

Ep #283: A Protocol for Becoming Securely Attached with Thais Gibson



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Host

Victoria: Albina, NP, MPH

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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 co-dependency 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. I want to say, ciao from Italia.

My dear friend Kara got married and took a group of her closest friends and family to Italia to have a group honeymoon. And first of all, it's just such a beautiful idea to share this special time, this celebration, with the people you love. Such a beautiful celebration, yes, of romantic love, but also the power of friendship.

There are several women here who've known Kara since second grade, I think, some from kindergarten, some are newer friends like me; I've only known her 10 or 15 years. It's just so amazing. I mean, I'm never out here complaining about being in Tuscany, right? So, ciao from Italia.

It's also been so fun to talk to people in Spanish really slowly. If you're new to the show, I'm from Argentina. Spanish is my first language. And so, I just say, "Parlo Italiano..." then I say, "I don't speak Italian, but can we do Spanish really slow and Italian really slow?" And people appreciate the effort.

It's just so fun to explore the world and get to share this time and experience with my beautiful wife, Billey, and with all these dear friends. And congratulations to Matthew and Kara. Thanks for having us along.

So, this week, I am so excited to share a conversation I had with the amazing Thais Gibson. She's a counselor, best-selling author, co-founder of the Personal Development School. She's a fancy pants with a PhD, is also trained in Somatic Experiencing... Which is my training; very cool... and she runs a school that's all about Integrated Attachment Theory, which is the focus of her work in psychology.

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She's super cool. We had a super powerful, beautiful, deep conversation. And I'm so excited to share it with you because it was a whole lot of fun. She also is from Toronto, which is where we are moving to in like three weeks. How fun, right? Right.

So, I hope you enjoy the conversation. And if you do, you're enjoying the show, I'd be so grateful if you could leave a five-star rating and review on Apple Podcast or wherever you get your show; even just a short, "This is good show."

Every review really helps the show come up higher in searches, which means more people are getting this free resource in their ears. And that's my goal, to share all the education I've been so immensely privileged to have. So, thank you, thank you, and take it away.

Victoria Albina: Hello, Thais, thank you so much for being here.

Thais Gibson: Thank you for having me. Excited to be here with you.

Victoria: It's so fun. I would love it if you could introduce yourself to the good people. I feel like I always do a better job introducing myself than anyone else, so...

Thais: My name is Thais. I am from Toronto, Ontario; I know we were just chatting a little bit about that. I spent a lot of time running our programs at the Personal Development School. I have a background in psychology, especially transpersonal psychology, a PhD in pastoral counseling, and a big focus area around hypnotherapy.

So, I've spent the last quite a few years, the last 12-13 years, in combination of private practice. I retired my private practice and went into building programs at the Personal Development School, and focused a lot on attachment styles and Attachment Theory in that space too.

Victoria: I love talking about attachment. It's such an important topic that I'm really glad it's finally getting its due. You know what I mean? As you know, my work is really about the evidence base, the place where the science

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and the woo meet, and really making sure that people understand a lot of the things we're seeing as hashtag trends in hashtag education these days, you know what I mean? Really clarifying the pop psychology.

So, I want to dive right in since you're such an expert on attachment. First of all, for folks who haven't heard about attachment styles, could you give us a really quick 101?

Thais: Psych 101. Your attachment style is basically the subconscious set of rules you have about love. So, we get conditioned growing up, we learn what our needs should look like, what connection should look like, what to expect in relationships, what boundaries should look like.

And you can think of your attachment styles as that subconscious set of conditioned patterns that you've learned, that we tend to bring into our relationships. There are four major attachment styles. In a very brief format:

There's the anxious attachment style, who tends to basically be quite needy and often clingy because they have deep abandonment wounds from childhood and a fear of being alone.

And we have, basically at the other end of the attachment continuum, the dismissive-avoidant attachment style. They tend to be really marked by childhood emotional neglect, which causes them to fear being engulfed or enmeshed. But also causes them to sort of grow up thinking 'something's wrong with me,' because we're wired for attunement in childhood. And so, when we can't get those needs met, often that's internalized as shame.

And then our third insecure attachment style is the fearful avoidant attachment style, who really shares in both sides of the attachment continuum.

You'll often hear fearful avoidant also referred to as disorganized. They have both that anxious side, that fear of abandonment, but also that fear of being trapped like the dismissive avoidant. And they tend to fear really letting their guard down and trusting in relationships, because their childhood tends to have a lot more chaos.

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And last but not least, we have the secure attachment style. And the secure attachment style has a lot of what we call “approach-oriented behaviors” in psychology. So, they tend to have a lot of attunements from their caregivers. When they cry or express their needs at a young age, the caregivers tend to go towards them, approach them, try to figure out what's going on and how they can soothe them.

And it conditions this child to grow up thinking that relationships are safe. We can trust other people. We can rely on them. We can connect. And they, statistically, as adults have the easiest time in relationships and have the most long-lasting relationships, and report being the happiest in the relationships overall.

