2023

The Lived Experiences of Entry-level Employees with Posttraumatic Growth Following Workplace Gaslighting

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This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

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has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2023

Abstract

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Following Workplace Gaslighting

by

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MS, University of Phoenix, 2012

BS, Universidad Interamericana de Puerto Rico, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Psychology

Walden University

November 2023

Abstract

Although researchers have studied workplace gaslighting (a devious and manipulative tactic used by abusers) in recent years, little is known about it. The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting. The conceptual frameworks for this study were the resilience and posttraumatic growth (PTG) concepts. The sample consisted of currently employed participants ages 20 - 45 with two or more years of college experience who, during their first year in an entry-level position, experienced gaslighting. Semi-structured interviews were conducted via Zoom and data was analyzed and coded manually. The analysis revealed themes associated with the experiences of the participants with gaslighting and PTG: a) Stories about workplace gaslighting, b) Understanding of the phenomenon, c) Toxic workplace environment, d) Who the gaslighters were and when did the abuse start, e) Gaslighting tactics, f) Possible reasons for the abuse, g) Effect of gaslighting in participants' lives, h) Reporting the abuse, i) Coping with the abuse, j) Effect of gaslighting in job performance, k) Stories about starting new at a different job, l) Positive changes as a result of the gaslighting experience, m) Role of resilience in participants' ability to develop PTG, n) Resilience based on previous gaslighting experiences, o) Role of mental health professionals in healing process, p) Stories of resilient moments, q) In hindsight, and r) Using lived experiences to help other victims. The findings of this study can benefit both entry-level and experienced employees facing workplace gaslighting. Additionally, raising awareness about gaslighting can lead positive social change through a healthier, more enjoyable, and productive workplace for everyone involved.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to the resilient survivors of the gaslighting
phenomenon. In solidarity with your pain and profound struggles in the aftermath of
abuse, I extend this deepest dedication. As a fellow member of the survivors' community,
I personally understand the depths of your experiences and the continuing impact they
can have. It is my fervent desire to assure you that, amidst the darkness, there exists a
bright light at the end of this traumatic tunnel. Let it be known that your light is
irreplaceable, and no one should ever attempt to extinguish it. Together, we stand united
in reclaiming our power, healing our wounds, and transcending the suffering inflicted
upon us. To my study participants, I want to tell you that your resilience and strength
inspire me, driving my firm commitment to supporting you on this transformative
journey. May this dedication serve as an encouragement of hope, a reminder that healing
and growth are possible. Embrace the knowledge that your experiences have gifted you
with a unique empathy and understanding, allowing you to provide support and guidance
to others who may be trapped in the throes of gaslighting. Let us band together, shining
our lights and empowering one another to reclaim our identities and to live our lives
liberated from the shadows of manipulation. To the survivors, please never doubt the
brilliance of your light, since it has the power to illuminate even the darkest corners of
your existence. With unwavering solidarity, we shall rise above and forge a path of
healing, strength, and resilience not only for us, but also for those we love the most.

Acknowledgement

I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt appreciation to all individuals who, in various capacities, contributed to the successful completion of this dissertation. First and foremost, I express my gratitude to God for being my guiding force and providing me with the strength and wisdom necessary to overcome the challenges encountered during my doctoral studies. Moreover, I am thankful for the insights gained from my personal experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon, which have equipped me to assist others in similar circumstances.

I am also deeply thankful to my children, Melody, Mileydy, John, and my niece Carolane, whose unwavering support and unconditional love have been a constant source of inspiration throughout this journey. Additionally, I am profoundly grateful to my husband, whose selfless and unconditional support enabled me to embark on a journey of self-discovery, reaffirming the notion that, even in the face of adversity, there is always a glimmer of hope.

Furthermore, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to my parents, whose sacrifices and imparted values have played an instrumental role in shaping the person I am today. Their encouragement to venture beyond my comfort zone and maintain firm self-belief has been crucial in charting my life's trajectory. Without their unflagging support and dedication, I would not have reached this significant milestone.

Lastly, I extend my deepest gratitude to my amazing dissertation committee members, Dr. Jay Greiner and Dr. Michelle McCartney. Their constant support, invaluable guidance, and belief in my capabilities have been instrumental in navigating

this arduous academic journey. Their steadfast commitment, without any doubt, ensured my dissertation's success.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

There is no doubt that our nation is currently experiencing a mental health crisis (Rethy & Chawla, 2022). Even when researchers have studied this topic before, past empirical studies have mainly focused on commonly known workplace emotional abuses such as bullying and mobbing (Arslantas et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Tsuno & Tabuchi, 2021; Vaclavikova & Kozakova, 2021). However, little research has been done on gaslighting as a form of emotional abuse. This hermeneutic phenomenological study sought to explore gaslighting in the workplace and the devastating psychological effect that this type of emotional abuse in the workplace has on entry-level employees.

According to Peoples (2021), phenomenology studies are mainly used to better understand the lived experiences of individuals within a specific phenomenon. Peoples (2021) stated that, when it comes to conducting a phenomenological study, researchers, in most cases, choose from two main philosophies when looking to develop their studies. These philosophies are known as Husserl's transcendental phenomenology and Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology.

Husserl's transcendental phenomenology theoretical framework was derived from Edmund Husserl's (1859-1938) philosophy that phenomenology was presuppositional. Husserl believed that researchers needed to suppress their biases so that they could protect the integrity of the process, while at the same time, avoiding any assumptions or

taking anything for granted when trying to explore or understand a phenomenon (Peoples, 2021).

On the other hand, Heidegger's hermeneutic phenomenology theoretical framework was derived from Martin Heidegger's philosophy (Peoples, 2021). Heidegger believed that biases in research cannot be set aside and that researchers, instead of suppressing their biases related to the phenomenon at hand, need to acknowledge and recognize them so they can later revise them as they discover new information related to the topic (Peoples, 2021).

In conducting this hermeneutic phenomenological study, I sought to interview entry-level employees who, at some point during their first job experience, faced workplace gaslighting. This study aimed to better understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees with posttraumatic growth (PTG) following workplace gaslighting. According to Kivak (2020), gaslighting is defined as a devious and manipulative tactic used by abusers (In this case, the gaslighter) to instill control upon his or her victims by making them question their sanity and perception of reality. For gaslighting, empirical studies have mainly focused on studying gaslighting as it relates to politics and romantic relationship environments (Beerbohm & Davis, 2021; Gabbard, 2017; Knapp, 2019; Korobov, 2020; Porter & Standing, 2020; Vankovska, 2020). However, as mentioned earlier, little is known about gaslighting in the workplace, specifically, about the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting. Moreover, research seems to be lacking in the sense of how employees who have experienced gaslighting in the

workplace were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG.

Chapter 1 provides the background of the study, the problem statement, the purpose of the study, two research questions, and an overview of the conceptual framework for this study. Chapter 1 also highlights the nature of the study, operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, the significance of the study, and a summary.

Background of the Study

Individuals can experience trauma at any stage of their lives. Traumatic events have a beginning and an end (van der Kolk, 2014), which, in a way, can serve as a safety net when dealing with such trauma. The reason is that, as frightening as the event may seem at the moment, it will eventually end. But the same thing cannot be said about emotional abuse which may not have a clear beginning and ending. It requires a different approach for its victims to be able to not only deal with the experience at the moment it is happening but also after the abuse has ended. Researchers have shown that compared to some of the most devastating traumatic events/abuses a person could endure in his or her life, emotional abuse is considered one of the most damaging (Dye, 2020).

This study examined the lived experiences of entry-level employees who faced gaslighting in the workplace and how they were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. The two main points associated with the gap in the literature were gaslighting and PTG.

Gaslighting

Gaslighting is a devious and manipulative tactic used by abusers (In this case, the gaslighter) to instill control upon their victims by making them question their sanity and perception of reality (Kivak, 2020). Some of the tactics used by gaslighters to control their victims include lying to them, omitting important information and then using that against the victims as a form of emotional blackmail, confusing the victims to make them doubt themselves, and or by telling the victim they are imagining things and or being too sensitive to try to destabilize their sense of reality (Graves & Samp, 2021; Kivak, 2020). This type of emotional abuse can happen in any environment—friendships, family relationships, educational settings, romantic relationships, and the workplace (Sarkis, 2018).

The term gaslighting was born in the 1930s, and in 1938, Patrick Hamilton first showed it in a stage play called Gas Light, which was later developed into two films in the 1940s (Graves & Samp, 2021). One of those films was *Gaslight*, which was filmed in 1944 (Cukor, 1944). The film, directed by George Cukor and starring Ingrid Bergman (As Paula Anton) and Charles Boyer (As Gregory Anton), portrayed a married couple. In this movie, the husband used a series of emotionally manipulative techniques to make his wife think she was crazy so that he could cover the true reasons for their marriage, which was to be able to steal some gems that belonged to the wife's late mother, who he had killed prior to marrying his wife. At times, the husband would hide things from his wife to later accuse her of hiding them herself (Sarkis, 2018).

On other occasions, he would do things around her to later question her recollections of the events to make her doubt herself. However, the term gaslight comes from the husband going into the attic to look for such gems without his wife's knowledge, an event that dimmed the lights of the room where his wife was. When the wife would point out the dimmed lights to the husband, he would suggest to her that she had imagined it, which is why the movie was called Gaslight (Sarkis, 2018).

Gaslighting is a relatively new term, and not many people have heard of it. However, many recent studies have explored the phenomenon for a better understanding (Grant, 2021; Graves & Samp, 2021; Johnson et al., 2021; Miano et al., 2021). Even though gaslighting has been studied by some researchers (Chauhan et al., 2022; Fraser, 2021; Riggs & Bartholomaeus, 2018; Sarkis, 2018), empirical studies have mainly focused on gaslighting as it relates to politics and romantic relationship environments (Beerbohm & Davis, 2021; Gabbard, 2017; Knapp, 2019; Korobov, 2020; Porter & Standing, 2020; Vankovska, 2020); however, little research has explored gaslighting in the workplace, let alone the lived experiences of people who have suffered from this type of abuse, and how they were able to use that experience as a catalyst for PTG.

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)

According to Henson et al. (2021), in most cases, people who have experienced traumatic events usually develop posttraumatic stress. On the contrary, some people who have experienced traumatic events, use those experiences as catalysts for positive

psychological changes (Bryngeirsdottir & Halldorsdottir, 2022; Kutza & Cornell, 2021; London et al., 2020), which Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) defined as PTG.

Mattson et al. (2018) defined PTG as the positive change that an individual develops after experiencing a traumatic event. In most cases, people who experience this type of psychological change after a trauma, develop a series of positive changes within their lives that could indicate that the trauma, instead of causing a negative outcome in the person's well-being, did, in fact, create the oppositive (Schaefer et al., 2018; Slade, et al., 2019; Wilson, 2021). According to the literature, some of the positive changes that a person who has experienced PTG tends to develop include boosted appreciation for life, a superior sense of personal power, enhanced appreciation for personal relationships, an increased self-esteem, and positive coping skills (Landi et al., 2022). Other changes include a change in victims' underlying belief systems and increased self-acceptance and self-efficacy (Huhne et al., 2021; Mattson et al., 2018; Schaefer et al., 2018; Sheridan & Carr, 2020).

A review of the literature has shown that, even when some people have the tendency to develop PTG after being exposed to trauma, others do not have that same capability, and instead of experiencing growth, they end up experiencing posttraumatic stress symptoms instead (Elliot et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2017; Rosic et al., 2021). Mattson et al. (2018) stated that there could be a correlation between people's capabilities to cope with trauma and their ability to develop PTG. On the other hand, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), the developers of the PTG theory, have suggested that in order for a

person to develop PTG, the impact of the traumatic event must have caused a huge disruption in the person's life, in their emotional/mental health, and even challenged their core beliefs in order for growth to take place.

In an effort to cover the gap in the literature related to workplace gaslighting and its possible link to PTG, I decided to do this hermeneutic phenomenological study. As part of this study, I interviewed participants who, during their first year as an entry-level employee, faced gaslighting to try to better understand their lived experiences with PTG following the traumatic experience.

The results of this qualitative study should aid organizational leaders and workers in general to identify red flags associated with the gaslighting phenomenon in the workplace to help create a safer environment in which every worker is given a fair chance to succeed in their assigned roles. Workplace violence, as portrayed by the #metoo movement, is a major problem in today's workforce (Gupta et al., 2019; Issitt, 2021; Jones & Wade, 2019; Midlemiss, 2021; Moody et al., 2021; Payne, 2022; Zawada, 2018), therefore, creating awareness of the role of the gaslighting phenomenon should help create a safer, healthier, enjoyable, and more productive work environment for all the parties involved.

Furthermore, the findings of this study should allow individuals currently involved in a toxic workplace environment to better identify the signs and traits of emotional abuse. The findings should also assist affected individuals in deciding whether to use those signs as a motivator to leave the abusive environment before their emotional,

mental, and physical health becomes compromised, or to take actions to stop the abuse and hold the abuser(s) accountable for their actions.

Problem Statement

The situation or issue that prompted me to search the literature was the mental health crisis that is currently covering our nation (Darcy & Mariano, 2021; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2021). Researchers have shown that one in every five U.S. adults (52.9 million in 2020) is currently living with a mental illness (National Institute of Mental Health, n.d.). Many studies on the current state of the mental health care system in the United States have not only provided valuable information that contributes immensely to the literature but have also offered evidence-based approaches in which professionals in the field of psychology can help manage the situation (Brown & Jones, 2021; Chang, Syed, et al., 2021; Hogan & Goldman, 2021; Shapiro et al., 2020).

In a study by Chang, Syed, et al. (2021), the authors gave an in-depth explanation of the current stage of the mental health care system in the United States and if people in need of these services were actually receiving the care they needed. In their article, the authors also provided possible solutions and examples of new models of care that could be beneficial for those who need them. Some of these solutions include the importance of training front desk staff at mental health facilities on cultural sensitivity, the delivery of mental health care by properly trained community mental health workers, and the importance of recruiting students from marginalized and excluded backgrounds as a way

of creating a more diverse medical workforce. Implementing these models could help repair the state of our mental health care system (Chang, Syed, et al., 2021).

In a different study by Genis et al. (2020), the authors investigated the effect that shift work had on the quality of life of healthcare personnel, more specifically, in their sleep quality and mental health status. The study also aimed to define the professionals at higher risk of developing common mental illnesses such as depression and anxiety disorders due to their occupational differences (Genis et al., 2020). The study findings concluded that doctors and nurses working in shift schedules were more prone to develop mental illnesses (Genis et al., 2020).

This study filled the gap currently present in the literature by exploring the link between gaslighting in the workplace and PTG. More specifically, this study explored how workplace gaslighting, faced by entry-level employees, could have a negative impact not only to their mental health but also on the way they perform their assigned tasks in current and future jobs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to better understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting and to explore how they were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. Entry-level employees face many challenges during their time as newly hired employees, and according to the literature, mistreatment from colleagues and those in powerful positions tend to be one of the most devastating encounters they will experience

(Ahmad et al., 2021; Dos Santos, 2022; Escartin et al., 2011; Hickox & Kaminski, 2021; Liang, 2020; Lovell & Lee, 2011; Menendez & Whitaker, 2012; Razali et al., 2020; Tsuno & Tabuchi, 2021). To examine this problem and to explore, more in-depth, the phenomenon of gaslighting in the workplace, I interviewed employed participants ages 20 - 45 years old who, during their first year in an entry-level position, experienced gaslighting in the workplace. The aim of this interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was to provide a detailed examination of their lived experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon while focusing on exploring how these entry-level employees were able to move past the traumatic gaslighting experience and continue developing their professional persona to the point of achieving PTG.

Research Questions

The two key research questions (RQs) I created to guide the study are as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting?

Research Question 2: What role does resilience play in entry-level employees developing PTG?

Conceptual Framework

The two phenomena the above RQs aimed to explore were gaslighting in the workplace and PTG. To assess these two phenomena, I used resilience and PTG as the conceptual framework for my study. It was my hope that these two concepts could aid me

in finding the data I needed to answer the RQs for this study: RQ 1 (PTG) and RQ 2 (Resilience and PTG).

The conceptual framework that I used for this hermeneutic phenomenological study to help me better understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting and PTG was a combination of the resilience and the PTG concepts.

According to McAslan (2010), the term resilience was presented in the early 17th century from the Latin verb *resilire*, which means to rebound or recoil. McAslan stated that there is no physical confirmation nor evidence of the concept of resilience being used in any academic work until it was introduced by Thomas Tredgold (1788-1829), an English engineer and writer (Britannica, 2022), who used the term in his 1818 article *On the Transverse Strength of Timber.* Tredgold (1818) used the term resilience to explain the possible reason why some types of wood had the flexibility of accommodating multiple loads without breaking. Van Breda (2018) defined resilience using the three components of the resilience process—adversity, mediating processes, and outcomes. The concept of resilience has been used for many years as a conceptual framework in studies trying to analyze, understand, prevent, and more importantly, treat mental health problems (Cenat et al., 2018; Jo, 2020; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Miller-Graff, 2022).

One of those studies is the one conducted by Wermelinger et al. (2022) in which the authors aimed to investigate if individuals with active lives have different levels of mental health and resilience compared to individuals with less-active lives. For this 4-year longitudinal study, the authors studied 180 individuals ages 60 and older who were

regularly enrolled in the FaMIdade Program at the Instituto Metodista Granbery in Juiz de Fora, a program "offered to the community in an effort to promote education and health through a series of activities and social interactions, such as information technology, pilates, hydrotherapy, literature classes, dance, strength training, functional gymnastics, culture, art discussions, and well-being lectures" (Wermelinger et al., 2022). The researchers concluded that regularly active individuals were found to show a favorable resilience level than those individuals with less active lives. The findings also showed that, in both groups, resilience was highly associated with mental health challenges (Wermelinger et al., 2022).

When it comes to PTG, this concept grew out of extensive studies conducted in the mid-1990s by researchers interested in examining the positive mental and emotional impact of trauma (Almedom, 2005; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), PTG arises in the framework of suffering and significant psychological struggles as a result of traumatic events, calamity, and extremely stressful experiences. Researchers have shown that some people who were exposed to a traumatic event only experienced posttraumatic stress, which could indicate that the experience is not what defines the PTG (Mattson et al., 2018). It is actually the way people cope with the experience that may indicate which type of response the person will have (Either PTG or posttraumatic stress, or maybe even a combination of both) (Mattson et al., 2018). According to some studies based on PTG theory (Cheng & Liu, 2022; Hoskins & Morash, 2021; Shuwiekh et al., 2018), experiencing PTG has proven to be life-changing,

and the hardship encountered could be seen as an empowering effect rather than a debilitating one.

Based on the information provided, both concepts (Resilience and PTG) seem to play a vital role in developing positive psychological changes in victims of trauma (Cheng & Liu, 2022; Hoskins & Morash, 2021; Shuwiekh et al., 2018). Using these concepts as part of the conceptual framework for my study allowed me to interview participants who were victims of gaslighting in the workplace to give me new insights into the role these two concepts play in the development of positive changes following workplace emotional abuse. As mentioned earlier, it was my hope that these two concepts would help me in examining the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting in the workplace and the role that the resilience phenomenon played in aiding these individuals in developing PTG as a result of their traumatic experience. Additional definitions and explanations of these two concepts are covered in greater detail in Chapter 2.

Finally, the RQs I used as part of this study were developed using the concepts of resilience and PTG as a focus. More specifically, RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting? covered the PTG concept, while RQ 2: What role does resilience play in entry-level employees developing PTG? covered both concepts, resilience, and PTG.

Nature of the Study

To address the RQs related to this qualitative study, I used the hermeneutic phenomenological design. A hermeneutic phenomenological design was appropriate for this study since it helped me explore the phenomenon of gaslighting in the workplace by using the participants' lived experiences in their personal, everyday context (Gadamer, 1997; Heidegger, 1962). More specifically, it assisted me in finding relevant insights on the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting to have a better understanding of how they were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG.

According to Patton (2014), phenomenology as a philosophical tradition was first introduced as a social science concept by the German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl (1913-1954), who used it to gain a better understanding of how people would describe their lived experiences.

According to Patton (2014), when using a phenomenological research design, the researcher should be methodological, careful, and thoughtful to capture and describe if the participants, in fact, did experience the phenomenon being studied. This aspect includes how the participants perceived, described, felt, judged, remembered, and talked about their experiences with others. In other words, a phenomenology study can help researchers study people's lived experiences and examine how those experiences relate to a certain phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2019). Using this research design helped me in gathering the data I needed to fully examine the experiences that the study participants

faced rather than the information they learned about the phenomenon at hand based on other people's lived experiences (Patton, 2014).

Various phenomenological studies have been conducted in recent years related to the field of psychology on improving matters related to mental health (Forsmo & Holmesland, 2021; Heck et al., 2022; Jensen et al., 2020; Kuipers et al., 2018; Perez-Corrales et al., 2019). In their study, Perez-Corrales et al. (2019) examined the lived experiences of people with severe mental health disorders who used some of their time to volunteer in different settings. Perez-Corrales and colleagues examined 23 participants with a severe mental disorder. The data for this study was collected using in-depth interviews and field notes (Perez-Corrales et al., 2019).

The findings of this study concluded that, based on the opportunity that the participants had to volunteer in causes close to their hearts and their ability to perform new roles, they managed to rebuild their self-identities and feel valued and respected (Perez-Corrales et al., 2019). The participants' ability to perform volunteer work, which came with responsibilities and normal job demands, helped them feel like a normal person doing normal people's things (Perez-Corrales et al., 2019).

In another study using a phenomenological approach, Forsmo and Holmesland (2021) examined the role of psychomotor physiotherapy in managing eating disorders. The study further explored the use of touch treatments on eating disorders. As part of the study, the authors interviewed five psychomotor physiotherapists treating patients dealing with eating disorders. The study found that psychomotor physiotherapy was well-

received since it allowed the patients to feel comfort and security within their own bodies (Forsmo & Holmesland, 2021).

That being said, my study used semi-structured interviews of entry-level employees who had faced gaslighting in the workplace. Interviews were conducted via Zoom. Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews (See Appendix G), participants were able to tell their stories in their own way, adding richness (When needed), and clarifying their responses (As necessary) (Kratt & Houdyshell, 2020).

The participants were recruited using Walden's research participant pool as well as volunteers from the website Researchandme.com, a web-based platform that allows researchers to connect, screen, and recruit willing participants from across the United States (Research and Me, 2022). As part of my recruitment, twelve participants (Two males and ten females) between the ages of 20 and 45, with at least two years of college experience and who were employed at the time of the study, who have had experienced gaslighting in the workplace sometime during their employment on an entry-level position, and who had developed growth as a result of the experience were invited to participate (See Appendix E).

The interviews were recorded and later transcribed with the help of Zoom recording and transcribing services. I coded the collected information manually. Moreover, after completion of the study, all the data collected during the study was kept (And is still being kept as of the date of this write-out) in a locked safe in my house. This data will be kept in that safe for five years. All the data is available for audit purposes if

needed, and upon expiration of the five years, all the data will be destroyed. Due to the sensitivity of the study (Workplace trauma experienced by entry-level employees), I needed to obtain Walden University's IRB approval before starting the recruitment process to ensure that the recruitment process would meet all the rules, regulations, and policies, as well as ethical procedures so that no harm could be caused to the study participants (Walden University Office of Research and Doctoral Services, 2021).

Definitions

The definitions of the key terms that were used throughout the study are provided below:

Active abuse: A mode of abuse that abusers use with the purpose of intentionally harming, hurting, and even traumatizing another person (Wienclaw, 2021).

Bullying: The act of verbally and/or physically abusing someone in a vulnerable position. It usually occurs among school-age children. However, this type of emotional abuse can also occur in other environments, such as family settings, friend groups, and in the workplace (American Psychological Association, 2022a).

Capabilities: A set of competencies that humans are born with, which make them who they are. These capabilities play a big role in defining not only who they are but also what they can achieve (American Psychological Association, 2022b).

Emotional abuse: A damaging behavior in which someone, with the purpose of intentionally hurting another person, engages in nonphysical violence/aggression toward

his/her victim to the point of compromising the victim's mental state and well-being (American Psychological Association, 2022c).

Gaslighting: Gaslighting is defined as a devious and manipulative tactic used by abusers (In this case, the gaslighter) to instill control upon his or her victims by making them question their own sanity and perception of reality (Kivak, 2020).

Manipulation: A destructive and damaging behavior in which a person uses influencing tactics to gain control over a person's life and/or to make this person do things they normally would not do (American Psychological Association, 2022d).

Mobbing: A violent act in which a group of people gang up against another person(s) with the purpose of mentally and/or physically abusing them (American Psychological Association, 2022e).

Passive abuse: A mode of abuse that perpetrators use with the purpose of intentionally harming his or her victims. However, with passive abuse, abusers tend to use less obvious or aggressive tactics that often go unnoticed by others, even the victims (Andersson, 2013).

Posttraumatic growth (PTG): Positive change that an individual experiences after experiencing a traumatic event (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD): A disorder that is based on a set of symptoms that a trauma survivor could develop as the result of the traumatic experience (American Psychological Association, 2022f).

Protective factors: Characteristics and/or factors that play a role in an individual's ability to successfully deal with adversity. These factors help reduce or mitigate the effects of the experienced trauma in an individual (American Psychological Association, 2022g).

Resilience: A psychological process in which people tend to bounce back from adversity without allowing the experience to have a negative effect on their lives (American Psychological Association, 2022h).

Assumptions, Scope and Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions

Although the assumptions of this study were relatively simple, they needed to be taken into consideration to ensure the successful completion of the research. Some of the assumptions included relying on the participants' responses to the demographic questions (See Appendix C). It was assumed that for the study to take its planned course, participants would answer the demographic questions as trustfully as possible since their responses would have a major impact on the results of the study.

Another assumption was that participants would understand that their participation in the study was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study whenever they wanted (If applicable). It was assumed that, by informing the participants that their participation in the study was completely optional, they would be more willing to participate in it.

Another assumption was that the selected participants needed to have experienced gaslighting in their place of work as entry-level employees and that they experienced some type of personal and/or professional growth as a result of that experience. It was also assumed that I would be able to recruit an acceptable sample size that could provide the necessary information to examine their lived experiences with workplace gaslighting and PTG since having enough participants would allow me to get the data I needed to be able to answer the two key RQs I had developed for this study (Patton, 2014).

It was also assumed that participants would not have any issues providing informed consent and that their participation in the study would provide an accurate description of their own experiences and not of other people's experiences.

Finally, it was assumed that participants would not have any adverse reactions to the IQs, allowing me to conduct the study to the best of my abilities without putting the participants' well-being in jeopardy, or having to stop the interview(s) if participants did experience any adverse impact during their interviews based on the questions they were asked.

Scope and Delimitations

As part of this study, I interviewed participants who had experienced gaslighting in the workplace as entry-level employees. Since the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting, and how they were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG, the best strategy to use was purposeful sampling. According to Patton (2014),

purposeful sampling is a recruiting strategy used by researchers seeking to study participants who, based on their lived experiences, can provide insightful and illuminative information on the phenomenon of interest. Participants were recruited using Walden University's research participant pool as well as the Research and Me website. From the volunteers, twelve fully qualified participants were selected for the study.

The inclusion criteria for this study stated that the participants should be between the ages of 20 and 45 with at least two years of college experience, and who were employed at the time of the study. These participants should have had some experience with workplace gaslighting sometime during their employment in an entry-level position. The experience must have happened in the last three years. The exclusion criteria for this study included participants who were unwilling or unable to provide informed consent, unable to understand or speak English, participants who had not worked since the gaslighting experience, and those participants who were unable to participate in the interviews via Zoom.

Delimitations of this study were that participants must have had experienced gaslighting in the workplace as entry-level employees and developed some type of personal and/or professional growth as a result of that traumatic event. The participants were required to be willing and able to complete the informed consent form, the demographic questionnaire, and answer the study IQs trustfully and to the best of their abilities. On the potential transferability of this study, the matter in which this study was conducted and the way the data was collected, analyzed/coded, and reported should allow

readers to use, apply, and transfer the findings into human relations in workplace environments as well as other professional settings (Howson, 2021).

Limitations

A limitation of this study was having access to participants who had experienced workplace gaslighting as entry-level employees, and that would be okay sharing the story about their traumatic experience with me. Another limitation was that, due to the inclusion criteria, this study was only available for participants who, at the time of the study, were employed. To address these limitations, and with the approval of Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I did my best to enhance my recruiting efforts by posting the flyer I created for the study in different locations where I knew possible participants could gather. Some of those places included my local Chamber of Commerce, local libraries, and local city hall. I also doubled my recruitment efforts by using the snowball sampling to help find possible participants who were willing and able to take part in the study. Another limitation I faced in this study was ensuring that the confidentiality of the participants was always protected. For this study, I used Zoom to conduct the interviews with the participants. Using Zoom to meet with participants allowed me and the participants to meet remotely. However, as with any online tool, Zoom has its advantages and disadvantages, and one of those disadvantages was the confidentiality issue. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Zoom became a very popular tool for meetings, since it allowed workplaces, schools, universities, and even churches to meet remotely. However, one issue put the confidentiality of some of these meetings in

jeopardy, and that was a phenomenon called zoombombing (Ling et al., 2021). According to Secara (2020), zoombombing is known as the devious practice used by hackers and prankers to get themselves inside Zoom meetings without being invited or authorized with the purpose of disrupting such meetings.

To ensure the participants' confidentiality and to avoid zoomboombing to threaten the integrity of the study, I activated passwords for all the interviews, with such passwords sent via email to each participant separately as part of the formal interview invitation process (See Appendix E). Furthermore, as part of the Zoom interviews, I also activated the waiting room feature for all the interviews to make sure only authorized guests were vetted and authorized prior to reaching the meeting room. Since all the interviews were recorded and used during the transcribing process, to protect the identity of the participants, the video feature for the participants was disabled to prevent their faces from being part of the recording, and names for each participant were changed to reflect their participant's identifier (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) instead of their real names. Once the audio recordings were extracted from the Zoom system, they were saved to a flash drive, and once the interviews had been transcribed, the flash drive was placed in a locked safe I had procured with the purpose of keeping all the materials for this study safe and protected.

Another limitation I faced during my study was the ability to recruit the participants I had intended to recruit who were between the ages of 20 to 30 and who, during their first entry-level position, faced workplace gaslighting. Even when I had a

considerable number of participants ages 20 - 30 applying to take part in my study during the first round of interviews, some of them did not meet all the requirements I had developed as part of the inclusion criteria. Some of the not qualified participants were either not employed or had not completed at least two years of college. To my surprise, the majority of the volunteers who contacted me interested in participating in my study were above age 30; however, since one of the requirements for participating in my study was that participants were between the ages of 20 and 30, these older participants were not able to participate in the study during the first round of interviews, which in a way, limited the number of participants I was able to use for those first interviews. Based on that recruitment challenge I faced at the beginning of my study, I decided to request approval from Walden University's IRB to change the age group of my sample from 20 - 30 to 20 - 45. After receiving approval from the IRB, I went ahead and advertised the study again, and thanks to that change, I was able to recruit and interview six more fully qualified candidates, bringing the total count of the study participants from six to twelve.

Finally, another challenge during the study was trying to keep my biases in check and to not allow my personal experiences related to gaslighting in the workplace to influence the data collection, its interpretation, and the findings of the study. As someone who has experienced gaslighting in the workplace, I realized I might have conscious and unconscious biases. To address this limitation, I used different methods such as reflective journaling, bracketing, and epoché as bias reduction tools. It was my belief that using one or more of these bias reduction tools would give me the opportunity to allow my study to

take its own course without letting my biases or previous gaslighting experience to influence the study in any way. I will expand more on these bias reduction tools as they apply to my study in Chapter 3.

Significance of the Study and Implications for Social Change

This study helped in filling the gap in the literature by exploring the lived experiences of entry-level employees who were victims of gaslighting in the workplace and were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. The results of this hermeneutic phenomenological study should aid entry-level employees, as well as other seasoned workers who have or are currently experiencing gaslighting in their place of work, in using other people's lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon as a roadmap for their own healing process. Workplace violence is currently a major problem in today's workforce, as recently portrayed by the #metoo movement (Issitt, 2021; Jones & Wade, 2019), and bringing awareness to the role that the gaslighting phenomenon plays in it and some of the ways in which employees can manage the experience should help contribute toward a more productive and enjoyable workplace environment for all the parties involved.

Summary and Transition

In this chapter, I introduced my study, including the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study, as well as the conceptual framework I used as part of the study. Furthermore, in this chapter, I also included an overview of the concepts I used as the base for the study. These concepts included emotional abuse and how a barely

studied form of psychological abuse (Gaslighting) could be related to the mental health crisis currently prevalent in the United States. This chapter further discussed the link I found between gaslighting in the workplace and PTG. The chapter also covered the importance for professionals in the field of psychology to conduct more research on this subject. In this chapter, I also covered the two RQs that drove the study as well as the nature of the study, the operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations of the study, as well as the significance and implications for social change.

In Chapter 2, I will provide the in-depth literature review I conducted prior to my study, which includes a brief introduction about the literature I examined, the literature search strategy, the conceptual framework I used for the study, and the literature review related to the key concepts. Chapter 2 also explores past empirical studies related to emotional abuse, gaslighting in the workplace, and PTG.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Although the concept of gaslighting is considered a relatively new topic in contemporary society, it has mainly been covered as a devious and manipulative practice in politics and romantic relationships, but not so much when it comes to the workplace (Sarkis, 2018). Gaslighting is a form of emotional abuse and manipulation in which the gaslighter (The abuser) uses deceitful measures to instill emotional control on the gaslightee (The victim) with the purpose of slowly debilitating them mentally, emotionally, and even physically (Kivak, 2020). With this behavior, the abusers make the victims doubt themselves by creating a sense of mental instability around the victims (Miano et al., 2021).

Research has shown that gaslighting techniques have devastating effects on its victims (Drinkwater et al., 2019). As inevitable as it is in most cases, exposure to traumatic events such as gaslighting could lead to mental illnesses such as chronic anxiety disorder, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and prolonged grief disorder (PGD) (Kokou-Kpolou et al., 2020). Research has shown that there is a correlation between gaslighting behavior and power (Miano et al., 2021). People with low and high levels of power in a relationship tend to use gaslighting as a weapon more than those with moderate power (Graves & Samp, 2021).

In comparison with some of the most devastating traumatic abuses that people could endure in their lives, emotional abuse such as gaslighting, which is usually seen in

interpersonal relationships such as family life and romantic relationships, has been considered by many experts in the mental health field as one of the most damaging forms of abuse since it leads to long-lasting emotional and physical consequences (Dye, 2020).

According to Dye (2020), when facing traumatic events, as well as emotional abuse, some people develop mental illnesses as a result of the experience. However, in other cases, people have been able to develop personal and professional growth by using those experiences as a catalyst to facilitate PTG (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004). Although some researchers have investigated and analyzed these issues before, empirical studies have mainly focused on gaslighting as it relates to politics and romantic relationships (Pohlhaus, 2020; Ruiz, 2020; Shane et al., 2022). However, very little research has been done about gaslighting in the workplace, specifically on the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting and how these employees were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG.

This literature review addresses studies related to trauma, emotional abuse, especially gaslighting, and the effects that these factors have in a person's life. The literature review discusses how some people may use resilience as a steppingstone for achieving personal and professional growth after experiencing emotional abuse. The review will uncover why some people who lack strong coping skills and/or strong protective factors end up being affected by the traumatic experience to the point of developing posttraumatic challenges (Gargot et al., 2021; Lenferink et al., 2021; Miro et

al., 2020). This literature review also addresses the conceptual framework for the study, which was based on the concepts of resilience and PTG.

The literature review summarized in Chapter 2 served to establish a better understanding of the two main topics covered during this study—gaslighting and PTG. The information provided in this chapter helped prepare the path for this study by increasing the working knowledge found within the gap in the literature and its prompting for future research on the topics at hand.

Literature Search Strategy

As part of the literature review, the scholarly review was completed using Walden University Library's databases, including Journals@OVID, Business Source Complete, Education Source, Walden University Library Catalog, ERIC, Academic Search Complete, ScienceDirect, Research Starters, Emerald Insight, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, Directory of Open Access Journals, Supplemental Index, Gale in Context, Opposing Viewpoints, ScholarWorks, SocINDEX, Social Science Citation Index, CINAHL Plus, Medline, International Security & Counter Terrorism Reference Center, Gale Academic OneFile Select, APA PsycInfo, and Complementary Index.

In relation to the terms and concepts covered in the literature review, the following terminologies were used as boolean indicators in the search: *Emotional abuse, forms of emotional abuse, emotional manipulation, emotional bullying, gaslighting, portrait of the gaslighter, reasons for gaslighting, portrait of the gaslightee, effects of gaslighting, workplace conflicts, types of workplace conflicts, workplace aggression,*

virtual aggression, face-to-face aggression, mode of workplace aggressions, direct aggressions, passive aggressions, workplace emotional abuse, gaslighting in the workplace, effects of gaslighting in the workplace, coping with gaslighting in the workplace, resilience, and *PTG*. The following strategy was used to gather the relevant sources of information. When looking for articles, peer-reviewed journals published less than five years ago were considered. However, to create a bigger picture of the problem, some studies older than five years old were also included. When reviewing some of these key terms, I had to use additional sources from the articles' reference sections to cover terms that did not appear in the initial search. I read each one of the articles I found, and once additional concepts were uncovered, they were further researched and synthesized in the literature review.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used for this hermeneutic phenomenological study was a combination of the resilience and the PTG concepts.

Concept of Resilience

Resilience depicts the art of recoiling or rebounding, with its origins from the Latin word *resiliens,* which refers to the pliant or elastic quality of a substance (Greene et al., 2002). According to McAslan (2010), there is no physical confirmation nor evidence of the concept of resilience being used in any academic work until it was introduced by Thomas Tredgold (1788-1829), an English engineer and writer (Britannica, 2022), who first used the term in his 1818 article *On the Transverse Strength of Timber.* Tredgold

(1818) used the term resilience to explain the possible reason why some types of wood had the flexibility of accommodating multiple loads without breaking.

Various researchers have defined resilience differently using varying concepts. Ledesma (2014) defined resilience as the ability of a person to easily recover from a traumatic experience without allowing the experience to affect their well-being. A more contemporary definition was created by Van Breda (2018), in which he referred to resilience as a process in which the human system works to prevent traumatic experiences from creating a negative impact in people's lives, instead promoting a positive outcome out of the experience.

Van Breda (2018) defined resilience using the three components of the resilience process—adversity, mediating processes, and outcomes. Resilience has been used for many years as a conceptual framework in studies trying to analyze, understand, prevent, and more importantly, treat mental health problems (Cenat et al., 2018; Jo, 2020; Masten & Tellegen, 2012; Miller-Graff, 2022). Jo (2020) used the resilience theory to explore the lived experiences of immigrant women and the processes in which they achieved positive mental health status after facing marriage and immigrant-related challenges. The findings of this study indicated that there are many factors that could affect the ability of married immigrant women to develop resilience. Some of these factors include their need for recognition, respect and reward, and the level of spousal support they received from their partners (Jo, 2020).

Resilience and its power toward helping victims of adversity to bounce back have been linked to many self-improvement factors such as vulnerability, adaptation, adjustment, recovery, resistance, transformation, and empowerment (Van Breda, 2018). Moreover, resilience has also been linked to some protective factors that either help bring a positive outcome or reduce or avoid a negative outcome (Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Wang, Liu, et al., 2017). Some of those protective factors (Comprising either assets or resources) include self-efficacy, coping skills, competence, hardiness, self-enhancement, proactive personality, positive and nurturing community or school environments, and in the case of children, living in a home with responsive caregiving (Bolton et al., 2017; Fergus & Zimmerman, 2005; Sinclair & Britt, 2013).

Concept of Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)

The PTG concept was developed by psychologists Richard Tedeschi and Lawrence Calhoun in the mid-1990s as a psychological theory to explain the process by which individuals achieve personal or professional growth after experiencing a traumatic event (Clarke, 2021; Collier, 2016). On the other hand, Mattson et al. (2018) defined PTG as the capacity of victims of trauma to develop positive changes within themselves as a result of the trauma. These positive changes could include positive spiritual changes, a major appreciation for personal relationships, and an increased gratitude for being alive. Some people who were exposed to a traumatic event only experienced posttraumatic stress, which could indicate that the experience is not what defines the PTG (Mattson et al., 2018). It is the way people cope with the experience that may indicate which type of

trauma response the person will have (Either PTG or posttraumatic stress, or maybe even a combination of both) (Mattson et al., 2018). According to some studies based on PTG theory (Cheng & Liu, 2022; Hoskins & Morash, 2021; Shuwiekh et al., 2018), experiencing PTG has proven to be life-changing, and the hardship encountered could be seen as an empowering effect rather than a debilitating one.

Over the years, researchers have studied the link between resilience and PTG in the workplace (Steinkopt, et al., 2018; Finstad et al., 2021). Steinkopf et al. (2018) completed a study with the purpose of evaluating the impact that job-related stressors had on emergency dispatchers. As part of their study, they had 90 emergency dispatchers working in a law enforcement agency complete a series of assessment tools. The aim of their study was to examine the level of stress developed by the participants, and to identify the leading contributing factors. The authors also aimed to assess trauma-related disorders in their participants, and to uncover any potential protective factors of stress resiliency and posttraumatic growth, while at the same time, investigating the role that these factors played in the participants' lives. The findings of this study concluded that, when compared to police officers, emergency dispatchers tend to experience sub-threshold PTSD, psychological distress, and occupational stress at a similar or higher rate. More specifically, the study revealed that 24% of the sample reported significant job stress, while 3.34% and 15.56% of the sample reported symptoms of PTSD. Lastly, 16.67% of the sample indicated sub-threshold PTSD symptomatology.

