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## Designing A Gaslighting Illustration Book as A Media For Parental Education

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### ABSTRACT

Gaslight parenting involves significant psychological manipulation that affects children, even to the point where they may doubt their reality and emotions. However, public awareness regarding this form of psychological violence remains low. This study aimed to design an illustrated book and merchandise as an educational medium to explain the impact of gaslighting parenting on children, thereby providing a visual solution that is easily understood by both parents and children. The design method employed a qualitative approach using literature on child psychology and interviews with psychology and design experts. The study results in an illustrated book that uses a combination of symbolic narratives with metaphorical visuals to depict the dynamics of gaslighting, its emotional impact, and its preventive strategies. This outcome is expected to serve as a preventive and curative tool to reduce harmful parenting practices that affect children's mental health.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gaslighting in parenting is a form of psychological violence that is often unrecognized, where parents or caregivers deny a child's emotional experiences, manipulate facts, or create cognitive confusion. These impacts include low self-esteem, chronic anxiety, and difficulties building healthy relationships in adulthood. Unfortunately, the lack of educational media addressing this topic has made many parents unaware of gaslighting practices in daily interactions. From the report published by Into the Light Indonesia Suicide Prevention Community for Advocacy, Research, and Education (SP-CARE), a community focused on advocacy, research, and education in suicide prevention and mental health in Indonesia, it is noted that 78% of 1,500 seminar participants on gaslighting "have only just realized they have experienced gaslighting." This phenomenon is certainly shocking, as the parenting patterns applied in Indonesia have gone unnoticed by the government. The absence of specific legal frameworks also poses a challenge to this issue. The Domestic Violence Law (UU PKDRT) has not explicitly recognized gaslighting as a form of psychological violence. Another angle is the role of religion and tradition. In Indonesia, religious teachings often stress respect for parents, which could be misused to justify gaslighting. Also, the patriarchal structure in many families might contribute, where the father's authority is absolute, and questioning it is discouraged.

Many efforts are being made by organizations and independent individuals to reduce and educate parents in Indonesia about gaslighting in parenting. This is exemplified by the Into the Light community through their gaslighting webinar events. Several prominent social media activists in Indonesia, such as @ndorobeii, @ikanaang, and renowned psychologist Alifia Armani, are also making similar efforts. However, it seems that these efforts have not yet shown optimal results. This is because gaslighting can be unintentional. Some parents may not realize that their behavior is harmful, believing that such actions make their children resilient. This nuance is important to mention. Furthermore, cultural context is also crucial; some cultures may normalize certain behaviors that are psychologically gaslighting. In Indonesia, the culture and values of honoring parents can be misinterpreted and may increase the risk of gaslighting in parenting.

Based on the phenomenon that occurs, the design regarding this gaslighting issue needs to be carried out to determine how to provide information to parents about the impact of gaslighting on parent-child relationships. This study addresses the need for creative resources that educate and invite critical reflections on parenting patterns. This was chosen to raise parents' awareness to minimize gaslighting behavior towards children, reduce toxic parenting behaviors, and reduce emotional and psychological violence against children. Therefore, information media is believed to be a solution to provide knowledge about gaslighting. The main medium chosen was an illustrated book in a visual vignette art style, along with supporting media such as posters, infographics, and merchandise. Illustrated books were chosen as the medium because of their visual-narrative ability to simplify abstract concepts and touch the reader's emotions (Nikolajeva, 2013). The combination of text and images increases memory retention by up to 42% (Clark & Paivio, 1991). Therefore, the community, especially parents, needs to increase attention and concern regarding the prevention and handling of gaslighting behavior by parents towards children, to establish an appropriate parenting pattern and improve the quality of the parent-child relationship. This study aimed to design an illustrated book and merchandise as an educational medium to explain the impact of gaslighting parenting on children, thereby providing a visual solution that is easily understood by both parents and children.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The phenomenon and cases of violence within a family have long been regarded as internal problems that have received little attention and are often seen as less necessary to be acknowledged or known by the public (Ajani *et al.*, 2024; Sopekan, 2024). However, reporting various cases of violence today indicates that these cases must receive attention and action in terms of prevention, mitigation, and punishment. Several types of emotional violence, including dominance, verbal attacks, harsh or aggressive demands, emotional blackmail, unexpected responses, constant criticism, character assassination, gaslighting, ongoing chaos, and sexual harassment. Gaslighting is a form of psychological torture that gradually undermines the victim's ability to judge and self-confidence, leading the victim to lose trust in themselves and what they believe is true or false, confusing a sense of always being wrong, and feelings of insanity (Beerbohm & Davis, 2018). The term 'gaslight' was first used by clinical psychologists in 1969 in a report published in 'The Lancet' by Barton and Whitehead (Sweet, 2019). Essentially, a gaslighter typically employs denial, blame-shifting, contradicting, and misinformation to attack a victim. Gaslighting can take the form of bullying, mobbing, discrimination, institutional gaslighting, or private gaslighting (Petric, 2021; Penttinen, 2023; Coates, 2024). Generally, gaslighting is discussed in relationships between partners and in the workplace, but it is often unconsciously experienced in family settings as well, particularly between parents and children, where parental behavior often includes harsh actions to assert dominance and frequent yelling at children.

