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Gaslighting by Crowd

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Abstract: Most psychological literature on gaslighting focuses on it as a dyadic phenomenon occurring primarily in marriage and family relationships. In my analysis, I will extend recent fruitful philosophical engagement with gaslighting (Abramson, "Turning up the Lights on Gaslighting" [2014]; McKinnon, "Allies Behaving Badly: Gaslighting as Epistemic Injustice" [2017]; Ruiz, "Spectral Phenomenologies" [2014]) by arguing that gaslighting, particularly gaslighting that occurs in more public spaces like the workplace, relies upon external reinforcement for its success. I will ground this study in an analysis of the film *Gaslight*, for which the phenomenon is named, and in the course of the analysis will focus on a paradox of this kind of gaslighting: it wreaks significant epistemic and moral damages largely through small, often invisible actions that have power through their accumulation and reinforcement.

Explorations of gaslighting have focused its scope in two ways: first, as primarily a dyadic phenomenon (a single victimizer and a single victim), and second, as a phenomenon occurring primarily in marriage and family relationships (see, for instance, Gass and Nichols 1988; Stern 2007; and Calef and Weinshel 1981). While some recent philosophical analysis of gaslighting fruitfully extends gaslighting to the realm of work and acknowledges the presence of multiple voices in gaslighting (Abramson 2014; McKinnon 2017), I think the dynamics of gaslighting are meaningfully different when it occurs in the world of work as opposed to in a domestic relationship. In particular, the role of the crowd, or external reinforcement, is important for gaslighting's success, particularly in workplace gaslighting. The primary destabilizing effect of gaslighting—to persuade its target that her perceptions of reality and judgments are unreliable and wrong—can *only* occur in the work world with explicit or implicit external reinforcement. Accounts of gaslighting that focus too much on the actions and intentions of a primary gaslighter, which I think is a

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natural consequence of this term's origin in fiction and marriage and family therapy, minimize this dynamic.

While I have no doubt that plenty of gaslighting experiences are individual and pathological in nature, in both domestic relationships and the world of work, this more diffuse version of gaslighting is more common than we recognize. This form of gaslighting needs observers or crowd members to assent implicitly or explicitly to a dominant view. In this way, gaslighting is often as much about worldview as it is about credibility—it functions not simply to undermine a target's sense of herself as a credible reporter of the world, but simultaneously to undermine a worldview that rivals or challenges a dominant perspective. I will focus primarily on sexist gaslighting in this analysis. Sexist gaslighting often reveals this worldview clash; accusations that sexist behavior or sexual harassment are merely "jokes," "kidding around," "collegiality," and counter-accusations that someone who disagrees with this view is "too sensitive," "crazy," "a prude," or a "troublemaker" don't merely undermine credibility, but describe what the world of the workplace can encompass. Perversely, the smallness of many of the workplace gaslighting actions and reinforcements renders it more effective—its relative invisibility makes it harder to recognize and thus challenge. Even nonverbally, in meetings where this sort of sexist conflict results in silence or laughter from the majority of attendees, we can see a gaslighting technique at work. By their silence and/or laughter, the majority signal that they agree with the worldview as represented by the sexist gaslighter, and thus disavow the worldview of the critic. In doing this, sexist gaslighters attempt to eliminate even the possibility of hermeneutic dispute or critique.

For this analysis, I'm going to adopt Kate Abramson's definition of gaslighting, as a form of "emotional manipulation in which the gaslighter tries (consciously or not) to induce in someone the sense that her reactions, perceptions, memories and/or beliefs are not just mistaken, but utterly without grounds—paradigmatically, so unfounded as to qualify as crazy" (2014, 2). It's the "without grounds" aspect that is crucial here; Abramson's insight is that gaslighting is fundamentally an epistemic injury as much as a moral one; gaslighters (when successful) don't just succeed in getting me to believe that I am wrong about a belief, but that I can't even perceive the world (or myself) competently. Simply being wrong about something is a fungible state; I can learn new information and alter my beliefs. However, if I am incapable of perceiving the world or myself competently, then no new information can help me improve my conclusions, and indeed, I couldn't even recognize the difference between getting something right and getting something wrong.