Victoria: And I feel like they're unicorns, right? The thoroughly, securely attached are the unicorns of the relationship spectrum.

Thais: I think to your point too, the securely attached styles are becoming less and less right now. A lot of what we're doing is focusing on how you can earn “secure”. How you can actually get into a space where you do that healing work to become securely attached, because it's not like a diagnosis or a disorder.

But I think especially now, with the world sort of the way it is and a lot of things that we're seeing, it's harder and harder to have a securely attached child being raised with all the stressors and pressure that's happening in the world.

Victoria: But I also feel like there's so much more education. I mean, I'm not a parent, so who am I to say? I don't know, I hear my clients and they're watching so many reels and reading so many books and learning so much about gentle parenting, but assertive, but affirmative... I guess I have hope when I look at my friends and my clients.

Thais: I agree with you 100%. But I think that speaks to the point that we can do that, earn “secure” work, right? Or we can do that healing because

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there's more emotional literacy that's becoming mainstream, because there's more introspection.

And I love that whole realm of conscious parenting, and really teaching children in healthier forms. Instead of that traditional punishment/reward system or classical conditioning system, which is essentially a lot of small-t trauma that happens repeatedly over time to individuals at a young age. It really adds up, right?

Victoria: And it's no wonder we don't feel... I talk about, when I define codependent thinking, it's what happens as a result of a lack of felt embodied safety, belonging and worth. And that classical conditioning takes all three of those things right off the table so quickly, right?

Thais: Absolutely.

Victoria: So, what's a human to do if you've learned enough to know 'I don't have that secure unicorn style'? What do we do?

Thais: Okay, there has been a lot of research that we've done on this topic as a whole. So, there was, obviously, the original, traditional Attachment Theory with John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. It was great work. Amazing stuff. But they never really shifted into how we can change our attachment style.

We're not born with an attachment style. And someone, like myself, who has a big background in hypnotherapy and the subconscious mind and how we receive our conditioned patterns, it was like, "Well, we get conditioned with an attachment style. And so, we can leverage those principles of neuroplasticity and subconscious reprogramming to recondition."

So, we've narrowed it down. I was in private practice, seeing about 40-45 clients a week for the better part of 10 years, and something like 15,000-18,000 client sessions, and I focused a lot in the specific area. And with a lot of that firsthand research, I found that there are basically five major areas that we can focus on to become securely attached.

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Number one is reconditioning these fears we have about love, based on our childhood. So, these ideas that, "I will always be betrayed. I will be abandoned. I will be trapped. I'll always end up with the wrong person." We have to recondition those stories that we have because of painful events in our past that our subconscious mind has stored.

Number two, after we do that core wound reconditioning, we have to learn what our needs are and how to meet them in relationship to self. If we do that, we actually have the capacity to self-soothe rather than just self-numb; that you would see with a dismissive-avoidant. Or try to get everybody else to soothe us if we're more anxiously attached.

The third thing is we need emotional regulation work. So, that has a lot to do with our nervous system work, meditation, breath work, body scans; all these things we can do to become more embodied. And once we've done those three things, in relationship to self-first... We've learned to question these old stories, meet our needs, do this embodiment and nervous system work... we can then actually move that out into our world with others.

And that requires us to learn healthy communication skills about our needs and healthy boundaries. And if we focus on those five crucial areas... We've got really big tools for how to tap into each of those five areas, and how to actually recondition at a subconscious level... that's when we'll end up seeing that we become securely attached.

Victoria: I love that we're starting off with the hope piece, because it's just so easy to go into that pit of despair. Where it's like, "Alright, well, XYZ happened in my childhood, I guess I'm perma-F'd." You know what I mean?

Thais: 100%, and I want to say something to that that's so important. I say this all the time to people in our programs. But I, especially when I was in client practice, never cared, when couples would come in to work with me, I never cared how much trauma somebody had. It was irrelevant to me. I don't care how much trauma, what type of trauma, that was not going to impact if somebody becomes securely attached. It was, are both people willing to do the work? And as long as we're willing to do that work...

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I think that's something that's so important to recognize. There are two things about the subconscious mind. Number one, you're subconscious and unconscious mind, collectively, are responsible for 95-97% of your beliefs, thoughts, emotions, actions.

Victoria: It so conquers. To interrupt you, it's just so wild to be a human walking around the world, thinking we have so much control over what we're thinking, right? And then we pause, and we think we're getting so meta, and then meta about being meta. But...

Thais: There's usually a lot more going on beneath the surface; all of our autopilot programs...

Victoria: Yeah, that limbic system. We talk a lot about the lizard brain around here. And yeah, it just runs the show. All right, go on, you were on number two, I believe.

Thais: I love it. And so, conscious mind is roughly 3-5%. And then the second big piece is that your conscious mind cannot outwill or overpower your subconscious mind. You see this in human behavior, right? You see people who go, "I want to make sure that I set my New Year's resolution. I'm going to quit eating chocolate."

