

Ep #69: The Power of Thought Work in Becoming an Anti-Racist Ally and Accomplice



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

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Hello, hello my love. We're going to dive right in this week because we're going to get really real about racism and our thoughts because this conversation is so needed.

As a white Latina, working every day to understand, examine, and unlearn my own anti-black racism, to unpack and get clear on my own daily privilege, the privilege of passing and code switching and moving seamlessly between the white world and the Latinx world, I offer you the following with a full heart, knowing I'm going to F up, knowing I'm not going to do it perfectly, knowing that some of you will turn away and unfollow and disregard.

Some of you will critique me and tell me about how I'm doing it wrong, which I welcome from black folks 110,000%, which is not a request for your labor in any way. But if you have something to say, I want to hear it. And some of you will think that this is right on.

Above all, I am here to own my privilege and to speak up and be a voice. A voice speaking to what's happening right now. The murder of black men, black people in this country, the 400 years of oppression, the inequalities in healthcare, housing, the unfair exposure of black folks, black children to toxins like lead that is found so much more often in the places in which poor folk, black folk live in this country.

As a healthcare provider, as a life coach, we need to be speaking to these things. And it is incumbent upon me to use this platform that I have been so privileged to have in this world to put out a call to action for all the white and white passing folks listening to step into the fray and to learn about our

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own privilege so we can start to look racism and white supremacy right in the teeth, and of course, to pass the mic back to black folks.

And I'll share some resources at the end and on my website, on the page with this episode over at victoriaalbina.com so you can deepen your own work. And if you have the financial or other resources to share, you can share them.

Let's do what we do. Deep breath in, expand that belly, and long, slow out. If this is making you uncomfortable, just bring your attention to that. Bring your awareness there, my angel. It's okay to feel uncomfortable. It's important. It's vital.

So brains like roadmaps, so today, we'll be talking about one, how brains work and where our thoughts come from. Two, self-compassion as a radical and vital act. Three, how absolutely necessary it is to regulate your nervous system so you can be an accomplice to black and brown folks.

On that nervous system note, take a moment to calm yourself, white folks. To calm your body, to get ventral vagal with yourself, with me. Let me voice bring you to a centered, grounded place. My beautiful love, you get to do the work to be grounded and centered so you can listen.

Bodies, nervous systems, inner children cannot listen when activated. So find that way to step out of sympathetic dominance, to step out of dorsal vagal, to step into ventral vagal with yourself. Use me as a tool, as a conduit if my voice soothes you.

I shared some simple concrete tips about how to begin to calm your nervous system before embarking on the work of being an ally and moving

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from ally to accomplice on an Instagram TV I did over at @victoriaalbinawellness.

So make sure to check that you so that you can keep your own nervous system in check. So important, my beauties. And also, do it so you can show up for the black folks in your life who may need your support and care and love and centered, regulated nervous system to lean on right now.

When your nervous system is in defense mode, protection mode, anxiety mode, when you're activated, your ears literally don't work well. Your brain doesn't work well. So take the time to practice and learn how to get into ventral vagal now, so you can hear the following with an open heart and mind and so you can listen to black folk.

That is what we are being asked to do, called to do, my love. To listen with wide open hearts and minds and wallets. Putting our defensiveness, fear, and worry aside. Deep breath into the belly, in, in, in, and long, slow out.

So let's start with a nerd alert about how brains work and where thoughts come from. Your brain did what it was supposed to do. It took on what you were taught by the world. I talk about this all the time, that we are shaped by our socialization, our habitual thoughts were literally taught to us and as our child selves, we learned to survive in the culture, society, and families we were raised in.

And here in the US, it's clear that we were taught that straight, white, CIS gendered men are the most important humans and their voices and opinions are the ones that need to be heard above all others. This is programmed into us before we even know what's what. And as always, those old cassette tapes are playing in your mind without your consent, without you even recognizing it until you stop to look at it all.

