

**Child Abuse and Patterns of Survival  
As Reflected in  
Dave Pelzer's A Child Called It.**

Submitted By

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Children are our future. What happens to children in their first days, months and years of life affects their development, the development of our society, and the development of our world (Foundation: P.1)

Childhood represents one of the most important stages in the human's life; it refers to the period between infancy to adulthood. Children can be considered minor, helpless and weak human beings. Thus, protecting them from abuse helps our societies to be improved and developed. "The healthy development of all children benefits society by providing a solid foundation for economic productivity, responsible citizenship, strong communities and a secure nation". (Quoted in Mercy: P.6) Therefore, child abuse can be regarded as one of the most crucial contemporary issues that attract the attention of the whole society towards the dilemma of abused children. Regardless of its reasons, child abuse can be categorized as one of the most severe problems for both women and children that create developmental and relational scars for both at the same time. In addition, the reactions of the whole world towards the various forms of abuse that are inflicted upon these victims are all of great importance in order to investigate the reasons and results of this disturbing phenomenon as well as to find solutions to help these helpless victims to be saved, since this issue reached the peak and calls for a great consideration. "Child abuse had achieved a place on the national agenda. A good point is made that how the problem of child abuse was initially defined had a

major impact on how society addressed the problem” (Smith: P.1285). The process of abusing children became one of the most dreadful crimes which results in harm, threat, pain and dehumanization against the child. “Abusing a child has come to seem the most heinous of crimes” (Hacking: P.259).

Until quite recently, parents regard themselves as having limitless power over their children and children, in turn, have few rights to protect themselves from these abuses which were practiced under the mask of discipline. Hacking affirms that “Child abuse is the worst of private evils”. (P.253) Children can be sold into slavery, killed for the cause of child sacrifice to god or supernatural beings, or for other psychological or financial reasons. Thus, the concept of Child Abuse is broad to the point of ambiguity. “Child abuse is still defined as a discrete event or set of discrete events- acts of omission or commission that endanger the well-being of a child”. (Wolfe: 462). In 1993, the National Research Council reported that “we still lack a solid base of research information that can guide and enhance society’s efforts to intervene and prevent child abuse and neglect” (P. VI). More importantly is the fact that interpreting the term is differentiated from one class to the other; it is categorized as a subjective term which varies from one category to the other, according to one’s personal beliefs and principles. For example, some countries regard educational neglect as a kind of child abuse. Therefore, understanding the minute details of the term helps to explain the “standards of the particular culture and community in which the child

resides, holding the child's experiences as primary to these deliberations" (Walters: 164)

Child Abuse refers to any harm or any threatened behavior deliberately practiced by the children's parents or other adults that resulted in physical, emotional or mentally damage. It can be interpreted as "an adult physically injuring a child not by accident, but in anger or deliberately". (Wall: P.222) As a human being, the process of abusing others is banned and prohibited not only against other human being , but also towards all helpless creatures like children, disabled people, and even animals and plants . "Child abuse is the portion of harm to children that results from human action that is proscribed, proximate, and preventable. (Futterman: P.498)" It also refers to the refusal to meet the basic needs of children including housing, clothing, feeding, financial and medical care and everything guarantees the child's survival. In this respect the US Advisory Board on Child Abuse and Neglect has concluded that "child abuse and neglect in the United States now represents a national emergency" (Qtd. In Melton & Barry: 1)

Due to the great concern to bring up a healthy child and a respected human being, there were endless efforts to solve this issue from the governments, the community agents and the families themselves. "Child abuse was a major issue once before, at the end of the Victorian era" (Hacking: P.264). As a result, the need to bring up healthy children can be attributed to the 19th century in Europe. "By the

beginning of the nineteenth century there was increasing concern for producing good citizens and maintaining law and order". (Rosen: P.658) In 1853, the founders of the first Children's Aid Society in New York have a great awareness towards that issue because of the total destruction which will be brought to the political, social and emotional structure of their society in the near future if they could not pay a considerable attention to this problem. "The children had to be saved, otherwise they will influence elections; they may shape the policy of the city; they will assuredly, if unreclaimed, poison society all around them. They will help to form the great multitude of robbers, thieves, and vagrants". (Hacking: P.264-265) Accordingly, there were continual endeavors to save the whole community from future downfall and collapse. The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (SPCC) was another contribution for saving and protecting children from their abusers. Accordingly, the last four decades witnessed a great consciousness towards this predicament. "The New York Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children was founded in the next generation, 1874" (Hacking: P.264-265)

Literature also played a crucial role in disclosing and investigating this issue throughout many literary works to be rediscovered and solved from the community agents. "The social work literature of the early 1900s through the 1950s reflects a sharply diminished discussion of child abuse as a condition requiring intervention by community agents. Child abuse was then rediscovered in the late 1950s and early 1960s and viewed as the most significant new initiative in the child welfare field"

(Costin: P.177) Similarly, the community activists exerted infinite attempts to save children to be protected and sheltered, instead of being abused, neglected, humiliated and maltreated .

In 1974 the United States Congress passed the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment (CAPTA). The overall goal of CAPTA was to protect children from maltreatment through abuse and neglect by parents and other care givers. Passage of CAPTA marked the beginning of the second “child saving” movement in the United States and ushered in an era in which protective services became a major function of the child welfare system (Hutchison: P.60)

According to The World Health Organization, the term child abuse and child maltreatment are used interchangeably in the academic and professional literature. Child maltreatment has been defined as “all forms of physical and/or emotional ill-treatment, sexual abuse, neglect or negligent treatment or commercial or exploitation, resulting in actual or potential harm to the child’s health, survival, development or dignity in the context of a relationship of responsibility, trust or power” (WHO :P. 2002) In recent times, professionals and researchers have recommended the general term Child Abuse to “maltreatment to cover the range of adult behaviors that can cause psychological and physical injury to children” (Hart: 243). Child Abuse is more preferable than child maltreatment, since abuse denotes to injury, insult, desecration. “Furthermore, it is the

term readily recognized in our culture and our community. Maltreatment or mistreatment does not necessarily have the same connotation”. (Andrew: 2)

There are various forms of child abuse; it may be physical, verbal, emotional, psychological and sexual. Meddin & Rosen reported that “Child abuse and/or neglect is any action or inaction that results in the harm or potential risk of harm to a child. It includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, physical neglect, emotional abuse and emotional neglect” (P.26). These forms may occur altogether or separately in an independent way. However, this typology suggests an overlapping comprehension to the term, because many children who are subjected to one kind of abuse are frequently exposed to the other kinds as *in A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer. In other words, each kind led to the other in different situation, or left bitter scars upon the child’s psychology through different ways. “It is difficult to draw casual relationships between parenting behaviors and outcomes experienced by children particularly when some outcomes may not be evident until later or when some outcomes are due to the accumulated effect of parenting practices and environment” (English :39)

Accordingly, the present study endeavored to investigate the issue of child abuse through the examination of Dave Pelzer’s *A Child Called It*; since the theme of Child Abuse and Patterns of Survival is complicated, broad and calls for a rigorous effort to explore one of the most terrible dangers that smashed children who suffered from child

abuse. The study also attempts to broaden our comprehension to the term and acts of child abuse which are practiced by parents against their children and to investigate patterns of survival that children managed to protest against the injustice inflicted upon them, an attempt would bring some clarity and relevance to our definition of abuse to express their dilemma and to let us navigate within their feelings, needs and sufferings. To meet the objectives of this study, it is of great importance to investigate and describe the process of child abuse by examining one of the most outstanding autobiographical novels in the history of American literature as *A Child Called It* by Dave Pelzer. Examining the narrative of the protagonist, the unique characteristics of abusive experiences, the context of abuse, and the process of labeling experiences as abusive surfaced can be regarded as the most important issues manipulated throughout the study. Moreover, the abusive interaction between the protagonist and his mother, the son-mother relationship and son-father relationship and the protagonist's attempts of survival are all examined. Emerging themes include: the factors which motivate Dave Pelzer as a victim/survivor to make disclosures of his trauma; the nature and effectiveness of help and support offered to him as a victim/survivor; the level of priority given to the needs of victim/survivor; and issues concerned with social isolation, frustration and hatred are all of great importance. The concluding discussion highlights vital issues for children who suffered the same feeling of child abuse, giving them a real experience of survival.

Dave Pelzer's *A Child Called It* achieved a worldwide fame and recognition among the history of American literature; it can be regarded as one of the most marvelous novels in the American literature. "Dave Pelzer received personal commendations from three presidents and several world leaders, was named as one of the *Ten Outstanding Young Americans in 1993*, and was the only American to be honored as one of *The Outstanding Young Persons of the World in 1994*. These are remarkable accomplishments for a young man who only a few years before had suffered degrading brutality at the hands of an alcoholic and emotionally unstable mother". (Moore: 31) It is a heart wrenching true story about one survivor child lived within one of the most heartless abusive families in California history. The book based on a true experience of the author Dave Pelzer. His childhood was a world of starvation, cruelty, humiliation, victimization, and abusing from the age of four until his rescue at the age of twelve. "The graphic depictions of the beatings starvation, and mental games his mother imposed on him are almost unbearable to read" (Moore: 31). He was banned from things other children enjoyed within their families. Instead of being protected and sheltered, Dave was abused and humiliated by his mother.