Abramson makes clear in her analysis that gaslighting frequently includes multiple parties implicitly or explicitly reinforcing the gaslighting message (2014, 2, 5); however, the way in which third parties meaningfully change or heighten the nature of the gaslighting goes unaddressed in her analysis. I will attempt to do this work here. The crucial distinction that I see is the effects of the supporting role

that third parties play. Abramson articulates clear intentions of gaslighters (typically around some sort of material gain for them—control or dominance) that are either attenuated or impossible to discern in the sorts of third-party gaslighting I see. Jean Harvey's concept of "support power" is useful in understanding why third parties facilitate gaslighting (2000, 184–5); Harvey argues that our social roles can be enhanced by the support we receive from others, and undermined when we are unsupported.[1] For instance, a bank manager turning down an applicant's loan receives support power from the regional manager when they have a preexisting relationship of trust. By contrast, if the bank manager is a manager of color in an overwhelmingly white institution, or a woman in a predominantly male institution, that support power may be lacking, and the applicant may be able to appeal the denial and further decrease the manager's credibility (2000, 184). Support power, in other words, doesn't always or often function through individual actions, or out of a hope of direct personal or intentional gain (the regional manager probably has little to gain or lose out of a single loan transaction). Rather, support power indirectly reinforces conventional networks of power, and indirectly reminds outsiders that they do not belong. Third-party gaslighting, in my view, functions similarly: verbal or nonverbal signals of agreement indicate who has credibility and status, or more usually, who does not. The effects of gaslighting are the same, but its more diffuse presence makes it more, not less, problematic.

Let me explain why the intimate family focus of much gaslighting analysis translates poorly to the world of work. By its very nature, an intimate or family relationship signals a kind of shared and private world; spouses, partners, or family members share a longstanding set of experiences that others do not, experiences or references that couldn't be easily understood by those outside the world of the family. (People who've joined a family as adults often talk about the lead time it takes to become conversant in family lore and in-jokes.) By contrast, most workplaces are far more public settings: coworkers tend to enter and leave the workspace at a more consistent and faster rate than in families, and many aspects of work are still more public-facing (working with customers, students, or clients, who may change on a daily basis). Our work experiences and references are thus more public and accessible than those taking place in the context of family relationships; the pressures in work may not be as singularly oriented or univocal as they often can be in domestic or family relationships.

Therefore, seeing gaslighting as individual or dyadic is problematic for applications to the workplace for several reasons. First, it minimizes the role of others. Psychologist Robin Stern, for instance, describes gaslighting as a "tango," which of course reduces its structure to two. Second, it tends to reduce the scope of consequences to the emotional realm only. Stern describes one effect of professional gaslighting as an "emotional apocalypse," whereas her gaslit client is concerned less with her emotions than the professional consequences of the disparate treatment

(2007, location 711[2]). Stern explicitly reframes professional gaslighting as disproportionately emotional in her analysis, suggesting that victims of workplace gaslighting fear they will never again get jobs that make them feel "as competent, as successful, as *glamorous*" (2007, location 3732, emphasis added). "Glamour" trivializes the kinds and range of damages gaslighting can perpetrate in the workplace (to say nothing of its highly gendered quality). Thus, the solution is personal and emotional, learning not to "view our . . . professional relationships as opportunities to make up for past injuries" (2007, location 3749). Given that Stern is writing to and for victims of gaslighting, it is particularly odd that she stresses that the onus for handling gaslighting is not just on the victims, but on their (presumed) transference in their professional relationships (seeing them as "opportunities for make up for past injuries," after all, is Freudian language).

Rewriting gaslighting as primarily an emotional phenomenon, in which the solution is entirely interpretive and therapeutic, completely elides the power relationships at work (particularly if a gaslighting instigator is a supervisor), as well as the material consequences of gaslighting. Losing one's job or receiving a bad evaluation brings with it material consequences (loss of income or reputation). Third, individual or dyadic approaches to gaslighting tend to limit the range of response to the realm of the individual only, which is less applicable and useful for the workplace. Stern's model, for instance, is so individually and relationally focused that her client Liz struggles with the diagnostic questions Stern has created for treating gaslighting. Unlike Stern's clients who are in gaslighting romantic relationships, Liz, who is being gaslit at work, can't make sense of the terms of gaslighting as Stern has framed them. "This doesn't apply to me," Liz keeps saying in the diagnostic questionnaire (2007, locations 3350–511). While Liz is being gaslit, the ways in which it functions and has its effects are notably different than they are in romantic or family relationships.

