

GASLIGHTING: A PREDATOR IN SHEEP CLOTHES IN BUCHI EMECHETA'S *GWENDOLEN*

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Résumé

Le manque d'amour et d'attention de la part de ses parents a rendu Gwendolen plus vulnérable aux prédateurs comme Uncle Johnny. Le but de cet article est de retracer l'enfance troublée de Gwendolen afin de mieux comprendre la façon dont Uncle Johnny en est venu à la manipuler et à profiter d'elle, tant sur le plan physique que sur le plan émotionnel. Notre objectif est également d'identifier les mécanismes d'adaptation que Gwendolen a mis en place pour faire face aux circonstances difficiles dans lesquelles elle se trouve. Pour cette analyse, nous avons principalement utilisé la critique littéraire psychanalytique (le complexe d'Edipe, les types d'attachement, les mécanismes de défense d'Anna Freud) et la théorie des traumatismes (en particulier les troubles de stress post-traumatique). Avant tout, nous examinerons la relation compliquée que Gwendolen a avec sa famille et comment cela l'a rendue vulnérable face à un pédophile comme Uncle Johnny. Ensuite, nous discuterons de la façon dont Uncle Johnny a magistralement utilisé le gaslighting sur Gwendolen pour l'empêcher de s'exprimer.

Mots clés : *Daddy issues, gaslighting, mécanismes de défense, viol.*

Abstract

The lack of parental love and attention Gwendolen went through made her more vulnerable to predators like Uncle Johnny. The purpose of this article is to go through the troubled childhood of Gwendolen to better grasp the way in which Uncle Johnny has come to manipulate her and take advantage of her both physically and emotionally. It is also our aim to identify the coping mechanisms Gwendolen has put in place to deal with her difficult circumstances. For this analysis we have mainly used psychoanalytic literary criticism (Oedipus complex, types of attachments, Anna Freud's defence mechanisms) and trauma theory (especially post-traumatic stress disorders). First and foremost, we will go through Gwendolen's strained relationship with her family and how it has made her vulnerable to a paedophile like Uncle Johnny. Then, we will discuss the ways in which Uncle Johnny has masterfully used gaslighting on Gwendolen to prevent her from speaking out.

Key words: *Daddy issues, defence mechanisms, gaslighting, rape.*

Introduction

Gaslighting is a mind control strategy that is done to control another person by changing their thoughts, feelings, memories, and belief system about who they are and or how they perceive an individual or a particular situation. We all have a self-narrative (the story we tell

ourselves about who we are and the environment around us). When a person is gaslighted, the information he believes about himself or about a particular person or situation is secretly implanted into his mind and the environment is systematically changed so that it can prove to the person in question that he has issues. To gaslight someone is to deny their sense of reality. It is a kind of emotional torment. The term owes its origins to the 1938 British play called *Gas Light*, which was later turned into a movie in 1944. It chronicles the relationship of a man and his wife, whom he slowly convinced was losing her sanity, encapsulating gaslighting in its purest form. K. Abramson (2014, p. 1) explains:

The term “gaslighting” comes from the movie “Gaslight”, in which Gregory deliberately tries to make his spouse Paula lose her mind by manipulating her, her friends and her physical environment. Gregory’s aim is to have Paula hospitalized for mental instability, so he can gain access to her jewels. We witness him engaging in one ‘crazy-making’ manipulative move after another, over a stretch of months.

There are several gaslighting behaviours. These include love-bombing, blame-shifting, denying abuse, and rewriting history. All of these leave the victim uncertain of their reality. Highly sensitive people and empaths are more susceptible to gaslighting because they do not trust themselves and their intuitions. They doubt their own perspective even when they sense that something is wrong. These people are like this due to the attachment styles they have formed when they were young infants. As E. Erikson (1963) and others have pointed out, early relationships may be prototypes of later relationships for a person’s childhood has an indelible impact on his teenage and adult life. Whether the person was securely attached to his caregiver or not determines in most part the way he will later act in relationships.