In a different study by Finstad et al. (2021), the authors completed a narrative review to explore the positive features associated with the COVID-19 pandemic by using available scientific evidence to uncover possible health prevention and promotion strategies. In particular, the authors focused on coping strategies, resilience, and PTG. As part of their review, the authors conducted a literature search, from which 46 articles were selected and included as part of the final review. The findings of this review indicated that, even when the COVID-19 pandemic could be characterized as a traumatic event for healthcare and emergency management workers, positive outcomes were also possible and achieved.

Even when different studies have been conducted in relation to the resilience and PTG concepts in the workplace (Finstad et al., 2021; Steinkopf et al., 2018), very little research has been conducted on the relationship between resilience and PTG as it relates to gaslighting; more specifically, workplace gaslighting. Moreover, gaslighting in the workplace has seemed to have taken a backseat to studies aimed at uncovering the relationship between emotional abuse in the workplace and the possibility of workers, more specifically, entry-level employees in developing PTG as a result of the experience (Iwaniec et al., 2006; Malhi et al., 2020), indicating that more research is needed to provide a better picture on these phenomena and the proposed conceptual framework.

Figure 1

Illustration of a Positive Outcome as a Result of a Traumatic Experience (Based on the Conceptual Framework I Used as Part of This Study).
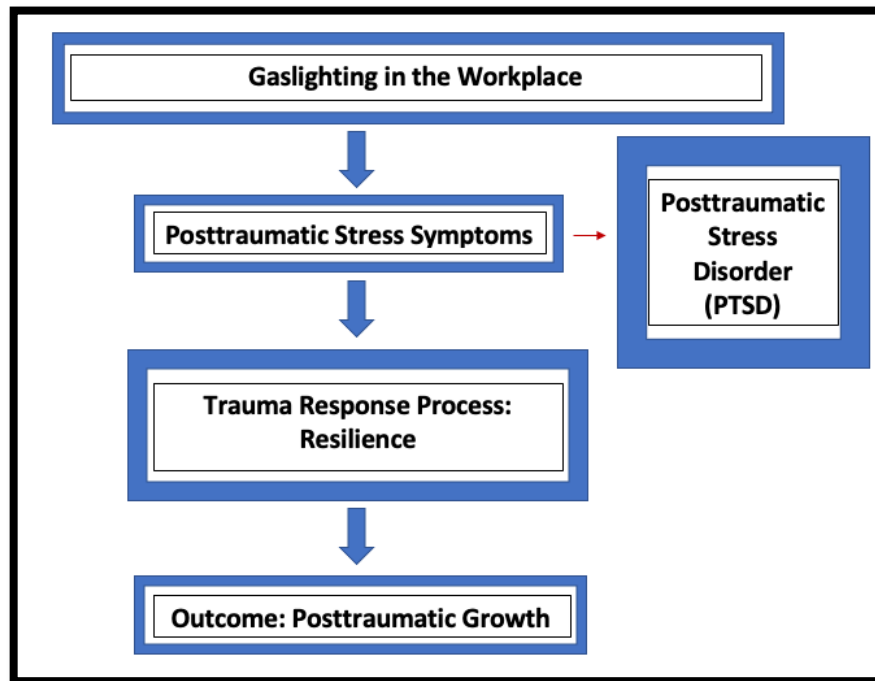
Literature Review

The following review provides the background information and an in-depth review of the current and historical literature concerning emotional abuse, specifically, emotional abuse in the workplace, the many components associated with workplace aggression, and organizational gaslighting. This review examined various resources to identify a gap in the literature.

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse is defined by Stark (2020) is a form of interpersonal violence in which the abuser uses non-physical tactics such as coercion, manipulation, verbal

hostility, intimidation, belittling, and control to dominate and exert power over their victims. Emotional abuse, as any other form of abuse, aggression, and violence, has the power to isolate, damage, and emotionally harm victims to the point of making them develop negative feelings toward themselves and others (Dye, 2020). Mental health issues such as chronic stress and anxiety, extreme emotional responses, moodiness, depression, low self-esteem, as well as suicidal ideation or thoughts have also been associated with emotional abuse (Dye, 2020).

According to Dye (2020), some people tend to misunderstand the seriousness of emotional abuse and completely or partially dismiss its severity and the effects it could have on victims. However, studies have shown that emotional abuse is one of the most damaging forms of abuse since it leads to long-lasting emotional and physical consequences (Dye, 2020; Hoover & Jackson, 2021; Lee et al., 2021).

According to Stark (2020), victims of emotional abuse tend to feel isolated and convinced that they are to blame for what happened to them. Mostly, they do not talk to others about the abuse they are suffering for fear of retaliation from the abuser, or due to the fear of being blamed, judged, made fun of, or accused of something they did not do (Stark, 2020). Some of the tactics that abusers use as part of their emotional abuse modus operandi include humiliation, jealousy, verbal abuse, gaslighting, threats towards pets and other family members, isolation from friends and family, threat of self-harm to make the victim feel sorry for themselves, and shaming (Dye, 2020; Hoover & Jackson, 2021; McClintock et al., 2021). As Dye (2020) expounded, emotional abuse tends to be

misunderstood and not given the importance it deserves when evaluating its damaging effects on a person. Emotional abuse has been considered one of the most damaging types of abuse due to its long-lasting, devastating consequences for adults and children (Hoover & Jackson, 2021).

Childhood Emotional Abuse

According to the literature, children are the most common victims of emotional abuse (Hoeboer et al., 2021). Emotional abuse in children leads to high rates of social detachment, chronic stress, anxiety, depressive behavior, lower levels of self-esteem, poor school performance, internalizing symptoms, drug and alcohol abuse, and suicide (Duprey et al., 2021; Kosson et al., 2021). Fabricio Gama et al. (2021) investigated the impact of childhood maltreatment on the severity of PTSD symptoms in students, and its association with revictimization. As part of this study, the authors studied 502 graduate and undergraduate students. The participants completed a series of questionnaires to assess life traumatic experiences in general, maltreatment during childhood, and PTSD symptoms (Fabricio Gama et al., 2021). The findings of this study concluded that all types of childhood maltreatment, in one way or another, lead to possible revictimization and severe PTSD. Furthermore, the findings showed that emotional abuse had the highest rate of revictimization and PTSD symptom severity (Fabricio Gama et al., 2021).

In a different study, Duprey et al. (2021) examined the indirect relationship between internalizing psychopathology via cortisol reactivity and two biomarkers of autonomic-nervous system (ANS) reactivity, and emotional abuse in children. As part of

this study, 101 children ages 9 - 19 were studied. The study found that blunted hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) reactivity to a laboratory social stress task mediated the association between emotional abuse and youth internalizing symptoms. Furthermore, the findings also showed a relationship between emotional abuse and the blunted parasympathetic nervous system activity (Duprey et al., 2021).

Emotional Abuse in Adulthood

According to the literature, as in childhood, emotional abuse during adulthood, especially among older adults, is a worldwide public health issue (Tulane University, School of Public Health and Tropical Medicine, 2021). According to the University's report, many health organizations, for instance, the World Health Organization (WHO), have raised concerns about the abuse against older adults and its impact on victims. On the other hand, various studies have concluded that emotional abuse is one of the most recurrent types of abuse, aggression, or violence in romantic relationships (Gonzales-Mendez et al., 2018; Momene & Esteves, 2018; Ponti et al., 2020).

Despite these studies raising pertinent awareness of this damaging practice, emotional abuse continues to be treated with less urgency than other types of abuse, like physical or sexual abuse (Capezza et al., 2021). Emotional abuse can happen to anyone— to any gender, age group, and in some circumstances, with the same damaging effects (Capezza et al., 2021). According to Capezza et al. (2021), both men and women tend to experience similar effects of emotional abuse; however, as the violent behavior increases, symptoms in women tend to become more severe (Harned, 2001). Ponti et al. (2020)

mentioned that psychologically perpetrated abuse is "very common and has a great incidence in Western cultures with percentages ranging from 70% to 90%, compared to Eastern cultures, where the percentages range from 5% to 59%" (p. 145-146).

Even when other empirical studies have been conducted about emotional abuse and its possible link to resilience and PTG (Cheng & Liu, 2022; Cenat et al., 2018; Hoskins & Morash, 2021; Jo, 2020), very little research has been conducted on the relationship between resilience and PTG as it relates to gaslighting; more specifically, workplace gaslighting (Camacho-Reyes, 2022). Moreover, as mentioned earlier, gaslighting in the workplace has seemed to have taken the backseat on studies aimed to uncover the relationship between emotional abuse in the workplace and the possibility of workers, more specifically, entry-level employees in developing PTG as a result of the experience (Iwaniec et al., 2006; Malhi et al., 2020), indicating that more research is needed to provide a better picture on these phenomena (Camacho-Reyes, 2022).

Modes of Abuse

When trying to understand the abusers' modus operandi, the literature suggests two forms of abuse—active abuse and passive abuse (Ponti et al., 2020; Wienclaw, 2021).

Active Abuse

In active abuse, abusers are driven by the desire to intentionally harm, hurt, or traumatize another person (Wienclaw, 2021). Some forms of active abuse include kicking, pushing, hitting, raping, spitting, and shoving. In other words, active abuse is

any physical behavior aimed at physically hurting another person in a violent way (Wienclaw, 2021).

Passive Abuse

On the other hand, passive abuse is a mode of abuse that abusers use to intentionally harm their victims (Ponti et al., 2020). However, with passive abuse, abusers tend to use less obvious or aggressive tactics that often go unnoticed to the naked eye, but that are as damaging and traumatizing as the active abuse techniques (Ponti et al., 2020). One of these tactics is emotional/psychological abuse (Ponti et al., 2020).

When it comes to passive and active abuse, and gaslighting in the workplace, the literature research provided little to no information that could specify in which category gaslighting in the workplace falls (Ponti et al., 2020; Wienclaw, 2021), indicating that more research in this topic should be conducted.

<div align="center">

Types of Emotional Abuse in Adulthood

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Some of the most common types of emotional abuse that adult individuals are prone to experience include psychological manipulation, bullying, mobbing, and gaslighting.

Psychological Manipulation

Butts (2022) defined psychological manipulation as the art of using control and coaxing as an emotional abuse technique to make people do things they would normally not do under normal circumstances. Manipulators usually use the victims' vulnerabilities and weaknesses against them to facilitate the manipulation (Butts, 2022). The peculiarity

of this abusive behavior is that, in most cases, since the abuse starts in a way that may go

unnoticed by the victims, the victims tend to be completely unaware that the

manipulation is taking place and will become, without even noticing, active participants

of the abuse (Butts, 2022). It is not until later, when the abuse escalates, that the victims

find themselves in a precarious situation, and it is at that moment when they realize that

their lives are and have been, for a long time, controlled by the manipulator (Butts, 2022).

The manipulative techniques that are often used as part of this psychological

abuse include lies, flattery, guilt, and blackmail, as well as gaslighting (Butts, 2022).

Some researchers categorize psychological or emotional manipulation as the dark side of

emotional intelligence (Grieve et al., 2019). Grieve et al. (2019) examined the role that

gender played in the ability of people to engage in manipulative activities. Their study

examined 574 participants (435 females and 139 males) via an anonymous online

personality study. The results of this study concluded that there was a correlation between

being a man and a higher ability to emotionally manipulate their partners (Grieve et al.,

2019). However, the study found that, for females, some factors including a higher level

of emotional intelligence and high primary and secondary psychopathy influenced their

manipulative capability (Grieve et al., 2019).

Other research has shown that one of the main characteristics of psychological

manipulation is the desire for the manipulator to receive some type of gratification or

personal gain from the abuse (Book et al., 2019). Like any other form of emotional abuse,

psychological manipulation is an abusive tactic used by predators to control their victims

for personal gain, to receive some type of advantage as a result of the abuse, or just for plain enjoyment of the abuser (Sarkis, 2018). Unfortunately, the only person who can stop psychological manipulation is the victim since the abuse could continue for years unless the victim realizes it and takes action to make the abuse to stop (Sarkis, 2018).

Bullying

Another type of emotional abuse described in the literature is bullying. Frizzo et al. (2013) describe bullying as the continuous and repetitive act of abusing or mistreating someone either verbally, emotionally, mentally, or physically. This type of behavior is common in the school setting between children. However, recently, there have been cases in which bullying has been happening in the workplace and in political settings (Al-Hindawi et al., 2021). Therefore, this type of emotional abuse should be recognized as a serious problem that needs to be studied and mitigated accordingly (Taylor, 2021).

Bullying has devastating effects on victims, and it has been linked to severe symptoms of mental health problems such as chronic stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm, suicidal thoughts or ideation, eating disorders, violent behaviors, and increased cardiovascular disease (Frizzo et al., 2013; Peregrin, 2019). Some of the tactics used by workplace bullies include personal harassment, sexual harassment, name-calling, retaliation, spreading rumors, pushing, ignoring, and personal and professional threats (Frizzo et al., 2013). Peregrin (2019) stated that workplace bullying includes a repetitive form of mistreatment or emotional abuse used by workplace abusers toward a vulnerable coworker and is usually ignored or overlooked by leaders. Some leaders view workplace

bullying behavior as a conflict between coworkers and not necessarily as a form of workplace abuse (Peregrin, 2019).

According to Iqbal et al. (2021), studies conducted in the medical profession have shown that nurses tend to face workplace bullying more than any other medical professional. Some of the workplace bullying they experience include verbal violence, physical attacks, and unwanted sexual advances (Iqbal et al., 2021). Most of the abusers against nurses are patients, the patients' relatives, and coworkers (Iqbal et al., 2021). Like psychological manipulation, bullying, and its devastating effects could continue for years unless the victim takes action to make it stop (Sarkis, 2018).

Mobbing

Another type of emotional abuse mentioned in the literature is mobbing. According to Ibiloglu (2020), mobbing was first mentioned in the 1960s by Konrad Lorenz as a concept related to animal behavior and the way weaker animals used violent behavior and or tactics to terrorize and keep away strong rivals. Ibiloglu (2020) also posited that the word mobbing comes from the English word mob, which means gang. Popa (2021) stated that mobbing was introduced in 1990 by Heinz Leymann. Leymann (1990) stated that mobbing is an abusive tactic used by abusers in a repetitive manner to try to cause psychological damage to others. According to Rohland (2020), mobbing is the act of emotionally abusing another person, but instead of the act being committed by an individual, a group of people is the perpetrator.

While other forms of emotional abuse take place in different settings, such as in romantic relationships, between family members, and friend groups, a mobbing behavior is common in the workplace (Rohland, 2020). Mobbing could happen in any form; however, the most common tactics used by abusers are emotional manipulation and intimidation, extortion, threats, silent treatment as a weapon of emotional destruction, and physical violence (Ibiloglu, 2020). Some specific tactics used by abusers toward their victims include harassment, spreading rumors to damage the personal and professional reputation of the victim, insults, unfair treatment, humiliation, and silence treatment (Arslantas et al., 2021).

According to the literature, the effects of mobbing exposure on victims tend to be devastating, ranging from "insomnia, loss of appetitive, distress, crying crises, sensitivity, loss of desire to live, and even posttraumatic stress disorder" (Arslantas et al., 2021, p. 41). As devastating as this form of emotional abuse could be, for the behavior to be regarded as a serious threat to the victim, the abuse must occur at least once a week and last for a period of six months or more (Arslantas et al., 2021).

Gaslighting

Another form of emotional abuse found in the literature is gaslighting. According to Kivak (2020), gaslighting is a devious and manipulative tactic used by abusers (In this case, the gaslighter) to instill control upon their victims by making them question their own sanity and perception of reality. This type of emotional abuse can happen in any environment—friendships, family relationships, educational settings, romantic

relationships, and even in the workplace (Sarkis, 2018). Some of the tactics used by gaslighters to control their victims include lying to them, omitting important information and then using that against the victims as a form of emotional blackmail, confusing the victims to make them doubt themselves, or telling the victim that they are imagining things or being too sensitive to destabilize their sense of reality (Graves & Samp, 2021; Kivak, 2020).

The term gaslighting was first portrayed in 1938 in a stage play called Gas Light produced by Patrick Hamilton, which was later developed into two films in the 1940s (Graves & Samp, 2021). One of those films was *Gaslight*, which was filmed in 1944 (Cukor, 1944). The film, directed by George Cukor and starring Ingrid Bergman (As Paula Anton) and Charles Boyer (As Gregory Anton), portrayed a married couple. In this movie, the husband used a series of emotionally manipulative techniques to make his wife think she was crazy so that he could cover the true reasons for their marriage, which was to be able to steal some gems that belonged to the wife's late mother, who he had killed prior to marrying his wife. At times, the husband would hide things from his wife to later accuse her of hiding them herself (Sarkis, 2018).

On other occasions, he would do things around her to later question her recollections of the event to make her doubt herself. However, the term gaslight comes from the husband going into the attic to look for such gems without his wife's knowledge, an event that dimmed the lights of the room where his wife was. When the wife would point out the dimmed lights to the husband, he would suggest to her that she

had imagined it (Camacho-Reyes, M. 2022), which is why the movie was called Gaslight (Sarkis, 2018).

Nevertheless, while gaslighting is a relatively new term in contemporary research, many recent studies have been conducted to better understand the phenomenon (Grant, 2021; Graves & Samp, 2021; Johnson et al., 2021; Miano et al., 2021). Gaslighting, like any form of emotional abuse, leads to emotional and mental challenges for the victims and could cause long-lasting and devastating psychological and sociological damage to the victims (Sweet, 2019). Moreover, due to the devastating effects that gaslighting has on victims, Sweet (2019) stated that studies and researchers, especially those in the sociology field, should focus more on studying gaslighting more profoundly rather than ignoring it or leaving it to psychologists to do the hard work.

Importantly, even when gaslighting often starts as a small act of control, it usually turns into a fully manipulative event in which the victims tend to lose themselves and even become active participants in the abuse (Kivak, 2020; Sarkis, 2018). Like any other form of emotional abuse or manipulation, gaslighting and its devastating effects could continue for years unless the victim seeks help or takes action to stop it (Sarkis, 2018).

Portrait of the Gaslighter

Even though gaslighting is considered a relatively new term, it became popular with the media during President Trump's presidency. In a series of news articles dedicated to exposing President Trump's allegedly devious political tactics, news reporters used gaslighting in their reports. Some of those articles include the one written

by Hemmer (2016) titled *Trump is Gaslighting America: This is an Intervention.*

America, You Have a Trump Problem, another one by Eltis (2020) titled *Trump, and the*

History of Political Gaslighting, the one written by Mercieca (2020) titled *When Trump*

Says He Was Being 'Sarcastic,' It's Just Part of His Gaslighting, and the one written by

Cillizza's (2021) titled *Donald Trump is Gaslighting Us on the January 6 Riot*. All these

articles portrayed President Trump as a manipulative political leader who loves using

gaslighting tactics to make America fall for his devious agenda. In response to these

articles, President Trump called the media portrayal a *witch hunt* (Rogers, 2019).

According to Miano et al. (2021), gaslighting behaviors could be categorized into

three different types—the glamour gaslighter, the good-guy gaslighter, and the

intimidator gaslighter. Miano et al. (2021) stated that the glamour gaslighters tend to

mimic the behavior of someone trying to initially win over the victim with flattery and

gratification, to later exercise control over the victim.

Regarding the good guy gaslighter, the abuser uses their behavior to make the

victims believe that their well-being comes first, but it is a façade to manipulate the

victim to cater to the abuser's needs at the expense of the victim's well-being or wishes

(Miano et al., 2021). Lastly, the intimidator gaslighter tends to be a little more straight

forward on their abusive techniques. Intimidators show their true colors from the

beginning by using direct aggression or manipulation, making the victim feel the full

effects of the gaslighting behavior without remorse, thus causing feelings of despair and

helplessness in the victim (Miano et al., 2021). According to Sarkis (2018), the

personality traits of a gaslighter resemble the characteristics of other personality disorders, specifically cluster B personality disorders—histrionic, narcissistic, antisocial, and borderline personality disorders. Individuals suffering from these types of disorders frequently show erratic, emotional, and or dramatic tendencies (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 5th Edition, 2015).

As far as personal relationships are concerned, Christensen and Evans-Murray (2021) postulated that anyone has the potential to become a gaslighter during their lives, since gaslighters' main reason for abusing their victims is to manipulate them to the point of making them question their sanity and perceptions of their reality. Moreover, any manipulative person involved in any type of personal relationship could develop gaslighting tendencies (Sarkis, 2018). For instance, Sarkis (2018) states that a spouse who makes all the decisions at home could easily fall into the trap of using gaslighting as a manipulation tactic. Similarly, a friend who wants to control the narrative of everything that happens around his or her friendship could also use gaslighting techniques to instill control in the victims. Furthermore, parents who want to control their children could also become gaslighters (Sarkis, 2018).

On gaslighting in the workplace, Mallick (2021) mentions some of the potential warning signs that could help readers to identify possible gaslighters. Some of those signs include excluding employees from important meetings or gatherings, preventing employees from participating in developmental programs or training opportunities, and preventing employees from presenting their own work during meetings with the

organization's leadership (Mallick, 2021). Other forms of workplace gaslighting could take the form of making jokes about employees with others, spreading rumors or gossip about an employee, or creating a negative picture of the employee's performance to damage their personal or professional reputation (Sarkis, 2018).

Portrait of the Gaslightee

Stern (2007) defined gaslighting as the manipulative act of making someone feel confused and vulnerable. She added that perpetrators use gaslighting to persuade others that they (the victims), could not remember events correctly or that what they recall is a product of their imagination (Stern, 2007). Furthermore, Stern (2007) mentioned that both, gaslighters and gaslightees, could come from all walks of life. They could be men or women, parents, spouses, friends, siblings, and even bosses or colleagues.

Stern (2007) mentioned the gaslight tango as the unfortunate situation that portrays a gaslighting setting in which the victim becomes an active participant in the abuse. On the one hand, there is the gaslighter, who manipulates, controls, and debilitates their victims to the point of confusion and doubt (Stern, 2007). On the other hand, is the gaslightee, who could be unknowingly allowing and/or facilitating the gaslighting practice by, unvoluntary, following the gaslighter's obscure steps of the gaslight tango (Stern, 2007).

According to Christensen and Evans-Murray (2021), victims of gaslighting experience some intense feelings as part of the whole gaslighting process. Some of the red flags that Christensen and Evans-Murray (2021) mentioned include constant self-

questioning and self-doubts, feelings that they do not fit in anywhere, low self-esteem, depression and anxious behavior, and feelings of guilt and embarrassment. Other red flags are feelings that the victims are constantly letting down the gaslighter, feelings of isolation, always seeking gaslighter's approval, hypersensitivity, confusion, and physical symptoms related to stress (Christensen & Evans-Murray, 2021).

Referring to personality traits, Christensen and Evans-Murray (2021) also said that some of the traits associated with personality disorders in the Cluster B spectrum could also be present in victims of gaslighting, specifically those associated with borderline and antisocial personality disorders. This information correlates with the findings of a study that Miano et al. (2021) conducted aimed to investigate the correlation between gaslighting tendencies and dysfunctional personality traits of both the abusers and survivors. The results of the study showed that, for abusers, psychoticism, disinhibition, and detachment were positively associated with gaslighting acts (Miano et al., 2021), and for survivors, the personality traits that were positively associated with gaslighting behaviors from a partner included psychoticism, disinhibition, and antagonism (Miano et al., 2021).

Gaslighting in the Workplace

Although various peer-reviewed articles and empirical studies have explored emotional abuse in the workplaces (Balducci et al., 2020; D'Cruz et al., 2018; Kamper & Henken, 2019), gaslighting has attracted little attention among researchers trying to understand the impact that emotional abuse has in the workforce. Some articles and

studies have investigated bullying in the workplace (Ahmad et al., 2021; Dos Santos, 2022; Escartin et al., 2011; Hickox & Kaminski, 2021; Liang, 2020; Lovell & Lee, 2011; Menendez & Whitaker, 2012; Razali et al., 2020; Tsuno & Tabuchi, 2021). Other articles explored mobbing in the workplace (Arslantas et al., 2021; da Silva Joao & Portelada, 2019; Grzesiuk et al., 2022; Ibiloglu, 2020; Kowal & Gwiazda-Sawicka, 2018; Manotas, 2015; Vaclavikova & Kozakova, 2021). Given the different studies on emotional abuse, gaslighting in the workplace has rarely been covered in the literature (Ahern, 2018; Brewer, 2021; Tobias, & Joseph, 2020; Wozolek, 2018). However, these few studies have discussed the topic only to highlight this abuse as a rising problem in the workforce and the importance for researchers to study the situation more deeply (Frase, 2021). Nevertheless, Ahern (2018) reported on whistle-blower gaslighting and the effect this abusive practice has in the workplace.

According to Ahern (2018), whistle-blower gaslighting entails individuals coming forward with whatever information they decided to share, only to be met by others (Gaslighters) taking advantage of the situation to weaponize it with the purpose of making the whistle-blower appear to be crazy, confused, sensitive, overreacting, and not in a good mental health status. By doing this, the gaslighter makes the person question their own judgment (Ahern, 2018). The gaslighter plays with the mind of the gaslightee to the point of making them regret saying anything, which is, in fact, the main purpose of the abuse (Ahern, 2018). Additionally, Ahern (2018) noted that, someone who has been the victim of a whistle-blowing experience usually face institutional betrayal and

reprisals, which in this context, can be classified as whistle-blower gaslighting. When this happens, the whistle-blower must deal with a profound unfairness that other people, including friends, family, coworkers, and even counselors might not understand. In view of the little information covering gaslighting in workplaces, it is clear that gaslighting is often a silent and undetected form of workplace aggression/abuse (Fraser, 2021) that needs to be studied more deeply.

Coping with Gaslighting in the Workplace

According to Kivak (2020), knowing ways that victims of trauma could use to cope with the effects of the traumatic experience plays a big role in the trauma recovery process. Sarkis (2018) reviewed gaslighting, including how people could detect gaslighting signs and ways to stop the abuse. As Sarkis (2018) expounded, gaslighters could weaponize the workplace and use it to instill emotional damage in their victims to destroy their professional lives. Some of the tactics that workplace gaslighters use against their victims include making false claims about the victims, throwing the victims under the bus, taking credit for the victims' work in front of leaders and subordinates, gossiping and spreading lies about the victims, and even using silence treatment to hurt the victims (Sarkis, 2018).

On coping with gaslighting in the workplace, Sarkis (2018) suggested a series of steps that gaslightees could take to protect themselves from the gaslighting behavior. She recommended never consuming alcohol at office parties, documenting everything, filing a harassment complaint with the human resources (HR) department (If applicable), and, if

things do not get better, seeking employment elsewhere. However, her book did not provide much evidence-based suggestions based on empirical studies that could give gaslighting victims a clear roadmap to help themselves navigate the abuse.

Regarding developing PTG after suffering from gaslighting in the workplace, the literature also lacked broad insights about the topic of the study. Most articles examined PTG as an outcome of emotional abuse such as bullying and mobbing (da Silva Joao & Portelada, 2019; Dos Santos, 2022; Tsuno & Tabuchi, 2021; Vaclavikova & Kozakova, 2021). These articles, however, do not provide information on any victims who have developed PTG after experiencing gaslighting in the workplace, and/or their perceptions about their lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Recent Studies About Emotional Abuse in the Workplace

Studies About Bullying in the Workplace

Tsuno and Tabuchi (2021) investigated the association between mental health challenges in workers and their experiences with workplace bullying during the COVID-19 pandemic. As part of this study, the authors surveyed 28,000 individuals from August to September 2020. The results of this study concluded that workplace bullying behavior was more frequently seen among males, single employees, employees with the lowest annual household income, and corporate executives. The findings also showed that the risk of employees exposed to workplace bullying developing severe psychological distress (SPD) and suicidal ideation were 3.7 and 2.5 times higher, respectively, than for those not exposed to the abuse.

In another study by Dos Santos (2022), the author explored the effect that workplace bullying had on a group of male nursing students in South Korea. Twenty male nursing students completing their undergraduate studies were invited to participate. The results of this study revealed that male nursing students were susceptible to work-related stress and burnout, professional pressure, and gender bias, which could influence their job performance and the choices they make related to their career and professional development (Chang, Jang, et al., 2021; Dos Santos, 2022).

Studies About Mobbing in the Workplace

In a pilot study by Vaclavikova and Kozakova (2021), the researchers examined the impact that mobbing had on the health of a group of nurses in some health facilities in the Czech Republic. The authors used the standardized evaluation tool Negative Acts Questionnaire – Revised (NAQ-R) to evaluate the participants. One hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed among the selected nurses. Out of the 150 targeted participants, 84 nurses responded: 76 (90.48%) of them were women, and 8 (9.62%) were men.

According to the study findings, out of all the respondents in the study, 10.50% described having experienced mobbing in their place of work. The participants who experienced mobbing stated that they were assigned tasks way below their expertise and capabilities. These participants also reported suffering from nervousness, pressure, and constant tension as a result of the mobbing experience.

In 2019, da Silva Joao and Portelada conducted a quantitative study to examine the prevalence of mobbing (The existence, frequency, and intensity) and its impact on the well-being and interpersonal relationships of the Portuguese nurse population. 3,227 nurses from various health institutions in Portugal were invited to participate by completing the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT-60). The results of this study showed that, out of ten nurses, nine of them had close experience with mobbing in the workplace (da Silva Joao & Portelada, 2019).

Studies About Gaslighting in the Workplace

In a recent study conducted by Graves and Samp (2021), the authors gathered 298 participants to examine the association between gaslighting and interpersonal power dynamics. The study findings showed a curvilinear relationship between gaslighting and power. People with lower or higher levels of power were more inclined to engage in abusive behavior more than those with moderate power (Graves & Samp, 2021). Furthermore, in her autoethnography study, Grant (2021) shared her experience with gaslighting during her doctorate studies. As part of her study, Grant (2021) recounted the devastating moments in which she realized she was being gaslighted and the steps she took to get out of that situation and finish her degree in another institution without allowing the experience to define her as a person or as a professional. Although there is research on gaslighting in the workplace (Ahern, 2018; Brewer, 2021; Tobias, & Joseph, 2020; Wozolek, 2018), it is insufficient to provide a thorough understanding of the phenomenon.

Posttraumatic Growth as an Outcome

To understand PTG, it is imperative to examine the connection between PTG and trauma. When people face a traumatic event, they tend to develop a series of after-effects challenges, which are associated with the exposure to the trauma itself (Zapolski et al., 2021). Some of these after-effects include chronic stress and anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, tendencies of nonsuicidal self-injury, using sex as self-injury, and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Kim et al., 2018; Oginska-Bulik, & Michalska, 2021; Zetterqvist et al., 2018). The American Psychiatric Association (2013) defines PTSD as the development of specific symptoms caused by experiencing or being exposed to a traumatic event in which the person's safety, well-being, or life was severely threatened or damaged. Such traumatic events may also include people witnessing the injury or death of someone else.

Some of the most prevalent symptoms of PTSD include feeling upset after remembering the traumatic experience, nightmares, vivid memories, or flashbacks of the event, which may make people feel like they were experiencing the event all over again (Tang et al., 2022). Other common PTSD symptoms include feeling emotionally disconnected from others, loss of interest in things that were once a source of joy or entertainment, hypervigilance, irritability or anger, sleeping difficulties, issues concentrating, and being easily startled (Tang et al., 2022). While some studies (Kim et al., 2018; Oginska-Bulik & Michalska, 2021; Zetterqvist et al., 2018) directly link traumatic experiences with the development of PTSD, others such as Henson et al. (2021)

and Mattson et al. (2018) connect these experiences with PTG. Mattson et al. (2018) defined PTG as the positive psychological change that some individuals experience after being exposed to a traumatic experience. Some of the characteristics of PTG include positive spiritual change, major appreciation for personal relationships, and increased gratitude for being alive (Mattson et al., 2018). Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) have stated that, for a person to develop PTG, the impact of the traumatic event must have caused a huge disruption in that person's life, specifically to their emotional or mental health, or even challenged their core beliefs for growth to occur.

Protective Factors

According to the American Psychological Association (2022h), protective factors are a series of characteristics in an individual that can help decrease the chances of that person's well-being becoming compromised as the result of an outside negative influence. According to the American Trauma Association (2022), some examples of protective factors include support from friends, family members, or mentors to guide the person toward the right path, access to services to help people manage their physical and mental health, and community leaders genuinely interested in the well-being of the community members. Furthermore, protective factors increase the possibility for trauma victims to develop a positive outcome (PTG) after experiencing a traumatic event (Mohr & Rosen, 2017).

In a recent study conducted by Campodonico et al. (2021), the authors examined the relationship that protective factors such as secure attachment, optimism, social

support, trait resilience, adaptive coping, and self-efficacy had on posttraumatic outcomes

(PTSD, Disturbances in Self Organization (DSO), and PTG) in people with a history of

psychosis. Eighty-five participants completed a series of research questionaries, which

included the Trauma and Life Events Checklist, the International Trauma Questionnaire,

the Post-Traumatic Growth Inventory, the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale,

the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, the Brief Coping Orientation to

Problems Experienced inventory, the Life Orientation Test-Revised, the General Self-

Efficacy Scale, and the Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale. The results of this study

concluded that multiple hierarchical regression showed that optimism, among other

protective factors, was associated with lower posttraumatic symptoms (Campodonico et

al., 2021).

Human Capabilities

There is extant literature on human capabilities as possible facilitators of PTG

(Boullion et al., 2020; Brooks et al., 2016; Mattson et al., 2018; Munroe et al., 2022;

Northfield & Johnston, 2022). Research related to cognitive and emotional capabilities as

predictors for PTG showed that some of the personality characteristics associated with

PTG include openness to experiences, agreeableness, optimism, and extraversion

(Mattson et al., 2018). On the other hand, Munroe et al. (2022) investigated the

association between PTG and emotion, problem-focused coping, and self-compassion.

One hundred eleven young adults completed an online questionnaire that included

measures of coping, PTG, and self-compassion (Munroe et al., 2022). The results of this

study indicated that there was a link between self-compassion and PTG. However, when interrelated with the three different problem-focused coping approaches (Active coping, instrumental support, and positive reframing), all these coping styles forecasted PTG above self-compassion (Munroe et al., 2022).

Brooks et al. (2016) shared the results of two meta-analyses of studies related to PTG. These analyses concluded that, since some people tend to see their life experiences as positively and comforting as they can, there was a direct correlation between PTG and the use of active coping techniques, including religious or spiritual coping. Furthermore, the victims had the willingness and need to move on and use their experiences as catalysts for growth instead of reasons for suffering (Brooks et al., 2016).

In reference to social capabilities and how they could be predictors of PTG, Boullion et al. (2020) stated that having a strong social support system facilitates PTG. In their study, Boullion et al. (2020) used the August 2016 Louisiana flooding to investigate how some protective factors, specifically, positive psychological factors, could help protect victims from the negative experiences associated with trauma. The study concluded that resilience and presence, and search for meaning had a significant impact on the participants' PTG scores when some of the variables, such as gender, posttraumatic stress symptoms, race, religion, and amount of property damaged were controlled (Boullion et al., 2020).

In a different study by Northfield and Johnston (2022), the researchers investigated the role that perceived social support played during the COVID-19 pandemic

when moderating psychological distress and PTG. The scholars relied on data collected from 296 adults living in the USA during August 2020. The study results revealed a positive connection between the impact of trauma and the development of PTG. However, the findings showed a moderated multiple regression, suggesting that participants' gender, age, education, ethnicity, psychological distress, and social support accounted for 39% of the variance in PTG. Although different factors were predictors of PTG, a significant positive association was only discovered between the social support factor and PTG (Northfield & Johnston, 2022).

Figure 2

Illustration of PTG Based on Protective Factors and Human Capabilities (As it Relates to Studies Conducted on the Topics).
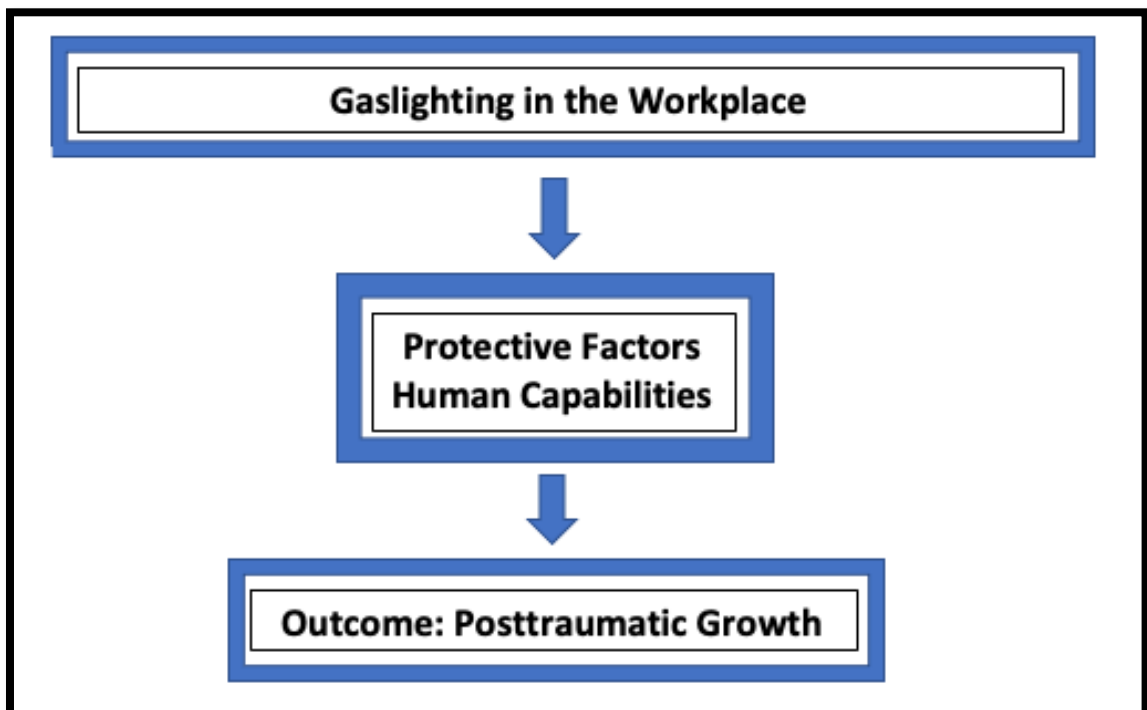
Studies Related to The Research Questions

The two key RQs constructed to guide the study were as follows:

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting?

RQ 2: What role does resilience play in entry-level employees developing PTG?

In a study conducted by Wang, Zhao, et al. (2020), the authors explored the influence that abusive supervision has on job insecurity. The theoretical framework used by the researchers as part of this study was a combination of the social cognitive theory and the leader-member exchange theory. As part of this study, Wang, Zhao, et al. (2020) also explored the mediating role of leader-member exchange (LMX) and the moderating role of power distance in the job insecurity phenomenon. For their study, the authors recruited 944 employees from two state-owned enterprises located in China, who completed a questionnaire as part of the study. The results of the study showed that, when it comes to job insecurity, abusive supervision was significantly and positively related to it. When it comes to job insecurity and LMX, the findings showed that LMX played a mediating role in the impact of abusive supervision. Lastly, when it comes to LMX and job insecurity, the study showed that power distance played a moderating role in that relationship.

In a different study, Zenda et al. (2021) discussed the relationship between work pathologies such as harassment, bullying, intimidation and/or mobbing, and humiliation

at the organizational level. In the article, the authors mentioned that these devious

practices are commonly used as a passive violent act to embarrass an individual or

a group of people. According to the authors, since these types of behavior usually

promote a sense of inequality and a desire for retaliation, it often permanently disrupts

the workplace creating a negative environment for all the parties involved (Zenda et al.,

2021).

Based on the literature review, previous research has been completed on

workplace abuse, more specifically, as it relates to abusive supervision and job insecurity

(Wang, Zhao, et al., 2020) and humiliation at work (Zenda et al., 2021). However, little

research has been done about workplace gaslighting and PTG, more specifically, about

the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting.

Based on these findings is that I decided to conduct a hermeneutic

phenomenological study to investigate the lived experiences of entry-level employees

with workplace gaslighting to gain a better understanding of how these employees were

able to rise from the ashes and use their traumatic experiences as a catalyst for PTG. The

results of this qualitative study should help fill the gap in the literature by providing a

better understanding of how entry-level employees view their past experiences with

gaslighting in their place of work and the growth that came as a result of it.

Summary and Conclusion

Chapter 2 provided an in-depth and extensive literature review related to the topic

of workplace violence, with a strong emphasis on workplace emotional abuse. For many

years, researchers have focused on exploring the workplace violence phenomenon (Chen, Lin, et al., 2016; Empie, 2003; Knight et al., 2022; Magnavita et al., 2022; Ventura-Madangeng, 2009). However, current literature has shown that workplace emotional abuse is still present in our society (Davis, 2021; Kampen, 2019; Wang, 2022).

During this literature review, most of the studies I found about workplace violence covered commonly known emotional abuses such as bullying and mobbing. However, throughout this extensive review, a gap emerged. This gap revealed the need for researchers to conduct more qualitative studies on workplace emotional abuse, more specifically, workplace gaslighting, to better understand the lived experiences of individuals with the phenomenon.

