

Ep #107: Thought Work 101



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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This is *Feminist Wellness*, and I'm your host, Nurse Practitioner, Functional Medicine Expert, and Life Coach, Victoria Albina. I'll show you how to get unstuck, drop the anxiety, perfectionism, and codependency so you can live from your beautiful heart. Welcome my love, let's get started.

Hello, hello my love. I hope this finds you doing so well. Before we dive in, I want to remind you that it is so helpful for me if you could take a moment to rate and review the show, particularly over on Apple Podcasts. The more subscribers, ratings, and reviews a show has, the more easily other people can find it on search.

And from all the messages I'm getting from you all, you're really liking the show and getting a lot from it, and so I want to make sure that this free resource that comes out each and every week right to your phone gets into as many ears as possible. So if you would just take a quick little moment to subscribe, rate, and review, I'd really appreciate it. And the next human who finds the show from your review will thank you too.

Okay my love, speaking of your DMs, I don't know what's up lately, but I've been getting a particular spike in DMs and emails to podcast@victoriaalbina.com asking for more details on the thought work protocol I teach, asking if there's one specific episode that breaks it all down for you.

While I do that in several different shows in different ways and I talk about each part of the think-feel-act cycle in episodes 35, 36, and 37 in detail, I figured why not make you all a go-to episode where I lay out all the specifics of what thought work is and why it's so amazing and life-changing.

So thank you for asking, I appreciate it when you ask for what you need. That's one of our central teachings. And so I made you a free resource. A handout you can get that details the thought work protocol, why we use it,

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give some helpful examples for you, and you can get that on victoriaalbina.com/thoughtwork. Nice and simple. So head on over there and grab that now.

Alright, here we go. So the thought work protocol is the framework I use in my coaching practice and it's based in cognitive behavioral theory, which is a top-down approach to understanding how humans operate in the world. With my clients, I pair this top-down brain to body framework with a somatic body-based approach, which I'll also do a whole show on soon, understanding that our nervous system runs the show as well. It's not just our brains.

Our habitual experience of life is not just our thoughts but the interplay of our cognitions and our somatic or bodily experience of being a human mammal, which is often referred to as a bottom-up approach because our body is constantly feeding information into our minds, which we then run through the filter of our habitual thoughts.

Body speaks to mind, while mind speaks to body. And both approaches matter greatly because both are key to understanding the human experience and how we can change our lives by getting into better touch with both our nervous system state and the stories we are telling about our lives as influenced by that state.

So the thought work protocol is a tool, a thought exercise. And I'm going to simplify the science a bit here to make it more accessible and frankly, to attempt to rein in my nerd talk, which let's be real, can lead me to say words like cramp cycle and mitochondria and greater omentum, which are my favorite biochemical cycle, my favorite cellular organelle, and my favorite organ respectively. Oh my gosh, they're all so cool.

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And I know you didn't come here for that, but now you know my favorites. Okay, so something happens in life and you have a thought about it. Most often, a thought based in your socialization, your conditioning, what you were taught by the patriarchy, by capitalism, what you were taught to think in your family of origin, where you grew up, what you saw modeled for you as a kiddo by your grownups and other kids, a habitual thought. An old cassette tape in your mind that creates your programming.

Most of us don't pause to examine or question our habitual thoughts, so of course we keep thinking them. That make sense. And so of course a nerd alert; each thought that you repeat into your mind and each time you repeat the same thought, it deepens that neural groove, meaning that old path of thinking and believing the same thing to be true that your brain is used to thinking.

Bodies in their wisdom seek the path of least resistance. Like water, which will always move down gradient or downstream. And after all, we are 70% water, right? And as that old neural groove gets activated, the molecules of emotion get released into your bloodstream and trust, I will be nerding hard on the neurobiology of feelings very soon on the show so once again, make sure you're subscribed so you don't miss that one.

Once those biochemicals are released, they create a feeling or emotion in your brain and body as your receptor cells pick them up and are like, dopamine, awesome, let's get excited and motivated and do stuff. Or oxytocin, that's amazing, I'm so full of love, or your thoughts could lead to feeling like being disappointed, frustrated, self-pitying, indecision, or sadness.

Thoughts lead to feelings because science. We then take action based on that feeling state. No one ever thought I'm a terrible dumb human and then took the action of engaging acts of deep self-love and self-care. Instead,

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when you have that kind of a thought, your brain likely ruminates and ruminates and ruminates on it, picking apart everything you've done in the last 24 hours or 24 years, beating yourself up about it.