Gaslight's Fictional Origins (Including Reinforcement)

While my discussion of third-party gaslighting as it occurs now will focus on professional gaslighting, it's noteworthy that we still observe the importance of external reinforcement in gaslighting's fictional origins (Patrick Hamilton's play *Gaslight*, 1938, made into a film by George Cukor, 1944).[3] In the play and film (which represent an extreme of sociopathic gaslighting), the gaslighting is for direct personal gain (lost jewels). The gaslit spouse (Paula) is the granddaughter of the murder victim. They resemble each other physically, and the granddaughter lives in her grandmother's house with (unknown to her) the grandmother's murderer as her husband (Gregory). The play even more than the film highlights the claustrophobic nature of a gaslighting relationship; Paula spends months essentially as a prisoner

within her home. Thus, the reality of their claustrophobic marriage is her reality; she has no shifting backdrop of experiences against which to compare it.

But even in intimate gaslighting, external reinforcement can still occur. In Hamilton's play and then Cukor's film, Gregory's manipulation of Paula to see herself as unreliable gets reinforced at crucial points in the plot multiple times, by two characters (Nancy the maid and Elizabeth the cook).[4] Nancy is the less interesting character; she clearly has her own agenda for supporting the gaslighting (hoping to become Gregory's next wife), though the nature of her gaslighting is quite blatant and out of character.[5] Elizabeth is the more interesting character in Cukor's film for several reasons. First, she is portrayed as consistently more sympathetic to Paula than Nancy, and second, she has no personal stake in gaslighting. Her gaslighting is not consciously manipulative, contrary to Nancy; it is a result of her hearing loss rather than an explicit perception or worldview dispute. Towards the end of the film, when Paula is fully in the throes of Gregory's gaslighting, she hears footsteps above her (what viewers know to be her husband, but which Paula now clearly fears as her disordered mind), and screams for Elizabeth, who is working in the kitchen a full three floors below. Elizabeth's profound hearing loss has been introduced and reinforced to the viewer on multiple occasions in the film, so her inability to hear soft footsteps three floors above her when she struggles to hear conversation six inches from her ear shouldn't lead her to assume Paula is imagining sounds. Indeed, the shot is framed to emphasize the great distance between the two, so it's clear to any attentive viewer that Elizabeth couldn't have heard footsteps. However, Elizabeth affirmatively tells Paula not just that she (Elizabeth) didn't hear the footsteps but that *Paula* didn't hear anything, and Paula believes her. While her gaslighting doesn't go as far as some of the more obvious examples in the scholarly literature, I think it is more reflective of the kind of diffuse professional gaslighting we see. It doesn't occur to Elizabeth to take Paula's viewpoint seriously; she immediately and without qualification rules it as incorrect and unreliable.[6] Paradigmatically, Elizabeth functions as a version of Harvey's support power; she reinforces Gregory's view of Paula as correct, and reminds Paula that she should not trust her own abilities to perceive and make judgments.

I want to pause to stress how important *both* Nancy's and Elizabeth's reinforcement of Gregory's gaslighting is to its effectiveness. Paula, like many victims of gaslighting, does not straightforwardly accept being undermined as an agent; the play and film present several clear and consistent moments of her accurately pushing back on Gregory's gaslighting.[7] And indeed, Nancy and Elizabeth themselves don't immediately agree with Gregory's view on Paula. Nancy asks Elizabeth what's wrong with Paula after Gregory describes Paula dismissively. Nancy says that she doesn't see that anything is wrong with Paula. Elizabeth's telling response is that "the master *keeps telling her* she [is ill]." Elizabeth's phrasing makes it clear that she is not actively endorsing this viewpoint, merely reporting another's assertion;

she has not (yet) internalized this worldview. So at least initially, Gregory's view on Paula is not in fact shared by the entire household, and it takes repetition and persistence for it to be absorbed. Therefore, when Nancy and Elizabeth begin to reinforce Gregory's view, telling Paula that the lights haven't started flickering (a straightforward lie in Nancy's case, as she is in the room with Paula as the lights quite visibly flicker), or that there are no footsteps sounding above (an indirect falsehood on Elizabeth's part, given her hearing loss and the great distance between her and the footsteps), Paula has already begun consistently to doubt her own perceptions and judgments. Given Paula's physical and social isolation, the fact that everyone she encounters appears to reinforce and support her husband's dismissive view of her seems clearly to reinforce and amplify her psychic decline.