Victoria: Sure. And it's like, whoa, whoa. We cannot. People, please do not ever quit eating chocolate. I just need to say this. My answer, right, it's the food of the gods. We have to be very clear here. Go on.

Thais: And so, you'll see all these ways that we do this. We're like, "I'm going to stop getting angry in relationships. I'm going to start setting healthy boundaries. I want to do all these things." We have all of these things that we say that we're going to do, but when we don't follow through, what that's actually illustrating is the difference between our conscious mind's intentions and our subconscious programming and conditioning.

So, when we can tap in, we can tackle those five areas; reprogramming those fearful ideas about relationships, meeting our needs, doing some nervous system work, communication boundary work. We can tackle those

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five areas in a way that allows us to actually recondition our subconscious programs. And that is where we'll really see the needle move.

That's where we'll see that there's not just hope, but it's very feasible to become securely attached.

Victoria: It's so beautiful. I'm really excited to have an attachment nerd expert here for this one. So, I've come to understand that our attachment styles are survival styles, right? It's the way we learned in childhood to get through childhood. And it's the way we relate towards people on whom we are literally dependent, right? Like kids on caregivers.

And so, it doesn't make sense to me, then... Let's complicate this, when people say, "Oh, I'm so insecure in romantic relationships." How do you think about that? Because to me, it doesn't quite click.

Thais: Yeah. So, it's a great question, and I love the nuances of this. There are a couple of things that also go into the backstory of it. The first thing is that our subconscious mind and our attachment style forms because of repetition and emotion. It's how we fire and wire those neuro pathways and form those patterns. It's also really important to recognize that our subconscious mind is an association making machine.

So, generally, a lot of the traditional Attachment Theory research out of Cambridge University with John Bowlby, discussed how we actually replace our childhood relationships with our primary caregivers in our adult life with our romantic relationship.

So, even though we may not have that same degree of dependency that we do in childhood, where literally our caregivers have to feed us and meet our needs and clothe us, when we look at the form of interdependency, there is this component of us depending on each other in various degrees. But more than anything, it's actually that vulnerability aspect of it when we really let something in that triggers those subconscious associations that foster this degree about feeling like we depend on this individual.

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And then we'll very likely bring out those same attachment patterns. So, if you follow the thread all the way through, how people are feeling and experiencing it that way.

The second part is that our subconscious mind can be reprogrammed all the time. So, our ideas about love. Somebody can be securely attached and then, all of a sudden, at eight years old, they go through this terrible divorce with their parents, or one parent perhaps passes away, and that could trigger them to form an anxious attachment style.

Because we have neuroplasticity, we are being conditioned and reconditioned all the time. So, there are two pieces here happening. Number one, our subconscious mind is forming these associations. When we get vulnerable, it reminds us of the degree of vulnerability in childhood and triggers us to have those attachment patterns that we use and connect with in our adult relationships.

It's just not necessarily as intense as the level of vulnerability we had in childhood with our caregivers. And number two, we also have this dynamic where sometimes our attachment style can change or fluctuate throughout the course of our lives from relationship to relationship.

Victoria: Yeah, that makes a lot of sense. Right. So then of course, reenactment feels like it's quite a part of this, right?

Thais: Absolutely.

Victoria: I have defined reenactment. Would you please define it for the good folks and talk about how it plays out with attachment?

Thais: Yes. So, by the way, I'm actually really interested to hear your definition of it. But here's an analogy for it. So, the way that we end up in these reenacting situations... And this is extraordinarily common. I think this is something that people have no idea how deep it actually reaches. But what happens is our subconscious mind forms a comfort zone, and it really doesn't want this comfort zone to change.

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So, if we, for example, grow up as an anxious attachment style, where we are taught that we have to stay externally focused, we have to please other people, we're trying to soothe through others, actually what's happening is that subconscious comfort zone in relationship to self, is that we're busy dismissing or maybe avoiding our own feelings, needs and boundaries in favor of externally people pleasing. And so, guess what happens?

Well, that subconscious comfort zone, we are most likely to be attracted to people who treat us the way we treat ourselves, because it's what's most familiar. And what's familiar is safe and equal to survival. And at the end of the day, the subconscious mind is very survival oriented.

So, what you'll see take place is this reenactment. The way it's actually happening is that it's just our subconscious trying to maintain its comfort zone. Meaning, if we felt dismissed in childhood, we'll internalize that relationship to self and we will go on to date external partners. Where, guess what? They're also dismissing or avoiding us.

And that's actually that reenactment cycle playing out. And you see this with narcissistic relationships, unfortunately; people who end up in narcissistic relationships. I've never seen a person... And this is absolutely not me blaming this person, this comes from earlier trauma...

But I never had a client, when I was running my practice, who was in a long-term narcissistic relationship with a narcissist, who didn't first have these deep-rooted patterns themselves; of being very self-critical, violating their boundaries, people pleasing so much, manipulating themselves to be who they thought other people wanted them to be.