Gaslighting towards children can take the form of denying feelings such as the sentence "You're not sad, you're just exaggerating", distorting the facts in the form of the sentence "Mom never said that", or abuse of authority with the statement "You're wrong, you should be ashamed". Although this pattern is not always recognized by parents, it can erode children's self-confidence and interfere with the development of identity. Due to a lack of knowledge about gaslighting issues, society, especially parents, pays less attention to the signs of gaslighting behavior. Gaslighting issues by parents have serious impacts on the parent-child relationship, the psychological development of the child, and involvement in other forms of psychological violence. This problem is particularly vulnerable to occur within families, especially among parents who experience significant stress, whether mental, physical, financial, or otherwise, and then consciously or unconsciously vent it onto their children. The condition of the child as a victim often does not realize or is unable to take much action to cope with the behavior they experience; this can be caused by several factors such as the child's feelings of love towards their parents, the belief that parents are always right, the desire not to be considered a disobedient child, and other factors. This leads the victim to become increasingly withdrawn and have difficulty seeking help from relatives, friends, or psychologists. A study showed that gaslighting victims tend to experience self-doubt, depression, and difficulty making decisions. At the extreme level, children develop a fawn response (excessive obedience to avoid conflict). Therefore, society, particularly parents, needs to increase attention and concern towards the prevention and treatment of gaslighting behaviors by parents towards children to establish a proper parenting pattern and enhance the quality of the parent-child relationship. Then, to educate gaslighting victims to understand the characteristics they are experiencing, it is hoped to provide solutions on how to confront the gaslighting situations they face.

### 3. METHODS

The strategy used in this study is a qualitative approach. It is a series of carefully planned tactical steps to address the problem of gaslighting parenting. The method is structured in phases, with the first phase involving data search and processing, followed by the second phase, which includes illustration design, book printing, and complementary media. In the first phase, the researcher collects data through three methods: a literature study to analyze psychology journals related to gaslighting and its effects on children. The second method involves semi-structured interviews with three child psychologists and two professional illustrators. The interviews produce data that will be compared with the journals to verify the actual conditions based on existing facts. The third method involves observing the target audience, which consists of young parents, both male and female, who live in densely populated areas in Indonesia, one of which is the city of Bandung, aged 26-40 years, with upper-middle socio-economic status. The researchers conducted observations by examining the treatment responses of 10 parents toward their children's academic outcomes, carried out in both private learning centers and home settings. The parameters analyzed included parental approaches to monitoring progress and academic performance, quality time allocation, and educational methods. All data were qualitative and will subsequently be discussed in consultation with developmental psychologists. This target audience is chosen because parents at this age tend to have difficulties in achieving maturity. This is due to the pressures and problems they face and their inability to cope with them. Various difficulties they experience after marriage include challenges in taking care of children and maintaining harmony in family relationships. The consumer journey of the target audience can be summarized by noting that both parents work, with the mother working until the evening and the father working from night until morning, using the morning as a break until noon, with points of contact revolving around work equipment. Both parents experience work-related pressure with a lack of quality time with each other, and have limited roles in taking care of the children.

