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Research Article

The Unspeakable Wound: Childhood Sexual Trauma and Suicidal Aftermath in Diana Evans' 26a

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About Article

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the representation of childhood sexual trauma and its devastating psychological aftermath in Diana Evans' 26a. Despite the novel's critical acclaim, scholarly engagement with its treatment of sexual abuse remains limited, creating a gap in understanding how Evans narrativizes trauma and its enduring effects. Employing a literary-critical approach grounded in trauma theory, the paper analyzes how 26a traces the progression of trauma through silence, dissociation, and eventual self-destruction. The analysis reveals that Evans portrays the unspeakable wound of sexual abuse as a force that fractures identity, distorts memory, and isolates the survivor from familial and social support. Ultimately, the study argues that 26a functions as both an intimate portrayal of psychic suffering and a powerful critique of societal failure to recognize and respond to childhood sexual trauma. Through its sensitive yet unsettling depiction, the novel compels readers to confront the long-term consequences of abuse and the urgent need for empathy and intervention.

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1. INTRODUCTION

There is minimal consensus on a single operational definition of trauma, which is defined in a number of ways. The majority of definitions of trauma have a few commonalities, though. Eisen and Goodman state that trauma can be broadly defined as an experience which (1) puts a person's health and well-being at risk; (2) leaves them powerless confronting an intolerable danger, anxiety, or instinctual arousal; (3) destroys a person's coping techniques; (4) includes a certain breach of basic presumptions related to surviving; and (5) showing the world as a place which is both uncontrollable and unpredictable (Eisen & Goodman, 1998). Child abuse, domestic/partner violence, combat violence, the unexpected or abrupt loss of a loved one, vehicle accidents, sexual abuse/violence, and natural catastrophes are examples of traumatic occurrences. Traumas can affect a person's sense of identity, memory, perception, sense of purpose, relationships, physical health, and psychological health (MacIntosh, 2019).

It is a challenging or uncontrollable traumatic experience which may be experienced by any individual regardless of their ages; nevertheless, once trauma happens in childhood, its effects are often far more serious and lasting given that the trauma has an effect on the individual's whole progress. It frequently occurs in a setting of relationships where the pervasiveness of the trauma is exacerbated by the pervasiveness of the relationship (MacIntosh, 2019).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The subject 'childhood memories trauma', especially 'childhood abuse', has generated a lot of discussion among experts and laypeople equally during the past few years. The controversy has caught the eye of the mainstream media, that mirrored and generated a broad range of interests in issues surrounding the recall of traumatic childhood events in adults. There are far too many children who endure significant childhood traumas. Children witness abuses on others, are kidnapped, or are the victims of rape in their communities. While most of this used to be kept from the public, it is now known that children are all too frequently the targets of adults' physical or sexual abuse. Those adults who are responsible for caring for them, or they are witnesses to violent incidents involving their parents.

E. Ann Kaplan is one of the most well-known academics working on trauma through the perspective of cultural research. She examines processed trauma, specifically in the manner that is experienced inside a specific society, in her 2005 work: *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*. She reverts to this idea of resisting meaning construction while defining trauma. For an explanation of the neurological impact of trauma, she consults psychiatrists Bessel van der Kolk and Onno van der Hart, who are renowned for their considerable work in contemporary trauma theory. Kaplan states that:

In arguing that trauma is a special form of memory, [van der Kolk and van der Hart] stated that in trauma the event has affect only, not meaning. It produces emotions terror, fear, shock but perhaps above all disruption of the normal feeling of comfort. Only the sensation sector of the brain the amygdala is active during the trauma. The meaning-making one (in the sense of rational thought, cognitive processing), namely, the cerebral cortex, remains shut down because the affect is too much to be

registered cognitively in the brain (Kaplan, 2005).

A person remembers differently when they think back on a distressing event. That is, it has a different impact on the brain than a non-traumatic memory would.

These childhood experiences can occasionally leave scars that linger into adolescence and affect how well adults operate, according to both science and personal experience. The tendency for childhood traumas and adversities to increase a person's likelihood of experiencing a wide range of subsequent challenges is one of the most consistently observed scientific study findings. This holds true for all types of childhood trauma, involving incidents, deaths, and observing violence. But since child abuse and neglect survivors are the focus of different studies, we are aware that this is especially true for them. The likelihood of developing a mental disorder as an adult is two to five times higher in those who experienced severe childhood maltreatment than in people who did not. They are more prone to experience poor self-esteem as well as issues in their social, educational, and professional lives. Children who experienced abuse or neglect are also more prone to fall victim to subsequent patterns of criminal activity, violence, alcoholism, and drug misuse (Ruth & Friedman, 1993).

Trauma from childhood may have a variety of negative repercussions on a person's life, including memory deterioration. A wide range of triggers, such as watching a TV show or reading certain resources about trauma, having an identical incident at another point in time, and discussing it with other people, appear being related to the memory recovery of childhood trauma, despite that studies show that numerous adults who endure childhood sexual abuse trauma might totally or partially forget such incidents and some or all of the related details. It is conceivable that situations containing elements of the original event's features are connected to restored memories (Ruth & Friedman, 1993).

It is significant to point out that stressful and traumatic experiences frequently leave a lasting impression on memory, particularly in youngsters. These memories are typically presented in a logical order and are quite properly described. This has been demonstrated in youngsters in investigations, anecdotal evidence, and academic studies (Eisen & Goodman, 1998).

'Child maltreatment' is a general term. It entails neglect as well as sexual abuse, emotional/psychological abuse, and physical violence. The physical, psychological/emotional, or sexual abuse are all examples of harm which parents or other adults inflict on children. Contrarily, neglect refers to omissions a parent or an adult who takes care for the child makes. Physical, emotional, medical, and educational neglect are all further divisions under which neglect can be broken down (Mallon, 2005).

