

Book Club Discussion
Underwater Daughter by Antonia Deignan

1. Parents often attempt discussions with their children regarding the ways in which they need to keep themselves safe (look both ways before crossing a street, wear a seatbelt, keeping hands or items out of electric sockets). More challenging danger zones to discuss would be sexual abuse. Recent studies reveal [one in four girls and one in thirteen boys experience child sexual abuse at some point in childhood](#). In what ways, have you navigated this sensitive topic? Have you done so with your own children? Do you struggle to find resolution with experiences relating to sexual abuse in your own past? Could you talk with your parents about it? On page 81, Tuni requests that her parents go to therapy with her. Can you imagine someone you love (or yourself) confronting both their predator and the predator's silent accomplice? Was it the right thing to do?
2. Tuni is four years old when she first experiences inappropriate touch from her father and the silent complicity from her mother. Does it make sense that she felt more desperation because of her mother's lack of protection than she did by her father's sexual abuse?
3. What if Tuni had been taught to 'be the boss of her body', to understand she should never be forced to accept *any* kind of touch'? Is it most probable that Tuni's parents were not raised to discuss these kinds of issues, resulting in their misguided approach to the subject? Is that excuse enough? Did a lack of a spiritual component or religious education in their household contribute to the family system's dysfunction?
4. On page 135, Tuni describes how, "victims will remember the details, the thoughts and codes embedded in their bodies messaging them, even as they were being overpowered." She continues, "They will remember what they saw behind their squeezed eyelids. They will remember the taste of the acid rising into the backs of their throats, the pain pressuring into their skulls, the color of the wood framing the door, the time travel, the day of the week, the color of the sheet, the taste of their own tongues, the blood, the dying..." Does this ring true to you? Can you recall a traumatic experience in patches of vivid detail? Can these experiences compartmentalize themselves into comprehensive memories, but be surrounded by blank pages of memory before or after?
5. Researchers have noted that trauma is stored in somatic memory. On page 224, Tuni quotes Bessel Van Der Kolk, the author of *The Body Keeps the Score*. "Once you start approaching your body with curiosity rather than fear, everything shifts." Preceding that quote on the same page, Tuni discovers that her response to sexual intercourse for so many years was a stored somatic releasing of her past trauma. And by choosing to reflect on and decipher that response, she could eventually transform the somatic experience into something different, and ultimately healthier. Can you think of patterns of behavior in your own life that feel out of your control? Do you believe you could reroute or transform these memories embedded in your biology?
6. Tuni used her creative impulses and inner fantasy life as a life raft, a way of surviving trauma. Do you think that slowed her ability to truly process her experiences? Is there

one right way to heal from trauma? Can you think of a time when art in any form became the tool for your own survival of trauma? And how did that manifest for you?

7. How do you perceive the impact Tuni's peers had on her self-worth? Did she have any healthy mentor-type relationships growing up? Or did the trauma in her childhood make developing positive and supportive relationships too challenging? Would you consider this a similar dynamic in situations of childhood bullying? Or cyber bullying? When children become victims of aggression of any kind, does that out rule creating or sustaining healthy relationships as they move into adulthood? What about mentors? Is it possible that the art of dance acted as Tuni's mentor or that her fantasy world was her nurse?
8. Does it make sense that Tuni lacked compassion, and empathy? Does it make sense that Tuni lacked the ability or the tools to navigate others hardships/depression, even when she had so much experience with it?
9. When does a parent's influence, opinions, judgements or actions cease to matter to their children?
10. Can love and forgiveness truly matter most? In all situations?
11. Do you think Tuni's mother wished she could have acted differently?
12. Did Tuni's parents suffer as much as Tuni did? Isn't suffering relative?
13. Can art help heal?
14. Can nature help heal?
15. Did the messages Tuni received at such a young age, receiving attention in a sexual manner, reinforce that truth in Tuni's behavior? Or did Tuni have an innate sensual nature that spurred those types of interactions to come her way? Did her physical appearance factor into how we interpret, in her case, consent, victimhood, and agency?
16. Has this memoir helped reveal how eating disorders can manifest because of trauma?
17. Did the discipline of dance (like a discipline needed for goals in general) save Tuni? Sometimes, a radical template of discipline encourages self-criticism. Many believe to befriend the self-critic, acknowledge its presence while simultaneously practicing self-compassion, is an effective way of allowing one's life to unfold in grace, and step forward in love. Would you agree?
18. Has this memoir affected your understandings of victimhood, agency, consent? Why or why not?
19. This story reveals how a family system can fail, even under the best of circumstances, and how important finding and developing relationships is to *feel seen* and *be seen*. Do

you believe **being seen** by others is vital to reciprocating the ability to see others in return?

20. On page 121, Tuni writes, "So, if I love you, but you fear, what then? And if you love me, but I fear, what next?... My hope is when we meet and I place my love in the lead you will do the same. As you lean in toward me and offer your love forward first, can we meet there, love on love, and leave fear behind?" Can we see fear (our own and others) for what it is? And choose over and over and over again, (like practicing anything at all) until we finally get it right?