The second phase of the study is to carry out media design activities consisting of 3 stages. Stage 1 involves developing narratives using a structure of 3 chapters, chapter 1 containing Introduction to gaslighting through figurative storytelling, chapter 2 containing Emotional impacts, and chapter 3 about Solutions and recovery. Several researchers (Kurniawan & Faisal, 2024) have used this three-act storytelling method in their study on anti-online loan comics. In stage 2, illustrations are created using metaphorical symbolism techniques, for example, a child character is depicted with a blurred shadow to represent identity confusion. Picture books are effective as a therapeutic tool (bibliotherapy) because they trigger empathy through fictional characters and visualize complex emotions (Cohen, 1993). Successful examples such as *The Invisible String* (Patrice Karst) prove that visual metaphors can explain abstract concepts such as emotional attachment. This is due to the ability to interpret and create visual messages becoming an important skill in the digital era (Avgerinou & Pettersson, 2011). The WHO "Depression: Let's Talk" campaign uses illustrations to depict the symptoms of depression, increasing understanding by 35% among the lay public.

In this design, the visual style used is vignette art. Vignette art originally comes from the French word "vignette," which means vine and refers to decorative art in the form of plant ornaments that serve to fill empty spaces and are placed at the margins of pages as markers of the end of chapters in a book. Over time, its meaning has shifted to refer to descriptive

sketches that serve as a medium for expression. Vignette art is a visual style in illustration that utilizes texture and gesture to continuously fill a space with texture. This visual style was chosen so that the content in the main media and the elements of figures of speech used can be visualized.

This illustration was chosen to better visualize the design content about the form of gaslighting expressively, so that the audience can gain an understanding of the issues raised. Complex vignette art illustrations can feature visually expressive words. It is hoped that children's feelings can be represented through illustrative and expressive depictions. The choice of vignette is also based on consideration of the variety of metaphors in one image. So that the visual presentation of the message can be conveyed accurately and in detail, while also making it easier for parents to understand their child's emotions. The following are reference studies conducted in the process of creating illustrations for the needs of the main media, as shown in **Figure 1**.



**Figure 1.** Vignette art reference.

(Source: <https://i.pinimg.com/564x/d5/f8/d5/d5f8d53052717ddb0c2818f777bfa70.jpg> (2020).)

The mandatory in this study is a book publisher, this is because the media used to contain information on a fairly large scale are books. The publisher chosen is Qanita, which is also part of the Mizan Publica Group. This publisher was chosen because it is located in the city of Bandung. Apart from that, Qanita also often publishes informative books in the form of novels and picture books on the themes of toxic relationships, psychology, and for children, such as various books about family and parenting education.

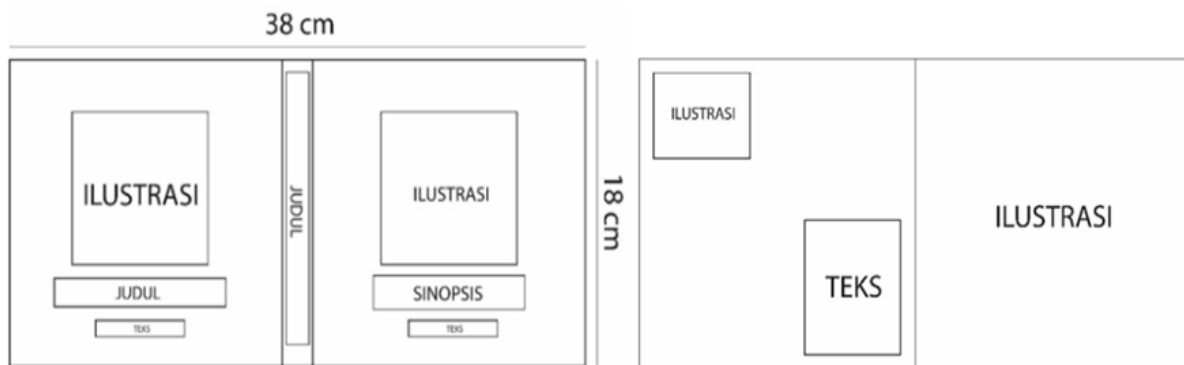
Stage 3 consists of finalizing the book and merchandise used to attract the target audience's interest. Other media created to support the illustrated book include a book launch event through posters and banners that contain event information. Merchandise was also made as a reminder of the message and as promotional media. The promotional media consists of mugs and tumblers, while the reminder media consists of stickers and desk calendars.