I want to emphasize how important this external reinforcement is for even Gregory's extreme version of gaslighting to succeed. It seems reasonable to imagine that if, at one of these points in the film, Nancy or Elizabeth had declined to reinforce Gregory's view—had Nancy acknowledged that the lights were flickering, or had Elizabeth said that she can't hear anything three flights above so shouldn't be trusted—Paula might have come to different conclusions about her husband. Her suspicion of her husband is never far from the film's surface, even with her self-doubt; she correctly notes towards the end of the film that Gregory has been implying that she is mentally unstable since the day they moved into the house. (During the move she uncovered a letter, a crucial piece of evidence that ultimately incriminates Gregory in the murder of the grandmother. Gregory successfully hides the letter from Paula, and Paula's discovery of the letter in the closing scenes of the movie gives her concrete evidence that her husband has been manipulating her all along.) Thus, towards the end of the film it is Paula's judgment that is lacking against a crowd—her entire domestic world (which, given her isolation, *is* the world, as far as Paula is concerned). Gregory alone would probably not have succeeded in his gaslighting; he needed his crowd to overwhelm Paula's sense of her own intelligence and perception.

External Reinforcement as Testimonial Injustice

External reinforcement isn't simply a fictional phenomenon in gaslighting. Crucially, of the eight examples of gaslighting that Abramson discusses in her paper, six of them are collective rather than individual: more than one person denies accusations of sexism, or redescribes the behavior as benign or harmless rather than sexist. Three of these six examples include the denigration of the victim's judgment by witnesses or bystanders. Only one of her examples—Simone de Beauvoir's recounting of a conversation between Sartre and herself—fits the more classic model of a dyad of gaslighter/gaslightee. Importantly, of those six, three of them describe a generic collective of many fellow graduate students, colleagues, or audience members,

rather than just one or two. Abramson herself notes this reinforcement simply as an aggravating feature of the gaslighting, asking readers to imagine that a terrible experience was occurring for months while “all or most of the voices around you either flatly denied that anything worth being upset about was going on, or radically minimized it” (2014, 5). She contends that even smaller examples can still be gaslighting because of their context (2014, 11): serial gaslighting (hearing the same reaction from different people), as well as a reference to the “purported authority of the crowd” that supports gaslighting (2014, 22). However, in the meat of her analysis, the grammar is individualistic: she regularly refers to how “*the*” gaslighter operates, how “*he* sees her” (2014, 14, emphasis added). And indeed, the authority of the crowd seems distinct, in Abramson’s analysis, from gaslighting itself; it is a secondary by-product of gaslighting, but not the phenomenon itself. In contrast, I want to stress that, at least with professional gaslighting, external reinforcement isn’t merely reinforcing but *constitutive*; the gaslighting does not function absent reinforcement. In other words, hermeneutic gaslighting isn’t at all personalized; gaslighters are describing how *it is*, not how *they* (or *he*) see things when they gaslight. They will allow no daylight between their interpretations and reality. As with the example of Elizabeth from the Cukor film, it’s hard to imagine that the explicit consent these others provide to sexist gaslighting doesn’t simply work to exacerbate the effects of gaslighting, but to (re)produce them. The victim of gaslighting is reminded that *everyone else she talks to at work* doesn’t see the sexism she sees. Absent cumulative effect, workplace gaslighting is much less likely to succeed.