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The core thing I teach here and in my coaching practice is to see how our own internalized biases and narratives are keeping us in the place of oppressor. Maybe not in the obvious ways, but in the insidious ones, which is what I'm always talking about here.

Lifting the cover on the insidious thought habits we learn from our socialization. Whether you were raised in a family that spoke openly about being racist or were raised in the opposite, listening to Free to be You and Me. The dominant culture gets into our brains, my beautiful love.

Amy Cooper, the white woman who recently threatened a black man in Central Park, saying she would call the cops on him for asking her to leash her dog was a self-proclaimed liberal, and that's so important to know. Because we've been raised in a white supremacist culture, we all have inside of us the same inclination, that same thought habit that Amy Cooper had, whether we act on them or not.

And not acting on them, choosing to acknowledge, understand, and uproot them is our work. You don't have to be wearing a MAGA hat, whatever, you know what I mean, you don't have to be wearing that to have racist thoughts. You just have to grow up white or white passing in America.

And to be clear, there is racism all over the place and I'm staying in my own lane here as a white passing Latinx to speak to my experience. So one of the key things I teach is that we can look at our own narratives and recognize that they aren't inevitable, that your thoughts aren't facts. They're just lessons we were taught and we don't have to believe them anymore.

Whether it's about body image and not believing that beauty is only had by slender, tall, blonde, white women, and we can talk about the racism inherent in our beauty standards on another day. Or if you were taught that

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women should be quiet or should listen to their husbands or that people pleasing, appeasing, saying yes when we mean no are important in order to be seen as a good girl or polite or nice.

Or that you shouldn't rock the boat by speaking up when someone says something you don't agree with, or that codependency and putting others ahead of ourselves is something that will keep us safe and lovable. We have been talking together for over a year now about how all of that is BS.

And if you can believe that those narratives, those stories are just not true, then you can begin to believe and can come to fully believe that you too have racist thoughts within you. They were put there. And that you can look at them, excavate them, and do the work to no longer believe us.

We can look to our own lives for examples of this. The one that immediately comes to mind for me is yes, the body image stuff. Always believing I would be more lovable if I was thinner and also what comes to mind is this core story I've been working through for the last 40 years about my own value and worth.

And the story goes that I'm an F up and it was the joke in my house that if anything went wrong, it was my doing. Like, we'd be in the living room and I'd be sitting right there and there would be a crash in the kitchen and the joke was to look to me and say, "Oh Maria Victoria must have done it."

I don't know how this started, but I sure internalized it. And I always thought I was wrong or had done something bad because I'd been taught that story. And I've spent years working to unlearn it but I had to start by recognizing it was there, by excavating it. And I've worked to know that I'm not bad, though I F up all the time and I'm doing my best to learn and grow and to believe that spinning in shame doesn't help me or the world.

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In my life, it leads to my being defensive when I feel accused, and that my habitual action is people pleasing to attempt to prevent that moment of shame and recrimination. Self-recrimination. Is any of this resonating for you within your own story? That thing that you always defend yourself against.

So we can take a step back and we can look at these stories we once believed were true because we were taught that they're true by the world and can start to ask, what else was I taught to be true that I no longer want to believe? And what are those insidious messages about race and racism?

So that's step one, always. Looking at your thoughts, being deeply honest with yourself, especially when it's painful and not allowing your brain to spin out in all that self-flagellation, the pity, the shame, or guilt. I will come back to talk about that some more.

For now, let's look again at Amy Cooper. She threatened to call the police because she knew the police would take her side and would believe her. She also had to know what often happens when white women call the police on black men, who ends up in jail or dead because of it.

And she knew the police would take her side, would defend her white womanhood, not because women are respected but because of the combination of paternalism, toxic masculinity, and white supremacy that is alive and well in this country means that protecting white women is a way to protect white masculinity.

That doesn't make white women innocent victims, but rather, it's used to support a deeply engrained racism, a misogyny. So what does this mean? Why am I talking about this? I'm here talking about this today because I

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love you and I want to support you in unlearning racist thoughts, feeling, and actions that you may not even be aware of, so you can be an ally to black and brown folks, so you can step into ever greater awareness and acceptance of your own unexamined thoughts and feels and can grow and evolve into being an accomplice and coconspirator to black and brown folks.