The developmental psychologist M. D. S. Ainsworth (1970) and the British psychologist, psychiatrist, and psychoanalyst J. Bowlby (1973) have pondered over child psychological development and put forward the basis of attachment theory. According to this school of thought, a child’s first years are critical to his emotional development in the sense that the way he bonds with his primary caregiver in this period determines mostly the way he apprehends the world around him.

If a child has a strong bond with his primary caregiver, he feels secure and is therefore eager to explore the world around him. If on the contrary, his primary caregiver is not available or attentive enough for

the child to form a strong physical and emotional bond with him/her, the child feels insecure and is therefore frightened to leave and explore the rather scary-looking world. He intuitively knows that he does not have a safe base to which he can return to anytime.

M. D. S. Ainsworth, M. Boston, J. Bowlby and D. Rosenbluth (1956, p. 211) observe that “[...] a break in the continuity of the [parent]-child relationship at a critical stage in the development of the child’s social responses may result in more or less permanent impairment of the ability to make relationships”. They further add:

[...] the core of healthy adult personality is the ability to make continuous stable and co-operative relationships with other persons, especially love objects, and [...] the satisfactory development of this ability in the adult is dependent on its healthy development in childhood, especially during the first three or five years of life when the child is making his first social relationships –those with his parents. [...] the majority of personality disturbances, and of neurotic and even psychotic symptoms, are the end-results of a dysfunctioning of the personality in the field of object relations. (M. D. S. Ainsworth, M. Boston, J. Bowlby and D. Rosenbluth, 1956, p. 211)

All these issues are clearly exemplified in Buchi Emecheta’s *Gwendolen* in which the eponymous character has an insecure attachment style due to the fact that she has always felt abandoned by her parents. An old pervert, Uncle Johnny, takes advantage of this weakness in her to approach her and later molest her. He subsequently gaslights her so that she does not denounce him.

The purpose of this article is to go through the troubled childhood of Gwendolen to better grasp the dysfunctional relationship she has with her parents, especially her father, and how Uncle Johnny has taken advantage of it to rape Gwendolen and gaslight her. For this analysis we will mainly use psychoanalytic literary criticism (Oedipus complex, types of attachments, Anna Freud’s defence mechanisms) and trauma theory (especially post-traumatic stress disorder).

Psychoanalytic literary criticism will help us understand the psychodynamics of gaslighting. Indeed, there are several psychological factors which shape the minds of the typical gaslighter and his perfect victim. Not only is the attachment style of the person a key element but Gaslighting is also often associated with narcissism or other personality

disorders. In such cases, a defence mechanism of dependence-promoting behaviours kicks in.

The end result of successful gaslighting is that the target becomes emotionally dependent on the perpetrator. For this reason, gaslighting has been the focus of psychoanalytical research for many years—including how it relates to attachment theory and defence mechanisms. As a matter of fact, individuals who experience gaslighting may become emotionally dependent on the gaslighter, seeking his validation and approval while feeling trapped in an unhealthy dynamic. This is called narcissistic abuse syndrome. It is characterised by a range of symptoms, including low self-esteem, self-doubt, feelings of worthlessness, and a distorted sense of reality.

For this reason, it is obvious that a psychoanalytic reading of *Gwendolen* will help to elucidate the struggle of its eponymous character. Furthermore, it is of utmost importance to use Psychoanalytic literary criticism in this article to analyse the phenomenon of “daddy issues” since it is the urban way of calling the female Oedipus complex.

As for trauma theory, it is relevant to this analysis in the sense that gaslighting can have such a profound impact on individuals that it can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a psychological disorder that develops after experiencing or witnessing a traumatic event. Gaslighting, with its constant manipulation, psychological abuse, and erosion of one’s sense of self, can be traumatic in nature. Individuals may exhibit symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, hypervigilance, emotional detachment, and avoidance behaviours. The effects of gaslighting can linger long after the abusive situation has ended, significantly impacting an individual’s quality of life and functioning.