Dave's childhood is divided into three stages: the first, early childhood and before abuse (from birth to the age of four), the second stage is abused childhood (from the age of four to the age of twelve). The final stage was the rescue (from the age of twelve till now). His memories about early childhood were ultimately contrasted with his

second stage of life; his early childhood was characterized by its perfection, idealism, and happiness. He described his family as a “Brady Bunch” of the 1960s; he was part of a typical family; a good merciful father, an affectionate and kindhearted mother and lovely compassionate brothers. During that period, he enjoyed school and had a wide group of friends and a limitless imagination towards his future. He felt love from both of his parents. “In the years before I was abused, my family was the “Brady Bunch” of the 1960s. My two brothers and I were blessed with the perfect parents. Our every whim was fulfilled with love and care” (Pelzer: 15). During that period, Dave’s mother represents fairness, morality, goodness, discipline and many good qualities that were unfortunately contrasted with the embodiment of his mother through his second stage of life.

In early childhood, morality manifests itself as the ability to judge right from wrong, good from bad, fair from unfair, decent from indecent, and compassionate from callous behavior. Young children typically learn to make these distinctions by socially referencing their primary caregivers. For Dave Pelzer, however, the development of morality appeared to be complicated by the fact that extremes of good and bad behavior were embodied by the same person—his mother. (Duncan: P.172)

At the age of four, Dave’s life was totally changed; he was brutally beaten, stabbed and starved by his alcoholic mother, who had lost her brightness and love of life and became miserable to live with it;

she resorted to alcohol to get through the day and she became too mean to him and practiced various forms of abuse upon her helpless son. She would take out her negative feelings on Dave only. She no longer considered him as her son, but a slave, an “It”. From the title page of the novel, the reader can predict the disheartened, ruthless, hurting mother who called her son (It), (the boy)...etc. “That was literally the truth- his mother did not acknowledge him as a person, but as an "it".(Moore:P.31) These painful and hurting remarks at her son were how the book got its title. “Mother had even stopped using my name referring to me only as ‘the Boy’ ” (Pelzer: 50). Verbal abuse can be considered the first kind of abuse from which Dave suffered, since language seems to be as damaging to the fragile psyche of the child as physical abuse; it has a destructive impact upon the child’s psyche. He was depersonalized by his mother and treated as a thing. He was mistreated and abused and the traumatic effect of the abuse characterized Pelzer’s life. With this attempt to dehumanize his entire existence, Dave was considered her enemy who was ignored and denied; he became as an object, a thing, a slave, nothing in his mother’s eyes.

The second kind of abuse was physical which can be defined as “being hit on part of the body other than the bottom with an object” (Emery & Laumann-Billings: P. 123). Physical abuse can be categorized as the most obvious form of abuse which results in physical damage to a child; it may take the shape of punching, beating, flogging and blowing, biting, burning, hair pulling and snapping. In *A Child Called It*, Dave Pelzer suffered from all of these kinds at the same time.

He was beaten, snapped, scolded, starved and humiliated through various forms of dehumanization and abuse. “Abusive physical punishment consists of beating, kicking, punching, scolding, and otherwise inflicting bodily injury on a child” (Baumrind: P.177).

*Burning* was the first form of physical abuse Dave experienced; he was burnt by his mother through a bizarre scene when she ordered him to put his hand in the flame, because she claimed that he played on the grass and this was not true. Furthermore, she, in an unbearable scene, ordered him to lie on the stove to see him burning.

Once home, Mother ordered me to strip off my clothes and stand by the kitchen stove... Gripping my arm, Mother held it in the orange blue flame. My skin seemed to explode from the heat. I could smell the scorched hairs from my burnt arm...Finally I fell to the floor, on my hands and knees, and tried to blow cool air on my arm...Mother then ordered me to climb up onto the stove and lie on the flames so she could watch me burn. (Pelzer: P.27-28)

*Beating* was another form of physical aggression directed at Dave by his heartless mother, a fact that placed him at obvious risk of serious injury or death. Dave was beaten from his mother almost all the day except the school time; she acts like a terrorist in their home; he was feared from her to a great extent. In the first page of the novel, he described one of the frightful scenes in which he was the hero: “SMACK! Mother hits me in the face and I topple to the floor. I know better than to stand there and take the hit.” (Pelzer: P.3) Again, he said

that “my nose bled twice and I was missing a tooth.” (Pelzer: P.32) When he was beaten, she left him powerless like dead people; she kicked him as if they were in a battle between two adults. “While I stood shivering in my pyjamas, she’d smack me from one side of the kitchen to the other.” (Pelzer: P.32) In her article “*Child Mistreatment, Child Abuse*” Alice Miller denotes that “Humiliations, spankings and beatings, slaps in the face, betrayal, sexual exploitation, derision, neglect, etc. are all forms of mistreatment, because they injure the integrity and dignity of a child, even if their consequences are not visible right away”. (P.1)

Snapping was a part and parcel of Dave’s mother process of physical abuse; she always feared him by saying that she would kill him if he did not finish his household duties. “She told me if I didn’t do the dishes on time ... she’d kill me.” (Pelzer: P.54) Again, she used a knife to frighten him, screaming if he did not finish the dishes before the time, she would snap him. She screamed at him saying, “If you don’t finish on time, I’m going to kill you!” (Pelzer: P.51) He was not only responsible for finishing the dishes, but he was also responsible for cleaning the bathroom and scrubbing the tile floor through short time to save himself from starving, beating and snapping. “When I finished the dishes, I began cleaning the bathroom...I knew Mother was going to beat me, but I didn’t know how, when or where”. (Pelzer: P.44) Dave’s mother snapped him because he was overdue in finishing the dishes. He was snapped in his stomach; he described the scene as if it was a thriller movie. “Out of the corner of my eye I saw a

blurred object fly from her hand. A sharp pain erupted from just above my stomach. I tried to remain standing, but my legs gave out, and my world turned black. As I gained consciousness, I felt a warm sensation flowing from my chest. It took me a few seconds to realize where I was. I sat propped up on the toilet. I turned towards Russell who began chanting, "David's going to die. The Boy's going to die." (Pelzer: P.52). This situation gave him the feeling of relief to put an end to his dilemma; he believed that he was freed by this accident and the whole charades of living as a slave come to an end by his death. Unfortunately, he became a wounded slave who must do his chores during 30 minutes instead of 20. During that time, the clock was running, the pain was intensifying, his shirt was saturating with blood, and his feeling of humiliation and victimization reached to its peak.

There was no remorse in her eyes... Looking at me with no emotion, Mother stood up, washed her hands and told me I now had 30 minutes to finish the dishes. I shook my head, trying to understand what she had said. After a few seconds, Mother's message sunk in. Just as in the arm incident a few years ago, Mother was not going to acknowledge what had happened. I had no time for self-pity. (Pelzer: P.52-55)

*Humiliation* was also a form of abuse that took many different shapes and these shapes led to each other; for example, Dave's mother used food as her weapon and a metaphor for power and much of the struggle between Dave and his mother was over food; he suffered from starvation like homeless children. Dave was always hungry and complained from being starved from his mother.

Mother would “forget” to feed me any dinner. Breakfast wasn’t much better. On a good day, I was allowed leftover cereal portions from my brothers, but only if I performed all of my chores before going to school. At night I was so hungry, my stomach growled as if I were an angry bear. At night I lay awake concentrating on food. “Maybe tomorrow I’ll get dinner,” I said to myself. (Pelzer: P.30)

In *A Child Called It*, Dave’s mother main target was to humiliate and belittle him by many inhumane acts; he was the only person who was responsible for the household’s duties, otherwise, he was beaten, starved, snapped and punished. The first line of the novel reflects this fact “I’m late. I’ve got to finish the dishes on time, otherwise no breakfast; and since I didn’t have dinner last night, I have to make sure I get something to eat. (Pelzer: P.7) He was not allowed to eat with the other members of the family; he was only allowed to eat the leftover of his brothers’ bowls. “I finish the dishes, then my other chores. For my reward I receive breakfast – leftovers from one of my brothers’ cereal bowls”. (Pelzer: P.7) Even leftover was banned, when he took more than 20 minutes in finishing the dishes after his coming back from the school. She told him “You have 20 minutes! One minute, one second more and you go hungry again! Is that understood?” (Pelzer: P.51).

In summer, there was no food because he has no classmates to steal from them something to eat. He was allowed to take one meal every three days; food was a fantasy in June and July. He was a slave in his mother’s house; he was ordered to sit on the stairs during the

eating time of his family as if he was not a member of the family; his role after his family's eating was to clean everything before sleeping in the basement.

I had not eaten in three days. Because school was out for the summer, my options for finding food vanished. As always during dinner, I sat at the bottom of the stairs with my buttocks on top of my hands, listening to the sounds of "the family" eating. Mother now demanded that I sit on my hands with my head thrust backward, in a "prisoner of war" position. I let my head fall forward, half dreaming that I was one of them – a member of "the family. (Pelzer: P.50)

The absence of his father added to Dave's trauma, since when his father was away, he was not only starved for three days but also for ten days more. "During one period of time when Father was away, Mother starved me for about ten consecutive days". (Pelzer: P.61) Although his father was very passive with him, but he sometimes gave him some food to be strengthen. "I knew that I wasn't going to be fed that night, or the next. Since Father wasn't home, I would have a bad weekend. Sitting in the cool air in the backyard, on the steps, I could hear the sounds of Mother feeding my brothers". (Pelzer: P.68-69)

His *poor appearance* was a continuous plan of Dave's mother policy of humiliation; she let him wore threadbare clothing and looked as if he hadn't changed or washed his clothes in months and his smell was very bad; "Upon entering the room, all the students plug their noses and hiss at me. The substitute teacher waves her hands in front of her face.

