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Gaslighting Exposure During Emerging Adulthood: Personality Traits and Vulnerability Paths

La relación gaslighting para jóvenes adultos: rasgos de personalidad y caminos hacia la vulnerabilidad

Martina Bellomare¹ , Vincenzo Giuseppe Genova² ,
Paola Miano^{1,*} 

¹Department of Psychology, Educational Science and Human Movement, We Search Lab - Laboratory of behavioural observation and research on human development, University of Palermo, Italy.

²Department of Economics, Business, and Statistics, University of Palermo, Italy.

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*Corresponding author:

Paola Miano

Email: paola.miano@unipa.it

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Abstract.

Among the many forms of psychological violence, gaslighting is a particularly insidious manipulative behaviour that includes acts aimed at controlling and altering one's own partner's sensations, thoughts, actions, affective state, self-perception, and reality-testing. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the association between the experience of gaslighting and dysfunctional aspects of the partner's personality. Gaslighter personality facets were assessed using the Personality Inventory for DSM-5–Informant Form–Adult (PID-5-IRF), while gaslighting behaviours were assessed using a 25-item questionnaire, based on the three categories of glamour, good-guy, and intimidator (Stern, 2007). The sample was made up of a group of 177 Italian emerging adults aged between 19 and 26 (49.2% male, 50.8% female; $M = 21.88$, $SD = 1.75$), enrolled at University, who participated voluntarily in the research. In fact, none of them received any form of direct or indirect incentive. In our study, we applied a beta regression model mapping the Likert scale into the open interval (0,1). The main results show (a) good-guy gaslighting is positively associated with manipulativeness and negatively associated with deceitfulness; (b) glamour gaslighting has a negative association with separation insecurity and manipulativeness, but it is positively associated with irresponsibility; (c) intimidator gaslighting has a positive association with separation insecurity and distractibility and a negative association with eccentricity and perceptual dysregulation; (d) all three gaslighting categories are negatively associated with anhedonia and impulsivity. Based on what emerged from the data, aspects such as separation insecurity, irresponsibility, and distractibility can be seen as serious risk factors for gaslighting. For this reason, with regard to clinical implications, an early recognition of dysfunctional traits in potential abusers should be fostered in order to protect both potential abusers and their partner from aggressive conduct within an intimate relationship.

Resumen.

Entre las muchas formas de violencia psicológica, el *gaslighting* es un comportamiento manipulador particularmente insidioso que incluye actos destinados a controlar y alterar sensaciones, pensamientos, acciones, estado afectivo, autopercepción y estado de realidad de la pareja. El propósito de este estudio fue evaluar la asociación entre la experiencia del *gaslighting* y los aspectos disfuncionales de la personalidad de la pareja. Los aspectos de la personalidad de *gaslighting* se evaluaron utilizando el Inventario de Personalidad para DSM-5–Formulario de Informante–Adulto (PID-5-IRF), mientras que los comportamientos de *gaslighting* se evaluaron usando un cuestionario de 25 ítems, basado en las tres categorías de glamoroso, buen tipo e intimidante (Stern, 2007). La muestra estuvo compuesta por un grupo de 177 adultos jóvenes italianos de entre 19 y 26 años (49.2% hombres, 50.8% mujeres; $M = 21.88$, $SD = 1.75$), quienes estaban matriculados en la universidad y participaron voluntariamente en la investigación. De hecho, ninguno de ellos recibieron algún tipo de incentivo, ya fuera directo o indirecto. En nuestro estudio aplicamos un modelo de regresión beta que mapea la escala Likert en el rango abierto (0,1). Los principales hallazgos muestran (a) que el buen tipo de *gaslighting* está positivamente asociado con la manipulación y negativamente asociado con el engaño; (b) el *gaslighting* glamoroso tiene una asociación negativa con la separación, la inseguridad y la manipulación, pero está positivamente asociado con la irresponsabilidad; (c) la iluminación del intimidador tiene una asociación positiva con la inseguridad de la separación y la distracción y una asociación negativa con la excentricidad y la desregulación perceptiva; (d) las tres categorías de *gaslighting* están asociadas negativamente con la anhedonia y la impulsividad. Según lo que surgió de los datos, aspectos como la inseguridad en la separación, la irresponsabilidad y la distracción pueden considerarse factores de riesgo graves para el *gaslighting*. Por esta razón, en las implicaciones clínicas, se debe promover un reconocimiento temprano de los rasgos disfuncionales en los abusadores potenciales para proteger tanto a los abusadores potenciales como a su pareja del comportamiento agresivo dentro de una relación.

Keywords.

Gaslighting, Psychological Violence, Intimate Partner Violence, Personality Traits, Young Adulthood.