Physical abuse that causes children great harm is referred to as physical abuse. Threats of violence are included in physical abuse. Several bruises in varying stages of recovery, inexplicable wounds that are out of character for the child's age, including scrapes on new-born's knees, and injuries on the body that are typically concealed by clothes, like bruises on the thighs and chest, are all indications that physical abuse has taken place. Age of the child, where is the harm, the pattern of injuries, and hypothesised causes of injuries are further considerations



(Wilkinson & Hirschy, 2009).

"Sexual abuse" is described as being a "sexual conduct harmful to a child's mental, emotional, or physical welfare, including conduct that constitutes the offense of continuous sexual abuse of a young child, indecency with a child, sexual assault, or aggravated assault" (Texas Family Code, 261.001). The Texas definition of sexual abuse includes failure to stop sexual behaviour that is damaging to children, encouraging children to engage in sexual activity, including prostitution or trafficking, and child pornography. Physical and behavioural signs of sexual abuse may include acting inappropriately sexually, having trouble standing or sitting, and pregnancy (Houlgate, 2017).

A further definition of emotional abuse in Texas law is "mental or emotional injury to a child that results in observable and material impairment in the child's growth, development, or psychological functioning" (Fam. Code 261.001). Another form of abuse is forcing or allowing a child to be put in a situation where they will experience emotional abuse. Examples of emotional abuse include ridiculing a child in public, threatening them frequently, or neglecting them or restricting their physical contact. The effects of emotional abuse may be negative and protracted. Due to its difficulty in identifying, emotional abuse is underreported. Poor self-esteem, substance misuse, sadness, suicidal thoughts, destructive behaviour, and angry outbursts are all indicators of emotional abuse. For males and girls, the warning indicators may be different. In contrast to boys who might take an action with destructive or/and aggressive behaviour, girls who experience emotional abuse can appear far more socially distant or sad (Miller, 2003).

The Family Code's defines neglect as being "acts or omissions by the person responsible for a child's care, custody, or welfare" (Fam. Code, 261.001). This includes: 1) To place a child in a dangerous environment or to fail removing a child from one where there is a risk of damage or bodily harm to the child is considered physical neglect. 2) To fail to offer the "food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain life," omitting failure because of poverty, unless aid was denied, is considered physical neglect (Fam. Code, 261.001); or 3) Parenting or caring for a child with the aim to abstain from returning is prohibited under Family Code (Section 261.001). This includes leaving a child in a position wherein the required provisions for their care are missing.

Other forms of physical neglect include abandonment, disrespecting a child's well-being and not supervising a child when in a car. Medical neglect is described as "failing to seek, obtain, or carry out medical care for a child" and happens when this carelessness causes or includes the possibility to cause a child's death, bodily injury, or deformity. A caregiver's "inattention to a child's emotional needs [or] failure to provide psychological care" is emotional neglect (Daigle & Muftić, 2016). One example of emotional neglect is when a parent or caregiver fails to show their child enough affection, which prevents the youngster from developing to their full potential. Moreover, educational neglect involves the "failure to educate a child or attend to special education needs" (Daigle & Muftić, 2016).

It is vital to note that suicidal behaviour can range in intensity from having suicidal thoughts to actually committing suicide. Although common risk variables including sadness, despair,

the majority of mental diseases, and impulsivity can predict suicidal ideation, they are not very good predictors of actual suicide attempts among suicidal ideators. The shift from suicide thoughts to deadly suicidal attempts can be seen as a separate phase in an ideation-to-action paradigm for suicide. This process may involve elements that lessen a person's dread of suffering or dying, which might enhance their propensity to try suicide (Coulacoglou & Saklofske, 2017). Comparing to the general population, those who are confronted by childhood traumatic experiences are more likely to attempt suicide. Suicidal behaviour has regularly been linked to sexual abuse, especially throughout childhood. Latest investigations have proven that a significant risk factor for suicide attempts is childhood sexual abuse (Borges *et al.*, 2012).

Moreover, there is a strong amount of evidence linking potentially traumatic situations to dissociative symptoms. Depersonalization, derealisation, forgetfulness, fugue states, and identity disorders are all examples of dissociation, which may be thought of as a type of detachment. Dissociation may entail a break from the body, which might lessen the anxiety and suffering of damaging one's body and increase the likelihood of suicide attempts. Dissociation is related with the increased risk of suicidal thoughts in several studies. People who has a suicide attempt history can be distinguished from those who only have suicidal thoughts by their dissociative experiences. Independent of any mental problems, studies have shown that higher degrees of dissociation might play a significant mediating role in the emergence of self-harm and suicide attempts (Tasman *et al.*, 2015).

According to Dermirkol and colleagues (2020), "psychache" and dissociation serve as mediators in the association between childhood maltreatment and suicide attempts. Childhood maltreatment was also found to be a substantial predictor of suicide attempts. They discovered that dissociation played a complete mediator function in the relationship between emotional and physical abuse and suicide attempt, and that it played a partial mediator role in the relationship between sexual abuse and physical neglect. Nevertheless, given that the impact of the trauma may diminish with age, their study's large age range constituted one of its limitations. A thorough analysis of the literature reveals strong evidence for the mediating function of dissociation in trauma and non-suicidal self-injury, but the data is deficient in support for the mediating role of dissociation in suicidal thoughts and suicide attempts. To our knowledge, no research has been done on the relationship between dissociation and sexual abuse and the risk of suicide that distinguishes between those who have attempted suicide just once and those who have made several suicide attempts (Demirkol *et al.*, 2020).

