

WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF GASLIGHTING IN ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIPS
IN TÜRKİYE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

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**WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES OF GASLIGHTING IN ROMANTIC
RELATIONSHIPS IN TÜRKİYE: A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

Gaslighting is an under-researched topic in which the survivor's knowing abilities regarding her sense of self and reality are diminished by another person. Despite the growing interest, the term remains largely invisible in intimate partner violence literature and requires further research. Although studies in Türkiye mention the psychological impacts of gaslighting, the experience of survivors is not adequately studied. To address this gap in the literature, the current study explores the women's experience of gaslighting in romantic relationships in Türkiye. The research questions focused on how women experience and name gaslighting, their separation process, and how they cope with it during and after the relationship. Semi-structured interviews with 10 women aged 20-28, who have reported experiencing gaslighting in past relationships, were completed. Based on the thematic analysis conducted with the MAXQDA 2024 program, three main themes were derived: Gaslighting as Asserting Power, Experiencing Gaslighting, and Coping Through Learning and Growth. The impact of gender roles on the experience of gaslighting is discussed in the context of Feminist Theory as the explanatory framework. Whereas the experience of gaslighting induced self-doubt and diminished the sense of reality in the survivor, belief in idealized love and receiving reassurance from a third party were the other common experiences. The gradual escalation of emotional turmoil weakened the narrative of the partner, paving the way for separation and naming gaslighting. In addition to the clinical implications, strengths and limitations of the study are discussed; the self-protection strategies and empowerment of women are emphasized.

Keywords: Gaslighting; Romantic Relationships; Empowerment; Women's Experiences; Gender Roles

ÖZ

Gaslighting bir kişinin benlik algısı ve gerçekliğe dair bilme kapasitesinin bir başka kişi tarafından zayıflatıldığı; yeterince araştırılmamış bir konudur. Konuya duyulan ilgi giderek artmasına rağmen bu deneyim yakın partner şiddeti literatüründe büyük ölçüde görünmez kalmaya devam etmektedir ve ek araştırmalar gerekmektedir. Türkiye’de konuyla ilgili yapılan çalışmalar gaslighting’in psikolojik etkilerine değinse de, mağdurların deneyimleri nadiren çalışılmıştır. Literatürdeki bu eksikliği gidermek için, bu tez, kadınların romantik ilişkilerindeki gaslighting deneyimlerini inceledi. Araştırma soruları, kadınların ilişkilerinde gaslighting’i nasıl deneyimlediklerine, nasıl adını koyduklarına, ayrılık süreçlerine ve hem ilişki sırasında hem de ilişki sonrasında bu deneyimle nasıl başa çıktıklarına odaklandı. Yaşları 20 ve 28 arasında değişen, bitmiş bir ilişkilerinde gaslighting deneyimi yaşadığını bildiren 10 kadınla yarı yapılandırılmış görüşmeler tamamlandı. MAXQDA 2024 programı kullanılarak yapılan tematik analiz sonucunda 3 tane ana tema ortaya çıkmıştır: Bir Güç Uygulama Yolu olarak Gaslighting, Gaslighting’i Deneyimleme; Öğrenme ve Büyüme Yoluyla Başa Çıkma. Toplumsal cinsiyet rollerinin gaslighting deneyimi üzerindeki etkisi kavramsal çerçeve olarak seçilen Feminist Teori üzerinden tartışıldı. Gaslighting deneyimi kendinden şüphe duymaya yol açarken ve gerçeklik algısını zayıflatırken, ideal aşka olan inanç ve üçüncü bir kişiden güvence alma ihtiyacı ortak deneyimler oldu. Giderek artan duygusal karmaşa partnerin anlatısını zayıflatırken ayrılığın ve deneyimin adını koymanın yolunu açtı. Çalışmanın güçlü ve zayıf yanları ile klinik uygulamaların yanı sıra kadınların kendilerini koruma stratejileri ve güçlenmelerinin üzerinde durulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Gaslighting; Romantik İlişkiler; Güçlenme; Kadınların Deneyimleri; Toplumsal Cinsiyet Roller

*To every woman who has ever
resisted drowning in a man's shadow,
(y)our battle will forever be cherished
and you will never walk alone!*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Gaslighting is defined as a form of psychological abuse in which one person's fundamental memories, beliefs, and knowledge about the self are questioned because of the manipulation of another person (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Even though this may occur in a variety of contexts, gaslighting is commonly observed in the context of intimate partner violence (IPV) (Warshaw et al., 2014). Many of the survivors of IPV reported that their partners deliberately manipulated them to believe that they were crazy. It aims to weaken a person's self-trust and make them incapable of knowing, and therefore, they can no longer rely on their experiences (Klein et al., 2023). The word, gaslighting has caught an important amount of attention in recent years. It was even selected as the word of the year by Merriam-Webster in 2022 since the number of searches for the word "gaslighting" has increased by 1740%. However, the scarcity of studies regarding the experience of the person who is being exposed to gaslighting and their personal process of naming the experience as gaslighting is noteworthy. Furthermore, the number of studies in Türkiye context is too limited, with no previous qualitatively designed study in the literature. Since gaslighting is suggested as a form of abuse, some extent of it is covered in the IPV literature under the name of psychological abuse and emotional manipulation (Esin, 2022; Kuru, 2022). Yet, gaslighting is a topic that is generally undefined and hardly given suggestions and treatment with certain distinctive features (Stark, 2019). Only a few empirical studies have addressed gaslighting directly, such as the exploration of its relationship with narcissistic traits and emotional abuse in romantic partnerships (Akiş & Öztürk, 2021), and a master's thesis that focuses on psychological symptoms among women who report experiencing gaslighting (Gökçe, 2022). Additionally, Gören (2024) has focused on adapting measurement tools into Turkish. Despite a few recent attempts of review studies (Çabuk & Kumova, 2024; Nazir & Özçiçek, 2022; Uzun & Bulut Uğurlu, 2024), there is still a lack of qualitative, experience-based studies that center women's narratives in intimate relationship settings. In this qualitative study, the aim is to explore young heterosexual women's experiences of gaslighting, how they cope with it, end their romantic relationships, and after-effects of this experience in Türkiye. This

study aims to contribute to the literature by deeply exploring young women's experiences of gaslighting as a specific form of psychological abuse, highlighting the process of naming and coping. The findings of the study also aim to provide guidance for clinicians who work with young women on their romantic relationship experiences and may assist in the formation of prevention and intervention programs about unhealthy romantic relationship dynamics, which can enable faster labelling of this specific form of psychological abuse.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Gaslighting in Intimate Relationships

2.1.1. Gaslighting and Psychological Abuse

Psychological abuse can be defined as a form of non-physical violence (Pitman, 2017). It involves using verbal or non-verbal communication for causing harm in a cognitive or emotional manner (Breiding et al., 2014). While the emphasis of previous research was focused more on physical and sexual abuse in relationships, psychological abuse without the experience of physical abuse is recently focused on (Geffner & Rossman, 1997; Marshall, 1996; Tolman, 1989). Although the exposure to psychological abuse has always been widespread, due to its unrecognizable nature, it was not focused on until the 1980s (Hoffman, 1984; Kasian & Painter, 1992; Kirkwood, 1993). As some studies suggested that the concordant emergence of psychological abuse with the physical or sexual abuse has contributed to its invisibility (Martin, 1976; Walker, 1984), some studies suggested that it was not focused on because it was hard to define and realize (Allen, 2013). It is also noteworthy that non-physical forms of violence were initially began to be topic of research with studies regarding women who have been exposed to physical violence in heterosexual relationships (Follingstad & Edmundson, 2010).

In the literature on intimate partner violence (IPV), the term psychological abuse stood out as women survivors suggested that psychological violence posed greater difficulties than physical violence (Follingstad et al., 1990). Studies pointed out that women who have been exposed to multiple forms of abuse have described psychological belittling, fear, and shaming as the most hurtful type of experience in heterosexual relationships (Walker, 1984). Ferraro (2006) has presented that psychological abuse has some detrimental effects on women's self-esteem. Gradually developing a distorted sense of self-esteem has made survivors incapable of coping with experiences, and thus, causing them to feel helpless and trapped in the vicious cycle of violence (Follingstad et al., 1990).

In this regard, psychological abuse in IPV can be described as a pattern of detrimental acts that can be displayed in various levels of frequency and severity (Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Lammers et al., 2005; Loring, 1994; Tolman, 1992). Lackhar (2001) has proposed that emotionally abusive tactics, such as belittling and neglecting the needs of a person, could result in self-doubt and other psychologically compelling consequences. Kirkwood (1993) has claimed that psychological abuse is remarkably powerful in distorting the reality of the victim. In IPV literature, studies suggested that other forms of abuse might coexist with psychological abuse, but it is also possible that they might emerge independently (Loring, 1994; Sims, 2008). Indeed, Myhill and Hohl (2019) and Coleman and Straus (1986) have found that the existence of control is seen as an indicator of future physical abuse. Sometimes psychological abuse might evolve to physical abuse or be limited to psychological abuse, in which women experienced painful wounds afterwards that were less visible than physical abuse (Asensi, 2008; Manso et al., 2011).

Studies have indicated that there are various ways of implementing psychological abuse. For instance, public humiliation (e.g., name calling), use of verbal abuse (e.g., harassment, humiliation, direct insults) can be considered as some of these ways. Studies suggested that these methods aim to deteriorate the sense of self-worth and control the continuation of the relationship (Follingstad et al., 1990). In this regard, verbal threats for a potential future abuse of any kind (e.g., threats for physical abuse) function as psychological abuse (Walker, 1979). Furthermore, tactics for social or financial isolation of the women can be regarded as psychological abuse (Martin, 1976; Walker, 1979; Walker, 1984). This method contributed to the diminished power of women to deal with the abuse. Similarly, it is also indicated that jealousy is a way of implementing psychological abuse. Walker (1979) has put forward that abusive partners might be jealous of everything in women's lives, including family, friends, or pets. Furthermore, emotional threats (e.g., "I will cheat on you if you don't do what I say) and destruction of things that victims own and appreciate (e.g., breaking her favorite cup) can be regarded as ways of psychological abuse (Follingstad et al., 1990). Moreover, it is suggested that lack of understanding for one's own mistakes (Taverniers, 2001), ridiculing one in public or private (Manso et al., 2011), manipulation of information (e.g., giving incomplete information or misinformation), emotional neglect, attribution of responsibility

(Marshall, 1996) can be regarded as forms of psychological abuse in IPV literature. In this regard, coercive control can also be considered a form of psychological abuse. Coercive control refers to behaviors done to impose control and power on the other (AIHW, 2024) and is composed of various strategies such as intimidation, isolation, or humiliation (Darke et al., 2025; Katz, 2015; Stark, 2007).

While every relationship may have times of disagreement, the labelling of psychological abuse can be completed when the one party's behaviors have the aim of intimidating, oppressing, and controlling the behaviors of the other party (Karakurt & Silver, 2013). In these kinds of relationships, victim-survivors may experience intense negative physical, emotional, and psychological impacts (Marshall, 1996). Even though, all these methods mentioned above do not occur in same frequency, or they might have different amounts of effect, it can be said that the harmful nature of the abuse can be understood through the action itself and the impact it has on the victim (Follingstad et al., 1990; Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Consequently, different behaviors resulting in different effects can also be separately conceptualized. For instance, while coercive control is depicted as an attack on victims' freedom, taking them under control by using various strategies, gaslighting can be implemented with similar methods, and the perpetrator's aim is to control, but the focus is targeted to undermine their knowing abilities. In this regard, gaslighting can be considered as a form of psychological abuse and under coercive control but distinguished in terms of having a separate emphasis (Stark, 2007; Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Yet, gaslighting can also be regarded within the scope of psychological abuse and coercive control literature. As the motivation of the perpetrator is to attain power and control over the victim, survivors are tried to be controlled by being made to believe that their perspectives are baseless or crazy (Abramson, 2014).

Another important academic topic that should be underlined in the context of gaslighting is emotional manipulation. Austin et al. (2007) have explained it as a strategic influence on the emotions of others according to one's desires and wishes. Sirbu (2019) has suggested that, based on the impact of the manipulation, it can be constructive (e.g., parent-child, doctor-patient relationships) or destructive (e.g., oppression, restriction of the will). It includes subtle or direct aggression and can be considered as one of the most

adverse methods of psychological abuse (Yılmaz, 2018). It involves strategies such as threats, inducing feelings of guilt and dependency in others, and constant devaluation of the other. In a more general manner, it aims to disrupt the self-identity and self-confidence of others (Şenay et al., 2021). Emotional manipulation is found to be strongly associated with gender roles, as being masculine is a positive predictor of the emergence of emotional manipulation, while feminine gender roles, such as being gentle and sensitive, are less predisposed to display emotional manipulation (Grieve et al., 2019). It is also indicated that the Dark Triad (psychopathy, narcissism, Machiavellianism) is found to be closely related to implementing emotional manipulation (Grieve & Mahar, 2010; Hyde et al., 2020). As hegemonic masculinity includes traits, such as exerting domination, control, disregard for others, it has also been found to be significantly associated with the dark triad personality traits (Waddell et al., 2020). This can be seen in intimate relationships as the ‘dominant’ party trying to manipulate the other in order to assert power (Aydın & Gölge, 2022). The victim-survivor may experience feelings of worthlessness, gradual isolation from social network, frequently being criticized, and encountering occasional politeness from the partner. Thus, the survivors may feel trapped in a position where they try their best to make their partner happy yet end up feeling useless at the end of the day (Chapaux-Morelli et al., 2012). While these methods bear similarities with the implementation of gaslighting, gaslighting can be seen specifically in terms of the perpetrator’s aim of destroying the victim-survivor’s knowing abilities under the scope of emotional manipulation (Hailes & Goodman, 2025).

2.1.2. Definition of Gaslighting

Gaslighting can be mainly explained as a kind of psychological abuse which focuses on undermining survivors’ trust in their knowing abilities (Abramson, 2014; Dickinson et al., 2023; Graves & Samp, 2021; Stark, 2019; Tormoen, 2019). Their fundamental memories, beliefs and knowledge about their selves are questioned as a result of manipulation (Spear, 2019). The process of gaslighting emerges in consequence of a person (gaslighter) manipulating another one (gaslightee) to make them doubt their judgments about themselves and reality (Stark, 2019). This way of manipulation aims to

weaken a person's self-trust and make them incapable of knowing and erase the gaslightee's sense of self and identity. Therefore, they can no longer rely on their experiences (Abramson, 2014; Hailes & Goodman, 2025).

Even though the term's roots date back to the 1930s, it has recently stood out. In 2022, it was chosen as the "word of the year" by the Merriam Websters Dictionary (Darke et al., 2025). The term "gaslighting" first emerged from a 1938 play by Patrick Hamilton, where a husband manipulates his wife into believing she is losing her sanity to facilitate his theft. This play is also known as *Angel Street* in the United States (Thomas, 2018). This concept was further popularized by its film adaptation, in which the husband uses dimming gaslights to distort his wife's perception of reality. His aim is to control his wife's behavior so that he can find the jewels, which he previously knew were in the house. These jewels are said to be in the attic, so the husband uses a gaslight in the attic, which makes the inside of the house dimmer, just like the wife's perspective on herself and on her husband (Searles, 2019). When Paula asks about the lights, Gregory and the household staff (following Gregory's persuasion) accuse Paula of imagining the dimming. Moreover, he consciously hides some objects in the house and again accuses Paula of taking and stealing them, which eventually makes Paula question her sense of reality, memory, and perception. Gregory aims to convince Paula that she is "crazy" and commits her to a mental institution so that he could have the jewels and the house for himself. The movie ends with Paula regaining her sense of reality and confidence when she finds out Gregory's plot with the help of a detective (Searles, 2019).

Although gaslighting is used in a variety of contexts, it has been suggested that gaslighting played a significant role in the context of IPV (Darke et al., 2025). The presence and importance of the concept in the field can be recognized as it was studied without being labelled as gaslighting (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Hayes and Jeffries (2016) use the term "crazy making" and describe it as a method of distorting the victim's sense of self, self-confidence, and mental health. Williamson (2010) has portrayed similar experiences of gaslighting with the words "constructing unreality." This term also involves the perpetrator imposing their own reality while invalidating the victim's perception. Findings suggested that the women experienced self-questioning (Ferraro, 2006); the

perpetrator's reality becoming their own (Williamson, 2010). Similarly, Tolman (1992) introduces a term called "psychological destabilization," which is the deliberate effort of the perpetrator to confuse the victim. Moreover, Cull (2019) has proposed "dismissive incomprehension," which involves devaluing the perspectives of the other with the purpose of reducing credibility and suppressing the victim. It also includes third parties that the perpetrator convinces to support their narratives. These conceptualizations are similar to the definition of gaslighting by means of the actions implemented and the impact on epistemic knowledge of the victim.

Furthermore, even though gaslighting can be implemented in various contexts and relationships, it is mostly reported within IPV literature. Studies suggested that the vast majority of the survivors who have been subjected to IPV experienced being called "crazy" and self-doubt as a result. A similar number of survivors have claimed that their partners acted intentionally to make them feel "crazy." (Loring, 1994; Tolman, 1992; Warshaw et al., 2014). In this regard, it can be said that controlling behaviors and the aim of reality distortion are intertwined despite the differences. It is suggested that controlling actions that are identified in the Power and Control Wheel, such as denial of one's own parts, belittling, strongly overlap with gaslighting tactics (Darke et al., 2025; Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Pence & Paymar, 1993). Even though coercive control and gaslighting have strong overlaps, the motivation of implementing gaslighting is to make the survivors doubt their sense of reality beyond controlling (Dutton & Goodman, 2005; Hailes & Goodman, 2025).

Gaslighting is initially described as actions of an individual that aims to influence the judgment of another by causing him/her to doubt their own judgment (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). Afterwards, the possible unconscious motive of the gaslighter is added to the conceptualization, likening the process to projective identification as a defense mechanism. In the process, the perpetrator projects their own anxieties onto the other and manipulates them to internalize the enforced reality. Being wrong is one of the usual anxiety topics of the gaslighter, meaning that the anxiety of being wrong is projected onto women and women finding themselves in the position where the partner is always right and they are always wrong (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Graves and Samp, 2021). After a

certain period, Stern (2007) put forward a four-step model. She argued that a) The gaslighter initially enters a conflict with the gaslightee as a result of a significant insecurity that may be threatening to a sense of self. b) The gaslightee enters the same conflict with a need and desire to receive the approval of the gaslighter. The motivation to get approval also leads them to create a conflict-free atmosphere where they avoid conflicts. c) The gaslighter gives approval only when their perspectives and judgments are accepted as true. d) The gaslightee becomes mentally and emotionally drained and accepts their demands. This cycle enables gaslighters to impose their own judgments and reality on gaslightees, coercing them into accepting them as right. In this regard, the gaslightee loses confidence in their own judgments and gradually loses their sense of self (Graves & Samp, 2021; Stern, 2007).

As gaslighting is defined as an unhealthy relational dynamic, Graves and Samp (2021) have indicated that it may also emerge from socially accepted patterns of conflict. They argued that most of the gaslighting emerges from conflict, but not every conflict evolves into gaslighting. Typical forms of disagreements in relationships become gaslighting when the gaslighter uses the other party's reconciliation effort to impose his/her own perspective and judgments. In this regard, the power dynamics in-between stand out rather than the context of the conflict. In other words, in this definition, gaslighting is perceived as occasionally "normal," yet becomes abnormal as a repeated pattern (Graves & Samp, 2021; Schulman, 2016; Stern, 2007). Furthermore, Abramson (2014), Graves and Samp (2021) and Stern (2007) have highlighted the strong relation between power and gaslighting. Power can be defined as the success to influence others and may become so desirable that individuals occasionally exhibit abusive behaviors to attain it (Dunbar, 2015). In this regard, the term dependence power rises to the forefront, where the gaslighter gains power over the dependency of the gaslightee (Worley, 2016). This dependency may be created due to emotional, social, or financial dependency. From this perspective, the dependent power is attained through the gaslightee's dependency on receiving approval. This eventually makes less powerful parties more prone to being exposed to gaslighting (Graves & Samp, 2021).

A frequently discussed aspect of the gaslighting behavior is the intention and the motivation of the gaslighter. While some of the authors suggested that it is an insidious act motivated by the deliberate desire of controlling the other (Abramson, 2014; Dorpat, 1996; Spear, 2019); some of them argued that it is not necessarily be conscious and occasionally caused by personal dynamics or means of defense mechanisms (Durvasula, 2021; Stern, 2007; Tormoen, 2019). Some of the studies have stood in a middle position and argued that gaslighting can occur deliberately or unintentionally, according to the context. While sometimes it is a deliberate strategy of manipulation, sometimes it arises as a natural consequence of the underlying dynamics of the implementing party (Graves & Samp, 2021). Similarly, some case studies published between 60's and 80's suggested that gaslighters mostly have clear aims that they would gain from, and they are supported with the findings of contemporary case studies (Ahern, 2018; Christensen & Evans-Murray, 2021; Dumitrașcu et al., 2015; Klein et al., 2023). On the other hand, Sarkis (2018) and Stern (2007) have claimed that they don't have to have a single apparent goal. Yet, all the studies have argued that the general motivations of the perpetrators exhibit resemblance. Furthermore, there are also debates regarding the necessity of gaslighting being a repeated act (Bhatti et al., 2021; Graves & Samp, 2021) and having outcomes like self-doubt (Catapang Podosky, 2021; Hailes & Goodman, 2025). These uncertainties are believed to be emerging from disconnection between works of gaslighting across different domains or due to the slow advancements in the field (Darke et al., 2025).

2.1.3. Historical Use of Gaslighting

The first use of gaslighting in academic literature dates to the late 1960s. The first academic use of the term can be seen in the works of Barton and Whitehead (1969). In this paper, they used gaslighting while expressing three cases which were about the efforts to commit an unwanted relative to a mental health institution (Sweet, 2019). In these cases, the subject of the gaslighting was other parties from the person who was called "crazy," and it functioned as a way of resolving issues for personal gain (Darke et al., 2025). There are also a few mentions of the term afterwards. In 1972, a similar case study was formed, and the term gaslighting was explained by its resemblance to psychiatric

conditions such as Ganser Syndrome. Ganser Syndrome is a dissociative condition involving deliberately making mistakes (Smith & Sinanan, 1972). Furthermore, while Barton and Whitehead (1969) mentioned cases where the husbands were trying to convince hospital staff, Smith and Sinanan (1972) proposed a case where the husband tried to persuade his wife to believe that she was crazy, which increased the likelihood of her admission to the hospital. Lund and Gardiner (1977) and Sheikh (1979) have focused on the gaslighting in the context of psychiatric institutions. They investigated how individuals are exposed to systematic reality distortion. Cawthra et al. (1987) have introduced a case where the gaslighting was not used for an aim that was purely malicious and about admission to the hospital. It was about a girl who pretended to be her late father's ghost to obtain permission for the actions she could not normally ask with direct communication (Cawthra et al., 1987).

The oldest studies of gaslighting in a relational context date back to 1981. Calef and Weinshel (1981) have highlighted the resemblance between gaslighting and schizophrenia yet suggested that gaslighting is composed of various behaviors and responses that extend beyond psychosis. Following this, Gass and Nichols (1988) suggested that men also displayed gaslighting in relationships for the purpose of avoiding responsibility without having particular aims of imposing madness on their wives. Nevertheless, even in the absence of such motivation, constant lying caused self-doubt regarding reality in women (Darke et al., 2025). Dorpat (1996) has focused on gaslighting in therapeutic relationships and indicated that it can be defined as a more general concept that can either be conscious or unconscious and is implemented through various strategies of communication in various contexts. It is also suggested that gaslighting is used for purposes of control and power assertion, especially in dynamics with power imbalance (Dorpat, 1996).

There is also research regarding the term's place in psychodynamic literature. Gaslighting is viewed as a process that both parties contribute to, either consciously or unconsciously. Dorpat (1996) and Calef and Weinshel (1981) pointed out the relevant defense mechanisms used in gaslighting. Deteriorating results of introjection, projection, and denial were addressed. As introjection, meaning internalization of external experiences

in a psychoanalytic manner, they argued that those who were more predisposed to experience introjection could also be more prone to be exposed to gaslighting (Calef & Weinshel, 1981). Nevertheless, most of the focus was on projective identification (Calef & Weinshel, 1981; Dorpat; 1996; Hightower, 2017; Graves & Samps, 2021). Yet, there are also some question marks regarding the defense mechanism, as Calef and Weinshel (1981) argued that projective identification is only a part of the process, and Abramson (2014) suggested that what is projected to the gaslightee is beyond the gaslighter's own anxieties like the definition of projective identification implied. Nonetheless, the fact that a perpetrator's anxiety is relieved through imposing a new reality and convincing the others into it constructed the core framework of this term (Darke et al., 2025).

In line with this, certain typologies and personal traits came to light for both the gaslighter and the gaslightee in the literature. In her works, Stern (2007) suggested three types of gaslighters: the 'glamour' gaslighter, the 'good guy' gaslighter, and the 'intimidator' gaslighter. These types vary in terms of self-presentation and frequently used methods for implementing gaslighting. While 'glamour' and 'the good guy' portray themselves as polite and charming while subtly using manipulative tactics, 'intimidator' uses direct and open suppression, force for agreement, and induces frustration. It is also suggested that these can differ across personality traits. She also added that these types can be used by gaslighters interchangeably, and on certain occasions, gaslightees can be coerced into adopting one of the types. Similarly, Miano et al. (2021) have suggested vulnerability traits for gaslighting such as lack of self-control, disinhibition and psychoticism. March et al. (2023) have proposed a correlation between sadism and viewing gaslighting as more acceptable as traits for gaslighters. On the other hand, Stern (2007) also mentioned common features of the gaslightee. These can be sorted as high empathy, a need to be seen and understood, a desire for sustaining the relationship, and fear of being insufficient. (Stern, 2007). Based on the research of Stern (2007), Hightower (2017) has found that intolerance for uncertainty, high sensory processing sensitivity, and neuroticism are associated with being more vulnerable to be exposed to gaslighting. Yet, these studies do not take gender socialization into account and how women are socialized into emphatic roles with the responsibility to maintain relationships. These studies also pose the risk of placing the responsibility onto the survivors, looking at gaslighting as

something that happens between equals, while in fact, gender-power differentials play a crucial role in the emergence of this harmful dynamic. Suggesting that some women experience gaslighting because they are prone to it blames the survivors to an extent and reduces the problem to an individual trait. It is also raising questions regarding which factor influences which. While it may be presented like onset of exposure to gaslighting, these traits can be results of gaslighting experience.

As these studies assess gaslighting based on various elements, the development of measuring tools regarding gaslighting stands out. Stern (2007) have formed a quiz called “Am I Being Gaslighted?” in her self-help book that can be regarded as the most frequently used tool, yet it needs further research as it is limited in terms of empirical validity. Thus, the questions do not directly assess gaslighting. Following this, March et al. (2023) have developed a scale based on the same quiz and suggested that gaslighting is intentional and positively correlated with some dark triad features (e.g., machiavellianism, sadism). The scale developed by Bhatti et al. (2021) is considered the first valid measurement tool to assess gaslighting. The scale was developed focusing on the experiences of survivors, and it implied that being exposed to gaslighting is positively correlated with hardships in peer relationships and diminished self-trust. This scale has also been the focus of critics as it lacks transparency and a comprehensive framework of gaslighting (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Overall, it can be said that the research regarding the personality traits of gaslighters and gaslightees needs further development. The reason behind the insufficient development can be explained by the lack of conceptual clarity (Darke et al., 2025).

One reason behind the ambiguity in the definition of gaslighting can be explained by the fact that it has been used across various disciplines. Gaslighting can be seen in various kinds of relationships in various contexts apart from romantic relationships. It can be implemented in friendships, parent-child, and workplace relationships (Abramson, 2014; Akiş & Öztürk, 2021; Durvasula, 2021; Rodrigues et al., 2021; Tormoen, 2019). Furthermore, gaslighting is studied in literature, politics, and social issues (Abramson, 2014; Stern, 2007). It is depicted as a narrative tool that is seen in Gothic or psychological fiction in literature. It can either be used to portray the mental stability of the character or

the reader (Bleecker, 2015). Furthermore, gaslighting is also described in terms of legal literature. It is portrayed as a subtle form of psychological abuse, which is difficult to put forward as evidence (Stark, 2007). Apart from these concepts, gaslighting can also be seen in various memoirs (Machado, 2019; Westover, 2018). These memoirs depicted experiences of authors that involved others invalidating their realities and led them to undergo self-doubt.

Later approaches looked at gaslighting as a power dynamic and studied it in different contexts. The effort to explain gaslighting from a social perspective arises from the resemblance of such experiences in diverse social structures. Since it is seen mostly in any relationship with power imbalance, the experience of gaslighting goes beyond relational context (Dorpat, 1996). Gaslighting is mentioned in the organizational setting as a means of workplace psychological abuse, generally implemented by powerful authority figures to subordinates about their self-sufficiency as a professional worker (Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013).

