



Pain and Gain: Achieving Recovery from Childhood Trauma in Paula Vogel's *How I Learned to Drive*
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Abstract

When children are abused, they are traumatized at the most crucial period of their lives in which their personality is still developing. Consequently, they suffer from several problems that continue to plague them into their adulthood. On the contrary, the trauma that happens during adulthood affects the personality that is already formed (Herman, 1992, p.96). This paper aims to investigate the long-term consequences of childhood abuse in Paula Vogel's play *How I Learned to Drive* (1997) based on Judith Herman's views in her book *Trauma and Recovery* (1992). It examines two psychological disorders proposed by Herman that the characters suffer from: post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (c-PTSD). Additionally, it introduces the different types of abuse Li'l Bit experiences and the risk factors that make her more vulnerable to abuse. Moreover, it shows how trauma can be transferred from one generation to another. It further investigates the complicated nature of the relationship between Li'l Bit and Uncle Peck, elaborating her psychological motives behind meeting him. Finally, the paper elaborates Li'l Bit's journey of self-discovery being the play's protagonist and main victim of childhood trauma.

Keywords: *Herman, Child abuse, Vogel, Childhood trauma, PTSD, c-PTSD, Recovery*

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to display the psychological consequences that result from experiencing abuse during childhood in Paula Vogel's play *How I Learned to Drive* in which she resolves the ambiguity concerning the relationship between Li'l Bit and Uncle Peck, explaining Li'l Bit's reason behind remaining in contact with her abuser. Additionally, Vogel displays how trauma passes from the old generation, represented in Li'l Bit's grandmother and Li'l Bit's mother, to the next generation, represented in Li'l Bit. Moreover, it proposes the fact that a survivor of childhood abuse can reach her self-realization and recover from the trauma of abuse. This is seen through the analysis of Li'l Bit's character. Vogel displays the way abuse and pain can develop into something positive. The paper aims to answer the following questions: How far is a child's psychological well-being affected by his or her being abused? What are the symptoms of trauma that result from experiencing child abuse as represented in the play? How far can childhood abuse be either damaging or beneficial for its survivors? These questions are to be answered by relying on Judith Herman's ideas of psychological trauma and the psychological disorders that result from experiencing abuse during childhood.

This paper is divided into seven parts. The first part introduces the definition of child abuse and three main types discussed in the play under study. The same part gives an account of how the theme of child maltreatment is depicted by American dramatists who precede Paula Vogel. The second part introduces the frame of reference utilized in this paper. It provides an overview of trauma as a term as well as Herman's explanation of PTSD and c-PTSD that result from experiencing childhood trauma and their associated symptoms. After that Herman's three-part process of healing from trauma is explained. The third part gives an account of Paula Vogel's life and literary works placing her among her

contemporaries as well as a synopsis of the chosen play and the reason for choosing it to be analyzed.

The fourth part investigates the factors that increase the susceptibility of Li'l Bit's abuse. The fifth part illustrates the kinds of abuse that Li'l Bit is subjected to during her childhood causing her trauma. The sixth part examines the main character of Vogel's play, Li'l Bit, through the lens of Herman's diagnostic concepts of PTSD and c-PTSD. It applies the symptoms of PTSD on Li'l Bit as well as the symptoms of c-PTSD due to experiencing recurrent prolonged abuse when she was a child. Additionally, this part elaborates Li'l Bit's healing process according to Herman's phases for recovery. The seventh and final part examines the suffering of Li'l Bit's grandmother and mother from the intrusion of their past trauma. It shows how the re-enactment of their trauma on Li'l Bit perpetuates her abuse.

Different Types of Child Abuse

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) in the *Report of the Consultation on Child Abuse Prevention* issued in 1999 child abuse or maltreatment:

[C]onstitutes all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment ... 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. (p.15)

Three major types of child abuse are to be discussed throughout the paper: emotional abuse, child sexual abuse, and neglect. Child physical abuse will not be tackled because it is not applicable on the play's characters.

Child Emotional Abuse (CEA)

According to the WHO CEA "includes the failure to provide a developmentally appropriate, supportive environment, ..." for a child (1999, p.15).

It is also called “psychological maltreatment” or “psychological abuse” (Garbarino et al., 1986, p.8). There are acts done by the parents or primary caregivers towards the child causing harm to his or her development such as “the restriction of movement,” “blaming,” “threatening,” and “frightening” (1999, p.15). This type of abuse includes acts of “spurning” which refers to rejecting, criticizing, belittling, or ridiculing a child as well (Geiger& Schelbe, 2021, p.88). Hence, CEA generally happens when an individual causes serious emotional damage to another through his or her speech or actions.

Child Sexual Abuse (CSA)

According to a report on child maltreatment by the Children’s Bureau (CB) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) published in 2018, CSA refers to:

[T]he involvement of the child in sexual activity to provide sexual gratification or financial benefit to the perpetrator, including contacts for sexual purposes, molestation, ... prostitution, pornography... incest¹, or other sexually exploitative activities. (p.120)

Christiane Sanderson (2006) in her book *Counselling Adult Survivors of Child Sexual Abuse* divides child sexual abuse into two types: the first type includes contact sexual acts, such as touching parts of the child’s body especially the private parts or rape (pp.31-32). The second type includes non-contact sexual acts, for example, sexual comments, urging a child to indulge in a sexual activity, taking pictures of a child in a sexually provocative way, with the intention of keeping them for sexual fantasies or pornographic use (pp.31-32).

It is believed that children are usually sexually molested by persons they do not know. This is called the “stranger danger” myth (2006, p.16). Yet studies indicate that approximately eighty to eighty-five percent of the reported cases of

¹ According to the *Collins English Dictionary*, the word “incest” is derived from the Greek word “incentum” which means unchastity or moral sin. It is defined as “the sexual intercourse or sexual molestation between persons within the degrees of consanguinity or affinity wherein marriage is legally forbidden” (Collins, n.d.).

CSA, the abuser or molester is familiar to the child rather than being a stranger (p.16).