An adult who uses a child for this reason whilst abusing his or her position of dominance is said to be engaging in sexual abuse of children if their goal is to offer them sexual satisfaction, arousal, or delight. The effects of childhood sexual abuse may be catastrophic for the victim. Previous research has found that people who have experienced sexual abuse as children are more inclined to engage in hazardous sexual behaviour and are more likely to face additional instances of sexual victimization during adolescence and early youth. The traumagenic dynamics model



and the information-motivation-behavioural skills model are two theoretical contributions that, despite providing skewed perspectives, can aid in understanding the relationship between childhood sexual abuse, sexual behaviour, and re-victimization in adulthood. This concise review gives an overview of the issues and theoretical justifications that have been put forth up to this point, highlighting the value of prevention and sex education beginning in childhood as well as the need for further research to create specific theoretical frameworks that aid in understanding and preventing child sexual abuse and its repercussions (Umarhathab, 2023).

Child sexual abuse frequently has life-altering effects on those who experience it since it damages the child's behaviour, emotions, and, occasionally, seriously interferes with his or her development. In every nation on earth, childhood sexual abuse is seen as a severe public health and social issue. It may be described as a behaviour in which an adult utilises a minor for sexual stimulation, pleasure, or enjoyment while preying on their vulnerability. It can happen through physical contact (such as touching, vaginal, oral, or anal sex, both done and recommended), as well as through watching pornography, attending adult shows, or being asked for sexual favours (Castro *et al.*, 2019).

Being a child victim of sexual abuse may have a severe effect on an individual's emotional well-being in general, leading to low self-esteem and a shortage of confidence. Only a few instances of negative effects on mental health or behaviours that are internalised include depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-harm, and suicide. There are certain gender-specific differences in the incidence of mental health issues. For example, it has been argued that males are more prone to display externalising behaviours than females are to display internalising behaviours. The impact of interpersonal ties on reducing or increasing the impacts of childhood sexual abuse on mental wellness has been shown to be crucial (Doyle, 2013).

Also, as a reaction to the violence they have suffered, victims and survivors of childhood sexual abuse may engage in a variety of externalizing behaviors. Many reactions to childhood sexual abuse are comparable in both genders (such as guilt, humiliation, and fury). They frequently adopt unhealthy coping mechanisms to deal with the misery of the abuse as well as the distress brought on by other effects (such mental health issues). Depending on the victim's age and gender as well as the abuser's gender, different behaviors might be shown after experiencing sexual abuse as a child. Research, however, indicates that exposure to childhood sexual abuse is linked to a higher likelihood of externalising behaviours, such as substance addiction, improper or "risky" sexual behaviour, anti-social behaviour, and criminal activity (Draucker & Martsolf, 2006).

Indicators of childhood sexual abuse include externalising behaviours, which can also be used to communicate a problem and ask for assistance. It has been found that victims and survivors who have strong family relationships and greater levels of education are less prone to participate in these maladaptive behaviours. Childhood sexual abuse may also have an influence on interpersonal relationships. The ability of victims and survivors to form and maintain meaningful

relationships may be greatly impacted. Secure attachment types, which are essential for forming strong emotional ties, behaviours, and interpersonal interactions, are thought to be present in a small minority of survivors of childhood sexual abuse. It is more common for victims and survivors to struggle with issues such as fragile relationships, interpersonal hostility, and dysfunctional sexuality. Relationships that are intimate might have negative behavioural and health implications (Moore, 2012).

Regarding the socioeconomic consequences, there is proof that there is a long-lasting link between childhood sexual abuse and decreased life chances. This link begins throughout the school years and goes on into adulthood, effecting the educational status, work rates, and income levels of the victims and survivors. Additionally, there is evidence linking childhood sexual abuse to higher rates of unemployment or time away from the workforce, increased reliance on social assistance, lower earnings, and more unstable financial situations. The statistics suggest that there may frequently be a link between childhood sexual abuse and worse socioeconomic results, including both physical and mental health. It is important to realise, as with education, that some abuse victims and survivors use their employment and success or "overwork" to cope with the impacts of the abuse, which includes the psychological effects like low self-esteem (Ey & McInnes, 2020).

The evidence raises the notion that certain results can only be significant at particular life stages or could possibly occur at those periods from a developmental point of view. For instance, throughout childhood and adolescence, prominent bodily harm brought on by childhood sexual abuse includes: conduct disorders, sexually inappropriate behaviour, early puberty, and low educational attainment. In adulthood, individuals who suffers from childhood sexual abuse are prone to longer-term persistent physical health conditions, problems concerning emotional and sexual intimacy, interpersonal relationship issues, and work problems. Numerous effects, involving mental health issues like PTSD and anxiety as well as a greater propensity for sexual re-victimisation, have been discovered to bridge life phases (Schroeder & Ollendick, 2012).

Lack of evidence linking childhood sexual abuse to specific outcomes throughout a person's life stage does not always mean the person is not at higher risk of that shows up throughout that stage of life. Instead, it is possible that no research has yet been done to address this issue. Although some study results are conflicting and there is not enough information on male victims and survivors which can be used in putting firm conclusions, it is possible to identify variations in outcomes by victim and survivor gender in the studies we analysed. The research indicates that some outcomes, such as those pertaining to mental health disorders, internalising and externalising behaviours, offending, intimate relationships and sexuality, pregnancy and delivery, and offending, differ according to gender (Wolfe *et al.*, 2002).

