



Conscious Life presents

# TRAUMA SUPER CONFERENCE

## Recognizing subtle psychological abuse

Guest: Avery Neal

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### **[00:00:10] Alex Howard**

Welcome everyone, to this interview, where I'm super excited to be talking with Avery Neal.

And we're going to be talking about psychological abuse and particularly subtle abuse that can show up in all kinds of relationships, but particularly for the purpose of this interview, in intimate relationships. One of the things about subtle abuse is we often don't realize it's happening. And over time, it gradually diminishes our capacity to not just stand up for ourselves, but also to get away from destructive and damaging relationships. And Avery is an expert on this topic and I think makes this content super accessible.

To give you a bit of Avery's background, Avery Neal is a practicing psychotherapist, international author and speaker. In 2012, she opened Women's Therapy Clinic, which offers psychiatric and counseling support for women. Avery is the author of *If He's so Great, Why do I Feel so Bad? Recognizing and Overcoming Subtle Abuse*, which has been translated and published in twelve languages. Her articles and interviews have been published by Oprah.com, American Counseling Association, Daily Arm, Best Self Magazine, Hitched Magazine, Bustle, POPSUGAR and PKWY Magazine. And her courses have been taken by over 18,000 people worldwide.

So, Avery, firstly, welcome and thank you so much for joining me.

### **Avery Neal**

Thank you for having me. It's nice to be with you.

### **Alex Howard**

So your work focuses a lot on psychological abuse and its effects. And I think one of the things that's often really tricky for folks that are impacted by abuse is they often don't realize how many other people are being impacted in the same way. There's often a shame and an isolation that people experience. I feel like a nice place to start is just to touch on a little bit of actually the prevalence of psychological abuse and the types of people that it can impact.

## **[00:02:18] Avery Neal**

Absolutely. And this is so important to understand, because psychological abuse is incredibly prevalent, that most people experiencing it don't actually know that they are experiencing it. So just to give you an idea, one study found that over half of the men and women in the United States had been psychologically abused at some point by an intimate partner in their lifetime.

So if you think about that, I mean, that's a huge number. And those are the people that could actually identify it and report it as such. And that was also looking at only intimate partner relationships. So that didn't even begin to cover family relationships, relationships in childhood, friendships, even bullying in school, all of these other types of relationships that can actually be psychologically abusive as well.

So the prevalence is actually quite staggering. And the other piece to it is that there are a lot of misconceptions around psychological abuse, and it keeps people thinking that psychological abuse wouldn't apply to them, but it can actually happen to anyone, regardless of someone's age, gender, race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status. Often it happens to people who've never been abused in childhood, too. So that's another misconception that people think if they haven't experienced abuse before or if they've had a healthy childhood that they're not going to be at risk for further abuse. But that actually is not the case and it truly can happen to anyone.

## **Alex Howard**

I guess it's also helpful to name a little bit of what we mean when we're talking about abuse. Because I think sometimes that the issue can be that we can become normalized to certain things. Because we're normalized to them, we don't realize that actually, not only are they unhealthy, that they're also not normal and they shouldn't be happening. So maybe you can say a little bit, particularly around subtle abuse and some of the different ways that abuse can present itself.

## **Avery Neal**

Absolutely. So abuse happens gradually over time. So I'm sure most people have heard the analogy of boiling the frog and the water slowly so that it doesn't jump out. And so that's exactly the case for abuse as well. Especially in a romantic relationship. It doesn't start out abusive, it starts out, there's some other early warning signs but it starts out in a very seemingly normal, healthy way usually.

And so what happens is that you get used to the relationship, there's further and further attachment and then the unhealthy behaviors begin to become apparent and then they escalate over time. So the more committed you are in the relationship and the longer you've tolerated the mistreatment, the more the abuse and the mistreatment escalate.

So that's sort of how it begins. And in terms of the more subtle aspects of psychological abuse, which is the area that I'm so interested in studying, what happens is the person doesn't know that they're necessarily experiencing abuse because there's no name calling, there's no hitting, there are no bruises, there's no sexual abuse usually. So it's typically these less overt patterns that we're looking at and so it gets very confusing to the recipient.