So, of course, their subconscious mind is drawn to people who will manipulate them, violate their boundaries, criticize them, etc. because that's what's comfortable and familiar.

Victoria: We talk a lot about the things that 'haven't killed me yet', being the things that your nervous system, your soma, is naturally going to gravitate

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towards. Because, a new red berry in the forest you haven't eaten yet, hmmm, probably not so smart, right?

So, it makes sense. Reenactment, the way the nervous system attunes that way, and continuing to have the same attachment style over and over in all these different relationships.

Thais: And really the attachment style is the relationship to yourself first, that's where it's really coming from. And so much of our childhood is internalized. So, I often say to people, for example, your internal dialogue is often your internalized dialogue. How you were spoken to in childhood becomes how you speak to yourself.

And then, we will often be attracted to people who mirror that back to us. And if we take that a step further, your conscious mind picks up about 4060 bits per second of data. You're subconscious and unconscious, collectively pick up to a billion bits per second of data.

So, when people say, "How do I keep going back? Why do I always see the same type of emotionally unavailable person, or the same type of person who violates my boundaries? Why do I always end up with these types of situations or people?" It's because when you meet somebody, you are taking an enormous amount of information through micro expressions, body language, tone of voice, how long they maintain eye contact; all these little nuanced pieces.

And we'll end up investing in people. Only a very tiny portion of that, that 40-60 bits per second of data makes it to your conscious mind's awareness. And all of this web of information you're storing and taking in at a more subconscious level, that's causing you to be attracted to people where your conscious mind may even know better and go, "There are some red flags here." But the subconscious mind might be like, "Well, it's familiar. So, we're going to jump back in here."

Victoria: "Yay, I love a red flag."

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And that is one of the top three things that will actually determine what we're attracted to in relationships; if that person represents a point of familiarity and how we treat ourselves.

Victoria: Wow. So, then it makes sense that we would... By getting to know what our own shiniest red flags are, the most alluring of red flags, that's the way to begin to break free of all this, right?

Thais: There's a one really good exercise that you can do around that, absolutely. You can ask yourself: What are the things... I actually call this your "relationship shadow"; if you're familiar with Carl Jung and shadow work. I call this your "relationship shadow", and what I get people to do is...

If you always find that you're in the same type of relationship with somebody; maybe you always have the same type of best friend and they also have the same patterns as all of your exes, and those are the things that trigger you. Or, these relationships that we find ourselves investing in they really trigger us.

I ask individuals to sit down and say, "Well, what are the specific traits that trigger us?" So, let's just use the example that somebody who doesn't listen to you is something that triggers you. And not you necessarily, but we'll say, but person X.

And so, let's say that person says, "You know what? I always end up with partners who don't listen to me. Friends who don't listen to me. That's my big trigger." Well, what I ask them to then do is look in three areas.

Number one, and this is first and foremost the biggest one. Where do I not listen to myself? Because what we're attracted to and investing in is that subconscious comfort zone. And often it's somebody mirroring back to us how we treat ourselves, and that's part of why it's triggering. We take things personally that are personal to us in our programming.

And so, that's a really big piece. And then we can look at, where do I not listen back reactively? So, where do I represent the same behavior or trait back to the person I'm judging. Which, often, we'll see that reactive form of

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it. Somebody doesn't listen to me and maybe I go, "I'm not going to listen to you either."

Victoria: And then we don't comment. It feels like you're protecting yourself. Like, "Forget you then. If you're going to be like that, I'm not even... Forget it." All right, and number three?

Thais: And number three is, where am I also doing the same thing to somebody else in my life and not realizing? And it's not always there. But sometimes when we look carefully, we see, "Oh, yeah, my partner does this to me, but I actually do this to one of my parents, my sibling," or whoever it might be.

And so, it gives us that 360-degree view that shadow work is sort of contended to do. And people see this a lot. Manipulation is a big one. Where I manipulate myself and maybe please other people. Or somebody is dismissing me. Where do I dismiss my own feelings and needs?

And we'll generally see that part of that zone of familiarity is because we are treating ourselves that way, makes it comfortable. And then, that's what we invest in.

Victoria: It's interesting. In Anchored, my six-month program, we were talking the other day about how we often resent people, or get annoyed by people, who allow themselves things we don't allow ourselves. It's sort of the flip side of this in a way.

So, a client was saying her husband's so lazy. And he just doesn't take any initiative. And he's always sitting on the couch after work. And I was like, "Well, when's the last time you sat on the couch?" "I don't." I was like, "When's the last time you let someone else take initiative?" "I don't." And I get it, the house probably would collapse if she didn't do it; everything, right?

So, there's the reality in here, and the frustration comes from, we have these scripts that say 'I can't rest. I can't stop. I can't pause,' that we project onto others.

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Thais: So, I love this topic so much. I don't know if you're familiar with the work of Susan Johnson, but she talks of the six stages of relationship: Your dating stage, your honeymoon stage, your power struggle... Statistically where most people break up... You make it out of there and you go to the stability, commitment, and bliss stages. Bliss is like the honeymoon stage but without the mask; you know each other more deeply.