In other side, the child's age when the abuse happens has a negative relation with the intensity of the symptoms, or that the effects are worse if the child is younger. The child's age when the abuse happens is related to both its severity and duration, as abuse is more likely to endure longer and take



on a range of manifestations in younger children, which has a more significant knock-on effect for the child. The frequency or duration of the abuse, whether it was coupled with physical violence, whether it occurred during penetration, and the connection between the victim and the abuser where the risks are more severe if the abuser is someone who is emotionally connected to the child are the other most frequent mediators of importance of the impact of sexual abuse on a child's wellbeing. In situations of more severe abuse perpetrated by a biological parent, the worst consequence for a child may be anticipated (Geer & O'Donohue, 2013).

Childhood sexual abuse and trauma has not been the subject for only clinical studies. It has been tackled and also studied in literary works too. There remains a demand for a practical and analytical assessment of the abuse issue to be incorporated to literary works on the characters by evaluating the negative consequences of abuse and the good benefits of individuation, despite all the research on abuse, heroes, and antiheroes in literature. The *Color Purple* 1982 by Alice Walker is one of the best-selling works of adult literature that addresses childhood sexual abuse and trauma. The *Color Purple* is a superb depiction of the existence of impoverished black women who experience not only social exclusion because of their gender and skin colour but also severe abuse at the hands of black males. Infidelity, verbal and physical violence, and sexual abuse all fall under this category. Celie, a young black lady growing up in the impoverished South, is the main character of the novel *The Color Purple*. Celie must contend with all kinds of abuse, such as racism, misogyny, and poverty, in order to discover herself and achieve freedom. Celie gets sexually attacked when she is barely 14 years old by a guy she mistakenly thinks is her father. She had two children from her rapist, and he gives both of them to a minister. *The Perks of Being a Wallflower*, by Stephen Chbosky, was published in 1999 and is another book that addresses childhood sexual abuse and the pain it causes. The reader follows Charlie in the book as he goes about his daily business as well as on his quest to make friends and begin to accept himself. Charlie seems to be alluding to his history of sexual assault in the opening letters. According to studies that have examined this book from the perspective of trauma, Charlie is not aware of his trauma until he experiences more traumas that cause his suppressed emotions to surface. As for 26a 2005 by Diana Evans, it deals with the life of a migrant Black woman who suffers not only the way society treats her, but also the consequences of what she has experienced in her childhood. She suffers childhood sexual trauma as she gets raped when she goes back to her motherland in a visit. This experience never lets her live a normal life, leading her eventually to commit suicide. This novel has not been studied from the perspective of childhood sexual abuse trauma before-which makes it a good choice for this study. Another novel is *Swagger* 2013 by Carl Deuker. In this book, Jonas, a senior in high school, moves to Seattle. Levi is a pleasant, soft-spoken man and a fellow basketball player, and he makes him feel good. As readers begin to suspect that Ryan Hartwell, a charming basketball coach and sexual predator, is a rat, tension rises like a steady drumbeat. When Levi hesitantly informs Jonas that Hartwell had mistreated him, Jonas must choose whether to

endanger his future career by coming out with the allegations. This psychological sports novel is a slam dunk thanks to its razor-sharp basketball moves, well-rounded characters, and excellent narrative. A final example to mention is *A Little Life* by Hanya Yanagihara (2015). This novel follows the lives of four friends in New York City: aspiring actor Willem, moody painter JB, quiet architect Malcolm, and the brilliant, mysterious litigator Jude. Both a disorienting meditation on the agony of child sexual abuse and an emotional ode to the potentials and constraints of adult male friendship and love may be found in the book. It offers a disturbing reflection on pain, sexual assault, and the challenges of healing. Finally, Jude seems to be a target for sexual assault.

The core of the study is Diana Evans' first book 26a. Evans (born in 1972) is a contemporary novelist, journalist and critic. She won the Orange Award for New Writers and the Betty Trask Award. After it was published, this book garnered a lot of interest. For this book, Evans was awarded the inaugural Orange Prize for New Writers in 2005. It is much praised and earned her the 2006 Decibel Writer of the Year award from Arts Council England. This book, which explores the bond between twins in a Nigerian-English household, was named to the Commonwealth's best-first-book and Whitbread first novel shortlists. The public's acceptance of the novel's success and Evans's standing among literary reviewers coincided. 26a transformed her from a promising young writer who was unknown to those outside of her immediate group into a well-known and very important person (Philips & Aughterson, 2021). As stated earlier in this study, as traumatic memory chemically and neurologically alters the body, not all survivors can forget the past and get on with life. Evans' 26a depicts a mixed-race household in North London. Evans, as a Black writer, describes how Black people suffer in 'White' countries. The main character, Georgia, in this novel suffers due to different issues which basically include the way society treats her and the sexual abuse she can never get over. When Georgia travels to Nigeria and experiences a sexual assault from which she never fully recovers. She chooses not to inform her twin sister Bessi because she does not want to compromise what she perceives to be her twin's innocence. The effect of this encounter for Georgia is despair. She begins to deteriorate in the direction of the breakdown that will finally lead to her suicide. Despite being a bildungsroman, this book is more concerned with the problem of childhood sexual abuse trauma than it is with particular occurrences in the twins' life. The narrative begins with Ida's surprise at the coldness of England when she wed there and her previous withdrawal into thinking about Nigeria. All of that is followed by Georgia's surprise at being raped in Nigeria and her comparable withdrawal into escapism and daydreaming about her home in England.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This study adopts a qualitative research design anchored in literary-critical analysis. The analysis is interpretive and analytical, seeking to explore how Diana Evans' 26a represents the long-term psychological and emotional consequences of childhood sexual trauma, culminating in the suicidal aftermath



of one of its protagonists. As a qualitative inquiry, the research does not aim for quantifiable measurement but instead for a nuanced understanding of how trauma and its aftermath are encoded and expressed through narrative, language, and characterization.