That person usually is questioning themselves, doubting themselves, wondering what's going on in their relationship, and usually can't quite put their finger on it, even though they're feeling poorly in

the relationship. And so that's why I think one of the most important things to be paying attention to is how you feel in your relationship. How do you feel in your body, how do you feel emotionally without having to look for hard evidence or facts to back up your position or your feelings, to just tune in to how you're feeling in the relationship? Because that actually gives very valuable information well beyond what you can actually define or pinpoint that may be off in the relationship.

**[00:06:54] Alex Howard**

Can you give some examples of subtle abuse, of some of the ways it can show up?

**Avery Neal**

Absolutely. So some classic indications of subtle abuse would be sort of humorous put downs, whether that's something that's happening in private or in public. That's often prevalent in subtly abusive relationships where humor is used as a weapon to sort of degrade the other person, and it's done to degrade the other person. This isn't just a one-off thing, somebody said something that was slightly insensitive. This is a pattern of behavior that's going on over time.

Another example might be putting down someone or making fun of someone's family and friends and creating further isolation from a person's support system. So an abusive personality may make their partner think that it's in their best interest, that they're just looking out for their partner. And their other relationships may seem unhealthy, but what the abuser is actually trying to do is sort of keep you more dependent on them and pull you away from your other support systems.

So again, this can be done in such a subtle way, you don't even realize what's going on. You may just notice that you find yourself having to defend your family and friends on a regular basis. So that might be another thing. Another example that's quite common is someone who is really sort of keeping tabs on you a lot of the time, and it may be seen as very loving and oh, I'm just checking in with you because I love and care about you so much, that it actually can become quite smothering.

And what's really going on is that the person is trying to keep tabs on their partner and know exactly where they are and what they're doing at all times. So it's sort of disguised and loving concern, but it actually can be an indication of a really unhealthy pattern. So some basic patterns for people to look out for are: does your partner have empathy? Does your partner understand when you're hurting or when they've done something to hurt you? And are they sensitive to that?

Can you work through these things together without it escalating? Is your partner responsible in the relationship? So if they hurt your feelings or if they do something that isn't right, are they accountable for it? Do they take responsibility? Do they apologize? Can they own their peace in their relationship? So these are some important things to pay attention to, and is your partner entitled, or do they feel like they have to work in the relationship too? These are all important indications to be paying attention to.

**Alex Howard**

It also strikes me, Avery, as well, I guess there's often a lot of gaslighting that goes on here as well, right? Where it's like someone can feel something's not right and they raise it and then they're sort of just made to think that it's all in their head.

**[00:10:13] Avery Neal**

Absolutely. That is extremely common. An example of that that comes to my mind that for some reason I hear over and over and I don't know what it is about this, but you hear it a lot that people will say that their partners hide their keys. And then when they go to look for their keys and can't find it, their partner says, you can't keep track of anything, or you're so forgetful, or you're so irresponsible. Things like that. Or they'll do it in a humorous way and so you end up feeling like oh my gosh, what's wrong with me? Am I losing my mind? This type of thing. All the while your partner has hidden the keys.

**Alex Howard**

So it's orchestrating situations to then weaponize them to perpetuate the cycle of abuse.

**Avery Neal**

Exactly. And that can be seen in many, many different ways. But gaslighting is absolutely a very common technique.

**Alex Howard**

Can you speak a little bit to the relationship of subtle abuse to trauma? I mean, obviously in of itself it is a traumatic experience to be on the receiving end of it. But are there also origins in both abuser and the abused in childhood trauma. I noticed you said earlier that one can have not experienced abuse as a child and still find themselves in an abusive relationship, which I think is an important distinction to make. Can you tell a bit about how trauma is related here?

**Avery Neal**

Absolutely. Well, so two different sorts of things. If we're looking at the background, someone who is actually abusing often has an abusive background. Often they've witnessed one parent behaving in this way to the other parent, but not always. So this can kind of come up as the whole nature versus nurture debate and there's a lot of evidence on both sides of that. Same is true for the recipients of the abuse, the victim of the abuse.