Rachel McKinnon’s analysis of gaslighting similarly functions through external reinforcement, and argues that the damages of this gaslighting are a form of testimonial injustice. She contends that transphobic gaslighting can function to grant unearned testimonial credibility to already privileged knowers, and undermine testimonial credibility of marginalized knowers. Specifically, to deny that a transphobic comment is actually transphobic by testifying on behalf of that colleague (this person cannot be transphobic because he has won diversity awards, or because the colleague has never herself heard such commentary [2017, 168]) serves both to give unearned credibility to the transphobic colleague, and to undermine the trans colleague’s ability to perceive and report hostile commentary. McKinnon’s analysis focuses on the ways in which ostensibly supportive colleagues can still undermine and betray others’ credibility, by actively looking for and offering “innocent” explanations for what on the face of it appears to be a transphobic comment. This analysis of gaslighting isn’t quite in line with mine—McKinnon focuses on the ways in which gaslighting silences its targets by undermining their credibility with others, whereas I see the silencing occurring because the target is manipulated into believing that nobody else sees some behavior as sexist—but the effect (silencing a target’s ability to report unacceptable workplace behavior) is the same.[8]

I think McKinnon's version of gaslighting as testimonial injustice is quite common, but the kind of collective gaslighting I'm observing seems more diffuse, and less consciously manipulative than the accounts provided by McKinnon or the therapeutic literature. What we see with Nancy and Elizabeth in *Gaslight*, and in much professional gaslighting, is less about testimonial injustice than hermeneutic injustice. This is not to say that it is benign; indeed, I will argue that it still perpetrates epistemic and moral harms. Professional relationships can be time-enduring. The stakes can be high: people's material sustenance depends on their incomes, their reputations are largely determined by their performance at work, and many people do in fact have friends at work. Abramson's analysis of gaslighting articulates the nature of hermeneutic injustice by gaslighting; gaslighting functions to "destroy even the possibility of disagreement" (2014, 10). Gaslighting manipulatively and destructively redescribes how *it is*, not how *I* (the gaslighter) see it.

Invisible Gaslighting

Public, collective gaslighting of this nature is paradoxical in that it accomplishes large aims (persuading someone that 'the world' is not as she thinks it is, but that everyone else has access to reality she lacks) by often small and low-stakes actions (or even inactions). The kinds of side comments and questions we see in accounts of gaslighting are often deeply contextual; taken abstractly, they seem at worst politely skeptical (asking someone if she's sure a colleague is sexist as opposed to simply "friendly"), to neutral, to even possibly considerate.[9] The explicitly reinforcing actions (laughing along with a hostile joke, silence when hostile or challenging behavior occurs) seem barely to rise to the level of moral action. This, I'd suggest, is precisely why they function as gaslighting; as Harvey describes it when writing about how support power operates in morally problematic fashions, "pre-critically we will not see anything wrong with it, even when there is" (1999, 39). The very smallness or low-stakes nature of the actions or inactions often means that they do not register in our consciousness as actions, and thus we cannot make arguments to that end. Indeed, it's unclear in the movie *Gaslight* if Elizabeth in particular is even conscious of her dishonesty when she tells Paula she imagined hearing footsteps. I suspect that much workplace gaslighting is similarly unconscious or unintentional; sexist actors aren't aware that they are re-describing behavior falsely, and telling colleagues they are untrustworthy reporters of the world.[10]

But even if these low-stakes collective gaslighting actions register as problematic, targets or allies cannot make public arguments about colleagues' bad behavior without dangerous potential consequences to their work life; Harvey acutely notes that someone with less privilege seeking to challenge those who have more privilege "may have no way to object without socially 'causing a scene,'" (1999, 52). In other words, the very smallness and ostensive triviality of public gaslighting and its

external reinforcement makes it both pervasive and hard to challenge; those who speak up directly risk looking like tattletales or thin-skinned outsiders (or both). Given that one of the effects of gaslighting is to remind those on the margins that they do not belong and do not see the world accurately, this means that all too often, one would be locked in an inescapable feedback loop: accept the gaslighting and accept marginalization; protest the gaslighting and be further marginalized as a thin-skinned sore loser.