And the most interesting part about exactly what you're saying is that every single time that we get triggered by somebody, usually in the power struggle stage, those things that really bother us, those were actually things that we were infatuated with in the dating or honeymoon stage.

So, there are three things that drive attraction. Let me backtrack. Number one thing that drives attraction in the dating and honeymoon stage, somebody who meets your deeply unmet needs from childhood. If you felt unseen your whole life, somebody makes you feel seen when you're dating them, it's like a crack, right? People are like, "Oh, my gosh."

Number two, somebody who's expressing your repressed traits. That's where we get that "opposites attract."

Number three, what we'll invest in the longest term is somebody who mirrors back to us some unconscious comforts on how we treat ourselves. So, those are the three factors driving attraction.

But interestingly enough, you'll see the first two in the dating and honeymoon stage, and then that subconscious comfort zone is what really takes seed long term. But we'll always see, somebody in the dating stage might be like, "Oh my gosh, I'm so attracted to this person. They're so easy going," and the power struggle comes on and they're like, "They never do anything."

It'll be like, "Oh, this person, they're so assertive. Oh my gosh, it's so attractive." And then the power struggle stage comes in and they're like, "They never compromise with me." And the way out of exactly that, that you

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were sharing, and I'm sure you've done probably this work too, but it's to learn to integrate those traits in a healthy way in relationship to self.

And as we do, that's actually the purpose and a sense of the relationship, we integrate some of the traits from one another and it actually brings a greater sense of wholeness to ourselves.

Victoria: Yeah. Can you get even more nuts and bolts? What do we mean by “integrate that aspect”?

Thais: Great question. It means we learn to practice those traits in our own lives. And we do this a lot through something called “exposure work”, which is that we actually have to make this intentional at first. As we talked about earlier, the subconscious mind, where we get that actual wired sense of self, it gets programmed through repetition and emotion. And a lot of the research shows that it takes about 21 days to recondition new neural pathways and get away from old ones as they atrophy over time.

So, what we'll see is that through those 21 days, if somebody says, “Oh my gosh, this person, they never make compromises,” well, I actually... And this was actually personal to me. I was very attracted to my husband at the beginning because he was so assertive. And I thought that was such a great trait. And I thought it was so attractive. And then the power struggle stage came along; we've been together for 10 years now, so this is years ago.

But I was sitting there going, “Oh, he doesn't make compromises.” And so, I knew this. I had this awareness ahead of time. And I was like, “Well, I have to practice being assertive and saying, ‘Look, I need compromises. Look, here's my need.’ ”

And in doing that, it actually grew me into a healthier space. It also grew him into a healthier space, because he had to be more mindful of those things and communicate better. And it was beneficial for both of us in the relationship. But when we don't do that work, things can fall apart instead, or create resentment.

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Victoria: Oh, for sure. And that's where really focusing... and in my work, I've come from Somatic Experiencing... so really focusing on felt, embodied, oriented safety so that we can be assertive, right? Because if we're not feeling safe, how are we going to say 'my needs matter,' right?

And that loops me then around to when you were sharing the five things to work on, or to work through, to step onto the other side of insecure forms of attachment. One of them was get to know ourselves and our needs. And this is something that comes up so much for my clients. What are your tips on getting to know yourself and your needs when you've always pushed them aside for survival reasons?

Thais: It's such a great question. And so, there are a few tips. And I'll say one thing too, it's so important for these things to be drawn together. Because when we get into a place where we want to express our needs, we need that embodied safety, that nervous system work, right? Which is point number three.

We also need, though, to recondition the scary ideas we have about expressing our needs. If we believe at a core wound level, "Oh my gosh, if I express my needs, I'll be too much. I'll be abandoned," then we go back into that space. So, that's where that belief reprogramming is so valuable as well, to make sure that we're working through those things.

So, when it comes to actually knowing our needs and learning them, one of the first exercises I give to people is... I give them a worksheet, a very indepth needs worksheet. And I just ask them, "If you were in a relationship to somebody else and you had the perfect partner, what needs would they meet for you on a regular basis?"

And what I find is that it tends to really trend by attachment style, ancient attachment styles. They want certainty, consistency, validation, reassurance, acknowledgement.

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Dismissive-avoidant; they want freedom, independence, but they also want appreciation, acknowledgement, harmony, support, empathy, and acceptance. Those are big dismissive-avoidant needs.

And fearful-avoidance tend to want depth, intimacy, closeness, novelty, exploration, freedom and independence at the same time. So, they have those sort of two sides to their attachment style. And I find it helps to break it down that way.

Victoria: And then on the day to day, this is something I end up coaching on and working with a lot. "I don't know what I want for dinner. I don't know what movie I want to watch," right? That level of disconnection for me.

I have a number of exercises I use with my clients. And I'm curious where you go to help people really connect in with that quotidian level?