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The design format chosen for the media is an illustrated book, sized 18 x 18 cm. The type of paper used is 260 g art paper for the cover in the form of a softcover and 180 g art paper

for the book's contents. This format is chosen so that the book can be easily carried and stored, allowing readers to read more freely in various places. In this design, the visual presentation of information is emphasized, with supporting elements such as typography serving as additional explanations. This is done so that readers can be guided hierarchically from important information to ordinary information.

The layout used refers to a minimalist style, which has several streams such as De Stijl, Constructivism, Bauhaus, among others. The minimalist style used in the book is minimalist by Noa Snir, which is simple and needs-based while still conveying the message. This layout is chosen based on considerations of the vignette art visual style used, which fills empty spaces with textures and decorative ornaments, so that the placement of text and images is separated to avoid confusing the reader with overlapping visual elements. The layout of the cover and contents can be seen in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 2.** Layout design.

Fonts used in the design are aligned with the content and illustrations in the book, as well as the target audience. The typography used does not exceed 4 types of fonts to avoid confusing the reader and neglecting the alignment of the message to be conveyed. Below are several typographies used as shown in **Figure 3**.

Glend Bold Font

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
!@#\$%^&\*()\_+<>?:'{}|1234567890

Mechanical Pencil Font

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
!@#\$%^&\*()\_+<>?:'{}|1234567890

Gills Sans Font

ABCDEFGHIJKLMNOPQRSTUVWXYZ  
abcdefghijklmnopqrstuvwxyz  
!@#\$%^&\*()\_+<>?:'{}|1234567890

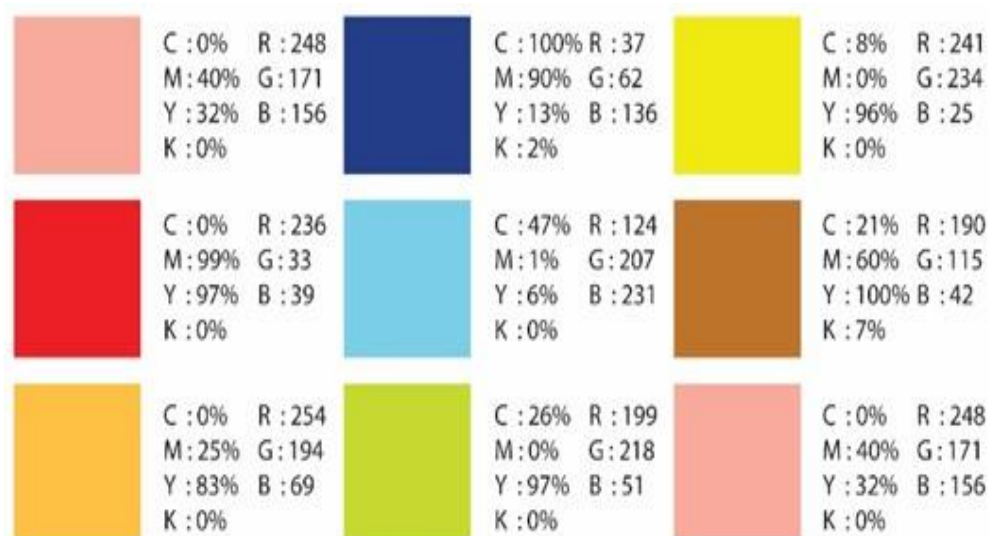
**Figure 3.** Fonts used in the design process.