Palabras Clave.

Gaslighting, violencia psicológica, violencia de pareja, rasgos de personalidad, jóvenes adultos.

1. Introduction

Emotional abuse is a form of psychological abuse that includes manipulation, verbal abuse, and criticism; it is often reciprocal and it may occur both in adult relationships and in adolescents' dating relationships (Banister et al., 2003). Since emerging adults tend to experience casual dating and occasional relationships, they could be considered a group at a high risk of psychological violence and gaslighting, a type of abuse that is intended to psychologically subjugate another individual in different ways, such as by assaulting, denying and/or minimizing the other person. Gaslighting is a form of psychological violence characterized by manipulative and controlling behaviors intended to alter one's own partner's thoughts, perceptions, actions, and affects (Stern, 2007). The aim of the current study is to analyze the correlation between gaslighting behaviors and abuser's personality traits, in order to identify personality risk factors within a romantic relationship.

1.1 Emerging Adults and Intimate Partner Violence

Even if there are no shared specific characteristics with regard to demographic status (some individuals live with their parents, others live with peers or partners, some change their accommodation frequently), it is possible to state that emerging adults range from 18 to 25 years old (Arnett, 2000). Several implications arise from research studies on emerging adults. As Arnett (2000) has argued, (a) emerging adulthood is characterized by frequent changes in interpersonal relationships, one's professional life, and other important areas of life; (b) emerging adults consider themselves as no longer adolescent but not yet as young adults able to accept full responsibility, to decide autonomously, and to be financially independent; (c) given that during emerging adulthood, social and personal roles are not stable, meaningful identity explorations can occur.

Emerging adults highly involved in a couple relationship may have to deal with relational difficulties and challenges that could increase the odds of dysfunctional behaviours such as aggressive behaviour towards the partner (Johnson et al., 2015). Intimate partner violence (IPV) consists of a large range of violent behaviours, including physical, sexual, and psychological violence perpetrated by one romantic partner against the other. IPV represents a severe risk factor to which girls and boys as well as men and women are exposed; nevertheless, IPV seems to be particularly dangerous for individuals from adolescence to young adulthood (Baker & Stith, 2008).

In the context of psychological aggression, both open and covert aggression are associated with negative outcomes, but hidden psychological violence is harder to identify and to report. Gaslighting is a peculiar type of violence characterized by manipulation strategies intended to control and alter the partner's sensations, thoughts, actions, affective state, and even self-perception and reality-testing (Calef & Weinshel, 1981).

According to Stern (2007), gaslighting is more insidious at its very early stage, because at the beginning of psychological violence it is usually very hard to identify signs of emotional abuse; the more the relationship is recent, the more gaslighting behaviours could be hidden. Given that emerging adults tend to experience casual dating and occasional relationships, they could be considered as a high-risk group for gaslighting: the more frequently they begin a new relationship, the more they can be exposed to gaslighting. An effective protective factor is represented by the capacity to recognize a violent partner and to promptly interrupt a dysfunctional relationship.

1.2 Gaslighting Behaviours as a Form of Psychological Abuse

Gaslighting is manipulative behaviour that includes acts whose purpose is to control and alter the partner's sensations, thoughts, actions, affective state, self-perception, and reality-testing (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). As Stern (2007) has posited, gaslighting could be seen as a gender-neutral form of violence in which an abuser, who is identified as the *gaslighter*, tries to control his/her romantic partner, who is identified as the *gaslightee*.

Gaslighting consists of a wide range of behaviours that victimize and intimidate a partner within a couple relationship; as a form of psychological abuse, it causes social and emotional distress, confusion, increasing self-doubt, diminished self-esteem, anxiety, depression and, in extremely rare cases, it may elicit symptoms of psychosis; those who have a partner who acts as a gaslighter suffer due to negative remarks, surveillance, controlling behaviours, and threats of violence (Barter, 2011) that compromise their self-esteem.

Stern (2007) distinguishes three different categories of gaslighter: glamour, good-guy, and intimidator. The glamour gaslighter tends to control his/her partner through flattery and pandering and makes him/her feel special. Concurrently, the gaslightee often neglects dysfunctional behaviours of the glamour partner and these entrap the gaslightee in a distorted reality that the survivor accepts. The good-guy gaslighter's behaviours are directed at satisfying his/her narcissistic needs and preserving his/her positive self-image; apparently, he/she seems to be interested in the victim's well-being, but instead it is through support and encouragement that he/she exercises his/her control. The intimidator gaslighter, to conclude, expresses his/her aggression in a direct form, addressing harsh, reiterated and frequent criticisms and disapproval to the gaslightee.