She's not used to my smell" (Pelzer: P.10). She aimed at embarrassing him among his classmates. "My long sleeve shirt has more holes than Swiss cheese. It's the same shirt I've worn for about two years. Mother has me wear it every day as her way to humiliate me. My pants are just as bad, and my shoes have holes in the toes" (Pelzer: P.9)

*Sleeping* was Dave's punishment throughout the novel; it was a form by which she could socially isolate, humiliate and other him. Actually, Dave was banned from sleeping with his brothers; instead he was first ordered to sleep under the breakfast table and was covered by the newspaper. "After I finished the bowl of regurgitated hot dogs, Mother returned in her robe and threw a wad of newspapers at me. She informed me the papers were my blankets, and the floor under the table was now my bed. Again I shot a glance at Father, but he acted as though I was not even in the room. Forcing myself not to cry in front of them, I crawled, completely dressed, under the table, and covered myself with the newspapers, like a rat in a cage" (Pelzer: P.42) Then, she decided not to let him sleep with his family upstairs, he was only allowed to sleep downstairs in the garage on an old army cot and was covered by a newspaper in spite of the freezing weather downstairs. "Finally, Mother told me that I was no longer privileged enough to sleep upstairs, so I was banished downstairs to the garage. My bed was now an old army cot. To stay warm, I tried to keep my head close to the gas heater. But after a few cold nights, I found it best to keep my hands clamped under my arms and feet curled towards my buttocks". (Pelzer: P.42)

*Gas Chamber* was part of the thriller movie in which Dave lived; his mother was not desperate from the dreadful games with her son; she invented a game called Gas Chamber in which she sent her son to clean the bathroom and put a bucket filled with ammonia and Clorox, ordering him not to open the door of the bathroom. “As I breathed in the fumes, I collapsed and began spitting up. My throat felt like it was on fire. Within minutes it was raw. The gas from the reaction of the ammonia and Clorox mixture made my eyes water. I was frantic about not being able to meet Mother’s time limits for cleaning the bathroom”. (Pelzer: 63-64)

*P.O.W.* is the abbreviation of Prisoner of War which was Dave’s next form of humiliation and abuse; in other words, he was a prisoner in his mother’s house; he was humiliated to a great extent that he was ordered to sit outside the home when she took his brothers to the zoo and told him to sit in the position of prisoners of war. “I lost circulation in much of my body, as I sat on my hands in my “prisoner of war” position” (Pelzer: P.65). He turned out to be her slave; “I had become Mother’s slave”. (Pelzer: P.32) He was exhausted with fear from her hideous plans against him. He was drained with fear and could not expect her abusing plans. “The term "child abuse" naturally invites a far wider range of application than child battery”. (Hacking: P.270) After finishing his household duties, she called him upstairs and he was tired from fear and abuse. “Mother ordered me to return upstairs. I dreaded every step. I knew the time had come. She had drained me emotionally and

physically. I didn't know what she had planned. I simply wished Mother would beat me and get it over with". (Pelzer: P.45-46)

*Corner and mirror treatments* were part and parcel of the dreadful plans of Dave's mother; after the gas chamber, he was moved from what he called "Corner Treatment" to "Mirror Treatment" in which he was ordered to repeat that "I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy! I'm a bad boy!" I was then forced to stand, staring into the mirror" (Pelzer: P.21-22). He was humiliated and destroyed by his cruel mother who totally othered him from not only his brothers, but also humanity as a whole. "Whenever my brothers came into the room while I was at the mirror, they would look at me, shrug their shoulders and continue to play – as if I were not there. At first I was jealous, but soon I learned that they were only trying to save their own skins". (Pelzer: P.21-22)

Dave was graduated from the corner and mirror treatments and he was promoted to another dreadful game in which she drowned him in the bathroom. She filled the bathtub with cold water like refrigerator, putting his head into the water and asking him to keep his head below the water or she will make it longer next time. "As the tub began to fill with cold water, Mother tore off my clothes and ordered me to get into the tub. I got into the tub and laid down. A cold fear raced throughout my body. "Lower!" Mother yelled. "Put your face in the water like this!" She then bent over, grabbed my neck with both hands and shoved my head under the water" (Pelzer: p.66-67) Then, she ordered him to wear soaked clothes and stay outside in the shades

in order to lessen his chances to be dried and to increase his feeling of pain and humiliation.

The sun had begun to set, but half the yard was still in direct sunlight. I tried to sit in a sunny area, but Mother ordered me into the shade. In the corner of the backyard, while sitting in my POW position, I shivered. I wanted only a few seconds of heat, but with every passing minute my chances of drying off were becoming less and less. (Pelzer: P.66-67)

This game was one of the most favorable games to Dave's mother. Again, she used this game as a way to other Dave from his brothers especially in the time of playing or eating. For example, she opened her house for the boys to carve designs on pumpkins because it was the last week of October and this was a tradition every year. Dave's mother again filled the tub with cold water and warned him about keeping his head out of the water. "As the hours passed, I could feel the water slowly draining away. As the water drained, my body became colder and colder. I cupped my hands between my legs and laid the length of my body against the right side of the bathtub". (Pelzer: P.70)

This time, Dave's mother used another disguising way of abuse in which she ordered her son to eat the shit of his brother because he made too much noise. He was not allowed to go with his father or brothers to the super slide when they were in the cabin during the summer. He was ordered to sit on a chair in a corner, guessing about

his mother hideous new game. She brought one of his brother's diapers and ordered him to eat it in an unbearable scene which combined all kinds of abuse at the same time. She told him that:

“Eat it.”...“No way!” I said to myself...Mother smacked me from side to side. I clung to the chair, fearing if I fell off she would jump on me. “I said eat it!” she sneered. Switching tactics, I began to cry...Mother answered my crying with more blows to my face...She grabbed me by the back of the neck and led me to the kitchen. There, spread out on the counter top, was another full diaper. The smell turned my stomach. “Now, you are going to eat it!” she said...Again she repeated, “Eat it!” I held my breath. The smell was overpowering...She slammed my face into the diaper and rubbed it from side to side...I tried to stop the blood from escaping by breathing in. I snorted bits of defecation back up my nose with the blood. I threw my hands on the counter top and tried to pull myself out of her grip. I twisted from side to side with all my strength, but she was too powerful. (Pelzer: P.34-36)

Dave's mother was not only satisfied with making her son ate shit but also she decided to make him taste everything harmful and poisonous. She ordered him to drink a spoon of ammonia as a punishment for stealing food to satisfy his starving. At the beginning, he felt it as an easy punishment, but after drinking it his throat was burnt and he could not breathe or speak.

My throat seized. I stood wobbling in front of Mother, feeling as if my eyes were going to pop out of my skull. I fell on the floor, on my hands and knees. “Bubble!” my brain screamed. I pounded the kitchen floor with all my strength, trying to swallow, and trying to concentrate on the bubble of air stuck in my esophagus. Instantly I became terrified. Tears of panic streamed down my cheeks. After a few seconds, I could feel the force of my pounding fists weaken. My fingernails scraped the floor. My eyes became fixed on the floor. The colors seemed to run together. I began to feel myself drift away. I knew I was going to die. I came to my senses, and felt Mother slapping me on the back. (Pelzer: 46-47)

After swallowing ammonia, Dave’s mother invented a new game of humiliation by letting her son to drink a cocktail of Clorox and a dishwasher liquid soap “Although Mother never made me swallow ammonia again, she did make me drink spoonfuls of Clorox a few times. But Mother’s favorite game seemed to be dishwashing soap. (Pelzer: P.46). Accordingly, he stayed in the garage, suffering from the dryness of his mouth, a consequent problem in his stomach after drinking soap and Clorox and feeling of degradation and less self respect as a whole. “I felt so degraded; I cried like a baby. I had no self-respect of any kind. I closed my eyes trying to think of a way to clean myself and my clothes when suddenly, the garage door opened behind me. I turned my head to see Father, looking on dispassionately, as his son “mooned” him and as the brown seepage spilled into the bucket. I felt lower than a dog”. (Pelzer: P.46-47)

Due to the previous episodes of horrible humiliation and abuse, Dave passed through many conflicted feelings; in other words, there are a great number of results which can be regarded as ultimate consequences of the great amount of abuse he faced through his second stage of life. “Child abuse has devastating consequences for victims. Depending on its form(s), duration and severity, abuse may affect every aspect of a child’s life; it may have consequences that are psychological, physical, behavioural, academic, sexual, interpersonal, self-perceptual or spiritual”. (Day, Hibbert, Cadman: P.29) Accordingly, depression and frustration can be considered the first consequence of Dave’s constant feeling of humiliation and abuse. He reached to the peak of depression, saying “I wished I could dissolve and be gone forever. I wished I would never have to face another human being again. (Pelzer: P.34) His life was full of sadness and hopelessness; his morbid life was a mixture of scarce food, burning, endless chores, bathtub scene, gas chamber and cruel beating. He reached to a point of abuse which can hardly be identified because there was no external evidence; he instead felt internal bitterness, degradation and depression and his aspirations of freedom were all shattered. “My hope deteriorated and I began to believe that my life would never change. I thought I would be Mother’s slave for as long as I lived. With every passing day, my will power became weaker. I no longer dreamed of Superman or some imaginary hero who would come and rescue me”. (Pelzer: P.69) Furthermore, thinking of his mother’s hideous plans to humiliate him led Dave to hate arriving home and pray for the ending of the world. “That day at school I

prayed for the world to end...Running to the house from school that afternoon, my feet felt as though they were encased in blocks of cement” (Pelzer: P.43).