In Chapter 2, I also covered the conceptual framework I used as part of this study. The conceptual framework I selected for this study was a combination of the resilience and the PTG concepts. It was my belief that this conceptual framework, combined with the research approach I chose for the study (Hermeneutic phenomenological study), would allow me the opportunity to answer the two RQs I created for this study with the purpose of exploring the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting in the workplace, and how they were able to move past the traumatic experience and develop PTG as a result of the gaslighting experience.

In Chapter 3, I briefly introduce the study, including a detailed explanation of the selected research design and rationale for the study, as well as the role I played as the only researcher in the study. Chapter 3 also provides a detailed description of the

methodology used for the study and how conducting this study, based on my selected

research approach, helped me examine the gap I found in the literature.

In Chapter 3, I also cover the participants' recruitment and selection process. This

chapter also provides information about the practice interviews I conducted as part of this

study, which was aimed at assessing the efficacy of the IQs I was planning on using as

part of the data collection process (See Appendix J). Lastly, Chapter 3 also provides

detailed information about the data collection and analysis methods I used as part of the

study, as well as information about trustworthiness issues and any ethical considerations

associated with the study.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

When entry-level employees start a new job, many enter the workforce with big dreams and many personal and professional goals. In most cases, the experiences they face and skills they learn in these entry-level positions serve as steppingstones for future professional endeavors (Practice Interviews Participant Number 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022). However, in some cases, entry-level employees have found themselves as the victims of manipulative and devious workplace practices led by superiors and other colleagues that can threaten not only their employment, but also their physical, emotional, and mental well-being (Albuainain et al., 2022; Ribeiro et al., 2022; Sharma & Prasad, 2022), and gaslighting in the workplace is one of those traumatic experiences (Sarkis, 2018).

Past research has revealed some of the practices used by bullies during their journey as workplace tormenters (Al-Hindami et al., 2021; Frizzo et al., 2013; Iqbal et al., 2021; Peregrin, 2019; Sarkis, 2018; Taylor, 2021), however, very few studies have covered the workplace gaslighting phenomenon, and the possible link between the traumatic experience and the possible development of PTG.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting to better understand how these employees were able to rise from the ashes and use their experiences as a catalyst for PTG. Gaslighting in the workplace is a phenomenon that has not been fully studied

before, especially, when it comes to the lived experiences of entry-level employees who were victims of this abuse. Although some researchers have studied gaslighting previously (Au et al., 2022; Cheung, 2022; Sharpe, 2022;), little research has been done related to how employees who suffered this type of emotional abuse were able to use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. To assess this situation, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twelve participants to expand the understanding of these employees' lived experiences with the two phenomena associated with this study.

Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of the major sections related to the methodology of the study, with each section providing an in-depth account of the processes I used as part of the completion of my study. In this chapter, I provide the research design I selected for the study, the rationale behind the selection of that research design, the RQs I developed for the study, as well as the steps I took during the recruitment and selection of the participants. This chapter also covers my role as the researcher, the data collection plan, and data analysis and coding methods I used as part of my study, as well as the issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations associated with the study.

Research Design and Rationale of the Study

The main phenomenon for this study was the lived experience of entry-level workers with gaslighting in the workplace and the PTG that followed as part of the traumatic experience. To examine this problem qualitatively, I developed the following RQs, which concentrated on two main elements: gaslighting in the workplace and PTG:

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting?

RQ 2: What role does resilience play in entry-level employees developing PTG?

Gaslighting Phenomenon

According to Kivak (2020), gaslighting is a form of emotional abuse in which the abuser (Gaslighter) uses manipulative tactics to make the victim (Gaslightee) question the perception of their reality. During the abusive behavior, the gaslighter makes the gaslightee think that he or she is losing his or her mind for not remembering things that happened or did not happen (Catapang Podosky, 2021). As a result of this abuse, victims no longer believe in themselves and tend to be cautious not to upset the abuser (Davis & Ernst, 2019). Kivak (2020) stated that, while gaslighting was mostly associated with acts of domestic violence, it can also happen in other environments, including politics, friend groups, medical settings, and even in the workplace.

The term gaslighting was first portrayed in 1938 in a stage play called Gas Light produced by Patrick Hamilton, which was later developed into two films in the 1940s (Graves & Samp, 2021). One of those films was *Gaslight*, which was filmed in 1944 (Cukor, 1944). The film, directed by George Cukor and starring Ingrid Bergman (As Paula Anton) and Charles Boyes (As Gregory Anton), portrayed a married couple. In the movie, the husband used a series of emotionally manipulative techniques to make his wife think she was crazy so that he could cover the true reasons for their marriage, which

was to be able to steal some gems that belonged to the wife's late mother, who he had killed prior to marrying his wife. At times, the husband would hide things from his wife to later accuse her of hiding them herself (Sarkis, 2018).

On other occasions, he would do things around her to later question her recollections of the events to make her doubt herself. However, the term gaslight comes from the husband going into the attic to look for such gems without his wife's knowledge, an event that dimmed the lights of the room where his wife was. When the wife would point out the dimmed lights to the husband, he would suggest to her that she had imagined it, which is why the movie was called gaslight (Sarkis, 2018).

Gaslighting has been and is currently being used by manipulators and abusers in our society with devastating effects (Christensen & Evans-Murray, 2021). Many people who have suffered from this abuse have developed mental, emotional, and physical health issues, and some even developed suicidal ideations as a result of the experience (Christensen & Evans-Murray, 2021). Thus, creating awareness of the gaslighting phenomenon is imperative to help current and potential victims of this emotional cruelty to identify the common traits of the abuse and take action to make the abuse stop.

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG) Phenomenon

Mattson et al. (2018) have defined PTG as the positive change that an individual develops after experiencing a traumatic event. In most cases, people who experience this type of psychological change after a trauma develop a series of positive changes within their lives that could indicate that the trauma, instead of causing a negative outcome in

the person's well-being, did, in fact, create the oppositive (Schaefer et al., 2018; Slade, et al., 2019; Wilson, 2021). According to the literature, some of the positive changes that a person who has experienced PTG tends to display include boosted appreciation for life, a superior sense of personal power, enhanced appreciation for personal relationships, an increased self-esteem, and positive coping skills (Landi et al., 2022). Other changes include a change in victims' underlying belief systems and increased self-acceptance and self-efficacy (Huhne et al., 2021; Mattson et al., 2018; Schaefer et al., 2018; Sheridan & Carr, 2020).

A review of the literature showed that, even when some people have the tendency to develop PTG after being exposed to trauma, others do not have that same capability, and instead of experiencing growth, they end up instead experiencing posttraumatic stress symptoms (Elliot et al., 2021; Martin et al., 2017; Rosic et al., 2021). Mattson et al. (2018) state that there could be a correlation between people's capabilities to cope with trauma and their ability to develop PTG. On the other hand, Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004), the developers of the PTG inventory (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2017), have suggested that, for a person to develop PTG, the impact of the traumatic event must have caused a huge disruption in that person's life, emotional/mental health, and even challenged their core beliefs for growth to take place.

Research Tradition and Rationale for Selection

To have a better understating of the lived experience of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting, I used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach. According

to Alsaigh and Coyne (2021), hermeneutics centers on humans' lived experiences. This type of research approach is designed to generate "rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of a phenomenon where a deeper understanding of the meaning is sought, through progressively layered reflection while using rich descriptive language" (p. 2). Furthermore, a phenomenology study can help researchers study people's lived experiences and how those experiences relate to a certain phenomenon (Burkholder et al., 2019). Phenomenology is a philosophical tradition first introduced as a social science concept by German philosopher Edmund H. Husserl (1913-1954) to understand how people would describe their lived experiences (Patton, 2014). Based on the knowledge I had acquired as part of my Walden University Doctoral coursework and the literature review I did prior to my study, I decided that a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was the most appropriate research design for this study since I knew it would provide a better chance for me to gather the data I needed to be able to gain an in-depth understanding of how these employees were able to rise from the ashes and use their workplace gaslighting experience as a catalyst for PTG.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher, my primary role was to conduct this qualitative research study to the best of my abilities using the knowledge and skills I had acquired throughout my time as a Walden University Doctoral student (Stadlander, 2015). As the only researcher in this study, it was my responsibility to create the IQs I would be using during the data collection part of the study, as well as requesting all the necessary authorizations prior to

the start of my study, such as approval for Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for accessing the intended population, as well as seeking approval from my dissertation committee and University Research Reviewer (URR) to start my data collection process (Stadlander, 2015).

The main roles I performed as the researcher included interviewing the participants via semi-structured interviews, as well as maintaining confidentiality during the collection and analysis of the data. Furthermore, it was my responsibility to analyze and code the data, so the information could be successfully presented according to the findings of the study (Stadlander, 2015). To complete this study in the most ethical way possible, I did my best to be mindful of any personal biases or conflicts of interest that could arise as part of the study. Several years ago, I experienced gaslighting in the workplace; however, that experience never prevented me from moving forward in my professional life. In order not to allow my previous experience with workplace gaslighting and biases associated with the phenomenon to influence my study, I took the necessary steps to avoid these biases to take control of my job as the researcher so that these biases could not interfere with the proper and genuine analysis of the data. Specifically, I did not allow my previous experience with gaslighting in the workplace to influence the results of the study. To achieve this, I did my best to stay focused during the study by using the RQs I had developed for the study and the conceptual framework I selected as the roadmap to follow during the completion of the study. Furthermore, to

address this limitation, I used different methods such as reflective journaling, bracketing, and epoché as bias reduction tools.

According to Ortlipp (2008), using a self-reflective journaling approach as a bias reduction tool is a common practice used by qualitative researchers to promote reflexivity. It is common for researchers to use journaling to examine study expectations, assumptions, and goals, while at the same time, clarifying individual belief systems and biases (Ortlipp, 2008). Bracketing has been defined as a practical tool in phenomenological inquiries that involves setting aside people's own beliefs, expectations, and lived experiences about the phenomenon under examination to not allow them to have an influence on how the study is conducted and the way the collected data is analyzed, used, and presented as part of the findings of the study (Carpenter, 2007). Epoché is defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2022) as the methodological approach of refraining or suspending judgment when conducting research to not allow it to interfere with the sense of the study. Using one or more of these bias reduction tools gave me the opportunity to allow my study to take its own course without letting my biases or previous gaslighting experiences to influence the study in any way.

Moreover, as the researcher, it was my sole responsibility to ensure that participants who could have any ties with me, personally or professionally, were excluded from the study. The way I made sure no persons known to me took part in the study was by carefully screening all applicants for possible connections with me during the participant qualification and selection process. If, during this process, it was known to

me that a possible participant had ties with me, I would let the participant know via email (See Appendix F) that, due to ethical issues, he or she was not going to be able to take part in the study. It is important to mention that no one known to me applied for the study.

Finally, to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of all the participants, I protected participants' identities by using participants' identifiers (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.) during the entire study, as suggested by Dr. Lee Stadlander in her book *Finding Your Way to a Ph.D*. Furthermore, as the researcher, I conducted this study following all the rules and regulations that the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) had established as part of their approval of the study.

Methodology

Participant Recruitment and Selection Logic

Since the purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting and how they were able to rise from the ashes and use their experiences as a catalyst for PTG, the best recruitment and selection strategy for me to use was the purposeful sampling strategy. According to Patton (2014), purposeful sampling is a recruiting strategy used by researchers seeking to study participants who, based on their lived experiences, can provide insightful and illuminative information on the phenomenon of interest.

For this study, the participants were recruited using Walden University's research participant pool, as well as volunteers from the website Research and Me, a web-based

platform that allows researchers to connect, screen, and recruit willing participants from across the United States (Research and Me, 2022). Participants were also recruited on Walden University IRB-approved social media channels. Since I faced difficulties recruiting the number of participants I had initially hoped for the study (10 - 15), a snowball sampling method was also used, besides the purposeful sampling strategy. The snowball sampling method is a participant recruiting strategy that allows researchers to use current study participants to aid in the recruitment of more participants based on referrals to help provide more data that the researcher can use to answer the RQs (Kirchherr & Charles, 2018). Participants were asked not to share the study invitation with people in their workplace or place of education since that would require that I obtain organizational approval.

Once I received approval from Walden University's IRB, I posted recruitment flyers (See Appendix A) in all the approved Walden University IRB recruitment channels, which provided full details of the study, operational definitions, a detailed description of the requirements needed to participate in the study, as well as a copy of Walden University's IRB approval number and all the details related to how to contact me via email with further questions, and/or to share their interest in taking part in the study.

During the first round of interviews, after initially connecting with possible participants via email, and after they provided acceptance to the informed consent, one male and five females, between the ages of 20 and 30, with at least two years of college

experience, who were employed at the time of the study, and who have had some type of experience with workplace gaslighting during their time at an entry-level position were invited to participate. The traumatic experience must have happened in the last three years, which was the case for all the participants who were invited to participate in the formal interviews.

As mentioned earlier, one of the limitations I faced when recruiting participants for this study was that the majority of the volunteers who contacted me interested in participating in my study were above the age of 30; however, since one of the requirements for participating in my study was that participants were between the ages of 20 and 30, these older participants were not able to participate in the study during the first round of interviews, which in a way limited the number of participants I was able to use for those first interviews. Based on that recruitment challenge, I decided to request approval from Walden University's IRB to change the age group of my sample from 20 - 30 to 20 - 45. After receiving approval for the proposed changes from IRB, I went ahead and advertised the study again, and based on those changes, I was able to recruit and interview six more fully qualified candidates bringing the total count of the study participants from six to twelve.

After I selected the twelve qualified participants, and prior to conducting the two rounds of interviews (Six participants per round), I proceeded to send each one of them an email inviting them to a formal interview. This email included a suggested date and time for their interviews, with the requirement that they must be in a quiet setting not

only to reduce noise and distractions, but also to increase their privacy and confidentiality. If the suggested date and time did not work for the participants, they were asked to provide a date and time that worked best for them, so that interviews could be scheduled based on their availability.

According to Creswell (2013), a phenomenological study should include between 5 - 25 participants to ensure an in-depth collection of data. During my proposal development, I expressed my intention to select 10 to 15 participants for the study, although the exact number of participants would depend on how fast I was able to hit saturation. In the end, I ended up selecting twelve participants for my study, and saturation was reached with Participant 12. According to Guest et al. (2006), saturation will occur when no new information is being provided by participants or when a researcher notices the same themes coming out repeatedly. Essentially, saturation is reached when researchers continue to get the same information, despite talking to more and more participants (Guest et al., 2006). There is not a specific number of participants as it relates to saturation, however, some researchers believe that studies can reach saturation in as little as five interviews (InterQ, 2022). Once participants were selected, formally interviewed, and saturation had been reached, those participants that agreed to participate in the study but who did not get the chance to be interviewed received a thank you email from me explaining that saturation had been reached and that their participation was no longer needed (See Appendix I).

Data Collection and Instrumentation

As part of this study, I used semi-structured interviews with the selected participants to collect the necessary data I needed to answer the RQs I had developed for this study: RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting? and RQ 2: What role does resilience play for entry-level employees developing PTG? According to Patton (2014), using semi-structured interviews when conducting a qualitative study allows the flexibility that the interview process needs so that the participants can provide more detailed information freely about their experiences within the same context of the interview.

During these interviews, I engaged in an in-depth conversation with each participant using the IQs I had developed for the interview process as a guide (Appendix G). Due to the semi-structured nature of the interview, participants were able to tell their stories in their own way to help add richness (When needed) or clarification to their responses (As necessary) (Kratt & Houdyshell, 2020). The interviews for this study were conducted via Zoom. Interviews lasted no more than 45 minutes each, with the exception of one that lasted one hour and 20 minutes. Each interview was recorded and transcribed using Zoom's recording and transcribing services to help facilitate the data collection and analysis/coding process. At the beginning of each interview, participants were reminded about the purpose of the study, and their responsibility as participants, which included their right to stop the interview at any time and/or to refuse to answer any questions they found inappropriate or triggering.

After the data was collected, I organized it into electronic files named after each participant's identifier. A quick review prior to the analysis of the data was performed on the data collected to make sure I had the information I needed based on the IQs I had created for the study. If, for some reason, I identified that data was missing or that I needed clarification on the data I collected, such participants were contacted via email to request more data or to be asked to clarify the data they provided during their formal interview (See Appendix H).

After completion of the study, all the data collected during the study was saved into a flash drive, which will be kept in a locked safe in my house for five years. All the data collected as part of this study will be available for audit purposes if needed, and upon expiration of the five years, it will be destroyed.

Practice Interviews

In preparation for the formal study, I conducted practice interviews (Also known as mock interviews) to assess the efficacy of the IQs for the data collection process (See Appendix J). The process of practicing interviews prior to conducting formal research is a process that has been used by researchers in the past to ensure that the IQs they crafted for their studies were able to elicit the type of data they needed to answer the RQs they developed for their study (Harchar, 2005). As part of this process, I sought to identify if the IQs I created could help gather the data needed to successfully investigate the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following a gaslighting experience. During the practice interviews, I interviewed three friends via email to assess the

effectiveness of the IQs. During the interviews, all three participants were sent the IQs as an attachment to the email (See Appendix K).

The findings of the practice interviews concluded that answering the questions, as I originally drafted them, allowed the participants to share their experiences with gaslighting in the workplace. Based on the information they shared, I was able to have a better understanding of the pain and struggles they went through as a result of such experience. Furthermore, the IQs also allowed the participants to share with me their experiences with PTG as a result of the traumatic experience.

As part of the process for the practice interviews, I sent the participants a follow-up questionnaire to examine their thoughts about the IQs and the questions' practicality when eliciting information from them (See Appendix L). The process of sending follow-up emails to obtain information from the participants in my mock interviews was one of the most crucial parts of the whole process since it was, at that stage, when I was able to hear from the participants themselves about what they genuinely thought about the IQs, what constructive criticism they had, as well as how they felt during the whole practice interview process.

The findings of the follow-up questionnaire concluded that the participants viewed the IQs as appropriate, easy to understand, and straight to the point. Furthermore, the participants stated in their follow-up email that the IQs were nonintrusive nor offensive, which, according to them, was the main reason they felt at ease during the whole interview process. This information is very important for me because making sure

that all my participants feel heard, understood, cared for, and respected during the interview process is one of my main responsibilities as the researcher in this study.

One example of a constructive criticism I received from one of my participants stated "I think the questions were really great. Toward the end, my answers got shorter and more straightforward, so I think if you want more 'fluff,' maybe finding a way to make the IQs a little deeper may help you in gathering more elaborated answers. But, if shorter answers are fine, then the questions, as they are currently drafted, may work" (Participant Number 3, personal communication, August 08, 2022).

Based on the findings of the practice interviews, I concluded that the IQs I created for the formal study would help me gather the appropriate data needed to understand the lived experiences of the participants. The practice interviews also showed that the IQs I created for the formal study would also allow me to provide the participants with a set of questions that will make them feel at ease, cared for, and most importantly, heard and understood. However, considering the feedback I received from Participant 3, I created additional prop questions to give the participants the opportunity to elaborate more if needed.

Data Analysis Plan

To successfully analyze the data, the study relied on an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (IPA). According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), the primary goal of IPA is to aid researchers in analyzing the data they collect via their study to gain a better understanding of how individuals make sense of their lived

experiences, but from the individuals' own perspectives. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that one of the main concerns of researchers when using the IPA approach is to obtain detailed first-person account information from the participants to understand the phenomenon under study.

To collect the data for the study as it related to the two key RQs I have developed for the study (RQ 1: What is the lived experiences of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting? and RQ 2: What role does resilience play for entry-level employees developing PTG?), and to ensure concise and reliable data collection and transcribing process, I recorded the interviews using Zoom recording services, as well as transcribed the interviews using Zoom's transcribing services. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, all the interviews were recorded in the form of audio-only, and all the recordings were saved on an electronic file on my password-protected computer, and all the files were named using participant identifiers, such as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.

Before I started the analysis/coding process, I made sure to re-read the RQs and the purpose of the study so that I could perform a critical evaluation of the information I gathered from the participants without allowing any bias, judgment, or preconceived notion to influence the way I analyzed the data (Pitney & Parker, 2009). Also, before I started the official analysis/coding process, I made sure to send the participants, via email (See Appendix H), a pre-analysis and pre-coding I did on the data I collected from each one of them to ensure not only correctness of verbiage, but also to corroborate that the

data, as it was pre-analyzed and pre-coded, was presented in a way that portrayed their

true experiences, stories, and thoughts related to the two phenomena examined as part of

this study, which in research is a process called member-checking.

According to Madill and Sullivan, (2017), member-checking is known as a

critical process in research used by researchers before they officially analyze and code

the data, in which they provide each participant with the opportunity to review the

transcripts of their interviews to ensure that the data collected from them was correct and

that it provided the exact information they wanted to share with the researcher. During

this process, the participants will have the chance to correct and/or add any information

they feel will better portray their lived experience with the phenomenon (Madill &

Sullivan, 2017). Once all the participants had the chance to review their respective pre-

analysis/pre-coding spreadsheets, and corrections and/or updates had been made to the

data collected (If necessary), I went ahead and started the official data analyzing and

coding process.

As part of the official analysis/coding process, I coded the information manually.

According to GeoPoll (2023), researchers using manual coding are responsible for

cautiously scrutinizing the data they collected from the study participants and by

manually producing the codes and themes they will be basing their study in. Despite

being a time-consuming process, manual coding can contribute to streamlining the data

analysis and coding process as it involves researchers deciding the pertinence and

importance of the data they are analyzing, ultimately reducing the bulk of data to be considered in the final study write-out.

During the analysis and coding process, I used the RQs and the purpose of the study as a roadmap to make sure my data analysis and coding portrayed the true meaning of the lived experiences of each participant with gaslighting in the workplace and PTG (Stanlander, 2015). During the coding process, I also made an annotation of all the relevant repetitive words and key phrases used by the participants during their interviews, which eventually became the themes I used as part of this interpretative phenomenological analysis. Smith and Fieldsend (2021) state that the main goal when performing IPA during research is to provide an in-depth analysis of the collected data by using the human lived experience phenomenon as a base during the analysis with the purpose of obtaining detailed first-person account information from the participants to understand the phenomenon under study.

<div align="center">**Issues of Trustworthiness**</div>

Credibility

Maintaining the credibility of this qualitative study was my main priority. According to Burkholder et al. (2019), the concept of credibility is the heart of qualitative studies. Credibility is an important part of the research puzzle that gives the study the trustworthiness it requires based on the data gathered and presented (Burkholder et al., 2019). To ensure the credibility of this study, I conducted the interviews via Zoom. I ensured that the interviews were recorded and transcribed using the advanced features of

the Zoom application to not only maximize my efforts during the data collection and

analysis/coding processes but also to protect the integrity of the whole interviewing

process (AHC Media, 2019). After completing the interview, and after doing a quick pre-

analysis and pre-coding of the data, I reached out to each one of the participants via email

with instructions for them to review the summary of the data I had collected from them to

make sure the data, as it was collected and pre-analyzed and pre-coded, truly expressed

their thoughts and experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon. (See Appendix H). The

email I sent the participants mentioned that if, after reviewing the pre-analysis/coding

they felt as if they would like to have another meeting with me to double-check my

interpretations, they could contact me via email to schedule another meeting. Once all the

participants had the chance to review their pre-analysis/coding and corrections and or

updates had been made to the data collected (If applicable), I went ahead and started the

official data analyzing and coding process (Camacho-Reyes, 2022).

Transferability

According to Burkholder et al. (2019), the researcher's role is to ensure they

present the readers the exact data collected as part of the study in a way it can help them

use and apply the findings of the study in a more practical, informed, and meaningful

way. To facilitate the transferability of this study, I included thick descriptions of the

information the participants shared during the study in the form of direct quotes from the

participants. Some of the data I was able to collect during the interviews is presented in

Chapter 4 in a way that promotes a good understanding of the lived experience of the participants with gaslighting in the workplace.

Burkholder et al. (2019) defined thick descriptions as a complete narrative or account of what went on during the study, including the settings, the participants that were selected for the study, a complete and detailed description of the findings, including ample evidence from those findings presented in the form of field notes, artifacts, documents, interview transcripts, and quotes from participants. To ensure transferability in my study, all the steps I took, all the processes and documents I created as part of this study, including the IQs I developed (See Appendix G), are part of this write-up, either in the actual body of this dissertation or as a form of tables, figures and/or appendices.

Dependability

Dependability, as Burkholder et al. (2019) stated, is the process in which researchers achieve the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring that data collection, analysis, and interpretation are conducted consistently. It stipulates that any alterations or modifications to the methodology of the study should be acknowledged and justified in a way that readers can easily assess and understand it. To ensure dependability in this study, I used inquiry audits (Audit trails). According to Burkholder et al. (2019), an audit trail, when used in a qualitative study, helps to show, in detail, everything related to the data collection, meaning how the data was collected, categories that came out of the data, and why and how the researcher made any decision during the whole process.

As part of the audit trail process, and in an effort to obtain dependability in my study, I created an audit trail. For this particular study, this audit trail consisted of emails between participants and me from before, during, and after the formal interviews were conducted, field notes I took during each one of the formal interviews, the audio recordings for each interview I conducted, and the spreadsheets and other documents I created as part of the data analysis and coding processes. As part of this audit trail, bracketing and epoché were also used to not allow any preconceived notions, assumptions, or judgments I might have had based on my past lived experiences with the phenomenon at hand to not allow the free flow of ideas and feelings from the participants to become the main character of this study.

During qualitative research, it is important for researchers to obtain dependability, and by creating an audit trail, researchers can not only protect the integrity of their studies, but at the same time, provide a clear picture of the phenomenon they were trying to better understand as part of their study, which in this particular study was the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting. Dependability for my study was obtained via the audit trail I created during the study.

Confirmability

Concerning confirmability in a research setting, Burkholder et al. (2019) stated that, to aid other researchers who would like to replicate a study to verify if they can attain the same findings and conclusions when examining the data, researchers should take some steps to ensure the confirmability of their studies. Researchers need to ensure

that their study results, findings, and conclusions are strictly and solely derived from the data collected and not from any external factors such as opinions, biases, or interpretation errors (Chang et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2016).

To facilitate confirmability in this study, I used a confirmability audit, which also falls under audit trails. According to Statistics Solutions (2022), an audit trail in a qualitative study is a research strategy used to determine the confirmability of the finding of such study. Confirmability in research includes determining that the findings of the study are based on the participants' responses during their formal interviews, instead of the researcher's own presumptions, judgements, and/or biases (Statistics Solutions, 2022). Furthermore, an audit trail, when used in a qualitative study, helps to show, in detail, every aspect of the study completion. My audit trail started by sharing with my readers everything related to the data collection process (Including how the data was collected, categories that came out of the data, how the data was analyzed, as well as any relevant direct quotes from participants). The audit trail also included bracketing and why and how I, as the researcher, made the decisions I made during the whole research process (Burkholder et al., 2019).

To ensure confirmability in my study, all the steps I took, all the processes and documents I created as part of this study, including the IQs I developed for the study (See Appendix G) are part of this dissertation (Camacho-Reyes, 2022).

Ethical Procedures

According to Walden University Office of Research and Doctoral Services

(2021), before conducting studies, which include recruitment of the study participants,

collection of data, and or data access, researchers will need to request and receive ethics

review approval from Walden University's IRB. Before conducting my study, I worked

with the Walden University IRB to obtain approval for my study to make sure that the

study, as I created it, followed the appropriate ethical steps to ensure that the rights and

welfare of my participants were protected at all times during the study (Walden

University Office of Research and Doctoral Services, 2021), and that participants could

remain free from harm at all times during the entire research process (Bersoff, 2014).

Furthermore, to maintain the high standards required for this and all types of

research using human subjects, prior to the study, I completed a required online training

class on human subject research. This class, offered by the Collaborative Institutional

Training Initiative (CITI), was guided toward educating researchers on ethical

considerations associated with human data collection (CITI Program, 2022). Some of the

topics covered in this class included roles in the protection of human subjects, as well

as topics about vulnerable populations and informed consent associated with the use

of human subjects in a research setting (CITI Program, 2022). For me to be able to use

the data collected from the participants, and to protect their privacy and confidentiality, I

ensured that all the participants were provided with an informed consent form (See

Appendix D) via email prior to the start of the study, so they could provide their informed consent prior to the start of the interview process.

Moreover, I made sure that all the data collected throughout the study was always protected before, during, and after the study was completed. During the study, the data I collected from the participants was kept in an electronic file on my password-protected computer. This data will always remain confidential. The only parties that had access to the data were me (As the researcher), and my dissertation committee (If needed). Once this study was completed, the data and all the audio recordings, written transcripts, informed consent forms, printed copies of the emails from and to the participants, as well as any electronic notes added to my journal, were placed in a flash drive, and kept inside of a locked safe that I had acquired for this specific purpose. These documents will be kept in this safe for a period of no less than five years, as required by Walden University (Walden University Office of Research and Doctoral Services, 2021).

Finally, I was prepared that if, at any time during the formal interviews, participants felt that they wanted to withdraw from it, I would make sure they did so at their earliest convenience and without making them feel as if they were letting me down or threatening the completion of the study. That did not happen. All the participants who volunteered and were selected for the study completed it without any issues. At no time were the participants obligated or made feel as if they needed to continue in the research process if they did not want to do so. Furthermore, I was prepared that if, at any time during the research process, which started with answering the demographic

questionnaires and IQs during the formal interviews, any of the participants became upset

or unwell, I was ready to stop the interviews and refer them to the Crisis Text Line, a free

crisis counseling service they could reach via text (Crisis Text Line, 2022) for further

mental health support and assistance. Again, that did not happen, and all the participants

who volunteered and were selected for the study completed it without any issues.

As the only researcher in this study, it was my ultimate goal and responsibility to

conduct this study not only to the best of my abilities, but also to ensure that the study

followed all the ethical procedures established by Walden University and the U.S.

Federal Government (Walden University, 2021) as they applied to my study, not only to

protect the integrity of the process but also to protect the well-being of all my

participants.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided an introduction to the phenomena that was examined as part

of this study, which involved the concepts of gaslighting and PTG. A detailed description

of the major sections related to the methodology was also provided in this chapter, with

each section providing an in-depth account of the processes I used as part of the

completion of my study to explore the lived experience of entry-level employees with

workplace gaslighting to better understand how they were able to rise from the ashes and

use their experiences as a catalyst for PTG.

In this chapter, I also provided the research design I selected for the study, the

rationale behind the selection of that research design, the two RQs I developed for the

study, as well as the steps I took during the recruitment and selection of the participants. This chapter also covered my role as the researcher, the data collection plan, and data analysis/coding methods I used as part of my study, as well as the issues of trustworthiness and ethical considerations associated with the study.

The results of this hermeneutic phenomenological study should not only aid organizational leaders and workers, in general, in identifying red flags associated with the gaslighting phenomenon in the workplace to help them create a safer environment in which every worker is given a fair chance to succeed in their assigned roles, but it should also aid entry-level employees as well as other seasoned workers who have experienced or are currently experiencing workplace gaslighting in using other people's lived experiences with the phenomenon as a roadmap for their own healing and posttraumatic development process. Workplace violence, as portrayed by the #metoo movement, is a major problem in today's workforce (Gupta et al., 2019; Issitt, 2021; Jones & Wade, 2019; Midlemiss, 2021; Moody et al., 2021; Payne, 2022; Zawada, 2018), therefore, creating awareness of the role that the gaslighting phenomenon could be playing in it should help create a safer, healthier, enjoyable, and more productive work environment for all the parties involved.

Chapter 4 covers the research results, which includes research setting, demographics, in-depth information about the data collection and analysis/coding processes, evidence of trustworthiness, as well as the findings and results of this study.

Chapter 4: Research Results

Introduction

The objectives of this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study were to examine the lived experiences of entry-level employees who faced gaslighting in the workplace and to better understand how they were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. The two main points associated with the gap in the literature were gaslighting and PTG. As part of this study, I created two research questions (RQs). These two RQs were as follows:

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting?

RQ 2: What role does resilience play for entry-level employees developing PTG?

This chapter starts with a complete overview of the study results concerning gaslighting and the devastating psychological effect that this type of emotional abuse in the workplace had on the study participants, as well as these employees' ability to develop PTG as a result of the abusive experience.

Research Setting

As part of this study, I had the opportunity to recruit participants who, during their first year in an entry-level position, experienced gaslighting in the workplace. The data collection occurred via individual Zoom interviews. Interviews were recorded and transcribed using the Zoom recording and transcribing features. To protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, interviews were recorded as audio-only, and each

participant's name was masked using a pseudonym. As a form of respect for the participants' time, all the interviews were conducted in 45 minutes or less, except for one that lasted one hour and 20 minutes. During this particular interview, the participant (Participant 4) was the one who spoke most of the time. The study sample consisted of twelve participants (Two males and ten females) who were currently living in the United States and that, based on the minimum qualifications posted on the recruitment flyer, were fully qualified to participate in the study.

Participant Demographics

As part of the study, I created the following inclusion criteria:

- Participants needed to be between the ages of 20 - 45.

- Participants had to have experienced gaslighting in the workplace in an entry-level position. Experience must have happened in the last three years.

- Participants must have, at least, two years in a higher education setting.

- Participants must be employed at the time of the formal interviews.

- Participants must understand and speak English.

All the selected participants met all the minimum qualifications I had established as part of the inclusion criteria. During the first round of interviews, five of the participants were female, and one was a male. During the second round of interviews, also five of the participants were females and also one was a male, bringing the total count of participants to twelve (Ten females and two males). Each participant received a pseudonym ranging from Participant 1 to Participant 12, and these pseudonyms were

used throughout the entire data collection and data analysis/coding process. None of the

participants dropped out of the study after agreeing to participate, which allowed me to

collect the data I needed for the study. Data saturation happened during the data

collection process after the interview with Participant 12. Lastly, none of the participants

were known personally by me, nor did they have any personal, nor professional

relationship with me during the conduction of the study. Table 1 shows the complete

picture of the participants' demographics.

Table 1

Participants' Demographics

Participant ID	Age	Gender	Years of College Completed?	Currently Employed?
Participant 1	24	Female	4.5	Yes
Participant 2	24	Male	4	Yes
Participant 3	20	Female	2	Yes
Participant 4	30	Female	4.5	Yes
Participant 5	21	Female	3	Yes
Participant 6	24	Female	4.5	Yes
Participant 7	35	Female	4	Yes
Participant 8	35	Female	6	Yes
Participant 9	24	Female	4	Yes
Participant 10	41	Female	5+	Yes
Participant 11	45	Male	5+	Yes
Participant 12	45	Female	5+	Yes

Data Collection Procedures

The primary outlets I used to recruit participants for this study were the website Research and Me, the Walden University's research pool, and three social media outlets (Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn). As part of my recruitment tactics, I included a recruitment flyer (See Appendix A) that contained the title of my study, the IRB approval, the minimum qualifications to participate in the study, as well as what was involved in the study, and the definitions of some of the working terms participants would be hearing during their formal interviews. Most of the participants I was able to recruit came from the Research and Me website, as well as via snowballing. Once participants saw the flyer, those who felt they met the minimum qualifications contacted me directly either via my Walden University email address or via the Research and Me Application form.

As soon as I received communication from an interested participant, I contacted him/her back within 24 hours with a welcome email thanking him/her for his/her interest in participating in my study. This welcome email (See Appendix B) included a quick overview of my study and the terminology that would be used during the interview, as well as a copy of the recruitment flyer and the informed consent form (See Appendix D). As part of this email, the participants were instructed to review both attached documents and to reply to the email with the words "I Consent" if they wanted to take part in the study. Participants were also made aware via this welcome email that only those volunteers who met the basic requirements mentioned in the flyer and on the informed

consent form would be invited to participate in the study. Once informed consent was

obtained from all the qualified participants, I went ahead and sent each one of them

(individually) an email inviting them to a formal interview (See Appendix E). This

invitational email included a suggested day and time, a link to the Zoom interview, and

some housekeeping instructions about the interview. Most of the participants agreed with

the suggested date/time for their interviews, and those who requested a different

date/time were provided with the opportunity to suggest a date/time that worked best for

them. Once that information was gathered from those participants, new Zook links were

sent to them for their formal interviews.

The Interview Process

Once all the formal interviews were scheduled, at the designated date and time,

the participant and I logged into the Zoom website, and I conducted the formal interview

there. All the interviews were conducted with each participant individually and on

different dates/times. All the interviews were recorded as audio-only, and participants'

identifiers were used instead of names (e.g., Participant 1, Participant 2, etc.). At the start

of each interview, participants were asked some demographic questions (See Appendix

C). After the demographic questions were answered (See Table 1), participants were then

asked the formal interview questions (IQs) I had prepared for the interviews. All the

questions were asked in a conversational way to allow the participants the opportunity to

speak freely about their lived experiences with the phenomena at hand. At the end of each

interview, I thanked the participants for their willingness to participate in my study and

gave them final instructions on what would happen next. Participants were told that a copy of my pre-analysis and pre-coding was going to be sent to them via email for them to review it as a form of member-checking.

As mentioned before, to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the participants, interviews were recorded as audio-only, and each participant's name was masked using a pseudonym. As a form of respect for the participants' time, all the interviews were conducted in 45 minutes or less, except for one interview that lasted one hour and 20 minutes. During this particular interview, the participant (Participant 4) was the one who spoke most of the time. All the interviews were conducted as planned, and no unusual circumstances happened during any of the interviews, except for a minimal technical issue with one of the participant's computers, which ended up shutting down on her at the beginning of the interview, which was fixed right away and, in no way, affected the flow of the interview, or the data that was collected during this particular interview.

As part of the member-checking process, after I was able to review, pre-analyze, and pre-code all the data I collected from each participant, each one of them were sent a quick summary of the pre-analysis and pre-coding I did to the data I collected during each one of their interviews, which included quotes of things they said taken straight from the transcripts. Each participant was instructed to review the information as a form of member-checking and to contact me to let me know if they felt like the information they shared or the pre-analysis/coding I made of their data did not truly portray their lived experiences. The participants were also instructed to come back to me after reviewing the

information with either "I Approve" or "I Do Not Approve, and here is why." After reviewing their data, ten participants replied with "I Approve." Once I received their responses, I then started the official data analysis and coding process. Out of all the participants, only two (Participants 4 and 7) did not reply to my member-checking email, even after numerous attempts on my part to have them review their data and to approve or disapprove of the way I had pre-analyzed/coded their data based on their lived experiences.

Data Analysis

When I created this study, my initial plan was to interview 10 - 15 participants who, during at some point in their first entry-level position, experienced gaslighting in the workplace. Of the participants who contacted me willing to participate in the study, twelve of them met the minimum qualifications I had established as part of the inclusion criteria for my study. A vast majority of the unqualified participants who contacted me were not employed at the time of the study, and some did not have two or more years of college. Out of all the participants who contacted me, the twelve that were fully qualified were invited to participate in the formal interviews. Data saturation happened during the interview with participant 12. Each interview lasted between 45 - 80 minutes.

During each interview, each participant was given the opportunity to talk about their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon, and each interview generated a considerable amount of data. During each interview, I listened carefully to what each participant was saying and took notes of the data I thought was important,

which also allowed me to collect a great deal of information from the participants, which helped me in having a better understanding of their experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon and how they were able to develop PTG as a result of the negative workplace experience they endured.

As a person who has experienced gaslighting in the workplace in past jobs, it was my main objective to not allow my past experiences and assumptions about the gaslighting phenomenon to influence the data analysis of my study. I have to say that I was able to accomplish an unbiased reflection, data analysis/coding, and bracketing of the data I collected from my participants without allowing those past experiences to guide or have an impact of the analysis I did with the data I collected. Another technique that helped maintain my focus during the entire data analysis process was epoché. Epoché allowed me to remove any preconceived judgments and/or personal beliefs I might have had about the phenomenon when it was time for me to search the data for themes, categories, and codes. That being said, it is safe to say that the data I collected from each participant was perceived and analyzed objectively and unbiased.

To successfully analyze the data I collected via the formal interviews with the twelve participants, I used the interpretative phenomenological analysis approach (IPA). According to Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014), the primary goal of IPA is to aid researchers in analyzing the data they collect via their study to gain a better understanding of how individuals make sense of their lived experiences, but from the individuals' own perspectives. Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) stated that one of the main concerns of

researchers when using the IPA approach is to obtain detailed first-person account information from the participants to understand the phenomenon under study; however, I was able to work around that concern and was able to collect the data I needed from the participants to help answer the two RQs I had created for my study.

After I was able to review, pre-analyze, and pre-code all the data I collected from each participant, each one of them were sent a quick summary of the pre-analysis I did of the data I collected from each one of them, which included quotes of things they said taken straight from the transcripts. Each participant was instructed to review the information as a form of member-checking and to come back to me with either "I Approve" or "I Do Not Approve, and here is why." After reviewing their data, 10 out of 12 participants replied with "I Approve." One participant (Participant 8) replied that I had misinterpreted a piece of information, which she then clarified. Two participants (Participant 4 and Participant 7) were the only participants who did not reply to my member-checking emails. Once I received all the other participants' responses, I then started the official data analysis and coding process.

During the data analysis process, and before I started the manual coding process, I reviewed the RQs and the purpose of my study one more time to have the information fresh in my mind while doing the data analysis/coding. After reviewing the study information, I proceeded to listen to each interview again and made corrections to the transcripts as necessary. Once corrections were made, I re-listened the interviews to compare the data to the notes I had taken during the actual interviews to make sure I had

not missed anything and/or that what I wrote made sense and was according to the data

that was provided from each participant (See Appendix M). In order to organize the data

and start gathering the themes, I created a spreadsheet in which I organized the data by

participant, RQ, IQs, and finally, by the themes and codes that emerged from each piece

of data that I collected from each participant. Once the data was better organized, I was

able to extract the recurring words that were used to finally identify the themes that the

data yielded. From the analysis and coding process, RQ 1 yielded one main theme (MT)

and 11 subthemes (ST), while RQ 2 yielded one MT and two STs. From one of the STs

that emerged from the data collected as part of RQ 2 (ST 2), two additional themes

emerged, which I labeled them in this dissertation as emerging theme (ET) one (ET 1)

and ET 2 (See Figures 3 and 4).

