

Put Away Gaslighting

Dr. Neil Richey, LPC, NCC

Gaslight is the name of a film from 1944, and if you are an Angela Lansbury fan, this was her Hollywood debut. However, the term originated in a 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton called *Gas Light*. “Gaslighting,” as used in the film, refers to the act of making his wife perceive that she is mentally ill so that he could steal from her. The act of gaslighting is to “manipulate another person into doubting his or her perceptions, experiences, or understanding of events” (APA, 2021). For instance, consider this excerpt from the film:

Paula: I couldn’t have dreamed it. I couldn’t have dreamed it. I couldn’t have dreamed it. Did I dream? Did I really? Dream, dream, dream—

Gregory: Yes, Paula. You dream all the time.

Paula: You’re telling me that I dreamed?

Gregory: Everything! All that did not happen.

Paula: My mind is going. A dream—

Gregory: I told you, Paula, it’s a dream. It was a dream. (Portnow, 1996, p. 1).

In Robin Stern’s book, *The Gaslight Effect: How to Spot and Survive the Hidden Manipulation Others Use to Control Your Life*, the author said: “The gaslight effect results from a relationship between two people: a gaslighter, who needs to be right in order to preserve his own sense of self and his sense of having power in the world; and a gaslightee, who allows the gaslighter to define her sense of reality because she idealizes him and seeks his approval” (Stern, 2007, p. xx). Perhaps a synonym word would be “bully.” Another word that could be employed is “liar.”

While “gaslighting” is not a clinical term, the concept is genuine and potentially dangerous (Harvard Business, 2021). The emotionally and sometimes physically abusive behavior known as gaslighting can lead to anxiety and depression (Stern, 2019). Sometimes the consequences of gaslighting are far worse.

Proverbs 8:13 says, “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do hate.” In that passage, I was struck by the word “froward.” This term is not new to me. However, I decided to take a fresh look at it.

The word “froward” is sometimes translated as “perverted.” According to [yourdictionary.com](https://www.yourdictionary.com), the term “froward” is defined as “not easily controlled,” stubborn, and

“difficult to deal with.” If I understand the passage, we could replace the word “froward” with “gaslighting” and not change the meaning of the text. Look at the verse again. “The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the [gaslighting] mouth, do hate.”

Gaslighting in relationships, not just romantic ones, is far more common than we may admit—even among Christian relationships. Sometimes, those guilty of gaslighting fail to see their guilt due to a lack of self-awareness (Stern, 2019). Check-in with yourself and your relationships. Pay attention to your words (Mt. 12:36). Genuine love requires us to put away hurtful words.