

14. Criticism



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With Your Host

Maisie Hill

Period Power with Maisie Hill

14. Criticism

If you are in the horrors with menstrual cycle issues or you want to learn how to harness your hormones then you are in the right place.

Welcome to the *Period Power Podcast*. I'm your host Maisie Hill menstrual health expert, acupuncturist, certified life coach and author of *Period Power*. I'm on a mission to help you get your cycle working for you so that you can use it to get what you want out of life. Are you ready? Let's go.

Hello, hello folks. Today is day 20 of my cycle. And this morning I went for a long walk with my partner to a nearby village that has the most amazing bakery, so a shout out to Staple Stores over in St Peters. I don't know about you but day 20 isn't when I'm the most talkative. It's not the best day of my cycle to go on a date. It's very different to say day 12 when I've got all the bants and I can do small talk. I can be witty in conversation all these things kind of come very naturally to me around that time in my cycle.

But at this point in my cycle I can be very in my head, which isn't a problem, I prefer not to talk at all which I don't think is a problem. Sometimes it can make life a bit tricky but it's not a problem. And I prefer focusing on projects and spending time on my own. So I was feeling a bit apprehensive about our date. And I was talking to my friend Nat the other day and I was saying how Paul and I were going to go for a walk. And she was like, "That's really great that you're going to do that." And then I said, "Yeah, but it'll be on day 20." And she just went, "Oh no."

Because day 20 is similar for her and she also knows how much I struggle with small talk at the best of times. But it's rare for my partner and I to both be able to take some time off at a mutually convenient time so I wanted to be able to honour that. And it was a really lovely day. And I love walking at this point in my cycle. So I coached myself a bit, psyched myself up and it was great. We had a really great conversation, a lovely walk in the sunshine. We got to have some lovely food.

I was definitely a bit rusty with my conversation skills to begin with but once we warmed up we got there. And we got to have a laugh about my early

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attempts at making conversation at the beginning of the walk. And then I've gone on to do some podcasts today and I had a couple of client sessions. So it's been a great day.

And this week I have also been busy getting some things lined up for The Flow Collective. And I have some important dates for you. So March 29th to 31st, The Flow Collective is going to be open for enrolment. And after that there won't be a chance to join until the summer. So stick those dates in your diary and make sure you're on my email list. That way you'll get the heads up when the doors open and you won't be reliant on whether Instagram chooses to show my posts or not.

And today's podcast episode is actually an intro to what we are spending all of April on inside The Flow Collective, and that's criticism. This is a topic that's very dear to me because it's something I've done a lot of personal work on in various ways. And it's what I spend a lot of my time coaching my clients on either actual criticism or sometimes it can just be helpful, quite factual feedback, but our bodies and brains respond like we're being attacked. But it can also be fear of criticism and that can really hold us back from going for the things we want in life.

And then of course there's also all the ways that you criticise yourself. So this is a big juicy topic. It's going to be a great month. So for today just take a moment to think about the last time you experienced criticism. So how did you respond? Can you remember where your brain went? Often one thought can very quickly descend into a huge shame spiral. But also think about what it felt like physically. Did you go into a stress response?

Now, remember that the stress response in itself isn't a problem. It's a very handy survival mechanism. But when you're in it all the time without any resolution then it becomes a problem. For a start it's not much fun to live in fight, flight or freeze and your stress hormones also impact on your other hormones as well as your reproductive and digestive function. And I spoke about this in episode four which is called How Patriarchy Fucks up your

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Cycle. So if you haven't listened to that episode yet then go and check it out.

But consider when you experience criticism or what you perceive to be criticism, did you get defensive? So this is the fight part of the stress response, even if all you're actually doing is just fighting in your head by arguing with someone in your imagination.

Or you might actually be saying words to someone, maybe yelling. I'm hoping not punching, but you might notice those kinds of sensations in your body like you're gearing up for a fight. Maybe the position of your body might change like you're getting ready to punch someone. Think of it as posturing up like a puffy chest, tension in your upper body, ready to throw down should you need to. Or did you just try to run away? Maybe you walked out of the room, or retreated to the toilet, or tried to hide behind your computer screen hoping that no one can see you.