During the data analysis, I noticed that one of the participants (Participant 5) did

not answer one of the questions I had asked her during her formal interview (IQ 10:

"How did you cope with the gaslighting while it was happening?"). After identifying that

discrepancy, I went ahead and sent a follow-up email to the participant, respectfully

asking her if she could answer that question. After Participant 5 had the opportunity to

reply to my email with her answer, I went ahead and analyzed the data and included the

theme that emerged from that data to the other data I had previously collected from the

other participants as it related to that particular IQ. By manually coding the data, I was

able to perform a more detailed and complete interpretation of the data I had collected

from each participant. The MTs, STs, and ETs that arose for the data assisted me in

developing a better understanding and interpretation of the lived experiences of the

participants with workplace gaslighting and the possible PTG that participants developed

as a result of their traumatic experiences.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Maintaining the credibility of this qualitative study was my main priority. To

ensure the credibility of this study, I conducted the interviews via Zoom. I ensured that

all the interviews were recorded as audio-only and transcribed using the advanced

features of the Zoom application to not only maximize my efforts during the data

collection process but also to protect the integrity of the whole interviewing process

(AHC Media, 2019). After completing the interviews, for those participants who I needed

to conduct follow-ups to corroborate the information to make sure the data collected truly

expressed their thoughts and experiences, I went ahead and sent them an email with the

follow-up questions (As applicable), which they answered quickly. After follow-ups were

completed, member-checking emails were sent to all the participants, respectfully asking

them to review a pre-analysis and pre-coding of the data that was collected from them to

make sure that the information they shared during their interviews and the way it was

pre-analyzed and pre-coded truly portrayed their lived experiences with the phenomenon

(See Appendix H). The emails I sent to the participants mentioned that if, after reviewing

the pre-analysis/coding, they felt like they would like to have another meeting with me to

double-check my interpretations, they could contact me via email to schedule the follow-

up meeting. Once all the participants had the chance to review their transcripts, and since none of them requested changes to their data, I went ahead and started the official data analyzing and coding process.

Transferability

To facilitate the transferability of this study, in this dissertation, I included thick descriptions of the research setting, participants selected for the study, the data collection process, and information the participants shared with me during their formal interviews. Some of the data I collected during the interviews has been presented in the form of direct quotes from each participant in upcoming sections of this dissertation to help promote a good understanding of the lived experiences of the participants with gaslighting in the workplace. Other important information related to or that came out of the study has been presented in this dissertation either in the form of a table, figure, or appendix.

To ensure transferability in my study, all the steps I took, all the processes and documents I created, and all the data I reviewed as part of this study, including the IQs I developed (See Appendix G), have been included in this dissertation.

Dependability

According to Burkholder et al. (2019), dependability is the process in which researchers achieve the trustworthiness of the study by ensuring that data collection, analysis, and interpretation are conducted consistently. It stipulates that any alterations or modifications to the methodology of the study should be acknowledged and justified in a

way that readers can easily assess and understand it. To ensure dependability in my study, I created an audit trail. Burkholder et al. (2019) state that an audit trail, when used in a qualitative study, helps to show, in detail, everything related to the data collection, meaning how the data was collected, categories that came out of the data, and why and how the researcher made any decision during the whole process.

As part of the audit trail process, and to obtain dependability in my study, I created an audit trail. For this study, this audit trail consisted of emails between participants and me from before, during, and after the formal interviews were conducted, field notes I took during each one of the formal interviews, the audio recordings for each interview I conducted, and the spreadsheets and other documents I created as part of the data analysis and coding process. As part of this audit trail, bracketing and epoché were also used to not allow any preconceived notions, assumptions, or judgments I might have had based on my past lived experiences with the phenomenon at hand to not allow the free flow of ideas and feelings from the participants to become the main character of this study (Camacho-Reyes, 2023).

During qualitative research, it is important for researchers to obtain dependability, and by creating an audit trail, researchers can not only protect the integrity of their studies, but at the same time, provide a clear picture of the phenomenon they were trying to understand as part of their study, which in this particular study was the lived experiences of entry-level employees with workplace gaslighting (Camacho-Reyes, 2023).

Confirmability

When conducting empirical studies, researchers need to ensure that their study results, findings, and conclusions are strictly and solely derived from the data they collected from each study participant and not from any external factors such as opinions, biases, or interpretation errors (Chang et al., 2021; Moon et al., 2016), which is known in the research world as confirmability. To facilitate confirmability in my study, I used a confirmability audit. A confirmability audit is a research strategy used to determine that the research findings reflected the data collected from the study participants and not a direct or indirect reflection of the researcher's presumptions, judgments, or biases. Furthermore, an audit trail, when used in a qualitative study, helps to show, in detail, every aspect of the study completion.

For this study, I established confirmability by providing a detailed explanation of all the processes I followed and the steps I took as part of my study. As part of the confirmability process, I made a point to share with my readers everything related to the research setting, data collection and analysis process, including the IQs I developed (See Appendix G), as well as how the data was collected and analyzed, the themes that came out of the data, as well as any relevant direct quotes from participants. Member-checking was also used as part of the confirmability process. This part of the research process was conducted to give the study participants the opportunity to review the data that was collected from them to see if the data, as it was collected and pre-analyzed/coded, truly reflected the sense of their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting

phenomenon. That being said, confirmability for my study came from the extent and properly organized confirmability audit trail I created as part of my study.

Results

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, the purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting in the workplace and how they were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. For this study, I created two RQs.

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting?

RQ 2: What role does resilience play for entry-level employees developing PTG?

During their formal interviews, each one of the twelve participants who were selected to participate in the study had the opportunity to share their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon by providing answers (In an unstructured and conversational way) to the IQs I had created for the study. All the participants seemed at ease during their interviews, and they all seemed eager about having the opportunity to share their experiences and personal/intimate details of being gaslighted at work during their first entry-level position. None of the participants seemed to have difficulties with sharing their experiences with the phenomena at hand, and none of them seemed to have difficulties remembering nor dealing with the emotions associated with talking about the traumatic experience they all lived.

In the next couple of sections, I address each RQ, as well as the themes that came out of the data I collected from each participant as part of their formal interviews. In this section, I will also provide a detailed hierarchy of the study's RQs, IQs, the two MTs that emerged from each one of the RQs, the 13 STs that came out of the 18 IQs I asked the participants, the two ETs that came out of one of the STs that emerged from the data I collected as part of IQ (IQ 2.1), and lastly, the two STs that came out of the extra question (EQ) and final question (FQ) I asked participants as I was closing out the interviews. (See Figures 3 and 4).

Research Question 1: What is the Lived Experience of Entry-Level Employees with PTG Following Gaslighting?

Main Team One (MT 1): Stories About Gaslighting in the Workplace

The first RQ I created as part of this study was broken down into five demographic questions (DQs), three background questions (BQs), and 16 interview questions (IQs) guided to examine the lived experiences of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting the workplace. At the beginning of the formal interviews, I asked the participants five DQs I had created for the study: DQ 1: What is your age? DQ 2: What is your gender? DQ 3: How many years of college have you completed? DQ 4: Are you currently employed? and DQ 5: At what age did you start in your first entry-level position? (When the gaslighting happened).

After gathering the data I needed from the participants as part of the DQs, I went ahead and asked the participants the three BQs I had created for the study with the

purpose of not only start building rapport with the participants, but also to get to know them a little better and to see where they came from (Personally and professionally). These BQs included: BQ 1: Tell me about your life at home before going to college, BQ 2: Tell me about your time in college: What did you study? Was that what you planned on studying? Or did you change your major after starting studying? and BQ 3: What can you tell me about the skills you acquired during college?

After gathering the data I needed from the participants as part of the BQs, I went ahead and started asking the participants the 16 IQs I had created for the study. The first semi-structured IQ I asked the participants was, "Can you tell me what you believe gaslighting means?" The primary focus of this IQ was for me to have a better idea if the participants had a good understanding of the gaslighting phenomenon and to see to what extent participants were able to use that knowledge to identify the traumatic experience they faced at work as gaslighting. From the first IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which it was labeled ST 1. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 1 (ST 1): Understanding of the Phenomenon

As mentioned above, this ST emerged as part of the first semi-structured IQ I asked the participants, which was: "Can you tell me what you believe gaslighting means?" (IQ 1). As part of their answer to this IQ, participants shared what they believed gaslighting meant for them. The purpose of this question was for me to have a better idea if the participants had a good understanding of the gaslighting phenomenon. All the participants' responses were direct, and straight to the point, and they all shared a very

concise and truth-to-the-point account of what they thought gaslighting is. An example of the data I collected from the participants as it relates to IQ 1 was the one shared by Participant 5:

> I feel like for me, personally, gaslighting is manipulating someone's personal experience for personal gain, so like something that happened to me someone like morphs my own personal experience so that they can have a game where they don't have to take responsibility for something.

> Participant 1's answer to IQ 1 was along the same line: "Needing someone to

believe a certain truth or a certain way that things are done at their own expense. Kind of being led to believe that their own truth is, in fact, not the truth." On the other hand, Participant 3 stated that, for her, gaslighting was: "Gaslighting is... as I understand it, is when someone sort of like manipulates a situation or a conversation to make you believe that you're in the wrong, or that you're crazy, or you know that it's your fault."

> When asked this question, Participant 7 shared the following:

> To me, gaslighting... it tends to... the way I've experienced it I guess is someone denying something that I know to be reality, either something that that I'm currently experiencing, or I have witnessed, or I have like hard proof evidence of a case, and someone is working with their lips and with their actions to make it seem as though what I am seeing experiencing witnessing is not the case, or is not what I think it is, or is not as bad as I think it is.

Out of all the answers to this question, Participant 11 was the only one who did

not seem to have a very clear picture of what gaslighting is. When asked this same

question, Participant 11 replied:

> Gaslighting, in my opinion, is a way to treat the employee wrong without... It's
>
> kind of like a passive aggressive method to treat the employee wrong without
>
> letting them believe that you're doing it.

Figure 3

Hierarchy of Study's Research Question One, Interview Questions 1-16, and Associated Themes and Subthemes.

Research Question One	Interview Questions	Themes
What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting in the workplace?	1) Can you tell me what gaslighting means? 2) What can you tell me about the job you performed in which you experienced gaslighting? 3) Who did the gaslighting and when did it start? 4) How was the gaslighting done? 5) Based on your lived experience; what do you think caused the gaslighting? 6) How the gaslighting made you feel while it was happening? 7) How did the gaslighting affect your mental health? 8) How did the gaslighting affect your life outside of work? 9) Did you report the gaslighting? Why yes, or why not? 10) How did you cope with the gaslighting while it was happening? 11) What effect did the gaslighting have in your ability to perform your job? 12) Did you leave your job due to the gaslighting experience? Why yes, or why not? 13) How soon did you get a new job after leaving the old one? How was that experience? 14) How have you changed professionally and personally since the gaslighting experience? 15) How is your relationship with supervisors and coworkers in your new job? 16) What personal and/or professional positive changes did you develop as a result of the gaslighting experience? And how would you have handled the situation now?	Main theme: Stories about gaslighting in the workplace. Subtheme 1: Understanding of the phenomenon. Subtheme 2: Toxic workplace environment. Subtheme 3: Gaslighter was manager and abuse started either immediately or a couple of months after their first day in the position. Subtheme 4: Gaslighting tactics used by gaslighters. Subtheme 5: Possible reasons for the abuse. Subtheme 6: Effect of gaslighting in participants lives (Including mental health and life outside of work). Subtheme 7: Reporting the abuse. Sub-heme 8: Coping with the abuse. Subtheme 9: Effect of gaslighting in participants' ability to perform their job. Subtheme 10: Stories of leaving the job and starting new at a different job. Subtheme 11: Positive changes that participants experienced as a result of the gaslighting experience and the PTG that came out it.

From the second IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which it was labeled ST 2. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 2 (ST 2): Toxic Workplace Environment

The next question I asked participants was, "What can you tell me about the job you performed in which you experienced gaslighting?" (IQ 2). The purpose of this IQ was for me to have a better idea of the type of work environment the participants were part of, as well as to try to understand what attracted the participants to that specific job, and what their assigned tasks were. After clarifying the question to the participants and sharing with them what I was looking for as part of this question, they started sharing with me detailed information about the specifics of the workplace they were part of. Even when the workplaces and specific tasks that the participants shared were different for each one of them, all of the participants referred to the work environment as toxic. For example, Participant 5 stated that:

> So, my major is health sciences. I want to go to PA school after graduating from my undergrad and I need a lot of hours of clinical experience before applying. So, the job I went to was giving me a lot of clinical experience... I'm making connections with doctors because I'll need letters of recommendation. So, the job is super appealing. It had good work hours for my school, so it was just a very good entry-level job to get into the health, healthcare... to get healthcare experience.

However, she also stated that:

So, I have two bosses that hired me for their company that I work for that are like private contractors. And then, I have one boss that is like the manager of the practice. So, my connection with my 2 bosses is very good. They're very understanding that I'm a full-time student. They treat me very well. They understand when I ask for time off, so that connection is usually pretty stable, but there are times where they kind of are quick to judge or quick to not fully understand, but I think that's mostly because they're not actually at the practice seeing everything that goes down every day. My other supervisor is a little more judgmental and contributing to, I think, some of the gaslighting because all the doctors, when they have a problem like, they go directly to her and then she goes directly to my two other bosses.

When asked Participant 3 this same question, she replied:

So, the job that I performed where I experienced gaslighting was... I worked in an office front desk position. It was customer service, it was sales... it was like a little bit of everything. And it was a very toxic workplace and a very... a place where workers were underappreciated but expected to go above and beyond and do a lot more than was in the job description.

She also added:

It was interesting; basically... my supervisor was relatively young compared to the other bosses I've had in the past. My supervisor was a lot closer to my age than

my regional manager, for example. So, we had a good, like, friendly relationship when it came to just like casual work talk and like if we were both at the desk, you know, for an extended period of time like we could make conversation and it wouldn't be awkward and it would be like a good time and whatever, but she would kind of switch to manage mode every now and then in which then our relationship would change and then it was more so like... I was then viewed as someone providing something for her as opposed to an equal.

When asked Participant 4 this same question, she stated:

My coworkers and I had a lot of camaraderie because we would be talking to each other all day and messaging each other about like helping each other on stuff. Our leader... she was an attorney and didn't seem to want to talk to us about almost anything. Our relationship with her was really strange. Within the first week or two, when we had asked our pod lead for help... first of all, instead of... we found this out later, but it turns out her method for us asking for assistance was for us to just e-mail her and 99% of the time when we would e-mail her our specific questions with the information about the specific claims, she would never reply. So, we got used to very quickly having to fund for ourselves... not having any backup or support and being unable to answer questions. She just like, basically refused to do the vast majority of her job.

When asked Participant 9 this same question, she stated:

I would say it was definitely a strained relationship because the culture at the

company sort of made it that way. I don't think it was necessarily the fault of the

people before they joined the company... that the company sought out a culture

like that. But it was sort of a culture that I would say enabled snitching.

When asked Participant 12 this same question, she replied:

I was an administrative assistant. What attracted me to the job was the potential of

growth... it was a big worldwide organization, and it was working for the

executive vice president of HR. So, I thought at the time that it would help me

grow in the organization and professionally speaking, you know, grow to a more

meaningful position.

After a short pause, she continued:

The relationship with the supervisor was good in a way. It started off very

friendly because she is also Puerto Rican, and she also grew up in New York, so

we had a lot of things in common. She also had a bachelor's degree in psychology,

which to me was also something that we had in common. So, I actually thought

that we had... we're going to hit it off nicely, professionally speaking, and it was...

it was like that for a short period of time. Until I expressed wanting to grow, and

then after that, things changed a little bit.

From the third IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was

labeled ST 3. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 3 (ST 3): Gaslighter Was Manager and Abuse Started Either

Immediately or a Couple of Months After Their First Day in the Position

The next question I asked participants as part of the study was, "Who did the gaslighting and when did it start?" (IQ 3). The purpose of this question was to have a better idea of not only who the gaslighters were in each particular situation but also to know when the abuse started. Having the opportunity to learn who the main abusers were and at what point these abusers started traumatizing the participants was very crucial for me because having a better understanding of this part of the workplace gaslighting phenomenon could eventually help me in addressing the impact that managerial negative behavior toward entry-level employees have in employee's ability to see their first entry-level position as a negative and traumatizing one rather than a rewarding one, and the role that their manager played in the abuse they suffered at that particular entry-level job.

When asked this question, most of the participants named either their direct manager or a second manager as their gaslighter. There was only one participant (Participant 10) who named a coworker as the gaslighter. Furthermore, when asked when did the gaslighting behavior start, five of the participants (Participants 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9) stated that the abuse started immediately after they started their job, one participant (Participant 5) stated that the abuse started a couple of months into her time at the position, one participant (Participant 2) stated that the abuse he experienced was a one-time thing that did not escalate into more events because he quit the job right after the first gaslighting incident happened, one participant (Participant 7) stated that the abuse

started in phases, one participant (Participant 10) stated that the abusive behavior started

as soon as her old manager left and a new manager came, one participant (Participant 11)

stated that the abuse started once a team member became the manager, and lastly, one

participant (Participant 12) stated that the abuse started once she expressed desire to

move up and grow within the company. When asked these questions, Participant 2 stated:

It was like a 2-day thing, really, like... and that's kind of where it ended. It was by

like not my manager but like kind of a subordinate manager who I went to ask

about the schedule and then they kind of blamed it on me and said it was my

responsibility. So that's where I was like, no... and I just like left.

On the other hand, when asked these same questions, Participant 6 stated:

Definitely members of management did the gaslighting. And, then we had one

bartender who was kind of like in the lead position because of some like nepotism

issues that were going around more like that. She had a relationship with the

owner of the restaurant, so the gaslighting definitely started immediately and as

soon as I started standing up for some of the things that I saw as unfair or that I

saw as inappropriate.

When asked these questions, Participant 4 stated:

My leader was the one doing the gaslighting. It started pretty much immediately

after the beginning of the job. She.... you know, we received information, and we

went through trainings. We did a lot of stuff, and she would tell us that we can ask

questions or submit our questions, and that she would be happy to help us and be

supportive. So, she basically... she would tell us right away and we would say, hey, I'm having issues with XYZ thing and then we would ask for help, but she would just refuse to respond and then tell us that she was like still around and a lot of us would reach out to each other for help and we would tell her, like, hey, we're having this issue can you reach out and help us? And, she would say like oh, of course and then just never reply.

When asked these questions, Participant 11 stated:

The abuse was done with everyone in the team... it wasn't personally directed to one or the other. The whole thing started when the team will provide feedback and advice to him that was against what he wanted to do.

On the other hand, when asked these same questions, Participant 12 replied:

The gaslighting started when I expressed wanting to grow. Once I expressed that, things changed a little bit... I guess she didn't see that I had the potential for growth, so her way of treating me became more of like me serving her, instead of it being a professional relationship.

When asked these same questions to the participant who stated that the abusive behavior stated in stages (Participant 7), she replied:

It started in phases; I think with the associate producer. She was my coworker, and at the same time, she was a superior of mine when I was the administrative assistant. What I started experiencing was miscommunication or lack thereof. And, then when that was addressed, I would be told something to the effect of

'you know, I didn't see that, or I never got that,' which could be like emails or text

messages.

From the fourth IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was

labeled ST 4. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 4 (ST 4): Gaslighting Tactics Used by The Gaslighters

The next question I asked participants was, "How was the gaslighting done?" (IQ

4). The main objective of this question was for me to have a better idea of the different

tactics that gaslighters used toward their victims (In the case of this study, the

participants). Learning about the gaslighting techniques used by the abusers was an

important piece of information I needed to gather from the participants, so that readers

who could be experiencing workplace violence could use the information to identify if

they are, in fact, victims of similar abusive techniques. That, in my opinion, would help

them not only to put a name on the abuse they are experiencing but also to act

accordingly to make the abuse stop.

From the responses I received from the participants for this particular IQ, I was

able to construct a list of the many tactics used by gaslighters toward their victims (See

Table 2). Some of the tactics included retaliation for speaking up about wrong things

happening at work (Participant 1); supervisor not taking into consideration participants'

thoughts or conflict with the participant's work schedule, and making the participant feel

responsible for not being able to comply with his work (Participant 2); manager telling

participant that she did not remember the conversation in which she promised to allow

the participant to take time off (Participant 3); supervisor ignoring her employees (Participant 4); participant being blamed for things that went wrong at work that were not her fault (Participant 5); little personal attacks here and there (Participant 6); participant being left out of important meetings and decision-making opportunities (Participant 7); participant's job being constantly criticized without reason (Participant 8); participant's performance being constantly micromanaged (Participant 9); participant's English language proficiency been constantly criticized (Participant 10); the use of silent treatment toward the team (Participant 11); and lastly, manager cutting participant's wings when participant expressed desire to grow professionally (Participant 12). Table 2 shows the complete picture of all the gaslighting tactics the participants shared with me during their formal interviews.

When asked about the tactics used on her, Participant 1 stated:

So, there were basically... It was largely related to my workload. So, I was seeing you know... a normal day for a PA at that office would have been like 10 - 12 patients a day. I was seeing about double that. Yeah, because I, you know, my coworker was on maternity leave and, you know... people needed to be seen and all that good stuff, and I understand that's, you know, it's nobody's fault really. But you know, I would ask multiple times for my schedule to be kind of dialed back because I was staying too late, and it wasn't good for my mental health. And they would kind of... they would do it for, you know, a few weeks and then it would go right back to where it was. And I would ask them about it, and I would

be like, is this like a personal thing that's happening here? And they'd be like, oh,

no, it's just how the schedule works.

When asked this same question, Participant 2 shared the following:

It was just pretty much like verbally... like face to face... like a quick incident. It

was kind of just said like, you're responsible, insinuating that I'd be in trouble if I

didn't like meet the tasks, pretty much.

Participant 3 talked vastly about the ways she was gaslighted by her supervisor.

She shared that:

So, for about 2 to 3 months, I would come in early, like 2 hours early for my 7-

hour shift, so I'd be working like 9-hour shifts, 8-hour shifts, whatever. And then,

eventually, it came the time of sorority recruitment, so this is about 6 - 7 months

later, maybe. And I tell my boss... I had given my boss the dates well in advance,

but I reminded her about the dates, and I tell her, hey, just make sure you don't put

me on the schedule. I'm not gonna be able to work these dates, yadda yadda yadda

and then my boss tells me that she doesn't remember us having the conversation...

that she would not be able to guarantee me these days off. And she said that she's

just not sure if she can do it because the schedule is really tight, and people

already requested off that weekend... like everyone wanted those weeks off or

whatever. And so, I reminded her of our conversation, and I reminded her of, like,

all the times that I've come in early and all the times that I've stayed late and

covered peoples shifts and I reminded her that during my interview she told me

that if I was flexible and if I, you know, helped them out, that they would help me
out. And so, in this specific conversation, she told me that she did not remember
our interview because she had so many interviews all the time that she can't
remember ever specifically telling me that, and that that's nowhere in writing. So,
she couldn't honor that for me, and that me coming in early and me doing all that
is just me being a good employee and I think her exact words were this isn't a tip
for tat. So, it's not you do something for me, and I do something for you. And so
that's when I think that was like the big sort of scenario for me where I was just
like, am I crazy? Like, did I actually make that up and have I been doing this for
nothing, or did she really say that, you know, and it was kind of alarming.

When asked about the tactics used on her, Participant 9 stated:

So I guess for example, on the first day I was using the bathroom and a woman
met with me at the sink and asked who I am, my name, and I said yes, and she
said 'OK, great, I've been looking for you all day, I have work for you to do, come
to my desk and I'm going to assign you this work,' I told her, 'hey, you know, it's
my first day I'm still setting up my laptop getting my passwords set up, I don't
have any of the programs I need, yet I still have trainings with my whole starting
class... I don't think I have time to get started on work right now... there's a lot,
you know that we have going on for our cohort of eight people that started all of
our trainings and things that we need to do.' And she told me 'skip your trainings
with the cohort' and said, 'you have to be doing your work.' And from that

moment, I knew something is going on with this workplace and it just sort of went

on and on from there.

On the other hand, Participant 8 shared that:

My boss was a big believer in telling... in criticizing my work just to be critical.

And then when I'd ask, you know, kind of like why you're being critical to be

critical, she would tell me that if she didn't care, she wouldn't criticize me.

Table 2

Complete List of Gaslighting Techniques Used by Gaslighters on Study Participants

Participant	Gaslighting Technique Used on Participants
Participant 1	* Retaliation for speaking up about wrong things happening at work. * Blamed for things that went wrong at work that the participant was not at fault for.
Participant 2	* Supervisor not taking into consideration participant's thoughts or conflict with participant's work schedule and making the participant feel responsible for not being able to comply with his work.
Participant 3	* Supervisor going back on said words/promises and telling participant that she did not remember having any conversation in which she promised participant to allow her to take time off.
Participant 4	* Supervisor ignoring her employees. * Supervisor not providing support to her employees. * When the supervisor was confronted with not doing her job, she would say that that was not true and that she was, in fact, doing her job. * Supervisor talking behind participant's back and participant finding out by other people.
Participant 5	* Supervisor blaming participant for other people's mistakes. * Supervisor blaming participant for things she did not do.
Participant 6	* Little personal attacks here and there after the participant raised a flag about the wrong things that were happening at work. Attacks included tips being docked without an explanation, schedules being changed out of nowhere and without a reason and being put down in front of other coworkers (Either in person or on the group chat). * Participant was love-bombed and then mistreated. * Lack of communication. * Participant was bullied about the type of phone she had. * Hurtful jokes. * Denial of things being said.
Participant 7	* Participant was left out of important meetings and decision-making opportunities. * Participant was blamed for things going wrong when she was not given the opportunity to succeed in her position due to the lack of guidance. * Participant was isolated. * Participant was constantly criticized about her job performance. * Participant was treated like an outsider. * Participant's job was constantly criticized without reason. * Supervisor made the participant feel bad for trying to do her job correctly.
Participant 8	* Participant was made feel as if her concerns with COVID were not valid. * Participant was made feel stupid when trying to do her job correctly. * Managers making her feel like she was not doing her job.

Participant	Gaslighting Techniques Used on Study Participants
Participant 9	* Participant was micromanaged. * Participant was strictly monitored at work.
Participant 10	* Silent treatment. * Disregard for team's opinion.
Participant 11	* Manager ignoring the people in his team. * Not giving the team the opportunity to express themselves in meetings. * Hurtful comments toward the participant. * Micromanaging participant's work.
Participant 12	* Finding mistakes in everything the participant did when in the past, that was not the case. * Cutting participant's wings when she expressed a desire to grow professionally. * Treating the participant as the "secretary." * Participant was criticized constantly for her job performance.

From the fifth IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 5. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 5 (ST 5): Possible Reasons for the Abuse

The next question I asked the study participants was, "Based on your lived experience, what do you think caused the gaslighting?" (IQ 5). The purpose of this question was for me to have a better understanding of what made the gaslighters snap; meaning, was there a specific reason that caused the supervisor to behave that way? Was it just because the gaslighter is/was just a bad person? Or was it just due to the gaslighter's inability to do his/her job? Learning about what went on prior to the abuse being committed and the possible reasons (If any) behind the gaslighters' behavior toward the participants was important for me to know because having a better picture of the gaslighter's possible reasons could help in expanding the gaslighters' portrait and to be able to identify possible common reasons/motivations behind the gaslighting behavior.

When asked this question, all the participants responded with different reasons they thought motivated the abuse; however, some of the common themes that emerged from their responses were power issues (Participants 5, 6, 8, and 12); nepotism (Participant 6); lack of an established HR department (Participants 6 and 7); supervisor not wanting to work (Participants 2 and 4); being lazy (Participant 2); type of work environment (Participants 6 and 9); miscommunication or lack of communication (Participant 5); entry-level employees been hazed, exploited, and not respected (Participant 9); a culture of discrimination (Participant 10); misunderstanding (Participants 5 and 11), and sense of superiority by the manager (Participant 12). Table 3 shares a complete picture of the participants' responses to the question about possible reasons for the abuse.

When asked this question, Participant 5 replied:

I think it was mostly just miscommunications, and I try not to put too much blame on these doctors because they are great doctors and they have so much going on that they probably just felt more comfortable addressing it to their managers. But then I don't know because it's frustrating for me because I'm a student wanting to pursue a similar career path and they were once in my shoes as well and they know that mistakes happen and like they didn't have the time to really consider the fact that I wasn't there when these patients were getting the treatment and I do kind of think it could have been some sort of power thing or authoritative. They felt they had so much more power, so they didn't have to explain their side. They just knew something was wrong and were upset about it, and so they went straight

to my bosses and said something which I understand, but it also is like when you do have that authority and power, use it as an opportunity to teach instead of an opportunity to get someone in trouble.

When asked this same question, Participant 2 responded:

I think it was a combination maybe of lack of communication, laziness, and maybe like a manager not wanting to like have to fix something or like even say something was wrong.

On the other hand, when asked this same question, Participant 6 stated:

Just the toxic environment. I think the main issue being nepotism, the second issue being a lack of HR. And also, the kind of environment that they were trying to foster, which is money can get you anything. I mean, the restaurant was staffed with young, beautiful people like... it just... it was an environment where, like, if you had money, you can kind of get away with whatever.

When asked why she thought caused the gaslighting behavior, Participant 10 replied:

Because I was different... I was different from every other member of the team and a woman of color from African background. And so, she felt I did not understand English, and that it was her role to teach me how to speak English.

For Participant 8, the reasons she believes caused the abusive behavior was based on a power struggle. When asked this question, she stated:

It was a power and control. I don't know if it's because you know, that's how... if it was the cycle of, for lack of a better term, the cycle of violence. You know, if their boss had treated him that way, therefore, they thought that was how all bosses had to treat people. Or, if again like it was... you know, things weren't great at home, therefore, they felt like they could only have control at work, so they lashed out at work.

Out all the participants, only one participant (Participant 3) shared a possible reason for the gaslighting behavior that was more directed toward the type of person the participant is and not so much directed to any external reasons. When asked this question, Participant 3 replied:

I think it's definitely because I had proven to be a people pleaser at my job for the period that I was there. So obviously, I came in every single time she asked me to and covered shifts and did whatever. So, clearly, I proved to be easy to like to get to do something that you wanted them to do. So, I could see how she would assume that I would be like ohh... you know what? Maybe she didn't say that. Like maybe I'm remembering wrong and just be like very like push over.

Table 3

Complete List of Responses from Participants About Possible Reasons for the Abuse

Participant	Responses From Participants About Possible Reasons for the Abuse
Participant 1	* Participant being punished emotionally for speaking up after being accused of something.
Participant 2	* Lack of communication. * Laziness of supervisor when the participant asked her to fix his schedule.
Participant 3	* Participant being a people's pleaser. * Participant being easy to manipulate. * Participant being a hard worker.
Participant 4	* Supervisor seemed not wanting to do her job.
Participant 5	* Miscommunication. * Power issues.
Participant 6	* Nepotism. * Lack of an established HR department. * The type of job environment.
Participant 7	* Participant does not know. She has been asking herself that question for years.
Participant 8	* Power and control. * A circle of violence. * Abuse was normal in the eyes of the abuser.
Participant 9	* The culture of the company enabled this type of behavior. * Entry-level employees being hazed. * Entry-level employees being exploited. * Not respect for lower-titled employees. * Rivalry for promotions.
Participant 10	* Participant feels that she was targeted because she was from a different nationality.
Participant 11	* Supervisor seeing the opinions of the team members as a disloyal behavior.
Participant 12	* Power struggle. * A sense of superiority from the manager. * Manager resorted to using the abuse to let the participant know she was the one "in charge."

From the sixth IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 6. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 6 (ST 6): Effect of Gaslighting in Participants' Lives

(Including Mental Health and Life Outside of Work)

The next three questions I asked the participants as it relates to RQ 1 included a) "How the gaslighting made you feel while it was happening?" (IQ 6), b) "How did the gaslighting affect your mental health (If applicable)" (IQ 7), and c) "How did the gaslighting affect your life outside of work?" (IQ 8). During the formal interviews, I asked the participants these three questions separately, but for this write-up, I decided to merge them into one since the responses I received from the participants were very similar for all three questions. The reason for me to include these three questions as part of my data collection plan was to gain a better understanding of the mental, physical, social, and emotional effect that workplace gaslighting had on the participants, and how their personal and professional lives could have been impacted and/or compromised by the abuse.

Some of the effects of the abuse that the participants shared included feelings of unworthiness (Participant 1); feelings that his thoughts and opinion did not matter (Participant 2); feelings of being patronized (Participant 3); feelings that she did not need to work hard to do her job (Participant 4); feelings that her good qualities were overlooked and only the bad ones were looked (Participant 5); feelings of being picked on and bullied (Participant 6); feelings as if she was going crazy (Participant 7); feelings as if everything she though she knew was correct, it was not (Participant 8); feelings as if she could never be her authentic self (Participant 9); feelings of mental and physical

stress (Participant 10), negative effect on participant's mood (Participant 11), and lastly,

feelings as if she had a constant stomachache every time she had to go to work

(Participant 12). Table 4 shares a complete picture of the participants' responses to these

three IQs.

When asked these questions, Participant 4 stated:

So, it was like demoralizing, defeating. It makes you feel hopeless and also makes

you really angry. Like, I started searching for jobs a lot for a while, like when this

was... but I was also like very... I was depressed from like obviously the pandemic

and other reasons. I was very depressed... at the time it was really stressful and it's

just having to go to a job where we had no support every single day. And we're

just told that things were not happening that were... and, just being totally left to

fend for ourselves. It was, like, stressful and just horrendous. Like it was very

frustrating for all of us. (Participant 4's response to IQ 6)

It's hilarious because I felt a little ashamed that it was affecting me so much

because as someone who like... like I majored in psychology. OK, I took my

outside classes... I kind of know a little bit about this like, but it's different from

when you learn about it, to when you're subjected to it through a position... that

you're really desperate to keep because it's... it's obvious like I really want it to be

able to keep my money... I wanted... I just... I hated my... it made me feel really

hopeless and it made me feel like ashamed of myself for letting it affect me so

badly because I was like, why do I give so much of a **** about this? It's

maybe... it's because there were other managers that were not gaslighting that were like not abandoning their teams and hearing more about those other teams made me feel even more demoralized and worse. My mental health was really bad during this time in general. I actually developed a facial twitch from stress around this time. I also got diagnosed with migraines. (Participant 4's response to IQ 7)

I became really irritable and stressed out and I was already pretty irritable and stressed out... I was kind of... I honestly... manic because I don't have any issues like bipolar disorder. I definitely... I don't have a mood disorder like that, but it made me feel like really stressed out and just had struggled to get anything done. It was really clouding my judgment to be able to like take care of myself on days off. And I did my best to like, you know, go outside for my long walks and like go hiking... like, hang out with one of my friends outside to like see them. And it was really rough. So, it just... it affected my ability to like take good care of myself and to like... I don't know... to do simple tasks like... I don't. I already have executive dysfunction problems because I mean... and I think this made that way, way worse and feeling like I was crazy and not being taken seriously. (Participant 4's response to IQ 8)

When asked these three questions, Participant 2 replied:

I didn't feel great. I kind of felt like unheard. Like what I thought didn't matter, so I didn't appreciate that. (Participant 2's response to IQ 6)

I mean, it just kind of made me question myself, like oh, was it my fault?... you know, like I second guessed myself. (Participant 2's response to IQ 7)

It didn't really affect me outside of work. It's more than like... I guess it's just like an inconvenience within my life that I had to deal with. It wasn't... I guess there wasn't any long-lasting ones. Maybe in the sense of like I'm more susceptible, I guess to like changing land like within the workplace. So, like if a change happens, it's like ok, let me be more flexible, but that's about it. (Participant 2's response to IQ 8)

On the other hand, when asked these same questions, Participant 10 replied:

At first, I was shocked because I've never experienced such behavior, so I didn't know how to handle it. So, I felt if I spoke up for myself, it will help, but I only make things worse. Since I didn't understand the system perse and she has spent more time in the agency than I have... so she went to the supervisor and said 'oh, she's trying to correct me about something and I am not taking it,' because this was normally when we write to people, we address them by their names. But when it came to me, she said 'I put you do not have the right to address them by their names.' And I asked, 'is that the agency standard, or that was my standard? (Participant 10's response to IQ 6)

The work environment became very stressful, and it caused a lot of panic. I was more conscious about my work, about everything that I did. I had to like, track and then ensure that I was doing everything by the book and ensuring that

everything was being done as it should, and it caused a lot of stress. There was a

lot of mental stress... mental and physical stress, I could barely sleep. So,

whenever I got off work, I was always thinking about the emails I have sent... If I

put it just in the right place... If I did the capital T or like, it just became stressed.

(Participant 10's response to IQ 7)

I was stressed... I wasn't happy.... I felt my intelligence was being questioned. I

questioned a lot of things about myself and... it wasn't a very good experience.

(Participant 10's response to IQ 8)

Table 4

Complete List of the Negative Effects Experienced by Participants as a Result of Workplace Gaslighting

Participant	IQ 6	IQ 7	IQ 8
Participant 1	* Feelings of unworthiness. * Feeling of not being good at her job. * Feeling of being insufficient.	* Mental breakdowns. * Thoughts of her not being enough. * Sleep problems (Insomnia). * Changes in eating habits (Over and under-eating). * Burnout. * She thought she was the problem.	* Problems with her partner. * Being anxious outside of work. * Being late for things because of work. * Being unmotivated to go out. * Just wanted to stay home and do nothing.
Participant 2	* Felt unheard. * Felt as if his thoughts did not matter.	* Made him question himself. * Made him question if what happened was his fault. * Made him feel powerless and not being heard.	* Did not cause any major disturbance. * It felt more like an inconvenience that the participant had to deal with.

Participant	IQ 6	IQ 7	IQ 8
Participant 3	* Felt patronized. * Made her feel disrespected.	* Caused her a lot of stress. * Felt like the abuse was done on purpose.	* She did not want to do anything outside of work. * Sat on the couch for hours.
Participant 4	* Made participant feel demoralized, angry, defeated, hopeless, stressed, depressed, and frustrated. * Felt like she did not need to work hard to do her job.	* Felt ashamed that she was allowing the situation to affect her so much. * She felt hopeless. * She developed a facial twitch and migraines.	* Made her feel stressed out and irritable. * Struggled to get anything done. * Affected her ability to take care of herself. * Made her feel like she was crazy.
Participant 5	* Made her feel upset. * Made her feel like her good qualities were overlooked and that only the bad ones were looked at. * She felt like she was not being noted. * She felt frustrated and discouraged.	* Participant kept thinking about how she could do things better. * The gaslighting she experienced in her romantic relationship was harder on her mental health. * Participant feels like her previous experience with relationship gaslighting helped her overcome the workplace gaslighting better.	* She tried not to bring her work into her outside-of-work life.
Participant 6	* Felt like she was being picked on and bullied.	* Made her depressed. * She was always looking for a way out. * Experience messed up her eating habits (Under-eating).	* Made her want to party a lot. * Messed up her eating habits. * Made her develop a self-destructive behavior in her social life.
Participant 7	* Made her feel crazy. * Made her feel like she was the problem. * Made her feel as if her concerns were not valid.	* Made her feel like she was crazy.	* Affected her time with her new baby.

Participant	IQ 6	IQ 7	IQ 8
Participant 8	* Abuse made the participant feel small and dumb. * Made her feel as if everything she thought she knew was correct, was not.	* Abuse completely ruined the participant's mental health. * Participant feels like she lives in a state of constant struggle. * Being called into a meeting makes the participant very anxious.	* Abuse made the participant feel emotionally and physically exhausted all the time. * Participant did not feel like doing anything. * Participant found herself not being genuinely happy for other people's accomplishments/successes.
Participant 9	* Participant felt uncomfortable going to work. * Participant felt purposefully isolated. * Participant felt like she was back in high school. * Participant felt as if she could never be her authentic self. * Participant became scared that she could be discriminated against based on her sexuality. * Situation made the participant want to work from home more.	* Participant started self-harming due to the situation at work. * Abuse affected the way she communicated with her friends. * Abuse affected her mentality. * Abuse compromised who she was, since she had to lie to clients to cover the company's policies.	* Abuse damaged the participant's relationship with friends. * Participant started getting sick (She developed a stress-related tumor). * Participant developed self-destructive behavior (Self-harming).
Participant 10	* Due to the abuse, the participant became more conscious about her work and everything she did. * Abuse made participant develop mental and physical stress.	* Abuse caused the participant to develop panic. * Abuse caused participant stress. * Participant was not feeling happy.	* Abuse made the participant develop sleep problems. * Abuse made the participant stressed about aspects of the work to the point she obsessed at home about things she did at work.

Participant	IQ 6	IQ 7	IQ 8
Participant 11	* Abuse made it difficult for the participant to do his job.	* Abuse affected the participant's mood. * Abuse pushed the participant into leaving the position faster since he was already looking to leave the job anyways.	* Abusive experience did not affect the participant's life outside of work because the participant did not allow it.
Participant 12	* Abuse affected the participant professionally. * Abuse made the participant think that she would never grow in the position. * Participant struggled with herself. * Abuse made the participant feel like she had a stomachache every time she had to go to work.	* Abuse caused the participant to develop anxiety, which she continues to deal with up to today.	* Abuse affected the participant's time with her children.