3.2. Theoretical framework

The study is grounded in trauma theory, particularly drawing from the works of Cathy Caruth (1996), Judith Herman (1992), and Dominick LaCapra (2001). These theorists conceptualize trauma as an overwhelming event that resists full integration into consciousness, often returning through repetition, silence, or fragmentation. This framework enables the study to interpret 26a not merely as a fictional account but as a literary representation of the psychic processes of trauma repression, memory, and the impossibility of narrative closure. In addition, concepts from psychoanalytic theory (especially Freud's notions of repression and the death drive) are employed to understand the link between childhood sexual abuse and the suicidal tendencies portrayed in the novel.

3.3. Data source

The primary text for this study is Diana Evans' 26a (2005), a semi-autobiographical novel that centers on the twin sisters Georgia and Bessi Hunter and their experiences growing up in a racially and culturally hybrid family in 1970s and 1980s England. The analysis focuses particularly on scenes, dialogues, and narrative structures that illuminate Georgia's childhood sexual trauma and its psychological repercussions.

Secondary sources include scholarly articles, critical essays, interviews, and theoretical texts relevant to trauma studies, feminist literary criticism, and African diasporic women's writing. These sources provide interpretive depth and situate Evans' novel within a broader discourse of trauma representation and postcolonial identity formation.

3.4. Analytical procedure

The analysis proceeds through close reading of selected passages, attending to imagery, symbolism, narrative voice, and temporal dislocations that signify trauma. The study examines how Evans' narrative form, marked by fragmentation, repetition, and shifts in focalization, mirrors the disrupted consciousness of the traumatized subject. The researcher also identifies recurring motifs such as silence, the body, and memory lapses to trace how the text encodes the unspeakable nature of childhood sexual abuse.

3.5. Ethical considerations

Although the study deals with sensitive themes such as sexual trauma and suicide, it maintains a scholarly and empathetic approach, focusing on the literary representation rather than real-life cases. Citations and references are properly acknowledged to respect intellectual property and academic integrity.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Victimized childhood in 26a

Diana Evans' 26a primarily explores the lives and experiences

of twin sisters, Georgia and Bessi, who grow up in London in the 1980s and 1990s. The novel delves into their complex identities, relationships, and the challenges they face while navigating their Nigerian and British heritage. The novel does touch upon some difficult and sensitive topics related to the sisters' upbringing. Their childhood is marked by a strained relationship with their parents, who struggle with social and psychological issues and occasionally exhibit neglectful behavior. It is notable to say that Diana Evans herself was born to a Nigerian mother and an English father, and she wrote and dedicated the novel to her dead twin sister Paula.

In Diana Evans' novel 26a, the themes of abuse and psychological struggles are explored to highlight the difficulties of a multiracial household. Ida is the young Nigerian wife who married and travelled with an English man. She experiences a deep sense of displacement, leading to a form of psychosis (Scafe, 2015). Her intense feeling of being out of place affects her mental well-being, emphasizing the challenges associated with navigating multiple cultural identities. Ida is the mother of the twin protagonists Georgia and Bessi, along with other two girls. In her youth, she fancied life in Europe to be a safe haven from the Nigerian arranged marriage. However, her English husband, Aubrey, has proven to her that the different cultural heritage can make the marriage quite challenging.

Ida's role as a mother and a wife becomes more difficult as she experiences feverish longing to her family and homeland. Thus, her little children grow up with only half of her surrounding them, while the other half remains in Nigeria:

For her, home was not homeless; it was one place, one heat, one tree. She made herself a bubble and it was called Nigeria-without-Aubrey [...] At dinner, Ida sometimes said 'pass the pepper' in Edo [her mother tongue...] in the early mornings she said, 'At home now, they're singing' (Evans, 2006).

Ida's home becomes different from the house in which her children live. Given the multiracial nature of their home, the two girls witness the disharmony between their parents. They see arguments, differences, and lack of care between them. Naturally, the two girls gain the attributes and cultural background of their parents, along with a sense of attachment to each other rather than to Aubrey or Ida. Their difficult marriage made their parenting imperfect for the children (Olanipekun & Iliyas, 2021).

The girls, like their mother, have developed an attachment to the place in which they were born. The home at Neasden in London becomes their 'small England' where all their memories are rooted. The house with its Nigerian relics and English furniture reflects the differences that shape their lives and identities. The girls grow up close to each other, they are identical twins that have the same features and same age experiences. They enjoy their food, their music, favorite moments of princess Diana's wedding and form a little childish bubble around themselves. All that while their father keeps shouting about food and their mother "mostly she stayed in, wrapped up, shaded, talking to Nne-Nne [her mother] who often made her laugh" (Evans, 2006). The twins' relationship with their mother, despite her own challenges, is better than their father who shows little understanding or care for their troubles. Their mother tries hard to teach them her mother language and educate them about her



heritage at the time that Aubrey lived in a self-centered world. Besides their being twins, this early image of the father and the mother pushed the girls to look after each other more than natural siblings would. Thus, it may not be completely abusive, but Id's and Aubrey's parenting is not pictured as perfect: "*On the outside of their door Georgia and Bessi had written in chalk '26a', and on the inside, 'G-B' at eye level, just above the handle*" (Evans, 2006).

The first true difficulty that the two girls face is moving from their home in London to travel to Nigeria, where their father is going to work. This shift of place and culture puts them in a shock that manifests through series of dreams and longing to their home: "*At night, in the first weeks, the twins met each other in the middle of homesick dreams and went back together to check. They navigated the indigo skies hand-in-hand cloud-stepping over the Mediterranean*" (Evans, 2006). Nigeria was filled with sights, events and language with which they were not quite familiar. The cultural split between England and Nigeria formed a true fear:

Would there be television? Would there be Dallas? [...] Were they ever coming back? Were they emigrating? Ida was behaving as if they were. She kept shopping [...] and Bel had to be their mum and toasted-sandwich provider until Ida came home (Evans, 2006).