Beside his emotional depression and frustration, Dave’s second consequence of abuse may be resulted in his loss of his faith in God; he refused to believe in God anymore and Divine justice was an illusion. His mother was the only person who was responsible for his loss of faith; she pushed him by her abusive acts to give up believing in God. She was also the person in charge that nearly made him give up on himself and wished to be dead; if Dave had not been rescued by his school nurse, she would have probably succeed in her task. “I came to believe that for me, there was no God...No just God would leave me like this. I believed that I was alone in my struggle and that my battle was one of survival. By the time I had decided that there was no God, I had totally disconnected myself from all physical pain”. (Pelzer: P.77)

Dave felt as if his life was aimless; he became cold and hated everything including the sun, because he was not allowed to play with his friends under its beams and enjoy its warm presence. He became more revolutionary and wished to die as soon as possible.

At night I no longer dreamed, nor did I let my imagination work during the day...When I fell asleep, my soul became consumed in a black void...I was tired and told myself that I had one day less to live in this world. I shuffled through my chores, dreading every

moment of every day. With no dreams, I found that words like hope and faith were only letters, randomly put together into something meaningless – words only for fairy tales. (Pelzer: P.77)

Key to the experience of abuse is the total sense of social and psychological isolation that the child gradually acquires as a result of the consequent abuse throughout his/her development. Fear of meeting people, shyness, withdrawing from classmates and an introverted personality characterize the main features of the abused child. The feelings of victimization and isolation are maximized and aggravated by the consequent parent assaults against the body, the mind and the self of the developing child. “Over time, the accumulated cost of coping with unrelenting physical and psychological assaults interfered with his ability to initiate and sustain relationships with his father, brothers, classmates, teachers, and neighbors”. (Duncan: P.4) Due to his consequent exposition to various kinds of abuse, Dave expressed his feeling of social isolation, distancing, otherness and alienation from siblings and family members through the pages of his novel.

By this time I was no longer a member of the family. I existed, but there was little or no recognition. Mother had even stopped using my name; referring to me only as The Boy. I was not allowed to eat meals with the family, play with my brothers, or watch television. I was grounded to the house. I was not allowed to look at or speak to anybody. When I returned to the house from school, I immediately

accomplished the various chores Mother assigned me. When the chores were finished, I went directly to the basement, where I stood until summoned to clean off the dinner table and wash the dishes. (Pelzer: P.31-32)

Dave's feelings of social isolation were noticeable and felt by everyone. Moreover, he was not allowed to ride the family station wagon like his brothers. "I was not allowed to ride to school in the family station wagon. Mother had me run to school". (Pelzer: P.36) He was also prevented from watching TV with his family members. "She decided that I was banned from watching television, forever. I was to go without dinner and accomplish whatever chores Mother could dream up. After another thrashing, I was sent to the garage to stand until Mother called me to go to bed". (Pelzer: P.25) Furthermore, he was not allowed to go to the bathroom without permission. "I so badly wanted to run upstairs and go to the bathroom, but I knew without Mother's permission to move, I was a prisoner." (Pelzer: P.44-45). Even within his school, he was isolated from his classmates because of his poor appearance, bad smell and stealing food. "At school I was a total outcast. No other kid would have anything to do with me...I had no one to talk to or play with. I felt all alone" (Pelzer: P.36)

The passive reaction of the family members towards the abused child who witnessed the abuse or assault episode against the child and ignore it intensified his feelings of alienation and otherness. At the

beginning of the novel, Dave's father seemed to be his protector and hero; he loved his father and preferred to be with him in order to be saved from other abusive games. "Father became my protector... If he sat in his favorite chair to read the newspaper, I parked myself at his feet...I knew that as long as I stayed by his side, no harm would come to me". (Pelzer: P.23) He continuously tried to help his son by giving him some food and trying to convince his wife to change her cruel treatment to Dave; this fact is clear in many situations. For example, "Father was my only hope, and he did all he could to sneak me scraps of food...He tried to get Mother to change her mind about feeding me. He even attempted to make deals, promising her the world. But all his attempts were useless. Mother was as solid as a rock. If anything, her drunkenness made it worse. Mother became more like a monster". (Pelzer: P.32) His mother, in turn, began to spoil their relationship and he began to warn him from making bad things and advised him to be a good boy. "One day before he left for work, I received a dreadful shock. After he said goodbye to Ron and Stan, he knelt down, held my shoulders tightly and told me to be a "good boy". Mother stood behind him with her arms folded across her chest, and a grim smile on her face. (Pelzer: P.23)

Afterwards, Dave's father began to be passive towards his abused son. When Dave was stabbed, his father showed passivity and helplessness. He told him go back to do the household duties because he wanted his wife not to be upset. Dave was desperate with his father's reaction and stood before him in total shock and became sure

that his mother controlled everything. At that situation, his love and respect to his father were gone and his dreams of being saved by his fathers were shattered.

I stood before Father, waiting for him to turn his page and see me. When he did, I stuttered, “Father...Mo...Mo...Mother stabbed me. He didn’t even raise an eyebrow...All my respect for Father was gone. The savior I had imagined for so long was a phony. I felt more angry at him than I did at Mother. I wished that somehow I could fly away, but the throbbing pain brought me back to reality. (Pelzer: P.54-55)

Again, when his mother ordered him to eat his vomiting, Dave’s father was very passive and does nothing to protect his son. He stood like a statue without saying any word to his mother or even to prevent that dreadful abuse to happen to his helpless son. Dave said that he tried to swallow without tasting until his mother screamed at him and ordered him to chew that vomiting “I closed my eyes and screamed to myself to keep it from coming back up into my mouth. I didn’t open my eyes until I was sure my stomach wasn’t going to reject my cafeteria meal. When I did open them, I stared at Father who turned away to avoid my pain. At that moment I hated Mother to no end, but I hated Father even more. The man who had helped me in the past, just stood like a statue while his son ate something even a dog wouldn’t touch”. (Pelzer: P.41-42)

Throughout the novel, Dave's brothers also showed passivity towards their brother's abuse, a fact which may be attributed to their youngness, their mother's superiority and their fear from her. When Dave was ordered to put his head under the water in the bathtub treatment, his brothers came to see him, a fact which led him to feel degradation and low self-esteem. "The bathtub and the backyard treatment soon became routine. At times when I laid in the tub, my brothers brought their friends to the bathroom to look at their naked brother. Their friends often scoffed at me. "What did he do this time?" they'd ask. Most of the time my brothers just shook their heads, saying, "I don't know." (Pelzer: P.68)

As a result, Dave felt hatred to everyone around him; he hated his mother because of the great amount of abuse he received from her. "I hated Mother most and wished that she were dead. But before she died, I wanted her to feel the magnitude of my pain and my loneliness for all these years" (Pelzer: P.78-80) He also hated his father because he failed to save him from his cruel mother, "I also hated Father. He was fully aware of the hell I lived in, but he lacked the courage to rescue me as he had promised so many times in the past. (Pelzer: P.78-80) Similarly, he hated his passive and coward brothers because they were part of the abuse treatment; their mother used them to increase Dave's feeling of humiliation and degradation. "The boys who lived upstairs were no longer my brothers. Sometimes in years past, they had managed to encourage me a little. But in the summer of 1972 they took turns hitting me and appeared to enjoy throwing their

weight around. It was obvious that they felt superior to the family slave”. (Pelzer: P.78-80) Even the sun was a reason of his feeling of hatred, because he cannot profit from its beams or to play under its warmth. “Inside, my soul became so cold I hated everything. I even despised the sun, for I knew I would never be able to play in its warm presence. I cringed with hate whenever I heard other children laughing, as they played outside”. (Pelzer: P.78-80) He also hated his neighbors, relatives and everyone knew his miserable and acted passively towards it. He even hated himself at the end for being not strong enough to face his cruel and heartless mother. Thus, he believed that he deserved whatever took place to him whenever he failed to have enough courage to be survived.

I came to despise the neighbors, my relatives and anybody else who had ever known me and the conditions under which I lived. Hate was all I had left. At the core of my soul, I hated myself more than anybody or anything...“I hate myself. I hate myself.” Her efforts paid off. A few weeks before I started the fifth grade, I hated myself so much that I wished I were dead. (Pelzer: P78-80)

Throughout the novel, there is no distinction between physical, emotional, and verbal abuse; all that differentiates one from the other is the abuser’s way and selection of weapons; a fact which resulted in the destruction of the victim’s mental and emotional health. “Abused children often experience a number of emotional disturbances. Low self-esteem and depression are common, as well as emotions of anger,

hostility, fear, humiliation, and an inability to express feelings – all of which impact on children and young people’s mental health. The emotional consequences can be devastating”.(Day, Hibbert, Cadman,:P.29) In *A Child Called It*, Dave’s mother used everything imaginable and unimaginable that led her victim to be hopeless, lack self respect and dignity, and feel subhuman or even an animal and suffer from alienation and loneliness among his family.

