

Gaslighting examples

Author: Trish Makiwa . December 2021

The term [Gaslighting](#) refers to a form of psychological abuse that makes victims appear or feel "mad" by establishing a "surreal" interpersonal setting. Despite its widespread use, sociologists have mostly disregarded gaslighting, leaving psychologists to speculate.

Gas Light, a mystery thriller authored [by British dramatist Patrick Hamilton in 1938](#), was the first to popularize the word in the social and cultural zeitgeist. The drama was well-received when it was [performed on stage in 1940](#). In reality, it was performed approximately 1,300 times. It was soon adapted into a film starring Ingrid Bergman and Charles Boyer, adding to its enduring popularity. The plot follows [wicked husband Gregory \(Boyer\) as he attempts to slowly and gradually drive his wife Paula \(Bergman\) insane by fabricating false allegations, conjuring up false memories, and refuting prior remarks.](#)

A manipulative husband tries to make his wife believe she is losing her mind in the thriller film by making small alterations in her environment, such as gradually lowering the flame on a gaslight. He not only disrupts her environment and convinces her that she is nuts, but he also inflicts emotional abuse, and controls her, isolating her from her family and friends.

As a result, the wife continually questions herself, her thoughts, perceptions, and recollections. She also feels neurotic, hypersensitive, and out-of-control, which is precisely the purpose of gaslighting: to make the target feel off-balance and unsure of what is true and what isn't. Because this film accurately depicted manipulative people's controlling and destructive behaviors. Psychologists and counselors coined the term gaslighting to describe this form of emotionally abusive behavior.

[You can download the whitepaper for this article.](#)

Gaslighting occurs when someone continues telling you something you already know to be wrong, causing you to doubt your memory. It's a sort of manipulation and bullying in the sense that it

invalidates what you already know to be accurate and makes you feel powerless. [Gaslighters are masters](#) at distorting facts and exploiting genuine knowledge against their victims.

When someone in a position of power and authority, or someone well-liked, engages in gaslighting in the workplace, the victim is less inclined to confront this toxic co-worker. And the longer it goes unchecked, the more a victim of gaslighting questions reality.

A lot of the time, [gaslighting](#) is unintentional. Consider that direct report who never alters her conduct no matter how many times you offer her comments. The final result is that you doubt your efficacy and capacity to manage/lead in your office—not her goal, but how her actions made you feel. It may also have sexist or racial connotations.

Bottom line: Gaslighting is a damaging and poisonous behavior in any form. According to Psychology Today, it's also a prevalent character trait of abusers, narcissists, and cult leaders. In the workplace, it's frequently a power play that leaves the victim feeling befuddled, weak, and powerless.

[Gaslighting should](#) be seen as a form of abuse and manipulation founded on social imbalances, especially gender, and carried out in power-driven interpersonal relationships. According to the idea presented here, gaslighting occurs when abusers use gender stereotypes and structural and institutional inequities against victims to manipulate their realities. I demonstrate how abusers exploit gendered stereotypes, structural vulnerabilities connected to race, nationality, and sexuality, and institutional injustices against victims to destroy their sense of reality, using domestic violence as a strategic case study to identify the mechanisms by which gaslighting functions. Psychological manipulation is known as gaslighting.

Related: [Gaslighting at work: Everything you need to know](#)

What does it mean to have a gaslighter personality?

Some people appear to be more prone to gaslighting than others. Although the word is most commonly used when someone is actively influencing a friend, family member, or a romantic relationship partner. Not all gaslighters are aware of what they are doing.

It's terrible behavior that has grown over time and across various interpersonal connections for many people. Nonetheless, gaslighters have a few qualities in common:

- Highly-manipulative
- They have a low sense of self-worth or self-esteem, which they try to boost by putting others

down.

- When they don't have power, they control to the point where they don't respond well.
- A narcissistic personality disorder

It's not always easy to recognize a gaslighter. Others are enigmatic and difficult to decipher. Others are so charismatic and charming that they don't realize they're being gaslighted for a long time.

What Is Gaslighting and How Does It Work?



Gaslighting is a psychological manipulation technique based on instilling self-doubt. "I think of gaslighting as trying to identify someone with the label 'crazy,'" explains [Paige Sweet, Ph.D., a University of Michigan](#) assistant professor of sociology who studies gaslighting in relationships and the workplace. "Things make someone appear or feel unstable, erratic, and untrustworthy as if what they're seeing or experiencing isn't genuine, that they're making it up, and that no one else will believe them." This is most common in abusive relationships.

The phrase "gaslighting" is derived from a 1938 play titled *Gas Light*, which was transformed into the 1940 film *Gas Light*, followed by the more well-known 1944 film *Gaslight*, starring Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman. Each story features a male protagonist who convinces his wife that she is genuinely dreaming of things that are happening, such as the house's gas lights dimming, making her feel she has gone insane.