Thais: Yeah, what I find is that when people are most disconnected from needs to that degree... So, I'm not talking about, "Hey, how can I fine tune or get more specific?"... Generally, it first represents that they're disconnected from their own feelings and their own body. Because our needs are quite clear; it's very clear. I want them to say "When my feelings are sponsoring that."

And so, if we can first get in touch and actually do a lot of work to get back into our body, a lot of meditation or breath work... I also have a background as well in Somatic Experiencing... And a lot of that sort of nervous system work can get us more attuned to ourselves. And then I get people to really explore.

So, I give people a needs worksheet and I say like, "Try to just vet and audit what comes up for you in your life on a regular basis, and especially around your triggers." So, when something bothers you, ask yourself: What do I need to feel relief? Practice going back into your body, getting present, staying there for a little bit of time.

And then when you've had that opportunity to reorient yourself, then go into your needs and be like, "Oh, yeah, I guess if I felt seen that would feel

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better. I guess if I felt understood, I would feel better.” And then I get people to say, “Well, what is the strategy I can use to now get that need met?” So that they actually action them out rather than just cognitively understand them.

Victoria: Right. Oh, I got little shivers, right? It's just such a clear... I'm such a nerd for a protocol, right? And it just gives folks so many places to really sort of click in and make actual lasting change, right? It's very exciting. What's your favorite part of this work?

Thais: Oh my gosh, my favorite part of this work as a person, because I did this work... I was a fearful-avoidant. So, I had lots of attachment things to work on. My favorite part of this work was working through all my old stories, all my core wounds. Like always believing, going into relationships as a young teenager, “I'll always be betrayed or abandoned and trapped.” Or always fearing being too close or being too far, and just all the emotional energy that took up.

And then to work through, and really work to recondition, those scary stories and those ideas. It allowed me to really trust and be in relationship in a healthy way, and really connect and let my guard down and trust the future, trust a person, trust myself.

And so, really, when we look at our beliefs and those core wounds that we have, those scary relationship ideas, abandonment, trapped, betrayal, they produce a lot of negative thought energy, right? We think a lot of negative thoughts when we believe these core ideas, and we'll feed into those things. And then we feel negatively. And then neuroscience has proven every decision we make is based on our emotions. So, we kind of have this runaway train that happens.

But for me, by reconditioning a lot of those core wounds, my internal dialogue settled, I wouldn't jump into things as much. And I just went into a much more peaceful space where I could sort of focus my energy and attention on creating life, or designing things I wanted, or contributing rather than always feeling like I was fighting off something because of these scary

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ideas that were always lingering in the background of my subconscious mind.

Victoria: Yeah. So, I'm hearing in there, presence and intentionality. How beautiful, and how beautiful to embody those and then take that to your clients. I'm curious, nerd to nerd, how do you bring Somatic Experiencing into this work?

Thais: Well, a lot of the work here is getting people back in touch with their body. And so, we do a lot of, in our program specifically, we have a nervous system regulation and somatic processing course. And I'll get people to spend a lot of time.

I'll give a backstory. So, there's this study done, and you probably heard about this too, where they took participants and they put them into fMRI scanners. And they had the participants recall these really traumatic events or experiences.

And then, what they found is that a lot of that brain activity would go into the reptilian brain, amygdala, and get very activated. But then, what researchers found is when participants sat there and were able to just witness the sensations in their body and label the sensations and describe the emotions and just get present with that, a lot of brain activity... Actually, they could see on scans... came back into the prefrontal cortex regions and neocortex.

And so, what I get a lot of individuals to do, if this is something they haven't had the opportunity to do much at all, is first understand that piece. And then have the practice of, when they're triggered, rather than going into the mind and the story or the past or the future, to get really present in their body and practice attuning to those sensations, describing their emotions. And that really reconnects them in those core moments. And then we go into, afterwards: What is the core wound underneath that created that reactive response to begin with?

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And if we can recondition that... For example, let's say somebody has this an abandoned core wound that causes all the panic in their body. Well, now they can somatically process it in those moments. And then, when they feel more aligned and back to center, they can actually go into reprogramming this idea that they're always going to be abandoned.

So that they don't always just have to deal with it somatically. They can do that in that reactive way, but also go underneath and do the reconditioning of those scary ideas as well.

Victoria: Oh, I love that. And yeah, those affect labeling fMRI studies are absolutely incredible. I love looking at those scans. It's so interesting, right? Because we started talking about what a small percentage of our thoughts we actually have access to. And it's really just such a potent reminder that while we might not have access to the majority of our thoughts, we can have so much influence on how we feel, how we process, how we move through life by simply sitting with it. By simply being with it.

I was at a group coaching thing the other day with other coaches, and one of the coaches was talking about how she keeps getting so wildly dysregulated. And she needs to "work" harder at regulation. I just took a breath and I said, "Sweet, you don't need to do more, you just get to be with yourself, and be with your nervous system, and just hold space for your nervous system." And I think that really is the shift, right? Instead of just doing, just being.