Alone in the garage, I felt I was losing control of everything. I craved food... But more than anything, I wanted just an ounce of respect; one little bit of dignity. Sitting there on my hands, I could hear my brothers opening the refrigerator to get their desserts, and I hated it. I looked at myself. My skin had a yellowish tint, and my muscles were thin and stringy. Whenever I heard one of my brothers laugh at a television show, I cursed their names. “Lucky bastards! Why doesn’t she take turns and beat up on one of them for a change?” I cried to myself as I vented my feelings of hatred (Pelzer: P.63).

Mother-son relationship represents one of the main bewildered issues in *A Child Called It*; it can be identified as The Villain and The Victim theme; she is the embodiment of the villainy, wickedness and evil throughout the novel. He said “My relationship with Mom drastically changed from discipline that developed into a kind of lifestyle that grew out of control. It became so bad at times, I had no strength to crawl away – even if it meant saving my life” (Pelzer: P.21). Dave’s mother did not deserve the rank of mother; she is

portrayed as the Bitch, malevolent, cruel and abusive who was barked like dogs at Dave and his brothers. “Even when she barked at one of my brothers, I’d run to hide in our room,” (Pelzer: P.21); She was very creative in humiliating Dave and lowering his self-esteem. She was not satisfied with beating, starving, humiliating and snapping; she also slapped, punched, beaten, spited, burnt and degraded him in many ways. He expressed his fear from her throughout the novel; for example, “I had become afraid of Mom. Very afraid” (Pelzer: P.21). He feared from her voice. “Her voice scares me”. (Pelzer: P.13). Beside his hatred to her voice, he also hated her existence as a whole to an unbearable extent, since she was always ordering impossible assignments and chores. “When she yelled at us, her voice changed from the nurturing mother to the wicked witch. Soon, the sound of Mother’s voice began to send tremors down my spine”. (Pelzer: P.21). When he believed that he will be taken to the jail instead of the custody, he was very happy for not going to her again. “Now I know I am going to jail. “Good,” I tell myself. “At least she won’t be able to beat me if I’m in jail.” (Pelzer: P.12). Again, after the burning scene, he regarded the school as his refuge. “The summer after the burn incident, school became my only hope of escape”. (Pelzer: P.30)

The behavior of Dave’s mother against him let the readers and Dave himself wandered about the reasons behind her cruel, inhumane and abusive treatment against her child. He said “I stood before her dumbstruck. I didn’t know what to do or say. All I could think of was “Why?” I couldn’t understand why she treated me the way she did. I

was so close that I could smell every morsel. I knew she wanted me to cave in, but I stood fast and held back the tears” (Pelzer: P.62-63). In spite of the fact that all of the causes of child abuse cannot be counted easily, but after examining Dave’s *A Child Called It*, the most common explanations revolve around are as follows: First, Dave’s mother was addicted to alcohol which was her resort throughout the novel. Dresang (1997:133) comments that “alcohol and drug abuse make life unpredictable, uncontrollable, and irrational”. Second, Being a single mother for the traveling of her husband, and his working twenty-four hour shift may cause problems between them and stressed her nervous. It was well known that children in single family may be at high risk of all types of abuse more than children in other family structures, because parents take out their anger and revenge from their children. “As a small child, I realized Mom was as different as night and day when Father was home from work. When Mom fixed her hair and put on nice clothes, she seemed more relaxed. I loved it when Dad was home. It meant no beatings, mirror treatments or long searches for her missing things”. (Pelzer: P.23).

Third, although we haven’t information about this fact throughout the novel, Dave’s mother may suffer from a history of child abuse within her family, because most parents who abuse their children were at once abused as a child. “A qualitative study that explored abused women's experiences of abusive mothering behavior concluded that women's abuse of their children can be seen as a consequence of their own experiences of domestic violence, though

the authors also point at the women's agency and responsibility in occasions when they chose to use violence against their children".(Peled:P.327) Similarly, in one of the US researches committed on representative sample of children and their abusers, Peled noted that "women with recent domestic violence victimization were more likely to report physical aggression or neglectful behaviors toward their children than women with remote or no domestic violence victimization". (P.327)

The fourth reason may be attributed to the fact that abusers may be exposed to gender violence. "The social construction of masculinity and femininity, and traditional cultural notions of the 'right and proper role' for women and men contribute to the creation of an environment which nurtures gender violence". (Bower: P.85) Several studies affirmed that most cases of violence resulted in a high likelihood of abusing children who live within these families, because abused mothers took revenge from their children who were the reason for being abused from their fathers. "Child abuse and neglect in the context of domestic violence can occur in many patterns: a batter may be abusing both mother and children; children may experience neglect because of the impact of the violence on caregivers; children may be injured during incidents of adult domestic violence; or children may be abused by a mother who is herself being abused" (Appeal: P.228) However, there is also no evidence in the novel that Dave's mother was abused from her husband. In contrast, he was very passive with

his abused son and tried to make his wife satisfied regardless of anything else.

Fifth, poverty and economic crisis may be intensified the chances that a child will be abused. “In a briefing published in Agenda in 1997, Resources Aimed at the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (RAPCAN) argued that several forms of child abuse were directly linked to poverty”. (Bower: P.84) Economic crises represent one of the probable reasons for child abuse, because there has been discovered that there is a relationship between the family income and child abuse, since money is in short supply and this fact affected the stability of the parents. “The poverty that remains the articulation of the inequities of our history creates a climate in which children are especially and increasingly vulnerable to abuse and neglect”. (Bower: P.85) This economic shortage may be attributed to the social and political circumstances of the United States during the time of the novel, since the welfare state began to decrease their support to children and poor single mothers during that time. However, Dave’s mother abused her son more than her other children, a fact which made readers doubted about the justification of this secret.

This cynical view can be combined with the fact that during the 1980s there was a radical decline, in the United States, in the amount of federal and state funds available for children and poor single parents. The welfare state gradually withdrew one mode of intervention and replaced it by another. A mild version of this

observation is that the child abuse movement serves to conceal the decline in social support for children. (Hacking: P.262)

Sixth, the shaky mental health of Dave's mother can be considered one of the main reasons among others of child abuse; Dave's mother may be suffered from many psychological problems, because it is well known that people are not in their good mental health may behave like Dave's mother and harm their children whether intentional or not. Finally, the desire for regaining and practicing her domination and superiority may be also considered one of the reasons of her cruelty; the process of child abuse in *A Child Called It* stems from his mother's sadistic behavior which results in her inner desire to torture Dave. This sadistic behavior may be resulted from her lower self esteem, since people who suffered from inferiority and lack of self-confidence may behave violently and aggressively with the other especially weak and helpless targets. Besides, they tried to dominate the other in order to enhance and compensate this feeling of inferiority. Dave's mother had lost her brightness and love of life due to the absence of her husband. She, in turn, resorted to alcohol to get through the rest of her life. She gradually cut her relationships with the others and began to have poor relationships with her relatives and neighbors, a fact which revealed her inner feelings of anger and insecurities. Accordingly, she may be viewed as a victim and victimizer at the same time. In this respect, Peled confirmed that the feminist theory failed to provide a full explanation of the morally, emotionally and theoretically challenging

duality of victims who are abusers, abusers who are victims. This multiple identity of victim and victimizer has to be investigated and placed to be discussed by feminist scholars and to be put on the agenda of the theoreticians in the area of domestic violence.

If feminism is to continue serving as a leading social force in the development of theory and practice in the domain of domestic violence, it must own the problem of women's use of violence in general and particularly toward their children. How would an alternative feminist attempt to theorize, study and intervene with abused women who abuse their children look like? (P.328)

Generally, children were characterized by helplessness and innocence in dealing with severe issues as in *A Child Called It*, but after examining Dave's novel, the hero showed a new attitude which was not dominant among children; he was a survivor. Accordingly, Moore affirms that "His will to survive against all odds is inspiring" (P.31). This fact is also stressed by Duncan who denotes that, "Throughout *A Child Called It*, Dave described his ability to take control over his emotions. He wrote about remaining calm in the context of his mother's heinous punishments" (P.170) Due to the consequent physical, emotional, verbal and psychological abuse, Dave managed many unpredictable forms of survival to protect himself against his stressor, a fact which was apparent many times throughout the narrative. "Mother can beat me all she wants, but I haven't let her take away my will to somehow survive" (Pelzer: P.3). Again, he said

“I act timid, nodding to her threats”. (Pelzer: P.3). “I used my head to survive. For the first time, I had won!” (Pelzer: P.29). He showed strength and independence in many situations, for example, when he was stabbed by her and his shirt was saturated with blood, he said to himself “I told myself. “I don’t need that bitch’s help.” (Pelzer: P.58). He believed that it was he who was responsible for freeing himself by himself. “I believed that I was alone in my struggle and that my battle was one of survival”. (Pelzer: P.77). He showed strength and self-control in many situations; he emotionally and disengaging distanced himself from his reality. “I held in my tears, refusing to cry because I didn’t want to give her the satisfaction of my defeat. (Pelzer: P.77) In this concern, Duncan quotes:

The Wolins defined the strength of independence as one’s ability to establish and maintain boundaries between oneself and one’s circumstances. Although independence may be mistaken for a fear of intimacy, the Wolins hypothesized that this strength helps children of alcoholic parents to hold themselves physically, emotionally, or cognitively apart from their circumstances and to find some semblance of calm in the eye of the storm. According to the Wolins, independence begins as physically straying, evolves into emotionally disengaging, and culminates as cognitively separating from one’s troubled circumstances. (P.170)

As a result, Dave managed many patterns for survival, for example when he was beaten from his mother; he exaggerated his pain

in order to escape from other beats. “One of my resistance techniques was to lie on the floor acting as though I didn’t have the strength to stand. That tactic didn’t last long. Mother would yank me up by the ears and yell into my face with her bourbon breath, for minutes at a time” (Pelzer: P.52). In this situation, he tried to convey to his mother that he was strong enough to be defeated by her different unbearable ways of victimization. “I wanted to just lie down and quit, but the promise I made years ago kept me going. I wanted to show The Bitch that she could beat me only if I died, and I was determined not to give in, even to death”. (Pelzer: P.55) When she ordered him to drink dishwasher soap, he pretends that he drank it but in reality he refused to swallow the soap after he finished the kitchen chores.