Child Neglect (CN)

CN is defined by the WHO as

[T]he failure to provide for the development of the child in all spheres: health, education, emotional development, nutrition, shelter, and safe living conditions, in the context of resources reasonably available to the family or caretakersThis includes the failure to properly supervise and protect children from harm as much as is feasible. (1999, p.15)

It is noteworthy that CN is overlooked, although it is the most common form of child maltreatment because it is believed not to be as serious as physical, emotional, or sexual abuse (Myers, 2006, p.91). However, it has a traumatizing effect on children like other types of abuse

Literature Review

The theme of child abuse has been tackled by several playwrights preceding Paula Vogel, such as Tina Howe (1937-) Marsha Norman (1947-), and Christopher Durang (1949-) to examine the drastic effects of childhood abuse in forming an adult's personality. Shereen A. El-Shormilisy (2019) in her paper "Insights into Family Dysfunction through Bowen's Theory and Durang's Satire: An Interdisciplinary Approach" explores dysfunctional American families through two plays written by Durang (p.275). *Baby with the Bathwater* (1983) depicts neglectful parents who cannot their parental duties towards their daughter, Daisy, since the day she was born which results in Daisy's development of an unstable personality. *The Marriage of Bette and Boo* (1985) revolves around the marriage of Betty and Boo. They do not know how to care for their newborn child because of the effect of the abusive relationship with their parents on them (2019, p.287).

In another paper presented by Maika A. Gallardo (2016) entitled “‘You Gotta Admit You Had It Comin to You’: Trauma, Gender Violence and Female Bonding in Marsha Norman’s *Getting Out [(1979)]*” the researcher examines Arlene’s suffering of split personality disorder due to her past trauma of being abused by her father. It is divided into two characters: Arlene, the grown up woman, and Arlie, her younger traumatized self (p.23). Additionally, in a paper entitled “*Birth And After Birth and Painting Churches: Tina Howe's Examination of Love and Savagery in the American Family,*” Sarah Chambers-Ennis (1995) examines the devastating consequences of child abuse on the protagonists in the two plays. In the first play, written in 1973, a four-year-old child, Nicky, is subjected to physical abuse which leads to developing destructive behaviour, which is self-mutilation. In the second play, written in 1983, Mag experiences psychological abuse leading to her low self-esteem as an adult the thing that affects her career as an artist (pp.1-2).

Theoretical Framework

A Brief Overview of Trauma

According to Charles R. Figley (1985) in his book *Trauma and Its Wake*, the word trauma is a Greek word, which means “wound” inflicted on a body (p.xviii). In its modern usage, trauma refers to nonphysical wounds as well. Cathy Caruth (2016) in her work *Unclaimed Experiences* considers trauma to be “a wound inflicted not on the body but on the mind” (p.3). Several scholars and trauma theorists who work in the field of trauma begin to define the concept of trauma. Jenny Edkins (2003) explains that the traumatic incident does not only render the victim powerless but also “[i]t has to involve a betrayal of trust ...” (p.4). Moreover, Stolorow (2011) defines psychological trauma as “an experience of unbearable affect” (p.14).

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder resulting from a single traumatic or stressful event. In 1980, it was officially included with the name of PTSD in the third edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III)* of the American Psychiatric Association (APA) after

its symptoms had been identified in the soldiers who returned from the Vietnam War. According to this edition, such disorder emerges from experiencing a “psychologically traumatic event that is outside the range of the usual human experience,” such as war, a natural disaster, an accident, or bombing (236).

Judith Herman's (1942-) Trauma of Childhood Abuse and Its Effects

Judith Lewis Herman is a leading American psychiatrist at Harvard University. In her influential work *Trauma and Recovery* (1992) she discusses the effects of trauma that happens in the public sphere like war trauma as well as the one that occurs within the private sphere of family to women and children (pp.2-3). Additionally, she introduces her best-known contribution to the field of trauma; that is, the diagnosis of complex post-traumatic stress disorder (c-PTSD). She defines it as “the syndrome that follows upon prolonged repeated trauma” or “prolonged repeated abuse” (p.119). Hence, she distinguishes between PTSD, that results from a traumatic event that happens only once, and c-PTSD, that results from the repetition and the continuity of a traumatic incident.

Trauma and Recovery consists of two parts: in the first part, Herman presents her definition of psychological trauma, that is, “a feeling of intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation” (1992, p.24). In addition, she proposes the symptoms of the two psychological disorders: PTSD and c-PTSD. In the second part, she describes the stages through which trauma survivors can go through to recover from their trauma.

The reason for choosing Herman's work as the frame of reference for the present research is that she highlights the importance of childhood stage and the experiences that happen during this stage in the formation of an individual's personality. She states that the child who grows in a nourishing and healthy family environment, he or she “achieves a secure sense of autonomy” (p.107) and develops a clear self-image that leads to forming a normal personality. On the contrary, growing up in an abusive family environment leads to psychological problems that can carry onwards through adult life (p.107). Additionally, her new

diagnostic concept of c-PTSD is applicable to the main character of the play, Li'l Bit.

Herman's Three Main Categories of PTSD

Herman breaks down the symptoms of PTSD into three main categories: “hyperarousal,” “intrusion,” and “constriction” (1992, p.35).

Hyperarousal. It is the first symptom of PTSD. It refers to “the persistent expectation of danger” (p.35). Even though the traumatic experience is over, the victim becomes under a constant state of alertness believing that the danger may return at any moment (p.35).

Intrusion. It is the second symptom of PTSD. It “reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment,” as explained by Herman (p.35). This means that the traumatic moment is engraved in the victim’s memory; thus, he or she relives it through flashbacks, nightmares, thoughts, or exposure to similar reminders of this event like objects, words, or situations (p.35). Moreover, Herman asserts that some trauma survivors tend to relive their trauma in their actions. This is what she calls “reenactment” of the trauma (p.39).

Constriction. The third symptom of PTSD is “constriction” or “numbing” (p.42). It means that the traumatized person’s “system of self -defense shuts down” at the moment of the trauma (p.42). This means that the victim loses control and cannot escape from the threatening and dangerous situation.