1.3 Personality traits associated with gaslighting

With regard to individual precursors of psychological violence and gaslighting behaviours, various factors have been identified, and these include hostility, anger (Bowen, 2011a), emotional dysregulation (Teten et al., 2008), dissociative defence mechanisms (Moskowitz, 2004), and a poor reflective function (Bateman & Fonagy, 2008).

Furthermore, based on the pivotal article by Hamberger and Hastings (1986), there is wide agreement regarding the association between IPV behaviours and personality traits (South et al., 2008): impulsivity (Holtzworth-Munroe & Meehan, 2004), lack of empathy (Ehrensaft et al., 2006), detachment (Hamberger et al., 2000), antagonism, disinhibition, negative affectivity (Kasowski & Anderson, 2019), and psychopathy (Shaffer et al., 2021) are positively associated with violent aggression within romantic relationships. Looking at the three clusters of personality disorders, cluster A (paranoid, schizoid, schizotypal) and cluster B (borderline, narcissistic, antisocial, histrionic) seem to have a stronger correlation to IPV than cluster C (dependent, avoidant, obsessive-compulsive) (Ehrensaft et al., 2006).

The alternative model for personality disorders described (Krueger et al., 2011) in section III of DSM-5 (APA, 2013) may be very valuable to understanding the psychological reasons for aggressive conduct and gaslighting.

A previous study (Miano et al., 2021) has identified an association between the three categories of gaslighting (glamour, good-guy and intimidator) and specific dysfunctional personality trait domains identified in accordance with the DSM-5 alternative model for personality disorders, such as detachment, disinhibition, and psychoticism.

1.4 Research Hypotheses on gaslighting and Personality

The present study aims to improve understanding of personality correlates of gaslighting behaviours in order to shed light on vulnerability factors. Based on literature data, we hypothesized that three categories of gaslighting have a positive association with specific dysfunctional traits. In particular:

H₁: Glamour gaslighting is positively associated with the following nine personality facets of gaslighters, as reported by their partners: anxiousness, separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, irresponsibility, impulsivity, perceptual dysregulation.

H₂: Good-guy gaslighting is positively associated with the following eight personality facets of gaslighters, as reported by their partners: anxiousness, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, deceitfulness, impulsivity, perceptual dysregulation.

H₃: Intimidator gaslighting is positively associated with the following seven personality facets of gaslighters, as reported by their partners: separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, impulsivity, distractibility, eccentricity, perceptual dysregulation.

Therefore, assuming that there is a significant association between specific dysfunctional personality traits and gaslighting behaviours, the purpose of this study is to test these assumptions and to determine if these personality traits are positively associated with an increased probability of manifestation of gaslighting behaviours.

2. Method

2.1 Participants

Our sample was composed of 177 Italian emerging adults aged 19-26 years at the time of the exam (mean age = 21.88 years and SD = 1.75 years), enrolled at the University of Palermo, of which 49.2% were male and 50.8% female. All participants affirmed their voluntary participation; none of them received any form of incentive, whether direct or indirect. The Institutional Review Board of the University of Palermo, Italy, granted approval for the present study (protocol codes 150965-2023, 159061-2023, and 163786-2023, dated 26 October 2023). The study was conducted in adherence to the ethical treatment guidelines outlined by the Italian Association of Psychology (2015). The participants exhibited a response rate of 99.4%, and questionnaires were deemed incomplete if more than 10% of the items in any given scale were left unanswered. In adherence to this exclusion criterion, we excluded 23 individuals from our study sample.

The sample was composed of 149 (84.2%) bachelor's degree students, and 28 (15.8%) master's degree students. As for their social economic status, 11 participants (6.2%) reported a very good economic condition, 51 (28.8%) a good economic condition, 96 (54.2%) an average economic condition, 16 (9%) a poor economic condition, and 3 participants (1.7%) reported a very poor economic condition.

2.2 Measures

Personality traits were analysed through a dimensional approach to personality disorders rather than a categorical perspective, which can be found in the third section of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – Fifth Edition (DSM-5; APA, 2013). This approach, based on an alternative model for personality disorders (Krueger et al., 2011), was used because we thought it would be the most useful for understanding gaslighting relationships.

In this model, personality disorders are defined in terms of two key criteria: the first criterion (A) concerns personality functioning and focuses on the impairment of self-functioning (identity and self-direction) and interpersonal functioning (empathy and intimacy); the second criterion (B) evaluates pathological personality traits, which are organised into five domains.

