it was going to perform helpfulness rather than be genuinely helpful. And so I had to say enough with this performing helpfulness and telling people how simple it is and how easy it is, and I have all the answers because it's bs.

I have some answers, I have some experience as do my clients, and. I'm not going to keep pretending that I'm the expert and you are the lowly client. We're in this together. Right? And, and I got to that by, by listening to the wisdom in my own body. So it was a long answer, but I feel like that's what emerged as you asked that important question.

Mandy: Maybe you've always seen fawning as a character flaw or a weakness. I hope this conversation has changed your mind and helped you to see that it could have been a genius way to protect yourself. Maybe it even saved your life, but the process of unfawning now as a grown adult with agency and resources, that is what gives you your life back.

I love what Ingrid said about not having to unfawn every single time in the moment. Even if you've smiled, nodded and said, thank you, also known as, oops, I did it again. You can go back and reopen a loop and say the thing that you swallowed at the time. That's how safety starts to move from out there to being in an inside game.

All of Ingrid's details are in the show notes and do check out her brilliant book entitled, fawning. If today's conversation sparked something within you, please don't keep it to yourself. Share the episode because safety spreads when we stop whispering and start naming what's really going on. And remember when safety lives inside of you, so does enoughness and that changes everything.

See you next time.