Mother didn’t always win. Once, during a week when I was not allowed to attend school, she squeezed the soap into my mouth and told me to clean the kitchen. She didn’t know it, but I refused to swallow the soap...I would not allow myself to swallow. When I finished the kitchen chores, I raced downstairs to empty the trash. I smiled from ear to ear, as I closed the door behind me and spit out the mouthful of pink soap...After I finished, I felt as though I had won the Olympic Marathon. I was so proud for beating Mother at her own game. Even though Mother caught me in most of my attempts to feed myself, she couldn’t catch me all the time. (Pelzer: P.48)

Dave’s fight for food throughout the novel can be considered one of the most important patterns of survival; when his mother

starved him throughout his staying with her, he was not also helpless towards her trails. Dave skillfully tried to solve his problem through trial and error in order to be satisfied and survived. For example, he began to steal food through many ways. In this respect, “Children who take food from others may be suffering from neglect” (Meddin & Rosen: P. 27) First, he began to steal food from other children when they were playing outside. But after few days, his plan was discovered by his classmates and the administration of the school. “Soon after I had begun to dream about food, I started stealing food at school...Within a short time; my classmates began to hate me. The teacher told the principal, who in turn informed Mother. The fight for food became a cycle. The principal’s report to Mother led to more beatings and less food for me at the house”. (Pelzer: P.30-31)

Due to his endless household duties before going to school added to his starvation, Dave was sometimes late to steal food from his friends in the school. “Because I’m so late with my chores, I have to be driven to school. Usually I run to school, arriving just as class begins, with no time to steal any food from other kids’ lunch boxes. (Pelzer: P.7-8). He was known as ‘David the Food Thief’ among his classmates, a fact that added to his feelings of loneliness “At school I was a total outcast. No other kid would have anything to do with me. During the lunch recesses, I stuffed the sandwiches down my throat as I listened to my former friends make up songs about me. “David the Food Thief” and “Pelzer- Smellzer” were two of the playground favorites. I had no one to talk to or play with. I felt all alone”. (Pelzer:

P.36) When his mother knew about his stealing food from his classmates, she punished him in an inhumane ways; first; she prevented him from food at all. “Mother knew why I stole food and so did Dad, but she still refused to feed me. The more I craved food, the more I tried to come up with a better plan to steal it.” (Pelzer: P.38-39). Second; she beaten him till he was vomiting. “I came to my senses, and felt Mother slapping me on the back. The force of her blows made me burp, and I was able to breathe again. (Pelzer: P.47). When his plans to steal from his classmates were failed, he began to steal it from the grocery before going to school in order to survive. “Suddenly without thinking, I grabbed the first thing I saw on the shelf, ran out of the store and raced back to school. Clutched tightly in my hand was my prize – a box of graham crackers”. (Pelzer: P.38) After the discovering of this arrangement, he began his next plan by begging for food on his way to school in order to digest the food before going back to home. He ran extra fast and knocked the doors on his way, asking for a lunch box because he lost his own “Once, during my midnight fantasies, I came up with the idea of begging for food on my way to school. Even though the after school vomits inspection was carried out every day when I returned to the house from school, I thought that any food I ate in the morning would be digested by the afternoon”. (Pelzer: P.43)

Due to his feeling of starvation, Dave was indifferent to the kind of food he ate or swallowed; he wanted to satisfy his hunger at anyway. As a result, he began to eat after the dog, “Later, as I put

away some pots and pans in a lower cabinet, I crawled on my hands and knees to the dogs' dish and ate what was left of the pancakes. As I ate, I could smell traces of the dogs, but I ate anyway. It hardly bothered me. I fully realized that if The Bitch caught me eating what rightfully belonged to the dogs, I would pay dearly; but getting food any way I could was my only means of existing" (Pelzer: P. 78). When his mother discovered his eating of the dog's leftover, Dave was punished and began to eat from the garbage the leftover of their family's food. He as a result felt extreme pain and became too sick for two weeks, but this idea was his only hope for surviving. "I finished the dishes as fast as I could and emptied the garbage in the garage. My mouth watered at the sight of the food, and I gingerly picked the good pieces out while scraping bits of paper or cigarette butts away, and gobbled the food as fast as I could". (Pelzer: P.39)

When Dave's mother discovered his new plan, she caught him eating from the garbage and she, as a result, began to put ammonia in the trash can in order to make him gave up from eating from the garbage. "Mother sensed I was getting food some way, so she began sprinkling ammonia in the trash can". (Pelzer: P.39) Accordingly, he again thought of stealing frozen lunches from the cafeteria of the school. "After getting caught stealing from other kids' lunches, my next idea was to rip off frozen lunches from the school cafeteria". (Pelzer: P.39- 40) When she knew about his robbery, she began a series of horror acts by dragging him into the bathroom through unbearable scene. He said "Pulling me around to face the toilet, she

ordered me to shove my finger down my throat. I resisted. I tried my old trick of counting to myself, as I stared into the porcelain toilet bowl, “One ... two ...” I never made it to three. Mother rammed her finger into my mouth, as if she wanted to pull my stomach up through my throat”. (Pelzer: P.40) She was not satisfied with these acts, but she ordered him to eat what he had vomited. “I tried to swallow without tasting, until I felt a hand clamp on the back of my neck. “Chew it!” Mother snarled, “Eat it! Eat it all!” she said, pointing to the saliva”. (Pelzer: P.41-42) At the end of the fourth chapter, ‘The Fight for Food’, Dave felt some power whenever he tried to get hold of something to eat. When he has been capable to steal frozen food from the garage freezer, he felt empowerment and victory. “As I held a piece of frozen pumpkin pie crust or a bit of a taco shell, I was the king, and like a king on his throne, I gazed down on my food and smiled” (Pelzer: P. 79).

Imagination played an important part among other patterns of survival in allowing Dave to transform troubling events into tolerable and even satisfying experiences. Dave was creative when he used imagination to reframe his bad life experiences to bear what others could not tolerate; he used his imagination in order to survive and this fact was clear in many situations. “Sometimes at night I would wake up and try to imagine I was a real person, sleeping under a warm electric blanket, knowing I was safe and that somebody loved me. My imagination worked for awhile, but the cold nights always brought me back to my reality”. (Pelzer: P.42) Again, when he was prevented

from playing with his brothers and friends with the command of his mother, he said “I could hear the laughter and screams of the children playing. For a moment I closed my eyes and imagined I was one of them. I felt warm inside. I smiled” (Pelzer: P.44) He affirmed his humanity by saying “I could hear” in the last quotation, but his mother insisted to treat him as inhumane being. Sometimes he imagined himself as a king who was dressed in rich clothes and ate well “In the darkness of the garage I closed my eyes, dreaming I was a king dressed in the finest robes, eating the best food mankind had to offer”. (Pelzer: P.49) Again when he was stabbed by his mother and he bled from everywhere half walked and half crawled, he showed strength and tolerance in front of her. He imagined himself as a character in a comic book like Superman in order to elope from his reality. “I felt proud of myself. I imagined myself like a character in a comic book, who overcame great odds and survived...In my dream, I flew through the air in vivid colors. I wore a cape of red ... I was Superman” (Pelzer: P.59). Even when he was hungry and tried to feed himself, he used imagination to be fed and satisfied, since he could just eat in dreams. “At the house, while standing for hours in the garage, I passed the time by imagining new ways to feed myself”. (Pelzer: P.36) While sleeping in the freezing garage, he told himself that:

At night I was so hungry, my stomach growled as if I were an angry bear. At night I lay awake concentrating on food. “Maybe tomorrow I’ll get dinner,” I said to myself. Hours later, I would drift off to sleep, fantasizing about food. I mainly dreamt of colossal

hamburgers with all the fixings. In my dreams I seized my prize and brought it to my lips...As I brought the hamburger closer to my face, I opened my mouth to devour my prize, but nothing happened. I'd try again and again, but no matter how hard I struggled, I could not taste a morsel of my fantasy. (Pelzer: P.30)

Time can also be regarded as a part of Dave's patterns of survival. In the burning scene, time represented one of the main strategies for rescuing him from pain and to be survived. "Suddenly I began to realize the longer I could keep myself off the top of the stove, the better my chances were for staying alive...In order to survive, I had to buy time". (Pelzer: P.28) Similarly, when she ordered him to eat his brother's shit, time was the only means to save him. "Without the clock, I felt helpless. I knew I needed to lock my concentration on something, in order to keep any kind of control of the situation". (Pelzer: P.35)

Accordingly, Dave Pelzer's *A Child Called It* invented new patterns of survival which marked his novel. The various trials of stealing food, imagination and time can be regarded as helping hands to serve Dave's survival. He proved that he was a strong, independent and triumphant character; a fact which prepared him to enter his final stage of life which is The Rescue in which his school nurse played a key role in freeing him from the slavery of his mother. Generally, some abusive children sought refuge from their abusive parents by turning to other family members or to other families as a whole.