Gaslighter personality traits were assessed using the Italian version (Fossati & Borroni, 2015) of the Personality Inventory for DSM-5–Informant Form–Adult (PID-5-IRF; Markon et al., 2013), which consists of 218 items scored on a 4-point Likert scale, where 0 signifies 'Very False' or 'Often False', 1 stands for 'Mostly False', 2 represents 'Mostly True', and 3 denotes 'Very True' or 'Often True'. This measure assesses 25 dysfunctional personality facets, organized hierarchically into five broader domains (negative affectivity, as opposed to emotional

stability; detachment, as opposed to extraversion; antagonism, as opposed to agreeableness; disinhibition, as opposed to conscientiousness; psychoticism, as opposed to lucidity). Within each domain, three specific dysfunctional traits are identified and called facets. In the negative affectivity domain, in opposition to emotional stability, they are: emotional lability (e.g., item 18: 'changes in emotion for no good reason'), anxiousness (e.g., item 95: 'is very nervous about the future'), separation insecurity (e.g., item 126: 'fears being alone in life more than anything else'). In the second domain, detachment as opposed to extraversion, the facets are: withdrawal (e.g., item 145: 'is not interested in making friends'), anhedonia (e.g., item 187: 'rarely gets enthusiastic about anything'), intimacy avoidance (e.g., item 201: 'prefers being alone to having a close romantic partner').

In the third domain, antagonism as opposed to agreeableness, the facets are: manipulateness (e.g., item 217: 'finds it is easy to take advantage of others'), deceitfulness (e.g., item 53: 'often makes up things about themselves to help them get what they want'), grandiosity (e.g., item 113: 'thinks they are better than almost everyone else'). In the fourth domain, disinhibition as opposed to conscientiousness, they are: irresponsibility (e.g., item 170: 'has skipped town to avoid responsibilities'), impulsivity (e.g., item 4: 'acts totally on impulse'), distractibility (e.g., item 68: 'can't achieve goals because other things capture their attention'). Finally, in the last domain, psychoticism as opposed to lucidity, they are: unusual beliefs & experiences (e.g., item 94: 'thinks they have unusual abilities (like sometimes knowing exactly what someone is thinking)'), eccentricity (e.g., item 21: 'often says things that are odd or strange'), perceptual dysregulation (e.g., item 77: 'often seems to see things as unfamiliar or strange'). For the purpose of this study, gaslighter personality traits were evaluated by their partners, who thus acted as informants. In this study, the PID-5-IRF showed good internal consistency: Cronbach's Alpha for all domains was .98.

Gaslighting behaviours were assessed using a 25-item questionnaire, based on the three categories of gaslighting identified by Stern (2007): glamour, good-guy and intimidator. The original yes/no questions were rephrased into statements to allow answers on a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 signifies 'Strongly Disagree', 2 stands for 'Disagree', 3 represents 'Neither Agree nor Disagree', 4 means 'Agree', and 5 denotes 'Strongly Agree'. The questionnaire therefore consists of three subscales: (a) the glamour gaslighting subscale (11 items) evaluates the gaslighting behaviours characterized by the idealization of the relationship through exaggerated flattery and compliments (e.g., item 9: 'sometimes you feel that your partner has a whole repertoire of romantic ideas that don't necessarily fit your moods, your tastes or history together'); (b) the good-guy gaslighting subscale, which consist of 7 items, focuses on relationships in which the

gaslighter offers help and support in order to increase his/her own self-esteem and not out of empathy (e.g., item 18: 'your partner asks you about your day, listens attentively and responds sympathetically, yet somehow, you end most such conversations feeling worse than before'); (c) the intimidator gaslighting subscale, which consists of 7 items, helps to identify gaslighters characterized by contempt, denigration or psychological punishment (e.g., item 19: 'your partner denigrates you or treats you with contempt both in front of others and when you are alone'). Although the gaslighting behavior scale has not yet been formally validated in Italy, our preliminary studies have shown high internal reliability. Overall, this 25-item scale showed good internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha was .83). Specifically, for the three types of gaslighting (Glamour, Good-guy, and Intimidator), our preliminary analysis shows values of Cronbach's Alpha of .67, .72, and .83, respectively. These preliminary results suggest that the scale may be applicable to the Italian context. However, further validation study is underway to confirm these findings.

Furthermore, in accordance with our hypotheses, we evaluated the internal consistency of the facets we use to assess the association between the three types of gaslighting. Specifically, the facets of anxiousness, separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, irresponsibility, impulsivity, and perceptual dysregulation demonstrate a good degree of reliability in relation to Glamour gaslighting (Cronbach's Alpha .89). As for the facets of anxiousness, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, deceitfulness, impulsivity, and perceptual dysregulation, these also show a high degree of reliability in measuring Good-guy gaslighting (Cronbach's Alpha .91). Finally, with regard to our third hypothesis, which refers to Intimidator gaslighting, we measured the internal consistency of the facets of separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, impulsivity, distractibility, eccentricity, and perceptual dysregulation. In this case too, the values of Cronbach's Alpha show satisfactory results in terms of reliability (Cronbach's Alpha .87).