No one ever thought my body is perfect and amazing just as it is, and then took the action of depriving themselves of comforting, delicious, luscious food. Instead, that thought, "My body is so perfect," leads you to feel joy, peaceful, calm, self-assured, self-confident, self-love, any of those sorts of feelings. And so you take care of you in the most loving, kind, generous way.

No one ever thought I'm so overwhelmed by all the tasks on my to-do list and then immediately got to work conquering them. See how that works? When you're having the thought, "I'm overwhelmed," that propagates, that leads to more feeling overwhelmed. That thought, even just saying it out loud, "I'm so overwhelmed by these tasks," leads me to feel a little anxious, a little revved up, a little sympathetic, a little...

And from there of course you're going to ruminate. Of course things like procrastination seems like well, the action you should take because your perfectionist brain is telling you there's too much, you won't do it perfectly, why even try? Let's kick that can down the road. And so you don't take action.

Instead, maybe you buffer, maybe you scroll on your phone or turn on Netflix, or my brain's favorite, let's clean the house. Because it gives me that immediate dopamine, that immediate gratification, I can feel good about myself. But I'm still overwhelmed by the tasks on my to-do list because I didn't get them done.

I took a different action based on that feeling. No one ever thought, "I was born pure perfection, I am wildly worthy of love and care," and then took the

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action that so many of us do from codependency of accepting less than that from the people in our lives. What we do, the action we take from that place is to give more and more and more of ourselves.

More of our time, our energy, our heart, our support, our investment, our finances, we give more to attempt to get the people who are not treating us well to recognize our worth and value, while taking the action of showing ourselves and them that we don't believe we are worthy of love and care. See how that works?

And as humans, we take action or stay in inaction that matches up with our thoughts and the feelings they generate each and every time. The primary thought error of codependent thinking is that we are not worthy of love, that we have to be constantly and chronically sourcing it outside of ourselves, from our achievements, from giving, from other people, and from that thought, and this is not a conscious thought for most of us, we take actions that prove we are worthy of mere crumbs of love and care. Not the whole freaking cake.

So we take action like not attending to our basic needs, not putting our self-care first and foremost, looking to others to make our decisions for us, or to validate our decisions, which can sound like, "What do you think I should do?" We crowdsource the validity of our desires by getting other people's buy-in before we can even take a bath, asking, "I've earned it, right?"

Or telling the story, "Okay, so today here are the 20 ways I was productive and busy, therefore I've earned some gentleness, love, and care, right?" We stay in relationships, and I mean romantic, friendship, work relationships, familial ones because we feel we have to.

If someone else chose us, who are we to say they're wrong, to assert our needs and set boundaries, to say how we want things to be? On and on.

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You, I, we take action or don't take action from our feelings about ourselves and the world that comes from our thoughts.

And what we do in coaching that is so magical and transformation is to slow it all down so you can see the thoughts there in the middle that you otherwise aren't seeing. Like those far from conscious codependent stories about what is possible for you, how much joy you can experience before you will feel guilt or shame, whether it's okay for you to ask for help or support and it all boils down to that thought that you aren't worthy of love if you aren't enacting perfectionism, people-pleasing everyone you meet, living out that savior or fixer story, working to protect other people from having their feelings, because it's easier for you if they aren't sad, angry, irritable, or grumped.

And that pattern just sucks. And I know my beauty, I know, I know, I know, I get it. I lived it for a super long time. And once you get into this work and make it a daily part of your day, by starting, by setting aside five minutes at some point in your day, though I like to do it first thing in the morning before the conscious brain has really kicked in, to sit down, grab your journal and do a thought release where you just free write and let your brain express itself.

Get those thoughts out of your mind so you can get a little cognitive distance from them. It's so easy to be identified with our thoughts, to think they are us, we are them, until we see them in black and white. And that often can be the thing that can help us to see, oh wow, I sure am still thinking that and look what's happening.

So we spend those few minutes writing down that thought release and from there, we look at the circumstances in our life, the thoughts we have about that circumstance or situation, the feelings that are created by that thought, the action or inaction that we take.

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And once you can see the thought-feel-act cycle playing out and can realize that every action you take or don't take creates a result for you in your own life, the more power you have to intervene for yourself. And this last part is often super mind-blowing for my clients because what we do is put the focus squarely on you.