However, teachers professionally acted this role for having the chances to spend more time with children throughout school day. Besides, they are more conscious of the children's circumstances and home affairs due to the parent- teacher consequent meetings throughout the school year. Thus, in most cases the cooperation between the teacher and police resulted in the disclosing of the majority of child abuse cases. "Since teachers are potentially the best-situated of all professionals to advocate for children, their definitions of child abuse are critical to the welfare of children". (Andrew: P. 42)

In *A Child Called It*, Dave was saved by his school teacher from the abuses of his mother. One day, when his mother refused to let him riding her wagon to school because he was late in finishing the dishes, the school nurse watched his miserable state and noticed a hit above his eye. The refusal of Dave's mother to ride her wagon became the first step in liberating and rescuing him. "One morning at school, I was told to report to the school nurse. She questioned me about my clothes and the various bruises that spanned the length of both my arms. At first I told her what Mother had instructed me to tell her. But as my trust in her began to grow, I told her more and more about Mother". (Pelzer: P.69-70) Dave's life began to be changed; he felt the warmth of feeling from his school teacher; an unusual emotional feeling he missed throughout his life among his family. When the teacher treated him nicely, he was very happy with her treatment, since she treated him as a real person, a human being and a respected creature. "The substitute teacher had been so nice to me. She treated

me like a real person, not like some piece of filth lying in the gutter. As I sat outside feeling sorry for myself, I wondered where she was and what she was doing. I didn't understand it at the time, but I had a crush on her". (Pelzer: P.68)

Dave struggled to prove that he was not a bad boy as his mother always called him; his aspirations in life was to love and be loved from the others around him. "Given Dave's life experiences, one would expect that he would be hard-pressed to trust in the benevolence of others. Nevertheless, despite the fact that his mother had stopped using his name and forbid him from eating with his family, playing with his brothers, or riding in the family car on the way to school, Dave's tenacious longing to be loved by another person prevailed". (Duncan: P.171) When his teachers knew the truth about his mother, he was first ashamed of himself, but he then discovered the importance of making them know everything about her because they knew that he was not a bad boy as his mother always said to him through Corner and Mirror treatments. "It is so important for them to know that I'm not a bad boy. I want so much to be liked, to be loved. I turn down the hall. Mr Ziegler is holding Miss Woods. She is crying. I can hear her snuffle. She gives me another hug and quickly turns away. Mr Ziegler shakes my hand. "Be a good boy," he says. "Yes, sir. I'll try," is all I can say". (Pelzer: P.12)

Dave was freed when he was headed towards the custody of The San Mateo Juvenile Department. He even noticed the sign "THE

MOST BEAUTIFUL HIGHWAY IN THE WORLD” (Pelzer: P.13). The officer told him “David Pelzer, You’re free” (Pelzer: P.13) Actually, Dave was freed finally; he was informed that he had nothing to be worry about hence after and the officer affirmed that his mother is never going to hurt or abuse him again. During that moment, he began to feel the reflection of the sunbeams from which he was deprived to entertain or profit according to the orders of his mother. “I lean back against the seat. A reflection from the sun hits my eyes. I turn away from the rays as a single tear runs down my cheek. “I’m free?” (Pelzer: P. 14).

The Epilogue was written after many years when Dave is now an adult and is married with a son; this fact is proven by his using of the present tense and italics form of writing; it also helps to set him off from the main narrative and to stress that Dave is living a completely fresh new arena of his life, free from the shadows of his memories and free from the prison of his past. He proved that he was a survivor who decided to close the pages of his past and began a new life which was totally contrasted with its first part. He felt lucky and regarded his past as a black dark hole which must take no part of his future life except for strengthening and pushing him for success. Although he was exposed to different kinds of challenges during his childhood, Dave decided to be strong enough to start a new kind of life and used his painful past as a means for survival and victory. He cannot imagine that he was still alive; he started his Epilogue saying that:

I'm so alive. I'm so lucky. My dark past is behind me now. As bad as it was, I knew even back then, in the final analysis, my way of life would be up to me. I made a promise to myself that if I came out of my situation alive; I had to make something of myself. I would be the best person that I could be. Today I am. I made sure I let go of my past, accepting the fact that that part of my life was only a small fraction of my life. I knew the black hole was out there, waiting to suck me in and forever control my destiny – but only if I let it. I took positive control over my life. I'm so blessed. The challenges of my past have made me immensely strong inside. I adapted quickly, learning how to survive from a bad situation. (Pelzer: P.91)

Throughout The Epilogue, Dave proved that he was not ashamed of what happened to him in the past; he was, in turn, proud emerging intact from the dark years of abuse. The way he reports on his life in the Epilogue conveys Dave's message to other abused children that almost anything can be overcome and conquered; he discovered the secrets which pushed the person to succeed and survive. He began to retrieve his faith in God and introduced a great thanks to the people who left a great impact upon him. He concluded his message by saying that as long as you want to survive and succeed; you have to overcome memorizing the past, energize yourself to the future and to acquire a lesson from your cruises and dilemmas.

I learned the secret of internal motivation. My experience gave me a different outlook on life that others may never know. I have a vast

appreciation for things that others may take for granted. Along the way I made a few mistakes, but I was fortunate enough to bounce back. Instead of dwelling on the past, I maintained the same focus that I had taught myself years ago in the garage, knowing the good Lord was always over my shoulder, giving me quiet encouragement and strength when I needed it most. My blessings also mean having the opportunity to meet so many people who had a positive impact on my life. The endless sea of faces, prodding me, teaching me to make the right choices, and helping me in my quest for success (Pelzer: P.91-94).

In his Afterwards, Dave expressed his feeling and opinion about the issue of child abuse; he compared between himself as a child who felt degradation and bitterness of abuse and as an adult. He recognized that there are a great number of children who suffered the same agony of child abuse and cannot write their dreadful experience on papers. Dave believed that he was not the only child who was abused from his mother, but he was lucky enough to write about his dreadful experiences though his novel. As an adult, Dave was conscious enough that there were thousands of children who suffered from abuse and feared from unveiling their experiences. Besides, he attracted the attention to the difference between *discipline* and *over discipline* which can be categorized as child abuse.

As a child living in a dark world, I feared for my life and thought I was alone. As an adult I know now that I was not alone. There were thousands of other abused children. Sources of information vary, but it

is estimated that one in five children are physically, emotionally or sexually abused in the United States. Unfortunately, there are those among the uninformed public who believe that most abuse is nothing more than parents exerting their “right” to discipline their children and letting it get a little out of hand. These same people may believe that over discipline is not likely to follow the child into adulthood. They are tragically misinformed. (Pelzer: 95)

The reaction of the victims of child abuse towards their societies and the reaction of the society towards them varied from one class to the other and from one category to the other. This was known as the Cycle of Abuse. Colton, Vanstone and Watby denote that “There was a common concern about the so-called 'cycle of abuse', which might result in victims/survivors being perceived as potential child abusers”. (P.544) In other words, there are a group of people had thought about their abusive past and had scars within themselves, but they took no action, hoping to see their victimizers as future possible victims. Colton, Vanstone and Watby add that “The long-term emotional pain and suffering caused by the abuse had left several with a strong desire to see their abusers brought to account not just for themselves but also for future potential victims”. (P.544) On the one hand, many victims preferred to be silent, locking away their memories within their minds, coping with life, building new families and beginning professional and reasonable career. They in addition refused to remember what happened to them. “Many child abuse victims hide their past deep inside, so deep that the possibility of

becoming an abuser themselves is unthinkable. They live normal lives, becoming husbands and wives, raising families and building careers”. (Pelzer: 95-98). Dave lamented the increasing number of children who were abused and asked about the reasons and causes of this dilemma and the ways of solution. “Every year the number grows larger. Why? What causes the tragedy of child abuse? Is it really as bad as they say? Can it be stopped?...what is abuse like through the eyes of the child? What you have just read is a story of an ordinary family that was devastated by their hidden secret”. (Pelzer: 95-98)

On the other hand, there are a great number of abused victims unveiled their experiences but their communities gave no interest. The society will pay a great price for ignoring this wide sector of victims. Dave warns from the upcoming results of child abuse upon its members and explains that the child who was abused in the past will take revenge from people around him in the future. These people may be their husbands and wives, children, neighbors, relatives and friends. “Some readers will find the story unreal and disturbing, but child abuse is a disturbing phenomenon that is a reality in our society. Child abuse has a domino effect that spreads to all who touch the family”. (Pelzer: 95-98) He asked the public, the media and all means of mass communication to pay a great concern to the issue of child abuse. “On any given day, some adult who is the victim of a dark past of child abuse may vent his or her pent-up frustrations on society or on those he or she may love. The public is well informed about the most uncommon cases”. (Pelzer: 95)

In *A Child Called It*, Dave showed positivity and independence when he bravely narrated his story and he was not ashamed of it, since profession of such humiliated stories may result in loss of jobs, relationship problems, family conflict and breakdown, psychiatric problems, addiction to illegal drugs or prison. Dave's objectives behind narrating his story lies behind his belief that it is important to inform the readers about the experiences of child abuse and brought them to light to tell the readers how a loving parent may be changed to be sadistic and abusers like Dave's parents. Furthermore, it is important to tell the readers about a survival story of Dave Pelzer and how he overcame insurmountable odds. *A Child Called It* is a story of survival; it not only shows various types of abuse but also a new patterns of survival which is managed by its hero. Dave was lucky to be survived, since there were many children who failed to be saved and they were still abused. Thus, *A Child Called It* is a model of triumph and a typical story of success. "This is more than a story of survival. It is a story of victory and celebration. Even in its darkest passages, the heart is unconquerable. It is important that the body survives, but it is more meaningful that the human spirit prevails. This is my story and mine alone. For years I was confined to the darkness of my own mind and heart, being alone and a pitiful "loser". At first I wanted nothing more than to be like others, but that motivation grew. I wanted to become a "winner". (Pelzer: 95-98)

After abuse, Dave served his country in the military and gave seminars and workshops to help others to break the barriers and give

them a hope in happy future life. Like Dave, many adult survivors of child abuse have a strong yearning to look after their children against what they went through and became excellent parents. In *A Child called It*, Dave himself became a father to a spoilt son whose only mistake was to have a loving and caring father. At the end of his *Afterwards*, he delivered a message to both abused children and their parents to overcome the sad part of their life and to make parents recognize what they shatter in their children's psychology. He offered his help to assist those victims who in need to turn victimization to victory, tragedy to triumph by exposing their dilemma to be solved.