2.3 Data Analysis

In many applications, linear regression models are widely used to analyse relations among variables. Such an approach is not appropriate when the response variable is bounded since values fitted from a linear regression model can exceed lower and upper bounds of the response variable. Furthermore, bounded measures are typically asymmetric and inferences based on the normality assumption can be misleading (Ferrari & Cribari-Neto, 2004).

The analysis presented here is related to our previous work on gaslighting behaviour (Miano et al., 2021), but here our attention was focused on the relationship between the different types of gaslighting behaviour (our response variables) and personality facets. Instead of

the PID—IRF domains, in this study we decided to consider the facets in order to evaluate in detail how specific personality traits (inside domains) can influence gaslighting behaviours. As in our previous work, the response variables (i.e. glamour gaslighting, good-guy gaslighting, and intimidator gaslighting) are defined in a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. Thus, a classical linear model is not appropriate. To overcome this limit, we applied a beta regression model for bounded responses, using the statistical software R3.5.1, mapping the Likert scale into the open interval (0,1) as showed in (Smithson & Verkuilen, 2006) and (Miano et al., 2021).

3. Results

In order to test the research hypothesis, the association between dysfunctional personality traits and gaslighting behaviours was assessed. In particular, whit the aim of determining if glamour gaslighting, good-guy gaslighting, and intimidator gaslighting are associated with personality facets such as anxiousness, separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, deceitfulness, irresponsibility, impulsivity, distractibility, eccentricity, and perceptual dysregulation, a beta regression model was applied.

Tables 1, 2, and 3 present the outcomes of the estimated models, elucidating the associations between the explanatory variables (rows in Tables) and distinct gaslighting types.

In scrutinizing the results delineated in Table 1, focusing on glamour gaslighting, a negative coefficient for anxiousness (−.19) suggests a potential link between anxiety and reduced instances of glamour gaslighting. Negative coefficients for separation insecurity (−.2), anhedonia (−.15), impulsivity (−.1), and withdrawal (−.04) imply these factors diminishing the likelihood of engaging in glamour gaslighting behaviors. Conversely, the positive coefficient associated with intimacy avoidance (.23) indicates an inclination towards participating in glamour gaslighting for individuals marked by higher levels of intimacy avoidance. The negative coefficients for manipulateness (−.07) and impulsivity suggest a potential inverse relationship, hinting that higher manipulateness may be associated with lower levels of glamour gaslighting. In contrast, the positive coefficient linked to irresponsibility (.28) emphasizes the role of accountability in shaping gaslighting dynamics.

Turning attention to Table 2, the negative coefficient for anxiousness (−.22) suggests a potential inverse relationship, indicating that individuals with heightened anxiety may exhibit a reduced inclination towards embodying the traits associated with the good-guy gaslighter. Similarly, negative coefficients for withdrawal (−.37) and anhedonia (−.45) signify a negative correlation, suggesting that tendencies toward withdrawal and a reduced capacity for pleasure are linked to a decreased likelihood of

Table 1

Coefficients for the Glamour gaslighting estimated models. Coefficients with p value <.10

Glamour gaslighting Coefficients	
Intercept	.44
Anxiousness	−.19
Separation Insecurity	−.2
Withdrawal	−.04
Anhedonia	−.15
Intimacy Avoidance	.23
Manipulateness	−.07
Irresponsibility	.28
Impulsivity	−.1
Perceptual Dysregulation	.01

aligning with the characteristics of a good-guy gaslighter. Conversely, the positive coefficient for intimacy avoidance (.49) suggests that a higher degree of intimacy avoidance is associated with an increased likelihood of expressing traits associated with the good-guy profile. The positive coefficient for manipulateness (.16) indicates a modest association, suggesting that higher levels of manipulateness may be linked to the good-guy gaslighter profile. In contrast, the negative coefficients for deceitfulness (−.05) and impulsivity (−.12) suggest that higher levels of these facets are correlated with a reduced likelihood of aligning with the good-guy gaslighter. Lastly, the positive coefficient for perceptual dysregulation (.04) implies a positive association between perceptual dysregulation and the good-guy profile.

