

Understanding the Gaslight effect

Power, control can cross line in relationships

Have you ever felt that you weren't in control of your relationship? Not that you wanted to be controlling ... but that somehow you were the one BEING controlled.

We're all sometimes vulnerable to a little manipulation here and there, by our partner. So long as it's not heavy-handed or constant. But do you ever feel like you're being manipulated beyond what seems normal?

That doubt-filled sensation is sometimes referred to as the Gaslight Effect. It's a syndrome named for



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LISI TESHER
relating@metronews.ca

the classic 1944 movie *Gaslight*, in which the then-famous actor Charles Boyer tries to make his wife, played by the iconic Ingrid Bergman, doubt her sanity.

What makes this reference so unsettling was that Boyer in the film, was a murderer.

Twisted or not, if your partner wishes to control



Abuse can be emotional too. Don't let anyone, especially your partner, control you.

you, physically and/or emotionally, it's not healthy. For your personal safety —

both physical and emotional — it's important to break the pattern. But Gaslighting is a form of emotional abuse that can be hard to recognize, and even harder to walk away from.

In other words, Gaslighting is when someone wants you to do something that you know you shouldn't do, or believe something that's not necessarily true.

It's easy to fall prey because the person doing the manipulating has usually figured out the other person's weakness and plays to it. Take this real case as an example: A woman who has insecurities about her body is trapped in a relationship with a man who refuses to talk to her about

anything serious unless they are both completely naked.

Knowing full well that she was uncomfortable naked, the man was able to change the subject easily to whatever he wanted, avoiding the serious confrontations, because he knew she wouldn't be able to concentrate.

Believe it or not, manipulation is so common, it's happened to most people whether they realize it or not. Take the high school football star who notices that the smartest girl in his class has a crush on him.

He flirts, asks her to help him study, and she bends over backwards practically doing his assignments for him so he'll like her. She knows she shouldn't, but she does anyway because he showers her with false admiration, and she gets to spend time with him — time she thinks of as pre-

cious.

One semester, 12 assignments and six exams later, he's passed and is able to continue playing ball. A wink and a "thanks, you're the best" are about all she gets, as she watches him take another girl to the movies.

Relationships aren't a contest, or a matching of tit-for-tat. But it is important to make sure that you feel that you have as much power and control as you would like. And that amount differs for everyone.

Take a step back and re-evaluate where you stand — with your partner, your boss, even your mother. Don't let anyone manipulate you into second-guessing yourself.

Lisi Teshler is a much travelled freelance writer who has studied art history, photography, languages and pop culture. She is also a constant and fascinated student of relationships, maintaining contact with a worldwide network.