



A Trauma Analysis of Juliet Sykes's Character in "Before I Fall" (A Novel Written by Lauren Oliver) (*Analisis Trauma pada Karakter Juliet Sykes dalam Novel "Before I Fall" Karya Lauren Oliver*)

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Article Info	Abstract
Article history: Received: 29 September 2025 Revised: 21 Oktober 2025 Accepted: 27 Oktober 2025 Keywords: Psychological Trauma Before I Fall Juliet Sykes Complex Trauma Kata Kunci: Trauma Psikologis Before I Fall Juliet Sykes Trauma Kompleks	This research explores the psychological trauma experienced by Juliet Sykes, a secondary character in <i>Before I Fall</i> (2010) by Lauren Oliver, through the lens of Sheila Cavanagh's cultural-psychoanalytic trauma theory. The study analyzes dialogues and narrative descriptions that reveal signs of trauma to understand how Juliet's suffering is represented in the novel. The results show that Juliet endures both Type II and complex trauma, stemming from continuous bullying, humiliation, and long-term social rejection. Her psychological responses manifest as feelings of powerlessness, recurring memories of distressing experiences, unstable emotions, challenges in constructing a coherent sense of self, and tendencies toward isolation. Moreover, the narrative portrays Juliet's trauma as not only a mental or emotional disruption but also as an embodied and socially conditioned experience. This interpretation supports Cavanagh's assertion that trauma is relational and performed within cultural and interpersonal contexts. Overall, the study emphasizes literature's potential to illuminate the deep psychological consequences of bullying and to promote empathy toward individuals suffering from emotional wounds. Abstrak Penelitian ini mengkaji trauma psikologis yang dialami oleh Juliet Sykes, tokoh pendukung dalam novel <i>Before I Fall</i> (2010) karya Lauren Oliver, dengan menggunakan teori trauma kultural-psikoanalitik dari Sheila Cavanagh. Analisis difokuskan pada bukti tekstual berupa dialog dan narasi yang menggambarkan gejala trauma. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa Juliet mengalami trauma Tipe II dan trauma kompleks sebagai akibat dari perundungan berkepanjangan serta pengucilan sosial. Gejala yang ditunjukkan meliputi rasa tidak berdaya, ingatan traumatis yang berulang, kesulitan dalam pembentukan identitas, ketidakstabilan emosi, dan penarikan diri dari lingkungan sosial. Trauma Juliet digambarkan tidak hanya sebagai kondisi psikologis, tetapi juga sebagai pengalaman yang terwujud dalam tubuh serta dipengaruhi oleh konteks sosial, sehingga menegaskan pandangan Cavanagh bahwa trauma bersifat relasional dan performatif dalam konteks sosio-kultural tertentu. Penelitian ini menegaskan bagaimana karya sastra merefleksikan dampak jangka panjang perundungan terhadap psikologi remaja. Selain itu, penelitian ini juga menyoroti pentingnya karya sastra sebagai medium untuk menumbuhkan empati dan kesadaran terhadap pergulatan tersembunyi yang dialami individu dengan trauma.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In literary studies, works of fiction often explore the psychological experiences of individuals. These works focus on how people respond to distressing or destabilizing events, which may lead to trauma. Literature shows internal emotional states by illustrating how external forces—such as loss, violence, or adversity—shape a character's mind. Traumatic experiences serve as narrative catalysts, profoundly influencing a character's development and subsequent actions. Trauma can result from accidents, bullying, or violence, leading to deep and lasting effects. The consequences appear in both the short and long term, with recurring symptoms like anxiety, fear, and emotional instability. These symptoms often come with difficulties in emotional regulation. Freud emphasizes that unresolved trauma causes continued anxiety in the present (Andri & Dewi, 2007). Meanwhile, Cavanagh (2013) conceptualizes trauma as a subjective and multifaceted phenomenon, emphasizing that it cannot always be rigidly categorized. While trauma is commonly classified into physical, psychological, and complex forms, its literary representations often transcend these distinctions, revealing the intricate interplay between memory, the body, and social contexts. The novel, as a literary form, often serves as a medium for expressing psychological struggles, including trauma. According to Nurgiyantoro (2018), a novel constitutes an integrated artistic whole that reflects reality through its interrelated elements. Many novels portray characters confronting traumatic experiences, offering readers insight into human suffering, helplessness, and resilience. Through such portrayals, literature not only fulfills an aesthetic function but also facilitates engagement with complex psychological realities, which has attracted scholarly interest for its distinctive use of a non-linear structure. The narrative centers on the protagonist, Samantha Kingston, and the supporting characters as they confront issues of identity, mortality, and interpersonal conflict. Of particular significance is the character Juliet Sykes, an isolated and marginalized student whose experiences of bullying and social rejection function as a central catalyst for the novel's conflict. Juliet's portrayal offers a critical lens for examining trauma within a young adult literary context, especially in relation to how traumatic experiences influence behavior, relationships, and self-perception. Several studies have previously investigated psychological issues in Oliver's works, offering insights that reinforce the importance of analyzing Juliet's character through the lens of trauma and its impact on adolescent development, setting the stage for further exploration of trauma depiction within this novel. For example, Hummairah (2023) conducted a study entitled *The Impact of Childhood Trauma in Jennifer Niven's Novel Holding Up the Universe* (2016). The research examines the childhood trauma experienced by Libby Strout. Her trauma began with the death of her mother and grew worse due to verbal bullying. She often faced derogatory remarks about her body weight. Insulting nicknames like "*Flabby Stout*" became associated with her identity and caused significant emotional and psychological harm. As a result, Libby lost self-confidence, developed self-hatred toward her body, and began to believe she was unworthy of affection or acceptance.