Because if your feminism only focuses on the liberation of some women, it's not enough, my love. White feminism is not enough. And I'll invite you to do the work, to learn about intersectional feminism. The work now is to see the lies we were taught about black and brown folks, our implicit biases, to see where those thoughts live within us as beliefs.

Remembering that a belief is simply a thought you've thought over and over again until your brain believes it to be a fact. And these are your implicit biases, the ones you were taught and potentially raised in. And this is where thought work comes in.

Our implicit and unconscious biases stay unconscious until we do the work to make them conscious. This is what thought work teaches us, regardless of the issue at hand. And it is so vital to apply here, to look at your thoughts and the feelings they're creating in your body, the action you're taking, and the result you're creating.

Two, radical self-compassion. What's vital to note is that when you're trying to change a thought, whatever that thought is, from a judgmental or negative place, a place of judging yourself for having that thought, your brain will fight you each and every time and will create more guilt and shame about having had the original thought that you're now judging and criticizing.

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That loop will keep you so stuck, my beauty. For example, if you find yourself having codependent thought habits and you say to yourself, “I need to stop having these codependent thought habits because they’re so stupid and I’m an idiot for not changing them,” or if you recognize in a moment that you’re buffering and you say to yourself, “I’m so lazy for buffering. Can’t believe my stupid brain told me to go watch Netflix when I have to work and I did it.”

Here, once you recognize those insidious biases, those insidious thoughts about black and brown people that may be hanging out in your mind, your brain may want to fight the fact of being racist, of having racist thoughts. Judging yourself for having those thoughts will keep you from doing the work to change them.

Because instead of focusing on changing the codependent thoughts, changing the buffering, getting present to your life, instead of working to change those racist stories, your focus will be on how bad and wrong you are for having those thoughts. And then you’ll spin around that, being mean to yourself for having the thoughts in the first place, and my love, that helps no one. No one at all. And it won’t move you forward to become an anti-racist ally, accomplice, anything.

Let’s look at the framework we often use together. The framework of awareness, acceptance, and action. So we start with awareness of our implicit biases, of the racism that lives within us as white and white passing folks, by being our own watcher, which we talked about in detail way back in episode two.

And as with every topic we discuss here, if you’re not open to really seeing your own thoughts, to getting super real about what lives within you, then you can’t change it. So you get to look at your thoughts when you think

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about everything that's going on and you get to be curious and critical. Critical of the thoughts, not yourself for having them, instead of just thinking these thoughts and assuming they're true. That's the work.

Brains do well with parallels so let's pause to think of the example of codependency once again. So, so often, my listeners and life coaching clients don't realize they have these long-standing thoughts that lead them to put others ahead of themselves. It's just what they've always done and they've done it and done it so it becomes a belief, it becomes habitual, it becomes normal.

And when they begin to see these codependent thought habits and can recognize where it's showing up and keeping them from living their fullest, most joyful lives, then they can start to practice things like boundaries, taking care of themselves first.

And for example, to get concrete, not answering the phone out of guilt when your mom calls. This is an example of coming into awareness of your codependent thought habits, and you can do the same around your ingrained and unconscious racist thought habits.

When you start to see it all, as I hope you are doing now in this moment if you haven't done this work before, you may feel a sense of urgency to change your thoughts to attempt to create different feelings without really sitting with the painful truth, which is something we've talked about here before and is called emotional bypassing.

And that simply doesn't work and will keep you stuck in the same old thoughts no matter how much you try to not think them, to push them away, to ignore them. And I get how tempting it is to want to leapfrog over feeling the feels because sitting with the fact that you have implicit bias is painful.

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And brains are built to attempt to avoid pain. That is the motivational triad of being a mammal, my sweet nerd. To avoid pain, seek pleasure, and changing your thoughts quickly can feel good for a moment, so we try to do it, and to avoid change, also known as maintaining biological efficiency. How can I use the minimum of ATP in this moment?