Abramson (2014) and Stark (2019) have also approached gaslighting, focusing on social power in a more general context and analyzing who might be more predisposed to get affected by gaslighting (e.g., women, minorities, LGBTQ+), as some suggested that gaslighting benefits from social vulnerabilities (Sweet, 2022). Furthermore, the term 'Racial Gaslighting' is introduced to the literature, which means normalization and imposition of the white supremacist reality and criminalizing the resistance (Davis & Ernst, 2019). Similarly, Rodrigues et al. (2021) have focused on gaslighting experiences of women of color when their colleagues undermine their experiences of being exposed to discrimination. Nevertheless, some authors argued that for gaslighting to occur, marginalization is not compulsory; gaslighting can target a non-marginalized group for distorting their reality perception (Robert & Andrews, 2013). McKew (2017) has conceptualized gaslighting as frequently giving society false information and overlooking the clear reality on a political basis. Dorpat (1996) underlined how gaslighting is a common brainwashing and indoctrination technique used in the political context. Moreover, Berenstain (2020) has indicated that repetition of narratives of oppression contributes to the structural gaslighting on a societal level. This can again be seen in

narratives that minimize the oppression (McKinnon, 2019; Rodrigues et al., 2021). Riggs and Bartholomaeus (2018) and Wozolek (2018) have focused on the minimization of the experience of transgender children by their parents or in a school environment, which is regarded as gaslighting.

Lastly, Abramson (2014) defined gaslighting in a philosophical manner as a moral wrong due to its dishonest and manipulative nature. Furthermore, the works of Spear (2020) and Sweet (2019) studied gaslighting from a philosophical aspect, suggesting that in gaslighting, epistemic knowledge is harmed, and it targets to undermine people's expressing their own experience. Catapang Podosky (2021) has pointed out two different types of gaslighting with diverse effects. While first-order gaslighting is about interpreting a concept, second-order gaslighting is about the capacity to understand such a concept. The second-order gaslighting has more detrimental consequences for victim-survivors in terms of self-trust in their own judgment abilities, and thus, makes them more dependent on external validation. Similarly, Cull's (2019) description of 'dismissive incomprehension' of reducing the credibility of one's words functioned as portraying the victim/survivor with a version where they are less capable of knowing, that is, less likely to be believed by themselves and others. This can also be explained by the term 'epistemic injustice' proposed by Fricker (2007). Gaslighting is regarded as one of the forms of 'epistemic injustice,' as it deteriorates the self-trust for epistemic knowledge. Similarly, Stark (2019) has distinguished gaslighting as 'epistemic gaslighting' and 'manipulative gaslighting'. While 'epistemic gaslighting' focuses on unintentional weakening of credibility of specific groups due to social structural prejudice, 'manipulative gaslighting' can be seen as a deliberate act of controlling one by imposing one's own reality. On the other hand, Spear (2020) argued that, in order for someone to be gaslit, they should also have their own doubts about their judgments. Under these circumstances, mostly in terms of intimate relationships, repetitive introduction of the partner's own manipulative reality creates confusion for the victim/survivor (Spear, 2020).

Thus, overall, gaslighting has been defined in different ways. the psychology literature on gaslighting suggests that gaslighting is an experience that is associated with personal traits in terms of both gaslighters and gaslightees (e.g., Bhatti et al., 2021; Hightower,

2017; March et al., 2023); social conceptualizations of gaslighting express that it gains support and contribution from wider systems of power and inequality (Abramson, 2014; Sweet, 2019), while philosophical conceptualizations highlighted the importance of epistemic knowledge (Darke et al., 2025; Spear, 2020; Stark, 2019). Despite this diversity, gaslighting can be defined as a strategy of psychological abuse which involves systematical manipulation that induces doubt in victim/survivor's memory, emotions, reasoning and knowing abilities. Empirical research and explanatory models that aim to further delineate how and why gaslighting emerges in intimate relationships will be explained in the next section.

2.2. Explanatory Frameworks and Processes of Gaslighting in Intimate Relationships

2.2.1. Tactics of Gaslighting

Although the focus and scope of the definitions may change across disciplines, the ways in which gaslighting is implemented resemble each other in terms of tactics and effects of the tactics.

Firstly, the initial affectionate version of the gaslighter, mostly in the intimate relationship context, is explained as 'love bombing' by Hayes and Jeffries (2015) and Klein et al. (2023), and 'honeymoon period' by Tolhuizen (1989). This period is described with being rewarding and involving consistent communication (Klein et al., 2023). It is also characterized by gaining the trust and compassion of the gaslightee (Hayes & Jeffries, 2015). It functions as building positive views of the gaslighter and the relationship on the part of the gaslightee, which can be remarkably motivating and cause them to ignore even the initially visible red flags. Even though the pattern of love-bombing is mostly seen in initial phases, perpetrators occasionally return to this stage. This can be likened to the affectionate stage of the 'cycle of violence' proposed by Walker (1979). The cycle can be explained as a tension building with increasing severity of battering, acute battering, and stage of loving behavior. Yet, they are different in that love bombing is being followed

by gaslighting and perpetrators taking responsibility. In the cycle of violence, the affectionate and kind stage emerges as a reaction to abuse. Furthermore, Klein et al (2023) have suggested that while the perpetrators mostly take responsibility and apologize for the prior behavior, they could not receive any feedback about gaslighters accepting the behavior and taking responsibility for it.

Secondly, direct manipulation using verbal and physical actions can be mentioned (Gass & Nichols, 1988). Attempts of frequent lying, misdirection, or contradiction for disrupting the inner balance of the victim-survivor are included (Bates, 2020). Moreover, the gaslighter may induce self-doubt by being directly verbal or creating circumstances where the gaslightee would appear as if they would not be capable of understanding. This direct verbal communication is reported to be mostly composed of insults. While some of the insults function to induce doubt regarding themselves and their ability to comprehend reality accurately, such as being “crazy,” “dumb,” “paranoid,” some of the insults mainly target personal features of gaslightees, such as being “selfish,” “overly emotional,” “overly reactive,” and insults regarding physical appearance (Klein et al., 2023). These may escalate to the extent to call the other “slut” or “whore” (Gass & Nichols, 1988). Even though the insults that target physical look and personality may seem initially irrelevant, they function in terms of weakening their connection with reality, especially when they are initially thinking otherwise. For instance, a gaslightee frequently hearing that he/she is “selfish” may gradually change his/her perception of reality that he/she was not (Klein et al., 2023).

Likewise, denial in various ways can also be included. It can either be the denial of an obvious incident (e. g., “It did not happen”) (Sarkis, 2018) or minimizing and denying the effect of an issue (e. g., “You are exaggerating,” “This is crazy”) (Abramson, 2014). Furthermore, avoiding clarity on purpose and remaining in the grey area is regarded as a denial tactic, as well (Simon, 2011). These behaviors functioned as ways in which a gaslighter deflects responsibility and shifts it onto the other person. They suggest that the problem is not caused by the behaviors of the perpetrator, but the other’s response is problematic, hence, the perpetrator shifts responsibility (Klein et al., 2023). Frequent denial of responsibility for issues creates confusion in the other party (Ahern, 2018; Darke

et al., 2025). Similarly, perpetrators may display blaming the victim-survivor for their own behaviors. Not only does it create confusion regarding the attribution of responsibility, but it also assigns an agency to gaslightees that also contributes to the confusion of gaslightees about the extent of his/her capability (Klein et al., 2023). Gaslighting is known to be a frequent and hurtful way of implementing ‘victim blaming’ (Johnson et al., 2021).

Another significant tactic can be considered as isolation. Perpetrators may make efforts to isolate the victims from their support system in various ways. They may pressure them to spend less time with them, hindering their likelihood of getting external validation, opinion, or emotional support (Hailes, 2022; Klein et al., 2023; Sodoma, 2022). On the other hand, it can also be implemented by including their social network in their manipulation. The social network members can also be manipulated, thus supporting the narrative of the gaslighter, either intentionally or not (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). This tactic isolates the victims from the outside world, they remain unable to hear counter-narratives and receive emotional support (Darke et al., 2025; Stern, 2007). In this way, the gaslightee can be controlled by the perpetrator, which contributes to the continuation of the cycle (Klein et al., 2023).

Furthermore, unpredictability and cold-shouldering as a part of unpredictability can be regarded as tactics of gaslighting (Klein et al., 2023). It has been suggested that gaslighters adopt various positions on the two extremes throughout the relationship. The shift in attitude may happen quickly within minutes or may unfold gradually over time. This shift can be regarded as similar to the intermittent relationship reinforcement in which the hostile period of time is preceded by a ‘honeymoon period’ (Millen et al., 2021; Walker, 1989). This tactic may function as increasing the confusion of the gaslightee, emerging from the cumulative effect of other tactics (Klein et al., 2023). These shifts in mood may also be presented with a lack of communication and with full communication. In this regard, cold-shouldering characterizes the abusive period of a gaslighter. Although it is not a direct gaslighting behavior, it strengthens the control of the perpetrator (Klein et al., 2023). The inconsistent cycle of abuse and love also strengthens the confusion gaslighting creates (Darke et al., 2025; Sarkis, 2018).

2.2.2. Models of Gaslighting

In a non-academic manner, Stern (2007) has explained the process of gaslighting as follows: disbelief in partner as the sense of reality is not severely impacted; development of confusion, denial and frustration; defense for protecting own point of view (e. g., discussions about accusations); development of despair that is strengthened with lack of being understood and seen; anxiety for improving self-doubt and confusion; and lastly depression, loss of self-identity, and increased dependence to the gasligher. These stages not only show the process of gaslighting deteriorating sense of self in many ways, but they also show the severity of the impacts may occur.

Regarding the first attempts at modelling the process of gaslighting in a more academic manner, three main studies stand out. Hailes and Goodman (2025), Klein et al. (2023) and Sweet (2019) have presented an overview regarding gaslighting not only on an individual level but also at a more ecological and social level.

Sweet (2019) has perceived gaslighting as a social issue. In her work, she formed a situational map based on the interviews she did with individuals who survived domestic violence. The model presents information regarding the nested structure of gaslighting, gender, and institutional vulnerabilities, and how it is supported with the survivor's inability to receive social and institutional support (Darke et al., 2025). Furthermore, it shows how survivors' frustration of being seen as lacking credibility contributes to this cycle and silences them (Sweet, 2019).

Hailes and Goodman (2025) presented a two-model system where the purpose is to understand the perpetrator's behaviors and the victim-survivor's responses. The tactics involve features that induce self-doubt regarding the self and the reality, while responses are mostly composed of the survivor's experiencing confusion and self-doubt. The process is explained as having a connection with coercive control. According to Dutton and Goodman (2005), coercive control can be explained as a total of harming behaviors by which perpetrators exert power and control over the other party. This process can become easier with the help of existing vulnerabilities. Exploiting vulnerabilities allows an attachment to be formed, which is a way to wear down resistance (Dutton & Goodman,

2005). The misuse of vulnerabilities for the purpose of distorting epistemic trust causes them to trust the perpetrators' narratives more. This also brings a need for getting approval from them (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). The study also focuses on understanding these vulnerabilities, which were defined by the participants as significant to their experiences.

Klein et al. (2023) have added a different contribution by presenting information regarding the motivation of the perpetrator and the process of gaslighting. It is mentioned that perpetrators generally implement gaslighting to avoid responsibility and to control the other; these two can also occur concurrently and be interconnected. Gaslighting can be implemented for the purpose of bypassing accountability for the behaviors that were initially done to control the other. It is also seen that gaslighters who desire control the most have displayed actions that were coercive. These can be sorted as insults, threats, and setting rules.

The process of gaslighting, as Klein et al. (2023) described, unfolded as follows: typically starting with love bombing, causing victims to be emotionally bonded to perpetrators; rationalization of the gaslighting and abusive behaviors to sustain the positive image of the perpetrator; continuation of gaslighting through social isolation of the gaslightee. As they become socially isolated, the chance of getting an external reassurance and perspective decreases, which strengthens the gaslighting. Gaslighting behaviors, rationalization, and isolation have some detrimental effects on the survivor, such as deterioration of self-esteem and self-trust, which contributes to further isolation in a loop. It is also expressed that healing can only be possible with the recognition and acceptance of gaslighting.

Even though there are significant contributions to the process of academic understanding of gaslighting, further research is needed to externalize the findings on a broader context and conceptualize in a stronger background (Darke et al., 2025).

2.2.3. Understanding Gaslighting through Gender and Feminist Theory

Another widely discussed topic in the literature of gaslighting is its relationship with gender. Sarkis (2018) and Stern (2007) have suggested that gaslighting emerges in

relationships of any gender identity. Some studies proposed that individuals from any gender reported implementing gaslighting (e.g., Bashford & Leschziner, 2015; Graves & Samp, 2021). Furthermore, being exposed to psychological abuse is reported to be equal across genders (Renner & Whitney, 2010). Yet, especially within the literature of IPV, gaslighting is discussed as a tool of psychological abuse in a more gender-based manner, while also considering the lack of research on male victim-survivors (e.g., Abramson, 2014; Warshaw et al., 2014). Although the need for future research is emphasized to clearly point out the rates of exposure to gaslighting among genders, it is suggested that due to the structural and social inequalities, female victim-survivors tend to be more negatively affected by psychological abuse (Sarkis, 2018; Stern, 2007; Sweet, 2019).

Sweet (2019) has indicated that ‘gender-based stereotypes’ and ‘institutional vulnerabilities’ (e.g., immigration, court, workplace) have contributed to women’s experience of gaslighting. It is explained that women becoming more susceptible to gaslighting has its roots in traditional gender roles, stereotypes, and institutional inequalities. This also contributes to their challenges in receiving support and increases the possibility of their victimization (Darke et al., 2025; Sweet, 2019). This can be exemplified by women more easily being called ‘hysterical,’ contributing to the already existing inequality. Abramson (2014) suggested that self-confidence regarding a woman’s knowing abilities is inevitably influenced by her position as a subordinate to her partner within a patriarchal gender hierarchy. Furthermore, Portnow (1996) has suggested that ‘being an outsider’ creates hardships for standing by their opinions and knowledge when they are not compatible with social norms. As the power imbalance between men and women in society gives male perpetrators the opportunity to determine the social norms, it has been suggested that women experience an erosion of identity and their knowing abilities to be accepted in society (Darke et al., 2025).

In relation to this, Stern (2007) suggested that a more independent position of women has increased their experience of gaslighting. The fact that women becoming more resistant also affects their capacity to adopt abusive behaviors (Sarkis, 2018). Nonetheless, there are various studies that imply women’s attempts at manipulation and control are not being taken sufficiently seriously and their efforts to change this imbalance are disregarded by

men (Bhatti et al., 2021; Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Sarkis, 2018). Even though women's possibility of engaging with abusive behaviors themselves increased with such independence, their impacts on men are not viewed as serious, showing the ongoing power of male perpetrators. The studies suggested that a vast majority of males were not feeling pressured and did not change their behavior in response to women's abusive attitude (Ross, 2012; Sarkis, 2018). Men's leverage increases women's likelihood of being the victim to the extent that police might dismiss the narratives of women depending on the 'rationality' of men (Sweet, 2019). This contributes to the gender-based gap of social power, institutional vulnerability, and continuation of the cycle (Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Sweet, 2019).

Feminist theory has typically explained IPV in the context of the suppression of women by males within the patriarchal structure (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). Prior research pointed out that IPV is a product and a key element of a larger male-dominant system (Heise, 1998; Jewkes et al., 2015; McCarthy et al., 2018). The system is composed of multiple areas where men seem to be more powerful and dominant. In social norms, interactions, behaviors, beliefs, and identities at societal, interactional (e. g., workplace, family) or individual levels; male domination can be observed (Connell, 1987; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). For instance, social norms that are determined by this system possess masculine ideology and associate it with strength and dominance (Jewkes et al., 2015). In the system, men's perpetration of violence is maintained by their being the rule-makers (McCarthy et al., 2018). The power imbalance of the system on the interpersonal level is a key factor to strengthen the domination of men in keeping women in subordinate roles (Bell & Naugle, 2008).

Efforts for control and power assertion on the subordinate partner are key elements in male violence against women according to feminist theory (Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Hayes & Franklin, 2017; Martin, 1976; Steinmetz, 1987; Yllo & Straus, 1990). The power imbalances are also being strengthened by the unequal distribution of resources between men and women in the social structure, increasing the risk of IPV in relationships (Gage & Hutchinson, 2013). In response, researchers of feminist theory have proposed the 'power and control wheel.' It gives information regarding the tactics men use to keep

women under control. It is also indicated that any single act of suppressing women is only a small part of the big picture; they are all being motivated by the main goal of suppressing women and exerting male domination, giving the whole responsibility on the abuser (Ali & Naylor, 2013).

Furthermore, feminist theory argues that patriarchy reinforces the perpetuation by easing the acceptance of abuse by women (Smith, 1990). As male dominance is justified on a societal level, it becomes harder for women to resist (Ali & Naylor, 2013). In the system where women were being pushed to comply, the desire of men to control and power especially stands out when the women challenge their authority and dominance (Johnson, 1997). Abramson (2014) has conceptualized gaslighting as closely related to inner doubt women have in themselves due to gender-based social norms formed in a patriarchal structure. This 'norm of self-doubt' can be manifested in daily life in various ways. Frequent criticism of women who have high self-confidence, hesitations women have for public speaking, or prioritizing men's opinions can be given as a few examples. The internalized doubt renders women more vulnerable to gaslighting. Gaslighting gains its power from exploiting humane elements such as love and empathy. As a result, while weaponizing the gender-based social norms against women, it deteriorates their positive emotional features (Abramson, 2014).

Male perpetrators assert power mainly by efforts for control, tactics for isolation, and intimidation of women (Domestic Abuse Intervention Project [DAIP], n.d.; McPhail et al., 2007). This can also be seen in the 'power and control wheel' (Pence & Paymar, 2003). Main methods explained in the wheel are men's using coercion and threats (e. g., threats of separation); intimidation (e. g., terrifying her with actions or gestures); emotional or economic abuse (e.g., making her ask for money, making her feel crazy); isolation (e.g., limiting social interactions of her, justifying behaviors with jealousy); children (e.g., upsetting her about motherhood); male privilege (e.g., being in the dominant deciding position); minimizing, denying and blaming (e.g., shifting responsibility about abusive behaviors, not taking the abuse seriously), which are the same with gaslighting tactics (DAIP, nd). In terms of a more specific concept, the relationship between hegemonic masculinity as a product of the patriarchal system and

emotional manipulation reveals a similar situation. Connell (1987), Connell (2000), and Parent et al. (2018) have suggested that they are characterized by a desire for control and disregard for others. Therefore, individuals who can be regarded as more hegemonically masculine display more emotional manipulation due to the wish to be dominant and be in control (Waddell et al., 2020). In this regard, Abramson (2014) suggested that gaslighting is a version of emotional abuse that was expressed in the context of gender-based power dynamics and can be seen as a product of patriarchal structure. For that reason, feminist theory can be used as the explanatory framework of gaslighting in terms of IPV.

Stark (2019) has indicated that for gaslighting to emerge, a difference in terms of power is a must. To be able to decrease the credibility of a certain group of people due to prejudice in society requires the gaslighter to have more social power. This power also enables them to undermine the gaslightee's judgments regarding reality in a relational context. It is also suggested that one's sense of reality and trust can only be distorted if the gaslightee gives importance to the validation of the gaslighter. This shows the investment and importance women give to the men's approval, which can be regarded as the key element of the patriarchal system (Stark, 2019). Stark (2019) has also contributed to the works of gaslighting by underlining its connection with misogyny. Kate Manne (2017) has defined misogyny as the systematic hostility women encounter when they behave noncompliant. Gaslighting can be seen as one of the ways of implementing this hostility. Stark (2019) has proposed that when male perpetrators encounter the accusation of behaving abusively by women, they try to find ways to suppress these accusations. They often use the method of blaming women for personal features. They can either be about the capabilities or characteristics of women. As the accusations get more convincing and it is more difficult to refute, the severity of the attributed defect increases. This is because men feel the need to discredit women to justify themselves more.

Stark (2019) explains five different ways men use to displace the accusations women put forward. It can be the denial of the accusation and accusing women of falsely remembering it, accusing women of lying about the issue, acceptance of behavior but minimization of the reaction (e.g., "It was just a joke, you are oversensitive"), victim blaming accompanied by the accusation that women "deserve" it and the perpetrator

being presented as the victim. Gaslighting functions as a punishment mechanism that pushes women to comply with men's desires. It can be regarded as misogyny as it punishes women who react to men's abusive behaviors. This contributes to the patriarchal structure as it fosters misogynistic attitudes and legitimizes the psychological abuse done by males. Even when the accusations initially seem irrelevant, they support the already existing misogynistic ideology that is remarkably common in patriarchal structures. More gaslighting increases over the system, women who are not subject to the gaslighting experience also have hesitations regarding self-trust in epistemic knowledge. As it becomes a social issue of the patriarchal system, being exposed to psychological oppression in social practices might have led women to internalize inferiority, that is, women are socialized to learn doubting themselves. This functions as a mechanism that induces the self-doubt effect of gaslighting (Bartky, 1990; Stark, 2019).

Overall, gaslighting has been discussed as a form of psychological violence that is rooted in power differences. As one of the most significant power dimensions in social structures is gender, feminist researchers have focused on gaslighting as a gendered form of psychological domination that targets women's knowing ability, connections with reality, and self-doubt. This dynamic is established through different tactics, including accusations, criticism, isolation, denial, minimization of women's experience. Thus, it is important to clearly delineate how it impacts women's psychological well-being and how they resist to it. The next section presents an overview of the research findings on these topics.

2.3. Resisting Gaslighting

2.3.1. Psychological Effects of Gaslighting

Gaslighting by nature targets to undermine one's knowing abilities and judgements regarding self and reality. Gaslighting behaviors aim to deteriorate reality perception in terms of emotions, memories, and thoughts (Klein et al., 2023). Hailes and Goodman (2025) have suggested that perpetrators challenge the epistemic knowledge regarding

experiences, mental health, and basic properties. It can vary from who said a certain sentence to where a specific object was. In one example that Hailes and Goodman (2025) share, a husband rejected the use of domestic violence. Thus, it can either be a direct denial of a fact, suggesting that the women falsely remember the incidents. It is indicated that gaslighters generally put efforts into claiming that the gaslightee falsely interprets the experience rather than not remembering it at all (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Abramson (2014) has suggested that as a result of this, the gaslightee experiences cognitive dissonance, meaning an emotional divide between the narrative of the gaslighter and the gaslightee's own experience. As the gaslightee eventually loses her trust in her own perception, it becomes progressively difficult to affirm herself, resulting in confusion and self-doubt (Sodoma, 2022).

The self-doubt as an effect of gaslighting can be seen in multiple areas of life with various severity levels (Stern, 2007). A vast majority of survivors suggested self-doubt regarding memory. Frequent denial of a past event about how it unfolded makes victims-survivors question their memory. They gradually find themselves believing in the narrative of the gaslighter, and they don't remember the incidents correctly. This also led to self-questioning and confusion about their mental health (Klein et al., 2023; Stern, 2007). When that gaslighter claims a reality that is significantly different, the gaslightee gradually starts to believe that they were 'crazy' or 'losing their minds' (Hailes & Goodman, 2025).

The frequent criticism of personal traits reported in gaslighting can also result in self-doubt. Moreover, most of the survivors' experience self-doubt regarding their capability to comprehend (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). When gaslighters convince them that they are 'the cause of the problem,' they experience self-doubt and self-blame because they believe that there is another reality from the perspective of the other that they could not understand. For instance, when they are convinced that they had unrealistic expectations from their partners, they find themselves apologizing at the end. They start to believe that they are exaggerating, paranoid, obsessive, indifferent, and the perpetrators' narratives are true (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Efforts for 'crazy making' deteriorate the gaslightee's sense of self, sense of reality, self-esteem, and resources of understanding

and reasoning while making them more dependent on others (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016). It is shown that as survivors become distant from their social networks in a state where they strongly believe that they are what they are accused of, they become more dependent on their partners (Sweet, 2019). Furthermore, with the increasing social isolation and stronger belief in the accusation of the gaslighter, it induces dependency on the partner (Hailes & Goodman, 2025).

These impacts are also reportedly effective in causing victims to devalue themselves (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Klein et al. (2023) have suggested that women who have been exposed to gaslighting expressed experiencing feelings of worthlessness as a result of gaslighting. As the gaslighter refutes abusive behaviors, feelings of helplessness and hopelessness also arise in the gaslightee, which are about changing the perspective of the gaslighter. This experience of defeat traps them into depression (Gilbert & Allan, 1998; Gilbert, 2006; Lopes & Jaspal, 2025). Destruction of sense of self and self-trust, accompanied by depressive symptoms, is described as the most severe impact of gaslighting (Abramson, 2014). Furthermore, experience of gaslighting causes anxiety, guilt, depression (Abramson; 2014; Dorpat, 1996), suicidal ideation or suicidal behavior (Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2018), as they have hardships in determining what is real and what is not (Bates, 2020). From a more general stance of psychological abuse, findings suggested that the experience of abuse is also positively correlated with depression (Começanha et al., 2017; Estefan et al., 2016; Follingstad, 2009; Marshall, 1992; Rogers & Follingstad, 2014). Likewise, the association of psychological abuse with anxiety, post-traumatic stress (Rogers & Follingstad, 2014), low self-esteem (Graham-Bermann et al., 2007), and low self-efficacy (Hosey, 2012) have been found.

Although there is not a systematic exploration of long-term impacts of gaslighting, Hailes and Goodman (2025) have suggested that knowing abilities may not be completely recovered even years after gaslighting ended. A gaslightee may still feel the need to review the notes they had written to check the reality or still experience a vulnerability towards being ‘crazy,’ especially in issues of new relationships. Furthermore, it is also mentioned that they may still count on others’ opinions about reality. Yet, this finding is not fully generalizable. In Hailes and Goodman’s study (2025), some shared that the

journey of reconstructing self-trust has started before the relationship with gaslighting has ended and support them in their break-up process. Not only did they manage to get out of the relationship but also rebuilt themselves, transforming this hurtful process into self-empowerment.

In terms of psychological abuse literature, it is suggested that even five years after separation, the likelihood of development of depression related symptoms is higher in those who had been exposed to psychological abuse (Bonomi et al., 2006). Moreover, Follingstad and Rogers (2014) have indicated that the severity of the impact of the psychological abuse is also related to the amount of exposure to abuse in terms of length, frequency, and severity. While longer exposure creates more severe psychological impacts on survivors, it is also mentioned that survivors are more likely to display abusive behaviors when the severity of abuse is higher, but even a rare or a single act of abuse may cause challenging psychological and emotional impacts (Follingstad & Rogers, 2014).

Findings suggested that gaslighting has various detrimental impacts on the victim-survivors, such as self-doubt (e.g., regarding knowing abilities, mental health), confusion, depression, anxiety, and a reduction in self-esteem and a sense of self. Abramson (2014) has indicated that these symptoms cannot only be seen as psychological turmoil that wears victims out but also as a way of keeping their connection with reality. They can be interpreted as resistance methods to protect the core of their selves and the reality they have, showing that their selves are not completely destroyed (Abramson, 2014).

2.3.2. Leaving the Relationship

Gaslighting and its impacts may not always be easy to detect, considering its covert nature, occasionally causing survivors to misinterpret it as love (Sengkey & Illahibaccus-Sona, 2024). Stern (2007) has suggested that while the first step of the gaslighting process is disbelief, meaning that the gaslightee questions the gaslighter's points of view with a clearer mind, being sure of their stance, with increasing self-doubt and confusion, they found themselves experiencing denial. Denial is the step that is characterized by the start

of the reality shift, which gives room to the gaslighter's behaviors to be interpreted falsely. They start to believe that they are incapable of comprehending, but the gaslighter knows everything. Stern (2007) has also suggested that gaslightees gradually idealize the gaslighter and become very sensitive to their approval. While this also contributes to the misinterpretation of abuse as love (Stern, 2007), there are few other explanations in the literature.

Feminist perspective has indicated that the idealization of the perpetrator can also be explained through the expectations of "true love" of women imposed by cultural and social structures in psychological abuse (Illouz, 1997). Illouz (1997) has suggested that love is conceptualized as a utopia by the social system for women, which makes them more prone to concealing the signs of abuse and continuing to stay in the relationship. This utopia of ideal love leads survivors to think that the pain they occasionally experience in a relationship is the cost of love which they must endure. Pipes and Lebov-Keeler (1997) have argued the same within the scope of social cognition. When women believed that most women have experienced abusive behaviors in a relationship, causing them to perceive this attitude as normal and develop more tolerance. This is also explained by the process of trauma bonding (Dutton & Painter, 1993). It is expressed that strong emotional attachments are built with the abuser under the name of ideal love (Dutton & Painter, 1981).