So yes, while those who have experienced an abusive background are more likely to end up in an abusive relationship, that is not always the case. And that is because especially someone who's extremely manipulative and well skilled in their psychological abuse can actually pull anybody into it without the other person realizing it. And so it's not until you're pretty committed in the relationship through finances, children, that type of thing, marriage, that some of the signs of the abuse become more obvious or the abuse is escalated to a point where it becomes more clear and obvious.

So that's kind of the background piece as far as traumatization in the relationship. Psychological abuse is very distressing and upsetting, it makes you feel like you're going crazy. It makes you feel like you're losing your mind, it makes you feel bad about yourself. It diminishes your confidence and your self esteem and your self worth. And so what happens is you make yourself smaller and smaller and smaller in order to avoid the person's reaction or try to manage the other person's reaction in order to avoid the mistreatment or the hurtful behavior.

**[00:13:42]**

You become very skilled in trying to tailor your own behavior or neglect your own needs in order to avoid that. And so what happens is you get the same trauma response as you do in other situations that would create trauma. The body holds on to that, you get tight. A lot of times people experience the same feelings of anxiety and maybe even develop panic attacks. Depression and anxiety are quite common.

And then you also have people experience post traumatic stress disorder. And in fact, a common misconception is that that physical abuse is actually the most damaging to a person and most likely to create PTSD. But what we know from research and what people report is that it's actually psychological abuse that, particularly in women, is a stronger predictor of PTSD than the actual physical violence.

### **Alex Howard**

It's interesting what you say, Avery, as well, around one making themselves smaller and smaller to try and avoid the abuse. But of course, in doing that, one also is becoming more and more disempowered in their capacity to defend. Which I guess is a good place to get into the idea of learned helplessness and how that actually causes one to become more trapped in the situation.

### **Avery Neal**

Exactly. That's exactly right. So the concept of learned helplessness is incredibly important when we're going to understand trauma as it relates to psychological abuse.

So learned helplessness comes from this theory that when they've researched people and actually animals who are faced with a situation that is beyond their control and they can't avoid it or they can't overcome it, and it's something that's hurtful to them over time.

After repeated attempts to try to overcome it, they finally give up and they stop trying. And this, again, is seen in both humans and animals. And so what happens is not only do they give up trying to overcome the situation with whatever it is, whatever obstacle they're currently facing, then when they're faced with a new challenge or obstacle because they believe that they're so helpless, they don't even try to overcome it anymore.

So this is extremely important when we're talking about any kind of trauma, really. But when we're looking at the psychological abuse and the trauma that comes from the psychological abuse, what happens is the person becomes more and more helpless in their relationship and truly believing that they are helpless because all of their past attempts to try to remedy the situation, to try to appease their partner, to try to avoid the abuse, have failed.

It creates a worse effect, typically, when someone tries to stand up to an abuser, there's more abuse that follows. And so it teaches the person to become smaller and smaller and more and more helpless. And so what happens is, even after the abuse is over, even if the person gets out of the abusive relationship, that belief that they're still helpless remains, and it makes them more likely to get into another abusive relationship. And it's also learned helplessness is also strongly associated with depression, which, you know, makes total sense if if your efforts fail over and over and over, that creates a pretty hopeless feeling.

**[00:17:19] Alex Howard**

As you talk I was thinking of a former patient of mine who had been happily independent for a number of years, and then ended up in a psychologically abusive relationship. And then the problem became that she'd lost the sense of strength and self worth that she'd had before the relationship, which was what she needed to be able to leave. And so it was challenging for her to reclaim, in a sense, the identity that she previously had whilst in the throes of the relationship. And it's like there's the longer that one is in, the harder in some ways it can become to leave, I guess, in some ways.