Complex Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (c-PTSD)

Herman’s new diagnosis, c-PTSD, occurs only in conditions of captivity (1992, p.119). Such conditions exist in prisons, concentration camps, and in some families. She further explains that some cases of captivity include controlling the victim through physical barriers like putting bars on the windows or wire fences. But in domestic captivity, women and children are held captive by invisible barriers that can be psychological or economic (p.74).

According to Herman, individuals with c-PTSD have the symptoms of PTSD along with additional complex symptoms such as reliving their painful experience through images, thoughts, and behaviours or actions as well as perceiving themselves to be guilty (p.119). There are other symptoms of this disorder but they are exempted because they are not applied to Li'l Bit, the primary character in the play who is diagnosed with this disorder.

Herman's Three Stages of Recovery from Trauma

Herman (1992) divides the recovery process into three stages. They are the "establishment of safety," "remembrance and mourning," and "reconnection with ordinary life" (p.155). The first stage of recovery outlined by Herman refers to "the establishment of a safe living situation..., and a plan for self-protection that encompasses the full range of the [survivor's] daily life" (p.160). The second stage of recovery, that is remembering and mourning, refers to the fact that the survivor tells or narrates in details his or her trauma (p.175). Moreover, the victim mourns the losses associated with the traumatic event (p.189). The third stage of recovery is reconnection. In this stage, the trauma survivor begins to reconnect with people who help to come to terms with the trauma he or she went through. In addition, the survivor starts to create a new self and thinks of the future (p.196).

Paula Vogel: Life and Literary Career

Paula Vogel (1951-)

Paula Anne Vogel is a distinguished American playwright, screenwriter, and lecturer. Vogel attended the Catholic University of America in Washington where she got her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1974. Then she began to study for her Ph.D. degree at Cornell University. After that she left Cornell and started giving lectures at McGill University and the University of Alaska. In 1984, she was appointed as the director of the graduate playwriting program at Brown University (Smith et al., 2002, p.4).

Vogel along with her contemporary playwrights have revolted against the myth of the ideal family through discussing important social issues that are considered taboos in the American society, such as violence, sex, betrayal, and incest. An example of these playwrights is Sam Shepard (1943-2017) whose play *Buried Child* (1978) tackles the destroying effect of the act of incest between a mother and her eldest son, Tilden, which results in the birth of a baby. Tilden's father killed this child and buried him in the farm of their house (Bottoms, 1998, pp.152-156).

Another contemporary dramatist is Beth Henley (1952-) whose play *Crimes of the Heart* (1981) revolves around the three MaGrath sisters Lenny, Meg, and Babe. Their father left them and their mother committed suicide. Lenny, the oldest sister, is a spinster who takes care of their grandfather. Meg pursues a singing career in Hollywood. And Babe, the youngest sister, is arrested for the murder of her abusive husband after the discovery of her affair with a fifteen-year-old black boy (Andreach, 2006, pp.9-10).

Vogel is distinguished from her contemporaries because she sheds more light on more shocking subjects for society, such as child sexual abuse, pornography, pedophilia, and AIDS. Examples of these plays are *And Baby Makes Seven* (1985), *The Baltimore Waltz* (1992) that won the Obie Award for Best Play in 1992, *Hot 'N Throbbing* (1994), and *How I Learned to Drive* (1997) (Smith et al., 2002, pp.5-6). Moreover, Vogel "take[s] her audiences on a journey they would not ordinarily take" (Biggsby, 2004, p.289) not only to confront them with the ills of their society but also to educate them. The nature of the journey in her plays is like a "process of education" (2004, p.290). This is apparent in her best-known play *How I Learned to Drive* that is structured around Li'l Bit's healing journey after going through the traumatic experience of childhood abuse. Furthermore, she wants the audience to free themselves from the trap of victimization by giving them a sense of empowerment through her characters (Greene, 2001, p.473).

How I Learned to Drive (1997)

How I Learned to Drive was produced for the first time in 1997 in New York City by the Vineyard Theatre. It is regarded as a masterpiece of contemporary drama. Vogel was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Drama for this play in 1998 because it tackles crucial subjects like child abuse, incest, and pedophilia which is defined as “a sexual preference for children” in the fifth edition of *the International Classification of Diseases (ICD-10)* issued by the WHO under item F65.4 of disorders of adult personality and behaviour (2016, p.328). Li'l Bit mentions the issue of pedophilia in a monologue in the play by saying, “[e]ven with my family background, I was sixteen or so before I realized that pedophilia did not mean people who loved to bicycle ...” (Vogel, 1997, p.13).

Vogel's *Drive* is about a woman who is now thirty-five years old, known to the audience only as L'il Bit, tells the story of her past experience of childhood abuse and her complicated relationship with her aunt's husband, Uncle Peck. Their relationship is not legally incestuous because they are not blood-related, but it is considered morally incestuous because Uncle Peck is like a father figure for Li'l Bit. The play is presented in a series of non-linear scenes in which Li'l Bit gives the audience flashback scenes of the incidents of her abuse going back and forth in time. Writing in a non-chronological order is Vogel's method to keep the audience engaged in the events of the play (Savran, 1996, p.ix-xv). Starting narrating the first episode of her abuse when she is seventeen years old then takes the audience back to the age of twelve. After that she jumps forward to the age of eighteen and goes back to the age of thirteen reaching to the age eleven. Finally, she describes her journey of recovery from her trauma.

What makes this play unique is how its protagonist, Li'l Bit, is presented to the audience. In Alixes Greene's (2001) book *Women Who Writes Plays*, Vogel said: “I didn't want [the audience] spinning wheels in a victim mentality. I wanted to give them some degree of empowerment” (p.473). Thus, Li'l Bit is not a permanent victim as she managed to heal from her trauma. Moreover, in an interview with Holmberg (1998) about the play, Vogel declares that:

Without denying or forgetting the original pain, I wanted to write about the great gifts that can also be inside that box of abuse. My play dramatizes the gifts we receive from the people who hurt us. (para.14)

Li'l Bit's pain that is caused by the abuse she received from by her family members especially Uncle Peck's sexual abuse empowered her. Moreover, Uncle Peck is not presented as a complete "villain" (Hischak, 2017, p.152) or aggressor rather he is represented as a "mentor" (Holmberg, 1998, para.16) who teaches Li'l Bit how to control her life and perceive herself as valuable of succeed and respect.