It is also mentioned that these bonds can be ironically enhanced with power imbalance and unpredictable negativity and positivity. As the abuser becomes dominant in terms of decision making and control, the power imbalance grows; decreasing the victim's self-confidence, autonomy, and reinforcing the dependency on the abuser (Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Dutton & Painter, 1993; Huston, 1983). This gives the abuser a magnified power that contributes to the strong bond of the victim, concealing the dependency of the abuser (Fromm, 1973). This can also be shown in the sudden changes of the abuser in the times of risk of separation of the victim (Dutton & Painter, 1993). Yet, the second factor that explains the formation of trauma bonding is the inconsistent behavior patterns of the abuser. The abuser occasionally displays periods of maltreatment to exert power and dominance (e.g., cold-shouldering, withdrawal of communication, threats), that are

followed by episodes of affection (e.g., proclamations of love, promises not to be abusive again) (Walker, 1979). This has a slight change in the specific context of gaslighting as gaslighters may not always accept gaslighting behaviors and apologize for it openly yet still have periods of affection (Hailes & Goodman, 2025).

Learning theory of reinforcement and punishment has explained that victims in this regard are subjected to periods of negative arousal and periods of lack of negative arousal; that is very influential on the formation of strong emotional bonds (Harlow & Harlow, 1971; Rajecki et al., 1978). Moreover, Rounsaville (1978) and Walker (1979) indicated that survivors of abuse develop dependency on the positive periods, which preceded episodes of maltreatment. Studies suggested that alternating between two different moods of the partner reportedly factor that prevents ending the relationship, causing survivors to develop hope for perpetrators' behaviors to change (Lindgren & Renck, 2008). The same study revealed that after a certain point, survivors come to understand that the abusive attitude would remain regardless of their responses.

In situations where these factors may not prevent attempts to leave, it does not necessarily mean a definitive breakup. Victims' attempts to leave may end with being convinced to stay for a couple of times (Barnett et al., 1997; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979). One reason for survivors' stay in the relationship is because they may not have been fully traumatized, isolated, and burned out. Another can be expressed as perpetrators being unwilling to let go and showing this through alternating between positive and negative moods or threats. Despite diminished energy, survivors generally decide not to break up for a few times. With very limited energy, it is not easy to break up as well (Lindgren & Renck, 2008; Zink et al., 2006). One of the emotions that is significantly tiring is feelings of guilt and shame. When the shame of failing in a relationship is accompanied by concerns over how survivors would be perceived, it becomes strongly restraining from separation (Lindgren & Renck, 2008; Wilkinson, 2005).

Even though there are various important factors that make victims remain in the relationship, the severity and frequency of the abuse eventually escalates, causing survivors to attempt a final, definite break up (Eliasson, 2003). Factors that eventually cause survivors to separate from the perpetrator (e.g., external support and labelling) in

the context of both IPV and gaslighting, are another important topic that will be discussed in the following parts.

2.3.3. Help Seeking & Naming Gaslighting

The reality-deteriorating nature of gaslighting is reported to leave the gaslightee to experience decreased self-esteem, increased self-doubt, and some challenging emotions (Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Klein et al., 2023; Sarkis, 2018; Stern, 2007). No matter how strong it is, survivors not being completely destroyed is what keeps them going on their journey. One of the factors that forms a turning point in the decision to leave is insight in various ways (e.g., the fact that the violence would never stop, abusive behaviors were not the survivor's fault) (Lindgren & Renck, 2008). While this insight can be gathered from various resources, external support is vital (Hagglblom & Möller, 2007). Yet, IPV literature has suggested that frequently being exposed to abuse and control gradually leads survivors to feel hopeless, powerless, and socially isolated, and thus, creates difficulty in help seeking (Ahmad et al., 2009; Anderson et al., 2003; Barrett & St. Pierre, 2011; Lelaurain et al., 2017). The loss of self-esteem experienced in the context of gaslighting also fosters dependency on the gaslighter and increases the risk of depression, in which it is remarkably hard to seek help (Abramson, 2014; Decker et al., 2013).

Furthermore, help seeking may be remarkably difficult under various conditions, such as not recognizing the abuse (Beaulaurier et al., 2007; Bui, 2003; Djikanović et al., 2012), not perceiving it as sufficiently severe (Djikanović et al., 2012; Ergöçmen et al., 2013), and misperception of it as love (Frías and Agoff, 2015; Postmus et al., 2012; Pyles et al., 2012). While all these factors may cause delay in searching for help, high levels of distress are found to be positively correlated with help-seeking behavior, meaning that survivors can only delay this search up to a certain point (Dufort et al., 2013, Koepsell et al., 2006; Randell et al., 2012). Survivors search for external resources where they may seek help to gather some assistance (Morrison et al., 2006). The resource for seeking help and the process changes according to the individual's needs. They may prefer formal help (e.g., mental health professional) or informal help (e.g., family member, friends) (Ansara & Hindin, 2010; Cho et al., 2020). Help seeking helps resisting the perpetrator's frame and

narrative (Stark, 2007), which are the key features of the gaslighting experience. Yet, the quality of received help is also crucial for recognition of the process (Fleming & Resick, 2017). If the help is functioning, the survivor's traumatic experience can be seen and validated, which may decrease the self-doubt and self-blame of the survivor Parsons & Bergin (2010). It may also enhance social connection (Brown, 2004). The presence of a supporting third party is crucial in the process of making the decision to leave (Dobash & Dobash, 1992; Piispa, 2004).

Noting the lack of research regarding the gaslighting literature, IPV literature has suggested that survivors may need help for various reasons, including being understood (Cho et al., 2020; Smith, 1990). The feeling of being understood and receiving external support may function as a way out of the relationship, in which the survivors gain insight and have the power to leave (Hagglom & Möller, 2007; Lindgren & Renck, 2008). That is due to the basic need of relying on a narrative when making sense of an experience (Fisher, 1987). When the narrative of the perpetrator becomes gradually dominant, the victim is controlled and manipulated; the formation of a new narrative that finds abusive behaviors unacceptable is one of the ways to end the cycle and the relationship when the external support becomes crucial (Corbally, 2001; Wood, 2001).

The external support that makes survivors feel understood, seen, and validated helps them to search for a way out (Hagglom & Moller, 2006; Hagglom & Moller, 2007).

It has been suggested that while there various of reasons behind survivors not leaving the relationship (e.g., fear of not finding an alternative partner, social pressure, emotional investment in relationship), in addition to them, there are also studies regarding the psychological barriers to separation (Fincham, 2000; Gordon et al., 2004). It has been shown that the ways that the perpetrators are seen by the survivor have strongly impacted their decision to leave or stay (Gordon et al., 2004; Katz et al., 1995; Pape & Arias, 2000; Truman-Schramm et al., 2000). When survivors perceive perpetrators as responsible for the abusive behaviors and believe that they are at fault, they are more likely to be less satisfied with the relationship and consider leaving. This not only impacts the definite leaving decision but also occasional reconciliation. The uncertainty regarding the cause of the abuse can make victims more tolerant. This is what renders receiving support more

crucial; the change in the survivors' perception and attribution to the motivations of the perpetrator is the door opener for the separation (Wood, 2001).

While some of the studies suggested that recognition of the experience and naming it as abuse is a very important step in the process of seeking help (Peatee, 2022); some indicate that receiving feedback or insights gathered from the external resources enables recognition and naming the experience (Burke et al., 2004; Liang et al., 2005; Resick & Fleming, 2017). Therefore, labelling the abuse and seeking help are intertwined processes (Peatee, 2022).

In the literature of gaslighting, it is indicated that recognition of gaslighting enables survivors to revisit and reframe their experiences; thus, label their partners as gaslighters. The process of recognition can be remarkably sudden (e.g., learning a past infidelity, catching a lie) or in a more gradual manner (Klein et al., 2023). This recognition breaks the cycle of idealization of the partner and disrupts the gaslighting loops. Once it has been disrupted, survivors may enter a healing process which can be conceptualized in various ways (e.g., leaving the gaslighter).

On the other hand, in the psychological IPV literature, it has been suggested that survivors may not always label their experience as abuse for current or former relationships (Follingstad & Rogers, 2014; Goldsmith & Freyd, 2005). While some of the survivors are totally aware of the abusive behaviors, they either found themselves accountable or perceive the act as abusive rather than finding who implements it as the abuser. The rest of the participants do not label themselves as being emotionally abused even when their experience fits with the definition of psychological abuse (Peatee, 2022). Not labeling the experience as abuse may have various reasons, such as the presence of positive behaviors besides the abuse (Kaisan & Painter, 1992; Raymond & Bruschi, 1989), feelings of self-blame (Harned, 2005), experiences of abuse in childhood (Pipes & LeBov-Keeler, 1997), frequency of the abusive behaviors (Follingstad & Rogers, 2014), and commitment to the perpetrator (Arriaga et al., 2018). Labeling the experience relates to the separation as survivors are more likely to minimize or justify the abusive behaviors if they are motivated to remain in the relationship (Arriaga & Cappelz, 2011; Arriaga et al., 2018).

The process of recognition and labelling the abuse with the help of the external support is a non-linear process, meaning that it enables the survivor to make sense of the experience when realization and naming happens regardless of the time (Burke et al., 2004; Liang et al., 2005). The decision of leaving can be taken without naming and with having ongoing doubts, yet they gradually come to a position where they can no longer rationalize the abusive behaviors (Penttinen, 2024).

2.3.4. Healing the Wounds

The decision to leave itself can be seen as a way of resistance in the context of abusive relationships. Most of the attempts to leave do not necessarily involve survivors having full faith in its success (Hydén, 2005). In psychological IPV literature, it has been suggested that survivors have ongoing psychological symptoms after the separation, such as PTSD and depression (Friedman et al., 2014). Lindgren and Renck (2008) have proposed that psychological separation takes a longer time than physical separation. In terms of gaslighting literature, Klein et al. (2023) indicated that survivors experienced a destroyed sense of self in which they feel fully lost. Moreover, they have developed a mistrust towards relationships and reported the wish to be alone for a long time, isolating themselves as a means of self-protection (Ko & Park, 2020). Some survivors shared that they have lost their faith in themselves regarding being capable of comprehending another person's intentions. Thus, it is common to take early precautions if they sense a resemblance to protect themselves from further abuse (Penttinen, 2024).

While the anxiety is based on the repetition of prior experience (Klein et al., 2023), formation of a new non-abusive nurturing relationship is important in regaining sense of self (Loring, 1994). In a similar manner, increasing the social connection with others (e.g. through group therapy) is also restorative in terms of validation due to similar experience (Sackett & Saunders, 1999; Todahl et al., 2017). The healing impact of being understood and naming the uncertain experience led to feelings of relief (Tolman, 1992). Receiving external validation of that their experience of abuse was real and they were not accountable for its emergence is also significantly restorative (Penttinen, 2024). Furthermore, activates that involve self-reflection such as physical and creative activities

is helping in terms of regaining epistemic trust in self and reconsider self as a trustworthy agent once again (Klein et al., 2023). On the other hand, some studies suggested survivors instantly recovered from the effects of relationship once it ended (Campbell et al., 1997; Humphreys & Thiara, 2003; Surtees, 1995).

Overall, survivors try to resist gaslighting in number of ways. With the recognition of the emotional distress in the relationship, their efforts for making sense of the gaslighting experience stands out. They question themselves and the reality they live in trying to understand, they try to hold onto the relationship holding on to the hope that the abusive attitude may end someday, they try to preserve their connection with reality with involving third parties (e.g. friends, family members, therapists) and lastly, they name the experience which plays a crucial role. While all these methods would be counted as internal strategies of resistance, they emerge as efforts for preserving sense of reality on individual and interpersonal level, without necessarily include confrontation of the gaslighter.

2.4. Studies on Gaslighting in Türkiye

Hailes and Goodman (2025) have suggested that what is meant by gaslighting is studied without being labelled for a long time in literature. Therefore, research in the context of gaslighting in Türkiye cannot be restricted to only the term “gaslighting”. Research regarding IPV in Türkiye is conceptualized based on the political, economic, and cultural features of the country. Based on the reports of UNFPA and TKDF (The Federation of Women Associations in Türkiye), 8 out of 10 people who have been exposed to violence in a family context are women. Furthermore, in the reports, 57.6% of women reported being exposed to psychological abuse at least once in the last 3 months, the amount is 12.2% for domestic violence, and 8.6% for sexual violence. OECD Family database report (2020) has indicated that 38% of women have reported being exposed to sexual and domestic violence in Türkiye, which made Türkiye the highest among other OECD countries (Fener, 2024). Arat (2022) has suggested that this alarming and egregious level of violence against women is related to the current government’s conservative implementations that highlighted gender inequality. The percentage of women being

exposed to psychological abuse is found to be 52% (Yüksel-Kaptanoğlu & Çavlin, 2015), 56.6% (İlkkaracan, 1998), and 54.6% (Öyekçin et al., 2012) in studies conducted in Türkiye.

Altınay and Arat (2007) have proposed that a vast majority of women in Türkiye have been exposed to domestic, sexual, or psychological IPV at some point in their lives. It has been suggested that participants commonly perceive violence as “normal” and as a natural part of the relationship. The traditional and patriarchal background of Türkiye not only shapes the opinions of women but also contributes to masculine attitudes of men, in which they exert power and control over women (Fişek, 1982; Yılmaz, 2018). Men’s power and dominance are promoted by the patriarchal structure and practices of honor cultures, which Türkiye is being categorized under (Sakallı et al., 2013). The initiative that is being given to men regarding the “honor” of the women allows them to start or escalate the abusive acts (Bilgili & Vural, 2011; Sakallı et al., 2013; Sever & Yurdakul, 2001; Uskul et al., 2012).

The ways in which the violence is perceived and evaluated by women also play a role in violence against women (Günşen İçli, 1994; Mor Çatı, 1996). According to the results of a study conducted by the Ministry of Family and Social Services (1993), it has been suggested that 35.1% of the women find themselves accountable for the abuse (TBMM, 1993). They think that they “deserve” and justify the violence for various reasons (e.g., cheating, talking back to him) (Ergöçmen et al., 2013). Nevertheless, Jansen et al. (2009) have proposed that the number of women finding themselves accountable gradually decreases. A few of the factors that prevent women from understanding and protecting themselves from abuse can be sorted as women’s hope for ending the abuse, feelings of inadequacy, self-doubt, and helplessness, which are also seen in the context of gaslighting (Yüksel, 1996).

As a closer context, some studies are done under the name of “emotional manipulation”. In their works, Kuru (2022) has focused on the relationship between emotional manipulation and commitment; Esin (2022) implementing emotional manipulation through cognitive distortions; Ertürk and Arıkan (2022) have focused on the relation between borderline level personality organization, relationship consistency and emotional

manipulation. Aydın and Gölge (2022) have also examined psychological abuse, manipulation and dissociation in close relationships, the study also gives information regarding the connection between emotional manipulation and hegemonic masculinity. Şen (2023) has analyzed relationship quality and emotional manipulation; Kayıtmaz (2024) has examined emotional manipulation and level of relationship satisfaction. According to the results, Aydın and Gölge (2023), Esin (2022), Kuru (2022), Kayıtmaz (2024) has found significant differences on the level of implementing emotional manipulation between male and female participants. On the other hand, Ertürk and Arıkan (2022), Şen (2023) did not indicate specific gender differences on emotional manipulation. While these studies are remarkably important in making the emotional manipulation visible in Türkiye context, the impact of internalized gender roles in Türkiye as a patriarchal structure needs further research.

The gap in Türkiye's literature on research, including the term gaslighting, is noteworthy. Akiş and Öztürk (2021) have examined pathological narcissism in terms of emotional abuse and gaslighting, with the aim of understanding ways in which gaslighting is implemented by narcissistic partners. The importance of the study can be explained as the overview it presents about the pathological nature and psychological impacts of gaslighting. The relationship of gaslighting and narcissism is also significant in terms of understanding how and why gaslighters use gaslighting. It also expands the knowledge regarding emotional manipulation and gaslighting in the literature. Furthermore, Nazir and Özçiçek (2022), Akdeniz and Cihan (2024) have presented systematic review studies regarding gaslighting in interpersonal relationships. These studies also play crucial roles in introducing the term; yet the gender-based power inequality has not been explained as a factor which sets the stage for formation of gaslighting which marks a gap in the literature. The formation of gaslighting is inseparable from the social structure it emerges in. In this regard, Akiş and Öztürk (2021) have explained gaslighting as a product of misogyny which can be seen in various parts of daily life that is characterized by power inequality (e.g. workplace, family dynamics). Gaslighting is defined as a dysfunctional family dynamic that involves efforts for making the survivor doubting self. Nevertheless, the ways in which survivors experience gaslighting is lacking in this study. There are also master's theses that focused on the relationship between women being exposed to

gaslighting and their psychopathological symptoms and socio-demographic features (Gökçe, 2022) and the adaptation of the gaslighting questionnaire into Turkish (Gören, 2024). Çabuk and Kumova (2024) have conducted a review regarding the relationship between gaslighting, demographic factors, and personality traits. Likewise, Uzun and Uğurlu (2024) have conducted a literature review about gaslighting, explained various effects in detail, and examined the complexities of the term. This study's findings are crucial in terms of expressing the potential detrimental impacts of gaslighting both psychological and physical. While Çabuk and Kumova (2024), Gökçe (2022) have also presented important insight about the development of gaslighting and its potential psychological impacts on the survivor, some individual factors are present which make survivors more vulnerable to experience gaslighting. This poses risk for putting the blame on the victim-survivors and overlooking the impact of gender-based power inequality which is remarkably apparent in Türkiye context. Other research on gaslighting focuses on organizational gaslighting (Urgan, 2020), and the cinematographic analysis of the film *Gaslighting* (Gençer, 2024). Lastly, there is a scale development study about gaslighting in an organizational context (Öztırak, 2025).

All the studies mentioned are remarkably significant in terms of increasing the visibility of the term which is being implemented subtly by its nature. Yet, how gaslighting is being experienced and how it can be detected on interpersonal level is a question that needs further research. While the form of experience is in separable from social context and as the cultural and political features pose an increased risk for IPV among women in Türkiye, the position of gaslighting in Türkiye context is an important issue. Further research needs to be done to analyze the effects and emergence of gaslighting for a better understanding and development of intervention and prevention programs in various contexts.

2.5. Present Study

While the academic attention on gaslighting has recently increased in various contexts, there are still gaps and inconsistencies regarding its exact definition, scope, and function in the literature. As it is mentioned in family dynamics (Barton & Whitehead, 1969), form

of exerting power and silencing in social and political structure (Sweet, 2019), gaslighting has most notably been examined in the context of romantic relationships (Abramson, 2014; Graves & Samp, 2021; Stern, 2007). The focus is generally on individual differences and personality traits of the perpetrator and survivor in intimate partner relationships, which downplays gaslighting's features that are based on gendered power structures (Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Miano et al., 2021; Sweet, 2019). However, narratives of survivors have indicated that social power, traditional gender roles, social norms, and expectations are paving the way for the emergence of gaslighting (Darke et al., 2025). Likewise, it is noted that further research regarding the needs and experience of survivors is important for accurately defining, understanding, and labeling gaslighting.

In this regard, the present study aims to explore the experience of gaslighting not only as a psychological tactic used in intimate partner relationships but also as a way of patriarchal oppression that is strengthened by social gender inequality. Therefore, feminist theory will be used as an explanatory framework. Abramson (2014) has suggested that women's experience of gaslighting cannot be fully understood without comprehending it as a product of broader social system. Gender based power inequality within the patriarchal structure shapes the experience of gaslighting. Feminist theory presents necessary factors to explore how women's sense of reality is undermined in intimate relationships with providing explanations related with patriarchal oppression.

To form intervention and prevention programs, it has been suggested that interviewing and listening to the experience of survivors hold significant importance (Johnson, 1998). Since gaslighting is defined to be insidious, it can be experienced differently by different individuals (Stern, 2007). At this point, qualitatively designed studies enable a comprehensive understanding of the complex and specific process (Gale et al., 2013). A deeper understanding of gaslighting and the ways in which it is being experienced is remarkably beneficial for clinicians to detect this invisible method of abuse (Darke et al., 2025). Furthermore, the gap in research in Türkiye context is also significant. Even though there are literature reviews (e.g., Çabuk & Kumova, 2023) and quantitative analysis of gaslighting/emotional manipulation with specific elements such as the quality of relationship (Şen, 2023) and the level of relationship satisfaction (Kayıtmaz, 2024), a

qualitative analysis of gaslighting in romantic relationships is previously unexplored in Türkiye context. For this reason, the present study aims to demonstrate young women's (18-30) experience of gaslighting in the context of romantic relationships in Türkiye. Focusing on this age group is crucial, as it represents both a high-risk period for IPV (Johnson et al., 2016) and a risky stage in developmental terms. Arnett (2000) has characterized this stage with search for identity and efforts for individuation which cause individuals to be more vulnerable across conflicts. Furthermore, the potential lack of experience, not fully developed emotional regulation capacity are also factors which impose high risks (Capaldi et al., 2012). Moreover, Breiding et al. (2014) draws attention to this age group may have higher risk for internalization of traditional gender roles which increases the risk of being exposed to IPV. Consequently, exploring women's experience who aged between 18-30 is expected to present important findings regarding prevention programs. Their experience of gaslighting in terms of behaviors of the partner, their inner process within and after the relationship, and their journey of naming gaslighting and coping process will be addressed. The present study aims to address the research questions below:

- 1) How do young women experience and name gaslighting in their romantic relationships?
- 2) How do they cope with it within the relationship?
- 3) How do they decide to break up and experience the separation process?

3. METHODS

3.1. Data Collection

Following the Istanbul Bilgi University Ethics Committee's approval, the researcher used convenience sampling to reach potential participants. For convenience sampling, the researcher used the help of various online platforms to advertise the study. E-mail notifications were sent to the researcher's professional network, and posts were shared on the researcher's personal social media account and Bilgi University Clinical Psychology Program's social media accounts. The researcher asked contacts from other universities (Bilkent, ODTU, BOUN) to advertise the study.

Participation in the study was based on volunteering. Inclusion criteria in the study were being a heterosexual woman who (a) report experiencing gaslighting in a past relationship, (b) have ended their relationship in which they reported they have experienced gaslighting, (c) are aged between 18-30, (d) volunteer to participate in the study. The study focused on the experiences of heterosexual women and aimed to explore their experiences of gaslighting, as the literature suggested that coercive control and IPV are more common and lead to more critical consequences among women (Dichter et al., 2018). Being married/divorced or having a PTSD/Acute Stress Disorder diagnosis in the last 6 months were the exclusion criteria. Those participants who currently reported experiencing intense stress or challenging life transitions and those who were currently in a romantic relationship that involves violence were also excluded. 3 participants who rated their current level of stress as 5 on the questionnaire were not included as participants, the list of institutions where they can apply for psychological support where shared with them (Appendix D). These exclusion criteria are set to minimize the risk of causing distress to potential participants as an ethical precaution.

In the study, interviews were conducted with ten participants who met the inclusion and exclusion criteria. The researcher's personal contact information was shared in the e-mail and social media announcements. Potential participants who volunteered to participate

were asked to contact the researcher via e-mail. Firstly, the researcher shared a socio-demographic form (Appendix B) with those participants to check for their eligibility and suitability for the study. After screening the socio-demographic forms, the participants who matched the inclusion and exclusion criteria were contacted by phone. In this pre-interview phone call, the researcher confirmed the answers in the socio-demographic form, explained the procedures of the study and the content of the interview, and transparently gave information about the benefits and risks of participating in the interview. Thereafter, with those who were still willing to participate, an informed consent form was shared (Appendix C). Those participants who provided their consent and met the criteria were invited to an online or face-to-face semi-structured interview, based on their choice. All the interviews were held online, through Google Meet. For the interviews, the links were sent directly to the participant by the researcher, and they were password-protected. The participants were kindly requested to enter the meeting from a private space, and the researcher entered the interviews from an isolated, quiet environment to ensure privacy and confidentiality.

Prior to each interview, the researcher provided an explanation to the participants about the nature of the study and that the interview would be recorded. Participants were informed that they would be asked open-ended questions and that they were free to skip any questions they wanted, take a break, or stop the interview whenever they saw fit without any explanation. To protect the participants' well-being, the researcher observed their emotional reactions to the interview questions and continuously monitored their emotional state during the interviews. Toward that goal, the researcher watched their non-verbal behaviors, such as their facial expressions and tone of voice, as well as their verbal accounts. In emotionally intense moments, necessary precautions were taken, and a safe space they may need was provided to participants by normalizing their reactions and validating their experiences.

The researcher followed an interview guide in all interviews. The interview guide was composed of 5 parts and 27 open-ended questions in a semi-structured format. The questions did not include any judgmental or directive language, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The guide aimed to understand participants' experiences of

gaslighting, their process of naming it, and ending the relationship, and their ways of coping. The guide was developed based on prior qualitative research of Fener (2024), Lammers et al. (2005), and Richardson (2021). In these studies, the interview guides include questions regarding participants' perceptions of psychological abuse in terms of romantic relationships and their way of defining a healthy romantic relationship. These questions have guided the formation of such questions in terms of women's experiences of gaslighting in their romantic relationships. It was composed of 5 parts: 1) introduction, 2) their definitions of and expectations from romantic relationships, 3) their experience of gaslighting, 4) their ways of coping; 5) separation process and closure. In the introduction section, the researcher introduced herself and gathered brief information regarding participants' daily lives and current relationship status. Participants were asked to portray current or past relationships. The second section aimed to understand participants' definitions of a good romantic relationship, what they see as important in a romantic relationship, and their expectations from a partner. They were asked about potential problems that could arise in a romantic relationship based on their observations. In the following section, the participants were asked to define gaslighting and how they experienced gaslighting in their relationships. To understand their experience fully, they were asked about the start of the relationship and how it proceeded. Participants were asked about the behavioral changes of their partners, if there were any, their process of naming their experiences as gaslighting, and ways of coping during the relationship. In the next section, participants were asked questions that addressed the separation process. They gave information regarding how the separation process arose, how they were emotionally affected, and how they coped. Moreover, information about the impact of experiencing gaslighting on their views of themselves and their relationships was gathered. In the closure section, participants were kindly requested to give feedback about their comments about participating in the study.

As a first step, a pilot interview was conducted, and the transcribed version of the interview was reviewed by the researcher and the thesis advisor. As a result of the review, two sub-questions that include definitions of gaslighting and inquire whether the participant's experience aligned with these definitions were excluded from the interview guide. The reason for the removal was not to restrict the participant's experience to the

written definition and not to be directive. Nonetheless, the pilot interview was included as only the sub-questions were removed, and the main question remained in the interview guide. All the interviews were converted into transcripts, using audio recordings whose consent was taken from participants prior to the interview. A total of 10 interviews were conducted with durations ranging from 41 to 90 minutes.

3.2. Participants

It is suggested that the optimal sample size for a middle-scale thematic analysis study is 10- 12 (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Therefore, ten participants were interviewed for the study whose ages varied between 20 to 28. All the participants, apart from one, were living in the main urban centers of Türkiye, and one participant was living in a suburban city of Türkiye. 5 of the participants were students from various departments of various universities, three of the participants were financial sector employees, one of the participants was a clinical psychologist, and one was an engineer. All the participants identified themselves as experiencing gaslighting in heterosexual romantic relationships. Three participants indicated that they are currently engaged in a romantic relationship, while 7 of them reported that they were not currently in a romantic relationship. Table 1 presents the duration of relationships involving gaslighting, together with the length of time since separation. It also includes the demographic information of the participants.

Table 3.1. Demographic Information of the Participants

Participant	Age	Occupation	Currently in Relationship	Total Duration of Relationship with Gaslighting	Time Since Separation
P1	26	Financial Sector Employee	Yes	13 months	2 years
P2	25	Financial Sector Employee	No	2.5 years	4 years
P3	28	Clinical Psychologist	Yes	1 year	4 months
P4	20	Undergraduate	No	3 months	1 month
P5	21	Undergraduate	Yes	1 year	1 year
P6	25	Engineer	No	13 months	3 months
P7	22	Financial Sector Employee	No	3 years	3 years
P8	20	Undergraduate	No	1 year	1 month
P9	21	Undergraduate	No	9 months	4 months
P10	21	Undergraduate	No	10 months	1 year

3.3. Data Analysis

To explore the gaslighting experiences of women, thematic analysis was utilized. Braun and Clarke (2013) have suggested that thematic analysis is an effective way of determining themes and patterns within participants' experiences. Feminist theory as the explanatory framework used in this thesis has guided the analysis in terms of understanding women's processes of empowerment and reflecting subtle gender-based power imbalances in patriarchal structure. In this regard, thematic analysis was implemented through a six-step process (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The first step was transcribing all the interviews and repeatedly going over the data set to increase the familiarity of the researcher with it. This step provided a more comprehensive overview of the data set. The second step was to form initial codes by analyzing the transcripts sentence by sentence using MAXQDA 2024 program. MAXQDA enabled the formation of numerous codes, which were systematically labeled according to their meaning. The codes of the pilot interview were first presented to the peer debriefer for feedback. Involvement of the peer debriefer was crucial for enhancing the trustworthiness of the research, as Braun and Clarke (2006) recommended. The revised version of the codes, with a few additions of the peer debriefer, was reviewed by the thesis advisor and the researcher. Following that, it was decided to proceed with implementing a few revisions. By the end of the initial coding process of all interviews, a total of 1470 codes were generated. The most frequently used codes can be exemplified as "partner's emotional neglect," "partner's imposing responsibility for problems," "self-doubt due to partner's accusations."

