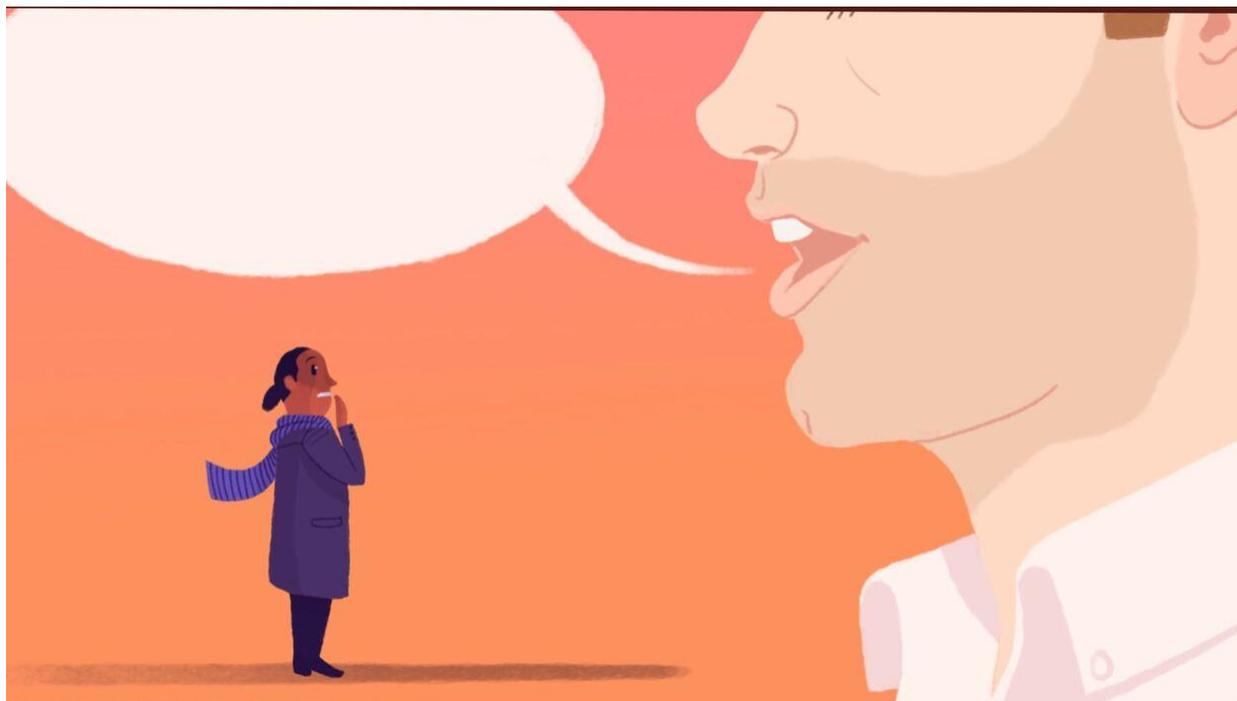


Overcoming Racial Gaslighting

Never Let Anyone Tell YOU how YOU Feel



In the 1940s, a movie called *Gaslight* was released. In it, a husband drove his wife insane by creating experiences and then repeatedly denying the very real experiences happened. That's how the term "gaslighting" became popular in reference to a person or group of people who deliberately work to distort your judgements, minimize your work, or distort your memories.

"Gaslighting is based on the need for power, control or concealment – it refers to a deliberate pattern of manipulation that's been calculated to make the victim trust the gaslighter and actually doubt [their] own perceptions of reality or sanity." – Anna Marie Houlis

Since then, gaslighting has been used to call out misogyny or emotional abuse. However, gaslighting can cut down the efforts and confidence of those in other situations, as well. Just as emotional abusers use traditional gaslighting techniques to make their victims question themselves or their judgement, racial gaslighting is used to make others question themselves during moments of racism.

what is racial gaslighting?

Racial gaslighting invalidates and dismisses the experiences of BIPOC, as well as shifts the blame of BIPOC's oppression onto them instead of on the oppressor.