From the seventh IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 7. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 7 (ST 7): Reporting the Abuse

The next question I asked the participants was, "Did you report the gaslighting? Why yes or why not?" (IQ 9). The main objective for this question was to have a better understanding of the reasons for the participants either reporting or not reporting the abuse. Learning why participants either reported or not reported the abuse is crucial to understanding what goes into the mind of a gaslightee when he/she decides to expose the abuse or not. When asked this question, 3 out of the 12 participants mentioned that they did report the abuse (Participants 4, 9, and 10). The other nine participants (Participants

1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, and 12) mentioned that they did not report the abuse citing different

reasons for not doing so. Some of those reasons included manager reporting participant

first to HR (Participant 1); participant quitting the position right after the abuse started

(Participant 2); participant feeling a weird sense of loyalty and felt bad about reporting

the incident (Participant 3); participant wanting to keep the experience positive

(Participant 5); concerns of getting fired (Participant 6); participant getting fired

(Participant 7); participant not officially reporting the abuse, but talked to some of the

board members about it (Participant 8); participant thinking that reporting the abuse

would not have changed anything (Participant 11), and lastly, not having anyone to report

the abuse to due to the Vice President of the HR department being the one committing the

abuse (Participant 12). Table 5 shares a complete picture of the participants' responses to

the question about reporting the abuse.

When asked this question, Participant 6 stated that she did not report the abuse

due to concerns of being fired. She said:

No, never really, because I didn't know what the... I didn't know what the.... like, I

didn't want to do something that was going to affect my employment because I

knew... I knew how unfair they are and that they would be... I mean, they fired

people for so many... any reason that if I ever reported something like that... I feel

like my job would be at risk, and at the place where I was at, I didn't really want it

to be at risk.

When asked this same question, Participant 1 replied that she did not report the abuse; and that what actually happened was that her supervisor brought the incident to the HR department first, and the HR representative contacted her. As part of her reply, Participant 1 said:

It was my boss who called HR on me first though like... I was willing to kind of just let it go. But HR reached out to me because my boss initiated that conversation. I did, I will say like, once I was in HR, and once I was kind of talking with my... you know, my representative, he kind of asked me about the dynamic in the workplace and, you know, did I feel comfortable in that office? And I actually started crying when he asked me because I was like, I've just never had a situation like this before. The HR guy reacted in a way that he basically looked disappointed, but in a way that I wasn't telling him nothing he didn't already know, if that makes sense. Like he... he kind of knew my answer before I said it and he was disappointed that he knew the truth. And he looked very apologetic to like he.... he very much made it clear that he was not a fan of this situation and that, unfortunately, because my boss was so high up, there's not really much he could do on his end.

On the other hand, when asked this question, Participant 2 stated that he never reported the abuse because he decided to quit the position as soon as the abuse happened. As part of his response to this question, Participant 2 stated that:

No, I just kind of just quit and then went about my day. I didn't report it because I guess I didn't want to like dwell on it. I didn't... I didn't... I didn't want to, like, just be stuck on it.

One interesting reply I received as part of this question was the one shared by Participant 7. When asked this question, she replied:

There was no HR to report it to. In fact, that was part of my job. I was trying to develop an HR because I was trying to establish policies that we didn't have in place... we needed a lot of policies, both legally and just to, you know, be a much better organization. And, in the process of trying to secure HR, I got cut out of that process as well. I found an HR solution that was rebuffed for over three months, only to tell me that it wasn't in the budget at the time... that this was something that I would be able to bring up for the next fiscal year budget. And I resolved to do that and then they onboarded their own HR... someone else entirely and then cut me out of all the policy building dialogues.

Around the same line, when asked this question, Participant 12 stated:

That was never even a thought. I mean, and normally you would... you will report this to HR, but she was HR. So, it was like, well, the only one above her would be the CEO. And then, there was no one else in HR because all the other VP' were basically an extension of her.

For those who did report the abuse (Participants 4, 9, and 10), when asked this same question, they stated:

Yeah, I did. I didn't necessarily frame it as gaslighting the entire time, but what I

definitely did bring up was... I brought up the... I didn't call it gaslighting when I

brought it up to people, but I explained factually what was going on. (Participant

4)

So, it wasn't any sort of a formal written complaint, but I did... well, I guess

technically, yeah. Some coworkers... I had formally documented certain instances

of gaslighting, but I overall had told my manager many times how this work

environment made me feel... how it was very clicky and how I felt I was being

targeted because of my status and my level, and my manager, you know, just

always defended that culture and said it's on me, I'm not experienced enough, I

need to try harder to fit in with the rest of the group and actually I think... it kind

of... even though all of our feedback was anonymous, it was very easy to decode

who was saying what because we would have to give specific examples about

projects, and you can tell 'ok, I know I worked on this project with,' and you know

you can deduce easily. So, because people knew that I was documenting these

issues, they sort of retaliated, and I was reported by multiple people, and they had

to open up an HR case on me because my manager received complaints that I was

inappropriate in the workplace, and I made people feel uncomfortable. And I

thought that was so vague and generic and I asked him 'what does this mean? And

can you give me specific examples of times that I was inappropriate or times that

I made someone uncomfortable so that I know and that I can change my

behavior,' and he was not able to give me any examples, and the HR case a month later came out with nothing, and he said, 'ok, forget about it. Let's just move on.' And so, I feel it was sort of a phony thing to retaliate against me to say 'hey keep your mouth shut or otherwise like you're getting reported to HR. (Participant 9)

And, lastly, I did, and it made it worse because my supervisor did not want to hear... my supervisor, I was handed over to... actually they gave me a performance issue, delayed my promotion. (Participant 10)

Table 5

Complete List of Participants' Responses About Reporting the Abuse.

Participant	Did Participant Report the Abuse?	Reasons for Decision of Reporting or Not Reporting the Abuse	What Happened After Reporting the Abuse?
Participant 1	No	* Participant's boss was the one who called HR on her.	* Participant was not treated fairly by HR. * Participant was pushed to resign due to lack of positive resolution.
Participant 2	No	* Participant did not report the abuse.	* Participant quit the position right after the abuse happened for the first time.
Participant 3	No	* Participant did not report abuse because she felt a weird sense of loyalty and felt bad about leaving the job.	* After another coworker quit, the participant just looked for another job and then quit.

Participant	Did Participant Report the Abuse?	Reasons for Decision of Reporting or Not Reporting the Abuse	What Happened After Reporting the Abuse?
Participant 4	Yes	* Participant reported the abuse to a higher manager. * Participant shared what was happening but did not label it as gaslighting.	* Manager came back to the participant and other employees and questioned them about talking bad about her. The manager was fired eventually.
Participant 5	No	* Participant did not report the abuse because she wanted to keep the experience positive. * Participant did talk to a manager she trusted about the abuse.	* The manager that the participant talked to helped her come up with a game plan.
Participant 6	No	* Participant did not report the abuse for concerns of getting fired.	* Participant quit the position eventually.
Participant 7	No	* Participant did not report the abuse because there was not an HR office to report the abuse to.	* Participant was let go eventually.
Participant 8	No	* Participant did not officially report the abuse, but she talked to some of the board members about it.	* The board members just listened to her, which felt like a life-changing experience for the participant.

Participant	Did Participant Report the Abuse?	Reasons for Decision of Reporting or Not Reporting the Abuse	What Happened After Reporting the Abuse?
Participant 9	Yes	* Participant reported the abuse during one of the anonymous reports.	* Participant was retaliated at. The participant's manager defended the workplace culture and accused the participant of not being experienced enough, and that she just needed to try harder to fit in with the rest of the group. When other employees found out that the participant had reported the abuse, they retaliated against her and reported the participant to HR and HR opened an HR case against the participant because, according to the participant's manager, she had received multiple complaints that the participant was inappropriate in the workplace, and she made other people feel uncomfortable. After the HR case was completed, nothing came out of the complaint and the participant was told by HR to just forget about anything and continue working as if nothing had happened.
Participant 10	Yes	* Reporting the abuse made things worse for the participant.	* Participant was given bad performance reports and was passed over for promotions.
Participant 11	No	* Participant did not report the abuse. * The team talked about the issue among themselves and with the manager, but nothing changed.	* When asked why he did not report the abuse, the participant mentioned that he thought that reporting it would not have changed anything.

Participant	Did Participant Report the Abuse?	Reasons for Decision of Reporting or Not Reporting the Abuse	What Happened After Reporting the Abuse?
Participant 12	No	* Participant did not report the abuse because the abuser was the Vice President of HR.	* Shortly after, the participant applied to a different position within the company and moved to that position. * Eventually, the participant ended up resigning from her new position due to health issues

From the eight IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 8. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 8 (ST 8): Coping with The Abuse

The next question I asked the study participants related to RQ 1 was, "How did you cope with the gaslighting while it was happening?" (IQ 10). The purpose of this IQ question was for me to have a better understating of the ways in which the study participants coped with the abuse. It was my belief that learning about the ways in which victims of workplace gaslighting cope with this type of abuse is crucial to understanding how gaslightees deal with the situation and what coping mechanisms they use to deal with the situation.

Some of the answers that I received to this question included using loved ones as support system (Participant 1); zooned out of conversation waiting until it was done to leave meeting (Participant 2); distracting herself with assigned tasks to block the issues at work (Participant 3); by using cannabis and going in long walks (Participant 4); by reinforcing positive self-talk and beliefs, as well as by surrounding herself with friends

who validated her feelings and the hard work she was still contributing at her job

(Participant 5); leaning on coworkers for support (Participant 6); venting to her husband

(Participant 7); by trying to remind herself that she was not the only one dealing with the

abuse (Participant 8); Participant telling herself that the struggle she was living was going

to help her grow up (Participant 9); deciding to start her doctoral studies to prove herself

that she was able to do a good job and that her English was not as bad as the coworker

wanted her to believe (Participant 10); doing what he needed to do, and keeping minimal

contact with the manager (Participant 11): and lastly, by telling herself that she needed

the money to pay for bills and support her family (Participant 12). Table 6 shares a

complete picture of the participants' responses to the question about the ways they used to

cope with the abuse while it was happening.

When asked this question, Participant 3 stated that:

I confided a lot in my coworkers. I mean, they experienced a lot of similar

experiences, I guess just with different, you know, scenarios. But, you know, I

went to them for support because they were the only ones who could really

understand because they were the only ones who, like, interacted with her and

knew, you know, how it was to like work under her. And so, I did that a lot and, I

don't know, I kind of just... I'm a person who tries to like... I try to like push

through regardless, like, at the end of the day, I was at work and like whatever

happened at work like I was still at work, and I still do my job and like... I like to

think of work like working, like actually doing my job as a distraction from like

all the drama that happened in the office. So, whenever like things would get heated with my manager or with a customer or whatever, I would just like start doing laundry or like stocking stuff and like doing inventory like I'm just trying to find some distraction.

When asked this same question, Participant 1 stated that:

I mean really... looking back, I don't know how... I would really just come home, and I would rot on the couch. I wouldn't really want to do anything else. My roommate at the time was very supportive at like keeping the house clean and picking stuff up for me so that I didn't have to do it, but I was very mentally exhausted. Spending time with my loved ones did absolutely help. At some point, I kind of drew a line where I would tell myself I'm not going to work from home anymore. Like you know, you finish everything... you need to finish in the office. You don't take any work home, which definitely helped.

On the other hand, when asked this same question, Participant 4 replied:

I don't know. Probably weed. I don't want to say I had a substance abuse issue because I don't really think I did, but a lot of you.. know how a lot of people were super day drinking during COVID. To me, that was kind of like that... So, when I would get off work, I would just get stoned like immediately most of the time, and that would help a little bit with it. The other things that I would do to help cope with this is, again, I would go for long walks outside. I didn't have my bike with me, which I really love to bike and I'm an avid cyclist now and I cycle a lot,

but I didn't have a good physical outlet besides just hiking and walking around. You know, I would also go for a really long walk down to the lakefront and I would try to like, listen to some good music like, I think Beyoncé came out with some good music at that time. So, I was listening to that. And I was listening to some podcasts. Actually, I listened to true crime podcast and that helped. Listening to true crimes and stuff helped me... it was like an outlet because I just felt like it was... I don't know because since I was in turmoil so much at my job that listening to other people's experiences of, like, dealing with horrible people or hopefully them getting, you know... hopefully the bad people getting caught and therefore there being some vindication for the victims made me feel a little bit better.

When asked this same question, Participant 9 replied:

I sort of convinced myself it was normal, and I think that's just how I coped with it. Like, I knew other people who were sleeping at their desk, bringing a change of clothes and a toothbrush to work, and I never did that. So, I thought hey, I'm better off than them. At least I'm not... I'm sleeping in my bed. I'm not sleeping at my desk.

Lastly, when asked this same question, Participant 11 mentioned:

We did what we were supposed to do... we gave him what he needed... And we kept very minimum contact or very minimal exchange or communication with him. We just did what we had to do and get out of there.

Table 6

Complete List of Participants' Responses About How They Coped with The Abuse While It Was Happening

Participant	Coping Techniques Used by Participants to Cope with The Abuse While It Was Happening
Participant 1	* Participant took refuge in loved ones.
Participant 2	* Participant just wanted the conversation to be over with. * He just wanted to get out of the conversation as fast as possible.
Participant 3	* Went to coworkers for support. * Distracted herself with assigned tasks to block the issues at work.
Participant 4	* Participant used weed to clear her mind. * Long walks, hiking, cycling, listened to good music, listened to crime theme podcasts.
Participant 5	* Coped with the gaslighting by reinforcing positive self-talk and beliefs. * Surrounded herself with friends who validated her feelings and the hard work she was still contributing at her job.
Participant 6	* Talked about the abuse with other coworkers. * Leaned on coworkers for support.
Participant 7	* Participant vented to her husband. * Participant tried reminding herself that she was not the only one dealing with the abuse.
Participant 8	* Participant convinced herself that what was happening was normal. * It did not register to her that what was happening was wrong. * Participant told herself that the struggle she was living was going to help her grow up.
Participant 9	* Participant sought the help of a mental health counselor to help her cope with the experience.
Participant 10	* Participant decided to start her doctoral degree to prove to herself that she was able to do a good job and that her English was not as bad as the coworker wanted her to believe.

Participant	Coping Techniques Used by Participants to Cope with The Abuse While It Was Happening
Participant 11	* Participant just did what he needed to do and kept minimal contact with the manager.
Participant 12	* Participant dealt with the abuse by telling herself that she needed the money to pay for bills and support her family. * She took advantage of a job opening in a different section and then moved to that position.

From the ninth IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 9. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 9 (ST 9): Effect of Gaslighting on Participants' Ability to Perform Their

Job

The next question I asked the participants was, "What effect did the gaslighting have on your ability to perform your job?" (IQ 11). The main objective behind this IQ was for me to gain a better understanding of the impact that the abuse had on participants' jobs; meaning, did the abuse compromise the participants' ability to do their job? And if yes, how was their job performance impacted? Learning about the impact that workplace gaslighting had on participants' ability to do their jobs is very crucial because it not only shines a light into the substantial and costly problem of having unmotivated and/or unproductive employees, but also on the way workplace violence, in this case, in the form of gaslighting has on the mental well-being of entry-level workers and the repercussions of it to the workplace. And, most importantly, the toll the abuse has on the employees' professional lives, which includes their present and future jobs. When asked this question, Participant 5 stated that:

So, it made me a little more anxious and nervous because I felt I was doing

everything incorrect. I was following the steps, I was having very good patient

care responses from the adults and the children that I was working closely with,

but when the doctors were saying 'oh, she did this wrong,' a lot of it was things

that, like I was taught incorrectly about, I was kind of, you know, a little upset and

like, I felt like I had to tiptoe kind of around the workplace. And I felt kind of like

that they were judging me at all times, so it just made me a little more anxious. I

felt like I was doing everything wrong and that was really frustrating because, you

know, I was doing my job correctly and very well. I just felt like I had a ton of

eyes just on me all the time. Eventually, I just took those feelings, and I kind of

just put them into me, really studying every single part of, like, the aspects of my

job and so that they had no way that they could say anything about me moving

forward. And then if there were any past patients that continued to come in like

prior and complained, I wanted to make sure that I had all the answers right away.

When asked this same question, Participant 6 stated that the workplace

gaslighting she experienced while in that position (As a bartender) went even beyond

gaslighting; it was actually a direct attack on her integrity as a worker since she actually

was the victim of workplace malpractice. As part of her response to this question,

Participant 6 stated that:

Yes, the gaslighting affected my ability to do my job because, at times, I was

having to be like... constantly be under the influence of something at work,

because that was another thing... we were always like... we were required to be

under the influence. Whether it was like our managers rounding us up to take

shots, because we needed to look alive or whether it's customers demanding to

like to have a drink with you. So, like your managers are running approval, so you

can have a drink with them and like... at that point, it was kind of like, well, they

want to take a drink with you, so go take it.

On the other hand, when asked this same question, participant 3 stated that:

I would say that sometimes, like the anger I felt toward my manager during a shift

because of like, whatever she made me angry about, caused me to like not work

as hard because I just would feel like... what am I working so hard for if the

person I'm working for like doesn't care about me.

From the tenth IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was

labeled ST 10. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 10 (ST 10): Stories of Leaving the Job and Starting New at a Different

Job

The next four IQs I asked the study participants as part of RQ 1 included a) "Did

you leave your job due to the gaslighting experience? Why yes or why not?" (IQ 12), b)

"How soon did you get a new job after leaving the old one? and "How was the experience

of being in a new job after facing workplace gaslighting?" (IQ 13), and c) "How is the

relationship with your current supervisor and coworkers?" (IQ 15). When asking these

questions to the participants, instead of asking the questions one by one, I instead,

merged all four questions into one so that the participants would not feel overwhelmed by all the questions. So basically, I asked participants if they ended up leaving the job in which they were gaslighted and what they could tell me about the experience of starting a new job after the gaslighting experience.

The main reason for me to ask these questions to the participants was that I wanted to have a better understanding of their lived experiences, starting from when they decided to either leave the job or not, and how was the experience of them starting a new job after experiencing workplace gaslighting (For those who ended up leaving their job). For those who did not leave the job, I was also interested in learning what was the reason for them not to leave the job, even when the experience they were having at their current job was not a positive one.

Learning about the reasons for these participants' decision to leave or not their job is critical in understanding the impact that workplace gaslighting has not only on entry-level employees' ability to move forward in their professional lives but also on these employees' ability to not allow the workplace violence they experienced at such early stage in the development of their professional persona to dictate or define who they were and where they wanted to go as professionals. Out of all the participants, eight of them ended up leaving their jobs, and only four did not leave the job. Table 7 presents a complete picture of which participants left their jobs, which of the participants did not, and the reasons for their decisions to leave or not.

When asked if he ended up leaving the job, Participant 2 stated that:

Yes, I guess I did leave because of it, and it made me feel, I guess, like in the sense that what I had going on didn't matter and like, but at the same time, it made me feel like... like... I guess proud in a way. (Participant 2's answer to IQ 12)

I think I got it within like a couple of... like a week or two. The experience of starting a new job was scary... It was, I guess... I wanted to make sure I did everything right in this one, so that I'm not met with something like that again. (Participant 2's answer to IQ 13)

Everything's good and there are no problems, you know, probably one of the better jobs I've been in. (Participant 2's response to IQ 15)

When asked these questions about leaving the job and the experience that came with starting a new job, Participant 1 stated that:

I did leave the job and I was very lucky to go from, you know, this job to a very, very nice one. I was very skeptical of my current job, just because you know.... what they would tell me about, like the way the workflow was, and you know how my coworkers were like I... what they told me about what to expect in the office, I didn't 100% believe because it sounded a little too good to be true. The reality, though, is that you know... I was unemployed. I needed a job, I took it, and I'm very happy. It definitely paid off. But even to this day, I'm still like... my guard is up a little bit.

On the other hand, when addressing these same questions, Participant 3 replied:

Leaving that job made me feel empowered. I felt... I felt trapped at that job for so long and a lot of my coworkers had been trapped at that job for so long, and I knew that I didn't want that for myself. I didn't want to work there for a year. I didn't want to become the assistant manager. I didn't want to become, you know, whatever... like I didn't want to do that, so leaving felt really empowering. And I was like, you know what, now I can actually work towards something... you know, I do want to do something in my field. I was miserable at that job every single day. So, leaving wasn't something that was a negative thing at all in my eyes. If anything, I would just say that I miss my coworkers. (Participant 3's answer to IQ 12 and IQ 13)

I have a very good relationship with my current boss, but I definitely make it clear that I have boundaries in terms of working from home, working late, you know, doing tasks that are outside of what my actual.... you know, duties. So, I would say I'm a little more cautious, but overall, it was a really good experience to get this job because you know my managers are all great. My coworkers are fantastic. My boss is great to work for and my patients are... honestly, I couldn't ask for better ones. (Participant 3's response to IQ 15)

As far as the participants who did not leave their jobs, when I asked them the questions, Participant 5 stated that the main reasons she did not leave the job were because she liked the job and that the job was a great opportunity for her, since she

needed the experience this job was offering her for when the time comes for her to apply

to physician assistant (PA) school. As part of her response, Participant 5 stated that:

> No, I didn't leave the job. So, I actually love this job. Like I said, I need the hours
>
> going into for PA school, and my bosses are very understanding about taking time
>
> off and I kind of work for myself... if there are certain days that I cannot go in, as
>
> long as there are no patients, I can call off... as long as I don't have patients that
>
> are scheduled, I can kind of work around my own personal life schedule as well as
>
> there's a lot of downtime at the job when I don't have constant patients or
>
> paperwork to do, so I can do a lot of my homework there, so there's the benefits
>
> sort of outweighed the cons. The cons were pretty intense for about two months
>
> maybe because of just what was going on, but I didn't want to just leave.

For Participant 7, the reason for not leaving the job was a little more dramatic

since the reason for not leaving was because she ended up being fired instead of having

the opportunity to leave the job voluntarily. In her response, she mentioned:

> They actually fired me and then framed it as I was being laid off. Essentially,
>
> claiming that, by wanting to be a startup, that my role was redundant, but the real
>
> case is that they hired someone else at the same time that they hired me as the
>
> director of operations, and that person was ultimately fulfilling all of the work that
>
> they needed.

And lastly, the reason for Participant 10 not leaving her job was mainly because

the union got involved. In her response to the question, Participant 10 stated:

I was moved from the team because the union got involved and then top

management and the department got involved. So, in order to shield me from the

backlash, I was moved to a different team.

Table 7

*Complete Picture of Participants Who Ended Up Leaving Their Jobs, Those Who Did Not
Leave, and the Reasons for Leaving or Not Leaving Their Jobs*

Participant	Left Job	Did Not Leave the Job	Reason for Leaving/Not Leaving the Job	How Soon After They Started in a New Job?
Participant 1	X		* Participant left the position due to the gaslighting experience.	* Participant started her new job within two weeks of leaving the old one.
Participant 2	X		* Participant left the position due to the gaslighting experience.	* Participant started his new job one week after leaving the old one.
Participant 3	X		* Participant left the position due to the gaslighting experience.	* Participant applied to a different job while in the old position, and once she found another job, she gave her two-weeks' notice and left the job at the end of those two weeks.
Participant 4		X	* Her contract expired.	* She started a new contract with that same company; however, the supervisor who gaslighted her was no longer with the company due to the supervisor getting fired.
Participant 5		X	* Participant did not leave the job because it was a good job and a great learning opportunity.	N/A
Participant 8	X		* Participant left the position due to the gaslighting experience.	* Participant started a new job one year after leaving the old one.

Participant	Left Job	Did Not Leave the Job	Reason for Leaving/Not Leaving the Job	How Soon After They Started in a New Job?
Participant 9	X		* Participant left the position due to the gaslighting experience.	* Participant applied for a different job while in the old position, and once she found another job, she gave her two-weeks' notice and left the job at the end of those two weeks.
Participant 10		X	* Participant was moved by the union to a different position to shield her from the gaslighting behavior.	NA
Participant 11	X		* Participant got tired of the toxic environment and decided to work full-time in his own company.	* Participant built his company while working in the position.
Participant 12	X		* Participant found a new position within the same company but ended up leaving eventually due to health issues.	N/A

From the eleventh IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which it was labeled ST 11. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 11 (ST 11): Positive Changes that Participants Experienced as a Result of The Gaslighting Experience and the PTG that Came Out of It

The last two questions I asked the participants in relation to RQ 1 were a) "How have you changed professionally and personally since the gaslighting experience?" (IQ 14) and b) "What personal and professional growth did you develop (If any) as a result of the gaslighting experience?" (IQ 16). The main objectives of these questions were for me to have a better understanding of the way in which the workplace gaslighting experienced by the study participants helped them (If that was the case) in developing positive

changes in their professional and personal persona, as well as to learn about any personal and professional growth that came out of the experience, and how the experience may or may not have served as a catalyst of the PTG that the participants experienced as a result of the traumatic experience. As a result of these questions, all the participants reported experiencing positive professional and personal changes since the gaslighting experience, as well as developing personal and professional growth as a result of the experience.

Some of the positive changes participants developed as a result of the gaslighting experience included being better at setting boundaries (Participant 1); believing more in himself now and knowing his true worth (Participant 2); being more aware of what treatment to accept and what not to accept (Participant 3); to have the courage to stand up for herself more (Participant 4); to know when to compromise but also when to set boundaries (Participant 5); to be able to pick up abuse tactics quickly and to know how to deal with them more appropriately (Participant 6); to know when not to share things about her personal life so they cannot be used against her (Participant7); to learn how not to treat people under her supervision (Participant 8); to understand that no job is worth compromising your health for (Participant 9); to not allow the bad experience she had to influence who she is as a person and as a professional (Participant 10); to learn to just focus on the job and to not take things personally (Participant 11); and lastly, for Participant 12, the abusive experience actually influenced her decision of pursuing a doctoral degree in Industrial Psychology, so that she could use her knowledge and experience to try to make a difference in the workforce. Table 8 shares a complete picture

of the positive changes and growth that each participant experienced as part of their traumatic experience.

When I asked Participant 1 these questions, she stated that:

In both, personal and professional regard, I definitely know my worth a bit more. Especially you know, I'm fortunate to have friends who still work at my old office because... this made me feel a little bit better about the situation, but my boss still has yet to replace me and it's been a good... it's been over six months since I left, so it's very clear to me that I was not the problem here. It definitely has made me kind of recognize that I deserve a life outside of work, and I deserve to be treated, you know, in a respectful manner in my work, you know... I definitely want more for myself than what I was given in my first job, and I know now to kind of ask for it. And I think overall it's kind of for better for worse. It's really kind of giving me a more... a little bit more confidence to set boundaries and to you know... know that if the situation isn't right for me, I can leave it and find something else. So, it was definitely scary in the moment, but I think overall, it kind of worked out for the better.

When I asked Participant 2 these same questions, he replied:

I think I'm grown. I think as a person and as like a professional too. And I think I now know more about the job market and how things are meant to be done and people are meant to be treated now. I guess more of like I believe in myself more.

I guess, I know my worth more in the sense of like in the professional

marketplace, you know, since I'm a hard worker.

When I asked Participant 3 these questions, she stated that:

I'm definitely more confident in like, both, my abilities as a worker and just like

more confident in the value that I bring as an employee. I think I'm a lot more

empowered now and I know what my value is, and I know what I bring to the

table, and I know, you know, the treatment that I will accept and won't accept, and

I think I've gotten very comfortable setting boundaries and maintaining them,

especially in a professional sense. At this new job, I always, you know... I

maintain boundaries like if I'm not on the clock, I'll, you know, I'll support where

it seems appropriate, but it's not, you know, my responsibility, on my day off, to

be answering work calls or answering work emails or things like. (Participant 3'

response to IQ 14)

I think I've learned that like work isn't everything, and I don't... I, for some reason,

I always thought that like, if you didn't work super, super, super hard all the time,

that you would get fired, and I think it's just like the overachiever in me, but I've

learned that like it's ok to have bad days and it's ok to not work super, super, super

hard all the time. Like, I don't have to burn myself out just to prove that I'm a

good worker. And, I don't have to, you know, I think that's the biggest thing... like

I do not have to burn myself out just to prove that I'm doing that. I'm being

productive and doing a good job and like doing my work. (Participant 3' response
to IQ 16)

When I asked Participant 4 these questions, she stated that:

If anything, the experience taught me that like I shouldn't... the way that it felt is
that like I learned from my previous job that I really shouldn't put up with people
that just don't do the things that they say they do and lie to your face about it. I
told myself... I was like, look, if I'm going to take another job with these people,
the minute something goes wrong... I learned that I need to stand up and talk to
someone who's above that person.

When I asked these same questions, Participant 5 stated that:

Personally, I stand up for myself more since I feel more comfortable, especially
since I've been working there longer. Now, I feel more comfortable expressing
how I feel about a situation to other coworkers there and the doctors and PA's.
Like, if something is wrong, or seems to be wrong, I don't feel as timid or judged
to express it. And then, for personal life, I think it's just the same way like in the
workforce; I stand up for myself, and then in real life I stand up for myself. I kind
of set these boundaries. I can compromise on certain aspects, but I set boundaries
for what makes me comfortable and what I think is how I will tolerate from other
people.

When I asked these same questions, Participant 6 stated that:

Um, I think it's made me more aware of what is like actually appropriate, and what isn't. I think it's also made me aware of the fact that I have rights when it comes to employment that go beyond what like... like things that are made aware to us. The service... the service industry is brutal. The service industry is absolutely brutal, but yeah, it's just... it's just changed my perspective on what is acceptable and what is tolerable. (Participant 6' response to IQ 14)

I now feel more self-awareness and like... like I said, what's tolerable and what isn't, and I think also like drawing from my personal relationships at home or like outside of that or like my intimate relationships. I was able to pick up a lot of like the tactics like you know... they try to distort your reality, so I'm more aware that that's actually a thing that can happen, so I'm less inclined to take things at face value, like, I actually ask questions now and I actually want to know why. (Participant 6' response IQ 16)

When I asked these same questions to Participant 7, she stated that:

It's very recent still. I think that I'm learning to meter myself more and not be so forthcoming about my personal life because it's information that can be weaponized, especially for women.

When I asked these same questions to Participant 8, she stated that:

I think I continue to change. I think you know... my progress... not thinking so negatively about everything is an ongoing thing. I think that it will be a while

before that's kind of behind me. You know, if it ever is completely. All I can do is hope that I never do that to someone else.

When I asked these same questions to Participant 9, she stated that:

So, I think it's just for me sort of a learning process. I've been at my current company for about three years now and I still have some of that old consulting nature in me. I didn't change overnight, but it's just, you know, trying to adapt to the current culture and take a deep breath and say 'hey, even if I mess up, nobody has a problem with that.' They just say 'hey, you'll get it next time.' And that's a really nice supportive culture, so that I'm trying to get used to that. And, then I think in my personal life... I just I... I changed my mentality after getting sick, I said 'you know what, no job is worth losing your life and losing your health over.' So, I, you know, I think that I value my free time... I value my evenings... I value my weekends, and I try to take a step away from work as much as I can.

When asked these same questions, Participant 10 stated that:

There's a lot of trust issues when dealing with people and I do not want to share my ideas. I am still looking for a way to go to a different agency where I will be able to share my creativity so that I do not stop my growth. I take my religious beliefs serious, but I've seen that being humble and kind it's not for this environment. It's not ideal for this environment that I have found myself in because being humble seems to be seen as inexperienced and not intelligent. So, being vocal and putting other people down is seeing as being smart and I'm trying

not to be like that... putting people down because it is not in my nature to put other people down. So, I am still trying to find that silver lining... trying to be successful without putting people down and, at the same time, try to push forward and say this was my project, something that I would never think to do. And just talk like if you're doing the right thing... it's for the good of the environment... for people around you. They all enjoy the process... it makes the work easy.

When I asked these same questions to Participant 11, he stated that:

I think it helped me understand how to deal with difficult people and challenging situations and how to... how to focus on the job that you have to do and don't take things personally and to try to move on because you only going to... things are going to affect you if you let them to affect you.

And lastly, when I asked these same questions to Participant 12, she stated that:

I think in a way, it influenced me on my decision to continue my studies. And in a way, go back to that same setting of the HR because of what I'm studying now. Not specifically to target gaslighting, but more to target how employees are treated in the workplace. So, it essentially has propelled me to work in that area and try to make a difference.

Table 8

Complete Picture of the Positive Changes and Growth Each Participant Experienced as Part of Their Traumatic Experience

Participant	Personal and Professional Growth Participants Developed
Participant 1	* Participant is better at setting boundaries. * Participant knows her worth more. * Participant has a better understanding of how people should be treated.
Participant 2	* Participant believes more in himself now. * Participant knows his worth now.
Participant 3	* Participant is more confident of the value she brings. * Participant feels more confident. * Participant has boundaries. * Participant is more aware of what treatment to accept and what not to accept. * Participant is more aware that it is okay not to work so hard to prove she is a good employee.
Participant 4	* Participant learned not to put up with people's bad behavior. * Participant learned to stand up for herself. * Participant is using her past experience to speak up more and to defend herself better.
Participant 5	* Participant learned how to compromise but to also set boundaries as well. * Participant now stands up for herself more. * Participant is more confident in expressing how she feels when wrong things happen.
Participant 6	* Participant feels more aware now of what is appropriate in the workplace and what is not. * Participant is able to pick up abuse tactics quickly and deal with them more appropriately. * Participant developed the knowledge and courage to always advocate for her right as an employee.
Participant 7	* Participant learned not to share her personal life at work.
Participant 8	* Abuse helped the participant to learn how not to treat people under her supervision.

Participant	Personal and Professional Growth Participants Developed
Participant 9	* Participant learned that no job is worth compromising her health for. * Participant values her free time more. * Participant learned how to better advocate for herself. * Participant learned how to walk away from things that cause her pain.
Participant 10	* Participant is not allowing the bad experience she had to influence who she is as a person and as a professional. * Abuse helped the participant learn how to deal with difficult people and challenging situations.
Participant 11	* Bad experience allowed the participant to learn to just focus on the job and to not take things personally.
Participant 12	* Abusive experience influenced the participant's decision to pursue a higher education (Ph.D. in Industrial Psychology).

RQ Two: What Role Does Resilience Play in Entry-Level Employees Developing PTG?

Second MT: Role of Resilience in Participants' Ability to Develop PTG Following Workplace Gaslighting

The second RQ I created as part of this study was broken down into two IQs guided to examine the role that resilience played in entry-level employees developing PTG as a result of the gaslighting experience. The first semi-structured IQ I asked the participants was "Do you consider yourself a resilience person?" (IQ 2.1), and the second IQ question was "Can you provide an example of a moment in which you experienced being resilient?" (IQ 2.2). These two IQs yielded two subthemes (ST) a) Resilience in entry-level employees (ST 12) and b) Stories of resilient moments experienced by the study participants (ST 13). (See Figure 4).

From the twelve IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 12. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 12 (ST 12): Resilience in Entry-Level Employees

As mentioned above, this ST emerged as part of the first semi-structured IQ I asked the participants as part of my efforts to answer RQ 2. As mentioned above, the first question I asked was, "Do you consider yourself a resilience person?" (IQ 2.1). The main objective of this question was for me to have a better idea of the role that resilience played in the participants' ability to not only successfully deal with and bounce back from the traumatic experience they were facing, but also to learn of the role that resilience played in these entry-level employees developing PTG as a result of their lived experience with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon.

When asked this question, Participant 2 replied:

I guess I am. I guess that being able to be like, ok, I'm leaving a job, and be able to bounce back and find a better job in a more like career driven job made me pretty resilient.

When asked this question to Participant 6, she stated that:

In my old job, I knew I was being treated unfairly and I stood up for myself, and even though it was scary, I was like... You know what, I'm going to figure it out and I think that's just the common theme in my life. Like, no matter how hard or how scary it is, I'm usually like... you know what? Like I'm just going to have to figure it out.

When I asked this question to the participants, Participant 4 stated that she feels her resilience helped her manage the situation. Participant 4 also stated that she knew she could put up with the situation and did not want to quit because she did not want others to have to experience what she was dealing with. When asked if she considers herself a resilient person, participant 1 stated "I do now. I do not think I did back then, but yes, I think coming out of that situation kind of proves that I am more resilient than I thought I was."

When asked this question, Participant 7 replied:

Yes, I consider myself a resilient person. Prior to that job, I did a brief stint as a test results dispatcher for a COVID testing company. That job had me burning the candle at both ends and dealing with a very passionate owner/boss, who... we're talking about people in LA who have a very strong personality type that can be aggressive and abrasive, and it can seem mean spirited, and she was also very inconsiderate of my schedule and that I was in a different time zone. And I, recall that the way that I dealt with her... I tried to make sure that I framed any of my statements or responses to her in a way that she could feel like she was being heard... that I had empathy for what she was concerned with, that we're on the same team.

Figure 4

Hierarchy of Study's Research Question Two, Interview Questions, Extra Question, and Final Question and Associated Themes, Subthemes, and Emerging Themes.

Research Question Two	Interview Questions	Themes
What role does resilience play in entry-level employees developing PTG?	2.1) Do you consider yourself a resilient person? 2.2) Provide an example of a moment in which you experienced being resilient.	<u>Second Main Theme</u>: Role of resilience in participants' ability to develop PTG following workplace gaslighting. <u>Subtheme 12</u>: Resilience in entry-level employees. <u>Emerging Themes (ET)</u>: ET 1: Resilience based on previous gaslighting experience in a romantic relationship. ET 2: Role that mental health professionals play in gaslighting victims' ability to be more resilient toward current gaslighting experiences based on their lived experiences with the phenomenon. <u>Subtheme 13</u>: Stories of resilient moments experienced by the study participants. <u>Subtheme 14</u>: In hindsight. <u>Subtheme 15</u>: Using lived experiences to help other victims and to make managers accountable for their actions.

Extra Question

EQ: Based on the personal and/or professional growth that you have experienced, if you could go back in time, how would you handle the situation differently?

Final Question

FQ: What advice would you give to an entry-level employee who is being gaslighted and to a manager who is doing the gaslighting?

When asked this question, Participant 8 replied:

When I was in college, my mother died. As you can imagine, that's traumatic. But I kept reminding myself that, you know, my mom wouldn't want me to sit around and sulk. She would want me to keep going. She would want me to, you know, move on with my life. She wouldn't want me to forget her, but she wouldn't want it to impact my life in the way that, at certain points, it did. And I think that I've taken that to heart, and I certainly played it into this experience and that, you know, don't let the ******** get you down kind of thing. That it means... it says it hurts them more when I succeed, even though they've tried so hard to get me not to.

When asked this question, Participant 10 stated:

Been able to come to work every day and being able to perform my tasks despite being denied promotion that I... you know... despite of being accused of things I knew absolutely nothing about... my ability to speak... being able to perform my tasks in the most professional manner, and still treated those people with courtesy and respect, even if... I mean there is so many things I would have been able to tell them. So, my level of resiliency shows in that I'm still with the department after all that was done to me.

When asked this question, Participant 11 stated:

I do consider myself a resilient person because even with what was going on... the situation at the work, when we had to perform some events or activity, we

performed to the standards, and we did it excellently. So, even when he was.... the

environment of the normal daily work wasn't good, At the end of the events, he

was happy because we killed it.

When asked this question, Participant 12 stated:

In a very weak way, I think that while in that situation, the resilience was being

able to get up every day and look past it, because my kids and I had other

priorities that I was focused on, and I didn't let even in that situation... I didn't let

that determine... I can't handle it anymore. And you know, I just have to leave this

work, you know? There was a level of resilience because I kept focused on what

actually mattered, which was supporting my kids and supporting my household no

matter what I was going through at work.

On the other hand, when I asked this same question to Participants 3, 5, and 9,

even when their responses were kind of similar to the ones I received from Participant 1,

2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12 (Yes, they also consider themselves resilient), the answers for

Participants 3 and 5 provided another angle derived from past lived experiences they had

with the gaslighting phenomenon but in romantic relationships, and how those past

experiences helped them be more resilient toward the gaslighting they were experiencing

in the workplace. For Participant 9, her response was more related to the role that mental

health counseling played in her ability to deal with the abusive situation.

Based on their answers to the question, I was able to identify two ETs: ET 1:

Resilience based on previous gaslighting experience in a romantic relationship and ET 2:

The Role that mental health professionals play in gaslighting victims' ability to be more resilient toward current gaslighting experiences based on their lived experiences with the phenomenon. These two ETs will be discussed below.

Emerging Theme 1 (ET 1): Resilience Based on Previous Gaslighting Experience in a Romantic Relationship

As mentioned above, this ET came out of Participants 3 and 5 responses to IQ 2.1 "Do you consider yourself a resilience person."

When asked this question, Participant 3 stated that:

I do consider myself a resilient person. I think I really roll with the punches. I don't think I've experienced anything like super deeply traumatic in my life, but I do... I have had a lot of like obstacles and hardships, so I think that I've learned to really like, persevere, and push through, so I would definitely... I would definitely call myself resilient. In one of my past romantic relationships... I was very like easily to convince because I wanted to be with the person, and I wanted to... I didn't want to be alone, and I didn't want the kind of like sadness that comes with like, the end of a relationship. So, I was willing to, you know, believe anything and kind of shove things under the rug because I wanted to be with that person, and then it was causing me a lot of sadness and it was causing me a lot of you know, loneliness just being in that relationship anyways because of it. And I think eventually I just sort of like... I would have considered myself resilient for pushing through the relationship, but then I think the real resilience was finally

like, you know, having that switch in you of like no... like I need to stick this

through. I need to be alone because I can't keep going through this. I can't keep

believing this and I can't keep lying to myself and saying you know this is ok and

that I'm in the wrong and that, you know, I'm the crazy one when I know that

these things are happening, so I think that was a time when it helped me get

through a gaslighting situation where I was like, I'm a strong person and I know

that I'm going to be able to get through this.