In the following stage, potential themes were developed from the codes based on their frequency, relevancy, and meaning. Moreover, sub-themes were formed under these themes. For instance, while "Gaslighting as Asserting Power" was one of the potential general themes, "Efforts for Social Isolation" was a sub-theme. In the fourth stage, relevance, coherence, and comprehensiveness of the data with the themes were assessed. The themes and sub-themes were reviewed to understand whether they accurately represent the participants' lived experiences. In the following stage, the names of themes and sub-themes were reviewed and discussed with the thesis advisor to determine whether

the labeling conveyed the expected meaning. Ultimately, 3 final themes were gathered as “Gaslighting as Asserting Power,” “Experiencing Gaslighting,” and “Coping Process.” In the last stage, a final report was prepared that demonstrated all main themes and sub-themes. These themes also included illustrations of participants’ relevant quotes. According to Braun and Clarke’s (2006) suggestions, the most representative quotes were used to enrich and deepen the analysis.

Braun and Clarke (2006) have highlighted the importance of the trustworthiness of the analysis, which can be carried out with several practices. Triangulation can be regarded as one of them to enhance trustworthiness. Toward that goal, not only a peer debriefer was involved in the coding process as mentioned above, but also, the researcher and the thesis advisor carried out continuous meetings in different steps of the analysis. These meetings were remarkably effective as they enabled a more detailed and multi-dimensional understanding of the data set through discussing them. They created space for diverse perspectives to be heard, which enriched the analysis.

Another practice can be considered as member-checking, in which the feedback is taken from the participants to explore whether the results of the analysis accurately represent their experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). To execute member checking, a report was sent to all the participants involving final themes as the result of the analysis. 2 of the participants responded. They confirmed the summary of the findings; no changes were made.

3.4. Reflexivity

According to Braun and Clark (2013), another important aspect of trustworthiness of the research is transparency and reflexivity. The process of deciding the topic of the thesis, meaning derived from the codes, and formation of themes are inseparable from my subjectivity. Both personal and social motivations have impacted my personal journey, which brought me to this topic. Firstly, as a 25-year-old woman who has spent all her life in Türkiye, I experienced firsthand the gender inequalities and how these unspoken rules are normalized in daily life. The assigned duties of women have always been a barrier to

women's self-actualization. This has a touching effect on a personal level as a woman who has been raised by strong women who had to face numerous obstacles to ensure the resources I have today. I have always had an urge to oppose this bitter truth: Had these strong women born male, would this be their experience? Probably not.

The bitter truths regarding the inequalities are not limited to the social world but are also evident in heterosexual romantic relationships. I have been given the chance to witness how relationships can detach people from their authentic selves and convert them into someone who they can no longer recognize. Furthermore, it was impossible to overlook the contribution of imposed inequalities of the patriarchal system. The unspoken and normalizing nature of this suppression provoked anger in me. Secondly, even though this self-loss is agonizing, it also captured my attention. How can a person become this much alienated and be completely unaware of how? At this point, gaslighting comes to light as an inequality practice in terms of power and one side finding oneself in a state of questioning. I wanted to learn about gaslighting to make sense of this sneaky and silent shift and to understand the extent to which societal norms impact experiences of romantic relationships.

During the data collection process, I became aware that some experiences are very common. Even though the process and instances can be diverse, the emotional impacts of these relationships sounded remarkably familiar. The sense of familiarity was present in terms of my own experiences and my own emotions. This allowed me to better engage with their narratives and contributed to the formation of a safe space in the interviews. On a personal level, I was surprised by the extent of common experiences I shared with the participants. I remembered the frustration I once experienced, and I paid attention to approach them in a manner I once needed to be approached. I tried to appreciate their efforts to share these vulnerable stories with me. Together, we also embraced challenging emotions such as anger, shame, guilt during the interviews, and I tried to validate the occasionally exhausting presence of them. Personally, it was occasionally compelling to hear such stories which reminded me of my own experiences. At this point, what complicated the situation was that I hesitated on where to stand and draw the line between being a therapist and a researcher. After a few interviews, I gained a deeper insight into

my identity as a researcher and positioned myself accordingly. The main difference was to adopt a standpoint that was less analytical and more active during the interviews.

I generally received positive feedback about the presence of this space where they can reflect on their experiences. They suggested that this space enabled them to view their experiences in a comprehensive way. I also realized that the process of naming their experiences as gaslighting sometimes can only be possible after separation. Thereby, many compelling emotions regarding the relationship remained unprocessed which was why providing a safe space where they can express their emotions became more crucial. I observed that even though participants occasionally got emotional, this space was said to have healing power. Furthermore, I noticed that they strongly experienced feelings of shame due to the state the relationship has brought them to. Talking to a stranger in a safe space without any judgments was said to be beneficial. Similarly, I generally observed the healing effect of social surroundings on the wounds caused by relationships. This showed me the cruciality of the need to be understood and seen.

Furthermore, I believe as researchers and mental health professionals, it is our responsibility to shed light on social issues which are left in the shadows. While gaslighting is not visible by its definition and nature, there are other issues that are more in the public eye and yet insufficiently spoken. Moreover, from a feminist perspective, which I resonate with, I believe our duty as mental health professionals is to put greater emphasis on gender inequality that has been normalized by the patriarchal system and imposed upon us. On this behalf, the first step in breaking common misconceptions is to recognize them. Therefore, my ultimate wish is to make gaslighting a little bit more visible and help people name it when they are exposed to it with the hope of contributing to relevant preventive studies. Lastly, as a woman of this country and this century, I feel it is our obligation to raise our voice to make a difference and I would be more than happy if my thesis would make the smallest change in somebody's perspective.

RESULTS

As a result of the analysis, three main themes are formed named as “Gaslighting as Asserting Power,” “Experiencing Gaslighting”, and “Coping Process”. Each main theme has several subthemes which are explained below. The themes and the subthemes can be found in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1. Themes and Subthemes of the Present Research

Themes	Subthemes
Theme 1: Gaslighting as Asserting Power	Constant Accusations Efforts for Social Isolation Mood Shifts and Emotional Neglect
Theme 2: Experiencing Gaslighting	Doubting Self Believing in Idealized Love Searching for an Objective Eye Burning Out and Breaking Up
Theme 3: Coping Through Learning and Growth	Naming Gaslighting Affirming Oneself Protecting Self within Future Relationships

4.1. Gaslighting as Asserting Power

This theme describes the behaviors women are exposed to and call as gaslighting in relationships. This theme is composed of women's reflections on how partners implement gaslighting to assert power and control over them. The subthemes explain how power assertion can be enforced in various methods: "Constant Accusations," "Efforts for Social Isolation," and "Mood Shifts and Emotional Neglect".

4.1.1. Constant Accusations

Women reported that throughout their relationships, they were exposed to various accusations. Partners accused women of various topics such as in multiple ways. This subtheme focuses on different ways and topics accusations being directed at women based on their reports. These accusations might or might not reflect the reality, yet they all involved partners' exaggerated claims that they are so. Partners have reportedly been firmly clinging to their points of views with no room for flexibility. According to the participants, they disregarded women's perspectives and tried to assert their own versions of reality. Eventually, as women reported, they gained significant dominance over them.

He does not listen; he only thinks he is right and only tries to convince you. (P7)

I realized that after a certain point I was convinced to his accusations. One day he said something about a conversation we had with someone. What he told me was, you were actually bothered by this man, and you were angry with me that's why you communicated with him too much that day, you flirted with him. I'm definitely sure it wasn't like that; I told my side of the story and we had a fight. Days later I sat down and thought about it and said yes maybe I really did do that to bother him. Afterwards I felt so guilty and was worried about how I could do this, how I could be such a person, I experienced something like this for a week. (P3)

Firstly, these accusations had a nature of reversing the truth the other way around. In other words, partners tended to put forward accusations with shifting responsibility and blame for behaviors which they actually performed themselves. Some participants described that

their partners convinced them into they were responsible for the events that occurred and behaviors that the partners displayed.

At the end of the day, I was always the one who apologized for everything, when, a fight breaks out and the person who started the fight was the other party, but I was the one responsible for starting the fight. He made me believe that I was responsible and it was my fault. (P10)

In terms of shifting responsibility, some participants reported that their partners experienced an emotional shift throughout the relationship. Women described that partner initially behaved more emotionally invested than themselves, they initially portrayed the image of perfect boyfriend. Women stated that this attitude fueled their excitement, foster their commitment to the relationship. Yet, in time, partners adopted a passive attitude in the process. They stopped acting in the way they used to; they became less affectionate and attentive. Women stated that after their partners 'change, the partners claimed that women were entirely responsible for what they expected and for how they acted. According to the women's accounts, this attitude made them feel they were subtly accused of acting wrongly and having unrealistic expectations, while partners were the ones who initially gave women positive hope and excitement about the future of the relationship. In other words, women reported that their partners did not take any responsibility for the change in their behaviors, they accused them of being responsible for the change or accused women of having unrealistic expectations from their partners.

In addition, some partners deflected responsibility about even the basic needs in the relational context. They acted as if women's bare minimum expectations in the relationship were too high, subtly or directly making them accountable without directly blaming them. For instance, one participant reported that her partner didn't call her for days, when she asked him to call her once in a while, he said that he was too busy, and it was too much to ask from him (P8).

He used to say that my demands were excessive, exaggerated... He taught me that it was so. He was drilling into my head that a man doesn't have to call a woman every day, it doesn't mean he doesn't love me. ... He was saying that my wishes and expectations was me being spoiled. (P1)

He was acting as if he did not want to continue to the relationship but had no courage to end it. He didn't talk to me as well; he was just going with the flow. Then, I wanted to talk with him to make everything clear as he had no such intention. When we were talking, he told me that normally when he does something like ghosting, people tend to distance themselves from him, but I somehow kept talking to him. He said that 'You brought this situation to this point, to where it is now. So, if we are having this conversation right now, the responsibility is entirely yours. If you would have walked away, none of this would have happened'. He told me this as if he couldn't talk and didn't have a mouth. (P4)

On the other hand, in terms of shifting blame, women reported that generally their partners projected their emotions and actions onto them, whereas partners were the ones who carried them out. Some participants believed that the reason for this distraction of focus was concealing his faults. These accusations involved direct blame, implying that not only did they have no responsibility, but also that women had faults. Lack of trust, lack of attention, lack of effort for resolving relational issues, being selfish, and not being a decent person were discussed as a few topics where partners shifted blame.

He was the one who didn't trust me but had convinced me that I was not trusting him. He was most likely cheating on me, but I couldn't catch him. He was always accusing me of having a lack of trust, but the one who was truly insecure was him. (P10)

He kept telling me that I was neglectful and uninterested. How can I be? I wanted to see you, talk to you. You are the one who doesn't want it, but I am the one who is indifferent? (P10)

Sometimes, partners reportedly put forward some lies to justify their version of reality. They made up unrealistic lies to be proven right and to draw women into their realities, often by concealing their faulty sides. These lies were about issues such as where the partner actually was when he said that he was busy or pretending to have heard that she cheated on her. On these matters, the reality that the partners were trying to convince women was based on a lie they consciously told. Moreover, even when their lies have revealed, they continued to justify their selves with excuses.

I told him that a relationship couldn't be sustained without communication, without being reached out to, without calling or messaging. However, he insisted that it could work and that was how relationships were maintained. He said that he was very busy and could not dedicate time to me, and I should not be expecting that. But later, I found out that while he was saying these things to me, he was spending time with his friends outside while telling me that he was working. When I told him that, he said that we were living in different cities; if we were living in the same city, he would have been with me every day. He always had an excuse; he manipulated me so much. (P8)

Another aspect that contributed to the strengthening of partners' narrative was that such accusations are generally related to women's personal characteristics. Women reported that their partners claimed that women had personal faults that caused them to go through the relationship difficulties that they had been through. The personal accusations that women reported were directed to their personality as an individual, their characteristics as a partner, their physical appearance, or mental health. Participants reported that they were being exposed to criticism and accusations of being insufficient regarding these areas. In this regard, the accusations adopted a more direct form where gaslighting was applied through personal insults.

In time, he started to tell me that we cannot have a proper relationship, because I was not someone worthy of being in a relationship with. If I were a decent person, we would have been celebrating our one-year anniversary. (P5)

When there was a physical intimacy between us, I didn't want to take my shirt off because I knew that he didn't find me attractive. He would make fun of my stomach. He would say, 'What's this? You should work out. (P7)

I used to ask him why he was making me feel alone. He would say that I was imagining things in my head, and he was not doing anything. He would say that 'Sometimes, we might not see each other. What's so wrong with that? You're being paranoid again. (P6)

Furthermore, women indicated that they faced accusations that they could not make sense of at first. They could not understand where the accusation came from; they lacked substance, meaning that these accusations occasionally had no correspondence in

women's reality. Women stated that they could not understand the accusation and they do not doubt themselves but still find themselves in the apologizing position, trying to convince partners that they were innocent. These accusations can be about women being flirty with another party, women cheating on them, women minimizing them.

He suddenly accused me of cheating on him when there was nothing going on. He asked me about some people I was following on Instagram, one of them was somebody I used to talk to, I told him this. He then accused me of cheating on him. Even though he had no proof, he kept on defending this for a long time... At some point, I started to ask for forgiveness for something I didn't do. (P9)

Women reported that the partners generally have justifications for their behaviors which they used as excuses but they always wanted women to be overly interested in their own needs. Partners behaved freely and were able to do everything they criticize or complain about when it was the other way around. According to women's reports when they reacted to this, partners always had an excuse, or an additional accusation prepared. Women indicated that this built a double standard between partners, leading to an unequal dynamic. This power imbalance increased emotional and psychological dominance of partners. By this way, they managed to create a reality in which the women were always apologizing as if they had a fault.

He was behaving in any way he likes while constantly making me feel as though I was incapable of doing anything. I was held responsible for everything, while he did nothing and taking no responsibility. I was accused of being obsessive, while he was obsessively accusing me of everything, but he was always right. (P2)

Because I can't call him unless he calls me, what if he's busy? When he's not available, we can't talk, but when I'm not available, I must create availability to talk to him. That's how I felt. I felt like I must find a way to talk to him when he's available. (P7)

In time, women recognized that partners were living in a version of reality created by themselves. They might engage in any course of action to secure their position of being right. Constant accusations about women's personalities, partnerships not only have left women in a position of being wrong and being blamed in every argument but also

undermined the way they see themselves. This eventually led partners to be emotionally dominant on women. Another way of implementing this dominance is through socially isolating them.

4.1.2. Efforts for Social Isolation

To assert power, partners frequently pursued the strategy of making women socially and emotionally isolated. Women reported that they were exposed to frequent efforts of their partner to make them more disconnected from the outside world. Social isolation of women enabled men to be more dominant in women's lives as their voices gradually became the only thing women could hear. This subtheme reflects their partners' strategies which women reported that they have been exposed to socially isolate them.

These efforts for social isolation were manifested in various ways, according to the participants' accounts. Several participants reported that, initially, partners displayed non-destructive, benign jealousy regarding the social network of women. Partners did not adopt intrusive attitudes at first. They expressed emotions in a lighthearted and polite manner, which did not sound like interfering. One of the participants indicated that this manner sounded like emotional disclosure, which was understandable. For this reason, due to its subtle nature, this attitude was not perceived as a boundary violation. Thus, as a line was not drawn, the intervention of the partner gradually grew. The extent of the effect of this intervention and the manipulations that were implemented to achieve it could be understood by how women suddenly found themselves in social isolation.

I had a very large social network. As I started spending more time with my friends, he began making subtle comments. Since it was still early in the relationship, it was around after 3 months, it did not create a very big problem. Because I didn't directly accept what he said. But he had been subtly making comments. At first, he began saying small things, like 'I'm a jealous person. I'm feeling uncomfortable with you going out with your friends, especially your male friends. I get jealous. Of course, you can go out, but I don't like it.' When he is politely expressing these concerns, I thought he was just sharing his emotions

with me. Gradually, I started to decrease my social events. But I did not do this on purpose. (P10)

Furthermore, participants who experienced partners' discomfort about their social life reported that they were occasionally blamed for changing their behaviors in the presence of their friends. They were accused of not behaving properly around them. Especially, women reported that third parties who were seen as potentially "dangerous" occasionally became topics of their arguments. Not only were these third parties accused of behaving inappropriately close, but women were also treated as if they were reciprocating this interest. Women's harmless efforts to build relationships with others were portrayed as wrong and inappropriate by men. Several participants reported their partners' effort to impose the idea that they were acting shamefully. Partners were reportedly highly frustrated and showed extreme sensitivity to the likelihood of a third-party showing interest and women falling under the influence of this potential attention. As a result of this anger and jealousy, partners raised their voices and directed insults at women.

I used to have a large group of friends, and I've always been someone who speaks in a very affectionate way, calling my friends 'honey,' 'darling,' and so on and I sent a message to a male friend saying 'honey.' He saw this message and said to me, 'You used to be such a cheap person. Were you that kind of woman? (P1)

We were at my friend's birthday party and my friend was a male. After we got out of the party, he accused me of dancing so close to my friend instead of him, which he thinks is very inappropriate. We started fighting, he yelled and insulted me as if I didn't know how to behave around people. (P3)

Although some of the participants experienced partners' discomfort about the opposite sex, few of them indicated problems about same sex friendships as well. They indicated that partners' discomfort was more likely to be about other powerful influences in women's lives who were important to women as much as their partners were. Partners made negative comments about women's friends, especially about the ones they did not know. Furthermore, when women tried to connect their friends and boyfriends, partners were behaving like uninterested and unwilling.

He was not intrusive about my clothing or anything like that, but he did interfere with my friendships, particularly with my female friends. 'I didn't like her. She did not sound well to me.' He used insulting accusations, like 'Are you really going to hang out with her?' He didn't even know her, but he didn't meet her. (P2)

I begged him to meet my friends, and I told him that he was being prejudiced multiple times; he always said that he had nothing to talk about with them. (P10)

As another effort for social isolation, partners also pursued the path of making women dependent on them. According to the participants, partners tried to attain this dependence through several ways. Some participants reported that their partners established dependency by drawing women into their own social circles and feeling only pleased if they were spending time with individuals whom they saw as acceptable. Apart from this, some of them indicated that their partners carefully monitored their needs from basic (e.g. making organizations according to the women's wishes) to complex (giving emotional nurture which woman cannot receive from her father) and fulfilled them all. Partners created a dynamic where women thought they were being highly regarded, while in fact it was later perceived by the participants as a subtle way of manipulation to control them.

Especially when I look back at that period, I came to the point where I could not be happy without him being by my side or I was only feeling happy when I talked about him. I have become dependent on him ... We had fights often, and the main reason for our arguments was his indifference and lack of attention, completely opposite of the way he was in the beginning. (P7)

He had made me very dependent on him because he had a more settled social circle. At that time, I had just moved to that city, and I didn't know many people there. Only his group of friends became my friends as he introduced all of them to me as my friends too. But when our relationship started to fall apart, he started saying that they were his friends and what was I doing with them and isolated me from there too. After a while, I found myself very weak as I had no friends left and couldn't deal with the emotional emptiness that were once fulfilled by him. (P2)

For some cases, another effort for creating social isolation for women was through falsely presenting themselves as very positive to women's social circle. They acted very politely and lovingly towards them when they were with other people, which was significantly different than how it was when they were alone. Women reported that their friends didn't believe that he could be so different in one-to-one. This was also reportedly causing women to be socially isolated because their friends could not understand them. Furthermore, some participants pointed out that their partners defamed them in their absence. Especially after separation, some partners kept talking negatively about women. Partners made efforts to falsely portray them as guilty in front of their social circle as well. Women found themselves in a position where they became socially and emotionally isolated and more dependent on them.

I heard that he was saying that I was promiscuous and they should stay away from me. He also told them that I was crazy and recommended other people to stay away. (P5)

He met 4 of my friends, he dropped by when we were having drinks. He was very nice to them; they loved him so much. He was acting so nice to me as well. After the meeting, when we were heading home, he suddenly told me that we belittled him there. I was completely shocked. (P3)

Overall, fostering social isolation could be manifested through creating discomfort in relationships or indirectly making women uncomfortable about themselves, or making others uncomfortable about women. Under any circumstances, women reported that their social worlds were affected by this and found themselves in a more dependent position where their partners were more powerful. This powerful position is further strengthened by the inconsistent moods and occasional emotional neglect of partners.

4.1.3. Mood Shifts and Emotional Neglect

This subtheme focuses on how partners displayed mood shifts; from affectionate periods to gradual emotional neglect and withdrawal of communication, inducing confusion in women. Participants reported that they were exposed to partners' mood shifts that were

changing arbitrarily. Partners generally had no explanation or solid reason for their inconsistent attitude, which placed women in a position of confusion. Women stated that partners did not make any clarifications regarding their cold behaviors. Even though it was hard to recognize, it put women in a position where they constantly demanded their partner's attention and emotional availability. The desire to bring out that affectionate part in men, which women knew existed, emerged whenever the cold mode is on.

Some participants expressed that the relationship began with a positive attitude of the partner. The initial positivity reportedly influenced participants' feelings about the partner; some of them even mentioned that they could not believe the number of ideal traits that their partners had. On the other hand, several participants reported that they did not have any positive impressions of the partners initially. The growth of emotions was formed gradually, especially with the additional effort of the partners. They engaged in actions that would elicit flourishing of positive emotions and captivate women. Either way, most of the participants stated that for a short period of time, partners were remarkably affectionate and caring. As a result, partners managed to convince women into a relationship without giving them room to recognize how. Most of them indicated that they suddenly found themselves in relationships in which they felt emotionally connected and were the subjects of this dynamic.

At first, I didn't like him at all. We did not have anything in common. We didn't listen to the same music, he was not into books, he didn't watch TV shows or movies. Initially, I was uncomfortable with these things, but in time, I'm not sure what happened. For the first and maybe even two months, he was really affectionate and attentive. He was reminding me of the things I had forgotten. He was very careful about the details during those first two months. After the third month, he made me fall completely in love with him. But as of now, looking back, I don't think it was love. Now, one year later, I think that this was entirely about my perception; I was thinking that I loved him because he wanted me to believe it. (P10)

According to the reports of participants, after a short period of time, the behaviors have changed either drastically or started to change gradually. Some of the participants

indicated that they received an unexpected negative reaction from their partner at some point after initial positivity which were surprising for the women. Even though, this unfolded differently in every relationship, this point has generally come to the surface when the relationships were definitively begun and when partners had no longer needed persuasion. Most of the reports showed that once the partners have unveiled both sides of the coin, the dynamic of relationships began to involve frequent mood shifts. All participants except for two reported that their partners displayed unstable, fluctuating actions and mood states which they had hard time making sense of.

I was just out of another relationship, and I wasn't ready. He was very patient and loving telling me that he would wait for me for as long as I needed. We kept seeing each other and after a while, I decided that I was ready for a relationship. He suddenly told me that he was no longer ready... that was when everything changed, from then on, he started to be very inconsistent. His frequency of messages was increasing and then decreasing and then increasing again. I couldn't understand. (P5)

We were talking very often, especially in lunch time or after he got out of work... At some point, he started not to call, saying that he was just busy and everything was normal. But I knew that was not him. He would have called me on the way home or walking to home. He was changed. (P6)

Some of the participants reported that the partners were occasionally saying that the reason for this shift was their sustained anger over past fights. They indicated that their partners arbitrarily revisited past conflicts and argued that the emotional impact of these conflicts continued. They justified their inconsistent moods by also claiming that they were the sufferer. In other words, they showed this argument as their excuse for their mood shifts. Women shared that this made them feel helpless.

In time, I learned that the things I shared with him might reappear weeks later as he found something to accuse me of. When he was upset again, these issues may reappear anytime whenever he feels like it. (P3)

On the other hand, some participants implied that partners' inconsistent moods started to emerge after a certain period, and it did not certainly include revisiting past conflicts. It included withdrawal of communication. Several participants indicated that they experienced episodes of withdrawal of communication frequently. There was time gaps in which partners disappeared and reappeared without a clear reason. Most of the participants who experienced withdrawal of communication stated that partners tended to cut off contact, mostly after arguments.

It was one of our first fights. We had a fight, and I got angry. I got out of the car crying. We didn't talk for two days; I expected him to message me. Then, I reached out to him and asked the reason why we weren't talking. He told me that he thought I wanted to be alone. I was expecting him to make an effort to reconcile. It was very abnormal that he was lost for 2 days. (P1)

Women highlighted that most of the time, they could not find a sensible partner as he was withdrawn for a reason. When they tried to talk about the problem to fix it, they did not encounter a constructive, reconciliatory attitude. Even sometimes, partners claimed that women were the reason for the withdrawal of communication. In addition to that, women highlighted that, despite the neglectful attitude of partners, their expectations of women were firm, and they had high expectations. In other words, partners found women's expectations excessive, while they were placing the same expectations on them, but strongly attached to the belief that their own wishes and desires were entirely reasonable.

He would get annoyed over normal things like my friends coming over to my house. We spent time at home, we would play games. He didn't like it, get annoyed and would stop answering my messages or give cold and distant answers. When I asked him why, he would say that 'You know I don't like your friends coming over your house, you don't care about what I feel and what I want. Don't expect me to do what you want.' Then he pulled away ... but when he was with his friends, I didn't even know where he was. (P10)

Participants reported that their partners used withdrawal of communication when they did not react in the way that partners wanted. Almost all the participants reported that initial conflicts resulted in partners' not talking with them for a certain period. To resolve the

conflict, women had to make the first move and take their words back. Women stated that their partners were only available if women acted in the way men wanted if they wanted to sustain the communication. This included communicating in times that the partners found appropriate and accommodating the partners' expectations regarding the frequency of communication, and the topics that could be discussed between them.

He didn't like good morning messages. He hardly replied to my texts in the morning and always told me that he was busy. We used to argue about it. In time, I learned and gave up trying. When he didn't message me, I wouldn't message him either, and we wouldn't talk for a week or two. It was up to him. But when he wanted to talk and we didn't because he was the one to start a conversation, he argued that the reason we were not talking was me and he would say 'I didn't message you because you were indifferent and not paying attention to me.' I couldn't understand what he wanted. Also, he would get angry with me when I wasn't available, and he'd say, 'How are you not available? What do you have to do? You're not working, you're at home. Are you studying? You're not even studying. (P7)

Women also noted that they spotted a pattern of emotional neglect and withdrawal of communication during times of physical distance. Women experienced a certain decrease in partners' attention and concern when they were physically apart for some reason. They generally pointed out that their communication became limited only to texting and rarely conducting video or phone calls. While this led to a reduction in the quality of communication, it also created a sense of disconnection. Partners behaved neglectfully in physical distance. Furthermore, partners created conflicts regarding a lack of trust or jealousy when couples were apart. They created conflicts that were not only difficult to make sense of by the participants, but also about the ways of resolving the conflict. They did not approach in an understanding and cooperative attitude. When women were willing to have open communication, partners avoided them mostly.

I tried to solve problems by talking and open communication. But often, we did not have a proper conversation because he was being distant for some time and then coming back again. In times of being distant, it felt like I was forcing him to talk. We were really good together, but when we were distant and we started using new media tools to communicate,

things were changing; he was not the same. No matter how much I tried, he was acting differently as if he didn't want to talk. (P4)

Everything was very normal; things were good between us. Then he went to his hometown. Whenever he was there, he always used to do something that upset me... He was behaving very differently; he was becoming very neglectful. No good mornings, no good nights. (P6)

Overall, according to the participants' reports, partners often adopted an emotionally neglectful manner in their relationships. The process generally began with a remarkably positive attitude for a certain period of time, only to be changed to the complete opposite. Throughout the relationships, oscillation between positive and negative moods of the partners could be observed by the women.

4.2. Experiencing Gaslighting

This theme focuses on the various effects of gaslighting on women. The psychological and emotional impacts of gaslighting are addressed, as well as the process women experienced that led to terminating the relationship. While the experience of gaslighting was negatively affecting them, the separation did not occur right away, and there were remarkably strong grounds for sustaining the relationship. Women initially experienced self-doubt, following the changes in women with the internalization of the manipulation. As undermined self-esteem, sense of self, and knowing abilities complicated the process of finding the power to break up; belief in the idealized love and hope of change, and the need for reassurance from an objective eye accompanied them on the path to separation. Eventually, they found themselves burned out and decided to leave the relationship. There are four sub-themes which explain their process of experiencing gaslighting and their paths leading to separation: "Doubting Self," "Believing in Idealized Love," "Searching for an Objective Eye," and "Burning out and Breaking up."