Font created by Glenda Fannon was chosen for the headline needs for each discussion in the book. This font was selected because of its flexible characteristics, providing a playful and



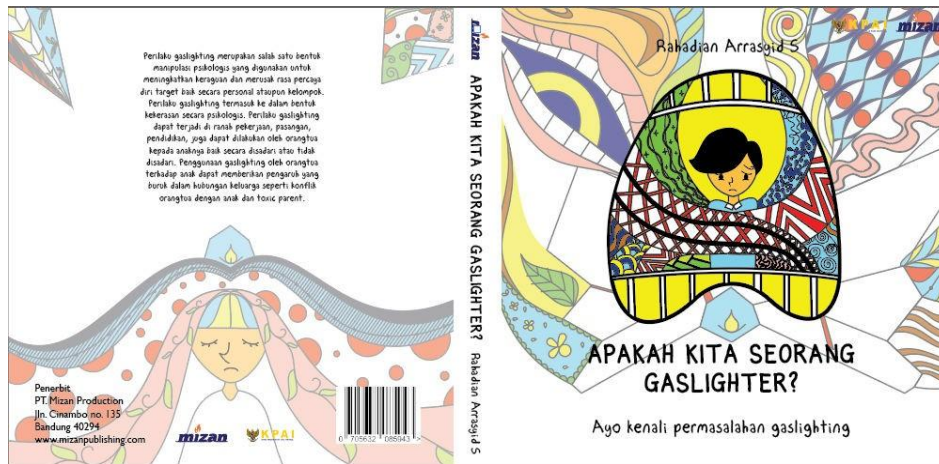
child-like impression with thick strokes, which helps emphasize the headlines in each discussion. The second font face, created by Leonardo White, has flexible characteristics that give a child-like writing impression. This font is a sans serif font, and its regular stroke thickness provides high readability, making it suitable to be used as subheadlines and body text in the discussions within the book. The third font was designed by Eric Gill, chosen based on its characteristics, which are similar to other fonts but more assertive, providing high readability. This font is used for the book's structure and formal information.

Color is one of the main factors in a graphic design display; color can create a first impression, increase people's interest in a graphic design, and reflect the mood of the viewer. Therefore, in creating a design, it is necessary to determine the appropriate colors to use. In the world of communication, colors have their meanings. Some meanings of colors are Red: symbolizes courage, aggression. Yellow: has meanings of cheerful, lively, bright, danger, greatness, and maturity. Green: signifies freshness, trust, youth, rawness, and fertility. Blue: symbolizes coolness, friendliness, peace, and togetherness. Purple: has meanings of sweetness, romance, negativity, sadness, sinking, gloominess, and surrender. Brown gives a sense of earthiness and neutrality. White: conveys purity, cleanliness, innocence, and goodness. Black: implies evil, dirtiness, depth, darkness, and assertiveness. All Colours are shown in **Figure 4**.



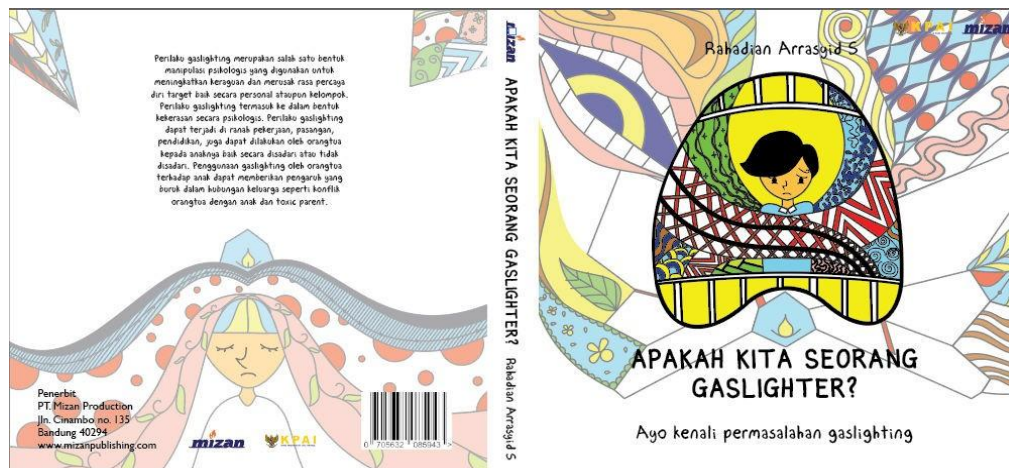
**Figure 4.** Colors used in the design process.

