

Gaslighting

Authored by
mohammad looti

November 19, 2022

RECOMMENDED CITATION

mohammad looti (2022). *Gaslighting*. PSYCHOLOGICAL SCALES. Retrieved from <https://scales.arabpsychology.com/?p=39339>

Gaslighting is a form of psychological abuse in which false information is presented to the victim with the intent of making them doubt their own memory and perception. It may simply be the denial by an abuser that previous abusive incidents ever occurred, or it could be the staging of bizarre events by the abuser with the intention of disorienting the victim. Gaslighting had a colloquial origin explained below, but the term has also been used in clinical and research literature.

Etymology

The term derives from the 1938 stage play *Gas Light* (originally known as *Angel Street* in the United States), and the 1940 and 1944 film adaptations. The plot concerns a husband who attempts to drive his wife to insanity by manipulating small elements of their environment, and insisting that she is mistaken or misremembering when she points out these changes. The title stems from the husband's subtle dimming of the house's gas lights, which she accurately notices and which the husband insists she's imagining.

Gaslighting has been used colloquially since at least the late 1970s to describe efforts to manipulate someone's sense of reality. In a 1980 book on child sex abuse, Florence Rush summarized George Cukor's 1944 film version of *Gas Light*, and writes, "even today the word is used to describe an attempt to destroy another's perception of reality."

Introjection

In an influential article "Some Clinical Consequences of Introjection: Gaslighting", the authors argue that gaslighting involves the projection and introjection of psychic conflicts from the perpetrator to the victim: 'this imposition is based on a very special kind of "transfer"...of painful and potentially painful mental conflicts'.

They explore a variety of reasons why the victims may have 'a tendency to incorporate and assimilate what others externalize and project onto them', and conclude that gaslighting can be 'a very complex, highly structured configuration which encompasses contributions from many elements of the psychic apparatus'.

Resisting

With respect to women in particular, Hilda Nelson argued that "in gaslighting cases...ability to resist depends on her ability to trust her own judgements" Establishing "counterstories" to that of the gaslighter may help the victim re-acquire or even for the first time "acquire ordinary levels of free agency."

Clinical and popular examples

Psychologist Martha Stout states that sociopaths frequently use gaslighting tactics. Sociopaths consistently transgress social mores, break laws, and exploit others, but are also typically charming and convincing liars who consistently deny wrongdoing. Thus, some who have been victimized by sociopaths may doubt their perceptions.* Jacobson and Gottman report that some physically abusive husbands may gaslight their wives, even flatly denying that they have used violence.

Psychologists Gass and Nichols use the term gaslighting to describe a dynamic observed in some cases of marital infidelity:

"Male therapists may contribute to the women's distress through mislabeling the women's reactions. The gaslighting behaviors of the husband provide a recipe for the so-called 'nervous breakdown' for some women suicide in some of the worst situations."

The Manson Family, during their "creepy crawler" burglaries of the late 1960s, would enter homes and steal nothing, but would rearrange furniture to upset and confuse residents.