4.2.1. Doubting Self

As explained previously, women reported that they experienced accusations, efforts to socially isolate them, and an arbitrary unstable treatment that depended on their partner's changing moods. In addition, women suggested that they experienced a devaluing attitude by their partners, as they generally perceived their perspectives as right, regardless of what women say or do. This subtheme focuses on women's emerging self-doubt and self-blame as an emotional and psychological impact of relationships with gaslighting.

Women suggested that initially they fought to explain their perspectives. They tried to convince their partners that they had false inferences about them. Since partners' perceptions of them held significance, they sought to be viewed favorably. Since partners constantly saw them as wrong and guilty, they showed a repetitive effort to change it. Furthermore, they suggested that they were more vocal regarding articulating their needs and demands in the beginning. Yet, in time, when mutual communication was not an option and they were not heard, women gradually gave up their hopes of self-expression. Although they tried to be cooperative and non-confrontational to avoid conflict, they reported that without being clearly aware, they started to internalize their partners' narratives. According to their statements, even after separation, they had no definite explanation of how that internalization had occurred.

My friends would ask me things like, 'What's your boyfriend doing now, where is he, why don't you invite him over?' Everyone else's boyfriend was texting, but he wasn't. I didn't know where he was because I thought that if I asked him, he would be angry with me, that was what he did mostly. Later, I started saying, 'We don't like texting during the day, what's the point? We're busy, I don't like to be on phone all the time. I actually didn't think like that before, but at one point, I really started to think in that way. He convinced me and I still find it absurd when I think of it, I don't know how that happened. (P7)

In contrast, this process did not unfold entirely without awareness for some participants. Even though their partners' accusations had no basis in women's reality, to understand their partners' point of view, they reported that they attempted to empathize with their partners by thinking like them. Thus, most of them reported that even though they could

not fully understand as they knew their own intentions, they started to give credit for some parts of the accusation. They started to find more parts in which the partner might be right. This effort to understand and empathize with their partner made their actions appear more justified.

When he talks about his sense of discomfort with my closeness to someone, I was thinking that I might have ended the conversation earlier, I could have just said hello, and the conversation might not have extended that long. (P3)

We were celebrating our friends' graduations, but when I graduated, we didn't do anything, and when I fought about it, he said, "Don't exaggerate, everyone graduates." I thought I was exaggerating. Why, isn't graduation something that should be celebrated? Maybe not, maybe he's right, am I being spoiled, I wondered. ... or he was giving the gift I bought him to his friend, for example. When I fought about it, he said, "What's the big deal, this guy is my best friend." I was thinking that maybe it was not such a big deal, and I was saying "Okay, fine, let him use it. (P1)

They reported that partners generally had a tone that was directly accusing and belittling. As a result of the humiliation of personal characteristics of women and partners' convincingly imposing responsibility for the relationship problems, women stated that they started to feel like their self-confidence degraded. Firstly, they started to raise their voice less often, internalized their partners' narratives and reality, and then, as a result of their partners' remarks, they found themselves as the cause of the problem and thus the solution. They started to feel like they should change to solve the conflicts in their relationships. This generally put them in a position where they gave serious consideration to partners' remarks as they believed that they had the power to fix the problem. They started to believe that the partner might be seeing something in them about their personalities that they have no awareness of and no capability to understand. In order to resolve the conflict, it was necessary and the only option for them to accept the accusations and begin working on altering them.

I was accepting that I was the problematic one and needed to change. Every time we reconciled after an argument, I was accepting to change because he made me believe that

I had a problem, and to maintain the relationship, I needed to change. I tried to behave as he wanted me to behave and drop my expectations from him. (P1)

Most of the reports suggested that women experienced self-doubt when they could not comprehend what they did that led to their partners' accusations. While partners exhibited discontent with women, women were not aware of what they were doing wrong; they could not have an open communication, thus they struggled with how to resolve the problem. They described this experience by likening it to a fog. The foggy experience was characterized with confusion in which they were accused of something they could not understand and were unable to detect a clear way out.

In the end, he sent me a message saying, 'I can't tolerate everything. I can't just ignore everything that's happened. I don't want to talk right now, but it is just for now.' And I said that 'If this will end, let's talk about everything.' He didn't respond to any of these messages. There was no closure at the end. He made me feel guilty. I was left thinking, 'What did I do that he cannot tolerate? What did I do wrong? I felt like I was losing my mind. (P6)

In contrast, women reported that when partners stood firm and clear in their claims, and women were able to comprehend the complaints of their partner, they experienced self-doubt as well. They reported that they developed less trust in their knowing abilities and more sense of responsibility. Hence, even when the behaviors of different parties were the same, the women were made to feel as though they were insufficient, and men had fulfilled their roles to make the relationship work. In such a state, women could not see that the partners did not exhibit what they said they did, that they had not actually done what they were being blamed for; they trusted the judgment of their partners.

When I said that I wanted to meet, he would want that. Then, when he wanted to meet, and I didn't want to, he would say, 'I tried to resolve things.' This was such a manipulation because I genuinely believed in him. I started thinking that he was right, he wants to see me, but I don't want to. I'm the one who isn't doing anything,' as though I was the one at fault. (P2)

Gradually, as women's self-esteem and knowing abilities were challenged, some participants reported that they started to feel more dependent on their partners. They reported that they experienced a fear of separation. Even if they had been through brief breakups, they found themselves being persuaded again. In time, they became what their partners blamed them for; they described becoming significantly dependent and frequently being in pursuit of gaining approval from their partners whom they saw as strong.

Later, he began to accuse me of not showing interest or concern, suggesting that I was not jealous. When I started asking these questions, I was labeled as excessively jealous. I had a very high self-confidence, but eventually, towards the end of the relationship, I became very suspicious. I would call him and, even hearing a television in the background, I asked him, 'Are you with someone else?' He eventually said things like, 'Do you realize how jealous you are? I'm at home, and you're just imagining things.' At some point, he no longer wanted me around, he told me that he no longer loved me and had feelings for someone else. He said that as long as I was around, he wouldn't be able to communicate with that person. I was very alone at that point that I told him, 'Okay, I'm fine with just being friends, please don't remove me from your life.' But he told me that it wouldn't be possible. It was so hard to be apart from him. (P2)

While the process of doubting-self began with the accusatory remarks of the partners, women gradually became less resistant to manipulation; they initially felt the power to resolve the conflicts, even when this included changing themselves. Yet, in time, they reported that they gradually became more dependent, less self-confident, and lost more of their knowing abilities day by day. Their connection with reality diminished, the idea of separation became more challenging, and there were still factors that kept them in the relationship.

4.2.2. Believing in Idealized Love

Although partners' attitudes presented drastic changes throughout the relationship, none of the participants described the relationship as solely negative. There were convincing

factors which have rendered women to holding onto the relationship. This subtheme focuses on women's holding on the relationship with the belief of idealized love, which is found to be very common in participants' reports. Most of the participants have stated an initial positivity at the beginning of the relationship, as explained previously. They described the initial phase of the relationship marked by romantic gestures, intense emotional connection, and exceptional emotional validation. According to their reports, the initial positivity of the relationship provided an opportunity for overlooking and concealing the patterns of manipulation.

We spent the first three days together without even being apart for 1 hour, talking all night long. It was so deep, so beautiful... Now I can say that, maybe the reason why it felt so fulfilling was part of the manipulation. (P3)

He was so affectionate and caring during the first two months. He was thoughtful and would bring up small details I previously told him. After two months, I honestly thought I fell in love. (P10)

Moreover, this dynamic created an impression of ideal love in women. Once women learned that the relationship might offer such an intense and idealized form of love, they found themselves trying to return to that phase of the relationship, even though they knew that it was not genuinely real, and it was an illusion of perfect love. Furthermore, women stated that they experienced the partners' emotional shifts as a profound sense of loss in which they not only lost the partner they once knew, but the love they once felt. After a while, the partners they once knew totally became unrecognizable for periods of time. If not always, occasionally, they became constantly accusing, complaining, and stating that their needs and demands were never satisfied. When these complaints came from someone they once viewed as idealized, women reported that they started to question themselves, wondering if they had a problem.

He loved me so much, at least that was what he always told me. He told me that he had done nothing to upset me, but I was not acting the same. After a while, I started to think that the problem was that I was not sensitive and devoted enough regarding the relationship. (P8)

Women reported that the partners' moods were not stable and constantly shifting between affection and negativity, as mentioned previously. This instability reinforced the belief that they could return to their loving version if women acted in the way that their partners desired. The process kept the women in the relationship.

Even though I was feeling bad in the relationship, I tried to stay calm during arguments, not to make a big deal out of his insults because I knew he would get calm at some point, and I did not want to lose him. I was thinking that it was true love, so I should accept anything. I thought losing him was worse than any of these. (P9)

In addition, a few participants reported that they misperceived partners' manipulative behaviors as love. Partners displayed such behaviors under the guise of love. When women thought that they were being mean due to love, they could not see the harm they might be causing them. They reported that they continued to feel like they were always at fault and responsible for conflicts. Furthermore, the idea of love made all the challenges worth enduring for the women. According to their reports, the issues in the relationship were not seen as problematic as long as they were motivated by love. Participants believed in the reciprocal love they ultimately felt for each other, and these were just daily problems. This idea of love became more grounded with the belief that every relationship had its share of problems. The participants' accounts showed that this was also supported by their lack of experience. Some participants indicated that this story became more persuasive as they did not know any other relationship.

When other people told me that he was harming me, I thought to myself that they were saying so because they don't know him. He criticizes me because he loves me and wants to improve me. I was really thinking that. I have never thought that he might be wrong. (P7)

It was my first serious relationship... He was willing to take responsibility, he was very charming. I loved him... No matter what we have been through, I always had the idea that we would get through everything because I thought these were relational problems and they were normal. (P9)

Furthermore, the views of others about the partner played a significant role in the partners' idealized image. The participants stated that partners being perceived as ideal boyfriends by their social circles and receiving external validation also strengthened their belief that the problem lay within themselves instead of the partners' behaviors. Participants revealed that the idealization of the partners got even stronger when partners could attract not only themselves, but also the people around them. In several cases, participants reported that they were not strongly impressed by the partners in the beginning; the positive feedback of their social circles was what impressed them and initiated idealization. The same collective approval later made them suppress the inner negative feelings about the relationship and encouraged them to stay in the relationship.

I wasn't really into him at the beginning, we didn't have many things in common, but our families were a great fit, they were a good match, so I thought maybe something could come out of it. My family was especially supportive; they found him very suitable for our family. (P10)

My friends loved him so much, my social circle was supporting my relationship with him. I thought I could never find someone like him ever again. (P6)

My mother loved him so much, she made explanations for the things I was broken about instead of him. I can say that my mother convinced me so many times not to be mad at him. (P8)

In time, as the relationships progressed, partners' initial selves seemed to fade away and the initial positivity was replaced by intensified manipulative behaviors. Gradually, women found themselves trapped in a position where they feel guilty, their self-confidence deteriorated. In a state where the initial behaviors of partners seemed very far away, some participants had attempts of ending the relationship. They stated that in result of these attempts they encountered with minimal but emotionally powerful efforts of partners. Partners displayed small gestures that could remind women of who they used to be and who they could be once again to prevent separation. They reported that these 'minimal efforts' can even be a single compliment but still very effective emotionally drawing them back in the relationship. When they were used to their partners being indifferent, these minimal efforts of the partners were seen as huge. These minimal efforts

reinforced the hope that the relationship could return to the initial phase, the behaviors of partners might change. According to them, their partners managed to maintain the relationship by giving bits and pieces of women's expectations and needs. Women expressed that their partners could have very affectionate attitudes when they wanted to. This feeling of hope closely associated with women's belief of the existence of ideal love, and it might return.

I couldn't break up, but my attitude completely changed. I never bowed to his words and demands after a certain point. Our relationship changed, then I moved away. After I moved away, he came to the city I had moved to see me, to make things work. Anyway, I reconciled with him and could not break up, but I knew that it was over for me. I reconciled, but it was all out of guilt. A man who has not done anything for me, came all the way there, it was not something I thought he would and could do, and out of foolishness and guilt, I could not break up with him. (P1)

Things weren't getting better, but I convinced myself they were. I kept telling myself, "I'm trying, and so is he." Whenever he made even a minor effort or gesture, I'd think, "See? He's trying too. We're going to get through this." I believed the problems weren't unfixable as long as both people wanted to solve. So, I made myself believe that we were both putting on effort, and that made it feel worth fighting for. (P3)

To sum up, the illusion of ideal love that the partners reinforced and the external validation that the social circle created had a strong emotional impact on women. The idealization of the partner and the love they once experienced deepened their feelings of guilt and self-doubt. The mood shifts of the partner and occasional minimal efforts made women tolerate the emotional mistreatment, hoping that the initial positivity could return. Looking back now, they considered this illusion of ideal love as a manipulative strategy which led to difficulty in terminating the relationship.

4.2.3. Searching for an Objective Eye

One of the major experiences that the women went through in gaslighting was searching for reassurance of reality. Most of the participants reported that their perception of reality

was distorted, as they were exposed to manipulation. Their self-esteem and knowing abilities were remarkably diminished, and they reported that they lost their connection with reality. In other words, women gradually diminished the trust they had in their own feelings and perceptions, and they had a strong self-doubt. In order to reconstruct reality, they needed an objective eye which is what this subtheme focuses on. This eye could be a friend, a family member, or a professional. The participants expressed that they needed this objective assessment as they strived to prove that they were not crazy, they had a logical point of view, and they were not exaggerating their problems.

Firstly, all the participants reported that they approached a friend or a family member to hear their evaluation and opinion. While some of the participants explained that their attempts to seek reassurance from friends or family failed, and this failed attempt strengthened their self-doubt and the emotional turmoil they were already experiencing, some of them stated the positive impact of being validated by their close circle. The inability to receive social support also stemmed from women's hesitations regarding sharing the negative sides of the relationship due to various factors. Friends reacting negatively or being ashamed of the treatment they were exposed to were strong barriers to sharing. Yet, according to the women's accounts, reassurance of reality and emotional support were slightly different needs. Some of the participants revealed that even though they were not always able to receive emotional support from their social circle, their stances and views always helped them to stay grounded and connected with reality. Mostly in times of intense confusion and self-doubt, little affirmations, even when not always comforting, functioned as reminders of their own points of view and helped them step back from partners' overriding narratives. On the other hand, those who reported getting emotional support from others described how being truly understood and acknowledged by a third party helped them restore their perception of reality. According to their accounts, this enabled them to rebuild their sense of self and reconstruct the narrative of their experiences.

I was feeling like I was going to be judged eventually at some point by my friends because they were getting angry with me for seeing the things I was letting him do to me. This

made me lonelier, I wish I had told them instead of pretending like everything was fine. (P10)

I have two really close friends at school. They had similar experiences with me, and they were my biggest supporters. They would tell me that they don't think someone who behaves like my partner really loves me. They told me that he wasn't making time for me, he didn't want to, and it wasn't love. Whenever I needed to hear that, they reminded me of these things and helped me to come back to myself. (P8)

As some of the participants experienced fear of being judged when talking to one of their close relatives, they reported that they found the support they sought in professional help. Several participants revealed that at some point in their relationships or after separation, they started seeking professional help from a psychologist or psychiatrist. This helped to create a space where they were not accused, nor were they contradicted or invalidated. This made them hear their individual voices without any interruption. In addition, with the help of the validation of the professional, they realized that their needs, emotions, and demands are “normal.”

I went to see a psychologist and feared that she would diagnose me with schizophrenia. I wasn't sure what, but I was sure I was a clinical case. I was very happy to hear that I was not schizophrenic, didn't have bipolar or borderline. (P5)

Even though many of the participants revealed that the reassurance of reality was very helpful during times of self-doubt, they also shared that the partners' narratives and the emotions induced by these narratives were significantly overriding. Regardless of the opinions from third parties, the convincing attitude of the partners pushed them back into a state of self-doubt, which also contributed to the partners' maintaining their impacts.

He used to talk to me as if I were just a child, saying I didn't understand anything about adult life, how people work. I would often talk to my friends about it, and they would tell me there was no such thing and I would believe them; they would convince me. But after talking to him, my thoughts would transform almost completely. He was very persuasive and by the end of the day, I'd somehow feel like I was the one who was being cruel, unreasonable, or inadequate. (P5)

Overall, searching for an objective eye described women's need for validation and reassurance from others in order to reconstruct the reality that had been broken. As a result of the continuous manipulation, self-doubt emerged, and hence, the need for the affirmation of their own narratives and perspectives. This drove women to turn to their social circle (family members, friends) or professional help. They not only functioned as sources of emotional support, but also as a connection to reality, even when emotional support could not be provided. Although even the smallest affirmation considered helpful by the women, they stated that it was hard to resist self-doubt and found themselves constantly returning back to their partners' narratives and realities.

4.2.4. Burning Out and Breaking Up

All of the participants shared that breaking up with their partners was not easy. All of them tried and made efforts for a very long time by the time separation took place. While some of them expressed fear for separation due to big emotional investments throughout the relationship, some of them reported feeling more dependent and less self-confident, and some of them were preoccupied with the risk that they could never be able to find someone like their partners again. Yet, commonly, all of them expressed intense burnout and mental drain. Even though every relationship was different, women reported some general patterns which eventually led them to experience burnout. They described a process where they became more and more overwhelmed day by day on the road to breaking up. This sub-theme explains what and how caused the emotional and mental turmoil on women focusing on commonalities and recurring patterns which pushed them to the point of decision to leave.

Firstly, several participants mentioned that the mood shifts of the partners led the relationship to be frequently uncertain, and women constantly walking on eggshells in order to avoid conflict. They reported that the relationship could not settle into a sense of stability, regardless of how much effort and understanding women put in. Frequent encounters with their partners' inconsistent moods eventually wore women out. Some participants believed that the change in moods was actually manipulative, for the sake of

their own good. Eventually, women became remarkably exhausted and withdrew from their relationship.

He had his own problems, and that's why I was trying to be more understanding towards him. He told me that he was feeling angry these days, and he might have anger outbursts. He asked me to be understanding and tolerate them. But he was acting completely indifferent with no care. If there were some attention and care, I would have been understanding, but we didn't even say good morning or good night to each other. So, I told my mother that I wanted to break up. I got used to his indifference, mood shifts, and his coming and going. I don't want to have such a relationship anymore. (P8)

The way he used to act was so much nonsense. But it was always the same, whenever I tried to break up, he would do something nice and I couldn't break up. Around the time when I definitely decided to break up, my close relatives passed away, and he used my grief to his advantage. That was the turning point. When I wanted to be alone, I realized that it was gaslighting and very manipulative. (P5)

Secondly, women reported being significantly tired of the chronic neglect of their partners. They generally described patterns where partners, after especially a certain point, adopted attitudes in which women's needs and desires of all kinds were recurrently ignored. This made the women feel emotionally abandoned, but after some point, these attitudes pulled women into intense emotional turmoil and caused them to detach from the relationship. According to the reports, most of the time women did not experience neglect as a single event but a recurring, gradual process which became the 'normal' of the relationship. While some participants shared that the indifference was causing conflicts and these constant fights also led to their emotional exhaustion, some of the participants did not portray an atmosphere full of conflict. Rather, they reported an experience of emotional abandonment caused by constant neglect. Furthermore, some of the participants reported the realization of neglect when a third party acted caringly and affectionately towards them. These participants shared that having an emotionally validating interaction from outside helped them recognize the trap of manipulation and neglect they had normalized, which eventually paved the way to a breakup.

I was constantly crying, certainly once in two days. We were constantly having fights about his indifference. I wanted him to be caring and attentive. Yet, he wasn't, and according to him, I needed so much attention, it was not normal. I knew he was never going to change. After this realization, something in me started to change. After 3 months, there was someone else who liked me, we came across and he was very polite and paid attention to me. Then I thought that I didn't experience such a thing in 3 years, excuse me, but he treated me worse than a dog.... Then, suddenly, there was someone who was caring. That felt surreal. Even though I realized this, it still felt wrong that I enjoyed it... Then, I broke up with him. (P7)

We were constantly having fights about his indifference because I was going to move to another city, and we had a short time. One day, my partner told me that he had no time for me that day. Around the same time, I was going to eat lunch with my current boyfriend, back then, he was my friend. I was waiting for him in the car, and he came and handed me a chocolate bar. Then I realized that I was not expecting something big, even a bar was enough. That bar made me cry and touched my heart because I was feeling so worthless. Then, I realized that I wanted to be with this person. (P1)

Another commonality across women's experiences that led to burnout was constant accusations and a lack of understanding. As explained previously, women shared that they were seen as guilty regardless of the topic right from the start, but it intensified in time, deteriorating their sense of self and reality. Partners deflected responsibility by redirecting the blame for everything back onto women. Furthermore, being constantly misunderstood also contributed to that emotional exhaustion. Women were constantly being seen as faulty, and their experiences were either ignored or reframed as selfish, spoiled, or oversensitive. This recurrent emotional invalidation, accompanied by efforts to be understood and avoid conflict, created intense emotional exhaustion. Consequently, participants reported gradual emotional withdrawal. They reported that the accumulation of mental and psychological turmoil made them unable to continue the relationship any longer.

In the last 1-2 months, he has become very furious as the fights progressed and ended up directly insulting me. In that time, I started losing my respect and care for the relationship

and for him finally and started to think that it must come to an end. I couldn't bear it anymore. (P3)

When the women were the ones acting emotionally withdrawn, the pattern of emotional neglect and withdrawal of communication changed drastically. Women reported a common dynamic of breaking up and reconciling. Most of the participants experienced brief separation periods before the final termination. According to the reports, these breakups could be initiated by either party and generally followed by partners' reconciliation efforts. With a completely changed attitude, partners began to display emotionally pleasing actions, when they felt a decrease in the influence they had on partners. They displayed the role of an understanding, supportive, considerate partner. Partners' affectionate and loving were waiting for during the relationship, deeply attracted them, leading them to decide to reconcile. They pointed out a recurrent initial relationship positivity after reconciliation, only to fall back into their previous attitude later. Some of the participants have reported that these recurring on-and-off processes became mentally draining. Even though, it might provide brief hopes and initial positive short periods, in time, the emotional fluctuations created emotional exhaustion in participants. While women stayed in the relationship with the hope of potential change, their emotional resources were eventually drained, and relationship became unsustainable. This also caused the separation process to be interrupted which prevented them from going through a single intensified period of grief. Instead, they went through the grief in small doses. A few of the participants reported that this caused them to be affected more severely. Due to this, participants experienced many grief-like days during the relationship which was more mentally draining according to their reports. As women gradually became aware of this cycle, they reported that their partners' neglectful manners were deliberate and might be considered manipulative. From that point on, they reported that the change in partners' attitudes became less effective on them, which led to the termination of the relationship.

He was frequently dumping me and coming back, that's why I didn't have a full break-up process. There was not a clean break, I remember having intense breakdowns in different phases. I remember one in March, one in August, and one in September. Our breakup in

November didn't feel like one. I had many worse memories than the breakup itself. I cannot recall a single break up process. Instead, it was a long phase." (P5)

Everything was great during the first month. I was thinking to myself that this relationship is too good to be true. I felt like the most loved and the most important person in the world. I cannot think of anyone who could care this much. He behaved like he missed me so much and loved every little detail about me. And I was a fool because I fell for it, believed it again. All these things attracted me again. ... For the first two months, there were no problems at all. Then I moved back here, we drifted apart again. I started school again, and once more, my friends became an issue, previous issues started again." (P10)

To sum up, the women explained the psychological and emotional fatigue caused by the relationship and accumulated over time, eventually leading to a breakup. Despite the fact that every relationship was unique and included various reasons for separation, participants commonly reported prolonged confusion, disappointment, exhaustion due to their partners' mood shifts, indifference, constant blame, and on-and-off periods. All these issues made the relationship unsustainable.

4.3. Coping through Learning and Growth

The end of the relationship gave room for women to confront the imprints the relationship left on them. This can be regarded as the time for making sense of the manipulation and gaslighting they were exposed to and coping with its impacts. After being exposed to prolonged negativity during the relationship, women as survivors searched for ways to cope with their emotional exhaustion, self-blame, and diminished self-esteem. They were trying to find their selves and their vitality again. This started with a comprehensive outlook on what happened to them and naming the experience. Quitting the position of self-blame, reconstruction of self, and ways of protecting it in future relationships were sorted as the following steps. This theme illustrates how women named and realized gaslighting, how they processed this experience, and dealt with its impacts. It focuses on how their perception of themselves, and relationships has changed. Moreover, the ways in which their expectations from future relationships are redefined and priorities are

reshaped are addressed in this theme under the subthemes of “Naming Gaslighting,” “Affirming Oneself,” and Protecting Self within Future Relationships”.

4.3.1. Naming Gaslighting

Most of the participants reported that all the manipulation they were exposed to seemed very normal during the relationship. This realization could only be possible either after separation or after a long duration in the relationship. Furthermore, the realization of manipulation did not necessarily mean naming gaslighting. The identification of the term “gaslighting” impacted the ways in which the participants defined and reframed their past experiences. This sub-theme focuses on the processes of realization of manipulation, encountering “gaslighting” and dealing with the awareness and aftereffects.

The initial moments of realization of manipulation had some commonalities across participants. For some, revelation of the lies was the first step either during or after the relationship. Learning that the partners were deliberately lying about certain things caused the breakdown of their all-knowing, powerful image. Therefore, women started to ask whether their partners might be wrong about other things they argued for or claimed, such as their accusations. This eventually led to the realization of the partners’ biased and manipulative narrative.

Apparently, there were also other things going on. Like you may guess, I was shocked. He had been frequently lying to me. That was when my eyes opened. He was interested in other people. He was not an honest person like I thought he was. Up until that point, I thought he was the right person, but he was not. He was still manipulating me by posting sad stories on Instagram, but behind my back, he was actually seeing other girls. (P6)

Secondly, some participants reported that as the psychological and emotional impact of the partner gradually faded, external reassurance became more effective. This could either be coming from a mental health professional or a member of their close circle. Their narratives started to become more dominant. When one of their friends or family was frequently saying that they had no fault as the partners claimed, the women reported starting to believe in them more. They reported that they realized that they did not have

any faults, at least as big as the partners suggested, and their behaviors were not the ones that changed. Even if they had minor faults, they reported that they did not deserve the treatment they received. They shared that they gained awareness regarding the personal motivation behind partners' actions. In other words, they asked that if they were as bad as their partners said, then why were they still there? Some of the participants shared that they could also realize manipulation by observing other relationships. According to the participants, these observations provided them with a set of objective eyes that they searched for and needed during the relationship to remember the reality beyond that of their partners.

I kept thinking about how he has treated me; how he has come out as right while I was the one who was uncomfortable. I kept thinking and thinking about how he made me feel guilty. My friends also helped a lot, I was asking them whether I behaved in an indifferent way or not. They brought me back to myself. "Is he right? Maybe he is right. Am I being distant?" I kept asking this to myself and them. Eventually, I understood that the cause of his lack of attention was him, not me... I realized that he manipulated me after these long brainstorming sessions. (P10)

I think it can only be understood after separation. Because this is only when something you live becomes a chapter you read. When you step back and look, you see that if the other person's behaviors have changed and he thinks you have the problem, then it's not normal. You are attributing guilt to a normal behavior of mine and making me feel like I have a problem. This is manipulation, a manipulation we see everywhere. (P4)

This realization of manipulation recontextualized the women's experiences by naming it as gaslighting. In this regard, the definition of gaslighting for the participants stood out. The majority of them defined gaslighting as manipulation, and some also added the detail of manipulating for the sake of the partner's personal gain. The definitions often included blaming, disregarding others' perspectives, creating confusion, and causing reality distortion. Mainly, the definitions were focused on the distortion of knowing abilities and the creation of self-doubt. While some of the participants indicated that their realization of manipulation and their naming of gaslighting processes happened simultaneously, some of them were able to make sense of their experiences only after they encountered

the term. For those who had newly encountered the word, the naming of the experience reportedly functioned as gaining clarity out of a fog. Some of the participants shared that the universality of the problem relieved them as it showed that this experience was not directly associated with being smart, beautiful, or worthy; it was a typical behavioral style.

Naming is good in terms of making sense. People can be lost about what they are going through in such things. Naming helps you to make it solid; you can answer why it happens, how it is, and what to do. It is also making searching for and receiving support easier. (P3)

Now I can define this as gaslighting, especially after terms such as ghosting, love bombing, and gaslighting entered our world. Maybe I wasn't able to name it because these experiences used to be undefined. The process before the naming was more painful because we couldn't define what we were living. I tried to call it jealousy, but it didn't fit. It was vague and confusing. (P2)

One of the participants shared that identifying her experience as gaslighting was also challenging during the relationship. She reported that this realization made the uncertain certain and formally made the foggy experience a problem. Naming the experience as gaslighting has deepened her emotional distress, as she faced with the harsh reality of that she didn't have the psychological strength to end an abusive relationship. She also added that the negative connotation of gaslighting put on her partner created hardships in sustaining the relationship.