To tackle the issue of Gaslighting and its aftermaths in Buchi Emecheta’s *Gwendolen* we will first and foremost go through Gwendolen’s strained relationship with her family and how it has made her vulnerable to a pedophile like Uncle Johnny. Then, we will discuss how Uncle Johnny has masterfully used gaslighting on Gwendolen to prevent her from speaking out.

1. Daddy issues: the breeding ground for child molestation

From a very young age, Gwendolen is placed to the care of her maternal grandmother by her parents who went to live in England. For years, she feels as if her parents have abandoned her. She is jealous of

her friends who have their parents by their side. No one is able to fill the void left by Sonia and Winston. As a point of fact, Gwendolen is unable to connect with her grandmother on a deep level as she would have done with her parents: “Granny was kind too, but she became tired easily and tended to complain a great deal. She was getting old, nearly fifty [...]” (*Gwendolen*, p. 10). She has no one to confide in. Furthermore, Gwendolen has an anxious-preoccupied attachment style and this pushes her to overthink about people’s behaviour. She tends to hold touchy feelings. This in return exacerbates in her the sensation of not being loved. She takes the fact that her mother went to live abroad without her as an act of rejection and thus she wonders if she will ever be wanted by anyone:

Mammy going was the final act of rejection life had imposed on her. She wanted her Mammy not to go. Would she ever be wanted by anyone, she wondered, as they walked back to Granville after wishing her Mammy a hurried goodbye, for unlike her Daddy Winston who came on time to the wharf, her Mammy was late. (*Gwendolen*, p. 9)

Gwendolen is all the more sad to be away from her mother because her father left Granville when she was still a little girl. Because she has been separated from Winston at such a young age, she suffers from daddy issues almost all her life. People who are afflicted with this condition secretly yearn for a man to step in and fulfil an unquenched fantasy role. They see the father as being a kind of superhero who will love them indefinitely, protect them and mitigate the chaos in their lives. D. Setiawan and L. Yuwono (2010, p. 185) give a simple and clear explanation of what Daddy Issues is:

In popular media, the female Oedipus Complex is often called as ‘Daddy Issues’. It refers broadly to the results of a female’s turbulent, or abusive relationship with her father, or absence of a father figure during her childhood, and the way in which this problem is said to hinder relationships later in life.

As a matter of fact, oftentimes people who suffer from daddy issues will look for a father figure in the friendships they form, the dating partners they have, or even at work or any other sphere of life. For those of them who grew up away from their father like Gwendolen, once they are reunited with him they cling to this man hoping that at last he will assuage the longing they bring to bear on him.

The lack of parental love and attention Gwendolen suffers from makes her more vulnerable to predators like Uncle Johnny. Even at the onset of the story one can see premises to the sexual abuse that will take place later. Uncle Johnny touches little Gwendolen inappropriately: “But Johnny always touched her thighs” (*Gwendolen*, p. 1). He is the only one to give her special attention at a time when children crave for it. Therefore, the gullible little girl cannot in a million years foresee that this caring uncle of hers is actually a predator in sheep clothes:

There were too many people and it was too hot. Uncle Johnny, who came in his smart church clothes with stripes, held her by the hand. Mammy was busy crying and Granny busy telling her Daddy off. All the others seemed to be talking and laughing. [...] Once in a while Uncle Johnny would ask her, ‘You all right, gal?’ And she would nod that she was OK. He would smile at her, displaying his golden tooth. [...] At other times, he grinned hugely at Gwendolen and called her ‘Smart Juney-Juney’. (*Gwendolen*, p. 3)

Uncle Johnny makes sure to create an atmosphere of trust and complicity between him and Gwendolen. It is not only the little girl who appreciates him. Granny Naomi also trusts Uncle Johnny. He is an old friend of the family and has always been kind to them: “He knew they both trusted him implicitly” (*Gwendolen*, p. 11). Thus, it is inconceivable for both Gwendolen and Granny Naomi that Uncle Johnny could even think about raping anyone, let alone a little girl like Gwendolen. Yet, it is worth nothing that the overwhelming majority of cases of child abuse are perpetrated by a close member of the child’s circle.