This is the flight part of the stress response. And I had a huge realisation last year about this because for a long time when I experienced confrontation or disagreement in my romantic relationships, my internal response would be to go straight to why am I even with you? What am I doing with you? I should just leave and get the hell out of here. And all these questions, they can still come to me now and when I'm very happy and settled in my relationship.

But what I suddenly realised was that this was just me going into the flight part of the stress response. So my body wasn't actually running physically but I was running away in my head, in my mind. And this just gave me so much peace, just being able to understand that because before that realisation I was just believing my thoughts a lot of the time and believing my body. Whereas now I can just be like, oh cool, okay nervous system, you're just looking out for me. And you think that this is a life or death kind of situation and that we're going to need to run away, got it. See how different that is?

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Okay, another way that you might respond is that you don't know what to say or do. You just get stuck. And this is the freeze part of it. So your nervous system is basically telling you to play dead. Think about if you are playing hide and seek and you're the person hiding and the person who's searching for you gets close. Go back to that place in your mind, the last time you played hide and seek. And when the person who's searching for you gets close what happens is we freeze because it's that whole idea of well, if I don't move then they won't see me and I'll be safe.

So you might be thinking about situations where you didn't say something or you didn't do this, you didn't do that, you didn't feel able to because you just froze, this is why. You just froze to try and stay safe. And what that looks like is you might become very still. Your breathing might become very shallow. You might feel tense. Your posture might become more hunched over.

You might fold your arms to try and protect your belly. Think about it, that's the soft part of us that if you were to be attacked would be very damaging so sometimes we curl up and try to use our bones to protect those organs.

There's also another response that we don't often hear about and it's called fawning, or sometimes it can be called appease. And this is when your nervous system is activated and you try to please your way out of a situation. So this is one that's happened a lot to me around men. It's the, well, if I just smile at you then you'll leave me alone and I'll be safe. Or if I just agree and nod nicely at what you're saying even though I completely disagree with you then you won't become a physical threat to me, even though they already are.

Or another way it can come up for me is that I won't say something out of fear of what will happen, which as I think I mentioned in last week's episode usually isn't that bad. So I'm talking here about less significant things in life where there isn't an actual threat. But my body really thinks that there is a threat. And this is all very understandable. Our bodies are wired in particular ways and there's a saying in the world of neuroscience that what

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fires together, wires together which means that the more a neural circuit runs in your brain the stronger it becomes.

But this also means that you can create new neural pathways and start to retrain your nervous system and this is why I love the power of thought work because we're consciously changing our thoughts and changing our neural plasticity, very cool.

So think about how you respond to criticism. You probably experience all of the variations I've just mentioned at one time or another. Or you might tend to go more in one direction. And of course it can vary depending on context too and that means the actual situation, the environment that you're in. But it can also mean the context of your cycle. There are times when I am 100% more up for a fight and other times where I want to run away or hide and cry it out in a place where I feel safe being vulnerable.

So know that your experience may vary depending on your cycle as well as other things, but also that you can hugely influence things by how you think about them. Now, keeping with the topic of criticism there are two parts to this, criticism from others and the ways that we criticise ourselves. So let's start off with criticism from other people.

When you've been socialised as female we tend to rely upon external validation. We are usually socialised to care more about what others think of us rather than what we think of ourselves, to value being needed and liked. And we're taught that in order for us to be needed and liked that we need to be good girls. Think about this, I might get a bit ranty here. But most of us have been told that we're good girls pretty much from the moment that we're born all the way through adulthood. And isn't it atrocious that grown women are referred to as girls?

Even in labour when you're giving birth you can probably expect a medical professional to tell that you're a good girl whilst you're breathing through contractions and whilst you're birthing your baby. It doesn't happen all the time. But I have a lot of thoughts and feelings about that one. It's just

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inappropriate on so many levels. Saying good girl or good boy is actually one of the key phrases that abusers use whilst abusing kids. And so it can be a very triggering phrase for people when they're in labour.