Naming can also be very difficult when you know that you won't be able to get out of the relationship, and the partner will continue to do whatever he is doing. You are stuck with this information, but what are you going to do with it if you don't have enough resources to process the information? It is very hard to see that it is an abuse. This also makes your partner a perpetrator, which is also damaging. (P3)

Overall, the realization of the manipulation and naming gaslighting can be regarded as the first step where women started to take their reality back, rewriting the narrative they have been exposed to for a long time. Although this process did not necessarily heal the

emotional damage, their journey of regaining a sense of self-trust and knowing abilities has started. All participants except for one have indicated that they were able to label their experience as abuse, manipulation and gaslighting after the break-up. They reported that abusive behaviors were appearing normal during the relationship.

4.3.2. Affirming Oneself

With the realization and naming of their experiences, participants' coping processes of repairing the emotional harm, reclaiming a sense of self, and quitting self-blame on a more emotional level continued. The state of affirming their selves can be characterized by the emotional acceptance of 'I'm not guilty.' The process of releasing themselves from self-blame in their own terms is expressed in this sub-theme. It explains how they restored their inner worth and self-confidence.

For some of the participants, becoming aware that they experienced manipulation and gaslighting caused them to be angry for letting their partners cross so many boundaries. They were not only angry at their partners, but also themselves for being "weak."

At first, one can't attribute to themselves that they are being made a fool of. Then, I feel again extra worthless. (P5)

I blamed myself a lot again. I blamed myself a lot, thinking how did I let this much happen, how did I let him cross my boundaries this much. I was very mad at myself for being this weak. (P10)

This struggling mental state created a need to be alone for some of the participants. They shared that they preferred self-isolation and processed the recognized experience with internal dialogue. A few of the participants reported that they spent the initial time after separation mostly at home. They found spending time on their own remarkably healing. While withdrawing into self was physically restorative, it also functioned as a mental clarifier, which helped dissolve the fog they were in. They also highlighted that they had a positive view of themselves and they believed that they would eventually work through the hard times.

At first, I didn't leave home in the beginning, didn't go out in public. Always talked to myself, tried to solve it with myself and I knew I was going to solve it because I always did. (P10)

I focused on myself. But of course, it took 5 days, 10 days to get out of bed. Being buried in bed and getting over that period was very hard, but I learned a lot. It was good for me to be on my own. (P6)

In a clearer mental state, the women expressed starting to gain control of their lives back. According to some of the participants, blocking their ex-partners on social media worked well for them in this regard. They started to act in a mindset that no one can enter their lives without their permission. They explained that they were aware of the sensitivity they had for their partners, and they did not want to return to the previous state.

If I hadn't cut communication, he was going to write to me, and I would have gone back to the beginning like nothing happened. I didn't want his influence over me to continue. Cutting the communication is definitely a solution. If I didn't block him, I wouldn't probably have gotten over him. (P5)

In addition, some participants reported that they entered a period of independence where they reestablished control in various ways, such as focusing on their work, doing sports, focusing on physical health and appearance, and picking up new hobbies. Redirecting their attention to their selves had a healing effect as they started to feel in control once again.

After the breakup, I started to take care of myself better; I started to dress better, did better make-up. I also started to focus on my own psychology, focusing on things that would make me happy. Being able to make myself happy made me feel strong. (P8)

Moreover, in terms of affirming themselves, the process of reestablishing their trust in their inner voices was remarkably crucial. Some participants shared that they evaluated the previous conflicts by revisiting them in their minds and found that their thoughts or doubts that were called nonsense by the partner were not actually baseless. For one of the

participants, learning that some of our emotions can be imposed by other people made a huge difference. She explained that letting go of the effects of gaslighting could be possible when she decided to refuse her negative experiences to define who she was. According to the participants' accounts, the growth of their inner voice enabled women to get rid of the internalized effect of gaslighting and rediscover their self-worth.

He always used to accuse me of changing in the presence of my friends. I thought about it a lot for the past year, whether I changed or not. I only stopped fighting in my head for the last 4 or 5 months. Now, with a clearer mind, I am sure that I did not change. (P10)

I started questioning myself, 'Should I have been a little more patient or was that enough?' But after each questioning, I started to prove myself right. Whenever I think that I should have remained a little calmer in that incident, I found myself saying 'But he did this and that...' I understood that the reasons why I couldn't stay calm was because of his actions, and again, I was proven right. (P8)

According to the women, this realization occurred when the logic entered the play. Some of the participants shared that this could only be possible after a duration of time following the breakup. They remarked that the healing happened gradually over time. According to them, time was one of the most important factors that led to the cooling of emotions, thus detachment from them.

Of course it's difficult, it's difficult to forget all that's happened, or I don't know, dealing with them, like intense emotions. I mean, I can't say I completely learned, but I believe in that; with time, the intensity of one's emotions decreases. Then reason really comes into play. You don't really get anywhere if you keep thinking right after breakup. You need to allow yourself and leave it to time. You should start to be thinking about the relationship after a while with a clearer mind. (P4)

Furthermore, participants shared that they went through a journey of forgiving their selves and stopping self-judgment. Even if it was not easy to look back on the past with compassion and understanding, they found ways. One significant way that was reported to be effective for almost all the participants was having social support systems filled with

people who did not judge them. They accepted that they needed emotional help, and having people who did not want to see them hurt functioned as remarkably restorative. Moreover, the fact that these people were respectful towards their boundaries was also mentioned as helpful. This highlighted the healing effect of centering their own emotional needs and states. Constantly attending to someone else's emotional state and needs was one of the things that caused them to lose connection with their selves, according to the participants. The supportive parties could either be a family member or friend, and for some, they were new partners. Redefining themselves as partners in a new relationship also changed their self-perception and healed emotional wounds caused by the old one.

He taught me new things about myself. For example, starting from scratch, he made me understand that I was not abnormal, crazy, or that I can feel certain things when I wanted to. He stood by my side calmly during the times of my mental breakdowns, he supported me. He didn't ask why I was the way I am. He faced my problems with me. (P1)

In the journey of returning to self, with experience of affectionate treatment, they became more aware of the abusive dynamics they went through. By acknowledging the fact that they were not guilty, they realized the emotional burden on their shoulders. At this point, apologizing to themselves for their experiences impacted them largely, maybe even beyond self-forgiveness.

I always used to think about the things he might be upset and offended about. Then, at some point, I started to ask myself, 'What am I upset and offended about?' This is the only way to mentally detach from him. He never cared for me, and I spent a very long time with someone that inconsiderate. For staying with someone like him that long, I owed myself an apology because the biggest mistake was staying in that relationship, and that mistake was on me. That was how I released burdens. (P2)

The process of affirming oneself expressed how participants' mental state was transformed from self-blame to rediscovering their sense of self, knowing abilities, and self-confidence. The analysis of the healing elements that nurtured them along the journey showed that their process of validating their emotions and learning self-compassion

helped them gain a more grounded self-perception. This journey cannot only be regarded as their return to the old self, but instead, it can be labeled as their transformation to a more empowered version of themselves by growing through challenging experiences.

4.3.3. Protecting Self within Future Relationships

The only thing that gaslighting experience impacted was not the women's self-perception and sense of self. It also had a strong influence on the view women had of relationships and their priorities in the relationships. The emotional turmoil of the experience made self-protection a priority for the participants' future relationships. As a result of experiencing gaslighting in a past relationship, women sought ways to take precautions to prevent ending up in the same position again. This sub-theme expresses the efforts women made to ensure emotional safety, transformation of the relational patterns, and changes in key concerns as a result of gaslighting. The women explained that self-protection became crucial for them. Self-protection becoming more crucial was not only a response to previous pain, but also one of the ways women coped with their past experiences, in other words, their ways of protecting agency and all the things that were lost once.

Participants indicated that these self-protective mechanisms began to be formed during the relationship. As the harm of the partner became obvious, as a coping strategy, they started to look for means to shield their well-being. Women shared that they began to stay silent during the arguments, shared less if they were not sure whether the issue would create a conflict or not, and experienced emotional withdrawal. All these methods aimed to avoid conflict and protect themselves from receiving further damage.

I was used to open communication, both sides tell their problems, and it would be resolved. That was why I used to give responses to him when things got intense. I was trying to explain to him every detail. At some point, I understood that what I was saying was not getting through to him, he didn't listen, or care, and I was getting out of the discussion feeling unimportant and upset more and more every day. Then, I decided to stop talking while arguing. (P3)

Yet, these strategies were not only the coping methods to deal with active damage during the relationships. These emotional repressions turned into more fundamental changes and more intentional boundaries. They led to setting firm and high expectations in relationships. Women reported that they became more sensitive regarding their red flags, being pickier and more careful about emotional disclosure, and more protective about centering their own needs in intimate relationships. They believed that the firm stance they adopted would function as self-protection in future relationships. Most of the women underlined the significance of prioritizing self. According to some of the participants, prioritizing self had a more general meaning, as they indicated that they put this lesson into practice in different areas of their lives. Their authentic selves began to gain a bigger part of their central focus. Their other relationships were also impacted by this shift.

I'm very thoughtful, I also hear this from my friends. But now I see that I shouldn't be like this all the time. Prioritizing self and not giving value to anyone you give to yourself is important; it is what needs to be done. This relationship clearly taught me this. I shouldn't try to make someone else happier than I make myself. (P6)

I've become my own priority now. My focus is centered on myself. It is on my education, my future. I have more important things to think about. (P10)

On the other hand, some of the participants pointed out this as a lesson for how they experienced romantic relationships. The lesson that they took away was never to prioritize a man in a relationship. According to their reports, this was caused by the need to have someone powerful in their lives- a man.

I realized that I should not make men a priority and put them before myself. My psychiatrist told me that I see my partners as father figures. I gave them the power of a father, although I am very self-sufficient. I mean powerful in an emotional way. I thought that I might ask for his help if things got hard, I might go to him when I feel upset. I learned that it was wrong, and I should become that strong. I started to ask myself, 'What kind of a relationship do I want?', which was brand new. (P2)

In addition to giving power to men, women had some common frustrations that they wanted to protect themselves from in the future. They mostly mentioned they were anxious about the possibility of repetition of the same pattern and being hurt again. To avoid that, the participants indicated that they would be more cautious regarding the early signs of manipulation. One of the participants pointed out that she would be looking at action rather than words to protect self-trust. Alignment between words and actions became crucial for her. Participants also thought this consistency was significant for preventing blame-shifting. Furthermore, the effort to change the partner began to sound as a way of concealing the manipulation and postponing the separation. They started to find this feeling of hope risky. To prevent their stay in a relationship where they felt unworthy, they pointed out the lesson of trusting in their own gut feeling before it was too late. They shared that ignoring their gut feelings was a problem, and they should have walked away sooner. Related to this, they gained awareness regarding the cycle of repetition.

At the end of the day, we are going to be all alone with ourselves. Because of this, we cannot let someone else wear us down, manipulate, building dominance over us. No one can play games with our minds if we don't let it. We cannot let anyone make us question ourselves and our reality. (P8)

One of the additions to my criteria was not convincing by words but also looking at the actions. I recognized that I was carried away with his words, but didn't pay attention to his behaviors. I kept thinking that it would be okay as he promised something, but he never kept any of his promises, but I overlooked it. His words and actions were very inconsistent. I think he liked showing himself as very confident, but now I think that he had self-esteem issues. Now my criteria changed, from now on I don't want to be with people who have self-esteem issues. (P9)

If we were there to live it 500 times more, if we were to break up and then reconcile, it would still be the same. After a while, it became a familiar pattern. But I knew that it was going to be like this, once you forgive or let it slide even for a single time, he started to push it harder, it got worse. (P2)

Regarding future relationships, the participants' understanding of intimacy and love seemed to shift after the breakup. Some of the women shared that they were unsure about how much they had healed. They reported that they were still feeling mentally and emotionally tired, and they could not find the power and motivation to try to know someone new. They were still trying to heal the wounds of the past relationship, even to the extent that their expectations from a relationship were negatively transformed. In a few cases, women shared that they started to be afraid of intimacy. Regarding the end of the relationship, they shared that they experienced emotional relief shortly after the breakup, caused by the mentally draining nature of the relationship. As they were just able to get out of it, they did not want to go back into something similar. Having internalized intimacy as something exhausting, they were trying to protect themselves by being distant from intimacy. This was a common motivation for the women not having a relationship after a previous experience. Even those with new partners reported that their current partners were not sweeping them off their feet. Their expectations of excitement changed into searching for a more grounded experience and soothing feelings in intimacy. In this regard, one participant reported that she used to crave the thrill of the relationship, yet now, her biggest expectation was feeling safe and being understood. In response to their hurtful experience, women tended to take precautions to prevent becoming emotionally vulnerable again. Staying away from intimacy, selecting partners who can make them feel safe, and building relationships in which they may complete their healing process were some of the precautions they reported.

I definitely didn't feel head over heels, my connection with reality was intense. Everything was calmer, it was not tiring or confusing. ... I realized that this was what I searched for in a partner. (P5)

Like right now, I don't want to have an intense feeling like excitement, even though it is very important to me. And now I could be just safe, minimum, in a state where I could talk and be understood. I normally love the excitement but now I really don't want to it. Right now, I just want to be able to communicate well and feel safe. (P3)

It is also worth noting that, in relation to staying away from intimacy, some of the participants reported they were experiencing hardships in building trust in someone new. They reported that their tolerance towards being disappointed again was so low that they didn't have the energy left to endure it. In such an emotionally vulnerable period, they also had hesitations regarding carrying emotional burden in future relationships. The risk of comparing the new partner with the old one frustrated the women. In this regard, they were afraid of the return of the old emotions towards the old partner.

In future relationships, I won't be giver in this giving and receiving balance. If the other side gives, they can give. For me, I would maybe go one step back, like if he were to come to me a thousand steps from now on. Because it's very difficult to trust. I wouldn't also want to make anyone pay for something they didn't do, but I wouldn't let someone into my life without weighing them on my trust scale first. (P6)

Right now, I don't want to have a relationship with someone and use them as a band-aid. Because right now, even though a month has passed, even after 2-3 months I would compare my old relationship with that person. And this comparison would be bad for me because I would get colder towards the other side, get distant, and also would get back to my old relationship in my head, and since this is going to be a huge disrespect for the other side, nowadays, I absolutely don't want to have any relationship. (P8)

Overall, the emotionally challenging experience shaped women's priorities in a relationship while self-protection became a very significant point. Even though women reported that most of them needed more time to heal, searching for ways to heal better was itself an effort for coping. As they grew through pain, they surrounded themselves with a protective armor, like a warrior, of empowerment and vitality.

5. DISCUSSION

The current study focused on the understanding of the gaslighting experience of women in romantic relationships that have ended. Their own ways of coping with, naming gaslighting, and separation processes are covered. The findings of this study are gathered from semi-structured interviews with ten women, and as a result of analysis, three central themes were obtained: (1) Gaslighting as Asserting Power, (2) Experiencing Gaslighting, (3) Coping Through Learning and Growth. These themes conceptualized the gaslighting experience of women in their romantic relationships, each describing a different aspect. They revealed their understanding of manipulative strategies of their partners, their detailed experience of gaslighting, and the ways in which they separate and cope with the effects of gaslighting during and after the relationship.

The first theme, *Gaslighting as Asserting Power*, describes the partners' methods of implementing gaslighting. This theme is further categorized into three sub-themes: "Constant Accusations," "Efforts for Social Isolation," and "Mood Shifts and Emotional Neglect." These subthemes conceptualize the strategies that gaslighters frequently employ according to the women. According to their statements, their partners occasionally accuse women. While these accusations are mainly composed of shifting responsibility and blame, some of them targeted personal features of women. Some of them were directed at their capacity of understanding and knowing abilities; as partners regarded women as obsessive or paranoid, this generally diminished their sense of reality, self-esteem and self-worth. Partners also made an effort to socially isolate them in various ways, mostly towards third parties under the name of jealousy. They are also found to be oscillating between positive and negative moods, which eventually turned into permanent emotional neglect and withdrawal of communication. The inconsistent moods of the partner led to confusion and emotional exhaustion in women.

The second main theme, *Experiencing Gaslighting*, depicts the impacts of the experience on women. This theme is further divided into four subthemes: "Doubting Self," "Believing in Idealized Love," "Searching for an Objective Eye," and "Burning Out and

Breaking Up.” Participants reported that they have been through a significant self-questioning process which eventually led to self-blame and dependency on the partner and reduced their self-confidence in their own resources. Through the process that ended with breaking up, women stated initially holding onto the belief of idealized love. With increasing self-doubt and diminishing knowing abilities, they searched for a reassurance of reality from outside. Eventually, they experienced psychological and emotional exhaustion that paved the way for separation.

The third and final theme, *Coping Through Learning and Growth*, describes their process of breaking up and coping with its effects in various ways. The theme is divided into three subthemes: “Naming Gaslighting,” “Affirming Self,” and “Protecting Oneself Within Future Relationships.” One of the significant ways of coping with the psychological effects of gaslighting was reported to be naming and labelling the gaslighting as a newly emerging concept. Realizing the abuse, labelling it as manipulation, and owning the name of gaslighting are described in the subtheme. The impacts that gaslighting has left on them, the changes the experience created on emotional and relational levels are assessed, including the psychological effects of it on their views of themselves and relational expectations.

The discussion section will be based on the exploration of these three themes in the light of prior research on gaslighting with the assistance of literature on psychological abuse and emotional manipulation in intimate relationships. Findings of this thesis will present an overview of the gaslighting experience of women and provide insights, regarding the development of possible prevention programs and implications in clinical settings. In the last part, an assessment of the strengths and limitations of the thesis and suggestions for the future research will be presented.

5.1. Discussion of the Themes

5.1.1. Gaslighting as Asserting Power

The first theme explains what women consider as gaslighting. The aim of the theme is to conceptualize gaslighting based on women's reports. Findings in this thesis indicated that perpetrators tend to implement gaslighting by constantly accusing the women, trying to isolate the women from their social networks, showing mood shifts and occasional emotionally neglectful attitudes. To define gaslighting as a strategy of asserting power and dominance, men's motivations and how these strategies cause men to have dominance over women needs to be discussed.

Firstly, the literature on IPV and psychological abuse have indicated that perpetrators generally have the desire of having control and domination in relationships. The patriarchal structure and hegemonic masculinity that have been reinforced in such a system contribute to men's such desires (Connell, 2000; Kupers, 2005). In such a state, one of the ways that men establish dominance is through keeping women under control by shaking their sense of self and reality (Hayes & Jeffries, 2016), which is what the conceptualization of gaslighting about. Frequent accusations, social isolation, mood shifts, emotional neglect and withdrawal of communication are found to be the strategies of deteriorating sense of self and reality in this thesis.

In terms of constant accusations, the results indicated that men often disregard women's perspectives. They seemed to be remarkably dedicated to assert their own versions of reality by accusing. While some of the accusations had the tone of blame, some of them could be regarded as ways of deflecting responsibility by projecting it onto women. While shifting responsibility implies only that the partner has no role in the matter, shifting blame infers that partner has no faults, but the women have. Yet, they resemble each other in terms of avoiding accountability and redirecting the responsibility of the issue to the women. The attribution of responsibility is regarded to be one of the forms of psychological abuse (Marshall, 1999).

Similarly, in terms of gaslighting literature, Gass and Nichols (1988) have suggested that gaslighting may be displayed to avoid responsibility without the specific aim of making the gaslightee feel like ‘crazy.’ It may involve constructing a reality with frequent lies to deflect responsibility. Yet, even without the motivation, it is still considered as gaslighting as the lies induce self-doubt in the gaslightee. Some of the participants indicated that their partners’ aim of shifting blame was concealing their faults rather than solely accusing them. Nevertheless, deflecting responsibility and attributing it to the women also involve the accusations that the problem lies within the gaslightee (Ahern, 2018). They give the message that the problem is not caused by them but by the reaction or response that the gaslightee gives. While it allows the gaslighter to avoid accountability, it also creates confusion in the gaslightee regarding the cause of the problem, as reported previously (Klein et al., 2023).

Gaslighting has a unique feature of diminishing the knowing abilities of the victim/survivor and make them feel like “crazy” (Abramson, 2014; Sarkis, 2018). Partners occasionally used accusations of being crazy against women about creating a problem, arguing that everything is normal. Stark (2019) has argued that men may deny accusations women have for them, directly accusing women of lying or falsely remembering and sometimes finding the reaction excessive while accepting the accusation. However, the results of the study did not suggest men’s accusations of falsely remembering, unlike prior research (e.g., Stark, 2019; Sweet, 2019). This may stem from the differences in the cultural context of Türkiye. The patriarchal structure in Türkiye focuses more on the honor and decency of women rather than their cognitive abilities. Therefore, the accusations have stronger psychological impacts on women when they are directed at moral values (e.g., accusing them of lying, not being decent enough).

Pence and Paymar (2003) have argued that men use the techniques of minimization, denying and blaming to manipulate how the abuse is being perceived. By downplaying their reaction or turning a blind eye to the perspective of the gaslightee, they invalidate the gaslightees’ experience and carry the aim of distorting the reality and asserting dominance over women (McPhail et al., 2007). This may explain how the knowing

abilities are being diminished even without the presence of direct accusation on memory; women eventually feel like they are incapable of knowing.

Moreover, the acceptance of the accusation but finding the reaction abnormal redirect the issue to a more personal level, as the problematic issue becomes directly the reaction of the gaslightee. Another form of accusation which was found to be commonly used in this thesis is accusations of personal features (e.g., personality as an individual, their characteristics as a partner, their physical appearance, or mental health). In a patriarchal structure where gender-based power inequality is present like Türkiye, constant criticism and accusations regarding personality function as a product of misogyny and strengthens the domination of men as women's sense of reality is shaken (Manne, 2017; Stark, 2007; Stark, 2019). While the aspect of personal motivation of men can be considered as the topic of another study, their aim is to make women more in need of partners' approval and lead them to act accordingly.

Moreover, prior research showed that victim-blaming can also be another way of deflecting responsibility (Johnson et al., 2021). This put victim/survivors in a position where they "deserve" the abuse, making survivor at fault and release the abuser from the abuse by rationalizing it. The fact that this has also been indicated in the findings may be related to Türkiye's legal context. The failure in legal punishments given to perpetrators and the legal tendency to cast blame on women while reducing men's sentences on the grounds of unjust provocation also contributes to the victim-blaming dynamic in abusive relationships.

Besides, results indicated that as partners find themselves not responsible for any of the problems and take no action accordingly, they also have high expectations of women. Women reported this as a 'double standard.' This puts men in a rule-maker position where the decisions of what to do and what not to do are up to them, just like deciding what women deserve or not. It has been suggested that structural power imbalance in the society give men power to determine the social norms, meaning that they may find themselves determinant of the amount of acceptance women would receive in their unique identities (McCarthy et al., 2018). In line with this, women reported an erosion of identity (Darke et al., 2025). This intentional distortion of reality by shifting responsibility and

blame aimed at eventual weakening of self-confidence and sense of reality of women, as a key element of gaslighting. The traditional gender roles and the honor culture in Türkiye have also determined men as the rulers and the judges, possibly to a greater extent compared to the West. Therefore, Türkiye may be speculated to be more convenient for the emergence of gaslighting in this regard.

Secondly, the results of this thesis suggested that perpetrators engage in gaslighting through efforts for social isolation. Some participants have stated that partners initially begin with a non-destructive, benign jealousy in a way that does not create an intimidating atmosphere or sound like restriction. Affectionate and caring language of the partner help the perpetrator mask the manipulative intentions. They indicated that they felt like overreacting if they would draw a boundary to partners' interference because they sounded polite. Aligned with this, Stern (2007) has proposed different types of gaslighters with distinct behavioral features and presented 'glamour' and 'the good guy' gaslighters with polite and charming elements while subtly using manipulative tactics. Even though, the subtle manipulation masked the efforts for isolation, it is later found to be associated with power assertion by women.

On the other hand, not all the methods of implementing gaslighting were subtle. A few of the women have pointed out that they were being accused of behaving inappropriately in the presence of others. This can be regarded as a direct and open way of making women feel guilty about their own behaviors. Türkiye context may also have a strong impact on this as women are also found responsible for their partner's image and are obliged to protect it (Topçu & Baş, 2018).

Moreover, participants have indicated that after a certain point, most of the partners shared discomfort for any strong influence in women's lives, including same sex friendships. The motivation of the perpetrator is to control and sustain the powerful position, as reinforced by the structure of hegemonic masculinity (Waddell et al., 2020). Therefore, they openly criticize the friend with the motivation of being the only dominant figure in women's lives, in line with the findings of Walker (1979) who has suggested that abusive partners are jealous of everything in women's lives.

In addition, Cull (2019) has introduced the term “dismissive incomprehension” which involves devaluing the perspectives of the other with the purpose of reducing credibility. Even though it has been introduced in the context of decreasing the credibility of victim/survivor’s judgments, it may be interpreted that it can also be used against the gaslightee about a third party, with efforts of decreasing the credibility of another close person. Likewise, in the opposite case, it can be used against third parties when partners falsely present themselves in an appealing manner to them. This also functions as isolating women in their narratives. As they become the only one who knows the unmasked version of the partner, they reportedly have a hard time convincing the others. Since gaslighting induces doubt in the gaslightee’s own judgment (Calef & Weinschel, 1981), attempts of convincing others when women are unsure of themselves can be significantly difficult.

Efforts for social isolation help perpetrators to hold women under control by making them lonelier (Hayes & Jeffries, 2015; Stark, 2007). In this regard, Hill (2019) has suggested that weakening of the women’s bonds with external social networks creates hardships for questioning the abusive behaviors. Participants also added that men either draw them into their own social networks or carefully monitored their needs to prevent them from needing an outside support. In this way, partners created an unequal dynamic where women were supposedly being highly regarded, while in fact it was a subtle way of manipulation to control women. One of the ways of attaining power over women in patriarchal structure is through make her dependent to the men, which is also defined as dependence power (Worley, 2016). The gender roles presented in the hegemonic structures position women as the weaker party, who are more in need of approval and guidance from men. As they become more powerful in the social structure, the increased dependency of women makes them more prone to be exposed to gaslighting when it is especially accompanied by emotional dependency due to having only their partners close to them in their social circles. As they are more affected by gaslighting, their confidence in their own justifications drops, forming a vicious cycle and causing them to be trapped deeper in the relationship.

Furthermore, the acquired power of men also grows in the journey that begins with subtle mood shifts and gradually progresses towards emotional neglect and to the withdrawal of communication. A vast majority of IPV and gaslighting literature have pointed out that the cycle of abusive dynamics often starts with a loving and affectionate stage (Walker, 1979), which is also called the ‘honeymoon period’ (Tolhuizen, 1989) or love-bombing (Hayes & Jeffries, 2015). This may be explained as partner’s strategy of gaining trust (Hayes & Jeffries, 2015). While most women similarly experienced initial positivity, a few of them reported experiencing emotional attachment after a certain point with partners’ efforts despite feeling neutral and even an unsettling beginning. This finding remarks a difference from prior research (e.g., Klein et al., 2023) and may be associated with how women feel more obliged to sustain the relationship in Türkiye context. This difference shows the extent of unfamiliarity with proper treatment and how they come to feel “lucky” and consider the affectionate treatment as rare. Furthermore, women’s average age for getting married is found to be 25 in Türkiye (TÜİK, 2024). This also marks the social expectation from and pressure on women regarding forming long-term relationships regardless of their desires.

In such a state where the women find themselves comfortable enough to show their vulnerabilities, most of the time they encounter with a sudden coldness, an unexpected accusation or a gradual decrease in attention. Furthermore, the exact time of ending of the loving episode is striking. While sometimes it occurs when the women let their guard down, sometimes it is related with men’s feelings of power and control over women. Love bombing ensures that men’s words are consistently perceived as worth listening and appealing, and thereby, enabling stronger control over women. When the tables are turned, women become equally sensitive to words of men.

Women reported that the following periods of love-bombing occasionally include arbitrary revisiting of past fights. These conflicts are generally reported as arbitrary because women could not always predict the onset. This functions as not only inducing guilt in women with holding on one side of the story where the men find themselves right, it also distorts the reality of women. When they frequently argue about the same side of the same narrative, it causes women to frequently hear that they were at fault. They also

justified their mood swings with emphasizing that they are the sufferer (Stark, 2019). In this sense, Berkowitz (1993) mentions ‘victim playing’ which allows deflecting responsibility by portraying the self as victimized and mistreated.

On the other hand, some women reported inconsistent mood shifts that do not necessarily include revisiting past fights; it may be exerted through withdrawal of communication in line with Walker’s (1979) presentation of methods of maltreatment. Likewise, withdrawal of communication is mentioned under the name of “silent treatment” and defined as a problematic way of dealing with relational issues (Buss et al., 1987; Williams, 2001). Being unresponsive to the partner as a way to express discontent is seen as a social strategy of punishment, as it includes letting women know that men are upset but leave the reason why unclear (Falbo & Peplau, 1980; Williams, 2001). This leaves women alone with complicated questions of what wrong they might have done. Williams (2001) has suggested that withdrawal of communication gains its power from its ambiguous nature. Yet, it gives the clear message that women have no presence in the eyes of men if they do not give what men want.

