

## Ep #217: You Are Not Your Thoughts



### Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

**Victoria Albina, NP, MPH**

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## Ep #217: You Are Not Your Thoughts

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. Me? I'm thrilled. There are daffodils, crocuses; croci. What is the plural? I believe it is crocuses. There are all these sweet spring flowers everywhere, Forsythia, Lily of the Valley. We are in the process of planting like 50 Lily of the Valley bulbs in front of the house. My partner grew up in southwest PA and there were tons of Lily of the Valley everywhere. It's a smell she associates with really beautiful childhood memories so we're planting tons of those.

Yeah, I love Spring. I mean, that said, I love all the seasons. I just love... I love transitions. I feel like you don't hear that often, people being like, "No, no, I love transition times." I love moving. I love traveling. I love the transition between seasons. My astrology shows that I would be a person who loves transitions, and I've always been drawn to that space, to transitions. I mean, I've worked in birth, I've worked in death. And I'm a life coach now, you know, my work is all about transitions. So, here we are. Here I am.

We're not talking about transitions today on the show, that would have been a really good and natural segue. But instead, we're going to talk about something really different. Though, I mean, I guess not, in that we're going to talk about thoughts. And it really is my thoughts. "I love transitions," that lead me to have a beautiful experience of transitions, right?

So instead, today, I want to respond to a message I got on Instagram the other day. A regular listener named Marie, said that she loves all of the work we've been doing together on the podcast around big topics like

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owning our sacred anger and overcoming fawning. And she said, and I quote, "It feels like we're in advanced *Feminist Wellness*, like seminar level." And that made me laugh.

She said that while she loves the deep dive we've been doing, she could use a little refresher, a reminder, a trip on the old personal growth DeLorean back to where it all starts; to how we make sense of and manage our minds. Which is a key skill I teach you all here and practice on the daily with the folks in Anchored, my six-month program.

Because thought work is it's part of my bread and butter, right? It's one of the key skills that I use as a life coach. I really love this request. So, advanced musicians still practice their scales. Elite athletes still run drills, because going back to the basics matters.

This week, we're going to do our version of skills and drills. We're going to check in with the foundational work, with the bedrock, that really underlies all we do here at *Feminist Wellness*, which is thought work. And soon we'll be talking about the other half of that foundation, which is somatic work or body-based work. Work with polyvagal theory and the nervous system, which is a thing I've been geeking out on for about the last 20 years or so and has radically changed my life.

I bring somatic or body-based practices, nervous system consciousness, into my coaching all day long, because it's magical. And when you combine thought work or mindset work, and somatics that is, I mean, dope. First of all, it is dope and rad and awesome. And it was also seriously life changing for me and hundreds, hundreds of clients, I have led through that dual process.

So, let's get meta about our thoughts. Science nerds who study thinking tell us that humans think, on average, 50,000 - 80,000 thoughts a day, which is just bananas to ponder. Luckily, most of those thinks don't reach the level

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of our consciousness, and those that do have significant impact on our lived experience. Because they create our stories about who we are, about the world, about life.

Our thoughts, our mindset, creates our lived experience. And yet, most of us don't stop to get meta with it, to think about thinking, and that's what thought work does. It helps us to recognize that if you think that thing is scary, it will feel scary. And if you think, "That's just a roller coaster," it won't feel scary, will it?

Thought work is a system, a process, for pausing and evaluating our habitual thoughts, to understand their impact in our lives. Which then offers us a chance to step into greater agency. Agency means to be the actor in our own lives, not just the bystander reacting to others in the world.

As we learn to hear our own thinking and to question it, we can then actively decide if we still want to think the things we've been thinking by default. And in so doing, we can start to live more intentionally, as we discussed in Episode 84 "Living with Intention".

We do this work of looking at our thoughts, because as human mammals, we're built to believe the things we hear in the world around us. Especially the things we heard as kiddos. And the things we hear over and over, become our belief system. Which means that if we aren't pausing to be thoughtful about our thinking, we can start to map false narratives, other people's stories about our own lives, into our bodies, as though they were our truth.

That is, we can start to believe negative or painful thoughts about ourselves, others, the world, life, our obligations, our roles, et cetera, just because our family of origin or community repeated those things around us a bunch. And so, we can fall into self-destructive thinking patterns. Like those that come with emotional outsourcing, aka codependent,

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perfectionist, and people-pleasing thought habits. Because it's what we've always thought. Because it's the line of thinking that was modeled for us growing up.