Table 2

Coefficients for the Good guy gaslighting estimated models. Coefficients with p value <.10

Good guy gaslighting Coefficients	
Intercept	.96
Anxiousness	−.22
Withdrawal	−.37
Anhedonia	−.45
Intimacy Avoidance	.49
Manipulateness	.16
Deceitfulness	−.05
Impulsivity	−.12
Perceptual Dysregulation	.04

Analyzing the coefficients from Table 3, which outlines the traits associated with the intimidator gaslighter type, the slight positive coefficient for separation insecurity (.04) suggests a subtle association, indicating that higher levels of separation insecurity may be linked to the intimidator characteristics. Similarly, the positive coefficient for withdrawal (.06) suggests that withdrawal tendencies may contribute, albeit modestly, to the intimidator gaslighter type. Contrastingly, the negative coeffi-

cient for anhedonia (-1.07) indicates a robust negative correlation. This suggests that individuals with a reduced capacity for pleasure are strongly associated with the manifestation of the intimidator behavioral profile. The negative coefficient for impulsivity ($-.18$) suggests a potential inverse relationship, implying that higher levels of impulsivity may be linked to lower instances of the intimidator gaslighting type. The positive coefficient for distractibility (.41) suggests that higher levels of distractibility may be associated with higher levels of the intimidator gaslighter. On the other hand, the negative coefficient for eccentricity ($-.06$) implies a modest negative association, suggesting that higher levels of eccentricity might be linked to lower levels of the intimidator gaslighting type. Finally, the negative coefficient for perceptual dysregulation ($-.18$) suggests a potential negative relationship, indicating that individuals with higher perceptual dysregulation may exhibit lower levels of the intimidator gaslighting type.

Table 3

Coefficients for the intimidator gaslighting estimated models. Coefficients with p value $<.10$

Intimidator gaslighting Coefficients	
Intercept	1.7
Separation Insecurity	.04
Withdrawal	.06
Anhedonia	-1.07
Impulsivity	$-.18$
Distractibility	.41
Eccentricity	$-.06$
Perceptual Dysregulation	$-.18$

4. Discussion

The main aim of our study was to investigate the association between gaslighting and dysfunctional personality in abusers (or gaslighters). In particular, some facets of the PID-5-IRF (Markon et al., 2013) were examined in relation to the three types of gaslighting—the glamour, the good-guy and the intimidator types—, since even if gaslighting behaviours share certain manipulative behaviours, some differences among the three can be identified (Stern, 2007).

It should be noted that differently from a previous study (Miano et al, 2021), we considered facets, instead of domains, of PID-5-IRF in order to specify more accurately how personality may affect violent behaviours.

With regard to glamour gaslighting, it was hypothesized that it would be positively associated with 9 personality trait facets (anxiousness, separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, irresponsibility, impulsivity, perceptual dysregulation). On the basis of previous data, these facets were chosen because the glamour gaslighter is described as an

individual who mistreats his/her partner and does not understand why he/she feels hurt and complains about their relationship. Our hypothesis was only partially confirmed and, of the 9 facets, only intimacy avoidance, irresponsibility, and perceptual dysregulation showed a positive association with glamour gaslighting. These positive associations are consistent with the personality of the glamour gaslighter (Stern, 2007) who is, indeed, only apparently affectionate and devoted, while it might seem that he/she loves his/her partner, he/she does not really care about him/her: intimacy is only a façade and on a deeper level—partially unconscious, it may be expected—, he/she rejects intimacy because it would increase his/her vulnerability and would lead him/her to feel more insecure.

Likewise, irresponsibility is described as having a tendency to consistently disregard obligations; individuals with a high level of irresponsibility show a severe lack of respect for agreements and promises and are prone to fail to honor their commitments (APA, 2013). Irresponsibility is consistent with the glamour gaslighter portrait, as someone who is narcissistically self-centered: he/she has a lack of empathy and does not take into consideration the effects of his/her own behaviours on others (Mager et al., 2014). Another positive association concerns the perceptual dysregulation facet and glamour gaslighting. This association can be explained by referring to a severe form of an archaic defence mechanism like dissociation: individuals who behave as gaslighter often react as if they were trying to keep some painful psychic content out of their consciousness. Gaslighters can use dissociation to ignore and to remain unaware of their own behaviours or, in turn, of their negative effects on their partner (Miano et al, 2021; Stern, 2007; Yang & Mulvey, 2012) who might even be blamed for their own psychological discomfort (Korobov, 2020). As Hamberger et al. (2000) have already underlined these personality characteristics seem to be associated to detachment from interpersonal relationships and to schizoid traits.