So let's take a big deep breath. Deep breath in and out. You get to recognize that urgency in you, change the thoughts, be less racist, change the thoughts immediately. And I'll just say it one more time. It's so vital to feel into what those thoughts are creating within you. It may be a false sense of safety.

If I call the cops because my neighbor is being loud, then I can feel safe. Dig a little deeper. Look at it, but really raise that mirror in front of yourself. And a big part of doing that work, of being open to doing it, to feeling into it is to get right with your guilt and your shame. Those feelings will stop you from stepping into acceptance and action. Those feelings will just keep you spinning and ruminating and not moving forward to be of service.

Self-compassion is vital here, my tenderoni. Feel into the difference between being cruel to yourself for having the thoughts you have, those old cassette tapes in your head, and recognize that someone else wrote those scripts. And you can meet those feelings, the thoughts, from that radical self-compassion and self-love. Feel into how different that feels.

From that latter place of giving love to your younger self who heard these tapes on repeat, you can start to shift and change in ways you can't from beating yourself up. Move through it with love so you can be of service. The time is now.

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Breathe into that, my love. Pause to take a look at where you may be stuck in spirals of pain, guilt, and shame. These things keep us biologically from looking at the truth of the thoughts we've been taught, and 110% keep us from taking action to make change when our thoughts stay centered in our negative self-talk.

It's natural to want to avoid thinking about these things, and that, that attempt to push the thoughts away, that will lead you to feel ungrounded, anxious, to buffer, and to take frenetic action to try to deny and avoid the feels.

That is, looking at your thoughts and feelings head on is absolutely uncomfortable and can lead you to be part of change, of healing for the world, while pushing it away, I can only speak to my own experience, but dios santo, so much more painful.

Meanwhile, when you work to release the guilt and shame, you can release that stuck feeling. That anxiety, which we know is the tension on your body that comes from denying and trying to be something other than a human raised when and where you were with the implicit biases you were taught, which takes us to the next step, which is acceptance.

And this is where I find that people struggle the most, to accept that these narratives of white supremacy live within us, often unchecked, unseen, unacknowledged, unexamined in our minds, and to accept that we get to do the work to unpack our privilege without shaming and guiltting ourselves, which is so unhelpful.

To continue our example from above, you might say to yourself, "I accept that I was raised with codependent thought habits by my caretaker or parent who modeled that. I took it in unconsciously and started to enact it in

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ways so insidious I didn't even realize it. Now that I'm aware of it, I can begin to accept that that way of being, those habits live within me and are harmful to me and everyone else in the world."

Sub in racism here, my darling love, and keep breathing. The next step is action. Action here means to do the work, to move towards being more and more anti-racist each and every day, tiny step by tiny step. This is not the moment to shoot that second arrow, my love. And if that Buddhist concept is new to you, do listen to episode 15 all about the second arrow.

My darling, this is not the moment to beat yourself up. This is the moment to do what we do in this familia, to get more and more comfortable with the discomfort of this work. We talk about it in terms of meditation. We talk about getting comfortable with the discomfort of journaling, of doing thought work. We get to apply that same skillset, that muscle of getting comfortable with discomfort that we flexed for our wellness to work to be anti-racist.

And baby, it's not cozy. It's not comfortable. It's not fun. And that's fine. That's totally okay. It's vital to get comfortable with the discomfort of growth, learning, changing, F-ing up, and learning how to be a thoughtful and openhearted accomplice.

Silence is violence, my beauty. Waiting to speak up until you can say it perfectly is self-centering. And especially if you're a coach, a therapist, a leader, a spiritual guider, breath worker, a self-proclaimed healer, my darling, speak up. Get it wrong. Be okay with that. Fail, fail again, fail better, as Pema Chodron has taught us, especially if you're not black and your life isn't literally on the line.