According to The World Health Organization (2006, p. 9) child maltreatment is: “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or other exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power”. It is well-known that child maltreatment often has long lasting medical and psychological impacts on the health of victims. As explained by the American Academy of Pediatrics, et al. (2008, p. 667), “[a]n increasing body of evidence documents the robust relationship between adverse experiences in early childhood and a host of complications, both medical and psychological, that manifest throughout childhood and later in adult life” in the form of posttraumatic stress disorders and other such things.

Gwendolen has experienced almost all the forms of maltreatment listed above. The most insidious one, which has scarred her for life, is the emotional abuse she went through. It made her feel insecure about herself. When thinking about abuse, physical abuse may come to mind first but emotional abuse can be as damaging as physical abuse and often precedes it. Sometimes they happen simultaneously as in Gwendolen's case. Indeed, while raping her, Uncle Johnny says hurtful things to her: "Your Mammy gone na England to join your Daddy. Dem no want you dere" (*Gwendolen*, p. 13).

It is such a shock for Gwendolen to discover this dark side of Uncle Johnny that her body shuts down. She is paralysed. The "fight, flight, or freeze" mechanism is the typical response of the body to stressful situations. Freezing often occurs before or after a fight or flight response. K. Roelofs (2017, p. 7) powerfully explains this freezing mechanism which often assails people when they are in a state of shock:

[...] freezing is a form of behavioural inhibition accompanied by parasympathetically dominated heart rate deceleration. Despite the potential relevance of freezing for human stress-coping, its phenomenology and neurobiological underpinnings in humans remain largely unexplored. This review paper indicates that freezing is not a passive state but rather a parasympathetic brake on the otherwise active motor system, relevant to perception and appropriate action preparation.

The freezing response is meant to protect a person from threats. However, sometimes it is this same reflex which was meant to protect against threat that actually renders people helpless in some frightening instances as is the case for Gwendolen. Her Freezing response fails her miserably in the sense that she cannot struggle and free herself from Uncle Johnny because her body has chosen to shut down: "She wanted very much to ask him what he was doing, but she could not; his hand was firmly over her mouth and she could not struggle because her body was frozen. Only her eyes roamed and it was dark. He was on top of her. She almost suffocated, but he soon rolled to one side" (*Gwendolen*, pp. 12-13).

Freezing up is a physiological response when the mind decides that there is not much thing the person can do to help himself/herself in a particular situation. This is called learned helplessness. Even before she can cry out for help, Gwendolen knows through daily indoctrination that

people will believe Uncle Johnny over her. Thus, her mind does what it thinks to be the best in this situation: to shut down.

The human mind works in intricate ways. Scientists make a difference between the primitive mind and the conscious mind. Before she can even think about it, Gwendolen's primitive mind has already processed the situation and decided that it will be to no avail for her to fight. This decision of her primitive mind is later sanctioned by her conscious mind when Gwendolen comes back to her senses after the rape. Granny Naomi is in a deep sleep. Therefore, had Gwendolen screamed she probably would not have heard her and this could have prompted Uncle Johnny to be angry and hurt her even more:

When she returned, she stood by the side of Granny's bed and peered into her corner of the shack. Uncle Johnny had gone, but still she snored and was deep in sleep. Gwendolen decided to go back to her corner. It was too late to wake Granny now.

Granny would only start complaining and maybe blame her. She would tell her in the morning. She placed her mother's sewing chair behind the door to prevent Uncle Johnny from coming back. It took her a long time before she was finally able to fall asleep. (*Gwendolen*, pp. 13-14)

There is a great deal of symbolism in the sewing chair scene. The mother's sewing chair serves as a shield and protects her as her mother would have done had she been there. A Sewing chair is used to sit and sew and Gwendolen's life needs to be mended piece by piece after this trauma. However, unlike a torn piece of cloth, Gwendolen's hymen can never be mended back to its first state. The writer makes Granny Naomi sit on this very same sewing machine the day Sonia leaves for England as if to say that Granny Naomi is now the one who stands for the mother.