Vogel uses a Greek chorus which is a dramatic device used by the ancient Greeks. It consists of two women and one man to play other roles in the play. The function of this chorus is to provide transitions from one scene to another, by delivering driving instructions, and to comment on the incidents throughout the play (Lute, 2018, p.2).

The play's title is symbolic since the whole experience of abuse teaches Li'l Bit how to lead her own life. Uncle Peck has given her driving lessons, but in fact he has given her life lessons the necessity of being responsible for her decisions and realizing her own power. This can be seen clearly through Uncle Peck's words to Li'l Bit:

There's something about driving—when you're in control of the car, just you and the machine and the road—that nobody can take from you. A power. I feel more myself in my car than anywhere else. And that's what I want to give to you. (Vogel, 1997, p.34)

Risk Factors that Contribute to Li'l Bit's Childhood Abuse

There are various risk factors that contribute to child abuse. They are child factors, individual or parental factors, and societal factors (Butchart et al., 2006, p.13).

Child Factors

First, child factors are certain characteristics of a child that make him or her susceptible for abuse than others. These include having a mental or physical disability or being a unwanted child because of unplanned or teenage pregnancy (2006, p.14). Moreover, the child may “demonstrates personality or temperament traits that are perceived by the parent as problematic, such as hyperactivity” (p.14). Li'l Bit's is considered an unwanted child because of her mother's early pregnancy (Vogel, 1997, p.31). Additionally, her father deserted the family before her birth. Consequently, she becomes more vulnerable to abuse.

Individual or Parental Factors

Second, there are individual factors present in parents or primary caregivers that increase the risk of abusing children. These factors include having alcohol issues, poor education, having a history of abuse, exhibiting bad parenting skills because of young age. These factors are applied to Li'l Bit's family members. Concerning alcohol, Li'l Bit's family members regard drinking as an essential element of their life. They drink all day during lunch or while eating dinner to relax and forget their problems. Later, Li'l Bit becomes an alcoholic especially when she becomes an adult. In short, Li'l Bit learns to drink because alcoholism runs in her family.

Moreover, all of Li'l Bit's family are poorly educated. This is evidenced in Li'l Bit's words when she expresses her desire “to learn things. Read. Rise above her cracker background—” (Vogel, 1997, p.14). Her grandmother, mother, and aunt got married early and did not complete their education. Because of their lack of education, Li'l Bit's family has nothing to do except drinking and discussing sexual matters.

Additionally, being a teenage parent, Li'l Bit's grandmother fails to support her daughters or teach them the essential life lessons. The same thing is applied to Li'l Bit's mother. Her early marriage results in her failure in protecting Li'l Bit

from being abused. Hence, none of them have the vital qualities and skills as mothers to raise their children due to their early marriages.

Societal Factors

Third, there are factors in society that put children at a higher risk of being maltreated. Examples of these factors are the existence of social norms that promote violent practices against children such as physical punishment and encouraging the sexual exploitation of children (Butchart et al., 2006, p.16). The time when *Drive* was written during the 1960s and 1970s in America, there were sexual crimes against children. They were raped or sexually abused by pedophiles. They were indulged in sexual activities like pornography (Smith et al., 2002, p.24).

Li'l Bit's family is influenced by the sexualization of children by society. It becomes obsessed with sex. This can be seen through the fact that her family members "tend to get nicknamed for their genitalia" (1997, p.12), that is, their nicknames are given according to their sexual parts. For example, her young cousin, Bobby, is nicknamed "B.B." which stands for "blue balls". When Li'l Bit's family members checked her gender on the day she was born she was "[j]ust a little bit" (1997, p.12). Thus, she got this nickname due to the appearance of her vagina.

Kinds of Abuse that Caused Li'l Bit's Childhood Trauma

Li'l Bit suffered from several kinds of abuse during her childhood. These kinds are emotional abuse, sexual abuse, and neglect.

Emotional Abuse

Firstly, she experienced emotional abuse by family members in the form of spurning. Li'l Bit was rejected from her family since the day she was born because her mother gave birth to her during high school. Rejecting a child is considered an act of spurning attitude as previously explained (Geiger & Schelbe, 2021, p.88).

In addition, Li'l Bit was criticized and shamed for her large breasts. When she was seventeen years old, her mother and grandmother commented on the size

of her large breasts during a family dinner. Li'l Bit's mother says, "[l]ook, Grandma. Li'l Bit's getting to be as big in the bust as you are" (Vogel, 1997, p.13). Li'l Bit's grandmother replies:

TEENAGE GREEK CHORUS (*As Grandmother*). Well, I hope you are buying her some decent bras. I never had a decent bra, ... the dents from my bra straps are big enough to put your fingers in. —Here, let me show you— (*As Grandmother starts to open her blouse:*)" (Vogel, 1997, p.13).

The way the topic is dealt with from discussing the proper bra size for Li'l Bit and undressing in front of her leads to her embarrassment and self-detest and makes her develop a negative body image. Criticizing or shaming a child because of his or her physical appearance is another act of spurning (Geiger & Schelbe, 2021, p.88). In short, it is clear that Li'l Bit's family members play a vital role in her childhood trauma because of the negative criticism they direct against her especially that of her grandmother who should have supported her because she had the same problem.

Additionally, Big Papa shows another spurning attitude towards Li'l Bit. He belittles her wish to get higher education and study Shakespeare's works saying, "[w]hat does she need a college degree for? She's got all the credentials she'll need on her chest—" (Vogel, 1997, p.14). He adds, "[h]ow is Shakespeare going to help her lie on her back in the dark?" (p.14). Belittling a child's wishes or views and it is considered an act of child emotional abuse (Geiger & Schelbe, 2021, p.88). Li'l Bit, like her grandmother, is treated as a sexual object by her grandfather. He believes that she must not get educated because education is of no importance for him. Instead, she must marry and be a housewife.

Sexual Abuse

Secondly, Li'l Bit suffers from sexual abuse by Uncle Peck. According to the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* the (DSM-V) that is proposed by the APA, an individual can be diagnosed with

pedophilia if he or she satisfies the following three criteria: first, the abuse lasts over than six months; second, “the sexual urges or fantasies cause marked distress to the victim,...” and third the perpetrator of abuse is at least five years older than the victim (p.691).