In her book *Healing Racial Trauma: The Road to Resilience*, Shelia Wise Rowe explains racial gaslighting as “the ways individuals or institutions try to manipulate or question people of color’s sense of reality, often to assert or maintain control, superiority or power.”

White people cannot be victims of racial gaslighting, as they have the **privilege** of maintaining institutions that perpetuate white supremacy.

@SOYOUWANTTOTALKABOUT X @DIVERSIFYOURNARRATIVE
SOURCE: SHELIA WISE ROWE

For example, if someone stated they experienced or witnessed an act of racism or inequality, the gaslighter might then use tactics to derail the confidence of the person coming forward. That, in turn, might cause them to look inward and question themselves and their judgement, rather than the racist act itself.

A classic example of racial gaslighting is where a person of color describes a racist interaction, only to have it immediately questioned.

“Are you sure that’s what it was about?” or “Was it definitely about skin color, though?” or “But I don’t think that was about racism.”

All of these responses undermine the lived experience of racism the person of color described. The purpose of these questions is to make the person who experienced racism second-guess what they remember and how they interpreted the events – which is gaslighting.

Dr. Pragya Agarwal, author of *Sway*, a book about unconscious bias, says racial gaslighting is a way of ensuring that accusations of racism lose credibility.

“In my view, it is a form of psychological abuse really because it makes the minority groups doubt their own instincts, and they become disenfranchised by continually feeling like an outsider,” explains Pragma.

“Racial microaggressions are one type of gaslighting and they leave people feeling unsure of the intent and wondering if they are being over-sensitive.”

She adds that gaslighting is all about gaining the upper hand and the gaslighter positioning themselves in a place of superior power over the gaslightee.

“It works through white privilege and white supremacy and the existing racialized hierarchies in our society,” says Pragma.



So, what can we do to protect ourselves, honor our truths and value our feelings when we feel we're being unjustly treated?

Jacquelyn Ogorchukwu Iyamah, a social wellness designer, states: “It is important that we do not betray ourselves to honor someone else’s feelings. This means clearly stating what happened, explaining how it was harmful and sharing how we would like the behavior to change.” She suggests: “Calling out: publicly pointing out the person’s harmful behavior,” and “calling in: scheduling a one-on-one with the person to discuss their behavior.”

She also suggests “removing yourself from the conversation to preserve your energy and peace of mind, writing down exactly what happened so that you can refer back to it if you find yourself questioning your truth, or sending the person educational resources and establishing boundaries around the person who racially gaslighted you to limit your interactions with them.”

Josh MacNab, counselling therapist at Black Minds Matter and Roots Counselling, urges people to safeguard their mental health by applying important cognitive actions such as “recognizing when gaslighting is happening to you — gaslighting works more effectively when you aren’t aware of it so recognizing that you are not the problem is key.” He argues that “acknowledging your feelings are valid, understanding that the only control you have is over your behavior and reaction, recognizing your strengths, courage, reactions and triggers” empowers us to negotiate difficult relationships. “It may mean thinking hard on your social circle, gaslighting is about the perpetrator. It is their sense of ego, narcissism and control that the victim is on the receiving end of.”

Lastly, it’s important to acknowledge the privilege and responsibility that comes with not being a person of color. Removing the responsibility of constantly calling out moments of racism or acts of injustice from people of color is crucial. If, as a white person, you can read this material and find examples within yourself or your organization of racial gaslighting, then take some time for reflection, education and restructuring. As in an abusive relationship, it is not the victim’s responsibility to change their abuser or withstand the abuse.



Local resources for caregivers:

[Multicultural Support and Advocacy](#)

[Free Citizenship Clinic](#)

[Leadership for Racial Equity](#)

Crime, Victims Support and Advocacy

[Fair Housing Center of Washington](#)

Videos:

[What is Racial Gaslighting](#)

[How to deal with gaslighting](#)

[7 Methods of Killing Racial Gaslighting](#)

Thank you for the amazing work you do every day. The DEI committee is excited to share with you the events we have planned for 2022. The events wouldn't be possible without the hard work, commitment

and empathetic leadership you provide to our teams here at Providence Swedish. If there is anything we can do to aid in your DEI journey, please don't hesitate to reach out.

Best regards,

Kaila, Brooke and Jess