From one who has been there, I bring a message to abused children and those who work with them...I believe it is important for people to know that no matter what lies in their past, they can overcome the dark side and press on to a brighter world. It is perhaps a paradox that without the abuse of my past, I might not be what I am today. Because of the darkness in my childhood, I have a deep appreciation for life. I was fortunate enough to turn tragedy into triumph. This is my story...If society is to come to grips with the problem, it must be exposed. Once exposed, the causes of child abuse can be understood and support can truly begin. Childhood should be carefree, playing in the sun; not living a nightmare in the darkness of the soul (Pelzer: 95-98)

Concerning the technique of the novel, this book is a memoir of the writer's childhood experiences of abuse; it is an autobiographical novel in which he described his tragic experiences and inspired many

children who suffered from child abuse to protest and survive like Dave Pelzer. “*A Child Called It, The Lost Boy, and A Man Named Dave* comprise an autobiographic trilogy accounting the life of one of the most severe child-abuse victims in California history”( Moore: 31). The novel endows the readers with a firsthand view of what the author felt; he reflects his private experiences, giving evidence of every incident to his readers. Throughout the novel, Dave wrote about his childhood which was filled with cruel events, since he and his heartless mother were considered the main characters in the novel. According to Wikipedia, “An autobiographical novel is a form of novel using auto fiction techniques, or the merging of autobiographical and fictive elements. The literary technique is distinguished from an autobiography or memoir by the stipulation of being fiction”(P.1).

Dave Pelzer narrates his novel through a Flashback technique; he opens the novel with its denouement or resolution with a title *The Rescue*. This fact may be attributed to many reasons: first, he may want to catch the readers’ attention with the victory he achieved at the very beginning and making the rest of the story unbelievable because the reader knows that Dave survived and he was all alone in his battle of survival. Second, his rescue or resolution at the first chapter may acquire him self-confidence to later narrate his memories about child abuse in a fog of alcoholism and mental instability, since this beginning makes the novel a story of survival not one of disgrace. Third, he may be tried to get rid of his shyness to speak frankly about what he felt and suffered through the hands of his mother. Finally, if

he was not rescued at the beginning, he can not mention his mother's name because he hated her to a great extent. The first chapter clearly introduces Dave's power to overcome his mother's abuses by cleverly pretending to be more resistant and strong than the other chapters, because he was already rescued. "I act timid, nodding to her threats" (Pelzer: 7), "Mother can beat me all she wants, but I haven't let her take away my will to somehow survive" (Pelzer: 7).

Structurally, the book includes seven chapters with an Epilogue and Afterward; the plot of the novel is unique and interesting because it narrates the incidents of a true story; it was not stemmed from the author's imagination-although it acted as a pattern of survival-, they are real events and chosen from many memories for the author's purpose to disclose the abuses from which children suffer; *A Child Called It* is a first person narrative; Dave used the first person to be more effective and real, since the incidents of the story essentially attributed to an account of his internal struggle to survive. Thus, by using the first person narrative technique he was able to describe his feeling obviously. It is marked by the use of "I" throughout the novel. "I'm late. I've got to finish the dishes on time, otherwise no breakfast; and since I didn't have dinner last night, I have to make sure I get something to eat...I can hear her stomping down the hallway towards the kitchen. I dip my hands back into the scalding rinse water". (Pelzer: 7)

The language was simple and persuasive; since Dave was aware enough that a child is narrating his trauma by himself. Besides, he aimed

at encouraging all children who were exposed to child abuse to narrate their dilemma like Dave, especially when they read the novel by themselves. Abernethy denotes that “Pelzer’s writing style is simple at best...Pelzer relies on language that was developed from a child’s viewpoint he tells us in the author’s notes, resulting in a straightforward This happened, then this happened, and this is how I felt approach. What makes the book so compelling is the tale itself, as Pelzer describes incident after incident of cruel torture at his mother’s hands and the ineffective and lame efforts of his father to protect him” (P.:4)

The setting of the novel can be considered one of the main factors which played a great role in the process of Dave’s child abuse and survival as well. The main setting of the novel is California, USA, whereas there are many minor settings which witnessed Dave’s abuse. First the Russian River is a place in California where Dave’s family would usually go for a vacation, but it also witnessed Dave’s eating of his brother’s shit. Second, the school was Dave’s only place of refuge from his mother’s cruelty; it was also the place where he could feel safe and steal food to feed himself from his classmates, but it was also a place where his poor appearance and bad smell tortured him in front of his classmates and teachers. The school also witnessed his rescue. Third, the Grocery Store is the place where he stole food during the break, but his mother punished him by eating his vomiting when she discovered this truth. Fourth, the Basement or the Garage is the place where Dave was isolated, othered, since he slept on an old army cot and was covered with newspapers, although it is really freezing to stay

there. Fifth, the bathroom is the place which witnessed Dave's mother games of torture; such as Gas Chamber, eating ammonia, sitting in a bathtub of freezing cold water for hours. Sixth, the kitchen was also a vital setting where Dave acted as a slave, since he was the only one who was responsible for finishing the household duties. It was also an eyewitness of his burning, snapping, beating, drinking poisonous materials, and other forms of abuse. Throughout the novel, the setting played a key role in the process of Dave's development from abuse, survival to rescue by the help of his school teacher.

To conclude, we dare say that nobody denies that childhood represents one of the most important stages in our life. Therefore, children have the rights to be protected, sheltered and grown up safely. As a result, the issue of child abuse have to be put on the table of feminists, writers, and people who worked and interested in the field of human rights, since this disturbing phenomenon not only refers to the failure of the parents or other guardians to provide needed shelter to the child, including food, clothing, medical care, but it may also denotes to the great amount of physical, psychological, verbal, emotional abuse from which the child suffer. *A Child Called It* perfectly and masterly unveiled this issue through the personification of Dave Pelzer whose life passed through three stages: early childhood from the birth to the age of four, the stage of abuse was from the age four to twelve and the third stage was his rescue. His second stage of life witnessed various forms of abuse which were practiced by his alcoholic mother against him, such as verbal, physical, emotional and

psychological abuse. He was called *It* from the title page of the novel. Moreover, he was burnt, beaten, humiliated, starved, snapped, isolated worked as a slave in his mother's house, ate disgusting things as his brother's shit, ammonia, liquid soap, Clorox and the leftover of his brothers and the dog as well. He was also drowned under the water by his mother who practiced many sadistic unbelievable and unbearable games at the same time against her son; such as Gas Chamber, POW position, Corner and Mirror Treatments.

Due to the large amount of abuse, Dave passed through many conflicting consequences. First, he experienced a series of frustrated and depressed feeling; he dreamt of being died to get rid of his dilemma. Second, he lost his faith in God because he believed that there is no Divine justice in life. Third, he felt social isolation and otherness, not only from his family, but also from all around him; a fact which may be attributed to his poor appearance and bad smell, continuous stealing from his classmates, grocery, neighbor, school cafeteria. All the reasons were the harvest of his mother's behavior against him. Accordingly, he was socially isolated and othered from his community. Even the passivity of the people around him added to his feeling of hatred to his father, brothers and mothers. One of the untraditional and main consequences of abuse was Dave's attempts to manage many patterns of survival; since he showed strength and independence in many situations throughout the novel; such as imagination, time and the many ways he managed to feed himself to be survived.

Accordingly Dave was rescued and survived and began a new arena of life which witnessed his success and victory. He proved that he was a survivor who decided to close the black hole of the past and began a new fresh start. At the end of the novel, he addressed a precious message to both the society and the abused children. First he asked from the society, the community agents, the media and the public to pay a great attention to those children who were abused from their parents or guardians under the mask of discipline or over discipline and feared from disclosing their experiences to solve this disturbing phenomenon because those children were directly or indirectly affect the whole community. His second message to abused children was to overcome the painful shadows of the past and press on to a brighter future, since these abuses are mainly responsible for turning them from tragedy to triumph and from victimization to victory. He was a true example of that kind of children who were turned to be a good and prestigious character in his society; Dave Pelzer can be considered a good example of abused child who overcame his dilemma, served his country in the military and became a famous writer and a teacher who gave seminars and workshops to shed light on this problem and to help others break their silence and achieve their identity.

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