The book is produced using soft cover binding techniques to facilitate accommodation, allowing it to be read during leisure time anywhere. The front cover displays the main title, subtitle, and illustrations. The design is made to look vibrant in hopes of attracting the target audience's attention. The back cover contains a synopsis of the book's content, address, mandatory logo, barcode, and illustrations. The design on the back cover includes more white space so that readers can more easily read the synopsis, as shown in **Figure 5**.



**Figure 4.** Front cover.

The content page uses a minimalist layout as described above to emphasize visual metaphors and ease of reading the content. The content segment consists of 38 pages divided into 3 chapters of storytelling. All pages are printed in color to clarify emotional metaphors. As explained above, the left side consistently features vignette illustrations, while the right side presents the narrative about the illustrations. The visual of the content page is shown in Figure 6.



**Figure 6.** Book chapters.

Posters are used as a supporting medium for event promotion purposes. The message conveyed through the poster is about the book launch event and the figures present at the event. The printed poster is A3 size. The design of the poster is adjusted to the theme and cover of the book, with additional text tailored to represent and promote the main medium, which is the illustrated book. In its placement, the poster will later be displayed in bookstores, health facilities, and several study groups. The appearance of the event poster is as shown in Figure 7.





**Figure 7.** Launching poster.

Mugs are used as one of the media for reminding and merchandise. Mugs are chosen because they are everyday items that are often used, thus having a significant point of contact with the target audience, which is why mugs are selected as one of the supporting media. The design on the mug features a visual of the book cover on the right side so that when the mug is used, it is visible on the outside, and on the left side, there is text in the form of a quote at the top directed towards the inside of the mug so that it can be easily read by the user when the mug is in use. An illustration is added at the bottom as an accent to the main media. The appearance of the mug is as shown in **Figure 8**.



**Figure 8.** Mug as promotional media.

A calendar is one of the media that is often used daily, both as a marker of important activities and simply as a reminder of dates, thus having a point of contact that is quite close to the target audience. The calendar can serve as a promotional medium and also as a reminding medium. The calendar contains a summary of the main material that can be used as a medium for brief learning. The design of the calendar separates the summary section from the dates so that the information and illustrations included can be more dominant, ensuring that it is effectively communicated to the target audience. Furthermore, the date section is complemented with illustrations as decorations and accents of the main media. The appearance of the desk calendar is as shown in **Figure 9**.



**Figure 9.** Calendar as a reminding media.

A tumbler is one of the tools that is closely associated with daily activities, whether it's school, work, sports, or other everyday activities, making it a point of contact with the target audience. On the tumbler, there are quotes related to the context of the issues, which is why the tumbler is chosen as one of the media that can be used for promotions, reminders, and merchandise. The design on the tumbler features visuals such as the logo from the main media cover and mandatory elements for promoting the main media, as well as quotes that serve as a reminder media and provide information to the users. The appearance of the tumbler is as shown in **Figure 10**.



**Figure 10.** Tumbler as promotional media.

Stickers can serve as attention, sharing, and reminding tools with designs that include quotes, illustrations as frames representing the main media, and cover logos as promotional activities of the main media. Stickers are chosen because of their flexible use; they can be affixed to objects that have a point of contact with the target audience. Thus, it is expected that the material can be conveyed not only through the main media but also be accessible in various locations outside of the media. The sticker is designed in a size of 5x15 cm to meet aesthetic aspects, as shown in **Figure 11**.



**Figure 11.** Sticker as a reminder.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Based on the data and analysis obtained, the designer found that the issue of gaslighting has not yet become a widely discussed topic, either in society or within the internal scope of family relationships. Therefore, there are challenges in gathering data and finding appropriate sources, as many are still unaware of gaslighting, and an expert statement is required to confirm that someone is indeed experiencing gaslighting. The illustrated book design concept was developed because it is seen as a simple and flexible medium for disseminating information to the public, particularly to the target audience, to provide more information about the issues of gaslighting that are similar to everyday life. Based on the process undertaken, this design process requires collaboration with experts such as psychologists. Considering the condition of society, which has seen a decline in interest in reading purely textual information, illustrated books were chosen because they are regarded as more attractive for reading with colors and illustrations that represent textual information.

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