In our analyses of the association between 8 facets (anxiousness, withdrawal, anhedonia, intimacy avoidance, manipulateness, deceitfulness, impulsivity, perceptual dysregulation) and good-guy gaslighting, two strong associations were found: a positive one and a negative one. The association between anhedonia and good-guy gaslighting is negative, such that the less an individual has a capacity for enjoyment, and the less he/she demonstrates he/she is ready to experience, to take interest in and to feel pleasure in life (APA, 2013), the more it is likely that he/she will behave as a good-guy gaslighter. It could be argued that the low level of anhedonia is the reverse of the interpersonal attitude that characterizes this type of gaslighter; indeed, the good-guy gaslighter is prone to consider his/her partner as a means to obtain narcissistic rewards (Stern, 2007) whereas high levels of anhedonia seem to be related to low narcissistic satisfaction and

likewise to a high level of covert narcissism, characterized by a sense of entitlement united with hypersensitivity to a perceived ego threat (Ryan et al., 2008). A positive association was found, however, between intimacy avoidance and good-guy gaslighting behaviours. This association brings together both the glamour and the good-guy gaslighting types for the same reason: each of these two types of gaslighter is only apparently attached to his/her partner and is rather afraid of intimacy, since closeness and intimacy raise his/her sense of insecurity and frailty (Dowgwillo et al., 2016; Stern, 2007).

Moreover, two other positive associations were found: both manipulateness and perceptual dysregulation are positively associated with good-guy gaslighting. With regard to the perceptual dysregulation facet, just as in the proposal made for glamour gaslighting, the use of dissociation as a defence mechanism would explain how a good-guy gaslighter does not usually recognize his/her detrimental behaviour and tends to deny its consequences (Yang & Mulvey, 2012). The positive association between manipulateness and good-guy gaslighting could be linked to the most distinctive aspect of the good-guy gaslighter: he/she is able to conceal his/her violent behaviour (Back et al., 2010). The good-guy gaslighter manipulates his/her partner through subterfuge and disguised forms of control; he/she appears to be seductive, glib, and ingratiating only in order to do things his/her own way (APA, 2013). It should be noted that manipulateness could be an unconscious disposition that, due to a dysfunctional pattern of defence mechanisms, remains unknown to those who enact manipulative behaviours; of course, this denial worsens the abusive dynamic since the gaslighter is unaware of his/her behaviours and the less he/she recognizes them, the less he/she will be likely to change them (Henning & Holdford, 2006; Scott & Straus, 2007).

As already noted by various authors, the good-guy gaslighter seems to have some similarities with narcissistic and paranoid traits: due to an incapability to be empathic and a tendency to interpret events as threatening they seem to be associated with IPV (Yang & Mulvey, 2012), through suspiciousness, hostility, and controlling behaviours (Ehrensaft et al., 2006).

In relation to the third type of gaslighting, 7 facets (separation insecurity, withdrawal, anhedonia, impulsivity, distractibility, eccentricity, perceptual dysregulation) were analysed with regard to the intimidator gaslighting. We found two associations to be strong in absolute values: intimidator gaslighting is negatively associated with anhedonia and positively associated with distractibility. These two crucial data points are consistent with the general description of the intimidator gaslighter as someone who is openly aggressive and sharply critical towards his/her partner; within an intimidator gaslighting relationship, violent behaviours include contempt, denigration, threats or psychological punishment, which are usu-

ally implemented unexpectedly and incoherently (Plouffe et al., 2020; Stern, 2007). In this regard, distractibility, which is a difficulty in concentrating on a task and in maintaining a goal-focused behaviour (APA, 2013), could explain the suddenness of intimidator gaslighting behaviours (Brem et al., 2019) and, consequently, the related sense of hopelessness in gaslightees. Moreover, another positive association concerns the relation between both separation insecurity and withdrawal, on one hand, and key aspects of intimidator gaslighting behaviours, on the other hand. Even if separation insecurity and withdrawal may seem opposed to each other, they could instead be expressions of a narcissistic vulnerability, a sense of unbearable loneliness, a terrible fear of being rejected (Baumeister et al., 2000).

On the other side, as already suggested in regard to the good-guy gaslighting type, high levels of anhedonia are consistent with a low capacity for enjoyment, low narcissistic satisfaction, and covert narcissism (APA, 2013; Ryan et al., 2008; Stern, 2007); negative affects, such as rage and misery, are, indeed, usually related to intimidator gaslighting (Rhodewalt et al., 1998) and are not at all associated with a search for narcissistic reward. Contrary to both glamour and good-guy gaslighting, perceptual dysregulation is negatively associated with intimidator gaslighting; this data is in line with the clear thinking (Plouffe et al., 2020) that underlies intimidator gaslighting behaviour.