Gaslighting's Damages

If gaslighting, particularly when it is done by crowd, perpetuates an epistemic harm by privileging a worldview of a majority and eliminating the possibility of critique, what are the epistemic damages? Most basically, the variety or quality of idea exchange is limited. If viewpoints are consistently undermined and disregarded, employees are given a clear message not to bother speaking up and challenging conventional viewpoints and behaviors. This sort of workplace promotes groupthink rather than creativity. Susan J. Fowler's account of her time at Uber and attempts to report consistent sexism demonstrates this amply (2017). Fowler, one of the very few women to work at Uber, regularly reported sexism to Human Resources. In her blog, she describes the kinds of incidents she experienced or witnessed, and the ways in which they were either unchallenged by peers, or dismissed by HR. The final time she reported flagrant sexism to Human Resources (which had responded dismissively to her many other reports), she was told that *she* was the consistent theme in all these reports; in other words, her (devalued and unreliable) perspective was the square peg in Uber's round hole. Her ideas and work were of no value to the self-enclosed reality of Uber. Public power can be expressed formally through policies as well as by actions; in other words, if Uber's policies as such didn't have a way to capture the sexism that Fowler experienced, and if their training and orientation didn't recognize the possibility of a sexist office climate, it's reasonable to say that their policies indirectly promote gaslighting.[11] Similarly, while the blog *What Is It Like to Be a Woman in Philosophy?* reveals a whole host of accounts of women experiencing sexism, several of the accounts include women experiencing but not reporting sexism out of a kind of gaslighting prevention. Several of them say explicitly that they do not want to report the allegation because it's clear it will be dismissed as them being "sensitive."[12] These kinds of cumulative effects encourage silence if not outright exits from professions or workplaces.

But there is also a moral harm associated with this sort of collective gaslighting. Kathy Ahern describes the sort of "institutional betrayal" experienced by nurses who whistle-blow bad behavior at work, when they find themselves getting the sort of gaslighting treatment that Susan Fowler experienced at Uber, or women philosophers report or fear on blogs. Ahern notes that institutional betrayal may only appear

to be a set of isolated incidents, but often reflects unstated but consistent policies and values held by the institution (2018, 62). When gaslighting is connected to the reporting of bad behavior that isn't simply immoral but the commission of a crime, there are distinct damages, particularly if the crimes and harms stay unaddressed. As Harvey describes it when writing about distorted relationships more generally, there are two levels of damage: first, the direct moral harm (harassment) arising out of the distorted relationship, and secondly, the harm, when a victim is silenced, of "blocking legitimate protest" (1999, 61). Those suffering from these sorts of unequal relationships of power are damaged because they are unable to function in their full capacities; they are blocked from being meaningful and effective participants in their worlds (1999, 111). In other words, collective professional gaslighting both perpetuates workplace climates of harassment, and also contributes to a professional atmosphere in which dissent and protest are delegitimized. These betrayals aren't simply individual, but institutional: the nurses Ahern analyzes aren't just angry at their sexist coworkers, but at a whole workplace that effectively undermines the values it ostensibly endorses.

Public Gaslighting, Public Responses

Because the nature of workplace gaslighting is more diffuse, the possibilities for response may in turn be more public. Stern's client Jill describes herself as having three options in response to being gaslit at work: quit, file an EEOC complaint, or stay at work until a better opportunity comes along (2007, location 2252). This response (which is not unusual) reflects an understanding of gaslighting as primarily an individual phenomenon. But since gaslighting at work often occurs in more collective or public situations (such as meetings), this suggests that a more collective response is at least possible. Given that so much external reinforcement in gaslighting is passive (silent consent, approving laughter at sexist jokes), victims of workplace gaslighting could be strategic in their responses. McKinnon acutely diagnoses the problem of some 'friendly' gaslighting: so-called allies "privilege their own first-hand experience over the testimony of the person they're supposed to be supporting" (2017, 169). In other words, there is a self-directed credibility excess. *I* have never seen this person act in a bigoted fashion (even though I have not been around this person in a variety of circumstances), therefore this person isn't a bigot, the gaslighting reinforcer thinks. By contrast, McKinnon observes, situations like hostile workplace reports call for greater testimonial charity; allies should be willing to trust their marginalized colleagues, and assume they are reporting accurately (2017, 171). As a strategy, this suggests the need for explicit conversation and consciousness-raising around what testimonial charity looks like. But more broadly, it calls for the need for alliances and support in workplace gaslighting. Public gaslighting thrives on silent consent; the absence of explicit challenge is

taken for passive unanimity. Being able to identify those who are willing to stand in solidarity and speak up at even small instances of sexism makes a crucial difference in challenging the cumulative effect of workplace gaslighting (that everyone sees the work world differently than I do, that I am alone in my viewpoint).