Thais: Absolutely. It reminds me of this great quote, an Eckhart Tolle quote. And he says, "The more identified we are with the mind, the more we suffer." It's that ability to be in our body. It really gives us space from that ongoing set of thoughts that are then causing the emotional reactions and causing the actions to take place.

And by really just being, we kind of get out of that train that carries us away. And so, a lot of that practice is so powerful in terms of regulating our nervous system and then creating in our healing.

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Victoria: So beautiful, such a powerful gift to not just give ourselves, but within the context of attachment styles and relating, what a gift to give our romantic partners, our parents, our friends, our kids, our cousins, or everyone around us. To just be a more present animal in the world.

Thais: I think it's hard for some people when they never had this knowledge or awareness before. Because a lot of where people's attachment style comes from is that it wasn't safe to be. And so, it's like that big piece, where we can reintroduce that, to your point, in our adult lives. "Maybe it wasn't safe to just be in being mode during childhood, but it doesn't mean that it still has to be that way as an adult."

And reintroducing that to ourselves can be this really sort of magical component of what's necessary to really heal.

Victoria: Yeah. And that's where I bring IFS-based, Internal Family Systems-based sort of thinking. And I like to talk about how there probably was always a part that was just being, and that part just got really small and stayed really quiet, and maybe lived in the back of a cave somewhere, right?

Thais: And maybe it was to sort of integrate those pieces. It's so interesting. So, I've done a little bit of the IFS work too. I feel like we have a lot in common.

Victoria: I know ,we're twins. I love it.

Thais: And what I found too, that was so interesting doing a lot of core wound work, is I found that it was very beneficial and effective when somebody was really stuck with a protector part, or things like that, to also identify and reprogram the core wound that was causing that part to feel like it needed to go into action.

And there's this really interesting relationship between these core wounds and those different parts.

Victoria: Yeah. Yeah, they really do inform each other, huh?

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Thais: It's really cool.

Victoria: I love that you're such a nerd, which is the biggest compliment available around here. So, you're welcome, and thank you. But also, you're welcome.

Thais: And likewise, it's nice to be able to chat about these things.

Victoria: It's so fun. It's so fun and so life changing.

Thais: Yeah, absolutely.

Victoria: All this deep work really sucks. You know what I mean? Like it sucks. And then, it doesn't. And all of life gets so much... I didn't realize how often I was on the struggle bus in all these majillion of little ways; based in all this core wounding, and all these core stories and attachment style. And no one's on the other side of it, right? Maybe the Dalai Lama would fight me on that, if he was a fighting man.

But to have done the lion's share of this work in these really powerful ways in the last decade, it just feels so beautiful to move through life with so much more ease. I guess that's where I'm going. We all get triggered. We all have struggles, but yeah, it's wicked.

Thais: It's always more work to not do the work. I know that it has to come first. It's always way better to go on the path. And it's funny, because some people, when they're new to this work, I know that when they open up and they look and we start introspecting, we start observing our patterns, we start feeling our feelings, and noticing sensations, it can feel like a lot at first. And some people are like, "Yeah, it never really gets better," but it really does get better. I hear this all the time from people. They go, "Yeah, no, it gets harder."

It's a little difficult at first, when we first look at things that we've never really looked at and we get in touch with them, but it gets way easier. And anybody listening, who's like, "I don't know," it really does get way easier.

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You'll never be perfect. There's never going to be this, 'oh, I never get triggered again.'

Victoria: You are perfect. And people are inherently perfect. And it is human to get triggered. And it is perfect to get triggered, because that is the gift of your mind-body telling you where to look.

Thais: I love that. I think that's beautiful.

Victoria: Thank you. Yeah. And sorry aren't interrupt you, but...

Thais: Oh, it was perfect. I love that. Yeah.

Victoria: We are all so perfect. And this is just part of the human condition, is having little areas of reactivity, you know?

Thais: Yeah. And they provide, like you said, it provides growth and feedback. Our emotions will literally give us feedback all the time. Sometimes it's less about our neighbor who shouldn't be cutting their grass, and sometimes it's more about 'actually that's representing an element of me that I have' or 'something deep within me, this core wound that's triggered what's coming up for me.'

And so, they're always giving us perfect feedback; sometimes less about the external world than our internal world. But when we actually listen to what's there, it also provides us the opportunity to grow.

Victoria: Oh, this is so beautiful. I'm so loving your approach to this really powerful work; how nerdy it is, and how loving and compassionate it is. Nice. I know you have a lot of really practical tips and tools that can really help folks. Would you be game to share a couple or one or two right now?

Thais: Absolutely. I would love to share a core wound reprogramming tool. So, it's such a big part of these scary ideas we bring from our past and childhood, right? That 'I am abandoned' core wound, or 'I'll be betrayed' or 'I'm not good enough' or 'I'll be trapped.'