Uncle Peck meets the aforementioned criteria by the *DSM-V* of a pedophile. He is forty-five years old, so he is around twenty five years older than Li'l Bit. The sexual abuse of Li'l Bit lasts for about seven years. And this abuse causes psychological damage to Li'l Bit because she felt that she is exploited both emotionally and sexually. Brantley (1997) wrote in a review of the play's productions that "Uncle Peck, surely the most engaging pedophile to walk across the American stage,...” (para.4).

Moreover, Uncle Peck as a pedophile uses grooming techniques to molest Li'l Bit. *The Oxford Dictionary of English* defines the word “grooming” as “the action by a pedophile of preparing a child for a meeting, ... with the intention of committing a sexual offence.”(Stevenson, 2010, p.773). He grooms his victim, Li'l Bit, by taking her to places where he can sexually abuse her. His car is regarded the main place for sexual abuse. Another place is the basement in his home where he met Li'l Bit alone with the intention of photographing her naked.

Uncle Peck's sexual abuse of Li'l Bit is represented through two kinds of sexual acts as explained by earlier by Sanderson (2006). They are contact sexual acts and non-contact sexual acts (pp.31-32). Uncle Peck touches Li'l Bit's body especially her breasts in several incidents which is considered an act of contact sexual abuse. An example of such incidents is the photo shoot scene. While posing for pictures, “([Uncle Peck] unbuttons her blouse to the midpoint, and runs his hands over the flesh of her exposed sternum,...)” (Vogel, 1997, p.41).

Another incident that shows Uncle Peck's physical contact with Li'l Bit happens when she is seventeen years old sitting with him in his car. He asks her if he can kiss her breasts as a reward for not drinking throughout a whole week:

PECK. Can I...kiss them? Please?

L'L BIT. I don't know.

PECK. Don't make a grown man beg.... (*[he] bow's his head as if Praying. But he is kissing her nipple...*)

LIL BIT. Uncle Peck — we've got to go....(*[she] pantomimes refastening her bra behind her back.*) (Vogel, 1997, pp.11-12)

Concerning non-contact sexual acts, Uncle Peck comments during the photo shoot on Li'l Bit's body saying "[f]or a thirteen- year-old, you have a body a twenty-year-old woman would die for" (1997, p.42). In addition, he asks her to take provocative poses like professional photo sessions and suggests sending the photos for Playboy in the future. When Li'l Bit rejects his idea, he tells her that he will "treasure" these photos only for himself (p.43). Giving sexual comments on Li'l Bit's body and urging her to engage in pornographic activity; besides, keeping her photos for sexual fantasies are considered acts of non-contact sexual abuse by Uncle Peck.

It is important to highlight the fact that the tactics used by Uncle Peck to seduce his victim are gentle rather than aggressive. His speech is manipulative. This can be clearly seen in the way he deals with Li'l Bit. He asks her "[d]o you want to go upstairs?" "[d]o you want something to happen?" (Vogel, 1997, p.22). He adds asking her "[h]ave I forced you to do anything?" (1997, p.23). These words show that he coerces her psychologically to fulfill his sexual desires.

Neglect

Thirdly, Li'l Bit is neglected by all her family members including her mother, Lucy. When Li'l Bit was just an eleven-year-old child, she begged her mother to let her stay with Uncle Peck for a week at the beach alone. At the beginning, Lucy refuses Li'l Bit's request saying, "I don't like the way your uncle look at you" (p.56). Because of Li'l Bit's insistence, she agrees but she puts the whole responsibility on the latter's shoulders for any bad consequences (p.56). Lucy suspects her sister's husband to have sexual desire towards Li'l Bit; however, she does not confront him or try to stop the abuse legally. So Lucy deliberately neglects her maternal duty toward her daughter who does not know the real intentions of adults.

Mary, Li'l Bit's aunt, is also considered a neglectful caregiver because she knows about Li'l Bit's relationship with Peck but she does not interfere and surprisingly accuses her of seducing him. This is evidenced through her words: "[Li'l Bit]'s twisted Peck around her little finger and thinks it's all a big secret" (p.45). She adds, " (*Sharply*) I'm not a fool. I know what's going on...." (p.45). Mary chooses to remain silent and puts the blame on Li'l Bit. Perhaps the reason behind silence is that she is afraid of confronting Peck and losing him and this can be seen clearly in her words, "I'd like my husband back" (p.45) wishing Li'l Bit to refrain herself from being with Peck.

It can be said that the whole family members neglect Li'l Bit as well. She is always told that "[f]amily is family" (p.54). This attitude allows Uncle Peck's abuse to happen and continue. Whenever she gets angry because of the negative and critical comments she receives, Uncle Peck is sent after her. Mary comments, "Peck's so good" with girls of Li'l Bit's age (p.15). It can be said that her family "formed a conspiracy of blindness and silence about what was happening in front of them" (Rose,1999, para.5). They are just bystanders. This chimes with Herman's explanation that in some families in which child sexual abuse happens, no one of the family members who are responsible for the child's safety intervene to prevent this abuse. They simply prefer to ignore the incident (1992, pp.100-101). In short, silence allows the abuser to continue abuse.

Li'l Bit's Development of PTSD and Complex PTSD and Her Journey to Recovery

PTSD Applied to Li'l Bit

Hyperarousal Applied to Li'l Bit

Hyperarousal, which is the first symptom of PTSD, means that the victim goes into a state of "permanent alert" after the traumatic event believing that it might happen again (Herman, 1992, p.35). Li'l Bit manifests this symptom. After the initial sexual assault by Uncle Peck, She feels insecure and remains on guard

all the time expecting Uncle Peck to assault her again. Thus, she decides that if she meets him, their meeting “has to be in public” (Vogel,1997, p.47). Additionally, she asks him not to drink before or during their meeting telling him that “[y]ou have got let me – draw the line. And once it’s drawn, you mustn’t cross it.” (p.47). By dictating these terms, Li’l Bit ensures her safety.