Buy books written by black women, from black-owned bookstores. Read them, form a book club. Join groups like SURJ, Showing Up for Racial

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Justice, and learn. Learn with other white folks and white presenting folks. Don't ask people of color to do your work for you.

And my beauty, do your thought work on the daily. I've taught you how to do it. Because if you don't, those cassette tapes keep rolling on in your mind unchallenged and unconscious. And there are so many beautiful and amazing resources available online to begin to look at your biases, your white or white passing privilege.

I've compiled a list on my website and it is by no means exhaustive. It's just one resource. And you can find it and share if you're so inclined at victoriaalbina.com/donate. And that's the URL because I had originally put it up as a place, a sort of holding spot for lists of where people could donate and I've expanded it to include a number of black women that I'd love you to follow on social media, whose books I'd love you to buy, et cetera.

On that tip, I highly recommend Rachel Cargle's work as a place to start. And for my coaches listening, please pay Trudi Lebron. She's amazing. And in lieu of my telling you further how to start seeing your white privilege, I'll pass the mic to black women, so go check that document out.

Three, your nervous system. So we talk about action, my nerds. We need to talk about the role of the nervous system here. A lot of my clients and colleagues are in dorsal vagal shutdown around this. Immobilization, freeze. So scared to do or say the wrong thing and to get called out about it that we don't do the work because we get stuck in that activated fear body.

And that's where the work needs to start, to learn to be okay with getting told, of being called out, to release the perfectionist thought habits that keep you procrastinating and spinning and being obsessed with being the A+ gold star in every area of your life, which you bring to this work to be

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actively anti-racist, which keeps you disregulated when you think about your bias, your racism, your cassette tapes.

So instead, I invite you to welcome it, to be open to failing on purpose, which we talked about at length in episodes 39 and 40, and to open your mind and your heart to black and brown people telling you that you F-ed up. And that's not just okay. It's a gift for marginalized folks to give you their labor, including the labor of telling you you misspoke, took a wrong action, centered yourself in a conversation, were performative in your allyship, optical, versus doing the work and being a true accomplice in this lucha.

Acceptance. Accept that you have bias, you can work on it. You will do it wrong and take action. My beauty, you have to get regulated. We as white and white passing folks have to get regulated in our bodies and nervous system if we're to be accomplices to black folks and other POCs and marginalized groups.

If this language, all this polyvagal talk is new to you, head over to episodes 61 and 48, which are all about the nervous system, and of course, there will be more to come. And remember, I did share some really concrete tips to help bring you back to ventral from sympathetic, which is fight or flight, and to bring you back to ventral, that safe and secure place, from dorsal. Those are all over on my Instagram, @victoriaalbinawellness, in an Instagram TV I did right after George Floyd was murdered.

So as an educator, coach, nurse practitioner and nervous system nerd, I know this to be true. Mental and physical health starts with feeling safe in your body, your nervous system, and the world. And black and brown folks have not known that true, deep felt sense of safety out in the white world because of a need, and I mean need to be hypervigilant, to be in sympathetic dominance because of our racist system where black people

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get murdered for going on a walk or a run or sitting in their car or having a bachelor party or going to the grocery store.

And when that part of your nervous system is on high alert, when the fear center in your brain, your amygdala is activated, when the world is read as a threat by your subcortical brain, which it is for marginalized folks, oppressed folks, healing is a challenging thing.

And the cognitive modalities I teach are impossible without that felt sense of safety in the body, and it's incumbent on all of us who do not walk in black and brown bodies to manage our minds so we can speak up, put ourselves, our reputations, egos, jobs, sense of security on the line to speak up and to be part of the solution, and to use whatever regulation we can tap into in our nervous systems to offer the invitation - those are careful words - offer the invitation of co-regulation with the black and brown people we love in our world.

And so we start with listening. Start with doing our own shadow work, looking at where we're being appropriative of other cultures, and yes, I'm talking to you, spiritual world. We start by having the hard conversations with the people in our world, being a voice for change, doing our own inner child and nervous system work, we start there and we start with our thoughts.