And even aside from that I just don't think that we should be patronised this way ever, but especially during labour and birth. So that's my rant for today. Anyway what that means when it comes to criticism is that it doesn't take much for us to come undone because we are socialised to care very deeply about what other people think of us. And there's evolutionary reasons for that as well but I'll get onto that another day.

So one comment that you receive could be very critical or it could actually be quite neutral feedback that you're receiving, it could be quite helpful. But it can have such a huge effect and all of a sudden everything from your childhood is suddenly coming along for the ride when you're just standing in your office having a conversation with your team leader or on Zoom right now I guess. I don't know what's worse. And this won't be true for all of you, at least I hope, but it's a major issue that I see in my clients, in some of my colleagues, in my friendship groups and in young children too.

So I really wanted to speak to you about it today and if this isn't you, amazing, I love it. I'm thrilled for you. But it's pretty prevalent so we're going to keep going with it. So the thing is when we receive praise it feels good. We get a hit of dopamine which is the same chemical that's released when we fall in love. And what I try to do actually as a parent is to praise the effort rather than the result and to take time to praise failure too. Last week's episode we talked all about failure.

And recently I read something somewhere. I can't remember where it was but this post or article online was saying that rather than saying, "I'm proud of you", to a kid, saying, "Do you feel proud of yourself?" Asking them that question can be a really useful phrase to have to hand. So that way my kid can notice and generate those feelings on his own.

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And the other day we had this lovely conversation about what pride feels like in his body and in my body. Because I'm all about actually feeling emotions and generating them on purpose when we want to which means that we need to be familiar with how they actually feel and developing that kind of awareness. And being able to name our emotions which I used to be – I used to really struggle with that but I can do a lot better these days. But it starts off with paying attention.

But a little side note, I'm going on a few side notes today. When you are very responsive to praise, often because of how we've been socialised, you're also highly responsive to criticism because it goes both ways. So if you want to be less affected by criticism, and please listen up if you've drifted off for a moment because this tip will change so much for you. If you want to be less affected by criticism my number one tip is to stop being so affected by praise. Just doing that will change so much.

Years ago when someone complimented me or my work, if someone I didn't know online told me how much I'd helped them because of a post or a course that I'd run it would lift me up so much. I would really feel the impact of their praise. But I would also swing wildly in the other direction if someone 'criticised' me. So my emotional wellbeing back then was very much dependent on what other people said about me in either direction, which is not a great way to live your life. I don't recommend it.

But I did a lot of internal work to come back to me and what I thought and being okay with me. So now when all of you send me incredible emails and DMs telling me about how my work has changed your life. I'm so thrilled for you. But I don't use it to prop myself up anymore. And the same way when I receive so called negative feedback or criticism I don't use it to take myself down. And I get a lot of what you might call criticism from people. Sometimes it's actually helpful feedback and that's all it is.

Other times it's a bit more personal or my sense can be that the person is being motivated to tell me their thoughts about me for some other reason. Some people think I shouldn't have said this or that in my book or on social

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media. Others are annoyed that I didn't write more on a particular topic. And I could have written more about some of the things but it's a chunky book. It was only meant to be 80,000, ended up being 126, so there's a point where you have to say, "That's enough." In all honesty it was probably my lovely publishers who said that.

There's an amazing woman called Holly who edits my books and she's just the best. And she does such a fantastic job of editing my books. And I think with both books she's had to say, "Maisie, it's done now." And it's really helpful to hear because when you're writing you're just so in it and having someone else's perspective is always very helpful because given half a chance I probably would have kept going. But that's why I now have the podcast and I get to talk to you every week about all the things that didn't go in the book. I've got a lot to share with all of you.

But sometimes someone will suggest something that I could have done and I'll think, yes, wouldn't that have been great if I had? And I'm fully onboard with the idea and really appreciate their feedback. Years ago I probably would have got very defensive at the idea of that, of the idea that I got something 'wrong' by leaving it out or making particular language choices for example. And for sure there are times when I get defensive still. But I have a process that I use to work through that. And that's what I'll be teaching in The Collective this month.