Intrusion Applied to Lil Bit

As stated by Herman that the memory of the traumatic event always keeps breaking in the victim’s memory as if it occurs in the present through flashbacks and thoughts (1992, p.37). Li’l Bit has flashbacks of the maltreatment she endured when she was a child. She suffers from the intrusion of the traumatic memory of the harsh criticism by her family members especially regarding her big breasts. She remembers her grandfather’s words about her developed breasts, “we could write to Kate Smith. Ask her somma her used brassieres she don’t want anymore –She could maybe give to Lil Bit here” (Vogel,1997, p.13). She describes her own breasts as “alien life forces” (p.38) that cause her a great trauma because she is being mocked and touched all the time by people around her.

Li’l Bit’s memory of Uncle Peck’s sexual exploitation of her keeps recurring as well. For instance, she recalls the time when she was sixteen years old sitting with Uncle Peck in a restaurant celebrating getting her driver’s license and how after she got drunk he tried to take her had a relationship with her (1997, p.22). She also remembers how Uncle Peck abuses her sexually during the photo shoot. Moreover, the painful moment of the first sexual assault by Uncle Peck intrudes into her mind and causes her to feel the same feelings of powerlessness as if she relives this incident again. This agrees with Herman’s words who remarks that intrusive thoughts “often return with all the vividness and emotional force of the original event” (1992, p.37). In short, Li’l Bit’s suffering from the intrusion of the unbearable memory of her abuse during her childhood shows the heinous effect of the experience she went through.

Constriction Applied to Li'l Bit

Li'l Bit presents the third symptom of PTSD, that is, “constriction” in which the victim “go[es] into a state of surrender” during the traumatic moment as previously stated by Herman (1992, p.42). Li'l Bit felt constricted during the first sexual assault by Uncle Peck when she was eleven years old. On their way home after spending time at the beach, Uncle Peck urges Li'l Bit to drive his car. Unable to reach the pedals he asks her to sit on his lap and steer the car while he works on them for her. Here his sexual abuse begins:

PECK. Keep driving. (*He slips his hands under her blouse*)

TEENAGE GREEK CHORUS. Uncle Peck—please don't do this— ...

TEENAGE GREEK CHORUS. (*Trying not to cry*) ... (*Peck tenses more, sharply. He buries his face in Li'l Bit's neck, and moans softly. The Teenage Greek Chorus exits, and Li'l Bit steps out of the car....*) (Vogel, 1997, pp.57-58)

Li'l Bit was paralyzed and could not resist Uncle Peck. The same state of paralysis that Li'l Bit experienced is described by a rape survivor who says, “I couldn't scream. I couldn't move. I was paralyzed ... like a rag doll.” (Bart & O'Brien, 1985, p.47). In short, Li'l Bit was in a state of helplessness, shock, panic, and fear during this moment.

As explained previously by Herman (1992), the traumatized individual tend to deny the traumatic incident believing that it is happening to someone else or it is just a nightmare from which he or she will be awaken (p.43). This is applied to Li'l Bit who was in a state of denial during the sexual assault. This is apparent in her words as she tells herself that “[t]his isn't happening” (Vogel, 1997, pp.57-58). Denying the traumatic event shows the profound impact of the trauma on Li'l Bit's psyche.

Traumatized people do not only have a disbelief in the occurrence of trauma, but also have a feeling that they are emotionally disconnected or separated from their bodies (Herman. 1992, p.43). Li'l Bit denies the traumatic experience;

moreover, she feels detached from her own body since the day of the initial sexual assault. She says, “[t]hat day was the last day I lived in my body.” (Vogel, 1997, p.58). A woman who survived the atrocity of rape informs the same feeling of detachment like Li'l Bit saying, “I left my body at that point....There was a feeling of flatness” (Warshaw, 1988, p.56). In short, Li'l Bit was profoundly traumatized by Uncle Peck's first sexual transgression.

Complex PTSD Applied to Li'l Bit

According to Herman (1992), c-PTSD occurs to “those who have endured prolonged repeated exploitation” or “abuse” in childhood (p.122). Li'l Bit's development of this disorder is rooted in long-term psychological abuse and neglect by her family members that are explained earlier; being rejected, criticized, not provided with care and attention she needed, and not protected from Uncle Peck's sexual advances as well as the prolonged sexual exploitation that happened for seven years on a weekly basis starting from the age of eleven till eighteen by Uncle Peck.

The victim of chronic childhood abuse is often held in a state of captivity (Herman, 1992, p.74). In Herman's words “[c]hildren are rendered captive by their condition of dependency” (p.74). In Li'l Bit's case, she is held captive by an invisible barrier: being dependent on her family for her basic needs such as food, a house to live in, and the expenses of her education.

Another invisible barrier concerns her relationship with Uncle Peck. She is emotionally attached to him because she needs his paternal love and support, which she has been deprived of since birth. Li'l Bit tells her mother defending Uncle Peck by saying “[h]e listens to me when I talk. And- and he talks to me. He teaches me about things....” (Vogel, 1997, p.56). Additionally, he encourages her to study Shakespeare saying, “I think it's wonderful. And on a scholarship” (p.14). He also tells her not to let her grandpa provoke her or impose his personal convictions on her, “Li'l Bit, you cannot let him get to you. Then he wins.” (p.14). Hence, Li'l Bit resorts to Uncle Peck because he is like a safe haven for her; he is

the only person in her family who gives her a space to talk and express her feelings.

Li'l Bit presents two symptoms of c-PTSD. The first symptom is reliving the past traumatic experience of abuse through thoughts or situations (Herman, 1992, p.121), which is a symptom of PTSD. As stated earlier by Herman, chronically traumatized individuals who are diagnosed with c-PTSD have symptoms of PTSD accompanied by other complicated symptoms (p.119). The second symptom of c-PTSD that Li'l Bit presents is having a feeling of "self-blame" or "a sense of defilement" (p.121).