[Gaslighting, unlike bullying](#), is a subtle sort of deception that can damage a victim's confidence, make

them feel incredibly vulnerable, and even cause them to abandon their jobs. It's often so subtle that people don't realize it's happening until they stop and think about it, which may explain why it happens so frequently. "Small actions like claiming credit for your work, taunting you in front of co-workers, establishing unreasonable deadlines, withholding information for a large job, and doubting what they said to you in the past are all indicators of gaslighting in the workplace." While they may occur as single inadvertent instances, they can cause you to doubt your self-worth and abilities if they occur frequently. This is most frequent in toxic relationships and workplaces.

"Gaslighting thrives in the workplace happen because of the natural hierarchical structures that exist and the power struggles that can occur between co-workers, while many managers simply lack the skills required to identify and handle instances of gaslighting because they receive no training in this area." Gaslighting behaviors are often rampant in abusive relationships and unfortunately, the victim may not be able to detect and recognize it.

Unchecked organizational politicking may result in political gaslighting, where individuals use lies, denials, and manipulation to control others and gain power.

Related: [Toxic work culture: Everything you need to know](#)

Typical Signs of Gaslighting



"One of the most difficult aspects of gaslighting is that it is fundamentally confusing," Sweet explains. "It's designed to perplex you, so it's quite difficult to spot," she adds, adding that it usually comes from someone you care about and trust, mostly in a toxic relationship. The following are warning signs to look out for:

- The influence of the "Twilight Zone." Gaslighting victims frequently describe a situation as surreal, as if it were taking place on a separate plane from the rest of their lives.
- The language that labels you or your actions as insane, irrational, or overly emotional. Sweet writes in "[The Sociology of Gaslighting](#)" in [American Sociological Review](#), "When I asked women about their spouses' violent behaviors, they typically reported being dubbed a 'mad bitch. I started thinking of this statement as the literal speech of gaslighting because it came up so often."
- You are told that you are exaggerating.
- After exiting an interaction, you may feel befuddled and powerless.
- Many gaslighters isolate their victims from their friends, family, and other support systems.
- Tone policing is a term that refers to the practice of policing. If you dispute a gaslighter on something, they may criticize your tone of voice. This is a strategy employed to make you believe you're the one who's to blame, rather than your abuser.
- A warm-cold behavior cycle. A gaslighter may vary between verbal abuse and flattery, often in the same conversation, to throw a victim off guard.

Recognizing the Effects of Gas Lighting

Gaslighting is more common than you might expect at work. [Gaslighters](#) at work are frequently narcissists, addicts, and even sociopaths, mainly when the gaslighting is premeditated or done to cover up workplace misdeeds.

According to writer [Melody Wilding's Medium post](#), "Gaslighters may come in many forms they could be a boss, manager, client, or condescending co-worker; they could also be a workplace frenemy who is jealous of your success or even an HR rep in disbelief that bad behavior could occur on their watch." "Gaslighting tactics aren't as obvious as physical abuse, but they're just as dangerous. You may not know what's going on at first, but you will feel the consequences."

Because these folks are so excellent at gaslighting, the more it happens, the more insidious it becomes — and you might not even notice it's happening.

[Gaslighting takes the form of activities](#) that either establish or exploit an imbalance of power to keep the victim "in their place."

- Canceling, postponing, or being consistently late to meetings while pretending to be listening.
- Looking at one's a cell phone or email, or texting someone else while pretending to be listening
- Asking a question and then interrupting the answer.
- Involving an uninvolved third person in the conversation to make the victim feel outnumbered

When engaging with others, the [gaslighter frequently](#) blurs the boundary between normal professional conversation and making backhanded remarks about the victim's shortcomings, insecurities, attractiveness, education, values, religion, personality, family, etc.

Related: [What to do when you have a gaslighting manager](#)

Common Examples of gaslighting:



1. Secret sabotage

You've finished a project, and your co-worker has offered to submit both of your assignments because she'll be meeting with the boss later. That afternoon, your manager inquired as to why she did not receive your assignment, which was due that day. You inform her that a co-worker promised to turn it in on your behalf. "Don't blame me for not getting your work done on time," says a co-worker who overhears you.

Some folks are simply saboteurs who thrive on seeing others fail. They believe that they will appear to be better in contrast if you fail. They don't comprehend that one person's failure at work makes things more difficult for everyone, including the saboteur. Gaslighting is a common tactic used by saboteurs to achieve their objectives: they will lie to your face (or to your supervisor) about never saying or doing something, and that you are known around the office for trying to get other people in trouble (a lie). [Gaslighters](#) are notorious for accusing others of doing what they are doing. These are referred to as projects.

2. Surveillance and denial

You thought you logged off your laptop an hour and a half ago before going to lunch. However, some

items on your desk have changed, and you last logged in 30 minutes ago. According to the system, you've been locked out of one of your social media accounts because your password has been tried too many times. You inform your boss that you believe someone accessed one of your social media accounts through your laptop. "You shouldn't be doing personal things on your laptop anyhow," your supervisor says. "Nope, not at all," your manager answers when you inquire if she noticed anyone around your desk. "It's just that you're paranoid."