Sometimes my thinking and approach has shifted and when someone emails me with criticism, I get excited because it's an opportunity for me to explore things in a deeper way. And it can bring a topic that's maybe in a blurry spot over on my periphery it just brings it into focus. And that's a really wonderful opportunity.

People have also criticised choices I've made in my personal life. And I open myself up to those by being transparent and showing my vulnerabilities. But I don't think that will change so kind of had to figure out how to be okay with that happening and I've done that successfully.

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Years ago I would have really struggled with all of this kind of criticism and feedback. I would have gone to great lengths to avoid being in a position where strangers could email me their thoughts and comment on all these parts of my life, or talk about me in online spaces because that happens too. But as I said, I've done a lot of work on this. I have been coached a lot. I've coached myself a lot. I've gone through some intense anxiety around it. So don't think it's all been lovely because it hasn't. In fact there was a period of time where I was experiencing a lot of emotion around this.

And I remember when my coach was asking me how I was feeling, my main answer was vomity, which isn't an actual emotion but that's how I felt physically. But I also didn't make feeling that way a problem. I understood what was going on. And I also knew that I was feeling that way because of how I was thinking at that time. And I was just in at the deep end going through some rapid growth that happened to feel vomity. So I have experienced huge changes here, it's also ongoing work for me. The difference is now I'm equipped to do that work.

And I have learnt to be less affected by criticism and praise. I'm good with me. And I have my own back no matter what. It would be really different if I already had thoughts about me not being good enough though, which is what used to be going on. And that's what I wanted to come back to. I started off talking about criticism in this episode just being two separate things, criticism from other people.

And then all the shit that your inner critic comes up with but really they're the same thing and here's why. If someone criticised you, let's say you're just walking down the street minding your own business and someone yelled something really outlandish across the road. Maybe they make a comment that the jacket you're wearing looks hideous. Now, if you know that your jacket is amazing and looks fantastic on you then you're just going to think that person is a weirdo and have an interesting story about your day to tell your mates.

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However, if you left the house already worried about if it suited you and what you looked like in it and this person yelled the same thing across the road then you're going to be more affected by it. You would feel self-conscious; maybe start looking at your reflection in the shop windows. You might take it off or just spend a lot of time wishing you hadn't worn it and doubting your wardrobe choices, criticising your body. It would be an opportunity to really go to town. And you would just think about how it doesn't look good and just be really in your head with it.

So that's what's really going on here is that when you believe what someone else is saying it's because you already have that thought about yourself. And that doesn't take away that these things can happen suddenly and be shocking, and they can be a nervous system response. There might be that kind of stress response to contend with. But whether or not it has a lasting impact on you will be down to whether you kind of attach meaning to what was said and believe it to be true or not.

Think about how you respond to criticism. That can depend on where you are in your cycle as well. I know many of you struggle at certain points in your cycle and it feels like your hormones are just going on a rampage and undoing all the good work that has maybe happened earlier on in your cycle. There are probably times when you feel less resilient to criticism or when your inner critic is really dominating the scene and starts to get the better of you. And this is a huge barrier to you going for your goals in life.

So if you found this episode helpful and you want to do some more work on this then make sure you get yourself on the wait list for The Flow Collective because I'm going to be teaching you my strategies and coaching you on this through about April. So if this is something that you could use my help with then sign up. It's also where I share my favourite ways of supporting and improving your cycle. And I teach you how to coach yourself through any situation whether it's related to your cycle or not.

So head to the show notes and stick your name on the wait list. Or if you're listening to this on March 29th, 30th or 31st then you can just jump in and

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sign up. And if it's after that then get on the wait list and you'll be able to join in the summer. Okay folks, have a wonderful week. I will catch you next time.

Thanks for listening to this week's episode of the *Period Power Podcast*. If you enjoyed learning how to make your cycle work for you, head over to maisiehill.com for more.