**Avery Neal**

Exactly. Well, and with psychological abuse, which I should say psychological abuse exists in any type of abusive relationship, whether it's physically abusive, sexually abusive, verbally abusive, there's going to be psychological abuse there and then it's also going to happen on its own too in some relationships. So when you're looking at what it does to the person, it makes you question yourself, it makes you doubt yourself, it makes you feel bad about yourself.

And so then it makes it that much harder to move forward in your life in an empowered way. For looking beyond that, even to childhood someone who's experienced a psychologically abusive childhood and the trauma that comes from that. Someone that has never been taught that they are valuable or worthy or hasn't been encouraged to develop themselves or been given good feedback about themselves, or if they are, then it's intermixed with put downs and criticisms. You can see how it would become very difficult to have that confidence to leave an unhealthy relationship or move forward.

**Alex Howard**

It also strikes me that obviously we're primarily talking about, at the moment, intimate relationship and also childhood. But subtle abuse can happen in family dynamics, in friendships and in also work relationships as well, right?

**Avery Neal**

Absolutely. Work and school settings absolutely. The term narcissistic abuse has really gained a lot of traction recently and that's good because people are really starting to learn a lot about what all is involved with that. But what we're talking about here with this is bigger than the narcissistic abuse because it affects so many more people. You can be mistreated by someone who isn't actually a narcissist and so this is seen in all types of working relationships.

It's the child that's getting bullied at school. Often girls, young girls are master psychological abusers because they know how to subtly hurt and take down another child in a way that you can't really identify, you can't put your finger on it. So yes, this is seen across the board and that's why it's so important for people to understand what the warning signs are, what the patterns are, because then they're better able to see the whole thing objectively.

And even if they can't do anything about their situation and they stay in the relationship, or let's say they can't leave the working environment or school setting or whatever, if they know the patterns and what to look for, then it helps to distance themselves from what's happening and not

take it so personally and not let it degrade them to the extent that it does if they don't recognize what's actually happening to them.

**[00:21:19] Alex Howard**

In a minute, I want to come to some of the healing practices. But before we do, I think maybe we just say a few words about what are some of the long term effects of psychological abuse, particularly when it's not worked with? So when we don't get help, effective help and support, what are some of the impacts?

**Avery Neal**

So this is a really good question because it's so important for people to understand how damaging this can be. So with psychological abuse, you can have sleep disturbances, you can have PTSD. Depression and anxiety are common, like we were talking about before, addiction problems, trying to escape the feelings, the painful feelings, or the diminished self worth. So addictions are common. You can even have some physical symptoms and physiological symptoms associated with it as well.

So we know from research that gynecological problems are often seen in women who are experiencing psychological abuse. Digestive issues and gastrointestinal issues like IBS are common. And also things like chronic pain, migraines, fatigue, that type of thing as well. Suicidal thoughts and attempts are also seen in people who've been psychologically abused.

**Alex Howard**

So let's come to the more hopeful part of the story. In terms of ways to support healing, I'm curious as to, well let's talk about the different pieces and then we can sort of dig in a bit more. So in your clinical work that you do, what are some of the pieces that you find the most helpful for people?

**Avery Neal**

Absolutely. So the most important thing first and foremost is psychoeducation. So helping people to understand the patterns of abuse and psychological abuse and so that they can begin to see what's not theirs to take on, it helps them to see the relationship more objectively. So again, we're talking about a moment ago. Even if they can't do anything about escaping the relationship, it helps them to not take it on so much and allow it to diminish them so much. That's the first piece; understanding the patterns of abuse and the common characteristics of abuse and even their own patterns within the abusive relationship, really understanding that and what their options are.

The next piece to it is, you know, healing from trauma. So best trauma practices in general. So EMDR is incredibly helpful for trauma, as well as hypnosis or hypnotherapy. Those things help to come out of that fight or flight response that's common whenever we've experienced trauma. And so especially if we've been experiencing this since childhood, a lot of times we don't even know what it feels like to be out of that trauma response.