The children are amazed with the aggression of a cockroach that they want to touch. The watchman, Sedrick impresses the girls by holding and lifting the animal quietly. The watchman's behavior is suspicious from the beginning. However, during a lively gathering hosted by the elder members of the Hunter family, Ida's family, a particular event unfolds as Georgia ventures into the garden. The garden captivates her senses, evoking a sense of serenity and beauty. In this mode, Georgia wanders without Bessi trying to enjoy the beauty of trees and the warm weather only to be surprised by Sedrick's voice: "*You want some sugarcane?*" Sedrick offered. [...] "*Want to play cartwheel?*" he said. "*I bet you can do seven. I'll watch you.*" (Evans, 2006). Sedrick's tone and speech is typical of a weasel abuser that attracts his little prey by sweets and games. He takes advantage by the fact that Georgia is alone without her parents. This is an important point to consider with regards to the responsibility and role of parents as protectors and keepers against evil and danger. Ida and Aubrey were busy with the friends inside while their child plays out unwatched. Sedrick attempt the sexual harassment by kissing the child first: "*Sedrick gave Georgia a rough kiss on the mouth. Georgia said, 'Oh, no thank you,' and her feet felt as if they'd turned into grass[...] Sedrick held her by the waist*".

Tranquility and order are destroyed as Georgia is positioned against the tree to be raped. The danger and fear consume the little girl and leave her speechless: "*Sedrick put his hand over Georgia's mouth. It took a lot of coordination. To hold the legs in cartwheel, to cover the mouth, to undo his belt. She was wriggling in all directions*" (Evans, 2006). Amidst personal anguish and trauma, Georgia's immediate concern turns to Bessi, as she shares a fear that they both might be facing the same thing now: "*Was Bessi dying? They had decided that they would die together. Was it now?*". Georgia's mind conjures distressing memories linked to her birth, a nightmarish imagery of being

trapped on a road with approaching traffic like the little animal they saw years ago in the middle of the road. The fear and pain she experiences creates unnatural and disorderly links among many ideas and images in her mind tinged with an apocalyptic aura: "*Yes, this is definitely it, thought Georgia. A wild thought. She saw the headlights. She heard the engine. Oh Bessi, be there when I get there, be there when I get there*".

According to Danaher, this recurring portrayal of Georgia as a helpless prey, threatened and consumed by fear, serves as a motif highlighting her tendency to withdraw into herself. In moments of vulnerability, Georgia associates herself with both the defenseless creature caught in the glare of headlights and the prey seeking refuge from a predator, symbolized during her visit to Leicester Square. The psychological and emotional aftermath of the assault relegates Georgia to a perpetual victim, trapped within that role (2018).

The act of rape violates Georgia's deep sense of belonging, disrupting her strong connection to her identity as a twin. To safeguard the sanctity of home, family, and her bond with Bessi, Georgia chooses not to report the violent assault. Georgia's decision is typical of a confused and helpless child who is physically traumatized by something that she has not yet completely realized. Her first action after the rape was that she ran and hid in the shadows of her room hoping to find safety again. Georgia's decision stems from a selfless wish to shield her sister and her lack of understanding of the wickedness involved. Nonetheless, Georgia quickly realizes the negative impact of withholding the truth from Bessi, as it affects their unique connection as twins:

Georgia tried to think about how she could put the cartwheels and grassfeet and the dark bushes like the evil forest and Sedrick's hands and Sedrick's belt opening into words that were sayable. It was the first time ever, in this land of twoness in oneness, that something had seemed unsayable (Evans, 2006, emphasis added).

In her study on rape and silence, Ahrens (2006) indicates that social reactions over rape and suffering makes victim hesitate and choose silence. And as a child herself, Georgia's ignorance of the nature of rape makes her coward even further from disclosing this to anyone, especially her twin. Georgia's struggle to express the details of the rape to Bessi carries a profound sense of tragedy. In an article about the tragedy of losing a twin, Evans writes to The Guardian "*whereas most people come into the world after nine months of virtual solitude, for twins the concept of solitude, and all that goes with it independence, individuality, selfsufficiency is an alien one. Solitude becomes something that you fear*" (2005).

Georgia's conflict is further heightened by the words used to describe the assault There is a continuous narrative voice, devoid of breaks or commas, mirrors the breathlessness and shock experienced during the actual incident. The innocence portrayed through terms like "cartwheels" and "grassfeet," which Georgia associates with the garden, feels out of place within this violent context. However, these elements also serve as poignant reminders of the belonging and connection to nature that Georgia had cherished until this moment (Danaher, 2018). The rape mutilates the beautiful image of nature that Georgia have held so far in her mind and heart,. Instead of



the safe haven, the garden becomes a symbol of evil and a continuous reminder of the Georgia's trauma.

The rape experienced by Georgia triggers her depression and detachment, leading both her and her twin sister towards separate paths. The trauma of sexual assault disrupts the sense of being in-between that is fundamental to Georgia's story, pushing her to withdraw further into a realm detached from the emotional challenges of confronting her experience:

Georgia felt confused. She couldn't remember something. How exactly, exactly, the kitten had felt in her hands while she'd sat in the garden. She couldn't remember it. There seemed, all of a sudden, lots of things in the way (Evans, 2006).