Lundgreen (2004) has suggested that men may control the women through drawing boundaries of rights or wrongs, imposing his ideas of what a woman should be. As they become the rule-maker and being the one with a more dominant narrative, words and actions that are guilt-inducing poses greater impacts in women. Abramson (2014) has proposed that power in gaslighting may be gained through the gaslighter’s taking advantage of feelings, such as empathy and love. Thus, withdrawal of communication can be seen as maltreatment of love and commitment women have for the relationship and gaining power over these humane emotions.

By nature, withdrawal of communication involves emotional neglect although it may not aim to neglect. The results indicated that when the partners begin to show another attitude rather than being solely affectionate, the dynamic of relationships take the form of oscillation between mood shifts. Dutton and Painter (1993) have suggested that trauma bonding is being formed with the inconsistent behavior patterns of the abuser. Periods of maltreatment is generally followed by the periods of affection, which causes women to endure the relationship for the hope of nonproblematic periods. This leads to the

formation of a polarized relationship dynamic where men are positioned as having the power to give love and attention, and women are positioned to seek and wait for these experiences. This interpretation is aligned with suggestions of feminist theory that is being conceptualized around men's active dominance and women's seemingly passive attitudes (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). The seemingly passive and waiting attitude women adopt is a product of men's being framed as the doer and active agent (de Beauvoir, 1949). In terms of gaslighting, positioning of men in such an active stance constructs them as more powerful epistemic agents, which sets the stage for gaslighting. In such an atmosphere, men were seen as knowing more than women.

Similarly, Sweet (2019) has conceptualized gaslighting within the framework of the gaslightee's epistemic knowledge being harmed. It can also be interpreted that not only is a decrease in the epistemic knowledge of the gaslightee effective, but also the construction of men as possessing more epistemic knowledge is also significantly influential. The term 'epistemic gaslighting' described by Stark (2019) suggests an unintentional weakening of the credibility of certain groups. Patriarchal structures boosting hegemonic masculinity is very effective in determining men as the epistemic agents (Sakallı et al., 2013). The emergence of gaslighting is remarkably easier when both men and women believe in women's passiveness and the possibility of women being less credible than men. In terms of Türkiye context, Kongar (2004) has described the social structure of Türkiye as "a combination of the Ottoman legacy and Western civilization" (p. 15). Women of Türkiye have been making efforts to find a place in a patriarchal society since the foundation of the Republic in 1923. Even though, legal rights were granted to women with various reforms of the Republic, the social change in terms of gender equality occurred more slowly, in fact still not completed. While women have been continuously striving to reach an equal position with men for all these years, the current political position and implications in Türkiye contribute to the oppression of women and weakening of their stance's credibility. Considering the social history and present political conditions, it can be speculated that Türkiye is socially permissive for gaslighting to occur, which makes the visibility of it more crucial.

The prior research in Türkiye context have suggested that when the psychological abuse is not combined with other types of abuses, it does not draw sufficient attention by both the abuser and survivor in Türkiye. Partner's being emotionally neglecting or restricting under the name of jealousy are portrayed as "normal" and "acceptable" in the culture (Ersanlı et al., 2013; Toplu-Demirtaş et al., 2017). Therefore, it may be argued that the invisibility of the psychological abuse and men's being justified as right set the stage for men's using gaslighting as a strategy.

To sum up, from the points of view of women, they indicated that the gaslighting they experienced has commonalities, such as being exposed to constant accusations, efforts for social isolation, mood shifts, emotional neglect, and withdrawal of communication. These findings are aligned with the findings of much research in the literature on both IPV and gaslighting; yet most of the findings emerged individually in previous studies. While isolation is suggested by Abramson (2014), Ahern (2018), Hailes and Goodman (2025) and Sodoma (2022), inconsistent behaviors characterized by mood shifts are indicated in the works of Hayes and Jeffries (2015), Sarkis (2018), and Stern (2007). Hailes and Goodman (2025) have conceptualized gaslighting with its impacts on epistemic domains, including memory. Accusations of falsely remembering are not found in this thesis. While the difference in results may stem from the Türkiye context being more focused on honor codes and conservative values, the findings give insight regarding how the knowing abilities might be altered without direct accusation towards memory.

In general, the findings of Klein et al (2023) are mostly aligned with the results of this thesis. It has been indicated that love-bombing, isolation, perpetrator's unpredictability, and cold-shouldering are common behavioral patterns of gaslighting (Klein et al., 2023). The findings are distinguishing in terms of the conceptualization of the love-bombing period. While Klein et al. (2023) characterized the period with excessive affectionate attitudes that would not normally occur in healthy relationships, participants in this thesis defined it as positive, as would typically be expected in a relationship. This difference may stem from the cultural context of Türkiye. As a patriarchal structure, masculine behaviors that may be considered dominant, rude, and aggressive elsewhere may be favored in Türkiye context (Sancar, 2013). Furthermore, men are expected to adopt active

stances while women are expected to be fragile and passive (Topçu & Baş, 2018), which may also explain why women initially considered the proactive partner who is taking initiative as ideal rather than excessive. The similarity of the findings with prior research (e.g., Hailes & Goodman, 2025; Klein et al., 2023) can be explained by a few factors. It can be thought that while the cultural and social context influences the ways in which manipulative tactics are enacted, tactics of gaslighting are consistent and universal.

5.1.2. Experiencing Gaslighting

The second theme addressed women's experiences in relationships with gaslighting, explaining their process that gradually leads to separation through the lens of women. While the first theme focuses more on what women call gaslighting, this theme explores the impact it has left on them. Women reported a gradual internalization of their partner's narratives. Abramson (2014) has suggested that gaslighting is closely related to the inner doubt women have due to gender-based social norms of patriarchal structure. At the beginning of the process, results indicated that women are more vocal about expressing discomfort or defending themselves. Stern (2007) has remarked on this by suggesting that disbelief is the first step of the gaslighting process. The gaslightee's initial response is questioning the words of the gaslighter with a clearer mind. Participants shared that they gradually become silent as a result of not being seen and understood, with the hope of avoiding further conflicts.

Salazar et al. (2011) have pointed out that in order to cope with abuse, acting submissive was regarded as the initial stage of breaking free of the abuse. Ali and Naylor (2013) have explained this by the social teaching that expect women to maintain their intimate relationships in the patriarchal structure. To ensure this, women may suppress their own needs, stay silent, or hesitate to draw boundaries. Despite the emotional hardships of this experience, participants reported that their sense of self and reality were still intact at the beginning.

Stern (2007) indicated that the shift begins with partners' frequent denials, causing women to be remarkably sensitive to a single recognition of their partner; thus, they

gradually start to feel more in need of men's approval. This motivation of receiving approval encourages them to form a conflict-free atmosphere where they give importance to receiving approval from their partners. Likewise, Stark (2019) has described men's approval again as a product of the patriarchal system. This is also related to the emergence of misogyny when women behave noncompliant. The reason why women may need men's approval is explained through certain vulnerabilities such as women being more emotional, less economically independent, or even pregnancy can be considered a vulnerability (Dutton & Goodman, 2005). From a feminist perspective, it can be interpreted that these vulnerabilities are not caused by individual weaknesses, but by a power imbalance that patriarchy asserts in social life. Women become more susceptible to abuse through exploitation of these vulnerabilities, either intentional or systemic (Dobash & Dobash, 1979). This also explains how convenient Türkiye context is for the emergence of gaslighting, as hegemonic masculinity is dominant and women are expected to stay silent as per the requirements of traditional roles.

The point at which women give up hopes of recognition and validation is generally conceptualized with frequent accusations and criticism. As their trust in their own judgments reduces, the credibility of the partners' narrative strengthens. However, the results indicated that some of the participants reported finding themselves internalizing partners' narratives suddenly without necessarily experiencing decreased self-trust in their own judgements. This shows the subtle nature of the gaslighting experience, aligned with the prior research (Abramson, 2014; Stern, 2007).

Whereas Stern (2007) interprets delayed recognition as rationalization of the abuse and the abuser who has remained idealized since the love-bombing period; Stark (2007) has approached this as women's need for having the power, even if it is an illusion of control. The accusations have generally been directed at declaring women responsible. They implied that they should change for the problem to be fixed. Underneath the direct accusation that is aimed at shaking the self-confidence of women, it also functions as making women feel like they are powerful when they manage to soothe the anger or discomfort of their partner. Yet, it is defined as fake power that is given to women within men's system of control (Stark, 2007).

Results indicated that regardless of whether women were able to comprehend how to satisfy the needs of their partner or not, they were never able to gain the validation they were expecting from them. They start to think that their partners are doing whatever they can, while they are incapable of performing their roles as a partner. Prior research pointed out that following these punishing episodes, women are most likely to receive “rewards” (Stark, 2007), or that positive periods which preceded episodes of maltreatment (Rounsaville, 1978; Walker, 1979) eventually foster dependency on the partner’s positive validations. Lindgren and Renck (2008) explained this as developing hope for change in partners’ attitudes, which motivates them to remain in the relationship.

The occurrence of feelings of dependency is found to be intertwined with women’s experience of confusion in this thesis. Women find themselves in a fog where they do not know what they have done to deserve the accusation or what to do to end it. Frequent denial and inconsistent moods of the partner confuse the woman about the reality (Hailes & Goodman, 2025). Women gradually come to think that the reality is neither what they experience, because it is frequently denied, nor what partners say, because it may change the next day. In addition, the accusations may occasionally be beyond what women can comprehend. Therefore, the reported foggy experience is about women believing that there is a reality beyond their capacity, and they need guidance from those who have higher abilities than they do, their partners. In line with findings of Dutton and Painter (1993), partners gaining power of decision making diminishes the autonomy of women, making them more dependent on men. Nevertheless, the fog and cognitive confusion of women may offer an insight specific to gaslighting while explaining the deterioration of the agency and emotional dependency.

The fear of separation caused by the feelings of dependency has also been strengthened by the social norms indicating that women cannot survive alone. The internalization of the fear of independence is explained as “Cinderella Complex” (Dowling, 1981). As social gender norms imply that women always need a ‘Prince Charming,’ this can be explained as the hegemonic masculinity affecting women’s self-confidence. This can also be valid for the experience of gaslighting, as Prince Charming is also found remarkably strong, not just physically, but also epistemically. Abramson (2014) has suggested that

the less-powerful stance of the gaslightee has decreased their knowing abilities, which can also be explained by the subordinate roles of women in society (Portnow, 1996). The confusion and contribution of the societal norms give women room to think and believe that they are doomed to know less, that they cannot survive alone, and therefore, in order to survive, they need to be accepted in society.

Considering all the impacts and process, one might question why women still choose to stay in the relationship, yet there are still powerful reasons and motivations influencing women. Belief in idealized love is one of the common themes that are indicated in the results. The initial positivity and the presence of an occasional loving mood, even if it arises from time to time, have been found to be big influences for women. The results suggested that the love-bombing period has created the illusion of perfect love, and when it is over, they felt like they had lost the love they once had, and this can only be their fault, as this is also what they have been told by their partners. Stern (2007) has explained this as when the gaslightee idealizes the gaslighter and becomes very sensitive to his approval in the process, as well as for other reasons, everything he does can be interpreted as love. In other words, they misinterpret the abuse as love. Similarly, women stated that they have the hope that their partners will eventually turn to their loving moods if they put sufficient effort.

Furthermore, feminist theory proposes that expectations of true love are also boosted by the cultural and social structures. The utopia of true love functions as another way to determine the social roles of men and women, and to experience the love they desire, they should behave accordingly to the gender roles (Illouz, 1997). In this way, women tolerate the abusive behaviors in a relationship and believe that it is all worth enduring when the destination is happily ever after. Results also showed that some participants kept their faith in the relationship, clinging to the idea that their love is reciprocal. They believe that the problems are minor and common in every other relationship. Pipes and Lebov-Keeler (1997) have indicated that when women believe that this experience is common, they are more likely to develop tolerance.

Results indicated that when the social circle thinks highly of the partner, women are also more likely to think that the problem lies within themselves. In line with this, bell hooks

(2000) has proposed that women's expectations in a relationship and sense of self are shaped by the need for approval and the society's expectations. Therefore, it can be said that women are more likely to view their partner not from their own lenses but from others' and society's lenses.

Results also indicated that lack of experience in romantic relationships may also facilitate the idealization of men based on their resemblance to society's definition of the "ideal partner." Furthermore, the idea of the 'ideal partner' has occasionally been reinforced by the minimal efforts of the partner. They put forward small traces of affection that caused women to maintain their bonds with them. This has been explained in the IPV literature through the term "intermittent reinforcement." The process of frequent abusive attitudes, occasional rewards foster the formation of powerful emotional bonds in victim/survivors (Dutton & Painter, 1981). Trauma bonding arises in the middle of oscillation between negative and positive moods, and with such minimal rewards given to women (Dutton & Painter, 1993), which have reportedly prevented attempts to break up. In her works, Anderson (2023) has defined this situation as a product of hermeneutic labor, that is, the responsibility of women to interpret and understand men's behavior in the way the social norms encourage and expect. Considering this angle, while women feel responsible for making sense of the behaviors, being convinced of the possibility of the behavioral change becomes meaningful.

The findings showed that the diminished knowing abilities and self-esteem reportedly formed a need for reassurance of reality in women. As a result of the ongoing denial, accusation, and isolation; the women needed others, a friend or a professional, to tell them that they were not crazy. It should be noted that the process of help seeking did not happen right away as there were many obstacles throughout the process. Some participants reported that the normalization of the behaviors and the way they always find themselves in the cycle prevented them from recognizing the problems and seeking help. Djikanović et al. (2011) and Ergöçmen et al. (2013) have suggested that, aligned with the results, not perceiving the abuse as sufficiently severe may complicate help seeking. This can also be interpreted as associated with the normalization of abusive behaviors in patriarchal structures (Connell, 2005). Barrett and St. Pierre (2011) and Anderson et al. (2003) have

suggested that the powerlessness women frequently endure creates difficulty in searching for help in the IPV context. Furthermore, as Abramson (2014) and Decker et al. (2013) suggested, the dependency that resulted in a loss of self-esteem complicates the help-seeking process in a gaslighting context as well.

Stark (2007) has proposed that gaining external help can be understood as resistance to the narrative that partners impose in the reconstructed reality of theirs. Women reported that when they shared their experience with a close relative, they were not necessarily able to get emotional support. Whereas some of them did, some of them encountered judgments and disappointments of their circle because they were angry at participants for sustaining the relationship. At this point, while some of them preferred professional help, some of them sank deeper into their loneliness. Some of the participants mentioned that because they were ashamed of their own experience, they had a hard time sharing this with others. This is also seen in prior research in Türkiye context. Sunar and Fişek (2005) have proposed that women would see themselves as guilty, which hardens the process of seeking help, which is already difficult in a patriarchal structure such as Türkiye. This is closely related to the dominance of honor culture in Türkiye's social structure, as it increases individuals' concerns over how they are viewed by others (Sakallı et al., 2013). The social conditions and place of women in Türkiye are increasing the likelihood of them experiencing shame, which facilitates the isolation of women and hinders help seeking.

Findings suggested that regardless of the fact that they received emotional support or not, the external reassurance has made them reconnected to reality. They come to believe that their needs, problems, and experiences are "normal" and that the partners' narratives were biased. This finding has some contradictory parts with the few previous studies. Fleming and Resick (2017) have given significant importance to the perceived benefit of the help. They proposed that when the help is found to be effective, the behavior of help seeking increases in abusive relationships. Yet, the findings of this thesis indicated that even when women may not find experience sharing very comforting and they occasionally thought of not repeating it again, they reported they still felt comforted. This may be related with reality distorting nature of gaslighting, the initial external support needed may be about

the sense of reality rather than emotional support. Nevertheless, Parsons & Bergin (2010) have found that the experience of being seen and being validated is what reduces the self-doubt and self-blame; small affirmations from outside may also be helpful. The challenging part may be more about the difficulty of receiving support. This contributes to the social isolation, and this is found to be causing the partner's narrative to still be overriding, even with the presence of minor questioning.

The progression of the relationship has gradually brought women to a point where they were very tired of conflict, but still in search of ways to avoid conflict. Partners' inconsistent moods and the fact that they must struggle persistently drained them. Hailes and Goodman (2025) and Klein (2023) have suggested that the constant devaluation of the partners have eventually made experience feelings of worthlessness and helplessness. A few studies have mentioned that the helplessness may trap women into depression (Gilbert, 2006; Gilbert & Allan, 1998; Lopes & Jaspal, 2025). The participants in this thesis did not specify depression; they only mentioned experiencing emotional turmoil. This may be related to the way participants define depression. The key elements of gaslighting (e.g., self-doubt, confusion) may not be experienced as symptoms of clinically known depression. While prior research showed that partners oscillating between two moods created a false hope and delayed the ending of the relationship, at some point, women realized the unlikelihood of change (Lindgren & Renck, 2008). Similarly, most of the participants reported tiredness due to chronic neglect. Women also added when the shifts between moods ended, and the chronic neglect became predictable. The predictability may be interpreted as the time of the initial attempts at breakups. However, some of the women reported that they could not find the power in them to break up, aligned with the findings of Zink et al. (2006).

Furthermore, like many of the previous studies (Barnett et al., 1997; Dobash & Dobash, 1979; Walker, 1979), the results of this thesis showed that women experienced multiple periods of brief separations, generally ending with partners' persuasion. Yet, it can be argued that the increased distress in relationships have eventually convinced women to consider ending, as Eliasson (2003) proposed. However, women also reported experience this frequent neglect as normal. Yet, in time, they felt like they were losing their partners

and experienced a strong feeling of abandonment when they were no longer able to solve the conflicts. In other words, when the false hope they once thought they had is gone, they realized the manipulative dynamic in the relationship. Similarly, Baholo et al. (2015) have claimed that the ending of hope marks the final ending of the relationship.

Even when they were not sure of separation and slightly open to reconciliation, they reported acting more “awake.” This affected their perception of themselves and the world, the world that they forgot was signaling the first traces of return. This has initiated their acts of help-seeking in every aspect. Similarly, McCallum and Lauzon (2005) have indicated that the time women were able to recognize the abuse was the time when they sought help. They leaned more on the support system around them and gave more importance to emotionally nourishing relationships around them.

To sum up, the findings of this thesis regarding emotional impact on women are generally found to be overlapping with prior research (Abramson, 2014; Hailes & Goodman; Klein et al., 2023; Sarkis, 2018; Stern, 2007), with a few differences. While the participants reported their experience as confusion, they did not refer to it as depression, which may stem from differences in the common understanding of depression in Türkiye. In addition to that, the context of Türkiye may affect the process of sharing with a third party and seeking help in therapy, as the experiences of gaslighting may lead to feelings of shame in women.

5.1.3. Coping through Learning and Growth

The third and final theme explains the experiences women have been through in the last periods of their relationship and after the final separation. This theme is built around the ways of coping with the impacts that gaslighting left on them in the last bits of the relationship and the post-relationship period. The first way of coping with the experience appears to be making sense of the experience, that is, naming is a very significant step.

Literature regarding naming the experience and help-seeking is explored as closely related. Yet, there are still some contradictory parts regarding which precedes the other. McCallum and Lauzon (2005) and Peatee (2022) have indicated that naming abuse is

what triggers victim/survivors to seek help; studies such as Burke et al. (2004), Fleming and Resick (2017), and Liang et al. (2005) have suggested that external help and gaining insights facilitates the process of recognition of abuse. That being said, Peatee (2022) has emphasized that the realization of the problem can also emerge without labeling the experience as abuse. It is suggested that survivors may experience distress and dissatisfaction or find conflicts in the relationship “problematic”. The results of this thesis indicated that while some of the participants recognized problematic issues and have pursued further brainstorming about it, some stated that the emotional turmoil mentioned in the previous section have resulted in the breakdown of the strong influence partners have on women.

In addition, some gained awareness of the neglectful and unpleasant attitude of their partner by observing other relationships or by a third party’s interest, and some may become enlightened with the revelation of their partners’ lies. Especially when they caught a lie, they reported questioning themselves about other issues that they might also be lying about. In this sense, Klein et al. (2023) have suggested that naming gaslighting enables reconceptualization of the past conflicts. As gaslighting is focused mostly on disrupting the perception of reality and ability to judge, reframing the experience in their own minds becomes healing. Klein et al. (2023) have pointed out that the realization of gaslighting can be gradual, and once the loop of idealization breaks, the healing process starts. In this sense, alteration of partners’ narrative can be indicated as the point when the idealization is broken.

The findings indicated that the decreased influence of the partner on women have paved the way to hear and benefit from outside help. In line with this, prior research indicated that feelings of hopelessness, loss of self-esteem, and increased dependency on the partner create hardships in help seeking (Ahmad et al., 2009; Anderson et al., 2003; Barrett & St. Pierre, 2011; Decker et al., 2013). The diffusion of the intensity of these feelings opened space for women to receive help. Furthermore, opinions of others sound more convincing with the drop in credibility of partners. Therefore, it may be argued that the quality and functionality of the help received (Fleming & Resick, 2017; Parsons & Bergin, 2010), as

mentioned above, is also related to women's readiness to receive support and hear other opinions.

IPV literature has indicated that the feeling of being validated, seen, and understood by the help of external support strengthens women to be ready to leave the relationship (Haggbloom & Möller, 2007; Lindgren & Renck, 2008). However, the results suggested that the functionality of the external help would be seen after women were detached from the dominant narrative of the partner, whether during the relationship or after the separation. This may stem from the reality-distorting nature of gaslighting; women may not be giving credit to the narratives other than their partners. Corbally (2001) and Wood (2004) have suggested that other voices that find behaviors of partners abnormal and acceptable give women the power to leave. The inability to seek help outside may also be related to Türkiye context as sharing one's privacy could be seen as inappropriate, even when women feel like sharing. The inability to share may push women to brainstorm on their own, which explains the difference in the cultural context of Türkiye.

Likewise, it has been found that as women started to hear others' such comments and they brainstormed about it more by revisiting the past issues, they started to find partners' attitudes more manipulative. They started to give themselves more credit and acknowledged that even if they had made mistakes, the reaction of their partners did not need to be as harsh as they were. Wood (2001) has associated this with how much survivors find themselves responsible. As they start to perceive that their partners were responsible for their abusive behaviors, the level of satisfaction in the relationship drops for the survivor, and they consider separation.

Goldsmith and Freyd (2005) and Follingstad and Rogers (2014) have explained that some women may assess the behavior as abusive but not the partner who implements it as an abuser. This may be due to accompanying positive behaviors (Kaisan & Painter, 1992), still ongoing feelings of self-blame (Harned, 2005), frequency of abusive behaviors (Follingstad & Rogers, 2014), and ongoing commitment to the relationship (Arriaga et al., 2018). Yet, the results of this thesis indicated that by the time they were able to label, they labelled both behaviors and the partners as abusive and abusers. Only one participant has indicated that it was difficult for her to label because labeling would mean

acknowledging that she cannot leave her partner where she should have. This is also explained as one of the hardships of naming abuse, which is the stigma left on women, because labeling the behaviors as abuse would mean labeling themselves as victims, which can be highly emotionally draining (Peterson & Muehlenhard, 2011; Taylor et al., 1983). At such a point, rationalizing, ignoring, and minimizing the behaviors seemed more bearable, aligned with the findings of Arriaga et al. (2018). It is also aligned with the strict expectations of patriarchal structure where women must endure and make the relationship work (Anderson et al., 2003; Barrett & St. Pierre, 2011). The hardship in calling the partner an abuser is also associated with the internalized powerful image of the male (Walker, 1979). The cultural context of Türkiye also sets the stage for this, as defining their partners as “abusers” would harm the image of the partner, which women are held responsible for protecting (Bingöl, 2014). Furthermore, help seeking behaviors of women may be understood as a disgrace as it implies exposing private matters of the relationship to outside, which is violating the traditional gender roles in Türkiye. Therefore, Türkiye context may obstruct the help seeking behaviors and naming the abuse during the relationship.

Naming of the experience not only provides power to leave but also functions as a way to make the male oppression visible. In her works, Frye (1983) has proposed that the power of the oppression comes partly from its invisibility to the victim; the male domination over women has been more strongly established when internalized without questioning. This again is shown as the survivors misperceive the abuse as love or jealousy as love. Therefore, naming the abuse function is a way to resist to patriarchy by making it visible. Furthermore, Hanisch (1970) has proposed that naming politicizes personal experience, meaning that it turns an individual situation into a shared experience between women.

However, this awareness does not necessarily include naming the experience as gaslighting. The naming process is closely related to their definitions of “gaslighting”. A vast majority of the participants defined gaslighting as “manipulation” and “manipulating for the sake of personal gain.” Those who were familiar with gaslighting as a term were able to define their experiences as gaslighting by the time they were able to call it

“manipulation,” but those who were not might only name it when they encountered the word. They indicated that finding such a word that accurately captures their experience has functioned as the clarity they needed in the fog, as mentioned before. The lack of knowledge regarding gaslighting as a term in Türkiye context also has created the hardships of labeling (Nazir & Özçiçek, 2022). Nevertheless, it can be indicated that naming the experience especially as gaslighting may provide clarity of meaning as psychological abuse includes many different strategies. While psychological abuse forms a general frame, naming gaslighting captures its unique effects on women’s sense of reality, making its target and tactics visible.

The time that the breakup took place is again found to be very relationship specific. Nevertheless, the results of this thesis revealed that the naming has not caused women to separate; the reduction of the exerted power and control over women has opened their eyes more, which led them to name. Still, there are some common grounds in the ways of separation and the following period. Firstly, many of the women indicated that they experienced a few brief separation periods, as mentioned above. Whereas they may seem like points where women were unable to separate and were convinced multiple times, these periods may also open a space in which women prepare themselves for the final break up by regaining their strength. In other words, these brief processes may shift women from a passive stance to their position of active subject in their own story. Likewise, Herman (1992) has suggested women to be the author and arbiter of their own story as the way to establish empowerment and recovery from the relationship.

Nevertheless, results indicated various effects remained with women. In this regard, Lindgren and Renck (2008) have proposed that psychological separation takes a longer time than physical separation. One of the most common aftereffects was women getting angry at themselves for “letting” their partner and being weak. This may be interpreted as the internalization of patriarchy’s narrative. Bartky (1990) has highlighted that the criticism women directed to self was internalized patriarchy speaking with women’s voice.

While these emotions also challenge their daily functioning, it can also be seen that they continue to experience self-doubt, which gives signs of long-lasting impacts of

gaslighting. In this regard, Ko and Park (2020) have suggested that the distortion of perception of reality causes survivors to develop mistrust of the outside world, which may also lead them to self-isolation by means of self-protection. Likewise, the results indicated that participants preferred spending time on their own with the aim of regaining control of their lives.

Furthermore, hooks (2000) explained that the feelings of guilt after the separation are not only an individual predisposition but a socially built internalization of patriarchal norms. Thus, self-isolation may not only be seen as a way of avoidance but as a self-protection from taking further psychological damage on a societal level. Even though it may also be thought that social isolation silences women and supports male oppression, Ahmed (2017) and hooks (2000) explained that healing on their own means giving room to themselves for rebuilding their distorted sense of reality, which is a way to resist male domination. This approach to self-isolation can also be descriptive of how women adopted silence to avoid further conflicts during the relationship. As self-isolation prevents women from hearing partners' words and opinions, similarly, the findings indicated that blocking partners' social media is a frequently used method to silence them and their impacts on women's lives.

Regarding the healing process, it can be argued that women rebuild their identity based on their individual desires, not on social expectations. Thus, the fact that they are highlighting the reestablishment of the trust in their own voice implies social empowerment, in line with the findings of Merritt-Gray and Wuest (1995), highlighting the intrapersonal aspect of reclaiming self. Furthermore, the reality-distorting nature of gaslighting stands out at this point. Breaking free from both of their partners' attempts to erode reality, especially when it is also being reinforced by the social structures, may not be the easiest battle women may have fought. In this regard, some participants highlighted the importance of self-forgiveness. The compassion women never found in relationships or in the societal level is found to be remarkably restorative when they give it to themselves. Given the accusatory tone of current political implications in Türkiye, the affectionate and self-forgiving stance of women is remarkably important as well. The lack

of governmental support mechanisms which protects women and their well-being elevates the need for self-compassion.

Results indicated that seeing that their doubts were not baseless has positively impacted the healing process. Furthermore, participants reported that being surrounded by people who were respectful of their boundaries and being appreciated for who they authentically are by their close relatives was what contributed to healing. Loring (1994) has suggested the healing effect of a non-abusive relationship. Similarly, some participants reported that they also found new partners' affection healing.