We don't even know what it feels like to be safe emotionally and to feel that way in our bodies and so these techniques can be very, very healing in terms of coming out of that trauma response. And then in terms of moving forward in order to overcome that learned helplessness, helping to

empower a person by coming up with ways to create a life that feels good and developing oneself and developing a greater purpose.

**[00:25:11]**

Because when you've been in a psychologically abusive relationship, as you've become smaller and smaller and you've kind of wilted away, also your purpose has often gone away too and the things that you're passionate about, your dreams, the things you enjoy, often your social network, those things have diminished or gone away as well. And so really taking the time to develop those things and kind of find yourself again and recover yourself again and develop your support system and let yourself dream, those things are also essential in terms of recovery.

### **Alex Howard**

Because it strikes me as you're talking that there's the inner work that one has to do and then there's the outer work in the actual relationship which is the source of the abuse and I guess sometimes there has to be a certain amount of inner work to build up to go from that sort of small place to reclaiming one's capacities and strength to start to address the relationship, which may involve leaving the relationship.

I guess one of the things that's often tricky is that when the dynamic of the relationship is someone's kept things safe by being small and they start to become bigger and embrace their capacities, that can actually make things worse, not better, at least in the short term. Right? Or when one tries to separate, the one they're separating from can actually try and pull them back in. I'm curious as to what helps people navigate that actually, I think, often, very difficult stage?

### **Avery Neal**

Absolutely. And I'm glad you're bringing this up because a common question that I get is how do I know when it's repairable versus there's no hope? And so it just kind of speaks to what you're talking about. And everybody is different. There's a huge spectrum of abuse, right? And so I certainly always like to tell people that if you're afraid for your safety physically or your children's safety physically, it's really important that you don't sort of poke the beast and put yourself or your children in harm's way.

So I don't recommend confronting an abuser if there's the potential for that level of harm. So I'm just going to answer your question assuming that we're not talking about that type of dangerous situation because that's really in a separate category. If we're talking about the psychological abuse piece and we're not going into the physical abuse piece, it's really, really good if you've been making yourself small to actually practice asserting yourself more and to set some healthy boundaries in the relationship.

Let your partner know when something doesn't feel right to you. Let them know how it makes you feel and then sit back and observe their reaction. So in a healthy relationship, your partner should make room for you to talk about those things. You should be able to take up some space in your relationship. So even if your partner gets defensive initially, which happens, there should be space for your partner to then come back and say, you know what? I want to work this out. Let's figure this out. I don't want to make you feel that way. Right?



**[00:28:29]**

So it's important as you start to take up more space in the relationship to observe your partner's reaction and see if there's room for you in the relationship. If there's not, if your partner becomes more aggressive, more angry, or tries to put you down in other ways, then that's something you've got to pay attention to. That is really, really telling and that is an indication that things are not going to improve in the relationship because you're only half of the relationship. You can only do your part.

Your partner has got to take responsibility for their part in the relationship and unfortunately, when we're talking about abuse, one of the fundamental traits of someone who's abusive is that they don't take responsibility for their actions or their behaviors. And so you can't really do much with that. You can't do someone's work for them.

**Alex Howard**

Yes. It strikes me, Avery, that this takes a lot of courage, doesn't it? The willingness to challenge a status quo that is painful and destructive, but familiar, but potentially familiar.

What in your experience helped people access and find that courage to challenge the dynamic? And particularly when you're working with people one on one and they say to you, I can't do this. I don't have what it takes. Yeah, what helps people to find that courage that's there?

**Avery Neal**

So for each person, it's different. I would say for many people, it's their children, their child or children. They don't want their children to see these unhealthy patterns. They want to be a good example for their child or children. And so for a lot of people, that's a strong motivation right there. But if we're leaving children aside, I think for many people, certainly if they've been in a relationship like this for a long time, the pain and the despair that is a result of living in this is so great that a lot of people feel like there is no choice but to do something different.

Someone might feel like, in fact, you see this a lot with people who have been suffering with this type of abuse. They may feel like they don't even want to live anymore. They may even feel like they don't want to go on unless something changes and so when you get to that point of desperation, then it's a very, very motivating thing.