Georgia's diverse heritage and her unfavorable sentiments towards Africa create a sense of isolation from her mother and sisters. Simultaneously, her perception of herself as the dark and impure twin shatters her identity. At this point in the story, Africa, instead of being a place of solace, becomes a source of mistrust, revealing the disconnect between the girls' ancestral roots and their current cultural experiences (Redondo, 2020). Despite going back to England and proceeding her life as it used to be, Georgia never manages to escape the pain of what happened. In fact, she descends into a realm of hallucination and terror without telling anyone about that: "[s]he had fallen to third place, then dropped out of the Cartwheel Olympics, and when Bessi asked her what was wrong with her Georgia couldn't say it, so she said, 'Nothing.'" (Evans, 2006)

Before going back to England, Bessi and Georgia lay on the ground to watch the rain drops fall on the glass. The author chooses this moment to reflect on the crack that have begun to appear in Georgia's perception of reality. Unlike Bessi's optimistic and hopeful look at things, Georgia looks and reminisce through nothingness. An utter void has begun to replace that child's emotions and joys:

"Isn't it pretty," said Bessi. "I'm going to miss this bit when we get home." Georgia had felt the colors and the rain, but she would not miss here. There was something lost. The nowness of things. It was not pretty.

"I don't know what you mean, Bess," she said. "Not quite" (Evans, 2006).

Individuals that experience a sexual assault are more likely to develop depressive thinking, depression, and general PTSD (Bell, 2015). Georgia's pain and suffering are not shown in words or actions as much as they are shown in the mental damage that consume her life in the aftermath. Following the experience of rape, Georgia's thoughts and preoccupations undergo a significant shift. She becomes consumed by a fascination with light, colors, and beauty, feeling as though an inner light has been extinguished within her. Metaphorically, her fingers take on a slippery quality 'grassfeet', symbolizing the difficulty she encounters in navigating the harsh realities of her existence. Paradoxically, it is in the realm of dreams where Georgia finds a semblance of relief and improvement. Escaping from the confines of reality allows her to momentarily transcend the pain and find solace in the realm of her own imagination: "Georgia dangled on the edge of the house, on the edge of sleep, and dreamed in colors of Sekon, how the kitten felt that night, because in sleep she could remember" (Evans, 2006).

Regarding someone as 'home' creates and directs emotions

of belonging from being spatially situated to being familially situated. Georgia's strong bond with her twin remains solidly the most important and strongest feeling inside her even after the rape incident. Despite having grown up into a teenager, Georgia keeps holding the secrets of what happened. Georgia, perceiving Bessi as her sanctuary, strives to shield her from any harm. In doing so, Georgia is safeguarding her other half, Bessi, following the traumatic incident. When Bel, their older sister, suspects that something unsettling occurred in Nigeria, she employs the game of reading hands to get the truth out of Georgia:

"This line here means there's something in your heart, and you should say what it is because if you don't you'll always be sad. Like Mum, except at least she's got somewhere to go and get happy."

"I've got somewhere," said Georgia stiffly. [...] "Bessi. Bessi and me [...] She'll always be there. She's the best bit of me. We're half each [...] Don't tell anyone, Bel [...] Bessi is where bad things never happen," (Evans, 2006, emphasis added)

As she enters adolescence, Georgia experiences a sense of physical awkwardness, but more significantly, she feels a growing disconnection from her twin sister. The twins perceive themselves as integral parts of a whole, and when Bessi begins pursuing her own path, Georgia starts to feel incomplete. Bessi travels to the Caribbean islands while Georgia stays home and deals with her own struggles.

Georgia and Bessi navigate distinct environments and engage with different individuals, resulting in the development of different experiences and different friendships, especially in the school days. As time progresses, the gap that originated during their time in Nigeria widens, leading to a spatial division between the twins as they enter adulthood. This separation poses a new challenge to their individual senses of identity, especially Georgia's. Georgia struggle with her secrets while she tries to maintain the one thing that matters to her, i.e. her twin sister (Pérez-Fernández, 2013). However, Bessi grows up without the ramification of rape trauma and she manages to develop friends and live healthy life without needing to stick to her twin all the time. This development was strange to Georgia: "[i]t was foreign, living like this, coming across each other [...] the way others did, as if they were the same as them, the twinless ones. It felt to them like being halved and doubled at the same time" (Evans, 2006). Trauma leaves weak and vulnerable human that struggles to survive, thus, the enthusiasm felt by Bessi towards life is sharply contrasted with Georgia's extinguished light and dim expectations.

Georgia embarks on a journey to lose weight and become thinner. She aims at losing weight and gain muscles. Her food choices are influenced by societal stereotypes surrounding body image, which holds significant importance for her. In response to the societal pressures related to body image, Georgia externalizes her awareness by resorting to self-starvation, a means to conform to the norms of a society that deems such behavior as normal (Redondo, 2020). Her dietary practices combine vegetarianism with a self-imposed pursuit of happiness, emphasizing the concept of self-development:

Good health was happiness. The right foods, the right combination of vitamins and minerals and proteins sliding



down into the body was a good, cleaning feeling of happiness. [...] Of course, exercise was also useful for not getting too fat, and Georgia wanted never ever to be a big bumbling blob, which was what she became when she got past eight stone. The aim was lightness, to glide, to slice through water, to take up very little space (2006)

Georgia's journey, however, is not as influential in changing her life like Bessi. Bessi believes that her journey outside the loft "*will be good for us ... it's time, to find out who we are when we're on our own*" (2006). Georgia on the other hand, does not need to venture to a different world or country to know who she is. To her, her identity is always defined in the same way; she is a twin sister.