Here's a little side note; my dad is scared of bugs. He does not like bugs. He does not like the eight-legged. No, thank you; scared. And my sister and I grew up kind of scared of them because the narrative in the home was that they were scary, right? We heard this story again and again; scary, scary, scary.

What we did not know until pretty recently was that our mom was petrified of snakes. She just didn't tell us. She's from the north of Argentina, there's some snakes you don't want to mess with up there, of the venomous kind. And she just didn't tell us. So, neither one of us grew up with that same level of fear of snakes that either she has, or that we had around bugs, because it wasn't a story in our brain. So, it didn't create a narrative. Right?

We didn't learn to believe, snake is scary. But we heard, bug is scary. So, bug was scary, but snake was not. You see where I'm going? You believe what you heard. Right? So today, I want us to contemplate the idea that we are not our thoughts. You, me, we, are the consciousness beneath it.

That we can, with time and effort and little, teeny, tiny kitten steps, work to better understand, befriend, and shift our painful or harmful thought patterns and replace them with intentional, thoughtful thoughts. Ones that serve us in living the lives we want to live.

Thoughts that can help us to grow, expand, connect, explore, and enjoy all the good stuff that life offers. While stepping away from the thoughts that have kept us feeling stuck and mired, and living lives that maybe don't really feel like our own.

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The more we practice hearing our own thoughts, naming them, getting intimate with them, and deciding to choose them or not, to repeat them or not, the easier it is to pause when our brains offer us catastrophizing or spinning thoughts when life gets lifey. And for more on catastrophizing, check out Episode 134.

But before we dive in, I'll say this, our thoughts and our nervous system are deeply tied. And for today's purposes, we're going to explore thoughts on their own. Almost as if they happen in a vacuum, which they totally don't, but that's what we're doing. Because soon enough, we'll talk about the somatic or bodily pathway, and then we'll tie it all together.

So yes, today, we're going to be a bit reductionist and a little oversimplifying in talking about thinking. And like everything I do, that's very much intentional and thoughtful and towards the end of keeping this simple. Especially for those of us who've never paused to look at our thoughts. Most of us who walk around like most of us, believing that the stories in our heads are facts.

Including painful stories, like, "It's my obligation to take care of my partner, my parents. Periods are gross. No one's going to want to date me until those last 10 pounds are dealt with. Yeah, I guess at the end of the day, what they think about me is more important than my happiness."

So, we're starting here, and we're building on that. Because most of us who are believing those stories don't even know we're operating from those stories. Because they are so deep in our subconscious we're not even present to or with them.

All right, so my nerds, let's take it way back. What even is thought? I know that sounds really dumb and basic, but again, most of us don't even pause to get curious about it, right? And in defining it, we can learn some things about it.

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So, a thought is a cognitive event. It's a release of neurotransmitters in the brain that produces a wee story we hear in our heads. It's a cascade of firing neurons which create brainwaves which can be recorded; yea, science; but which cannot be held in our hands. Which is completely unrelated, but it's also mind bending.

Thoughts can carry a lot of weight in our lives, our ideas, opinions, and judgments, can feel super important, and very near and dear. And those of others can feel even more weighty, especially when they're the thoughts of someone we value in the world, like a parent, partner, or authority figure, et cetera.

And their ideas, opinions, and judgments are, much like our own, just neurons firing in the brain and nothing more. I bring that up, and this is why I talk about science so much, because it helps us to release the blame, shame, guilt, attachment, stress, around so many things.

We've been taught that some things that we believe are just beliefs, right? They're just real, they're facts. But really, they're just neurons firing. And that, to me, reminds me that I do have agency, I do have choice. So, we're going to put a proverbial pin in that for just a moment.

There's a saying in the neuroscience nerd world, "That what fires together, wires together." That means that when we experience certain stimuli that bring about the same thought, we create basically thought habits or patterns in our mind ala Pavlov and his dog. That is, if someone rings a bell and feeds you every time you hear it soon enough, you too shall be salivating when the bell tolls.

We can also call this a neural map made up of neural grooves in our brain. For example, let's take a look at Amanda, a member of Anchored, my six-month coaching program. Like many of us who grew up with emotional outsourcing, Amanda's caregivers showed her, and her sisters, conditional

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love, approval, validation, praise, and care felt very much tied to markers like grades, or gold stars or achievement or being the good girl or good boy. The thoughts they heard and learned and that got mapped into them might sound like, "I'm only safe if I'm perfect. I'm only worthy of love if people are pleased with me."