And often you'll see someone who has, let's say, addiction issues, and that's their coping mechanism to deal with some of this and the addiction may have gotten to a point where they've got to get some help, something's got to give. And so then there's no choice then but to turn within and try to look at some of this and figure out how to take steps to reclaim themselves.

**Alex Howard**

I guess sometimes the really tricky thing is when someone raises these issues with their partner and they improve a little bit temporarily enough to go, maybe there's hope, maybe that's okay, and then it gradually slips back. So it's a kind of lip service to change and a temporary extra effort, but it's not a fundamental change.

**[00:32:22] Avery Neal**

Yes, absolutely and so when you're looking at does my partner or does this person that is mistreating me have the true capacity to change over the long haul, what you really need to be paying attention to is, is this a personality issue? So someone's personality, that is unlikely to change. So when we're talking about a person's personality, there are some core variables here. So like I mentioned earlier, is the person empathetic? Does the person take responsibility for themselves?

Not just with you and in the relationship, but across other areas of their life as well, so in their work relationships and their other relationships, does the person have tendencies to be really jealous and possessive and territorial? That's a personality issue as well. Is there a sense of entitlement or grandiosity? Does that person think they're above others?

So these are sort of... I'm sorry, also honesty. Honesty is a big one. Is the person honest or dishonest? So these are some fundamental personality characteristics that you want to look at because that is an indication of whether someone is likely to change. People's personalities don't change. They really don't. We just kind of are who we are fundamentally.

However, change is possible when it comes to learning new behaviors or when it comes to mood. So if your partner is willing to take responsibility for their behavior and willing to put forth the effort, it's not going to be a straight line, but if that effort is, you know, across the board over a long period of time, then there's hope for the potential for the relationship to change. Now, unfortunately, in an abusive relationship, that is not the majority of cases. So what is more likely to happen is the person doesn't want the relationship to end.

They may be apologetic or remorseful after an abusive episode, and then they work hard to get you back. There's this honeymoon phase and then that sort of diminishes over time, and then you go right back to the way things were. And unfortunately, again, you can only do what you can do. You can't do your partner's work for them. So that's then a point where you have to evaluate, is this something that you want to continue to pursue, knowing that this cycle is likely to continue and likely to escalate over time?

**Alex Howard**

I guess one of the things that you just touched on there as well, is to put it in slightly different words that if someone's got a rescuer pattern or a helper pattern that they want to believe that they can change that person, right? And particularly when you talk about personality issues, I guess the more rigid end of that is personality disorders. And many, many years ago I was in a relationship with someone who I subsequently diagnosed as having a personality disorder.

So full disclosure, not entirely impartial diagnosis but one of the really tricky things in those situations is that we can want to believe that we can have an influence on someone and in moments they can be genuinely connected and loving and sweet and that can be very confusing, I think, because we have those moments of connection. But I think what's really important IN what you're saying is you have to look at the long term pattern of behavior, not just measure a relationship by those moments of coming back together and having that sweetness and that connection.

**[00:36:32] Avery Neal**

Exactly. That's exactly right. You want to be looking for the pattern, the person's pattern of behavior overall. And so when we talk about understanding abusive relationships, one of the components of an abusive relationship is this push pull pattern where the person may pull you in because they are engaging, they're saying the right things, they're telling you what you want to hear, and they may truly believe that themselves in the moment too.

But then they engage in ways that push you away or that diminish you in some way and the effect is that you pull away. And so that has to be looked at when you're evaluating the entire course of the relationship. That's why I think it's so important to be able to look at your relationship objectively, try to look at it from a distance and look at the patterns in the relationship because that's going to give you information about what is likely to happen in the future with that person. The best predictor of future behavior is past behavior.

**Alex Howard**

So what you're saying is don't fall in love with the person you think they can become, we're talking about the person they actually are right now.

**Avery Neal**

Yeah. Very good rule of thumb. Definitely.

**Alex Howard**

Yeah. And I think that's particularly challenging for people who have that helper giving tendency. Right? They want to believe that they can save that person or that they know that that person, those moments of regret and remorse, has a heart. They want to believe that that's the person that they're going to bring out the rest of the time.