Elena Flores Ruiz makes an explicit call for solidarity to women of color in academic philosophy: "Amigas, sisters, *we're being gaslighted*, predominantly by the somnambulatory policing in the form of normative practices and tacit methodological assumptions in mainstream philosophy" (2014, 201). Her use of "somnambulatory" is deliberate; she clarifies that there is no "mastermind" or chief bully to this gaslighting; rather, it is "ambient abuse," it is present in the very environment of academic philosophy. Calling projects "not really philosophy" and forcing endless justifications of philosophical merit serves chiefly to demoralize and discourage those with interest in different kinds of philosophy. Recognizing the diffuse nature of workplace gaslighting does not require silent consent, but in fact challenges us to enact explicit and collective responses. As Jennifer Saul describes it when writing about sexist workplace climates, workplaces in which sexist jokes and comments predominate are driven by a "culture of permissiveness" (2014, 311). This quote speaks to the hypocrisy of diffuse workplace gaslighting; while the effect of gaslighting is often to narrow the world of work (epistemically, in terms of the ideas offered and debated; demographically, in terms of who stays and flourishes), it is defended and minimized (in a gaslighting style!) in the name of openness. A Millian marketplace of ideas and behaviors is cited as selective justification of behavior that is persistently directed only towards some workers. This so-called openness can only be challenged if we are willing to name it in its more pernicious and diffuse manifestations.[13]

Regis University

Notes

1. Thanks to Kate Norlock for suggesting I look to Harvey to clarify this account.

2. Location is page numbering for the Kindle edition.

3. In this discussion I will quote the film by Cukor.

4. It is also surely relevant for this analysis that the Anton home is both private and public space: while Paula and Gregory live there, Nancy and Elizabeth work there.

5. To give just one example, Nancy explicitly undermines Paula's judgment in one particular scene—Paula attempts to go for a walk, and Nancy explicitly and repeatedly suggests that this is a bad idea, and that Paula's husband will be angry and worried should he find out. This sort of explicit resistance is unusual given their social and class positions, and reflects the ways in which the film exaggerates gaslighting in sometimes unrealistic fashions.

6. Correlatively, the fact that Paula asks Elizabeth, whom she knows is hard of hearing, whether or not she hears footsteps itself indicates Paula's loss of self-confidence and -trust.

7. For instance, in the film the first time Gregory steals one of her belongings—a brooch—he tells her that she is inclined to lose things, and to be forgetful, and she straightforwardly disputes these characterizations: "I am? I didn't realize." Later, she goes so far as to (correctly) accuse Gregory of opening her bag and losing it.

8. Thanks to one anonymous reviewer for encouraging me to clarify the difference between McKinnon's use of gaslighting and mine.

9. To return to the example discussed in note four, it is interesting that Nancy's formally out-of-character behavior (in the Victorian world, servants were not expected to question employers' judgment) is cannily masked as consideration. Nancy frames her gaslighting undermining not as statements but as a series of questions, seemingly out of concern for Paula (does she have an umbrella, it may rain; is it safe for her to walk alone; what would Nancy say to the master if he asks why Nancy let Paula go), that have the cumulative effect of causing Paula ultimately to abandon her plan, return to the cloistered house, and continue her isolated existence. Absent the context of the film, the questions could seem thoughtful, but the context of the film makes it clear that they serve to undermine Paula's confidence in her perception of her own capacity.

10. To be clear, this sort of gaslighting is still morally harmful even if unconscious or unintentional.

11. One site visit of a philosophy graduate department reported similar concerns, noting that longstanding departmental practices around collegiality (hosting evening colloquia, events at bars, etc.) functioned to facilitate a climate of sexual harassment and sexism, but that the absence of any training or awareness of sexual harassment law meant that the perpetrators and those who enabled it could profess total ignorance that their behavior was problematic, with the result that women faculty and students withdrew from collegial engagement and did not report problematic behavior out of a conviction that it would go unrecognized. See APA report on the University of Colorado philosophy department (January 2014), available at https://spot.colorado.edu/%7Etooley/The_Site_Visit_Report_and_Administration_Summary.pdf.

12. Specifically, see "How can women win?" June 21, 2016; "I feel like I am missing out," January 31, 2016; "Not the way to welcome new faculty," August 24, 2012; https://beingawomaninphilosophy.wordpress.com.

13. Thanks to two anonymous reviewers, and editor Joan Woolfrey, for helpful clarifications and questions.

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