And remember, those are subconscious thoughts. Most of us aren't walking around thinking that, right? But we are enacting perfectionist habits, we are people pleasing in the world. And so, when your safety, your worth, your value is tied to these external experiences of you, emotional outsourcing, they can lead a person to never feel fully safe being themselves, because they learned to perform their lovability as a child. And there's a thought that ties their safety to what others think about them.

Fast forward to adulthood, and the slightest hint of a potential failure leads their brain down the same thought tornado. If there is any chance of not doing it perfectly, or someone in the world not being wildly and completely thrilled with what they're doing, then their brain feeds them the thought, "I'm unsafe."

Because of so many years of the neurons that perceive a failure or possible failure, firing along with neurons that provoke fear of rejection and abandonment not being loved or lovable. You with me? And so, their nervous system takes over and sends them into sympathetic activation.

Because failure equals fear of massive doom, and they're off to the races and are likely to self-abandon, Episode 163 and 164, or to fawn, Episode 208, or to chameleon and shapeshift to try to get others approval, all stemming from those early childhood thoughts. Because in Amanda's brain, these two events are wired.

Failure, meaning someone doesn't 100% love the way you did what you did, doesn't think it's perfect, doesn't mean it's good enough, equals

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imminent doom, because those neural pathways are deep. And so, the brain and body go to there. And the pattern deepens every time she goes down that same pathway. What wires together, fires together. You, see?

And so, of course that keeps her from trying, keeps her from going out on a limb, from living authentically, from doing what she really wants to, because of this story. This thought process that tells her that potentially failing is wrong, really dangerous, and scary.

Think of it like walking a wheelbarrow along the same path over and over. It can feel really hard to get the wheelbarrow out of that rut in the mud. The same can happen with our neural pathways, aka our habitual thoughts. Just like we can choose to walk a different path between the house and the garden, we can slowly and gently learn to walk a different neural pathway in our brain. And can meet that shift with a change, somatic or bodily experience, which, as promised we'll get into soon enough.

This is super important to understand because our thoughts lay the groundwork for how we feel. And we act from our feelings, in concert with our nervous system. Feelings are fuel for our actions. So, if we want to change how we act, how we show up in the world, carry ourselves, behave, respond to others, take charge of our lives, we need to start at the ground floor with our thoughts.

Let's hop right into a little remedy, my darling, which is to do a fault analysis; like a food journal, but for your brain. And this is something worth doing, whether you're brand new to thought work or your old hat at it, because every time we take a deeper look, we get a little more meta with our own thinking. There's always something interesting and curious to discover there.

At least there is for me because I'm a total nerd now. And if you're new to the show, I'm not dissing myself, that is a wild compliment. I am throwing

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my hair and I'm like, "I am a nerd," like it's the best thing ever, because come on, nerds, right? Best thing ever. So, my beauties, we have far too many thoughts in one day to write them all down. And that would be a silly way to spend a day anyway, in my opinion; that's just my thought, eh? All right?

So, the goal is to take a few days, and in those days listen for the patterns, the thoughts that come up on replay. Which allows us to tap into those places where the neural grooves are deep. Where we have some high leverage opportunities for self-exploration, and to also zoom out. And in this process to start to identify the times, places, people, that you have certain kinds of thoughts around.

Get curious about what your habitual thoughts are at different times of the month; when you're hungry, thirsty, or tired. When you're with your boss, mom, partners, strangers, et cetera. Remembering that you, my beloved, are a taller toddler, after all. And more on that in Episode 190 "When It's Not Just Your Thoughts. Right now, if it's safe to do so, I would invite you to hit pause, and to take just a few minutes to reflect on your habitual thought tendencies.

Some guiding questions are: What are thoughts that come up for you on the regular? What are thoughts that seem to make their way into your consciousness almost before you even knew what was happening? We're not evaluating, categorizing, and certainly not judging those thoughts right now. Rather, we're just calling them into our awareness and writing them down so we can get a little cognitive distance to get a clearer view of them.

Once you've identified a few regular thoughts of yours, you can then ask yourself if each of those thoughts is serving you. I like to start with the question: How does that thought make me feel? So, when you think, "They don't actually love me. He doesn't approve of my choices. She wasn't careful with my heart," how does that make you feel? What are the

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emotions that arise in your body? And bonus points for bringing somatics in here, what is the felt sensation? Right? What does it feel like to have that emotion in your body?