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So, when we look at these wounds, when we have this core wound, let's say, for example, just for simplicity's sake, "I'm not good enough." We can make our core wound as being this belief that's like a tree trunk, and there are all these tree branches.

If we think we're not good enough at our core, then we'll tell ourselves stories like, "I'm not interesting enough. I'm not attractive enough. I'm not smart enough," whatever it is, fill in the blank. And how do we feel when we think those thoughts? Not very good, right? Sad, insecure, you name it.

Now, as I mentioned earlier, neuroscience has proven every decision we make is based on our emotional state. So, even people who think they're very logical and rational, they're just quick to rationalize through logic after they made their own decision. So, what we want to be able to do is actually pluck those sorts of weeds out at their root, these old core wounds, or ideas, so we don't have to constantly get triggered. And then try to regulate the trigger and then repeat the pattern.

So, there's a really simple tool; three steps. It's called "belief reprogramming". It comes from roots in cognitive behavioral therapy. But this tool I've created has overlaps with the subconscious mind and hypnotherapy. It's almost like bringing CBT to the subconscious mind. So, what we do is we first look and we realize, okay, what's this old core idea?

So, maybe if it's 'I'm not good enough,' step one, what's its opposite? I am good enough. "I'm unloved, I'm lovable." "I'll be abandoned, I'll be connected." Pick your belief.

Step two is we don't just do an affirmation, because our conscious mind speaks the language, our subconscious speaks through emotion and imagery. If I say to you, "Whatever you do, do not think of the pink elephant," your conscious mind hears 'do not'. Your subconscious mind hears pink elephant. So, we actually have to speak in emotion and imagery in order to recondition these subconscious ideas or old stories.

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Nobody's waking up every day being like, "I'm going to tell myself consciously today, that I'll be abandoned all day, and see how I feel." So, these are subconscious problems, not conscious problems.

So, what we can do, is we can go, okay, well, I need to speak to my subconscious mind. So, emotion and imagery speak to the subconscious mind, what's the container of all emotions and images? Our memories. So, if you were to tell me your favorite childhood memory, you might be like, "I was playing on the playground," and you would see the images of the slide and you would probably smile as you're telling the story.

So, what we do is we say, okay, step one, take the core wound and its opposite; I'm not good enough. I'm good enough. Step two, we come up with 10 pieces of memory of when we did feel good enough. Because then we get to speak; we use our consciousness to speak to our subconscious mind through images and emotion.

And then, step three, we record this and we listen back to it for 21 days. Because research shows it takes about 21 days for old neural pathways to atrophy and new ones to hardwire in. And if we do that, especially in the morning or evening... first thing when we wake up, or last thing before we go to bed... we're in what we call a more "suggestible" state. Our brain is producing more alpha brain waves, which are actually the brain waves we need to be in a state of hypnosis.

And so, when we can leverage those three pieces, record those old memories... and we did, for example, feel good enough... and listen in the morning or evening, we can actually hardwire in these new ideas about ourselves and let go of those old things that have not been serving us and that we probably picked up somewhere, maybe in childhood, that we've been caring for a very long time. We can leave the past back in the past where it belongs.

Victoria: I love this. This leverages my favorite part of the brain. And I'd like to ask what yours is next. But the medial frontal cortex, which as we talk about on the show, it holds the VHS tapes of our lives. Our limbic system

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has the cassette tapes, the medial frontal has the VHS tapes. So, that's video with audio combined. And it goes right in and re-records those tapes. And then we do memory re-consolidation. Another thing we like to nerd about; we've been nerding about that in Anchored a lot lately.

This is so great. I love the way you break things down.

Thais: Thank you so much.

Victoria: Fabulous.

Thais: I love this conversation.

Victoria: It's so much fun. So much fun. We should probably do it again.

Thais: Yeah. Absolutely.

Victoria: I know everyone listening wants to follow you, wants to learn more, wants to take your courses. Can you tell the good people where to find you, please?

Thais: Yes, absolutely. So, I am on YouTube, Personal Development School-Thais Gibson. And I also have courses online. People can check out How to Become Securely Attached. We do a 90-day kind of boot camp in there. And that's at PersonalDevelopmentSchool.com. And so, there's an attachment style quiz, if anybody's like, "What is my attachment style?"

You'll get a report with your core wounds and your needs, and all these things to sort of be able to dig into.

Victoria: That is so fun. And we'll link to everything in the show notes. So, don't worry if you didn't catch it the first time around. Head over to VictoriaAlbina.com/podcast. You can find it there. Get a lot more details. This was such a blast.

Thais: This was so fun. It was really nice speaking with you, and thank you so much for having me.

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Victoria: Likewise, thanks for coming and sharing your brilliance with the good people of *Feminist Wellness*.

Thank you for listening to this episode of *Feminist Wellness*. If you want to learn more all about somatics, what the heck that word means, and why it matters for your life, head on over to VictoriaAlbina.com/somaticswebinar for a free webinar all about it. Have a beautiful day, my darling, and I'll see you next week. Ciao.