The impacts of gaslighting are found to be present in changing priorities of women in future relationships. They reported that they do not dive into relationships with past enthusiasm and feeling safe has become their priorities. This can be associated with the efforts for avoiding partners' exerting power and dominance over them. Moreover, this is also reflected in prioritizing self, becoming a new criterion for them. The experience of gaslighting has rendered them more cautious of early signs of manipulation. This can again be interpreted as continuous resistance to the gender-based social norms.

In a more general manner, Landenburger (1989) has summarized the experience of women as the integration of two different realities into one. The reality that has been constructed by the partner where the woman was always at fault and guilty integrates with the actual one in which the abuse is recognized and labelled, which could also be seen by the others whose judgments were not deteriorated. Landerburger (1989) has proposed this integration not only on a personal level but also on a societal level. From a feminist perspective, the detrimental effects of hegemonic masculinity boosted by the patriarchal structure are evident. Alongside their experiences, women also learned to resist the internalized image of what women should behave like or who they should be.

In a context like Türkiye, the domination of honor culture on top of the oppressive attitude of political regulations highlights the importance of the visibility of the term. Unlike some of the prior research on IPV (Haggbloom & Möller, 2007; Lindgren & Renck, 2008), findings indicated that the naming process took place after a long time, which may indicate the rooted and internalized doctrine that the women should be patient. This can also be seen in the emotional turmoil that builds up due to prolonged exposure to

gaslighting. The expectations from women of being maternal, nurturing, and welcoming in Türkiye may be speculated to delay the recognition, labeling, and separation.

Overall, the strategies that the participants develop in order to regain their sense of self and judgments of reality should be interpreted from the perspective of what they managed to do, despite all the obstacles they had to face. The extent of how challenging this experience was for women may be seen in the moment of relief a few participants reported to be experiencing right after the relationship ended. What they were capable of should be evaluated while keeping this emotional weight in mind.

5.2. Practical Implications of the Present Study

Findings of this thesis present significant implications regarding not only intervention and prevention programs but also for clinicians working in the field. Initially, the definition and the implications of the term “gaslighting” should be determined more clearly among clinicians and on a societal level. The results indicated findings about the women’s experience of gaslighting in the context of romantic relationships in Türkiye. Although the information gathered from women was presented on an individual level, the experience that was being shared went beyond efforts for power assertion, mainly by distorting reality in a relationship-specific manner. In other words, women have just not shared their personal experiences but instead conveyed a message of the extent of the impact of gender-based power inequality in patriarchal structure. During this process, women doubted their sense of self and reality, their trust in their capabilities severely dropped, and they developed guilt in a continuous manner. Their experiences have revealed that with separation, they managed to start reclaiming their self-worth and self-confidence while trying to break free from the internalized traditional gender roles and expectations. Being recognizing gaslighting makes it easier to recognize these experiences for clinicians and contribute to the empowerment of women.

Realizing the coping strategies requires knowledge of gaslighting. Comprehensive knowledge regarding the entire process of gaslighting is crucial for mental health professionals to be able to support victims/survivors in every step of the way. Even if a

mental health professional misses a point or a sign, detailed knowledge regarding the impacts and consequences of such an experience may help to spot relevant dynamics, functioning as a hint. Being familiar with the term and the process would also enable clinicians to see the women's efforts to protect themselves, and thus, show them what they are capable of. In this way, their efforts and experience become visible.

Aligned with the psychological abuse literature, as a part of it, the study presented implications for the visibility of the gaslighting experience despite not having physical marks. The invisible and subtle nature of abuse not only underlines the importance of clinicians' need for gaining comprehensive knowledge of the psychological abuse but also raises the question of why gaslighting should be approached as a specific term. Hailes and Goodman (2025) have defined gaslighting as specifically aiming at destroying the knowing abilities of the survivor under the scope of emotional manipulation. The specific feature of the term enables precise naming of the experience, which may be preventive for further disruption of targeted abilities. Defining gaslighting under the name of emotional manipulation carries the risks of overlooking the specific features and impacts of the term. While emotional manipulation includes many different strategies, gaslighting specifically and systematically targets knowing abilities which cause them to doubt their own judgment, destroys the agency of women, and causes men to assert power and control over them (Abramson, 2014; Klein et al., 2023). Formation of a distinct term is important for specifically describing the internal confusion, detachment from self and others through diminished self-esteem and knowing capabilities. The term "emotional manipulation" does not put particular emphasis on the impact of the manipulation on the survivor, whereas gaslighting presents a comprehensive overview of both the cognitive tactics of the perpetrator and the psychological impacts on the survivor. Most of the participants revealed that they were able to name the experience when they encountered the term, and it opened their eyes wider. The protective aspect of naming in this regard should not be underestimated. Therefore, detailed knowledge of the clinicians plays a significant role in detecting and forming prevention strategies in a clinical setting.

It becomes obvious that the struggle regarding naming the experience should be focused on more by addressing it more. For this purpose, seminars, educational materials, and

programs regarding psychological abuse and emotional manipulation are very critical as well as gaslighting. Similar to the participant age group in the thesis, these interventions could be very beneficial for the young group that involves both male and female participants. Along with the definitions and ways to recognize these abusive and harmful behaviors, topics including consent, boundaries, and respect should be addressed. In terms of women developing coping skills, intervention and prevention programs are found to be very influential (Waldrop & Resick, 2004). They must learn to detect it and develop strategies to cope with it.

Furthermore, recognizing ways to implement abuse and behave abusively should also be focused on training males. The strategies of exerting gaslighting, the consequences in relational, societal and individual level should be mentioned. Forming healthier emotional bonds and relationships should be addressed by including the underlying mechanism of gender-based social norms. Males being able to name the abuse holds great importance in the prevention of the normalization of masculine roles within the patriarchal structure. Furthermore, the implementations must be done on the societal level through policies that place emphasis on gender equality. In this regard, Türkiye context on the social and cultural level stands out. The definitions of ideal love, psychological abuse in intimate relationships, self-doubt, power assertion, and control in Türkiye should be included in the content of such trainings. Including the social context would enable finding more realistic answers to topics like drawing boundaries, women's gender roles definitions, and expectations from them. Understanding psychological abuse, gaslighting, control, and developing new gender role definitions could be influential.

The results highlighted the significance of seeking help and receiving support in dealing with the gaslighting experience. A notable portion of participants stated receiving the most beneficial help from mental health professionals. Noting the importance of the experience of being seen and validated, further knowledge would widen the ways in which therapists become able to see and understand clients who are both implementing gaslighting and being exposed to it. Moreover, the presence of a trustworthy psychotherapist who could be a reliable epistemic agent may be seen as a way for women to rebuild their sense of trust in the outside world. Consequently, clinicians' attendance

at prevention programs/trainings may initiate women's trust in such programs. Besides, adding informative content to trainings, including daily life encounters with gaslighting on a relational level (e.g., spotting gaslighting in a friend's relationship), gaslighting in other contexts (e.g., workplace), also enables detecting gaslighting in various ways and contexts.

5.3. Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study represents one of the first qualitative studies in Türkiye regarding women's experience of gaslighting in romantic relationships. It covers the ways in which women define gaslighting, how to cope with it, and the separation processes, and explains them within a feminist framework. It explores the links between experiencing gaslighting in heterosexual romantic relationships and social power relations. The fact that it has been done qualitatively provided an opportunity for women to express their experience in detail and share information regarding their experiences during and after the relationship, voicing their emotions. The interviews also consisted of questions about women's definitions of gaslighting, features of a healthy relationship, and the potential problems that may arise in the relationship. These questions are important in terms of understanding women's experience of gaslighting and psychological abuse in Türkiye context. It gives significant information regarding women's perspectives on the role of women and expectations from women in Türkiye context, which can shed light on their experiences of gender-based power inequality. This study also presented findings about breakup processes that can be useful in intervention and prevention practices. Moreover, as a distinct feature, this study offers a qualitative overview specifically on gaslighting in contrast to prior research that focused on psychological abuse and emotional manipulation. It offered an understanding regarding differences and similarities between prior research about emotional manipulation in literature and gaslighting, to a certain extent, yet needing further research.

Participants are heterosexual women who are aged between 18 and 30, but each has experienced gaslighting at distinct ages. The common features of the gaslighting experience, regardless of the age of experiencing the relationship, presented informative

knowledge for a deep understanding of the term. However, different parameters stand out for human development at different ages, and focusing on the commonalities in experience might cause these factors to be overlooked. In addition, all participants except for one were students economically tied to their family at the time of the relationship, and they all could be classified as middle-upper class. All participants except for one live in major cities of Türkiye and all participants were either attending or graduating from the university. The fact that the majority of participants share a similar socio-economic background may cause overlooking the experience of women from different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Further research is needed to expand the scope of the analysis to a more diverse population.

Furthermore, Pipes and Lebov-Keeler (1997) and Follingstad and Rogers (2014) have indicated that one of the aspects that impacts the labelling of abuse is its frequency. In terms of gaslighting literature, it may also be argued that the intensity and the frequency affect the naming of gaslighting. This study was able to offer limited knowledge regarding it, which may be considered a limitation. Further research is needed to obtain a clearer definition and the implications of the term and assess its severity.

In terms of the definition of gaslighting, the term's lack of recognition is also another topic of discussion. All the participants have different and subjective definitions of the term according to their understanding based on their experience. It is also impacted by how they encounter the word and what they understand of it. Gaslighting literature need further research for clarification regarding issues of intentionality and what types of behaviors are considered as gaslighting, whether it only occurs once or repeatedly, and whether a specific emotional impact on gaslightee is needed or not (Bhatti et al., 2021; Graves & Samp, 2021; Darke et al., 2025). Furthermore, even when gaslighting has been conceptualized as a specific term, the extent to which it can be regarded as an independent process from psychological abuse or other unhealthy relationship dynamics can be examined in future research. Even though, it is considered under emotional manipulation, future research may focus on the question of whether gaslighting can occur in relationships that do not involve emotional manipulation. Addressing such conceptual ambiguities would be an important step toward clarifying the boundaries of the term.

Another important hardship in terms of conceptual definition of gaslighting in the Türkiye context is the lack of a direct equivalent of the term in the Turkish language. Future research may also focus on developing a culturally and linguistically appropriate term for gaslighting in Turkish.

Although this ambiguity may create hardships for obtaining a consistent framework and comparing the narratives, it also enables revealing the experiential and nuanced nature of gaslighting. Different definitions of the term provide insight into women's understanding of manipulative behaviors of partners in Türkiye's socio-cultural context. The variety in the definition can be considered a strength in showing gaslighting experience more comprehensively, taking into consideration the gender-based power inequality in Türkiye.

Another aspect of this thesis is that it revealed the importance of therapy support in a relational context. This not only offered insight about the abusive nature of gaslighting experience in intimate relationships but also shed light on the extent of impact psychotherapy processes may have on recognizing and coping with abusive dynamics. Almost all the participants mentioned professional mental health support in the interviews; few of them reported receiving it, and one participant stated the importance of it as being a psychotherapist herself. Mentioning gaslighting in the therapy processes helped increase its visibility and made it more vocal. Moreover, participants mentioned the importance of having a space where they are listened to without being judged and feel seen and validated. While this not only shows the cruciality of therapy in terms of coping with abuse but also reveals that further research may focus on the positive impact of receiving therapeutic help on recognizing the abuse, labeling it, and coping with it. The findings should be used to improve the mental health services in a way that would be more beneficial to those affected by psychological abuse and gaslighting, categorized under it. In addition to the importance of support received in therapy setting, the effect of social support may be given more attention in future research. The role of resilience in women's ability to leave such relationships could be focused on in more detail in future research. In this regard, intergenerational dynamics in their families may provide insight,

particularly in understanding how family patterns influence women's entry into such relationships, their access to social support, and the development of resilience.

Lastly, the visibility of the topic by providing space for feelings and firsthand experiences of women may inspire hope and encouragement for individuals who have been exposed to or are still being exposed to psychological abuse in their romantic relationships. It may be encouraging and enlightening for those who are currently in an abusive relationship, but also who still have wounds and struggle with healing. The findings suggested that many women may continue to experience the impacts of the relationship long after it ended. Thus, coping with the aftereffects of gaslighting can be another topic and the effect of resilience may also provide insight in this regard as well. Highlighting the women's journeys of reconnecting with themselves can be validating, even for those women who are still unable to label their experience. More studies need to be done to obtain more information about hindering and facilitating factors for women coping with gaslighting. Gaslighting should not only be focused on as a brand-new term but as a longitudinal process which have many unnamed features. A more comprehensive model of gaslighting should be a further research concern. It is also worth noting that these models should also offer insight about the perspectives of implementers of gaslighting, focusing on how they rationalize and normalize the abuse. Exploring these processes and forming preventive trainings for young boys and addressing them accordingly would be remarkably beneficial. Furthermore, better understanding of naming process can be beneficial for men as well, especially in couple therapy context.

6. CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand the women's experience of gaslighting in romantic relationships based on feminist theory. What they were being exposed to as gaslighting, how they make sense of it and label this newly emerged term, and their ways of coping are addressed in this study. Aligned with the prior research, results indicated that women encountered men's efforts to exert power and domination over them with various methods. Women were exposed to frequent accusations and neglect besides becoming gradually isolated. They underwent self-doubt for various aspects of their selves. With increasing self-blame and diminished self-trust in women, they were being pushed into emotional turmoil. As a means of resisting and coping, they searched for ways to hold on, to protect their identities and mental health with various ways, however, the emotional exhaustion eventually drove them to separate from their partners, not just physically but also emotionally. With emotional detachment, naming of gaslighting became possible, that have happened close to the time of breaking up. After separation, women reportedly continued to have the psychological impacts of the experience on many levels. They kept putting effort into complete healing from the experience on an emotional and mental level. Their views of themselves, priorities, and expectations in relationships were reshaped. Their process of reconnection with themselves was also included, along with mentioning their empowerment as women in a patriarchal structure. Nevertheless, as a newly emerging concept, gaslighting needs further understanding and clearer conceptualization. Further research that may offer insight about detailed models of gaslighting may ease the way to detect it by those who are being exposed to it as a specific concept under psychological abuse. Moreover, considering the patriarchal structure and hegemonic masculinity tendencies in Türkiye, the detailed definition and its effects gain more cruciality in terms of early recognition of gaslighting, formation of comprehensive prevention programs to aid healthy intimate relationships.

To be able to give women opportunities to speak up about their extremely challenging experience and their journeys of coping has shown the significance of seeing and validating what has been remarkably subtle. Despite getting slightly emotional, they put

emphasis on the happiness they were feeling because of the experience of being listened to and validated, which is what every woman who has been treated without the love and respect they genuinely deserve wishes for. This study aims to shed light on the importance of the formation of egalitarian dynamics in which two parties are being equally treated for the ultimate hope of the emergence of healthier and safer relationships.

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7. APPENDICES

Appendix A. Result of Evaluation by the Ethics Committee

Ethics Board Approval is available in the printed version of this dissertation.

Appendix B. Socio-Demographic Form

Bu araştırma bilimsel bir amaçla yapılmaktadır ve araştırma kapsamında verdiğiniz bilgiler yalnızca bilimsel amaçlarla kullanılacaktır. Katılımcıların kişisel bilgilerinin gizliliği esas alınarak, araştırmada verdiğiniz tüm yanıtlar ve kimliğiniz gizli tutulacaktır. Çalışmaya katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayanmaktadır. Bu formun doldurulması, çalışmaya katılımınızı garanti etmemekte olup, yanıtlarınız araştırmanın kapsam ve amacı doğrultusunda değerlendirilecek ve sizinle yeniden iletişime geçilecektir. Araştırmada katılımcı olarak yer almamanız durumunda verdiğiniz bilgiler değerlendirilmeye alınmayacaktır. Araştırmayla ilgili daha fazla bilgi almak veya soru sormak isterseniz, araştırmacı Zeynep Gülbağ ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz. Eğer bu formu doldurarak araştırmanın bu aşamasına katılmayı ve kişisel bilgilerinizi paylaşmayı kabul ediyorsanız aşağıdaki kutucuğu işaretleyiniz ve soruları yanıtlayarak mail yoluyla araştırmacıya iletiniz.

Bu formu tamamen gönüllü olarak dolduruyorum. Yukarıdaki açıklamaları anladım. Bu formdaki soruları yanıtlamayı ve kişisel bilgilerimi paylaşmayı kabul ediyorum.

Demografik Bilgi Formu

1. Cinsiyetiniz:
2. Yaşınız:
3. Medeni Durumunuz
 - a. Bekar
 - b. Evli
 - c. Boşanmış
 - d. Dul
4. Yaşadığınız şehir:
5. Eğitim durumunuz: (Lütfen son mezun olduğunuz okulu seçiniz.)
 - a. İlkokul

- b. Ortaokul
 - c. Lise
 - d. Üniversite
 - e. Yüksek Lisans
 - f. Doktora
 - g. Diğer
6. Cinsel yöneliminiz:
7. Çalışma durumunuz:
- a. Çalışmıyor
 - b. Yarı zamanlı
 - c. Tam zamanlı
 - d. Serbest (freelance)
8. İlişki durumunuz:
9. (Varsa) Güncel ilişkinizde herhangi bir şiddet türüne (fiziksel, cinsel, psikolojik) uğradınız mı/ uğruyor musunuz?
- a. Evet
 - b. Hayır
10. *Merriam-Webster gaslighting*'i, “**partnerin mağdurun kendi düşüncelerinin, gerçeklik algısının veya anılarının geçerliliğini sorgulamasına neden olan; tipik olarak kafa karışıklığına, güven ve öz saygı kaybına, kişinin duygusal veya zihinsel istikrarının belirsizliğine ve partnerine bağımlılığına yol açan, genellikle uzun bir süre boyunca kişinin psikolojik olarak manipüle edilmesi durumu**” olarak tanımlar. (Açık Beyin, 2023) Bu tanıma göre, sizin daha önceki bir romantik ya da flört ilişkinizde gaslighting deneyiminiz oldu mu?
- a. Evet
 - b. Hayır
11. Bu tanıma göre, gaslighting yaşadığınız romantik ya da flört ilişkiniz sonlandı mı?
- a. Evet
 - b. Hayır
12. (İlişkiniz sonlandıysa) Bu ilişkiniz biteli ne kadar oldu?

13. Daha önce herhangi bir romantik ya da flört ilişkinizde psikolojik şiddete uğradınız mı?
- Evet
 - Hayır
14. Daha önce herhangi bir romantik ya da flört ilişkinizde fiziksel ya da cinsel şiddete uğradınız mı?
- Evet
 - Hayır
15. Son 6 ay içinde herhangi bir psikiyatrik tanı (Örn. Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu, Akut Stres Bozukluğu) aldınız mı?
- Evet (Tanı ve süreç hakkında kısaca bilgi veriniz.)
 - Hayır
16. Daha önce herhangi bir psikiyatrik tanı (Örn. Travma Sonrası Stres Bozukluğu, Akut Stres Bozukluğu) aldınız mı?
- Evet (Tanı ve süreç hakkında kısaca bilgi veriniz.)
 - Hayır
17. Hayatınızda şu anda deneyimlediğiniz, günlük yaşamınızı etkileyen herhangi bir stres ya da yaşam olayı (Örn. yakın birinin ölümü, taşınma, sizde ya da aile üyelerinde ciddi bir sağlık problemi) var mı?
- Evet (Kısaca bahseder misiniz?)
 - Hayır
18. Bu zorlayıcı yaşam olayının yarattığı stres düzeyini 1(en düşük) ile 5 (en yüksek) arasında değerlendirir misiniz?
- 1
 - 2
 - 3
 - 4
 - 5
19. Daha önce psikolojik/psikiyatrik yardım aldınız mı?
- Evet (Ne kadar süre devam ettiniz? Halen devam ediyor musunuz?)
 - Hayır

Appendix C. The Informed Consent Form

Araştırmayı Destekleyen Kurum:	İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi
Araştırmanın Adı:	Türkiye’de Kadınların Romantik İlişkilerindeki Gaslighting Deneyimleri: Nitel Bir Araştırma
Araştırmacının Adı:	Zeynep Gülbağ
Araştırmacının E-mail Adresi ve Telefonu:	
Araştırmanın Danışmanı:	Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Anıl Özge Üstünel Balcı
Danışmanın E-mail Adresi ve Telefonu:	

Bu araştırma, İstanbul Bilgi Üniversitesi Klinik Psikoloji Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi Zeynep Gülbağ tarafından Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Anıl Özge Üstünel Balcı danışmanlığında yürütülmektedir. Bu araştırmanın amacı, genç kadınların romantik ilişkilerde yaşadıkları gaslighting deneyimlerini anlamaktır. Araştırma, kadınların bu deneyimi adlandırma, tanımlama ve ayrılma süreçlerindeki baş etme yöntemlerini anlamayı hedeflemektedir. Kadınların ilişkilerini geriye dönük bir biçimde değerlendirmelerine dair toplanacak verilerin sağlıklı ve eşitlikçi romantik ilişkileri desteklemeye yönelik önleme çalışmalarına katkıda bulunacağı düşünülmektedir.

Bu araştırmaya katılmayı kabul ettiğiniz takdirde, yaklaşık 60-90 dakika sürecek bireysel bir görüşmeye katılmanız beklenecektir. Bu görüşmede geçmiş romantik ilişkinizdeki gaslighting deneyimlerinizi ve bu deneyimlerle baş etme süreçlerinizi öğrenmek için sizden bazı sorulara yanıt vermeniz istenecektir. Yanıtlarınız, sonraki analizlerde kullanılmak üzere ses kaydına alınacaktır.

Bu araştırma bilimsel bir amaçla yapılmakta ve katılımcıların kişisel bilgilerinin gizliliği esas alınmaktadır. Ses kayıtları araştırma süresince yalnızca araştırmacının, yardımcı araştırmacının ve danışmanın erişimi olan şifreli bir bilgisayarda beş yıl boyunca

muhafaza edilecek, bu süre sonlandığında ise silinecektir. Araştırma bulgularının sunumu ve raporlamasında kişi isimleri kullanılmayacak, bulgular görüşmelerde ifade edilen ortak konuları özetleyecektir. Görüşmede paylaştığınız görüş ve deneyimlerinize ilişkin örnek cümlelere bulguların raporlanmasında yer verilecek, bu cümleler isminizle ilişkilendirilmeden anonim şekilde bilimsel yayınlarda kullanılacaktır.

Bu araştırmaya katılmak tamamen isteğe bağlıdır. Görüşmeye katılmanın üzerinizde herhangi bir olumsuz etki yaratması beklenmemektedir. Ancak görüşme sırasında yanıt vermek istemediğiniz, size kendinizi rahatsız hissettiren sorular olursa bu soruları yanıtlamadan geçebilirsiniz. Görüşme sırasında dilediğiniz zaman kaydın durdurulmasını isteyebilirsiniz. Görüşme başlamadan önce, görüşme sırasında veya sonrasında dilediğiniz zaman soru sorabilirsiniz. Katılmayı kabul ettiğiniz takdirde çalışmanın herhangi bir aşamasında herhangi bir sebep göstermeden araştırmadan çekilme hakkına sahipsiniz. Araştırmadan çekildiğiniz durumda verdiğiniz bilgiler değerlendirmeye alınmayacaktır.

Görüşmenizin sonuçları, araştırma sonlandırılmadan önce gözden geçirmeniz için sizinle e-posta yoluyla paylaşılacak ve geri bildiriminiz doğrultusunda gerekli değişiklikler yapılacaktır. Burada amaç, sizin görüşlerinizin ve deneyimlerinizin en doğru şekilde anlaşılmasını sağlamaktır.

Araştırmayla ilgili bilgi almak, soru sormak veya yorumlarınızı paylaşmak isterseniz, araştırmacı Zeynep Gülbağ ile iletişime geçebilirsiniz.

Eğer araştırmaya katılmaya onay veriyorsanız, aşağıdaki metni e-posta yoluyla araştırmacıya iletebilirsiniz.

“Bu alıřmaya tamamen gnll olarak katılıyorum. Bana anlatılanları ve yukarıdaki aıklamaları anladım. alıřmaya katılmayı ve verdiđim bilgilerin bilimsel amalı yayınlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum.”

Appendix D. Psychological Support Centers

Psychological Support Centers (Turkish)

İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Psikolojik Danışmanlık Merkezleri (PDM)

Aile, Kadın, Çocuk ve Engelli Sosyal Danışma Hattı

İstanbul Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kadın Danışma Birimi- Kadın Destek Hattı

İstanbul Kadın ve Aile Hizmetleri Şube Müdürlüğü

Kadıköy Belediyesi Sosyal Hizmet Merkezleri – Alo Kadına Şiddet Hattı

Beşiktaş Belediyesi Kadın Dayanışma Merkezi

Şişli Belediyesi Kadın Dayanışma Merkezi

Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi Gençlik, Çocuk ve Aile Danışmanlık Merkezi

Ankara Büyükşehir Belediyesi Kadın Danışma Merkezi

Gelincik Hattı – Ankara Barosu

Aile İçi Şiddet Acil Yardım Hattı

KADEM Kadın Destek Merkezi

Mor Çatı Kadın Sığınağı Vakfı

Baro Kadın Hakları Merkezi Hattı

Appendix E. Semi-Structured Interview Guide

A. Giriş

- 1) Kendinizi biraz tanıtır mısınız?
- 2) Günlük yaşamınız nasıldır? Nasıl tarif edersiniz?
- 3) İlişki durumunuz ve ilişki geçmişiniz hakkında biraz bilgi verir misiniz?
- 4) Şu anda bir ilişkiniz var mı?
- 5) (Varsa) İlişkinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- 6) Geçmişteki ilişkinizi/ilişkilerinizi nasıl tanımlarsınız?

B. Romantik İlişkiler

- 1) “İyi bir romantik ilişki”yi nasıl tanımlarsınız?
- 2) Romantik ilişkilerde neler sizin için önem arz eder?
- 3) Partnerinizden beklentileriniz nelerdir, onun nelere dikkat etmesini istersiniz?
- 4) Sizin gözlem ve deneyimlerinize göre romantik ilişkilerde oluşabilen sorunlar nelerdir?

C. Gaslighting Deneyimi ve Baş etme

- 1) Gaslighting’i tanımlamanız gerekse, ne söylediniz? Sizce Gaslighting nedir?
- 2) Sizin Gaslighting deneyiminiz nasıldı, biraz bahseder misiniz?
 - a. Bazı tanımlara göre gaslighting, partnerin duygusal olarak manipüle etmesi, yönlendirmesi anlamına geliyor. Sizin partnerinizle buna benzer bir deneyiminiz oldu mu? Olduysa bahseder misiniz? Bu manipülasyon nasıl ortaya çıktı?
 - b. Bazı tanımlara göre gaslighting, partneri kendi gerçekliğinden, algısından, hafızasından şüpheye düşürme anlamına geliyor. Sizin partnerinizle buna benzer bir deneyiminiz oldu mu? Olduysa bahseder misiniz? Bu durum nasıl ortaya çıktı?
- 3) İlişkiniz nasıl başladı?

- 4) İlişkinizde partnerinizin davranışları başlangıçta nasıldı?
- 5) Partnerinizin davranışlarında zaman içinde bir değişiklik oldu mu?
- 6) Olduysa bu değişiklikler nasıl başladı?
- 7) Bu davranışlar karşısında siz ne düşündünüz, ne yaptınız? Partneriniz size göre neden bu şekilde davranıyordu?
- 8) Bu davranış değişikliklerini nasıl ve ne zaman Gaslighting olarak tanımladınız? Hangi noktada partnerinizin davranışları sizi düşündürmeye başladı?
- 9) Gaslighting deneyimiyle nasıl baş ettiniz?
 - a. İlişkiniz esnasında bu deneyimle baş etmenizi kolaylaştıran, size destek olan neler vardı?
 - b. İlişkiniz esnasında bu deneyimle baş etmenizi zorlaştıran neler vardı?

D. Ayrılma Süreci

- 1) İlişkinizde ayrılık nasıl ve ne zaman gerçekleşti?
- 2) Ayrılık sonrası süreç sizin için nasıldı?
 - a. Ayrılık sürecini sizin için kolaylaştıran neler vardı?
 - b. Ayrılık sürecini zorlaştıran neler vardı?
 - c. Bu zorluklarla nasıl başa çıktınız?
- 3) Partnerinizin ayrılık hakkındaki fikirleri nelerdi?
- 4) Bu ilişkinin sizi nasıl etkilediğini düşünüyorsunuz?
 - a. Sizin kendinize bakışınızı nasıl etkiledi?
 - b. Sizin ilişkilere olan tutumunuzu (beklentileriniz, istekleriniz) nasıl etkiledi?
- 5) Bu ilişkiden edindiğiniz çıkarımlar neler?

E. Kapanış

- 1) Görüşmeye katılmak, deneyimlerinizi paylaşmak nasıldı?
- 2) Benim sormadığım, ama önemli olduğunu düşündüğünüz, eklemek istediğiniz herhangi bir şey var mı?
- 3) Bana sormak istediğiniz bir şey var mı?