Reliving the Trauma in the Form of Intrusive PTSD Symptoms

As explained before, Li'l Bit relives the painful memories of her childhood abuse through flashbacks. Yet Herman remarks that intrusive symptoms include re-enacting some aspects of the abuse. This re-enactment can be seen through actions (p.39). In 1979, when Li'l Bit is twenty seven years old, she seduces a young man who turns out to be a senior in high school on a bus. After having a relationship with him, Li'l Bit experiences the same thrill Peck felt while seducing her. She admits:

I lay on my back in the dark and I thought about you, Uncle Peck. Oh. Oh—this is the allure. Being older. Being the first. Being the translator, the teacher, the epicure, the already jaded. This is how the giver gets taken. (Vogel, 1997, p.29)

This episode exemplifies how the abused becomes the abuser. Li'l Bit becomes the teacher instead of the student. Having already referred to herself as "old" and "cynical" (p.29) it is now clear that Li'l Bit has learned much from her perpetrator, Uncle Peck.

According to Herman, "[w]hile specific, trauma-related symptoms seems to fade over time, they can be revived, even years after the event, by reminders of the original [distressing experience]" (1992, p.48). This is applied to Li'l Bit because she is a grown-up woman now but still suffers from intrusive symptoms of the

sexual exploitation she endured for several years during childhood. Meeting the high-school boy is like a stimulus or a catalyst that reminds Li'l Bit of her relationship with Uncle Peck pushing her to reenact her past situation of sexual exploitation again.

Sense of Defilement

Li'l Bit experiences a profound feeling of shame and guilt due to her relationship with Uncle Peck. This can be clear during the photography scene that takes place at Peck's home basement. As soon as Li'l Bit enters the basement, she asks Peck about Aunt Mary's whereabouts. He tells her that she has gone to the theatre with Li'l Bit's mother. Here "*(Li'l Bit [becomes] quiet, apprehensive)*" (Vogel, 1997, p.40). Being afraid of getting caught by her mother and her aunt at the basement with Peck shows that she feels guilty.

Moreover, Li'l Bit reminds Peck that she will not be photographed naked (1997, p.40). she goes on saying, "I don't want anyone seeing this" (p.43). Additionally, when she poses for the pictures, she closes her eyes. Peck asks her to open her eyes while he is shooting (*[she] shakes her hand no*) (p.44) replying, "[If I look at you - if I look at the camera, You're gonna know what I'm thinking. You'll see right through me-" (p.44). Li'l Bit is sure that if she looks at the camera, Peck will know what she is thinking about, that is, being with a man alone and being photographed in seductive poses while she is only thirteen years old is not appropriate for her age. Hence, she closes her eyes. In addition, Li'l Bit refuses to go with Uncle Peck to a hotel room after the celebration of getting her driving license telling him that "[s]omeone will get hurt" (Vogel, 1997, p.23) referring to her aunt.

Stages of Recovery Applied to Li'l Bit

Li'l Bit goes through the three stages of recovery mentioned by Herman: establishing safety remembering and mourning, and reconnecting (1992, p.155). She argues that survivors can recover through therapy or depend on themselves

(p.133). This what happens to Li'l Bit who "becomes the author and the arbiter of her own recovery"(p.133). She heals herself without the help of therapy.

Establishing Safety

Concerning the first stage, Herman asserts that if the perpetrator of abuse is one of the family members, home can be a dangerous place for the survivor to live in. Consequently, leaving this home is a must (1992, p.162). To feel safe, Li'l Bit decides to move out of home to avoid being at risk of being abused again by Uncle Peck. This decision is shown clearly during the confrontation scene at the hotel room. She tells Uncle Peck, "I am not seeing you. Again...I'm not coming home for Christmas" (Vogel,1997, p.54). She lived in a dorm room at school and "stayed away from Christmas and Thanksgiving for years after" (p.55). By putting her relationship with Uncle Peck to a termination, Li'l Bit ensures her safety since she takes control of her body and the environment she lives in. "[R]estoring control," as stated by Herman, is a pivotal part of this stage of recovery (1992, p.134).

Remembering and Mourning

It is the second stage of recovery proposed by Herman, is considered a fundamental stage of healing. It requires that the traumatized person tells his or her story "in depth and detail" (1992, p.175). Li'l Bit, as a thirty-five year old adult woman now, gives a detailed narrative of her past trauma to the audience. She says, "[s]ometimes to tell a secret, you first have to teach a lesson" (Vogel, 1997, p.9). She reveals to the audience the secret of the abuse she endured throughout the years whether by her family or by Uncle Peck showing how her look at life and ideas have changed because of her past experience. She teaches the audience a lesson about healing and forgiveness.

It can be noticed that Li'l Bit narrates her experience in reverse; jumping from one year to another although Herman proposed that the survivor must "reconstruct" his or her story, that is, putting it in order while narration (1992, p.175). Yet she mentions at the begging of explaining the stages of recovery that "[l]ike any abstract concept, [these stages] are convenient fiction, not to be taken

literally” (1992, p.155). In short, the trauma survivor must delve deep and confront whatever is still remaining in his or her psyche of the traumatic experience through speaking.

After narrating comes the act of grieving or mourning in which the victim grieves or shows sadness about what he or she has been through. But Li'l Bit does not lament or grieve about her relationship with Uncle Peck. Li'l Bit's refusal to go through the pain of grieving is seen as a way of ensuring her victory over her perpetrator (Herman, 1992, p.188). She focuses on herself so that she can heal.

Herman states that during this stage the trauma survivor aims at freeing him or herself from “the prison of the revenge fantasy” of the perpetrator (1992, p.189). Instead, he or she has “a fantasy of forgiveness” that is considered “an attempt at empowerment” (p.189). Li'l Bit as a thirty-five-year old woman now “find[s] [herself] believing in things that a younger self vowed never to believe in. Things like family and forgiveness” (Vogel,1997, p.58). In an interview with Arthur Holmberg (1998), Vogel explains that “[t]here are two forgivenesses in the play: One forgiveness for Peck, but the most crucial forgiveness would be L'il Bit's forgiving L'il Bit. L'il Bit as an adult looking at and understanding her complicity” (Holmberg, 1998, para.18). Revisiting the past enables Li'l Bit to reconcile with her childhood trauma. She is now taking control of her present, forgiving herself and her family members including Uncle Peck.