The twins' physical distance from each other becomes certain when Bessi embarks on her journey to St Lucia. While Bessi eagerly seeks a sense of individuality and freedom, Georgia clings tightly to her sister, desiring their constant presence together. The confined space of the loft becomes restrictive and suffocating for Bessi, prompting her to yearn for a fresh start in a new location, one where the dynamics of their twin relationship do not hold sway. In her quest for self-discovery, Bessi feels the need to escape from her current circumstances: Bessi was getting restless. [...] What would it be like, she wondered, to be lost entirely? To awake in another place, not home, to be stripped of everything until all that was left was your mind and body and the future? (2006)

In contrast to this description, Georgia relies on her twin sister to maintain a sense of self and navigate the aftermath of the traumatic incident she endured in Nigeria. As Bessi embarks on her journey to St Lucia, she seeks to establish her own identity separate from their twin relationship, taking a divergent path from Georgia. Without her twin, Georgia feels incomplete and adrift, a feeling that dissipates when Bessi is present. The presence of her twin sister fills the void within her, bringing a sense of wholeness and dispelling any lingering dread (Pérez-Fernández, 2013). As Bessi's absence becomes more pronounced, Georgia experiences a growing sense of instability and vulnerability, underscoring the impact of the rape trauma on her ability to find her true self (Danaher, 2018). Being the best part of her, the un-traumatized part, Georgia becomes in true need of her distant sister that she begins to feel a true void maximizing within her:

Georgia. At Christmas she practically locked herself away in the loft and hardly ate a thing. She drifted out into the garden on Boxing Day and just stared at her allotment, and when I went out to see if she was all right she said, "*We're nineteen soon, I'm going to be nineteen without her*" (Evans, 2006).

Although Bessi's letters overflow with the joy of foreign encounters, Georgia's answers takes on a progressively desolate and detached tone. The reader bears witness to the initial signs of Georgia's distresses as she unveils her pains to Bessi, mentioning things like "*evil pens*" and long contemplations about happiness to conclude that "*happiness is a sensation, or a visitation, not a way of being*" (Evans, 2006). Her profound sense of alienation from others is epitomized by her feelings that, unable to establish a connection with Bessi within a dream, she begins to feel estranged from all people with no exception "*There's too much noise and I feel as if my life takes place in boxes*

full of faces watching me, and the faces are not kind like yours, Bessi".

The trauma of sexual rape can turn into an unsolvable knot when a person leaves it untreated. Georgia chooses silence and suppression of her emotions over talking and trying to solve her problematic experience. Thus, instead of becoming better with time, Georgia's mental well-being deteriorates gradually. Her continuous solitude and later separation from Bessi magnifies the horror of what she went through. Later in the novel, Georgia later tells Bessi why she kept her memory of rape to herself and never spoke of it:

"*I needed somewhere that wasn't bad. I wanted to be light and happy like you, and I wanted never for you to see the dark. I was scared I would infect you with terrible feelings and pictures in my head of walking out in front of the traffic and—no. That's not for you, see? Not for you to hear. I needed you to be my sunlight, Bessi*"—and here Georgia paused and her words became very small—"I lost mine, I lost it" (Evans, 2006).

Bessi's presence and talk with Georgia should have lessened the trauma, but it happens years after the incident that it almost changes nothing. At this point in the tale, the memory have become strongly rooted in the mind of Georgia that redeeming herself seems quite difficult.

Throughout the narrative, Georgia's experiences mirror those of her mother, suggesting a deep-seated connection between them. They both share a haunting vulnerability, chased by haunting dreams and elusive visions that disrupt their sense of reality. These manifestations serve as painful reminders of their past, amplifying their inner turmoil. As the story progresses, it becomes increasingly evident that Georgia grapples with a profound sense of detachment from her own self. The constant barrage of unsettling experiences intensifies her struggle, causing her to question her own existence and purpose. While other characters in the novel may face their own challenges and tribulations, Georgia bears the heaviest burden of losing her fundamental sense of identity.

Tragically, this overwhelming burden proves to be too much for Georgia to bear, leading her to make the devastating choice to end her own life. The act of suicide becomes the final manifestation of her anguish, reflecting the extent of her desperation and the tragic consequences of her internal torment:

She is on the water, holding out her little hand [...]. The wind picks up, the mist begins to fall. Georgia climbs the stairs. She throws her head back and shivers and reaches her arm up to the light. The hand is outstretched, the fingers wide apart. Sweep me from my feet (Evans, 2006).

Georgia's story shows the everlasting ramifications of an unhealed trauma that culminates in the victims' taking of her own life. By placing Georgia at the center of this exploration, the novel underscores the necessity of recognizing and acknowledging the psychological weight such individuals carry. It presents an urgent call for empathy, urging readers to comprehend the depth of pain that accompanies the fracturing of one's sense of self. Moreover, the narrative illuminates the crucial role played by understanding and support systems in helping individuals navigate their profound inner struggles.

Through Georgia's story, the novel explores the devastating



impact of losing one's sense of self. It emphasizes the profound psychological consequences that results from an unrelenting assault on one's identity. Ultimately, the narrative underscores the importance of empathy, understanding, and support for individuals facing such inner struggles.

5. CONCLUSION

Diana Evans' novel, *26a*, shows child abuse as a central event that has lasting impact on Georgia. Georgia tragically takes her own after enduring years of pain after the sexual abuse. The novel reminds of the severe and long-lasting consequences of such terrible acts. Georgia's suicide, happening years after the abuse, reveals the immense pain she carried throughout her life. The book tackles the difficult reality that the burden of abuse may be too heavy to bear, leading to tragic outcomes. Evans skillfully portrays Georgia's struggle with her shattered sense of self, as well as the feelings of shame, guilt, and powerlessness that accompany her. Through Georgia's emotional journey, the author sheds light on the challenges of healing from deep wounds. The novel also serves as a critique of a society that fails to protect and support children. It exposes the systemic failures and societal indifference that can contribute to the perpetuation of abuse and the isolation experienced by survivors.

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