Yet, Gwendolen's grandmother fails her. It is her close relationship with Uncle Johnny which makes him have access to Gwendolen. If they were not drinking together and hanging around Naomi's shack often, he would not have had the possibility to rape Gwendolen the night he did. If he was not in her close circle, Uncle Johnny would not have been able to have access to Gwendolen to even consider raping her. Also, it is because he hung around them enough that he knew exactly what to say to bully Gwendolen into not denouncing him after he molested her.

2. The art of gaslighting

Uncle Johnny started manipulating Gwendolen even before that fateful night. He used gaslighting on her. Gaslighting is gradually manipulating someone in such a way to make them doubt their own certainty. Sociopaths or narcissists are more prone to using this form of psychological abuse. When someone is gaslighted he is made to think that his memory of things, or what he felt in a certain situation is wrong. The whole goal of this type of abuse is to make a person question his perception, his memory or even his sanity. Gaslighting often erodes the victim's self-esteem.

When someone is gaslighting a person, he is exploiting the person's vulnerabilities, fears, insecurities, and neediness. There are several gaslighting behaviours. These include love-bombing, blame-shifting, denying abuse, and rewriting history. Love bombing is a tactic in which a person uses excessive and disproportionate gestures of affection to manipulate and establish control over a person. This can include elaborate gift-giving, excessive complimenting, showing undivided attention, and other manipulative tactics. Love bombing is commonly associated with narcissism and often progresses into emotional abuse.

As for blame-shifting, it is a form of manipulation in which the perpetrator twists things so that the victim ends up being blamed even if he was not at fault. Blame-shifting is a form of context switching and crazy making. It happens in this way: when a victim confronts an abusive person on something he did, or attempts to set boundaries, the abuser switches the whole focus back to the victim and thus puts him on the defensive. This is a ruse that he uses to get away with what he did.

When it comes to the gaslighting behaviour called "denying abuse," it is about denying the victim's memory or perception of an event. The gaslighter could be denying an agreement, or a conversation, or even something physical – like hitting the victim. However, denying abuse does not always mean outright saying something never happened. It can simply be refuting the fact that the victim's perception of things is accurate and thus, downplaying his feelings.

There is a similarity between "denying abuse" and the gaslighting behaviour called "rewriting history". Indeed, a person who gaslights tends to retell stories in ways that are in his favour. For instance, if an abuser shoved a person against a wall and later the victim calls him for

his misbehaviour, he may twist the story and say that the person stumbled and that he tried to steady him, which is what caused the person to fall into the wall.

Returning back to *Gwendolen*, one can clearly see that as the narcissist Uncle Johnny is, he has used all these gaslighting tools on Gwendolen. Love-bombing is one of the first manipulative tactics he uses on her. Love bombing is a manipulative tactic that is often used by people with narcissistic personality disorder to gain control in a relationship. The hypotheses that Claire Strutzenberg (2016 p. 12) has put forward in her study of the phenomenon of love-bombing are largely confirmed by instances of people being love-bombed or themselves applying love-bombing on others:

- (2a) Love-Bombing behaviors will be positively associated with insecure attachment styles (i.e., avoidant, anxious) and negatively associated with secure attachment styles, (2b) Love-Bombing behaviors will be negatively correlated with self-esteem, (2c) Love-Bombing behaviors will be positively associated with narcissistic tendencies, and (3a) Love-Bombers will be more likely to use texting and social media to communicate with their romantic partners as compared to non-Love-Bombers.

All these behaviours are exhibited in the dynamic of the relationship between Uncle Johnny and Gwendolen. Through daily indoctrination the young girl is led to believe that Uncle Johnny is the only one to truly care for her and that she has to be very grateful for having him around because her parents are living their best lives in England, away from her. Indeed, Uncle Johnny uses the fact that he is taking care of Gwendolen and Granny Naomi in Sonia's absence to cement his domination over Gwendolen. He makes her believe that her parents have abandoned her.