Reconnection

It is the third stage of recovery proposed by Herman. She asserts that since the survivor begins to reconcile with “the traumatic past, [he or she] faces the task of creating a future” (1992, p.196). She regards those who endure chronic abuse during childhood as “immigrants” because they build a new life different from their old one and reconnect with people who listen to them and provide them with help. Li'l Bit reconnects with the audience whom she tells her story to. Through this story, they will learn how to embrace the past and move forward in life.

Intrusion Applied to Li'l Bit's Grandmother and Mother

Li'l Bit's grandmother went through childhood psychological trauma because she married when she was only fourteen years old. This information is revealed through a conversation between Li'l Bit, her mother, and her grandmother in a scene in which it is mentioned that Li'l Bit's grandmother was "a child bride" (p.26). Li'l Bit describes the day her grandmother married to be "the day she died" (p.26) indicating the horrific experience her grandmother faced as a child because she had to have sex with a man older than her and bear children before she was ready for this whether physically or emotionally. Lucy tells her mother, "you were a married woman and you still believed in Santa Clause" (p.26). This shows that her childhood ended too early with her marriage. There is no happily ever after for her likes.

As stated earlier by Herman (1992), traumatized individuals tend to relive their trauma through reenacting it (p.39). This is applied to Li'l Bit's grandmother who reenacts her painful past trauma on her daughter, Lucy. This is apparent in Lucy's words blaming her mother:

FEMALE GREEK CHORUS (*As Mother*) Mother! if you and
Daddy had helped me —I wouldn't have had to marry that—
that no-good-son-of-a—

TEENAGE GREEK CHORUS (*As Grandmother*) ... I hold
you responsible! (Vogel, 1997, p.31)

As explained above, Li'l Bit's grandmother was forced to marry at a young age. Similarly, when Lucy got pregnant in high school, she pressured her into marriage and placed the whole responsibility on her for her unwanted pregnancy and early marriage.

Just as Li'l Bit's grandmother absolved herself of responsibility for Lucy's early pregnancy, the latter lays the responsibility on her eleven-year-old daughter, Li'l Bit, for any possible occurrence of sexual assault by Uncle Peck. By this Lucy reenacts her trauma on Li'l Bit. She knows that Peck has abnormal attraction

towards her daughter. This is evidenced through her words, “[y]our uncle pays entirely too much attention to you” (1997, p.56). However, she let Li'l Bit spend seven hours with him alone in a car telling her “... I'm warning you—if anything happens, I hold you responsible” (p.56). Lucy's repetition of her trauma on her daughter shows how disclaiming responsibility for victimization passes from one generation to another denoting that trauma leads to another trauma or begets trauma. Li'l Bit never returns to her mother for help throughout the entire course of the play. Instead, she starts to meet Uncle Peck who sexually exploits her. Consequently, her suffering increases.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the current paper has investigated the damaging psychological impact that result from child maltreatment in Vogel's play *How I Learned to Drive*. This has been done by utilizing Judith Herman's book *Trauma and Recovery* to show how the character in the play manifest the symptoms of PTSD and c-PTSD focusing on Li'l Bit's trauma as the main character in the play. Li'l Bit's psychological motive behind remaining in the abusive situation especially with Uncle Peck has been illustrated. Li'l Bit has kept meeting Uncle Peck because he has been affectionate and supportive. He has instilled in her a sense of self-confidence and has provided her with answers to all the questions about life. He has offered her driving lessons as well. So Uncle Peck has been the guide and the teacher for Li'l Bit. Despite the abuse that Li'l Bit has endured, she has got benefits and gains from it.

Moreover, the paper has depicted how trauma goes in cycles or how trauma begets trauma because Li'l Bit's grandmother has re-enacted her trauma on her daughter, Lucy. And Lucy has done the same re-enactment on her daughter, Li'l Bit. After that grown-up Li'l Bit has repeated her trauma of being sexually abused by having a relationship with a high- school senior showing how abuse greatly affects her personality formation. Li'l Bit's suffering from the recurrence of traumatic memories has been also explained. By the end of the play, Li'l Bit has started to question herself about the legality of this relationship revealing her deep-

rooted feeling of guilt for staying in such a relationship in which she has been exploited. Thus, she has ended her relationship with him and has started to attain recovery from her trauma according to the three stages of recovery explained by Herman.

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الألم والمكسب: تحقيق التعافي من صدمة الطفولة في مسرحية باولا فوجل "كيف تعلمت أن أقود"

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المستخلص:

عندما يتعرض الأطفال للإيذاء، فإنهم يتعرضون لصدمة نفسية في أكثر فترات حياتهم حرجًا والتي لا تزال شخصيتهم تتطور فيها. وبالتالي، فإنهم يعانون من العديد من المشكلات التي تستمر حتى سن الرشد. على العكس من ذلك، فإن الصدمة التي تحدث خلال مرحلة البلوغ تؤثر على الشخصية التي تكونت بالفعل (هيرمان، ١٩٩٢، ص ٩٦). تهدف هذه الورقة البحثية إلى التحقيق في العواقب طويلة المدى لإيذاء الطفل في مسرحية باولا فوجل "كيف تعلمت أن أقود" (١٩٩٧) استنادًا إلى آراء جوديث هيرمان في كتابها "الصدمة والتعافي" (١٩٩٢). ويوضح اثنين من الاضطرابات النفسية التي اقترحها هيرمان والتي تعاني منها الشخصيات وهما: اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة واضطراب ما بعد الصدمة المعقد. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يقدم أنواعًا مختلفة من الإيذاء التي تتعرض لها ليل بيت وعوامل الخطر التي تجعلها أكثر عرضة لهذا الإيذاء. علاوة على ذلك، فإنه يوضح كيف يمكن نقل الصدمة من جيل إلى آخر. كما يحقق في الطبيعة المعقدة للعلاقة بين ليل بيت والعم بيك، موضحةً دوافعها النفسية وراء مقابله. وأخيرًا، تشرح الورقة البحثية رحلة ليل بيت لاكتشاف الذات باعتبارها الشخصية الرئيسية والضحية الرئيسية لصدمة الطفولة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: هيرمان، إيذاء الطفل، فوجل، صدمة الطفولة، اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة، اضطراب ما بعد الصدمة المعقد، التعافي.