Emerging Theme 2 (ET 2): The Role that Mental Health Professionals Play in Gaslighting Victims' Ability to be More Resilient Toward Current Gaslighting Experiences Based on Their Lived Experiences with the Phenomenon

When asked this question, Participant 5's response turned from a simple "yes, I

am a resilient person" to "yes, I am a resilient person, and this is why," which expanded

from the role that resilience play in victims of gaslighting being able to not only bounce

back from a gaslighting experience using a past gaslighting experience as a roadmap, to

the role that mental health professionals play in victims' ability to be more resilient

toward current gaslighting experiences based on their lived experiences with the

phenomenon. When I asked the "Do you consider yourself a resilience person" question

to Participant 5, this is what she had to say:

Yes, I do. I think I always have considered myself... I like to.... I don't give up on

things easily. I definitely take more punches than I should before I walk away, or

I make a change. I'm... that's something that I've been working on with the

standing up for myself and making those boundaries. But I do think I'm very resilient, that I don't like to give up on things and I like to really understand situations, if that makes sense. For me personally, I was gaslighted in romantic relationships, and for me, that was way harder to deal with mentally than gaslighting in the workplace, for certain reasons, but it also kind of helped... the past gaslighting... I kind of had prior knowledge on it and how to kind of overcome it in the workforce because of what happened in the past. It was pretty quick for me to identify what was happening. I think that's also because in those months was when I was initially starting therapy about the gaslighting in my romantic relationship, so all those coping tools I was learning in therapy were fresh in my head and I was really, really diving into what happened in my romantic relationship and understanding all of the parts of gaslighting and what they entail. So, when I was doing that, I was also like wow... like I could sit back and really look at what was going on at work. And I was like, that is very similar. Like, that is gaslighting so... definitely, yeah. Yes, but I only think that's because I developed the tools of identifying and understanding what it was through the therapy that I went to for the gaslighting I faced in that past romantic relationship. So, yes, I knew it was bad. I knew things were not good, but I didn't identify it as gaslighting, and the terms associated with it until I actually went to a professional. And, then it kind of helped me identify it quicker and with actual terms.

Lastly, when asked this same question, Participant 9 shared that talking to a therapist helped her in a way, so when I asked her if she could expand on that, she replied:

> So, I actually started the mental health counseling for different reasons. Work actually paid for it because I was involved in a traumatic incident where I was actually abducted by an Uber driver and so I was in therapy for that. But then because they were paying for the therapy, I figured, ok, I can just use this therapy to talk about whatever I want. It doesn't only have to be about this incident. So, I did talk about this workplace gaslighting and yeah, all the effects that it had on me, and the therapist did try her best to help, and I think maybe she probably gave some good pieces of advice, but for the most part, I think it just wasn't a good fit... the therapist and me because she wasn't really somebody who can give good advice. She was more somebody who just listened and then tried to guide me in the direction by saying, well, what do you think? Well, how do you feel? So, it wasn't really what I was looking for. I was looking for somebody who was older and wiser and who could tell, you know, good direction to. So, I actually stopped the therapy and didn't look for a different therapist after that. So, my experience is very limited, but I guess answering your question honestly, yes. I did, you know, go to professional help for this at some point.

From the thirteen IQ I asked the study participants, one ST emerged, which was labeled ST 13. This ST will be discussed below.

Subtheme 13 (ST 13): Stories of Resilient Moments Experienced by the Study

Participants

The last question I asked the participants as part of my effort to answer RQ 2 was, "Can you provide an example of a moment in which you experienced being resilient?" (IQ 2.2). The purpose of this question was for me to immerse myself in the lived experiences of the participants with resilience and, as I mentioned earlier, to have a better understanding on how those past experiences could have provided a roadmap to the participants, to not only successfully deal with and bounce back from the traumatic experience they were facing, but also to learn of the role that resilience played in these entry-level employees developing PTG as a result of their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon. When asked this question, Participant 1 shared the following:

> In terms of a past experience with resilience, I think it was very much me staying true to myself throughout that entire experience. Like, at the end of the day, I did recognize that the treatment I was receiving was not right. And, in terms of resilience... I was definitely strong enough to stand up for myself and to stick with my guns instead of kind of laying down and, you know, allowing it to continue. The situation helped me grow so much as a professional because now I know what kind of treatment, professionally and personally, to accept and what not to accept, you know. I kind of developed consistency with sticking to my guns and, you know, making sure that I'm putting myself first before I'm putting any other

job, or my boss, or anybody first. So, the experience has helped me to prioritize my own well-being... both professionally and mentally.

When asked this question, Participant 6 replied:

In my old job, I knew I was being treated unfairly and I stood up for myself and even though it was scary, I was like... You know what, I'm going to figure it out and I think that's just the common theme in my life. Like, no matter how hard or how scary it is, I'm usually like... you know what? Like I'm just going to have to figure it out.

Lastly, when asked this same question, Participant 4 responded:

I used to talk to my parents a lot and like when this was happening, I did speak with them and they were constantly telling me to stand up for myself, but to me, what I felt I needed to do is like... what I kept telling myself was like, look, you listen to crazy people on the phone all day... because my parents kept saying you should quit and I said no, I'm too hard to quit. I don't want to... I want to keep making money and... my resilience was that I said... I think she's not gonna stick around forever if I like, hopefully, tell someone about this or I can switch teams. And my resilience was that... how I felt resilient was that I said, look, I can stand these crazy people yelling at me, threatening to kill me or my coworkers or saying absolutely off the cuff political opinions I did not ask for... ridiculous things all day. It's like, I can put up with these people... I can put up with a manipulative evil toxic manager for a little bit... I knew I had a limit, and I knew that my... I felt

like I wasn't necessarily enforcing my boundaries as far as it should have, but I
felt like I could have dealt with it if I really needed to because... and the main
reason I felt like I had to stick around and maybe tell somebody about it was that I
didn't want other people to have to suffer at the same.

Before ending the interview, I asked the participants one EQ and a FQ to try to
have a better understanding of the posttraumatic growth that they developed as a result of
the experience. Those questions were as follows: EQ: "Based on the personal and/or
professional growth that you have experienced, if you could go back in time, how would
you handle the situation differently?" and FQ: "What advice would you give to an entry-
level employee who is being gaslighted, and to a manager who is doing the gaslighting?"
(See Figure 4). These two additional questions (EQ and FQ) yielded two extra STs a) In
hindsight (ST 14); and b) Using lived experiences to help other victims and make
managers accountable for their actions (ST 15). (See Figure 4). The ST that arose from
the EQ will be discussed below.

Subtheme 14 (ST 14): In Hindsight

As mentioned above, the EQ I asked participants was, "Based on the personal
and/or professional growth that you have experienced, if you could go back in time, how
would you handle the situation differently?" The purpose of this question was to have the
opportunity to better understand what the participants had learned from the gaslighting
experience and, if given the opportunity to go back, whether they would handle the
situation the same way they did or if, based on what they learned from the experience,

would they react in a different way. Some of the responses I received from the participants included should have gone to HR sooner (Participant 1); would not have changed anything (Participants 2, 6, and 11); would have listened to her guts and left the job sooner (Participant 3); would have reached out to upper manager sooner (Participant 4); would have confronted the person who was talking bad about her (Participant 5); would not have changed anything (Participant 6); Would not have responded to the first email so fast (Participant 7); would have left the position sooner (Participants 8 and 9); would have not spoken directly with the individual who was mistreating her and, instead, would have involved the union sooner (Participant 10), and would have spoken up and defended herself (Participant 12). Table 9 shows a complete picture of the responses I received from the participants to this question.

When asked this question, the participants replied:

Participant 1: Not reacting so emotional to the email that her manager sent her. I think I would have honestly reached out to my HR representative before my boss had. I also don't think I would have texted him about this. I would have, you know, either called him or said, you know, it's a Friday why don't we meet on Monday and let's talk about it. I would not have reacted so emotionally. I don't think the outcome would have been different truthfully, but I think I would have come out of it a little less anxious because in the weekend and I was, you know, suspended and that I didn't really know what was going to happen with me. (Participant 1)

Participant 2: Would have stuck up for herself more.

Well, maybe looking at it back now, maybe I wouldn't have changed anything because things worked out, but maybe stuck up for myself a little bit more. (Participant 2)

Participant 3: Would have quit her job sooner.

I think if I could go back in time, I would have quit right then and there. During that conversation, I think I accepted the disrespect and like passive aggressive treatment from my manager for so long, hoping that it would eventually pay off and it never did. So, I stayed at that job for way longer than I should have and I was very unhappy, and I should have just listened to my gut and left when I wanted to and not, you know, stayed just because of the loyalty I felt for my manager. (Participant 3)

Participant 4: Would have reached out to upper management sooner.

I would have reached out... I feel like I would... knowing that having the knowledge that I do now, I would and should have reached out to their supervisor like earlier. I would have raised my voice more quickly to the supervisor and let them know what was going on. (Participant 4)

Participant 5: Would have confronted the person who was talking bad about her.

I believe if I could go back in time, I would go after I found out about it. I would go straight up to the doctor who reported it and just asked like just explained this to me. I would have a sit-down during lunch with him and really discuss all the

things that he was upset about, our program and our department and kind of just

nip it in the bud. (Participant 5)

Participant 6: Would have handled the situation the exact same way.

I think, if given the situation and to the extent and how I was being spoken to,

basically, being told that I should be grateful for the position I've been given, I

think I handled it well. I think I communicated respectfully. That's one thing...

I've always been like that's important to me like, at the end of the day, keep it

respectful, keep it cordial, keep it polite because you never know what's going to

happen in the future, but you still need to stand up for yourself. No one's entitled

to treat you badly. (Participant 6)

Participant 7: Would not have responded to the email right away.

Well, I wouldn't have responded to the e-mail in the moment. I would have given

it a day. I would have just let it lie there. And, I think I would have just responded

with 'thank you.' Just to like... to let it go. (Participant 7)

Participant 8: Would have left the position sooner, and maybe by doing that, the

damage the abuse did to her mental health would not have been so deep.

I would have gotten out sooner. I really thought that like... and maybe this was

part of the gaslighting of thinking like oh if... if and when, like this person left,

things will be better like things will be better at the office and then that person

left, and it didn't. (Participant 8)

Participant 9: Participant would have advocated more for herself.

I think from the start, I would have stood up for myself... I know it's easier said than done, but I think I would have. When I was pushed and pulled in so many different directions, this person wants that, that person wants that, that person doesn't like how you are doing this... I think I would have defended myself a little bit more and said 'well, here's the reason why I did it and, I wasn't trying to upset anyone, and I was just trying to do the right thing, and here's where I'm coming from,' and you know, maybe trying to build personal relationships with my coworkers, but I felt anytime I opened up to them, it was sort of weaponized against me. (Participant 9)

Participant 10: Would not have spoken directly with the individual who was mistreating her and instead, would have involved the union sooner.

First off, I would not have spoken directly to the individual. I should have just let them talk and then requested union representation because those were the things I was not aware of at that time. I thought we were having a conversation, and the person was being disrespectful and, if I handled it myself, it was going to be fine, but it wasn't. So that's what I would have done differently. (Participant 10)

Participant 11: Would not have changed the way he handled the situation.

I wouldn't change the way I handle it because I thought we handle it professionally, and well it just... you know... sometimes things don't work out, so you just have to move on.

And lastly, Participant 12 stated:

Would have spoken up and defended herself.

If I was to be in that position right now, the main thing would be just speaking up

and letting her know that, you know, I'm not this, I'm this. You know, I think

going back to one of your previous questions in terms of the... of the growth, I

think it's my ethics also. My perspective on my ethics is stronger now. And ethics,

of course, goes in many directions, but it also goes in the direction with yourself.

How much of it do you allow yourself to go through ethically speaking... knowing

that things are wrong but you're still allowing yourself to go through. And I think

that, at this point in my life, ethically speaking, I just would stand up and say 'no,

this is not right,' regardless of the consequences. (Participant 12)

Table 9

Complete Picture of Participants' Responses to the Question About If Given the Opportunity to Go Back in Time, How Would They Handle the Situation Differently

Participant	If Given the Opportunity to Go Back in Time, How Would the Participants Handle the Situation Differently?
Participant 1	* Should have gone to HR sooner. * Should have acted less emotionally.
Participant 2	* Would not have changed anything.
Participant 3	* Would have listened to her guts and left the job sooner.
Participant 4	* Would have reached out to upper management sooner. * Would have tried to make her voice heard sooner. * Would have raised the red flags earlier. * Would have set better boundaries. * Would have documented everything.

Participant	If Given the Opportunity to Go Back in Time, How Would the Participants Handle the Situation Differently?
Participant 5	* Would have confronted the person who was talking about her. * She was able to identify the abuse, based on her previous experience with it in a romantic relationship, thanks to the help of her therapist, who helped her identify the tactics and put a name on what was happening to her.
Participant 6	* Would not have changed anything.
Participant 7	* Would not have responded to the first email so fast. * Would have requested an outline of her new position to see what was expected of her.
Participant 8	* Would have left the position sooner. * Participant thinks that if she had left the position sooner, the damage the abuse did to her mental health would not have been so serious.
Participant 9	* Would have left the job sooner. * Would have stood up for herself more. * Would have been more reserved. * Would have advocated for herself more.
Participant 10	* Would not have spoken directly with the individual who was mistreating her and, instead, would have involved the union sooner.
Participant 11	* Would not have changed anything.
Participant 12	* Would have spoken up and defended herself.

The ST that arose from the FQ will be discussed below.

Subtheme 15 (ST 15): Using Lived Experiences to Help Other Victims and

Make Managers Accountable for Their Actions

Toward the end of the interviews, and as a way of ending them on a high note, I asked each one of the participants about what advice they would give to an entry-level employee that is being gaslighted, and to a manager who is doing the gaslighting.

For the advice to the employee being gaslighted, some of the answers I received included to think about what they are worth and to know what other options they have in

case they have to leave the job (Participant 1); to recognize what is happening and stand up for themselves (Participant 2); to listen to their guts, to know their value, and to base other people's treatment toward then according to their values (Participant 3); to document everything, to report everything related to the abuse, and to bring the issue to upper manager but not to HR (Participant 4); if employee feels certain way, to discuss the situation with their boss (Participant 5); to talk to people outside of the situation to hear their unbiased opinion (Participant 6); to communicate as much as possible via a written form and screenshots, and save everything in a folder in case of an emergency (Participant 7); to try to find someone that they can trust, that they can commiserate with (Participant 8); to try to fix the situation by talking to colleagues and managers, but if nothing changes, to not be afraid to leave the job (Participant 9); to stay calmed, to talk to others about what they are going through, and, if necessary, to seek for ways to leave the toxic environment (Participant 10); to address the situation politely to see if things can get resolved, but to understand that reporting the abuse may not fix anything and may come with retributions, so at the end, they need to make the decision that is best for them (Participant 11).

For the advice to the managers doing the gaslighting, some of the answers I received included to be a better leader (Participant 2); to remember where they started (Participant 3); to take accountability, apologize, and learn from their mistakes. And, if needed, to go to therapy (Participant 4); to reflect on when he/she was in an entry-level position and imagine the abuse was done to them (Participant 5), and, to remember that

the people who work for them are doing them a favor, and that they are part of their team (Participant 6). Table 10 shows a complete picture of the responses I received from the participants to the FQ.

When asked this question, participants replied:

Participant 1: To think about their worth.

I would tell them to really think about what they're worth and you know what other options you have... You know what?... I mean there's a time when I was being gaslighted and I felt as though I didn't really have any other option but to work there and to continue receiving that treatment... and looking back, I wish somebody had told me that that's not the case. So, I would say, you know, make sure that you're considering all options here and don't think that your career is over because you leave one... it usually leads to a better opportunity coming around if you know your worth and know how to ask for it. (Participant 1)

Participant 2: To recognize what is happening.

For an employee who is being gaslighted, I would say it's important to recognize what is happening and, at the same time, the one call it out like in the sense of like, hey, this is what I feel, this is what I'm. For the person doing the gaslighting, I would say that their position, part of their position is man management in the sense of like taking care of your own people and that gaslighting doesn't, you know, further your career or look better or for any reason is just kind of... It's like

poison to a team, so you're better off, you know, being a servant leader than trying

to lead from the front by gaslighting. (Participant 2)

Participant 3: To listen to their guts.

For workers being gaslighted, I think the advice is to always listen to your guts. I

think, especially, as an entry-level employee, you're younger than everyone...

you're less experienced and it's easy to think that these people, you know, know

what they're doing, that they have, you know... they're trying to help you and that

they're trying to mentor you and whatever. But always listen to your guts and

know your value as an employee. Know what you bring to the table and always

base your treatment off your value. If you are bringing a lot to the table, you

should not be treated like you don't, so I think that's a huge thing. For supervisors,

I think the advice would just be to remember where you started. I mean, at some

point, you didn't have the power, and at some point, you were the scared

employee who, you know, it was their first time in a big company. So, I think it's

important to just remember... remember your value, and what your value system

was before you had power and before you had the ability to control a lot of

people. (Participant 3)

Participant 4: To document everything.

For employees, to document everything. You don't even necessarily have to bring

it to HR, but just tell someone above them if they throw you under the bus and

you feel like you're not being supported. Don't be afraid to walk away and have a

plan to get out of there. For supervisors, I think supervisors need to like, take accountability, apologize, learn from your mistakes, actually go to like therapy, or talk to a serious professional. Not... not like your pastor. Not like some person who's gonna validate you. You need to find someone who's not gonna validate you. You need to find somebody to help you manage what's going wrong with you, like... and that your therapist can't just be there to validate everything that you say. They have to also help you work through the problems that you're having. (Participant 4)

Participant 5: To discuss the issue with their bosses.

To discuss it with your bosses. If it's something that's extremely severe, maybe you should bring it up to HR, or you should find a new job. (Participant 5)

Participant 6: To talk to other people about what they are going through.

To talk to people who are outside of the situation about it because they can help you see things clearly. Or, if you have a coworker that you trust, that you can kind of be like listen, what do you think of like... do you think that's weird? or, you know, have you experienced something like that? Because I think knowledge is power and people who are gaslighting other people usually thrive on the lack of communication on people not sharing their experiences. I think it brings a lot of shame to certain people. But the more you talk about it, I think the more you realize like, wait, that sucked or sorry, that's messed up. (Participant 6)

Participant 7: To document everything.

Document everything, communicate as much via a written form as possible, and screenshot and save everything in a folder in case of emergency. Make sure everything that is communicated to you is documented in some capacity because it's really tough to deal with a gaslighter who likes to talk on the phone or likes to communicate in person and makes it really easy for them to manipulate you. (Participant 7)

Participant 8: To find an ally.

I would tell them to find an ally where they are now. Particularly, if it's someone that is also experiencing the same. Try to find someone that you can trust that you can, you know, commiserate with. I did have a coworker that I could do that with and I really... she left about two months before I did and those were some of the most miserable times the entire time I was there. Those months without her... that was some of the most miserable times there. Because I didn't have someone that I could talk to; that could you know... we could commiserate about the bad experience. Someone that we, you know, I could talk about how awful like the boss was. That made such a difference. (Participant 8)

Participant 9: To try to fix the situation by talking to colleagues and managers, but if nothing changes, to not be afraid to leave the job.

I didn't know that I was in such a bad situation because it was all that I knew and I didn't realize really until leaving it, so I think, by people kind of understanding

that the gaslighting isn't normal and there's something better out there, it will empower entry-level employees to look for better for themselves. And, for people to advocate for a better work environment and hopefully... as I think... I feel that Gen Zs are very resilient and very upfront and say what's on their mind... and so, hopefully, as this new wave of students graduates and has this attitude, companies will behave accordingly, and cultures will change and become more healthy and I... you know, because I think everybody deserves that. (Participant 9)

Participant 10: To talk to others about what they are going through.

I will tell them to keep calm. Still do your job as much as you can, and then start networking with other agencies or outside your program office to see how you can leave such environment, but most importantly, keep calm and do not trust anyone. Look for outlet outside of your organization and talk to people if you are religious, talk to your kids, talk to your pastor, talk about it. Do not keep it in because it affects... it affects health.... it affects sleep patterns... it affects eating habits. So, I will say talk about it outside of your organization but start looking for ways on how to leave that environment. (Participant 10)

Participant 11: For the employee to address the situation politely to see if things can get resolved.

Well, I think there's two things... I think he/she can address the situation politely. However, it doesn't mean that the situation is going to get resolved, so they have to learn that, if they go above the person, there might be some retributions, sadly.

He got to make a decision that benefit them... either stay there or get a better job... a different job. (Participant 11)

When asked this question, after getting a little emotional, Participant 12 was able to gather her thoughts, and when she was able to continue, she replied:

I think the advice I will give someone that is going through a gaslighting experience in the workplace will be to focus more on themselves... to understand their worth, you know. Because it doesn't matter how much I tell you don't go through it... you should do this... you should do that...' but I think the most important thing is knowing why... why shouldn't you? And that brings me to self-worth. If the self-worth is not there, then it doesn't matter what else you do. Because, at the end of the day, if your self-worth is not there, then whatever you do, it's not going to have that much of an impact... because you're not taking care of the needs you should be taken care of, and I think that when your self-worth is higher, it's amazing how your mind follows. So, I think that would be my biggest advice.

And lastly, as part of her reply, Participant 5 had a strong message to employees in leadership positions. As part of her response, she stated:

If I was comfortable enough with that superior who was doing the gaslighting, I would kind of want them to reflect on when they were in an entry-level position, because everyone that is a superior started off at like an entry-level position. No one is just instantly in charge of everything and everyone, and kind of be able to

relate that to their experience and be like, 'hey, imagine if you were them?'... at

the beginning of your career path and you were just getting gaslighted by

someone who was supposed to be guiding you and mentoring you? And then,

yeah... just want them to really understand. And then remind them that everyone

is human. People make mistakes. People aren't perfect. So, discussing with

someone what they're doing wrong is really important and not just throwing

blame or talking to other people about it.

Table 10

Complete Picture of Participants' Responses to the Final Question About the Advice They Would Give to an Entry-Level Employee Who is Being Gaslighted and to a Manager Who is Doing the Gaslighting

Participant	Participants' Responses to the Final Question About the Advice They Would Give an Entry-Level Employee Who is Being Gaslighted and to a Manager Who is Doing the Gaslighting

Participant 1	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To think about their worth.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant 2	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To recognize what is happening and stand up for themselves.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    To be a better leader.

Participant 3	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To listen to their guts.
	    To know their value.
	    To base other people's treatment toward them according to their values.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    To remember where they started.
	    To remember their values and what their value system was before they had power and before they had the ability to control a lot of people.

Participant	Participants' Responses to the Final Question About the Advice They Would Give an Entry-Level Employee Who is Being Gaslighted and to a Manager Who is Doing the Gaslighting

Participant 4	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To document everything.
	    To report everything related to the abuse.
	    To bring the issue to upper management, but not to HR.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    To go to therapy.
	    To figure out what is wrong with them.
	    To identify why they are doing the abuse.

Participant 5	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To discuss the issue with their bosses.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant 6	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To talk to people outside of the situation to hear their unbiased opinion.
	    To communicate with others about abuse.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    To remember that the people who work for them are doing them a favor, and that they are part of their team.

Participant 7	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To document everything.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant 8	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To find someone, an ally, they can talk to.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant 9	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To look for a company that treats employees well.
	    To try to fix the situation by talking to colleagues and managers, but if nothing changes, to not be afraid to leave the job.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant 10	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To stay calm.
	    To talk to others about what they are going through.
	    To seek ways to leave the toxic environment.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant	Participants' Responses to the Final Question About the Advice They Would Give an Entry-Level Employee Who is Being Gaslighted and to a Manager Who is Doing the Gaslighting

Participant 11	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    For the employees to address the situation politely to see if things can get resolved.
	    To understand that reporting the abuse may not fix anything and may come with retributions.
	    For employee to make the decision that is best for them.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Participant 12	* For employees being gaslighted:
	    To focus on themselves.
	    To work on increasing their sense of self-worth.
	* For managers doing the gaslighting:
	    Participant was not asked this question.

Summary

When a researcher decides to embark on the completion of a qualitative phenomenological study, they do so with the intent of learning about a phenomenon but using people's lived experiences as the main focus during the study. And with this study, that was exactly what I intended.

After experiencing workplace gaslighting as a seasoned employee with an already established professional persona with more than 20 years of experience in the field I was working on at the time, I became extremely interested in the gaslighting phenomenon and the impact this emotional abuse has when used in the workplace, but on entry-level employees.

As a seasoned employee, my experience with the phenomenon did, to some extent, leave wounds that took years to heal, but my interest in the phenomenon went beyond the wounds that the experience could cause employees. After working alongside entry-level employees, and experiencing for myself how fragile those entry-level

employees seemed when experiencing simple and usual workplace conflicts such as a bossy coworker, a disorganized workplace, or not been taken seriously due to their entry-level label, my interest in the gaslighting phenomenon shifted to the catastrophic impact this type of workplace violence could have on entry-level employees who, at that point in their professional lives, did not have an established professional persona. More specifically, I became interested in better understanding how being the victim of workplace gaslighting could negatively impact entry-level employees' ability to move past the traumatic experience and become everything they wanted to become as a professional. And with that in mind is that this study was born.

In Chapter 4, I provided an extensive overview of what transpired before, during, and after the study was conducted, starting with a brief introduction of the purpose of the study and the RQs I created as part of the study. Chapter 4 also provided participant demographics, the data collection process I used to collect the data from the selected participants, the data analysis plan I used to analyze and code the data, as well as evidence of trustworthiness.

Lastly, in Chapter 4, I provided a complete detailed synopsis of the DQs and BQs I asked the participants at the beginning of their formal interviews, as well as their responses to the 18 IQs I created as part of my study, the purpose and objectives behind each one of those IQs, as well as some of the answers that the participants provided during their interviews, which were shared in this dissertation in the form of directs quotes.

For RQ 1, "What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG following gaslighting?" participants' answers to the 16 IQs I created were useful, direct, and straightforward, which helped me draw a good picture of the experiences each one of these participants faced. From these 16 IQs, one MT emerged: MT 1: Stories about gaslighting in the workplace. From this MT, 11 STs emerged: ST 1: Understanding of the phenomenon; ST 2: Toxic workplace environment; ST 3: Gaslighter was manager, and abuse started either immediately or a couple of months after their first day in the position; ST 4: Gaslighting tactics used by the gaslighters; ST 5: Possible reasons for the abuse; ST 6: Effect of gaslighting in participants lives (Including mental health and life outside of work); ST 7: Reporting the abuse; ST 8: Coping with the abuse; ST 9: Effect of gaslighting in participants' ability to perform their job; ST 10: Stories of leaving the job and starting new at a different job; and lastly, ST 11: Positive changes that participants experienced as a result of the gaslighting experience and the PTG that came out it (See Figure 3).

The data I was able to collect from the participants and the themes that emerged from the data as it relates to the IQs I created in support of RQ 1 helped me provide a complete picture of the experiences the study participants had with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon and the impact those experiences had in their professional and personal lives, which included experiencing positive professional and personal changes since the experience, as well as the development of PTG as a result of the experience.

For RQ 2, "What role does resilience play for entry-level employees developing PTG?" participants' answers to the two IQs I created were also direct, full of important information, and straight to the point, which helped me have a better understanding of the role that resilience played in entry-level employee's ability to develop PTG as a result of their experience with workplace gaslighting. From these two IQs, one MT emerged: MT 2: Role of resilience in participants' ability to develop PTG following workplace gaslighting. From this MT, two STs emerged: ST 12: Resilience in entry-level employees, and ST 13: Stories of resilient moments experienced by the study participants. From the data I collected from the participants as part of IQ 2.1, two ETs arose: ET 1: Resilience based on previous gaslighting experience in a romantic relationship, and ET 2: Role that mental health professionals play in gaslighting victims' ability to be more resilient toward current gaslighting experiences based on their lived experiences with the phenomenon.

Lastly, before ending the interview, I asked the participants one EQ and a FQ to try to have a better understanding of the PTG they developed as a result of the experience. Those questions were as follows: EQ: "Based on the personal and/or professional growth that you have experienced, if you could go back in time, how would you handle the situation differently?" and FQ: "What advice would you give to an entry-level employee that is being gaslighted, and to a manager who is doing the gaslighting?" From these two additional questions, the data I gathered from the participants showed

two additional STs: ST 14: In hindsight, and ST 15: Using lived experiences to help other victims, and to make managers accountable for their actions.

Overall, the data I was able to collect from the participants and the themes that emerged from the data as it relates to the IQs I created in support of RQ 2 helped me provide my readers with a better idea of the role that resilience played in the participants' ability to not only successfully deal with and bounce back from the traumatic experiences they were facing, but also to learn of the role that resilience played in their ability to develop PTG as a result of their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon.

In Chapter 5, I provide a brief introduction of the purpose and nature of my study, as well as the reason I conducted the study. In Chapter 5, I also share the interpretations of the findings, limitations of my study, recommendations for future research grounded in the strengths and limitations of my study, as well as the study's implications for social change. Lastly, as part of Chapter 5, I include a conclusion that captures the essence of my study and the "takeaway" message I want my readers to leave this study with.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Introduction

"What does not kill me, makes me stronger."

~ Friedrich Nietzsche ~

Have you ever heard someone saying one of these statements to you? a) "You are just overreacting. It did not happen the way you remember it," b) "You are being too sensitive. I was just joking; you cannot take a joke," c) "You are imagining things. I never said that. You must be confused," d) "You are so forgetful. I never promised that. You must be making it up," or e) "You are always making everything about yourself. It is not all about you, you know." If you have, were you able to identify these statements as forms of emotional manipulation?

According to Sarkis (2018), these phrases are often used by manipulative and controlling individuals seeking to induce a state of confusion in their victims, with the intent to distort their interpretation of reality, leading to victims questioning their own thoughts, emotions, and recollections of certain events, which in today's society is commonly known as gaslighting.

According to Li and Samp (2023), gaslighting refers to a type of psychological manipulation that leads the victim to doubt the accuracy of their own memories, thoughts, and perception of reality. In romantic relationships, gaslighting typically occurs in three stages within a relationship. Initially, victims struggle to comprehend or believe their partner's actions while still maintaining their own reality. In the second stage, victims

strive to uphold their own perspective and desperately seek approval from their partners. The final stage entails victims feeling overwhelmed by their partners' manipulations, leading to a sense of hopelessness regarding ever gaining their partners' validation. While gaslighting is commonly associated with intimate relationships, it can manifest in any personal relationship, including the workplace.

Previous research on gaslighting has primarily concentrated on well-known forms of workplace emotional abuse like bullying and mobbing (Arslantas et al., 2021; Iqbal et al., 2021; Tsuno & Tabuchi, 2021; Vaclavikova & Kozakova, 2021). However, there has been limited investigation into gaslighting, specifically, as a type of emotional abuse.

The aim of this qualitative study utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological approach was to explore the firsthand encounters of entry-level employees who faced gaslighting in their workplace. The findings of this study provided insights into the lived experiences of the participants and an in-depth comprehension of how they were able to transform those experiences into a catalyst for PTG.

Interpretation of the Findings

At the beginning of this study, and based on personal experience, as well as the literature review I conducted in preparation for the study, I realized that the gaslighting phenomenon had existed long before it was partially studied and given a name. The main purpose of this investigation was to explore the firsthand encounters of entry-level employees who were subjected to gaslighting. The primary research questions (RQs) guiding this study were: a) RQ 1: What is the lived experience of entry-level employees

with PTG following gaslighting? and b) RQ 2: What role does resilience play in the development of PTG among entry-level employees? The conceptual framework employed in this study was centered around resilience and PTG. As part of this dissertation, I conducted interviews with individuals ages 20 - 45 who were employed, had at least two years of college experience, and had experienced gaslighting during their first year in an entry-level position. From the analysis and coding process, RQ 1 yielded one Main Theme (MT 1) and 11 Subthemes (STs), while research question two (RQ 2) yielded one MT and two STs (ST 12 and ST 13). From one of the STs that emerged from the data collected as part of RQ 2 (ST 12), two additional themes emerged, which I labeled in this dissertation as emerging theme (ET) one (ET 1) and emerging theme two (ET 2) (See Figures 3 and 4). Furthermore, as part of the data collection process, I asked the study participants an extra question (EQ) and a final question (FQ). From the EQ, one ST (ST 14) emerged, and for the FQ, another ST (ST 15) emerged.

For RQ 1, the following MT and STs emerged: MT 1: Stories about gaslighting in the workplace, ST 1: Understanding of the phenomenon, ST 2: Toxic workplace environment, ST 3: Gaslighter was manager and abuse started either immediately or a couple of months after their first day in the position, ST 4: Gaslighting tactics used by the gaslighter, ST 5: Possible reasons for the abuse, ST 6: Effect of gaslighting in participants' lives (Including mental health and life outside of work), ST 7: Reporting the abuse, ST 8: Coping with the abuse, ST 9: Effect of gaslighting in participants' ability to perform their job, ST 10: Stories of leaving the job and starting new at a different job,

and ST 11: Positive changes that participants experienced as a result of the gaslighting experience and the PTG that came out it.

For RQ 2, the following MT and STs emerged: MT 2: Role of resilience in participants' ability to develop PTG following workplace gaslighting, ST 12: Resilience in entry-level employees, ET 1 (As part of ST 12): Resilience based on previous gaslighting experience in a romantic relationship, ET 2 (Also as part of ST 12): The role that mental health professionals play in gaslighting victims' ability to be more resilient toward current gaslighting experiences based on their lived experiences with the phenomenon, and ST 13: Stories of resilient moments experienced by the study participants. For the EQ, the following ST emerged: ST 14: In hindsight, and for the FQ, the following ST emerged: ST 15: Use of lived experiences to help other victims and make managers accountable for their actions. Before I go into details about the overview of the findings, below, I share a recap of the conceptual framework used as part of this study.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework I used for this hermeneutic phenomenological study was a combination of the resilience and the PTG concepts. In Chapter 2, I provided an in-depth explanation of these two concepts and how, according to previous studies, they seemed to have played a vital role in people's ability to develop positive changes as a result of the traumatic experience. Using this conceptual framework as part of my study allowed me to have a better understanding of the role these two concepts played in

helping the study participants in developing positive changes following the workplace gaslighting they endured. Prior to the formal interviews, I shared with each participant the definition of these two concepts to help them have a clear understanding of each concept.

When it came to the resilience concept, as part of the IQs, each participant was asked if they considered themselves a resilient person, to which each one of them answered that they did, in fact, consider themselves to be resilient. An interesting fact that came out of this question was not the fact that the participants considered themselves resilient or not, but the reason they felt they were resilient individuals. For example, when asked this question, Participant 2 mentioned that the fact that he was able to leave the job and find a new job without allowing the bad experience to interfere with his ability to successfully perform in his new job made him a resilient person. When asked this same question, Participant 12 replied that, despite knowing that she was the victim of workplace gaslighting, being able to get up every day and look past it so that she could continue to do her job proved to her that she was, in fact, a resilient person.

On the other hand, as part of his reply to this question, Participant 11 mentioned that he considers himself a resilient person because, even when he and his team were facing workplace mistreatment, when they had to perform events or activities, they performed the tasks to the best of their abilities without allowing the mistreatment to compromise the quality of their job.

As you can see, even when each participant had the opportunity to review the definition of the resilience concept prior to their interviews, they all interpreted the definition based on their own personal experience with the concept as it applied to their lived experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon. Furthermore, the participants' interpretation of the resilience concept seems to be aligned with three resilience traits mentioned by Leary et al. (2023) in their article *Build Resilient Enterprises with Resilient People: The Case of ASK Consulting*, who believe that, in order to effectively ready themselves for unexpected challenges, leaders must prioritize the establishment of an organization that can attract and empower individuals possessing three essential qualities for resilience:

1. Discipline: The ability to effectively carry out responsibilities and fulfill obligations in the face of significant changes or discouraging situations.

2. Open-mindedness to change: A receptive attitude and willingness to embrace and adapt to new ideas, perspectives, or modifications.

3. Serve the team: Engaging in actions or behaviors that prioritize the collective success, well-being, and goals of the team.

When it came to the PTG concept, during their interviews, each participant was asked about any personal and/or professional positive changes they developed due to their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon and, based on the personal and/or professional growth they experienced, if they could go back in time, how would they have handled the situation differently. As part of their responses, all the

participants shared some of the positive changes they developed as part of the traumatic experience, which included: a) Being better at setting boundaries, b) Being better about advocating for themselves, and c) Being better at walking away from things that cause them pain.

Similar to the concept of resilience, despite providing participants with the definition of PTG before their interviews, each individual understood and interpreted the definition through the lens of their own personal encounters with the concept, specifically, in relation to their firsthand experiences with workplace gaslighting. Furthermore, the participants' interpretation of the PTG concept seems to be aligned with what Tedeschi and Calhoun (2004) believe PTG entitles, which includes that merely experiencing traumatic events, including emotional abuse, is not enough to trigger PTG. Rather, individuals must engage in introspection and actively search for significance within their experiences. In essence, their perception of the concept goes in hand with the belief that growth emerges from the process of adapting to the trauma and reconstructing one's perception of the world, as stated by Sumalla, Ochoa, and Blanco (2009), which is the case of the participants in this study, who used their own lived experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon and their inner self to rise from the ashes and move forward in life with a renewed sense of self-worth and self-empowerment.

Research Question One (RQ 1): What is the Lived Experience of Entry-Level

Employees with PTG Following Gaslighting?

Main Theme 1 (MT 1): Stories About Gaslighting in the Workplace

The main objective of this study was to examine the personal experiences of

entry-level employees who encountered gaslighting within their work environment. The

study aimed to acquire a deeper understanding of their lived encounters with the

workplace gaslighting phenomenon and explore the ways in which they managed to

convert those experiences into a driving force for PTG.

During their formal interviews, each participant shared their lived experiences

with the gaslighting phenomenon, starting with the first time they experienced the abuse,

who did the gaslighting, and a detailed explanation of the gaslighting tactics used by the

abusers (In this case, the gaslighters). During their recount of the traumatic events, most

of the participants were able to share their experiences in a calm manner and with a

matter-of-fact attitude, with the exception of two of the participants who almost broke

down during their interviews, showing how vulnerable they still are about the traumatic

experiences they lived.

One of the most memorable stories the participants shared with me consisted of a

receptionist at a massage parlor (Participant 3) being told that her recollections of a topic

covered during a conversation she had with her immediate supervisor, in which the

receptionist had asked her manager for a specific week off, never happened and that,

since the manager had no recollections of the topic ever been discussed, the receptionist

was not allowed to take the week off. While telling me this story, the participant told me how hurt she felt about the whole situation and how, even when she was able to identify what was happening from the get-go, she questioned herself and felt like she may have imagined the conversation. From the tone in her voice, I could tell how affected she was by the situation. However, after a couple of seconds of silence, she was able to continue the interview and shared with me that she was 100 percent sure that the topic was, in fact, discussed during the conversation and that she knew that the manager was just "being petty and not wanting to give her the week off" (Participant Number 3, personal communication, April 16, 2023).

Despite the individual nature of each participant's lived experiences, most of them shared a common underlying narrative of a toxic workplace in which gaslighting was used as a silent weapon of destruction toward them.

Subtheme 1 (ST 1): Understanding of the Phenomenon

The gaslighting phenomenon, despite its prior coverage in news outlets and scholarly research, is widely recognized as a comparatively recent manifestation of abusive behavior deployed by manipulators to exert control over their victims, leading them to doubt their mental stability and ability to accurately recall past events. A substantial number of individuals with whom I engaged in discussions regarding this study exhibited a state of ambivalence regarding the precise definition of gaslighting. This prompted me to implement a strategy aimed at establishing a baseline comprehension of the phenomenon among study participants at the outset of the formal

interviews. I firmly believed that a sound understanding of the gaslighting phenomenon would greatly enhance participants' capacity to effectively address the interview questions.

As part of their formal interviews, all the participants were asked if they could provide, in their own words, what they believed gaslighting meant. Most of the participants provided answers that indicated that they had a good understanding of the gaslighting phenomenon, except for Participant 11, whose answer reflected a vague understanding of the concept. In his response to this question, Participant 11 replied that "gaslighting, in my opinion, is a way to treat the employee wrong without... It's kind of like a passive-aggressive method to treat the employee wrong without letting them believe that you're doing it" (Participant Number 11, personal communication, May 12, 2023).

Overall, even when Participant 11 showed a vague understanding of the gaslighting phenomenon, his recollection of the traumatic events he experienced, and the way he was able to carry out the interview proved that his lack of good understanding of the phenomenon did not prevent him from identifying and categorizing his lived experience as workplace gaslighting, proving that all the participants selected for this study were able to share their lived experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon without hesitation nor any doubt in their minds that the workplace abuse they had experienced fell under the scope of the gaslighting phenomenon.