One can clearly see the gaslighting behaviour called "rewriting history" being at play when after the abuse Uncle Johnny tries to make Gwendolen believe that it was consensual sex and therefore, urging her to keep their "little secret" (*Gwendolen*, p. 13). Uncle Johnny also uses on Gwendolen the tactic called blame-shifting. He often insinuates that if people are to know that Gwendolen is not a virgin anymore they will blame her. Hearing him, one would think that Gwendolen is the culprit in this case of rape and not him. He wants to crush her self-esteem, to dissuade her from speaking out:

‘Your Mammy gone na England to join your Daddy. Dem no want you dere, but me look after you, right? Me help your Granny on de farm and buy you tings, right? We one family nuh. This our secret, right? Don’t tell nobody, because they’ll say you’re a bad gal. You’ll do anything for your Uncle Johnny, not so, Juney-Juney? And if you wan’ anything, anything at all, just tell me. We good friends now, good, good friends.’ His voice was hoarse, his breath came and went and the sickly smell of rum escaped every time he opened his mouth. (*Gwendolen*, p. 13)

Later, Uncle Johnny uses another gaslighting move on Gwendolen to keep her from speaking out. It is “denying abuse”. The morning that comes after the night Uncle Johnny has raped Gwendolen, he acts as if nothing has happened the night before. This creates confusion in Gwendolen’s mind: “Gwendolen followed them in a confused state. If what Uncle Johnny had done to her last night was wrong, how come he behaved so normally this morning?” (*Gwendolen*, p. 15). Gaslighters are covert narcissists. They may avoid or refuse to have an open discussion about what took place. Or they may deny or downplay the abuse that occurred if one confronts them.

Thus, at first, Uncle John downplays the abuse by trying to convince Gwendolen that they are friends and that it is a normal thing for friends to do. Then, the following morning, in presence of Granny Naomi, he acts as if nothing has happened, therefore making Gwendolen feel confused. Later, when the young girl finally finds the courage to speak out, Uncle Johnny just bluntly lies and goes on a character assassination of Gwendolen, ridiculing her in front of all their folks.

When someone is convinced or forced into a sexual act they have not consented to and that subsequently the perpetrator insists in hindsight that the victim wanted to do it, this is called sexual gaslighting. The abuser will often resort to gaslighting behaviours such as the ones discussed earlier (love-bombing, blame-shifting, denying abuse, rewriting history, etc.). Just like Gwendolen, several rape survivors fall victim to these types of manipulations. While gaslighting can be done by the abuser, it can also be reinforced by a friend or family member who does not believe the victims’ account. This is the case of Granny Naomi who, at first believes Gwendolen but later blames her. Survivors of any kind of abuse need support, and without it, they can fall further down a rabbit

hole of not seeking guidance and enduring the mental effects of the abuse they have gone through.

Gaslighting is an attack on a person's memory, their intelligence and ability to convey reliable information. If these are constantly being questioned, it is bound to have an effect on the victim's self-confidence. Therefore, making him afraid to make decisions, pushing him to doubt himself, or urging him to constantly seek the reassurance of others to know that he is not imagining something. Constantly apologising and stepping on eggshells around others, can also happen when one is questioning his self-confidence. Gaslighting can create feelings of despair, hopelessness, and low self-confidence. All these feelings can contribute to developing depression. In some instances—and if the gaslighting is persistent enough—victims may come to believe that they may have requested or consented to a sexual act when, actually, they have not.

In *Gwendolen*, one can say that over the years, Uncle Johnny has manipulated Gwendolen so much so that she thinks that it is in her own best interest to keep the fact that he has raped her a secret. In an insidious way she is made to believe that it is her word against Uncle Johnny's. After all, he is a senior member of the community and a churchgoer. Who will ever think that he is capable of such ignominy? Worse, Gwendolen feels guilty because she thinks that she is supposed to love him as everybody else does:

Looking back at that time as an adult, Gwendolen could not really pinpoint on which day and at what hour Uncle Johnny had started to make her feel guilty. All she knew was that as she grew older, she began to entertain the irrational fear that everybody would blame her if they knew her secret. She was beginning to learn by daily indoctrination that there was little a man like Uncle Johnny could do wrong. He was usually right, listened to and regarded as a very kind person. Who would believe her word against such a respectable man [...] Yes, Uncle Johnny must be right. He had told her [...] that it was her way of showing him she loved him. It seemed at that time a sin not to love Uncle Johnny. He so good to them.
(*Gwendolen*, pp. 15-16)

Uncle Johnny uses the fact that Sonia has built a new life in England and does not send money anymore to exacerbate Gwendolen's feeling of abandonment. He wants to crush any ounce of hope in her.