**Avery Neal**

Exactly. Exactly. Well, typically, someone who ends up with an abusive personality is very empathetic and often we believe, okay, if I can just love this person enough, or I see how badly they were damaged in childhood, and if I can just help to heal that, then then they're going to be okay. They're going to treat me the way I deserve to be treated or the way I want to be treated and the reality is you cannot rehabilitate someone. We each have to do that for ourselves. We all have decisions that we've got to make in terms of how we want to conduct ourselves in our relationships and we cannot do that work for others and putting yourself in harm's way, that does not serve anyone.

**Alex Howard**

One of my rules of thumb as a practitioner is I should never feel like I'm working harder than the client is. And I guess it's the same thing as saying about relationship, right? That if one party is doing all the work, either actually doing the work or doing all the work to tolerate the behavior, then something is fundamentally not working.

**[00:39:30] Avery Neal**

Exactly. It's very much the case.

**Alex Howard**

So for somebody who's watching this, that is seeing themselves in a lot of what you're speaking about and maybe painfully so, it's kind of raw and they're really seeing themselves in it. We'll come to in a minute place people can go to find out more about you and your work. But I'd love to hear you just summarize a few of the key starting points for them. How do they begin? What are some of the places for them to start to put their attention and their behaviors at this point?

**Avery Neal**

Well, I think the first thing is to pay attention to how you feel in your relationship. Pay attention to what happens in your body. Look at, do you feel intimidated by your partner? Do you feel like you can fully be yourself? Or do you feel like you have to censor yourself or avoid certain topics? Do you fear your partner's reaction? Do you feel like you have become more isolated from your support system?

Those are the kinds of things that you want to be looking at and if you are identifying that some of these things are going on, I think it's really important to start looking at all of the resources. There's so many amazing resources that are available on abuse and on psychological abuse. So don't think that because you're not being hit or because you're not being called names that you're not experiencing abuse.

So if you feel like you are going crazy, in fact, that's the most common thing I hear that you feel like you're going crazy or like something's wrong with you or you're losing your grip on reality, you're losing your sanity. Those are the kinds of things that you really want to pay attention to and start digging into psychological abuse and what it's about and unfortunately, there's not as much as there should be out there on psychological abuse.

In fact, it's really lacking in the academic research as well and of course, academic research really drives other things too. But there's more and more and there certainly are resources available. So the more you understand the patterns of abusive behavior and that it isn't you. That you can be the world's best communicator, you can be loving, you can be supportive, you can be doing everything right in the relationship and still not have the relationship that you want, and it's not your fault.

There is no shame in being in a relationship like this. This happens. This can happen to anyone. So a lot of times, people feel embarrassment or shame or guilt having ended up in a relationship like this or staying in a relationship like this. And I just want to really say that this can happen to anyone, and it isn't your fault, and there is no shame in this. This really is about understanding what's going on, understanding what's happened to you, and how to take care of yourself moving forward in the best possible way.

**[00:42:43] Alex Howard**

Fantastic. Thank you. For people that want to find out more, Avery, about you and your work, what's the best place to go and what some of what they can find?

**Avery Neal**

Absolutely. So the best place to go is my website, [averyneal.com](https://averyneal.com), and you can find some courses that I've written. You can find the book that I've written called *If He's so Great, Why Do I Feel so Bad? Recognizing and Overcoming Subtle Abuse*. While that book focuses primarily on women in abusive relationships and psychologically abusive relationships, I do want to point out that the patterns and what's discussed in that book can apply to anyone. So there are plenty of men who find themselves in these types of relationships as well. So the book is there, as well as various interviews and podcasts where you can learn a lot of information about these types of relationships and how to uncover.

**Alex Howard**

Fantastic. Avery, thank you so much. I think this has been a really important interview for people, and I really appreciate the work you're doing so thank you so much.

**Avery Neal**

Well, thank you so much for having me. It's been wonderful.