Next, what sort of actions do you take when you have that feeling? If you feel sad, angry, rejected, what do you do? Finally, do you like how you behave, what you create in your own life, when you take that action, fueled by that feeling, because you had that thought? No judgment here. Again, just asking, do I like it? Does it work for me? Does it serve me? Does it support me? Is it to the best and highest good of my life, and all the lives I touch it in this world?

For example, before exercising for the day, you may have the thought, "I'll feel great when I'm done," which maybe makes you feel a little groany, but that same actual thought might get you moving, might be a really nice reminder. And lo and behold, because science, we do generally feel much better after working up a sweat.

If that's the case, then that thought, "I'll feel great when I'm done," that serves you. Meanwhile, thinking, "I need to work out if I ever want to be in good enough shape to feel attractive," oh, ouch. That one sounds pretty barbed. And while it may get you to the gym, it can do a lot of harm along the way. Right?

Then there are thoughts that straight up, hold us back and limit us. That don't even get us to the proverbial gym. "I don't think I'm ready for that promotion I've been offered. I'll never be good enough to compete, so why bother? Failure is so embarrassing, better not to even try. I'll never have a healthy relationship; I am so codependent," and this is a label that defines my life. "I'm so overwhelmed all the time."

Those thoughts, my love, are thorns upon thorns that not only do damage mentally and emotionally but cut us off from what could be fantastic

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experiences in life. Those are the thoughts I would invite you to get to know better, so that you can start to get a handle on them and can shift them as you see fit. If you're a regular listener, you know where I am *not* going next. I do not do good vibes only, toxic positivity, absolutely not, all vibes only, bring it, please.

I'm not out here about to tell you to shut down those negative thoughts. No, no, my friend. You can stick your finger in a geyser, but eventually the water's going to come flooding out. Right? You can tell yourself, "That thought isn't true. Don't believe it." But mental Band-Aids like that don't have much lasting power because the truth will win out, and you're gaslighting yourself. It's garbage.

And I'm certainly not out here trying to do it to you, either. Sometimes things happen that just suck. And rather than trying to talk ourselves out of it, I recommend acknowledging the suckage, start by being real about it. That thing that happened is a super bummer, and I wish it had been different. I wish she'd been more thoughtful before she spoke to me. I wish he looked before turning left. I wish I wish I wish.

Breathe into it, feel into it. And having acknowledged it, having befriended the emotions beneath it, instead of getting stuck in a swirl about it, we can start to accept that whatever happened, did. It happened. It's real. It happened. And you get to decide what you want to think next. And that is completely amazing. It's amazing.

So, let me give you a quick example. In the home where I grew up, there was a lot of judging. And there was a version of the thought, "That person's an idiot. That person's a moron," on repeat. It was often bandied about. There's a pattern, from the adults, of looking out on the world and casting this knee-jerk, pretty intense, judgment on others.

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Now, this is for sure, a thought that does not serve anyone at all. It's mean and unkind. It's the sort of thought that shuts down critical thinking and humanity. That cuts us off from others. That limits our perceptions of what's possible, what's acceptable. And it's also just a bummer to be around.

Oh, and I guess this sort of just hit me, when your parents are constantly criticizing and judging others, there's a part of you that knows, or it's a thought, right? But holds the belief, "If they're judging everyone else so easily, they're also judging me." Which then, if that doesn't lead us into the spiral of perfectionism and people pleasing even more? Like, come on now. Right? Cool.

So, part of the work I like to do with these thoughts that do not serve, is to reality check them by asking some thoughtful questions. For example, by asking some thoughtful questions that can help me to figure out if this is a thought I want to continue thinking, if it serves me, if it's going to be on repeat, or if I'm going to invite it to step out of my brain space.

For example, is everyone really an idiot? Probably not. I mean, okay, I haven't met everyone. But yeah, it is not a universal truth that I uphold, that everyone is an idiot. So, what is true in this specific circumstance, in this one moment? Well, what's true is that Rhode Islander turned left from the right-hand lane. Just picking something that happens a lot growing up in the greatest state of the union, Rhode Island.

Next, did someone just do something differently than how I would have done it? Yeah. Do I know the whole story about why they made their choice? I do not. Does it serve me, them, or anyone else to judge them? And the answer to this one is, absolutely not. And for me, that's sort of a fact across the board, it doesn't ever serve anyone to judge anyone. Right?

Once we have a handle on what's more true, we can do what people in the thought biz call "neutralizing" the thought. We can ask ourselves, is there a

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positive, or at least a neutral, version of this thought that is true? That we can focus on instead, without b.s.-ing ourselves? Basically, how can I trade in this thought that doesn't serve me, that likely isn't even true, for a true or truer thought that actually serves and has more truth to it, or even just more kindness, love, and grace?