In actuality, your supervisor requested that someone at the workplace access your laptop. "I need a file from her laptop, and she's at lunch," she may have started innocently. She said it was fine for me to use it." This is a case of digital abuse exacerbated by gaslighting.

Gaslighters would not only deny what they did but will also tell you that you are paranoid to sow doubt in your mind. This form of abuse, especially by powerful individuals leave you with lasting emotional damage.

Related: [Narcissism behavior traits](#)

3. Falsely accusing you of sexual harassment

Your employer makes a sexual advance toward you. However, when you report it to HR, your boss claims that you threatened to report him to HR unless he offered you a raise.

When an employer harasses you, they frequently assure you that no one will believe you. Typically, they will include a claim that everyone in your office despises you. They might also threaten to fire you. These are threats used to persuade you to remain silent about the harasser's harassment. You might even begin to doubt your version of events.

When it comes to a supervisor, they may give you great feedback in front of you but criticize you behind your back. Alternatively, they may chastise or embarrass you in front of co-workers or clients but act as if nothing happened when the two of you are alone.

In other cases, your boss may direct you to complete an assignment in a certain way, but when you do, they become irritated and says that wasn't what they wanted, leading you to believe that your memory is faulty, according to [Robin Stern, Ph.D., co-founder](#) and associate director of the [Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence](#) and author of [The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life](#).

In other cases, your manager may exclude you from a meeting and accuse you of being overly sensitive rather than responding to your inquiry when you inquire about it. When a co-worker is gaslighted, she may promise to help with a group project you're leading, only to subsequently deny it, stating things like, "Don't blame me if you can't get your work done!"

4. Work a co-worker lies blatantly

Your co-worker tells you the truth, right in your face. Perhaps they're fabricating the reason for missing a deadline or arriving late to work. Then they make you feel awful for thinking they were being careless or lazy. Your boss denies saying anything at all.

5. Perhaps your unpleasant employer promised you a raise a few months ago over lunch

They said you could talk about it again in six months, and that time has passed. When you question about the rise again, they flatly deny ever suggesting it. They do, however, acknowledge that they've heard you and are willing to discuss a raise in six months.

6. The actions of your direct report do not match their words

When your direct report gaslights you, it's possible that they're telling you that their report is nearly complete and that they'll turn it in on time. On the other hand, their actions may say otherwise; they may be so far behind that they won't be able to finish the report on time, yet they make you feel awful for questioning their efficiency.

A reminder that [gaslighting](#) isn't always an aggressive or malicious act perpetrated by someone who isn't doing anything wrong. There are a few minor details to consider when it comes to gaslighting in a professional setting. For example, a manager who sets expectations for a project but then tells you that the standards she uses to judge your work have changed after you meet them. It may even be someone forgetting to invite you to an all-hands meeting on a regular basis—an unintentional omission that leaves you perplexed about material relevant to your job that was discussed.

7. When another co-worker makes a racist or sexist remark, the gaslighter immediately condemns it. You're left unsure on how to proceed, as well as perplexed by their perception of reality.

The gaslighter downplays any suggestion of race. "Don't play the race card," they say, or "all lives count," which are both examples of racial gaslighting at work.

8. The gaslighter takes stuff from your desk and replaces them without asking. A trivial infraction, but one that makes you feel like you're going insane looking for a pair of scissors you swear you have.

When the gaslighter claims they're doing anything, they're doing nothing. That raise you requested? Of course, you'll receive it when they're not doing anything at all.

- The gaslighter alters corporate policies to suit their own goals. Do you have a limited number of vacation days? Is there a dress code? Is there a sick-day policy? All of these things are liable to change depending on your boss's whims and moods, making it difficult to know what the rules are and how to avoid breaking them.
- I'm sorry you believe I've harmed you."

This statement may appear to be an apology, but it isn't. Instead, [Tessina believes](#) that this is a way for an abuser to deflect guilt and place it on the victim. This type of apology makes the victim doubt their judgment and wonder if they genuinely overreacted. It may cause the victim to rely on the abuser's version of events.

9. You should have expected my reaction

This is another tactic for an abuser to blame the victim. This might make the victim feel guilty or hurt over a scenario where they did not commit any wrongdoing. "Gaslighting entails distorting facts to avoid taking personal responsibility for their actions. The gaslighter throws the blame on the victim for not only speaking up but also the abuser's response by telling them they should have known better," Tessina explains.

No one has the right to influence someone in any way, for any reason. Being the boss gives you a lot of power and authority in the job, but that's not enough for some people if you don't have complete control. The ideal workplace is one in which varied team members can be themselves, collaborate honestly and openly toward a common objective, make ethical judgments with personal integrity, and feel good about themselves when celebrating workplace victories. There are no perfect answers when it comes to gaslight, but it is vital to spot toxic conduct, keep a strong sense of self, and remain confident in the value you provide to the firm daily.

This article was written by Trish Makiwa, a consultant at the Industrial Psychology Consultants. She can be contacted at trish@ipccconsultants.com

<https://thehumancapitalhub.com/articles/gaslighting-examples->