So let's talk about the barriers to showing up for black folks right now. The main one I see is that when you're rolling around in your shock, sadness, disbelief, you're not taking action. We talk about this a lot, and I want into depth about this in the episode about worry. When you're in worry, you're not in action to change your life or the world.

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When you're focused on centering your own comfort in a situation, worrying about being called out or called in, worrying about being told that someone thinks you did it wrong, worrying you made a mistake or might make a mistake, all of that can trigger us to defend ourselves, to go into fight or flight, sympathetic, or into dorsal vagal shutdown, that immobilization place.

And from both of those places, we are not effective, efficient, or helpful. We are not our highest selves. We are not our most cognitively capable selves. That is when you're focused on your own shame or embarrassment or worry, your own people pleasing and perfectionism, you're physiologically not listening, not thinking well, not showing up, not rising to your fullest capacity to use your voice for good because science.

And a huge part of this work is to put aside your own shame, worry, and fear. I've spoken to that point quite clearly, I'd say. My love, trust and believe that I get it. My inner children have historically been so scared of being told that we've done something wrong because we equated being told we did something wrong with being wrong.

That's the difference between guilt, I did an oopsie, and shame, I am an oopsie. And fine, that's the language that I use to talk to my inner children about oopsies, but in your adult brain, it could sound more like, "Ugh, I'm an F up. I'm garbage. I'm not a good ally. I don't know where to start. I'm scared to do this work because I'll do it wrong, my racist uncle will tell me that I'm making trouble or I'm being impolite or I'm not being a good girl effectively, or my black friends or folks out in the world may tell me I'm doing allyship wrong." All of that.

And internally, it can sound like confirmation of your worst fears about being a bad or worthless or useless human. Thoughts you were taught in childhood and by your own socialization, culture, family.

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In my life, the more work I've done to get right with this, to understand what I remind you all of so often, that you and I were born completely and utterly perfect and amazing and so worth of love, the more I'm able to put my own stuff aside by giving it love and care, never by shutting it down, so I can show up now as ever to be actively anti-racist, to be okay with being wrong and walking around with the privilege of my own white skin, again, as a Latina who gets to code switch with ease.

And I get to continue to push through my own comfort zone, to not allow myself to hide out behind my own trauma, worry, and fear. My love, I want to encourage you to care about thought work around racism for yourself, for your empowerment and because of how your own unconscious thought protocols, your own TFAR, thought, feeling, action, result impacts and harms others.

The way you may be upholding systems that harm community of color by not challenging them and by using them when they're convenient and serve us, like Amy Cooper did when she threatened to call the police, knowing she would be protected, not thinking or maybe thinking, I actually don't know, about the risk of harm and death she was potentially putting a black man in for invoking that system.

My sweet beauty, do this work with love, gentleness, and above all, an open heart and mind. Show up. And start where you're at. If you're scared to go to a protest, then donate, read, support black folks, and then do the thought work protocol on those fear thoughts and decide if you want to keep them, if they serve you or humanity.

And above all, start. Spend your time, energy, money to uplift humanity, starting with black folks, and not to spin in self-pity, worry, or fear, so you

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can push past your internal cassette tapes, those internal biases and your own comfort zone to take action.

The time is now. Remember to head on over to victoriaalbina.com/donate to get my list, which is an imperfect list, I'm quite sure. I know for sure there's many, many authors and organizations that are not on this one list, but it's something. It's one offering.

For everyone listening, I want to support you in this work. I deeply believe in the power of meditation, visualization, of grounding ourselves in our bodies, of orienting, which is a nervous system exercise. So I'll put a link in the show notes for this episode.

You can head on over to my website, victoriaalbina.com. Right there on the homepage, you can download my free meditations. Please use them, share them, enjoy them. Regulate yourself, my beautiful love, so you can do your thought work.

That's it for today. Let's take a big deep breath in together and out. With a sweet hand on your sweet hand, I want you to remember, you are safe, you are held, you are loved. And when one of us heals, we help heal the world. Be well, my darling. I'll talk to you soon.