She has to endure everything and accept her lot for no-one is going to save her from his grip:

He seemed to be right all the time. Her Mammy had been gone now over two years, but she had written only four letters. [...] The next letter announced the birth of another brother and the fourth brought nothing but to say how difficult life was becoming with two baby boys to look after. Mammy even said she was lucky to have a mother like Granny Naomi who had agreed to take care of her daughter. Each time Uncle Johnny read such letters, he would lift his red-rimmed eyes and look knowingly in her direction as if to say, 'Did I not tell you that they will go there and breed and forget about you?' (*Gwendolen*, pp. 18-19)

Uncle Johnny's plan works to perfection. Gwendolen is convinced that her parents have abandoned her. For years on end, he has kept on raping her. This has repercussions not only on her self-esteem but also on her physical health. She is still wetting her bed even though she is well past the age of bedwetting. These are among the many ways in which post-traumatic stress disorder manifests itself.

Gwendolen's enuresis creates frictions between the young girl and her grandmother because Granny Naomi does not know that Gwendolen's bedwetting is linked to the abuse, she is suffering at the hands of Uncle Johnny. Granny Naomi is at her wit's end with her granddaughter and is often punishing her. However, rebuking a child for wetting her bed does nothing but increase the problem. In general, children who are rebuked for suffering from enuresis despair of ever finding a solution to this "shameful" problem. This sends their self-esteem into a downward spiral.

Realising that girls who are of her age do not wet their beds anymore, Gwendolen starts to ask herself whether her enuresis is not related to the daily physical abuse Uncle Johnny is perpetrating on her young body. However, because she has experienced so much gaslighting from this elderly man she does not trust her own judgement. Furthermore, she is certain that if she dares to denounce Uncle Johnny, no one will take her seriously. To her, the only solution left is to run away.

She goes straight to her grandmother from her father's side. To her disappointment, she is not welcomed with open arms in Granny Elinor's house. Therefore, Gwendolen feels compelled to go back to Granville. After this incident, Granny Naomi is grappled with guilt. Since

the institution of motherhood in patriarchal societies demands women to mother perfect children, maternal figures are always blamed for anything wrong their children do. The conditioning is sometimes so strong that they blame themselves even before anyone does it:

Why was the child running away from home? She wondered. A sense of guilt was enveloping her. After raising Sonia, and knowing that she could not have any more children, she had reconciled herself to her lot. She really did not wish to go through worrying after a young girl again, not since Sonia had dragged Winston from the coast to tell her bewildered parents that she was pregnant and that he was the father of her child. Naomi had thought that her only child would be a little school marm like Miss Peters, but instead she got herself 'stuck up' with an illiterate like Winston. She had given up trying to raise anybody proper. She was not good at it. (*Gwendolen*, p. 22)

The fact that Sonia is not sending enough money for Granny Naomi to take care of Gwendolen makes the elderly woman's life more difficult than it already is. She wonders if her granddaughter left because she has sensed that she is a burden to her. Feeling guilty, she decides to be more compassionate with Gwendolen. This helps Gwendolen to open up about her rape by Uncle Johnny.