Let's go back to say, having someone cut us off in traffic or turn left from the right-hand lane. A-hem, oh little roadie. Little roadie, I sure love you. The old thought pattern may be, "People are such idiots," which sends us into sympathetic activation, gets our blood pressure, and adrenaline up and our judgment flowing. Along with all sorts of really challenging emotional and potentially road rage fueled actions and separates us from our fellow human.

So instead of just thinking the habitual thought that you learned in childhood, where "you" here is actually me, that is a thought that I was taught in childhood, and no longer engage in. Instead of having the old thought, we can beyond to ourselves and our habitual thinking. Thoughts that we were taught by others, who were probably taught by others before them and others before them. Thoughts we didn't choose and can choose to choose or choose to not choose.

And so, we can pause, and we can ask, what's true right now? What's true is I just got cut off by that driver, and frankly, I'm feeling shaken up. I felt unsafe for a moment. So, my fight-or-flight kicked in and that led me right into the habit of judgment I learned in childhood.

From there, we may feel some of that worry, that stress, as a felt sensation in our bodies. And from there, we may make a wise choice from the thought, "I could use a little care right now." Which leads us to feel self-love instead of judgment of the other. We might take the action of choosing to pull over, to take the next exit, to do some deep breathing with a long, slow

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out, to bring our minds, bodies, and spirits back into alignment and safety. To bring our nervous system back towards ventral vagal.

And in that process, can pick a new thought, “I am having a normal human reaction to something scary. I don't need to villainize that person or judge them. I can also recognize that their choice was not the safest. And what matters here is how I felt, which was scared, and taking care of me.”

To notice that the true thought, the most baseline truth thought, has nothing to do with someone else, it's about you and your safety. It's a statement that can lead you to look inside, to self-reflect, and to take care of yourself.

Now, we are not going to be able to harness, evaluate, and neutralize all of our thoughts at once. Nor should that really be the goal, says I. You don't need to get all perfectionist fantasy about it, my darling. I'll invite you to see if you can set a goal for yourself of harnessing, evaluating, and neutralizing one thought that doesn't serve you, per timeframe that you want to set. Want to aim for one a day? One a week? One a month? Whenever you remember? Do it.

The beauty of this work is that you don't have to be a perfectionist with it. And there's no deadline, since we never stop growing, which is pretty rad. You could also choose to make this work your minimum daily baseline, which we talked all about in Episode 78. My perfect, tender ravioli, know that your thoughts are powerful, and they are a huge part of creating your lived experience. What they're trying to do for the most part, is protect you.

And like with everything, there's a shadow side. We can get stuck in thought patterns that have been wired into our minds. And those patterns can start to take on a life of their own until we get meta with them, and start thinking about our thinking, questioning it with love, and care for our own growth.

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When we can be open to change, to gently, oh so gently, listening to the thoughts in our beautiful brains, we can keep the ones that serve and hold the rest up to the light of truth. To see how we can start to make our thoughts work for us.

Thank you for listening, my love. I hope this was supportive. I hope it was as fun for you to start thinking about thinking; it's been a really important thing for me in my life, and I see how it changes the lives of my clients, day after day.

The other part of this work, the foundations of *Feminist Wellness* is somatics or body-based modalities that help us connect with our bodies to live not just from the neck up. If you have been really itching to dive deep into somatic practices, to really learn how to apply them to your life, you're going to want to check out the Somatic Studio, which is my new 12-week offering.

This is a beautiful program with lots of nerdity, lots of practical application of somatic practices, as vital skills for your life, your wellness, your growth. Learning how to reconnect with my body after a lifetime of emotional outsourcing, has been so clutch, so key, such a game changer for me. And I'm so excited to teach you all about it. Head on over to [VictoriaAlbina.com/thesomaticstudio](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/thesomaticstudio) to learn all about it and to enroll now.

The first group starts on April 26, and that group will be all live, which will be so incredibly exciting, so much fun. And yeah, I'm just beyond thrilled to share this new offering with you. Don't miss out on your chance to join this first offering. It's going to be so magnificent.  
[VictoriaAlbina.com/thesomaticstudio](http://VictoriaAlbina.com/thesomaticstudio).

All right, my beauties, let's do what we do. A gentle hand on your heart, should you feel so moved. And remember, you are safe. You are held. You

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are loved. And, when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling, my beauty. I'll talk to you soon.

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