This behaviour, even if it is unpredictable and brutal, is usually controlled and planned (Stern, 2007) just as has been confirmed by a negative association between impulsivity and intimidator gaslighting. Impulsivity is defined as acting on the spur of immediate stimuli, without planning and any consideration of the consequences (APA, 2013). These data are consistent with those reported in previous literature: marked impulsivity and instability of interpersonal relationships (Holtzworth-Munroe & Meehan, 2004), such as inadequate control of impulsive behaviours (White & Widom, 2003), seem to be related to antisocial and borderline traits.

5. Conclusion

Psychological violence is a form of IPV aggression widespread throughout the world (Morgan & Gilchrist, 2010; Yakubovich et al., 2018); in turn, gaslighting behaviours can be considered as a form of psychological violence that can occur within various interpersonal contexts, such as couple (Sweet, 2019) or psychotherapeutic relationships (Tormoen, 2019). Gaslighters manipulate their partner in order to control them and to alter their affective and mental states, as well as their self-perception (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). According to different authors (Bowen, 2011b; DeCuyper et al., 2018; Ehrensaft et al., 2006; Hamberger & Hastings, 1986; Smith et al., 2020) different personality traits are associated with the

tendency to be psychologically, physically, and sexually aggressive. Gunderson and Sabo (1993), for instance, have pointed out that individuals with borderline traits are more vulnerable to intimate partner violence and, subsequently, to PTSD (Kuijpers et al., 2010). With regard to personality trait domains, according to the DSM-5 alternative model for personality disorders, some gaslightee trait domains appear to be associated with exposure to gaslighting (Miano et al., 2021). High levels of impulsiveness and sensation-seeking characterize disinhibition (APA, 2013), which indeed seems to be associated with all three categories of experienced gaslighting (glamour, good-guy, and intimidator gaslighting) and may result in an incapacity to avoid dangerous interpersonal environments (Stoel et al., 2006). Likewise, gaslightee antagonism is positively associated with both glamour and good-guy gaslighting, through a narcissistic albeit dysfunctional and harmful form of gratification that they receive from their gaslighting partners (Ménard & Pincus, 2014; Pico-Alfonso et al., 2008) who are used to flattering them (Stern, 2007).

Lastly, gaslightee psychoticism is related to intimidator gaslighting due to a severe lack of mentalization processes, which may hamper critical judgment (LaMotte & Murphy, 2017; Moskowitz, 2004).

Nevertheless, it bears noting that dysfunctional personality traits are not sufficient to explain aggressive behaviours, and thus individuals with dysfunctional personality traits generally do not necessarily behave in a violent way.

From a clinical perspective, some results could provide useful indications for therapeutic practice and prevention programmes. The recognition of dysfunctional traits in potential abusers may help to reduce the likelihood of violent behaviours within intimate relationships (Kasowski & Anderson, 2019). An approach focused on protective and risk factors could help prevent violent relationships: vulnerable girls and boys, as well as men and women, could benefit from early identification of dysfunctional relational characteristics (Krahé & Vanwesenbeeck, 2015).

In particular, our data have shown that three facets in particular —separation insecurity, irresponsibility, and distractibility— may be seen as severe risk factors for gaslighting; early assessment of these traits could help minimize vulnerability to gaslighting behaviours. It should be noted that preventive measures for IPV are protective not only for potential survivors, but also for potential abusers; actually, the ability to help an individual to avoid aggressive conduct towards an intimate partner is no less important than helping an individual to defend himself/herself (Lu et al., 2019). Potential abusers who are able to find a functional way to be in an intimate relationship succeed in both protecting themselves and their partner (Smith et al., 2015).

Some limitations of this study should be underlined. One concerns the low heterogeneity of the sample; greater variability with regard to age, gender, and socioeconomic status should be attained. Future research should analyse other psychological and social precursors of gaslighting behaviours with regard to more diverse samples. Another limitation concerns the research methodology since other meaningful variables, such as couple relationship characteristics (Smith et al., 2020), individual variables (Brem et al., 2019), and cultural and social features (Sweet, 2019) could be considered in order to formulate a more precise description of gaslighting predictors. Moreover, our study has not analysed outcomes related to exposure to gaslighting, so that future studies may investigate outcome variables, such as attachment, self-esteem or psychological distress.

It should be noted that, given that our questionnaires were only completed by those who had suffered gaslighting from a partner, our study did not take into consideration the potential abuser experience; it should be mentioned though that other studies have used the same type of sampling (Fowler & Westen, 2011; Walsh et al., 2010). Likewise, personality traits of individuals who have suffered from psychological violence should be considered, as was done in previous studies (Miano et al., 2021; Shen & Kusunoki, 2019); future research may address this deficiency. Nonetheless, this study is one of the few that evaluates the association between dysfunctional personality traits and gaslighting as a specific form of psychological violence.

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