Even though at the beginning Granny Naomi supports her and even confronts Uncle Johnny about it, she later starts to insinuate that Gwendolen is lewd. This puts a strain again in their relationship. Albeit Granny Naomi is not a mean person, she has not always been gentle with her grandchild. The more Gwendolen thinks about her grandmother's lack of grace with her, the more she feels resentful:

How she wished she could drop down dead, when Granny made her walk about the yard carrying her bedding, with all her friends watching and laughing at the back of their hands? How little Granny had her feel when she sent her out to play simply because she and Uncle Johnny wanted to have an adult talk. And the most hurtful of all was when she started to suspect that Granny did not really believe that she did not encourage Uncle Johnny or that the whole thing was not her imagination. (*Gwendolen*, p. 31)

The tension between Gwendolen and her grandmother makes her want to be with her mother even more. She craves for a loving female figure to whom she can confine in and be herself around. To her, if she

can join her parents in England it will be the end of all her misery. She will be happy and carefree again. She will not have to worry about what people think about her enuresis-past and the fact that she has been raped multiple times by Uncle Johnny.

Conclusion

In this article we went through the troubled childhood of the eponymous main character of Buchi Emecheta's *Gwendolen* to better grasp the way in which an old family friend, Uncle Johnny, has come to manipulate her and take advantage of her both physically and emotionally. We also identified the coping mechanisms Gwendolen has put in place to deal with her difficult circumstances. Not only have we highlighted Gwendolen's strained relationship with her family and how it has made her vulnerable to a paedophile like Uncle Johnny, we have also shown the ways in which Uncle Johnny has masterfully used gaslighting on Gwendolen to prevent her from speaking out.

Gwendolen has an insecure attachment style due to the fact that she has always felt abandoned by her parents. Indeed, from a very young age, she has been placed to the care of her maternal grandmother by her parents who went to live in England. As the predator he is, Uncle Johnny sees this weakness in Gwendolen and takes advantage of it to get closer to her. It does not help that Gwendolen is suffering from daddy issues and thus she is looking for a father figure in him. Uncle Johnny makes sure to create an atmosphere of trust and complicity between him, Gwendolen and Granny Naomi so much so that it is quite easy for him to have access to Gwendolen and rape her.

It is such a shock for Gwendolen to discover this dark side of Uncle Johnny that her body shuts down. Freezing up is a physiological response when the mind decides that there is not much thing the person can do to help himself/herself in a particular situation. Although Granny Naomi is in the same room, she is too drunk to prevent Uncle Johnny to act on his sadistic urges. Indeed, Gwendolen's grandmother fails her. It is her close relationship with Uncle Johnny which makes him have access to her granddaughter.

Uncle Johnny has started manipulating Gwendolen even before that fateful night. He has used gaslighting on her over a long period. Gaslighting is a mind control strategy that is done to control another

person by changing their thoughts, feelings, memories, and belief system about who they are and or how they perceive an individual or a particular situation. There are several gaslighting behaviours. These include love-bombing, blame-shifting, denying abuse, and rewriting history. As the narcissist he is, Uncle Johnny has used all these gaslighting tools on Gwendolen.

When someone is convinced or forced into a sexual act they have not consented to and that subsequently the perpetrator insists in hindsight that the victim wanted to do it, this is called sexual gaslighting. Just like Gwendolen, several rape survivors fall victim to this type of manipulation. Gaslighting is an attack on a person's memory, their intelligence and ability to convey reliable information.

Over the years, Uncle Johnny manipulates Gwendolen so much so that she thinks that it is in her own best interest to keep secret the fact that he has raped her. Since no one suspects him, he keeps on abusing the young girl for several years. This has repercussions not only on her self-esteem but also on her physical health. She is still wetting her bed even though she is well past the age of bedwetting. This creates frictions between the young girl and her grandmother, all the more that Granny Naomi does not know that Gwendolen's bedwetting is linked to the abuse she is suffering at the hands of Uncle Johnny.

From Gwendolen's story one can see how important it is for a child to have a secure attachment to his parents and the damaging effects daddy issues and gaslighting can have on one's psyche. It is of utmost important for people to know what gaslighting is and to be able to identify the warning signs that one may be under the influence of a Gaslighter. Reading novels such as Buchi Emecheta's *Gwendolen* can help one understand both the physical and emotional struggle rape victims tend to go through.

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