Subtheme 2 (ST 2): Toxic Workplace Environment

Toxic workplaces have been in the spotlight in recent years, thanks to the #metoo movement. The Me Too or #MeToo movement is a determined and progressing social justice movement with the objective of shedding light on instances of sexual abuse and misconduct. Initially introduced in 2006, the phrase "me too" was employed to raise awareness, specifically about sexual violence, particularly targeting women of color. However, in 2017, the movement got global recognition as a social media phenomenon, empowering women to openly share their personal encounters with sexual misconduct. Numerous actors, politicians, and prominent figures in the public eye faced allegations as a result of this movement, leading to various convictions (Issitt, 2021).

During the interviews, participants had the opportunity to talk about their workplace. The stories that each one of these participants shared were full of negative incidents that, according to them, made their working experiences traumatic ones. Some of the stories seemed to share a common narrative, such as: a) Managers retaliating toward the employees, b) Employees being blamed for things that went wrong at work that the employees were not at fault for, c) Supervisors going back on said words/promises and telling participants that they did not remember having said that, d) Supervisors using silent treatment toward employees, and e) Participants being left out of important meetings and decision-making opportunities.

One story in particular struck me, and that was the one shared by Participant 9 in which she shared that the gaslighting she experienced started from day one as a new

employee. In her recollection of the events, Participant 9 expressed her belief that the company fostered a highly competitive culture, which encouraged the use of gaslighting to gain promotion and recognition. According to the participant, gossiping and undermining others was prevalent within the organization, as it allowed individuals to highlight their own accomplishments by contrasting them with the perceived shortcomings of their colleagues. During her interview, the participant also shared that this behavior helped certain individuals shine brightly in comparison. Additionally, she mentioned that the frequency of performance reviews placed pressure on employees to come up with regular assessments for everyone on their team, which in some cases, in situations where no significant issues were present, employees felt compelled to search for minor mistakes or flaws to later include them in the evaluations. The participant ended this part of the interview by mentioning that this practice, when incorporated into someone's review, had the potential to magnify the pact of a single error, making it a more significant issue than a mere one-time mistake.

Despite variations in the way participants described their workplace environment, they all referred to the workplace in which they experienced the gaslighting as a toxic workplace environment.

Subtheme 3 (ST 3): Gaslighter Was Manager and Abuse Started Either Immediately or a Couple of Months After Their First Day in the Position

As part of my literature review, in Chapter 2, I discussed the portray of a gaslighter. In that discussion, I mentioned that, according to Miano et al. (2021), a

gaslighting behavior could be categorized into three different types—the glamour gaslighter, the good-guy gaslighter, and the intimidator gaslighter. In that discussion, I also mentioned that Miano et al. (2021) have stated that glamour gaslighters typically imitate the actions of individuals who initially seek to win over the victim through compliments and indulgence, only to later establish control over them. Furthermore, in that discussion, I also mentioned that regarding the good guy gaslighter, the perpetrator employs their conduct to create the illusion that the victims' welfare is their top priority. However, this is a deceptive façade designed to manipulate the victims into fulfilling the abuser's desires, disregarding the well-being and desires of the victims themselves (Miano et al., 2021). Lastly, in that discussion, I also shared that the intimidator gaslighter adopts a more direct approach in their abusive tactics. Right from the start, they reveal their true nature through overt aggression or manipulation, subjecting the victim to the complete impact of gaslighting without any remorse. Consequently, the victim experiences feelings of despair and helplessness due to the relentless behavior of the intimidator (Miano et al., 2021).

During the interviews, the majority of the participants identified either their immediate supervisor or a higher-level manager as the perpetrator of gaslighting. Only one participant (Participant 10) reported a coworker as the gaslighter. Moreover, regarding the timing of the gaslighting behavior, five participants (Participants 1, 3, 6, 8, and 9) indicated that the abuse commenced immediately after starting their jobs. One participant (Participant 5) mentioned that the abuse began a few months into her position.

Participant 2 shared that the abuse he experienced was a singular incident that did not escalate, as he quit the job right after the initial gaslighting occurrence. Participant 7 stated that the abuse unfolded in phases. Participant 10 mentioned that the abusive behavior began as soon as her previous manager left, and a new manager arrived. Participant 11 reported that the abuse started once a team member assumed the managerial role. Lastly, Participant 12 stated that the abuse began when she expressed a desire to progress and grow within the company.

When taking into consideration the three different types of gaslighters as identified by Miano et al. (2021), I could see that those who committed the gaslighting (As identified by the participants), fell under all three of those types.

For example, in the case of Participant 4, the gaslighting was done by the participant's immediate supervisor, and it was done in a way that portrayed the same tactics used by the intimidator gaslighter (Tactics used by this gaslighter will be discussed in the next section). For Participant 7, the gaslighting was also done by the participant's immediate supervisor, and it was done in a way that portrayed the same tactics used by the glamorous gaslighter (Tactics used by this gaslighter will also be discussed in the next section). Lastly, for Participant 12, the gaslighting was also done by the participant's immediate supervisor, and it was done in a way that portrayed the devious and manipulative tactics used by the good guy gaslighter (Tactics used by this gaslighter will be discussed in the next section).

Despite variations in the gaslighting techniques employed by each individual abuser, a common thread emerged: the abuse of power by gaslighters to manipulate their subordinates.

Subtheme 4 (ST 4): Gaslighting Tactics Used by the Gaslighter

In Chapter 2, I mentioned some of the most common tactics used by gaslighters to instill control toward their victims. In that discussion, I mentioned that, according to Mallick (2021), there are several potential indicators that can assist readers in identifying possible gaslighters within the workplace. These signs encompass actions such as excluding employees from significant meetings or gatherings, impeding their participation in developmental programs or training opportunities, and inhibiting them from presenting their own work during meetings with organizational leaders. Additionally, workplace gaslighting can manifest in other ways, such as engaging in jokes with others at an employee's expense, spreading rumors or gossiping about an employee, or deliberately portraying a negative image of an employee's performance to undermine his/her personal and professional reputation (Sarkis, 2018). During the interviews with the participants, I had the opportunity to corroborate this information based on the answers I received from the participants about the gaslighting tactics used by their abusers. Some of the answers I received included: a) Supervisor not taking into consideration participant's thoughts or conflict with participant's work schedule and making the participant feel responsible for not being able to comply with his work, b) Supervisor ignoring her employees, c) Participant made feel as if her concerns with

COVID were not valid, d) Participant being constantly micromanaged, and e) Managers making participant feel like she was not doing her job (See Table 2).

In the case of Participant 4 (Whose gaslighter fell under the intimidator gaslighter), the tactics used to intimidate the participant included: a) Supervisor ignoring her employees, b) Supervisor not providing support to her employees, and c) When supervisor was confronted with not doing her job, she would say that that was not true and that she was, in fact, doing her job. In the case of Participant 7 (Whose gaslighter fell under the glamorous gaslighter), the tactics used to intimidate the participant included: a) Participant was love-bombed at the beginning and then mistreated, b) Abuser would make funny jokes about the participant, but, according to the participant, the jokes were not funny. They were, in fact, hurtful, c) The abuser tried to win the participant at first with talks about them being like a family, to later treat the participant as an outsider, and lastly, in the case of Participant 12, (Whose gaslighter fell under the good guy gaslighter), the tactics used to intimidate the participant included cutting participant's wings when she expressed desire to grow professionally just because the abuser thought she was not prepared to be in such position (Basically, trying to "save" the participant from a hardship).

While each participant had their own unique lived experiences and encountered different gaslighting tactics from their respective abusers, a prevailing common thread emerged among the majority of participants, as they all shared a collective narrative highlighting the gaslighting techniques employed by each individual abuser mainly

fueled by the desire of their gaslighter to instill control and manipulation among their victims.

Subtheme 5 (ST 5): Possible Reasons for the Abuse

As part of this qualitative study, one of my main aims was to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the participants with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon and having a better understanding of the reasons they believed were the cause of the abuse they endured was on top of my list. More specifically, I was very interested in identifying any specific factors that may have contributed to gaslighters behaving in such a cruel manner. The purpose was to determine whether the gaslighters' actions were solely indicative of their inherent character flaws, their inability to fulfill their job responsibilities, or if there were other reasons at play. Exploring the events preceding the instances of abuse and understanding the potential motivations behind the gaslighters' conduct toward the participants was crucial for obtaining a comprehensive understanding of the gaslighters' motivations while, at the same time, identifying common underlying reasons for engaging in gaslighting behaviors. In Chapter 2, I discussed some of the reasons individuals use gaslighting as a weapon of destruction. More specifically, this topic was discussed as it related to whistle-blowing circumstances.

According to Ahern (2018), whistle-blower gaslighting occurs when individuals who come forward with information are manipulated by others (Gaslighters) to make them seem crazy or mentally unstable. The gaslighter's goal is to make the whistle-blower doubt their own judgment, leading them to regret speaking up. This type of abuse

often involves institutional betrayal and reprisals, leaving the whistle-blower feeling isolated and misunderstood by friends, family, coworkers, and counselors.

When posed with this question, the participants provided varying reasons they believed could have motivated the abusive behavior. Nonetheless, several recurring themes emerged from their responses. These included power dynamics as an influencing factor (Participants 5, 6, 8, and 12), instances of nepotism (Participant 6), the absence of a well-established HR department (Participants 6 and 7), supervisors' lack of motivation to perform their duties (Participants 2 and 4), instances of laziness (Participant 2), the nature of the work environment (Participants 6 and 9), breakdowns in communication or lack thereof (Participant 5), mistreatment, exploitation, and a lack of respect toward entry-level employees (Participant 9), the presence of a culture of discrimination (Participant 10), misunderstandings (Participants 5 and 11), and a sense of superiority displayed by managers (Participant 12). A comprehensive overview of the participants' responses regarding potential reasons for the abuse can be found in Table 3.

From the data gathered from the study participants, several common factors emerged regarding the reasons behind gaslighters abusing their victims. These factors include a) The abuse of power by gaslighters to manipulate their subordinates, b) The work environment's nature or culture, and c) Retaliation for speaking up. It is important to note that, similar to the diverse manifestations of gaslighting behavior, the motivations for gaslighters to perpetuate such abuse can also be multifaceted. As discussed in Chapter 2, individuals with manipulative tendencies in any personal relationship can exhibit

gaslighting behaviors (Sarkis, 2018). Consequently, the motives behind the abuse can vary depending on the gaslighter's desired outcome.

Subtheme 6 (ST 6): Effect of Gaslighting in Participants' Lives

(Including Mental Health and Life Outside of Work)

In Chapter 2, I explored the impact of gaslighting on its victims. According to Stark (2020), individuals who endure emotional abuse often experience feelings of isolation and a deep-seated conviction that they bear responsibility for the mistreatment inflicted upon them. Oftentimes, they refrain from disclosing the abuse to others out of apprehension regarding potential retaliation from the abuser or the fear of being subjected to blame, judgment, mockery, or false accusations (Stark, 2020). Dye (2020) further added that emotional abuse is frequently misconstrued and fails to receive the recognition it warrants in assessing the detrimental consequences it has on an individual. Consequently, victims often choose not to disclose their abuse. Furthermore, recognized as one of the most profoundly injurious forms of mistreatment, emotional abuse brings enduring and devastating consequences to both adults and children (Hoover & Jackson, 2021).

During the interviews, and with an aim to better understand the effects that the workplace gaslighting experience had in the study participants, I asked them to share with me how the gaslighting they endured made them feel while it was happening, as well as how did the gaslighting affect their mental health and their lives outside work. Out of all the answers I received from the participants (See Table 4 for a detailed list of the

participants' responses to these three IQs), one in particular (Participant 9) struck me not only due to the severity of the effects and the fragile state in which the participant became while talking about the effects the abuse had on her mental health, but mostly, due to the physical effect that the abuse had on the participant, which included her developing a stress-related tumor and the development of a self-harming attitude.

While talking about her experience, Participant 9 became notably upset when mentioning the effects that the abuse had on her and reflected extensively on her personal experience with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon, acknowledging the trauma it caused. According to the participant, despite the passage of time, the effects of the gaslighting continue to haunt her, manifesting in recurring nightmares and emotional distress. She expressed ambivalence regarding the notion of personal growth resulting from the experience, as she believes it has left lasting impacts on her personality.

During the recount of the events, the participant compared the enduring effects of gaslighting to being trapped in an abusive relationship, emphasizing that one cannot simply overcome the associated feelings overnight. While she acknowledged the choices she made at the time were driven by career considerations, she expressed regret about being in that situation and does not wish it upon anyone else. She expressed hope that, through her participation in the study and the collection of additional data, the information can reach entry-level employees, enabling them to recognize and escape harmful and toxic workplace environments.

Furthermore, recognizing the difficulty she faced in recognizing the severity of the situation while immersed in it, she believes that increased awareness of gaslighting's abnormality and the availability of better alternatives will empower individuals to seek healthier work environments and inspire positive cultural shifts within companies. The participant also expressed optimism about the resilience and outspoken nature of newer generations such as the "Gen Z's," anticipating that their attitudes will drive positive changes in company behavior and foster healthier workplace cultures. Ultimately, the participant asserted that everyone deserves a work environment conducive to their well-being.

Based on the information collected from the participants, and the discussion of the literature review I conducted in Chapter 2, it is safe to say that, as with any other form of emotional abuse, workplace gaslighting should be taken more seriously and be classified as a passive form of emotional abuse which has the potential to leave its victims with devastating and debilitating mental, emotional, and physical wounds, as it was the case of Participant 9, who up to this day, is still dealing with the aftermaths of the abuse she encountered at the hands of the person who was supposed to foster support, motivation, guidance, and, overall, to serve as a mentor in her workplace, but who instead, chose workplace abuse in the form of gaslighting toward the entry-level employee she was supposed to care for.

Subtheme 7 (ST 7): Reporting the Abuse

Individuals who are subjected to emotional abuse often experience feelings of isolation and develop a profound belief that they are responsible for the mistreatment they endured. In many cases, they refrain from disclosing the abuse to others due to concerns about potential retaliation from the abuser or the fear of facing blame, judgment, mockery, or false accusations (Stark, 2020). Emotional abuse is frequently misunderstood and does not receive the necessary recognition when evaluating its harmful effects on individuals. Consequently, victims frequently opt not to disclose their abuse (Dye, 2020). During the interviews, I asked the participants if they reported the abuse and to expand on why yes, or why not. From all the answers I received (See Table 5 for the complete list of participants' responses about reporting the abuse), even when a couple of them struck me, four, in particular, caught my attention, and those were the ones provided by Participant 3, Participant 11, and the ones provided by Participants 7 and 12.

During her interview, Participant 3 shared with me that the main reason she did not report the abuse was that she felt a weird sense of loyalty toward her boss and felt bad about leaving the job, which brings me to think that the gaslighting this participant endured from the hands of her boss, somehow, possibly achieved the intended damage, which was the desire of their gaslighter to instill control and manipulation among the victim.

On the other hand, when asked this question, Participants 7 and 12 stated that the reasons they did not report the abuse was because either the gaslighter was HR or because there was not an HR office to report the abuse to. More specifically, Participant 7 mentioned that, in fact, it was part of her job to develop an HR department and establish necessary policies for the organization's improvement. However, she encountered obstacles and exclusion throughout the process. Despite her efforts to secure an HR solution, Participant 7 faced rejection for over three months, being informed that it was not within the current budget but could be considered for the next fiscal year. Participant 7 had resolved to address the matter during the budget planning, but to her dismay, the organization decided to bring in an entirely different HR professional, subsequently excluding Participant 7 from all policy-building discussions.

In the case of Participant 12, when asked this question, she stated that she did not report the abuse because the abuser was the Vice President of HR. More specifically, Participant 12 mentioned that the notion of reporting the issue to HR never crossed her mind. The reason was that the person responsible for the misconduct was actually the HR representative. In her recollection of the events, participant 12 mentioned that, with no higher authority within the HR department except for the CEO, and the other vice presidents being closely aligned with her abuser, there seemed to be no avenue for seeking resolution.

In the case of Participant 11, when asked this question, he stated that he did not report the abuse because he did not think that reporting the abuse would have changed

anything, adding that the team was a team of contractors, so they were treated differently than regular employees.

Considering the responses provided by the participants, it appeared that the decision to report or not report workplace gaslighting extends beyond the victims' personal inclinations. Factors such as the credibility of their accounts (Participants 7 and 12), doubts about the effectiveness of reporting channels (Participant 11), and concerns regarding loyalty (Participant 3) contribute to their hesitation in reporting the abuse. It is obvious that this hesitation inadvertently aided the abusers in achieving their intended objective of exerting control and manipulation over the victims, as observed in the case of Participant 3.

Subtheme (ST 8): Coping with the Abuse

As mentioned in Chapter 2, having a better understanding of the coping mechanisms that trauma victims can employ to navigate the aftermath of their traumatic experiences significantly contributes to the process of trauma recovery (Kivak, 2020). In addressing the concept of coping with workplace gaslighting, Sarkis (2018) proposed a set of measures for gaslightees to safeguard themselves against gaslighting behaviors. These measures included: a) Abstaining from alcohol consumption during office events, b) Maintaining meticulous documentation, c) Lodging a harassment complaint with the human resources (HR) department, if applicable, and d) If necessary, exploring alternative employment opportunities. During the interviews, the study participants had the opportunity to share the ways in which they coped with the gaslighting while it was

happening (See Table 6 for the complete list of participants' responses about how they coped with the abuse while it was happening). Of all the answers I received, two in particular caught my attention and those were the ones provided by Participant 4 and Participant 10.

For Participant 4, even when she resorted to using some conventional coping mechanisms to help her deal with the situation at hand, such as taking long walks, listening to music, hiking, and cycling, she also stated during the interview that another course of action she took was to start using cannabis to help clear her mind. During her interview, the participant mentioned that she turned to cannabis consumption as a mean of coping. During her recollection of the events, she expressed reluctance to label it as a substance abuse problem, as she did not perceive it that way. In return, she labeled her cannabis use as a form of personal coping mechanism, since after completing work, instead of dwelling over the situation, she would instead choose to consume cannabis, mentioning that the effects of the cannabis would provide some degree of relief to the abusive situation she was experiencing.

In the case of Participant 10, when asked this question, she mentioned that she became shyer and found it more difficult to identify trustworthy individuals within her team. Furthermore, the participant mentioned that she decided to embark on a doctoral program with Walden University, seeing it as an opportunity to reclaim her narrative and gain a deeper understanding that her extensive years of experience and knowledge were not in question. Rather, it was the responsibility of others who had subjected the

participant to doubt and mistreatment. Moreover, the participant mentioned that engaging in coursework, writing papers, and receiving positive evaluations at Walden University positively influenced her self-esteem. She added that the experience had profoundly impacted her perception of herself and the world around her, and that as she commenced her classes and witnessed the positive feedback on her papers, it became evident that there was nothing inherently flawed within her.

Taking into account the participants' responses, it is evident that, while experiencing gaslighting, some individuals tend to use coping mechanisms aimed directly at addressing their immediate negative emotions, as it was the case of Participant 4, who resorted to using cannabis to try to completely erase the experience from her mind (At least for a while), and Participant 10, who resorted to using a coping mechanism in the form of obtaining her Ph.D. to help restore her self-esteem. These findings bring me to think that the way victims of gaslighting use to cope with their abuse depends entirely on the personality and the way individuals have, individually, trained themselves and/or their brains to manage conflicts.

Subtheme 9 (ST 9): Effect of Gaslighting on Participants' Ability to Perform their Job

As part of the interview process for this study, the participants were asked about the influence of workplace gaslighting on their job performance. The primary aim of this inquiry was to gain a comprehensive understanding of how the abuse impacted on the participants' ability to fulfill their job responsibilities. Specifically, the objective was to

determine whether the gaslighting they experienced compromised their job performance and, if so, how it was affected. It was my belief that examining the effects of workplace gaslighting on participants' job performance could hold significant importance as it could help shed light on the substantial and costly issue of housing disengaged or unproductive employees. Furthermore, it was my belief that examining the participants' lived experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon could illuminate the detrimental impact of workplace violence on the mental well-being of entry-level workers and its repercussions within the workplace while, at the same time, showcasing the toll the abuse could have on employees' professional lives, compromising, both, their present and future professional personas.

From all the responses I received from the participants in reference to this question, which included that the abuse: a) Made her more anxious about performing her job (Participant 1), b) Feelings of anger toward her manager (Participant 3), c) Made participant feel hopeless, defend less, and lost (Participant 4), d) Made participant obsess about her job (Participant 9), and e) Made participant not want to do her job (Participant 8), one, in particular, struck me, and that was the response I received from Participant 6, in which she shared that one of the main issues that the gaslighting brought into her life was having to consent to take part in inappropriate behaviors (Like drinking on the job) to please managers and customers at the risk of getting fired if she did not comply with the requests.

As part of her response, Participant 6 mentioned that there were instances when she felt compelled to work while under the influence of substances, as it seemed to be an expectation in her workplace. In her recollection of the events, she described situations where managers would gather her team to consume shots in order to appear lively, or instances where customers would insist on having a drink with her. In such circumstances, it became a matter of seeking approval from managers to indulge in drinking with customers. In reference to this situation, Participant 6 shared that, in those moments, she felt obligated to comply with the requests reasoning that, if someone wanted to have a drink with her, it was expected for her to comply if she did not want to lose her job.

Taking into account the participants' responses to this question, it is evident that, while experiencing workplace gaslighting, individuals tend to behave in ways that closely match the way they are used to responding to challenging events (Including abuse), which involves the activation of their fight, flight, freeze, and fawn response. However, when we add the job performance factor into the picture, we can see how the trauma response goes beyond the victims' physical, mental, and emotional reaction to the abuse; it actually goes into individuals reacting to the abuse in a way that compromises not only their job performance but also the quality of the end product, which was the case of Participant 6 and Participant 8 who stated that the abuse caused them to not want to do their jobs. More specifically, in the case of Participant 8, she stated that the abuse made her not want to do her assigned tasks anymore, and that it was a complete struggle for her

to want to work there and to want to better the agency, since she kept asking herself why she would want to support people that were making her life miserable.

Subtheme 10 (ST 10): Stories of Leaving the Job and Starting New at a Different Job

This particular ST emerged from four IQs I asked the study participants as part of RQ 1. These questions encompassed topics such as participants' decisions to leave their jobs due to the experience of gaslighting, the timing of acquiring a new job following their departure, their experiences in the new jobs after facing workplace gaslighting, and the nature of their relationships with their current supervisor and coworkers. The primary objective of these questions was to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences, which involved exploring their decision-making process regarding whether to leave or stay in their jobs after experiencing gaslighting, as well as the subsequent experience of transitioning to new jobs (For those who left). The reason I wanted to better understand this situation was because it was important for me to gain an insight into the reasons behind their choices, particularly for those who opted to remain in their jobs despite experiencing the abuse. Out of all 12 participants, eight decided to leave their jobs; for one, her contract expired; one was let go; one was moved to a different section; and one decided not to leave the job. Detailed information regarding which participants left or stayed in their jobs, as well as the reasons behind their decisions, can be found in Table 7.

Of all the responses I received about leaving or not leaving the job, the one that struck me the most was the response I received from Participant 5, who was the only participant who decided not to leave her job. During her interview, Participant 5 shared that the main reason she decided not to leave her job was due to her appreciation for the job and recognizing that the job was a valuable opportunity. She further mentioned that the job held significant importance for her as it provided an essential experience that would benefit her future application to physician assistant (PA) school, highlighting her commitment to acquiring the necessary qualifications and skills for her desired career path.

In the case of those who did leave their jobs, two responses, in particular, caught my attention, and that was the one from Participant 7 since she actually did not leave the job--she was actually let go after the abuse took place; and the one from Participant 2, who ended up leaving the job the first time he was mistreated. In her recollection of the events, Participant 7 shared how, when she was let go, the situation was presented to her as a layoff, suggesting that her role had become redundant due to the company's intention to transition into a startup. However, according to the participant, the truth of the matter was that the company had concurrently hired another individual to fulfill the responsibilities of the director of operations position, making the participant's own role seemingly unnecessary.

In the case of Participant 2, during his recollection of the events that led to him to leave the position, he shared that he quit the job the same day the abuse started and that

what helped him make the decision to leave the job was, in fact, the abuse he experienced. Furthermore, he mentioned that the moment he experienced the abuse was the moment he knew he needed to leave the job since he sensed that his personal circumstances were been disregarded. However, the participant also mentioned that, amidst the turmoil, he also experienced a peculiar sense of pride since he felt that he was strong and brave enough to prioritize his well-being over a job. In reference to how soon he started a new job and the experience of getting into a new job, Participant 2 mentioned that he started a new job a couple of weeks after leaving his old job and that the experience has been, so far, a positive one.

Considering the responses provided by all the participants, it appeared to me that the decision to leave or not to leave the job in which they experienced the abuse was one that some of the participants made mainly based on their personal and individual situations at the moment of making the decision (As it was the case for Participant 7), and not one driven by the abuse itself, while for some of the other participants (As it was the case for Participant 2), the abuse was the main reason they decided to leave their jobs.

Subtheme 11 (ST 11): Positive Changes that Participants Experienced as a Result of the Gaslighting Experience and the PTG that Came Out of It

The last two questions I asked the participants that prompted this ST (IQ 14 and IQ 16) in relation to RQ 1 aimed to explore the professional and personal transformations that occurred as a result of the gaslighting experience. The objectives behind these IQs were to understand whether the gaslighting experience the participants endured facilitated

positive changes in their professional and personal lives and to identify any personal and professional growth resulting from the ordeal. Additionally, the IQs sought to determine if the experience acted as a catalyst for PTG among the participants.

As part of their responses, the participants described various forms of growth and positive transformations. For instance, they reported: a) Improvements such as setting better boundaries, b) Recognizing their self-worth, c) Becoming more assertive, and d) Gaining awareness of abusive tactics. Other positive changes included: e) Learning not to compromise personal well-being for the sake of a job, f) Separating personal and professional matters, and g) Developing leadership skills (See Table 8 for a list of positive changes and growth experienced by each participant).

In the case of Participant 1, in the personal and professional context, she expressed an increased sense of self-worth and confidence as part of the growth she experienced as a result of the workplace gaslighting experience. She mentioned that having friends who still work at her previous office, who have shared with her that her old boss has yet to find a replacement for her position, even though it has been over six months since her departure, provided some comfort amidst the situation, which helped her realize that she was not, in fact, the cause of any issues in that workplace. During her recollection of the traumatic event, she mentioned that the experience has highlighted the importance of having a life outside of work and being treated respectfully in a professional setting. The participant stated that now she recognizes her own deservingness of better treatment and aspires for more in her future endeavors. She also

added that this experience has given her the courage to set boundaries, prioritize her well-being, and pursue more opportunities that align with her personal and professional needs. Finally, she added that, although initially daunting, the overall outcome of the situation has been positive, providing her with increased confidence and a willingness to seek out new and more suitable opportunities.

In the case of Participant 2, during his interview, and as part of the question about any personal and professional growth that came out of the workplace gaslighting experience, he expressed a belief that, thanks to the experience, he matured and gained knowledge and understanding of the job market and professional expectations. He also shared that, as a result of the experience, he developed an increased self-belief and a greater sense of his own worth, particularly in the professional context, attributing it to his strong work ethic.

In the case of Participant 3, she shared that, since the traumatic experience, she developed a notable increase in confidence regarding her abilities as a worker and the value she brings as an employee. She describes feeling empowered and having a clear understanding of her own worth, as well as a strong sense of self-awareness and a nonnegotiable understanding of the treatment she is willing to accept or reject in a professional setting. The participant also mentioned during her interview that, since the workplace gaslighting experience, she has become comfortable setting and maintaining boundaries, particularly in her new job. She stated that she now prioritizes her personal time and refrains from engaging in work-related tasks, such as answering calls or emails

when she is not on the clock or on her day off, which correlates with her newly found rule of fostering and maintaining a healthy work-life balance, as well as upholding personal boundaries in a professional sense.

In the case of Participant 4, during the interview, she shared that following the traumatic experience, she has developed a profound understanding that tolerating individuals who engage in deceptive practices and make false commitments is unacceptable. This negative encounter served as a catalyst for her to adopt a proactive approach when addressing such behavior. She expressed her determination to take action and prevent the perpetuation of such misconduct. Additionally, the participant acknowledged that the experience has empowered her to assert herself and seek support from higher authorities when confronted with similar circumstances in future job prospects. According to her, this newfound awareness demonstrates her commitment to upholding professional integrity and promptly addressing issues, thereby fostering a healthy work environment not only for herself but also for her colleagues.

In the case of Participant 5, she shared that, as a result of the experience, she developed an increased assertiveness and comfort in standing up for herself in her professional and personal life. She expressed that, since the traumatic experience, she feels more at ease in expressing her opinions and concerns to coworkers, doctors, and physician assistants at her workplace. She added that she no longer feels timid or judged when addressing issues that seem incorrect or problematic. Furthermore, during her response, she highlighted the parallel between her assertiveness in the workforce and her

personal life, emphasizing her newly found ability to establish boundaries. She later added that, while she remains open to compromises, she now firmly establishes limits that define her comfort level and what she deems acceptable from others, which demonstrates a proactive approach to maintaining personal well-being and ensuring that her boundaries are always respected.

In the case of Participant 6, she shared that, as a result of the experience, she has experienced an increased awareness of what is considered appropriate or inappropriate in various contexts. She specifically highlighted her newfound understanding of employment rights that extend beyond what is commonly communicated. During her account of the events, she identified the service industry as a particularly challenging environment, and later on, she went ahead and mentioned that the traumatic experience she endured has shifted her perspective on acceptability and tolerance levels. She also expressed a heightened sense of self-awareness, specifically in terms of what she finds acceptable and what she does not, which confirms her newly found ability to recognize tactics employed by abusers to distort reality. She also added that this new awareness has led to a change in her relationship with other people, prompting her to ask questions and seek clarification rather than accepting things at face value. Overall, the participant stated that the experience has broadened her perspective and equipped her with valuable insights into navigating events in her professional, as well as her personal life.

In the case of Participant 7, she acknowledges that the experience she went through is still fresh in her mind. However, she did express having a new understanding

of the importance of exercising caution in sharing personal information. She stated that, as a result of the experience, she has learned to moderate and control the number of personal details she reveals with others, especially with her managers, recognizing the potential for such information to be used against her, particularly considering the gender dynamics at play and the potential vulnerability that can arise from openly sharing personal aspects of her life, particularly as a woman. She added that, as a result of the traumatic experience, she has adopted a more guarded approach, understanding the potential for personal information to be weaponized against her and on how to exercise caution accordingly.

In the case of Participant 8, even when she shared during her interview that she has, in fact, seen some growth within herself as a result of the traumatic experience, such as learning how not to treat people under her supervision, she also realizes that the journey toward positive change is still an ongoing struggle for her. She added that even when she has a desire to shift away from negative thinking patterns, she does recognize that it may take time before she can fully overcome this tendency. As part of her response, she expressed a sense of uncertainty regarding whether she will completely leave this mindset behind. However, she expressed a strong intention not to perpetuate negativity toward others, expressing a hope to never subject someone else to the same experiences she had to endure at the hands of her manager, which suggests a sense of empathy and a commitment to personal growth while considering the impact of her actions on others.

In the case of Participant 9, during her response as it relates to the PTG concept, she described her ongoing learning process in adapting to her current company's culture. She added that, despite having a background in consulting, she acknowledges that change does not happen overnight. Furthermore, as part of her response, she shared that, since the traumatic experience, a significant shift in her personal life has occurred, especially after experiencing illness as a result of the workplace gaslighting she had to endure. Moreover, she expressed how since the experience, she has developed a new perspective on the value of her well-being and recognizes that no job is worth compromising her health or life for. She added that, as a result, she now prioritizes her free time, evenings, and weekends, aiming to maintain a healthy work-life balance, a change that, according to her, reflects her commitment to preserving her physical and mental health by intentionally stepping away from work, when necessary, especially when mistreatment is involved. Overall, the participant's experience with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon has contributed to her evolving mindset, both in her professional and personal life, as she navigates her career and prioritizes her well-being.

In the case of Participant 10, she shared that, as a result of the traumatic experience, she still has trust issues when dealing with people and expressed a reluctance to share her ideas with others due to this lack of trust. She added that she still has a desire to find a different agency or environment where she can freely express her creativity without hindering her personal growth. As part of her response, she emphasized the importance of her religious beliefs, particularly regarding being humble and kind.

However, she also mentioned that she has observed that these qualities are not valued in her current environment, where humility is associated with inexperience and lack of intelligence. She also added that she strives to avoid adopting a mindset that puts others down since this behavior goes against her nature. As part of her response, she added that, as part of her PTG, she continues to search for a balance where she can achieve success without resorting to demeaning others. Lastly, she added that she aspires to create an environment where projects can be discussed openly and collaboratively, emphasizing the importance of teamwork, and making work easier for everyone involved.

In the case of Participant 11, during his response, he reflected on the valuable lessons he absorbed as a result of the traumatic experience, which revolves around having learned how to handle difficult people and challenging situations effectively without allowing the negative experiences to have an impact in his personal and professional life. As part of his response, he also mentioned that the workplace gaslighting he endured has helped him understand the importance of maintaining focus on the job at hand and not taking things personally. He also acknowledged that allowing external factors to affect him is a choice and reiterated the significance of moving on from negative experiences, which highlights his understanding of personal agency and the power of resilience in maintaining a productive mindset. He ended his recollection of the events by stating that, as a result of the experience, he has gained a strong insight into how to manage his emotions and responses, a behavior that has ultimately enabled him to navigate challenging situations with greater resilience and professionalism.

Lastly, in the case of Participant 12, she stated that the abusive experience she endured inspired her to pursue a doctoral degree in Industrial Psychology with the purpose of making a positive impact in the workforce. During her interview, she mentioned that, in a sense, the abusive experience influenced her decision to pursue further studies, not specifically to address gaslighting, but rather to focus on the treatment of employees in the workplace as a whole. She also mentioned that, consequently, the abuse she experienced served as a driving force for her to work in this particular field, aiming to effect positive change and make a meaningful impact in her community.

Based on the participants' responses to these questions, it was evident that most of the study participants reported experiencing positive changes in both, their professional and personal lives as a result of the gaslighting experience and that the experience did, in fact, serve as a catalyst for PTG. However, it is important to mention that even when most of the traumatic experiences the participants endured did, in fact, serve as facilitators for the participants' positive changes, for some of them, especially for those whose traumatic experiences are relatively recent (Within the past year), the growth that they could end up experiencing (If any) are still in the process of development, as it is the case for Participants 8 and 9.

It is important to mention that while conducting the interviews, and based on the fact that the age groups of the selected participants differed a little (Six of them were under the age of 24, and the other six were over the age of 30), I was extremely interested in exploring the role that this age difference could have played in the participants' ability

to develop PTG as a result of their traumatic experience with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon. However, upon performing an exhaustive analysis of the collected data, it was determined that age did not appear to have a significant impact on the participants' likelihood of experiencing PTG after experiencing gaslighting in the workplace, nor how fast they experienced the changes after their traumatic experiences.

That being said, these findings prompted the consideration of various other factors that contribute to the development of PTG in the study participants, as discussed throughout this dissertation. These factors include a) The individual's personality, b) Level of resilience, c) Employment of healthy coping mechanisms, d) Access to mental health services, d) The passage of time since the traumatic event, e) Availability of social support, f) Presence of nurturing environments, g) Cultural and spiritual beliefs, as well as h) Positive relationships and attachments. Among these factors, the level of resilience, the passage of time, and the access to mental health services emerged as particularly influential factors in shaping the progression of PTG, as evidenced by the lived experiences shared by all of the participants as it related to their resilient personalities, the lived experiences shared by Participants 8 and 9, who experienced a gradual development of PTG in comparison to the other study participants based on the time that had passed since their traumatic experiences, and in the case of Participant 5, whose access to mental health counseling helped her manage the gaslighting she was experiencing, while it was happening.

Research Question Two (RQ 2): What Role Does Resilience Play in the Development

of PTG Among Entry-Level Employees?

Main Theme 2 (MT 2): Role of Resilience in Participants' Ability to Develop PTG

Following Workplace Gaslighting

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, as part of the conceptual framework for this study, I used a combination of the resilience and PTG concepts. Previous literature I discussed in Chapter 2 established the significance of these concepts in facilitating positive changes following traumatic experiences. By employing this framework, the study aimed to explore how resilience and PTG influenced the participants' development of positive changes after enduring workplace gaslighting. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with clear definitions of these concepts to ensure comprehension.

Regarding resilience, participants were asked about their self-perception of resilience, with each affirming their identification as resilient individuals. One of the most memorable stories the participants shared with me consisted of the one shared by Participant 8. In her response, she shared with me that, during her college years, she experienced the loss of her mother. However, she found solace in reminding herself of her mother's wishes, acknowledging that her mother would not want her to dwell in sadness but rather to continue living her life. During her recollection of the events, she added that while she would never forget her mother, she understood that her mother would not want her absence to negatively impact the participant's life. As part of her

response, she stated that since the passing of her mother, she has internalized this mindset, applying it to various experiences, including the one related to the workplace gaslighting she had to endure. Lastly, she mentioned that, since losing her mother, she has learned to embrace the attitude of not allowing adversity to bring her down.

Despite the individual nature of each participant's lived experiences as it relates to the concept of resilience, most of them shared a common underlying narrative of considering themselves resilient individuals.

Subtheme 12 (ST 12): Resilience in Entry-level Employees

As discussed in Chapter 4, this ST was prompted as a result of IQ 2.1, which was designed to explore the participants' perception of their own resilience. The IQ, "Do you consider yourself a resilient person?" was asked with the purpose of gaining a better insight into the role of resilience in the participants' capacity to effectively cope with and recover from the traumatic experience they encountered. Moreover, it sought to understand how resilience influenced the development of PTG among entry-level employees who had experienced workplace gaslighting.

When asked this question, all the participants stated that they did, in fact, consider themselves resilient individuals. However, the difference was reflected in how each participant believed the resiliency in them had helped them in effectively coping with and recovering from the traumatic experience they encountered to the point of developing PTG.

In the case of Participant 12, she shared that her ability to persevere despite the difficulties she was facing at the moment proved that she is a resilient person. During her response, she mentioned that her motivation to continue in the position, even when she was facing gaslighting, stemmed from prioritizing her children and her household. She added that, despite the unfavorable circumstances at work, she demonstrated resilience by staying focused on what truly mattered, which was providing support to her children and maintaining her household. She later added that the temptation to give up or leave her job was very present in her, but that her commitment to her family enabled her to endure and push through the hardships she was experiencing at work.

In the case of Participant 2, during his interview, he shared his perspective on resilience, specifically in relation to his experience of leaving his previous job and, subsequently, rebounding by securing a more career-oriented position. In his opinion, this trouble less transition, characterized by his ability to adapt and overcome adversity, led him to perceive himself as a resilient individual.

That being said, based on the responses I received from the participants, it was deduced that most of them believed that their ability to develop positive growth was the result of them using their resiliency as a tool to deal with the traumatic experience they were facing while it was happening (As it was the case of Participant 12). However, in other cases, it was evident that the participants considered themselves resilient individuals but only based on their ability to leave the job and move past the traumatic experience, which suggests that their decision to leave the toxic work environment and

being able to use the traumatic experience as catalysts for PTG was, in these participants' understanding, what made them resilient individuals, which was the case of Participant 2. These findings seem to go hand in hand with what was discussed in Chapter 4 about Van Breda (2018) defining resilience using the three components of the resilience process—adversity, mediating processes, and outcomes.

According to Van Breda (2018), the three components of the resilience process are: a) Risk and Protective Factors, which involves examining the factors that contribute to individuals' vulnerability (Risk factors) as well as those that enhance their ability to cope and adapt (Protective factors) in the face of adversity, b) Mediating processes, which refer to the strategies, skills, and mechanisms individuals utilize to navigate and overcome challenges. These processes include problem-solving, positive reframing, seeking social support, and developing coping mechanisms that promote adaptation and growth in difficult circumstances, and c) Positive outcomes, which encompass not only the ability to effectively overcome adversity but also the potential for personal growth, increased self-esteem, improved well-being, and the development of valuable life skills.

In the case of the participants in this study, and based on the data collected from each one of them, it is safe to say that the resilience shown by these participants (As it relates to the way they were able to manage their individual experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon) seems to partially confirm Van Breda's theory that resilience is a process which, in his opinion, include three stages—adversity, mediating processes, and outcomes, with the only difference that, for the study participants, and

according to the data they provided during their individual interviews, the resilience process was not linear as suggested by Van Bread, but rather one based on the way they were able to identify how successfully they managed their traumatic experience.

Emerging Theme 1 (ET 1) (As Part of ST 12): Resilience Based on Previous Gaslighting Experience in a Romantic Relationship

According to Sabri et al. (2019), intimate partner violence (IPV) represents a significant societal and public health concern, posing risks of premature death as well as invisible and visible wounds, specifically toward women. The World Health Organization (2013) conducted a multi-country study involving 24,000 participants, revealing a wide range of lifetime prevalence rates for physical or sexual violence by an intimate partner, varying from 15% to 71% (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2005). Globally, the lifetime occurrence of IPV among women is estimated to be 30%, with the highest occurrence (37.7%) observed in Southeast Asia. Notably, the United States reports a lower lifetime occurrence of IPV, approximately 20% (Devries et al., 2013).