That is what your result is. It's the result in your life. What you create for you and not for anyone else. Because other people, they have their own protocol running in their mind, in their body. And it is not your job to get all up in their protocols, to attempt to manage it for them. Not at all.

And just because other people have their own thoughts, feelings, actions, and results doesn't mean to take free rein to be a schmuck or a jerk. Not at all. It's not like they'll have whatever thought they have if I call them some mean name. What it means is that you get to honor the agency and autonomy of the people you love by not trying to run their lives for them, by trusting that they can in fact do that on their own and your job is to manage your own mind, your own think-feel-act cycle.

So that's the thought work protocol and it's something you can absolutely do on your own, which for me is what makes it a feminist tool. You can do it on your own. And I will say that it's something I highly recommend, to have a skilled experienced coach such as myself, someone with tons of experience in listening for the story under the habitual story your brain is telling, who can support you in learning and putting the thought work protocol to practice because there are important nuances here that take time at task to truly master.

And I've dedicated my life to doing just that, particularly when it comes to applying the thought work protocol to the habits that my people like you are struggling with. The same habits that I struggled with, like codependent,

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perfectionist, and people-pleasing thinking, which can really deeply distort your view of yourself and the world.

And that can make it easy to jump to conclusions when you're looking at your own subjective experience and having an objective witness who can help you to slow it down, peel it all apart, and take a look at what the what is is truly life-changing.

Being coached myself is one of the best, if not the best investment I have ever made in my life because it has given me the tools I need to be onto myself, to be able to be my own watcher in this gentle, yet powerful way, and to hear my own thoughts without jumping to believing them, without assuming they are correct or factual and to be acted on, but rather to be able to say where did this thought come from?

Is this my family talking? The patriarchy? Racism? Capitalism? My middle school theatre teacher who told me I was too fat and loud to be a good dancer? Who's talking here? Who wrote this script and put it into my brain, my body, my nervous system? Is this me talking, thinking, being? Or is this squarely someone else's thought and I don't need to borrow it?

Next, I can pause now. Gosh, I feel like I didn't have a pause button on me for those first 30 years but I can pause now and can see what that thought, that generally borrowed thought, imposed thought is creating in my life, and wow is that powerful. And then I get to decide if that is a thought I want to keep feeding into my neural networks in my brain, understanding how neuroplasticity works.

The more you think a thought, the deeper the groove around it gets. The more you believe it in your mind and body. And I will testify to the incredible power of being able to see and manage my own adult mind, to recognize my protector parts, my perfectionist parts, when my inner children are

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screaming for my attention or crying in the corner, and to know that I have the tools and skills I need to support myself in new ways.

That I don't just have to believe the old programming that someone else put into my mind. And the deep sense of wellness I now have, knowing that I can process and experience the emotions and feelings in my life, and that I have an algorithm, a nerdy science-based protocol to help me make sense of it all so I can take courageous action for my own best life.

That has been nothing short of mind-blowing. So very, very powerful. And I feel so honored, delighted, and privileged, so grateful to be able to share this protocol with you, my darling. Thank you for listening.

And if you're ready to get the expert guidance, love, support, and nerdiness you deserve, you're going to want to check out my six-month program, *Anchored: Overcoming Codependency*, where I use the thought work protocol based in cognitive behavioral theory, along with somatic body-based practices, intuition practices, breathwork, meditation, and lots of community-based support and love to help you put codependent, perfectionist, and people-pleasing thinking in the rearview mirror.

It would be a delight and an honor to have you join us. Head on over to victoriaalbina.com/anchored to learn all about it and to apply for the April 5th group. The group is a little over half full so if you've been interested, if you've been wanting to work with me and get my support, now's the time, my beauty.

If I offer the course again in 2021, it will likely be way out into the fall and if you're motivated to get started now, let's do it. Alright my beauty, such a gift to be here with you all today. Remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my love. I'll talk to you soon.

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If you've been enjoying the show and learning a ton, it's time to apply it with my expert guidance so you can live life with intention, without the anxiety, overwhelm, and resentment, so you can get unstuck. You're not going to want to miss the opportunity to join my exclusive intimate group coaching program, so head on over to victoriaalbina.com/masterclass to grab your seat now. See you there. It's going to be a good one.