In Chapter 2, the literature review highlighted the limited focus of previous studies on gaslighting in politics and romantic relationships. During the formal interviews for this study, it was unsurprising to find out that some of the participants (As it was the case of Participants 3 and 5) had experienced gaslighting in past romantic relationships and how their prior experiences potentially contributed to their increased resilience in dealing with gaslighting in the workplace, as they drew upon lessons learned from those encounters. That being said, and as discussed in Chapter 4, ET 1 arose from the responses

of Participants 3 and 5 to IQ 2.1, "Do you consider yourself a resilient person?" This question was specifically designed to explore deeper into the participants' perception of resilience and the role it played in their ability to navigate and heal from the traumatic experiences they had endured. By exploring this topic, the study aimed to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the role of resilience in facilitating effective coping and healing among the participants. For Participants 3 and 5, the question regarding their perception of resilience yielded responses that shared similarities with those received from Participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11, and 12, all indicating a self-identification as resilient individuals. However, their answers provided a distinct perspective influenced by their past experiences with gaslighting, but in romantic relationships.

In the case of Participant 3, she described herself as a resilient person, attributing her resilience to her ability to navigate obstacles and hardships in life. During her response, she stated that while she has not experienced deeply traumatic events, she has, in fact, faced numerous challenges that have strengthened her perseverance. During her response, she reflected on a past romantic relationship where she was easily convinced and willing to overlook red flags due to a fear of loneliness and the desire to maintain the relationship. However, she stated that, eventually, she recognized the negative impact this had on her well-being and demonstrated true resilience by making the difficult decision to end the relationship. She added that this pivotal moment marked a shift in her mindset, realizing the need to prioritize her own well-being and no longer tolerate the gaslighting and self-deception she had been enduring at the hands of someone she thought was the

love of her life, which at the end, showed her that she had the ability to overcome

challenges, affirming her resilient personality.

Based on these findings, as they relate to this part of the study, it is safe to say that

Participant 3 and 5's past experiences (Which will be discussed in the next section) with

the gaslighting phenomenon in previous romantic encounters contributed immensely to

their enhanced resilience in navigating the gaslighting they faced in the workplace.

Emerging Theme 2 (ET 2) (Also as Part of ST 12): The Role that Mental Health

Professionals Play in Gaslighting Victims' Ability to be More Resilient Toward

Current Gaslighting Experiences Based on Their Lived Experiences with the

Phenomenon

According to Costello and Walters (2022), an individual who has experienced

trauma may seek mental health counseling while facing the neurobiological consequences

of psychological trauma. This exposure negatively affects brain functioning and disrupts

the connectivity of white matter between the frontal lobe and striatal areas, consequently

impacting the client's physical well-being and manifesting symptoms of anxiety. The

resulting stress triggers the body's survival mechanisms, potentially leading to acute

stress responses or symptoms associated with PTSD. In this context, the mental health

counselor plays a crucial role in supporting the client's healing process as they respond to

their neurophysiological reactions, such as the fight or flight response.

In the literature review I conducted in Chapter 2, I briefly discussed how mental

health counseling, when used as a protective factor in trauma victims, could help the

victims heal from the abuse, which brings me to reiterate that, when conducting the interviews for this study, it was not unexpected to discover that some of the participants (As it was the case of Participants 5 and 9) had sought the assistance of mental health professionals to address the effects of the gaslighting abuse they were experiencing. As discussed in Chapter 4, ET 2 arose from the responses of Participants 5 and 9 to IQ 2.1, "Do you consider yourself a resilient person?" For Participants 5 and 9, the question regarding their perception of resilience yielded responses similar to those I received from the other study participants; however, in their case, their responses offered a distinct perspective influenced by the role that mental health professionals play in victims' ability to be more resilient toward current gaslighting experiences based not only on their past experiences with the phenomenon, but also on the coping skills they could have learned during their individual therapy sessions.

In the case of Participant 5, when asked this question, she stated that she considers herself a resilient person, describing her tendency to persevere and thoroughly understand situations before making changes or walking away. During her response, she recognized the importance of setting boundaries and standing up for herself, a skill she has been actively developing since the traumatic experience. As part of her response, she reflected on her experiences with gaslighting, noting that the emotional impact of gaslighting in romantic relationships has been more challenging for her compared to gaslighting in the workplace. However, she added that her prior experience with gaslighting in romantic relationships provided valuable insight and tools that have helped her navigate similar

dynamics in the workplace. She also added that being under the care of a mental health counselor during that period has helped her in developing coping mechanisms and to gain a deeper understanding of gaslighting, which allowed her to quickly identify the presence of gaslighting in her work environment and to deal with the situation right away before it became too much to handle. Toward the end of her interview, the participant emphasized the significance of mental health therapy in helping her identify and label the manipulative tactics associated with gaslighting, which in a way, empowered her to recognize the harmful nature of the situation and to employ appropriate terminology to describe it accurately.

In the case of Participant 9, when asked this question, she shared her experience of seeking therapy. During her response, she explained that she initially began mental health counseling due to a traumatic incident involving an Uber driver who had abducted her, and since her workplace was covering the therapy expenses, she decided to utilize the sessions to discuss various topics, including the workplace gaslighting she was enduring, and its impact on her well-being. While Participant 9 acknowledged that the therapist made an effort to provide advice, she felt that the therapist was not the right fit for her since the therapist primarily adopted a listening role and encouraged Participant 9 to reflect on her own thoughts and feelings. Based on this, the participant expressed a preference for an older and more experienced therapist who could offer guidance and direction. However, before she could find a therapist with those qualities, she decided to discontinue therapy and did not seek another therapist. It should be noted that, even when

Participant 9's exposure to therapy was limited, she did acknowledge the importance of seeking professional help at some point in her life so they could help her in addressing her experience with workplace gaslighting.

Based on the information provided by Costello and Walters (2022), and the findings as they relate to this part of the study, it is safe to say that Participant 5's past experiences with the gaslighting phenomenon, combined with her ability to seek mental health counseling contributed immensely to her enhanced resilience in navigating the gaslighting she faced in the workplace. And, in the case of Participant 9, even when mental health counseling did not work as she planned when she first tried it, acknowledging that, in the future, that could be something that she should pursue gives her the confidence that maybe seeking help from a mental health counselor could help make a positive impact in her recovery, which could send a strong message to those suffering from the aftermaths of workplace gaslighting and are reluctant to seek professional help that maybe seeking the help of a mental health professional may allow them to heal from the abuse faster than trying to do it on their own.

Subtheme 13 (ST 13): Stories of Resilient Moments Experienced by the Study Participants

As previously mentioned in this chapter, the conceptual framework I used for this study incorporated both the resilience and PTG concepts. The literature review I completed in Chapter 2 emphasized the importance of resilience in facilitating positive transformations following traumatic experiences. By including resilience as a key

component of the conceptual framework, this study aimed to investigate its influence on the participants' ability to cultivate positive changes in response to workplace gaslighting. During the formal interviews, participants were asked to provide examples of past experiences where their resilience played a role in overcoming challenging events.

Of all the responses I received, one, in particular, struck me, and that was the one shared by Participant 4. In her recollection of the events, she shared that she used to have frequent conversations with her parents, who consistently encouraged her to leave the job in which she was experiencing the gaslighting. However, the participant felt a different course of action was necessary. She stated that she believed that enduring challenging interactions with difficult individuals, which she encountered regularly in her job, showcased her resilience, and despite her parents' suggestion to quit, she believed in her own ability to persevere. During her response, she mentioned that she considered reporting the situation or seeking a team change as potential solutions, recognizing that the toxic behavior of a manipulative manager would not last indefinitely. However, according to her, the way her resilience was demonstrated was by her ability to withstand instances of verbal abuse, threats, and unsolicited political opinions, and although she acknowledged her need to better enforce boundaries, she felt capable of handling the situation, if required. In the end, she mentioned that her motivation to stick around and potentially share her experience with someone else stemmed from a desire to prevent others from enduring similar suffering.

As the recipient of this and the other stories of resilient moments experienced by the study participants, it struck me how individuals who have suffered unjustified and terrible abuse, such as workplace gaslighting (As it was the case of all the study participants), were able to not only face the abuse head on and learned from it, but also, how they acknowledged the responsibility they had to share their lived experiences in order to help mitigate the potential suffering of others.

Subtheme 14 (ST 14): In Hindsight

In Chapter 4, I mentioned that ST 14 emerged from the EQ I asked to participants, "Considering your personal and/or professional growth, if you could revisit the past, how would you handle the situation differently?" The purpose of this question was for me to gain a better understanding of what the participants had learned from their experiences with workplace gaslighting. Additionally, the question aimed to explore whether, given the chance and based on the insights gained, if they would approach the situation in the same manner or would respond differently.

Based on the provided question, the responses I received from the participants varied as follows: a) Participant 1 expressed that she would have reported the issue to HR sooner, b) Participants 2, 6, and 11 stated that they would not have changed anything, c) Participant 3, 8, and 9 mentioned that they would have trusted their instincts and left their jobs sooner, d) Participant 4 indicated that she would have reached out to upper manager sooner, e) Participant 5 expressed that she would have confronted the person who spoke ill of her, f) Participant 7 mentioned that she would have responded to the initial email

less hastily; g) Participant 10 stated that she would have avoided direct communication with the individual mistreating her and would have involved the union sooner; and lastly, h) Participant 12 stated that she would have spoken up and defended herself. See Table 9 for the complete overview of the participants' responses to this question.

One response in particular struck me, and that was the response from Participant 11, in which he reflected upon the situation and determined that changing the manner in which he handled it would not have been his preference. As part of his response, he added that the decision to maintain his initial approach stemmed from a belief that he handled the situation in a professional and emotionally intelligent manner. Furthermore, in his recall of the events, he recognized the certainty of occasional setbacks, acknowledging that, despite one's best efforts, circumstances may not always align favorably. Hence, he embraced the notion of resilience and the necessity of moving forward, leaving behind past experiences that did not yield the desired outcomes.

Based on the responses gathered from the study participants, it can be deduced that, in the event of being given the chance to revisit the past, most of the participants would have adopted a different approach in managing the situation. Particularly, this collective inclination toward alternative courses of action serves as a remarkable indication of the individual growth achieved by the participants. The ability to harness their respective traumatic encounters and leverage the resulting outcomes as a foundation for their newly acquired mental outlook is particularly commendable. Furthermore, the said transformation shows the positive personal development experienced by each

participant, highlighting their capacity to navigate adversity and cultivate an enhanced state of mind.

Subtheme 15 (ST 15): Use of Lived Experiences to Help Other Victims and Make Managers Accountable for their Actions

As mentioned in Chapter 4, during the concluding phase of the interviews, I asked the participants to provide advice for both entry-level employees experiencing gaslighting and managers engaging in gaslighting behaviors. As part of these questions is that ST 15 was born. Based on these questions, participants offered the following advice. For employees being gaslighted the participants suggested: a) Participant 1: To reflect on self-worth and explore alternative options, if necessary, b) Participant 2: To recognize the situation and assert oneself, c) Participant 3: To trust their instincts, value their self-worth, and to align treatment from others with their own personal values, d) Participant 4: To document incidents, report abuse, and escalate the matter to upper management rather than HR, e) Participant 5: To discuss feelings with their immediate supervisor, f) Participant 6: To seek unbiased opinions from external individuals, g) Participant 7: To maintain written communication, gather evidence, and store it securely in case they need to use it later, if they need to, h) Participant 8: To identify a trustworthy confidant for support, i) Participant 9: To attempt to resolve the issue through dialogue with colleagues and supervisors, but consider leaving, if necessary, j) Participant 10: To remain calm, seek support from others, and explore options for leaving the toxic environment, and k)

Participant 11: To address the situation politely, but to recognize that, reporting abuse, may not yield immediate solutions, and to prioritize personal well-being.

For managers engaging in gaslighting, some of the participants offered the following advice: a) Participant 2: To strive to become a better leader, b) Participant 3: To reflect on personal origins and empathize with the experience, c) Participant 4: To assume accountability, apologize, learn from mistakes, and consider seeking therapy, if necessary, d) Participant 5: To reflect on their own past entry-level positions and envision themselves experiencing the abuse, and lastly, e) Participant 6: To acknowledge that employees are valuable team members deserving of respect. See Table 10 for a more comprehensive overview of participants' responses to this question.

Of all the responses I received (As it relates to the advice the participants would give to entry-level employees and managers), the one that struck me the most was the one shared by Participant 3. In her response, she stated that, for workers experiencing gaslighting, it is essential for them to trust their instincts and maintain a sense of self-awareness. Particularly that as entry-level employees, it could be tempting to defer to the authority and expertise of others in the workplace. However, that is crucial to listen to one's intuition and recognize the value they bring to the organization. She also added that by understanding their worth and basing their treatment on that value, entry-level employees can assert themselves and avoid being undermined or mistreated, since this self-assuredness will play a significant role in helping them navigate a gaslighting situation effectively.

In reference to the advice she would give to a manager doing the gaslighting, Participant 3 mentioned that the advice she would give them would be for supervisors to reflect on their own beginnings and recall the position of vulnerability they once occupied. As part of her response, she added that by acknowledging their own journey and considering their previous value system before attaining power and control, supervisors could maintain empathy and perspective toward those less experienced. Lastly, she ended her interview by advising managers to make a point of remembering their own experiences as entry-level employees in a larger corporate setting so that the memories could help them treat their subordinates with more respect and fairness, adding that this awareness of their own growth and the lessons learned from their own previous experiences could contribute to managers cultivating a positive work environment not only for themselves but mainly for those under their supervision.

Based on the responses I gathered from the study participants, as it relates to the advice they would provide for entry-level employees facing gaslighting, as well as to managers committing the abuse, it can be safely deduced that the traumatic experiences each one of these participants endured, in one way or another, helped them become more in tune with what a healthy work environment should look like, which include what behaviors and/or practices need to be put in place to make sure that every entry-level employee has a fair chance to succeed in the job that has been assigned to them.

Limitations of the Study

Throughout this qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological study, I aimed to explore the firsthand encounters of entry-level employees who faced gaslighting in their workplace. This study sought to gain insights into their lived experiences and to have a better understanding of how these employees were able to transform those experiences into a catalyst for PTG. As with any type of research, a qualitative study has its limitations, and even when I did my best to conduct this study to the best of my abilities and by using the knowledge I acquired as a Walden University Doctoral student, when it comes to showing limitations, this study was not the exception. That being said, several limitations were encountered throughout the course of this study.

First, the access to participants who had experienced workplace gaslighting as entry-level employees and were willing to share their traumatic experiences presented a constraint. Additionally, the study was confined to individuals who were employed at the time of the research, as per the inclusion criteria. To mitigate these limitations, and with the approval of the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB), I made diligent efforts to enhance participant recruitment. Various avenues were explored, such as posting recruitment flyers in strategic locations frequented by potential participants, including my local Chamber of Commerce, libraries, and city hall. Furthermore, to expand the pool of eligible participants willing to engage in the study, I decided to use snowball sampling, which in the end, helped me in finding the qualified participants I needed for the study.

Recruitment of the intended participants, specifically individuals ages 20 - 30 who had encountered workplace gaslighting during their initial entry-level positions, posed another challenge for me during the initial recruiting stage of the study. Although a significant number of applicants within the desired age range expressed interest in participating during the initial round of interviews, some did not meet the established inclusion criteria. Non-employment status or insufficient college education were among the disqualifying factors. Notably, a considerable number of volunteers above the age of 30 expressed interest in participating. However, due to the initial predetermined age range, these older participants could not be included in the initial interviews, resulting in a limited pool of participants. To address this recruitment obstacle, a request was submitted to the Walden University IRB seeking approval to expand the age range of the sample from 20 - 30 to 20 - 45. Once approved, the study was advertised again, attracting an additional six fully qualified candidates, thus increasing the total participant count from six to twelve.

Finally, I struggled with the challenge of minimizing personal biases and avoiding the influence of my previous experiences related to workplace gaslighting during the interpretation of the study results. As a survivor of gaslighting in the workplace, it was crucial for me to mitigate conscious and unconscious biases that could potentially affect the study outcomes. To address this limitation, I used various techniques as bias reduction tools. These included reflective journaling, bracketing, and epoché, which I

adopted to ensure an objective approach and to allow the study to progress independently, without undue influence from my personal experiences with the phenomenon.

Recommendations

Although the concept of gaslighting is considered a relatively new topic in contemporary society, empirical studies have been conducted to better understand the phenomenon, mainly as it relates to manipulative practice in politics and romantic relationships. Furthermore, past research has revealed some of the practices used by bullies during their journey as workplace tormenters (Al-Hindami et al., 2021; Frizzo et al., 2013; Iqbal et al., 2021; Peregrin, 2019; Sarkis, 2018; Taylor, 2021); however, very few studies have covered the workplace gaslighting phenomenon (Sarkis, 2018).

As suggested by Sarkis (2018), gaslighting in the workplace is a phenomenon that has not been fully studied before, especially when it comes to the lived experiences of entry-level employees who were victims of this abuse. Although some researchers have studied gaslighting previously (Au et al., 2022; Cheung, 2022; Sharpe, 2022;), little research has been done related to how employees who suffered this type of emotional abuse were able to use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG. To assess this situation, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with twelve participants to expand the understanding of these employees' lived experiences with the phenomena at hand, and even when the study provided interesting findings, more research should be conducted if researchers want to have a better understanding of the workplace gaslighting phenomenon.

A recommendation for future research involves a quantitative study centered on examining the correlation between the passage of time and the fast development of PTG after a gaslighting in the workplace experience. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the passage of time emerged as one of the most influential factors in shaping the progression of PTG in the study participants after experiencing workplace gaslighting. However, being able to quantify this information could help researchers in providing a bigger and more complete picture of this terrible situation to help past and present gaslighting victims in having a better idea of what they are dealing with when it comes to healing from the abuse.

A second recommendation would be for researchers to investigate, either via a qualitative or a quantitative study (Or even a mixed method study), the role that generational trauma plays in gaslighting victims unconsciously using their past family experiences/dynamics to enable the abuse, or for gaslighters unconsciously using their past family experiences to perpetrate the abuse. Even when in this study I briefly covered the topic of childhood emotional abuse, I did not go into much detail about the topic, nor did I examine the role that generational trauma could play in the workplace gaslighting phenomenon. Thus, being able to further investigate this topic could assist professionals in the field of psychology in providing their victims with a more personalized therapy approach to help the victims manage the situation better.

A third and last recommendation would be for researchers to explore the role that the fight, flight, freeze, and fawn response play in victims of workplace gaslighting's

ability to manage the gaslighting while it is happening. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the data I collected from the participants suggested that their experiences with workplace gaslighting triggered trauma-based responses similar to the ones seen in the fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses, which in a way, seemed to have a major impact on their decision to leave the position or not. Thus, exploring, more in-depth, the role that the fight, flight, freeze, and fawn responses play in victims of workplace gaslighting could help shine a brighter light on the decisions that victims of workplace gaslighting take as it relates to their professional future, especially for those employees whose professional persona has not been established yet, or for those who, due to the Covid-fueled great resignation, had to start from zero in a completely different line of duty.

Implication for Social Change

Workplace violence has been in the news recently, fueled by the growing force of the #metoo movement. Newspapers and journal articles, such as the one written in 2017 by NYTimes investigative reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey, *Harvey Weinstein Paid Off Sexual Harassment Accusers for Decades,* the one written in 2022 by Edith Lederer, *Global Survey: Workplace Violence, Harassment is Widespread*, the one written in 2020 by Alan Ayers, *That's Not What Happened! How to Deal with Gaslighting in the Workplace*, and the one written in 2022 by Laura Berlinsky Schine*, How to Decipher Workplace 'Gaslighting,'* have made a point to not only bring awareness to this terrible situation but also to try to equip the victims with some of the tools they may need to manage the situation. However, since minimal research has been conducted as it relates

to the workplace gaslighting phenomenon and its possible traumatic effects on entry-level employees, as well as the PTG that could come out of it, is that I decided to conduct this study with the aim to better understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees who were victims of gaslighting in the workplace and were able to rise from the ashes and use those experiences as a catalyst for PTG.

According to the literature, workplace violence has a substantial influence on employee's absenteeism rates and malingering (Sharma & Verma, 2017). Furthermore, when it comes to the impact that workplace violence has on victims' mental health, the literature suggests that considering the potential harm that workplace violence poses to the physical and mental well-being of employees, it becomes crucial for individuals responsible for maintaining a safe work environment and promoting occupational health to develop policies dedicated to protecting employees from these and other life-altering experiences (Abo-Ali, Zayed, & Atlam, 2020).

As part of the study, participants not only shared their lived experiences with the workplace gaslighting phenomenon but also the ways in which they were able to develop PTG as a result of their traumatic experiences. Furthermore, as part of the study, participants also shared the different ways (In the form of advice) in which victims of the phenomenon (Gaslightees) could help themselves manage the situation, as well as the ways in which possible perpetrators and/or active perpetrators (Gaslighters) could use to prevent and/or stop the abuse they are inflicting to those under their care.

That being said, the outcomes of this study, coupled with the comprehensive literature review conducted on the phenomena at hand, indicate that the results obtained from this hermeneutic phenomenological study can serve as a valuable resource for entry-level employees and seasoned professionals alike who have encountered or are presently facing gaslighting in their work settings. By leveraging the lived experiences of others who have confronted the phenomenon of workplace gaslighting, individuals can navigate their own healing journey effectively. Presently, workplace violence poses a significant challenge in contemporary work environments (Baek & Lee, 2023). Thus, shedding light on the role played by the gaslighting phenomenon within this context and providing insights into strategies for managing such experiences can contribute significantly to fostering a more productive and gratifying workplace environment for all the parties involved.

Conclusion

While there is an abundant of research committed to studying workplace violence, such as bullying, sexual harassment, and mobbing, past researchers have failed to provide a firsthand account of the individual lived experiences of employees who during their first entry-level job experience, were the victims of workplace gaslighting. As a result, for this study, 12 participants meeting the main requirements for the study (As detailed in Appendix D) were given the opportunity to share their lived experiences with the phenomena at hand. Each one of the participants' stories, as told by them, were full not only of painful memories but also of accounts of bravery and self-determination.

What these participants went through at the hands of those who they were entrusted to with the purpose of helping them feel safe, protected, and guided is something that no one (Entry-level employee or not) should ever have to experience. And while all of them were able to rise from the aches and use their traumatic experiences as catalysts for PTG, it is vital to say that workplace gaslighting should be one of those problems we currently have in our society that needs to be taken more seriously, not only since no one should be expected to work in such hostile environments, but also for the damaging effects that this type of emotional abuse has in victims of the abuse.

It is my hope that, through the voices of these participants, employees who are currently experiencing this type of abuse can see that, even when the experience may be a life-altering one and they feel like throwing the towel, to remember what they learned from the stories shared by the participants of this study, who did not allow the workplace gaslighting experiences they endured to define who they were and are as individuals nor as professionals.

Moreover, it is crucial to convey to individuals currently dealing with the phenomenon of gaslighting that the abuse they are experiencing is not attributable to their actions. It is imperative to recognize that they are not overreacting, nor are they being excessively sensitive. It is inappropriate to dismiss their experiences as mere fabrications of their imagination. These individuals are not forgetful, nor are they fabricating their experiences. Similarly, they are not constantly self-centered, despite any claims to the contrary. It is essential to acknowledge that no one possesses the authority to dictate the

legitimacy of other people's emotions or to prescribe the appropriate range of feelings.

They alone bear the weight of these emotions, and it is unjust for anyone to undermine

the significance of their feelings.

Furthermore, although the circumstances may be regrettable, it falls upon them to

stand up, speak out, and advocate for what is right since, regrettably, no one else will

assume this duty on their behalf. As someone who has endured the ordeal of gaslighting,

I have come to realize that, despite not being at fault, I cannot alter or erase what

happened to me since it has become an unforgettable part of my life's narrative. However,

I can use my experiences to assist others confronting the same abuse I once endured.

To the gaslighting victim/survivor, it is essential to understand that I perceive

your struggles, empathize with your anguish, and not only do I validate your experiences,

but I also have faith in your strength. Although it may be impossible to change the past,

your voice holds significance, and it possesses the potential to aid those in need.

Therefore, I implore you to vocalize your story since you never know whose life you may

save through its dissemination. Finally, to those who tend to mistreat others, today I say...

in a world in which you could be anything, please be compassionate, be kind... because,

at the end of the day, we are all in this together.

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Appendix A: Recruitment Flyer

Research Title: Gaslighting in the Workplace from the Employee's Perspective

- Are you between the ages of 20 - 45?

- Did you experience gaslighting in the workplace in an entry-level position? Did this experience happen in the last three years?

- Did you complete at least 2 years in a higher education setting?

- Are you currently employed?

- Do you understand and can speak in the English language?

- I am a Ph.D. student conducting a research study to better understand the lived experiences of entry-level employees with gaslighting in the workplace. I am also trying to explore how entry-level employees were able to rise from the ashes and use the gaslighting experiences as a catalyst for posttraumatic growth (PTG).

What is Involved

As part of this study, each participant will be asked to share their experience via Zoom interviews, lasting no more than 45 minutes. I will be asking participants to share

their lived experiences with gaslighting in the workplace, what personal and or professional positive changes they developed due to the gaslighting experience, and how they were able to use those experiences as a motivator to grow personally and or professionally.

Definitions

Gaslighting in the Workplace: Gaslighting in the workplace is defined as a devious and manipulative tactic used by workplace abusers (in this case, the gaslighter) to instill control upon his or her victims by making them question their own sanity and perception of reality. This type of emotional abuse can be performed by coworkers, managers, or administrators.

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG): PTG is defined as the positive change that an individual develops after experiencing a traumatic event. In most cases, people who experience this type of psychological change after a trauma develop a series of positive changes within their lives that could indicate that the trauma, instead of causing a negative outcome in their well-being, did, in fact, create the oppositive.

If you feel you meet these qualifications and would like to help with this study, please contact me via email at **marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu**. Also, if you know someone who meets these requirements, please forward this flyer to them so they can participate as well.

Appendix B: Email I Will Sent to The Volunteers During the Qualification Process

Dear (Volunteer's Name)

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Marielys Camacho-Reyes, and I am contacting you in reference to your interest in participating in my study about workplace gaslighting. First of all, I want to thank you for your interest in participating in my study. As mentioned in the flyer, this hermeneutic phenomenological study aims to better understand the lived experience of entry-level employees with posttraumatic growth (PTG) following gaslighting. The results of this study should aid organizational leaders and workers in identifying the red flags associated with gaslighting in the workplace to help create a healthier and more productive work environment in which every worker is given a fair chance to succeed in their assigned roles.

Furthermore, the results of this study will aid organizational leaders and workers identify red flags associated with the gaslighting phenomenon in the workplace. The results will also assist entry-level employees and other seasoned workers who have experienced or are currently experiencing workplace gaslighting in using other people's lived experiences with the phenomenon as a roadmap for their own healing and posttraumatic development process. Workplace violence, as portrayed by the #metoo movement, is a major problem in today's workforce; therefore, creating awareness of the role of the gaslighting phenomenon will help create a safer, healthier, enjoyable, and more productive work environment for all the parties involved.

Terminology That Will Be Used During the Interview Process

Before we conduct the interview, I would like to share with you a more in-depth definition of a couple of the terms you may hear during the interview if you end up participating in the study.

Gaslighting in the Workplace

Gaslighting in the workplace is defined as a devious and manipulative tactic used by workplace abusers (in this case, the gaslighter) to instill control upon their victims by making them question their own sanity and perception of reality. This type of emotional abuse can be performed by coworkers, managers, or administrators.

Posttraumatic Growth (PTG)

PTG is defined as the positive change that an individual develops after experiencing a traumatic event. In most cases, people who experience this type of psychological change after a trauma develop a series of positive changes within their lives that could indicate that the trauma, instead of causing a negative outcome in their well-being, did, in fact, create the opposite.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as a psychological process in which people tend to "bounce back" from adversity without allowing the experience to have a negative effect on their lives. An example of a resilient person is someone who is learning how to ride a bicycle and is not scared of falling, and if he or she falls, they get up and get on the bike again to continue with the learning process.

As part of the qualification process, I will need you to look over the attached

informed consent form and send your consent via email. Once I have received the

following statement in the body of your email: "I consent" (as it relates to the consent

form), I will contact you with an invitation for the formal interview. Please, be advised

that only those volunteers who meet the basic requirements mentioned in the flyer and on

the informed consent form will be invited to participate in the study.

Again, I want to thank you for your interest in my study, and I hope to hear from you

soon.

Respectfully,

Marielys Camacho-Reyes, MS
Doctoral Student, Walden University
marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu

Appendix C: Demographic Questions I Asked Participants at The Beginning of Their

Formal Interviews

1) What is your age?

2) What is your gender?

3) How many years of college have you completed?

4) Are you currently employed?

5) At what age did you start in your first entry-level position? (When the

gaslighting happened)

Appendix D: Informed Consent Form I Sent to the Selected Participants Prior to Their

Formal Interviews

Informed Consent Form

Dear (<u>Volunteer's Name</u>),

This study is being conducted by me, Marielys Camacho-Reyes. I am a doctoral

student at Walden University.

Study Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to better understand the lived experiences of entry-

level employees with gaslighting in the workplace, and its possible link to posttraumatic

growth. This form is part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to

understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study seeks 10 - 15 volunteers who are:

- Ages of 20 - 45

- Who have had a gaslighting experience in the workplace in an entry-level
  position that happened in the last three years

- Who have completed at least 2 years of college in a higher education setting

- Who are employed at the time of the formal interviews

- Who can understand and speak English

Procedures:

This study will involve you completing the following steps:

- Take part in a confidential, recorded Zoom interview (Audio Only) (No more than 45 minutes)

- After the data has been analyzed and coded, you will have a chance to review the data (via email) to make sure that the data, as it was pre-analyzed and pre-coded, truly reflected the sense of your experience with the gaslighting phenomenon (No more than 30 minutes)

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Research should only be done with those who freely volunteer. So, I will respect your decision whether to join or not, or to stop the interview at any time. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later and you may end your participation in the study at any time if you feel the need to do so.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this study could involve some risk of minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life such as sharing sensitive information. This study would pose minimal risk to your well-being. If at any time during the interview, you feel unwell or in need of a mental health break, we will stop the interview. Participants in need of mental health assistant before, during, and or after the interview can contact the Crisis Text Line by texting HOME to 741741 to get connected with a live crisis counselor via text.

This study offers no direct benefits to individual participants. The aim of this study is to benefit society by aiding organizational leaders and workers in general in identifying red flags associated with the gaslighting phenomenon in the workplace to help

them create a safer environment in which every worker is given a fair chance to succeed in their assigned roles. Furthermore, it will also aid entry-level employees as well as other seasoned workers who have experienced or are currently experiencing workplace gaslighting in using other people's lived experiences with the phenomenon as a roadmap for their own healing and posttraumatic development process. Once the analysis is complete, I will share the overall results by emailing you a link to the results.

Payment:

No payment will be issued for participating in this study.

Privacy:

I am required to protect your privacy. Your identity will be kept confidential, within the limits of the law. I am only allowed to share your identity or contact info as needed with my Walden University supervisors (Who are also required to protect your privacy) or with authorities if court ordered (Very rare). I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, I will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. If I were to share this dataset with another researcher in the future, the dataset would contain no identifiers. Data will be always kept secure using password-protected files, a locked safe, and by using participant identifiers instead of real names. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years and then destroyed, as required by Walden University.

Contacts and Questions:

Please, review this consent form in its entirely before agreeing to participate in my study. If you have any questions, you can contact me via email at marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant or any negative parts of the study, you can call Walden University's Research Participant Advocate at 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is 02-09-23-1068945. It expires on February 8, 2024.

You might wish to retain this consent form for your records. You may ask me or Walden University for a copy at any time using the contact info above.

Obtaining Your Consent

If you feel you understand the study and wish to volunteer, please indicate your consent by replying to this email with these words: "I consent."

Appendix E: Email I Sent Inviting the Selected Participants to the Formal Interview

Dear (Participant's Name),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. Below, you will find the information for your formal Zoom interview.

Meeting Date/Time: <u>Date / Time</u>

Zoom Link: <u>XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX</u>

Meeting ID: <u>XXX XXXX XXX</u>
Password: <u>XXXXXX</u>

Instructions:

1. It is required that you be in a quiet setting during your interview to not only reduce noise and distractions but also to increase your privacy and confidentiality.
2. When you log in for your meeting, please change your name to <u>Participant #</u>. Since I will be recording the interview, the name change will allow me to protect your privacy and identity.
3. Make sure your video is off and that your microphone is on.
4. Once you log in, I will give you access to the main room, so that we can start the interview.

Please, feel free to contact me via this email if, prior to the meeting, you have any questions about the interview or the study in general.

Thank you again, and "see you" soon.

Respectfully,

Marielys Camacho-Reyes, MS
Doctoral Student, Walden University
marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu

Appendix F: Email I Had Created for the Participants Who Might Have Had Ties to Me

Letting Them Know They Could Not Participate in the Study

Dear (Participants Name),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. Unfortunately, since we know each other, you will not be able to take part in my study. According to Walden University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) rules and regulations, any individuals who volunteer for my study who are known to me (personally and or professionally) are ineligible to participate in it.

I do want to thank you for taking the time to read about my study, and for your support. It really means a lot to me. If reading my final dissertation is something you are interested in, please let me know, and once my study is completed and published, I will make sure to send you the link, so that you can read it.

Again, thank you so much for your willingness to support my educational endeavors. Stay safe and healthy.

Respectfully,

Marielys Camacho-Reyes, MS
Doctoral Student, Walden University
marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu

Appendix G: Interview Questions I Used During Participants' Formal Interviews

* Demographic Questions I Used at the Beginning of the Formal Interviews:

    1) What is your age?

    2) What is your gender?

    3) How many years of college have you completed?

    4) Are you currently employed?

    5) At what age did you start in your first entry-level position? (When the

gaslighting happened)

* Questions I Used to Get to Know More About the Participants' Backgrounds:

    1) Tell me about your life at home before going to college.

    2) Tell me about your time in college.

        a. What did you study?

        b. Was that what you planned on studying? Or did you change your major

        after starting studying?

    3) What can you tell me about the skills you acquired during college?

* Formal Interview Questions as They Were Related to Each One of The RQs I Was

Grounding My Study In:

Research Question 1: *What is the lived experience of entry-level employees with PTG*

following gaslighting?

    1) Can you tell me what you believe gaslighting means?

2) What can you tell me about the job you performed in which you experienced gaslighting?

    a. What attracted you about that job?

    b. What were your assigned tasks?

    c. How was your relationship with your supervisor?

    d. How was your relationship with your coworkers?

3) Who did the gaslighting, and when did the gaslighting start?

4) How was the gaslighting done?

5) Based on your lived experience, what do you think caused the gaslighting?

6) How did the gaslighting make you feel while it was happening?

7) How did the gaslighting affect your mental health? (If applicable)

8) How did the gaslighting affect your life outside work? (If applicable)

9) Did you report the gaslighting?

    a) If yes, what happened after you reported it?

    b) If not, what was the reason for you not to report the abuse?

10) How did you cope with the gaslighting while it was happening?

11) What effect did the gaslighting have in your ability to perform your job? (If applicable)

12) Did you leave that job due to the gaslighting you experienced? If yes, how did that make you feel?

13) How soon did you get a new job after leaving the old one?

a) How was the experience of starting a new job after experiencing gaslighting in your old position?

14) How have you changed professionally and personally since the gaslighting experience?

15) How is your relationship with your current coworkers and supervisor?

16) What personal and/or professional positive changes did you develop as a result of the gaslighting experience?

Research Question 2: *What role does resilience play in entry-level employees developing PTG?)*

1) Do you consider yourself a resilient person?

2) May you provide an example of a time when your resilience helped you manage a gaslighting event?

Extra Question:

1) Based on the personal and/or professional growth that you have experienced, if you could go back in time, how would you handle the situation differently?

Final Question:

1) What advice would you give to an entry-level employee who is being gaslighted, and to a manager who is doing the gaslighting?

Appendix H: Follow-Up Email I Sent to the Participants as Part of the Member-Checking

Process

Dear (Participant's Name),

Thank you so much for participating in my study. As promised, attached you will find a typed transcript of your interview with my pre-analysis and pre-coding, so that you can review it and let me know if the data, as it was pre-analyzed and pre-coded, truly reflects your experiences with the gaslighting in the workplace phenomenon. If after reviewing this transcript, you feel like you would like to have a second meeting with me to hear my interpretations and share your feedback, let me know what days/times work best for you and I will send you a meeting invite. However, if after reviewing the pre-analysis, you feel like everything you shared with me, in fact, covers everything you wanted to say, just reply to this email with these words: "Reviewed and Agreed."

Again, thank you for participating in my study. I wish you all the best in your personal and professional endeavors.

Respectfully,

Marielys Camacho-Reyes, MS
Doctoral Student, Walden University
marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu

Appendix I: Email I Sent to Volunteers Who Did Not Get to Participate in the Study Due

to Saturation Being Reached

Dear (Volunteer's Name),

Thank you for your willingness to participate in my study. Unfortunately, with the

interviews that I have already completed, I was able to reach the required number of

participants for my study, and do not need to conduct any further interviews.

I do want to thank you for taking the time to read about my study, and for your

support. It really means a lot to me. If reading my final dissertation is something you are

interested in, please let me know, and once my study is completed and published, I will

make sure to send you the link so that you can read it.

Again, thank you so much for your willingness to support my educational

endeavors.

Respectfully,

Marielys Camacho-Reyes, MS
Doctoral Student, Walden University
marielys.camacho-reyes@waldenu.edu

Appendix J: Practice Interviews: Email I Sent to the Three Practice Participants

Dear (Participant's Name),

Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this <u>practice interview</u>. Please, be aware that the purpose of this practice is to test the practicability of the interview questions (IQ) that I will be using during my official dissertation research, which I will be conducting in the next couple of months.

It is important to mention that the responses you provide for the IQs <u>will not </u>be used as part of my main study and your participation in this practice interview will disqualify you from participating in my main study. By agreeing to participate in this practice you authorize me to use the responses you provide to the IQs as a guide to help me better develop the interview questions in preparation for the formal study.

Please know that your identity will be always protected, and no one other than me will read the answers you provide. Once I review your answers, I will contact you again to see if you could give me feedback on what you thought of the questions.

Attached you will find the IQs. Please, answer the questions in the same word document and, once you are finished, save the document, and send it to me as an attachment to this email.

Again, thank you so much for your willingness to help me with this important step in my dissertation process. I really appreciate it.

Respectfully, Marielys Camacho-Reyes

Appendix K: Questions I Asked to the Practice Participants During the Practice

Interviews

1) Tell me about your life at home before going to college.

2) What can you tell me about your personality?

3) Tell me about your time in college.

a. What did you study?

b. Was that what you planned on studying? Or did you change your major after starting studying?

4) What kind of internship(s) did you complete during college?

5) What can you tell me about the skills you acquired during college and/or internships?

a. Soft skills?

b. Hard skills?

6) What can you tell me about the job you performed in which you experienced gaslighting?

a. What attracted you to that job?

b. What were your assigned tasks?

c. How was your relationship with your supervisor?

d. How was your relationship with your coworkers?

7) Who did the gaslighting, and when did the gaslighting start?

8) How was the gaslighting done?

9) What do you think caused the gaslighting?

10) How did the gaslighting make you feel while it was happening?

11) How did the gaslighting affect your mental health? (If applicable)

12) What posttraumatic stress symptoms did you develop? (If applicable)

13) How did you manage the gaslighting while it was happening?

14) How did the gaslighting affect your job? (If applicable)

15) How did the gaslighting affect your life outside of work? (If applicable)

16) Did you leave that job due got the gaslighting you experienced?

17) How have you changed professionally and personally since the gaslighting experience?

18) Did you get a new job right after that experience? If yes,

    a. How was the experience in that job after experiencing gaslighting in your old job?

19) What growth did you develop as a result of the gaslighting experience?

20) What traits in your personality do you think help you in developing growth as part of the gaslighting experience?

21) If you could go back in time, how would you handle the situation differently?

22) Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your gaslighting experience and any professional and/or personal growth that came out of it?

Appendix L: Follow Up Email I Sent to the Practice Participants Requesting Feedback

Dear (Participant's Name)

The last step on my practice interview is to have a better understanding about what you thought of the IQs. Would you please answer the questions below?

Did you feel like the questions were:

1) Appropriate and related to the topics at hand (Gaslighting in the workplace and posttraumatic growth)? Yes_____ No_____

a) If not, may you please specify why you did not feel they were appropriate?

2) Easy to understand? Yes_____ No_____ If not, may you please tell me what made the questions difficult to understand?

3) Straight to the point? Yes_____ No_____ If not, may you please tell me your experience answering the questions?

4) Intrusive or offensive? Yes_____ No_____ If yes, may you please tell me your experience answering the questions and why you feel they were intrusive and/or offensive?

5) Did you feel at ease during the process of answering the questions? Yes_____ No_____ If not, may you please specify why you did not feel at ease?

6) Is there anything else you would like to share with me in reference to the IQs, and how they made you feel while you were answering them?

Again, thank you so much for your help with providing feedback for this practice interview. I really appreciate it.

Appendix M: Spreadsheet I Created to Help Me Analyze and Code the Data I Collected

from the Participants

Transcript Analysis / Coding Form

Participant _____

Research Questions	Themes	Code	Direct Quote
RQ 1			
IQ 1			
IQ 2			
IQ 3			
IQ 4			
IQ 5			
IQ 6			
IQ 7			
IQ 8			
IQ 9			
IQ 10			
IQ 11			

Appendix M (Continuation): Spreadsheet I Created to Help Me Analyze and Code the

Data I Collected from the Participants

IQ 13			
IQ 14			
IQ 15			
IQ 16			
RQ 2			
IQ 2.1			
IQ 2.2			
EQ			
FQ			