This study addresses that gap by focusing specifically on the complex and layered trauma Juliet endures as a result of sustained bullying. The primary purpose of this research is to conduct a detailed trauma analysis of Juliet Sykes using Sheila Cavanagh's cultural-psychoanalytic trauma theory. This study aims to identify the specific symptoms of trauma Juliet exhibits, categorize her condition as both Type II trauma and complex trauma, and analyze how the novel portrays trauma not just as a psychological state but as an embodied and socially situated experience. This research is significant for both theoretical and social reasons. Theoretically, it contributes to literary trauma studies by applying Cavanagh's framework to a contemporary young adult novel, demonstrating how literature reflects the long-term psychological impact of bullying on adolescents. Socially, this study highlights the importance of literary works as a medium for building empathy and raising awareness about the hidden struggles of individuals affected by trauma. By providing a detailed analysis of Juliet's suffering, this research can help readers, educators, and parents better understand the severe and often invisible consequences of peer victimization.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Approach

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to examine the psychological trauma experienced by Juliet Sykes in *Before I Fall* (2010) by Lauren Oliver. As stated by Bogdan and Taylor in *Qualitative Research for Education* (as cited in Santoso, 2013), the qualitative method is a research procedure that generates descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words and observable behaviors. Likewise, Kirk and Miller (as cited in Moleong, 2002) emphasize that qualitative research involves direct observation and focuses on describing and interpreting phenomena within their specific contexts. In this study, the qualitative descriptive method enables the researcher to portray and interpret the trauma symptoms, behaviors, and experiences of the character in a naturalistic manner. This approach is particularly suitable for literary analysis since it allows a detailed exploration of psychological and social aspects represented in fictional narratives. Furthermore, the researcher acts as the primary instrument who interprets textual evidence and constructs meaning based on theoretical and contextual understanding (Sugiyono, 2018).

2.2. Data and Source of Data

In research, data is a crucial element that forms the basis of analysis for drawing conclusions. According to Sugiyono (2018), data can be defined as a collection of raw materials or facts that, once processed, provide information or an overview of a certain state or condition. This data is obtained from data sources, which play a vital role in determining the quality of the research. In line with this, Arikunto (2010) distinguishes between two main types of data sources: primary and secondary sources. A primary data source is one that directly provides data to the researcher, whereas a secondary data source is supportive in nature, obtained from existing documents, books, or other parties.

The data of this study consist of textual evidence found in the form of dialogues, monologues, and narrative passages that reflect psychological trauma symptoms experienced by Juliet Sykes. These data are drawn from the novel *Before I Fall* (2010) by Lauren Oliver, which serves as the primary data source. The secondary sources include scholarly articles, books, and theoretical references that discuss trauma studies, particularly Sheila Cavanagh's cultural-psychoanalytic trauma theory. These secondary sources are utilized to support the analysis and interpretation of trauma-related phenomena within the text. The inclusion of both primary and secondary data ensures the comprehensiveness and theoretical validity of the study.

2.3. Techniques of Collecting Data

The data collection technique refers to the method or procedure used by a researcher to gather the necessary data for a study. The selection of an appropriate technique is crucial as it directly impacts the quality and validity of the data obtained. According to Sugiyono (2018), "the data collection technique is the most strategic step in research, because the main purpose of research is to obtain data" (p. 224). In this study, the techniques employed are documentary study and textual analysis. A documentary study is a method of collecting data by analyzing existing records or documents. Creswell (2014) explains that in qualitative research, data often consists of texts and documents, which allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under study without being physically present in the field.

The data collection process is conducted through documentary and textual analysis techniques. The researcher first conducts a close reading of the novel to identify passages that illustrate trauma-related experiences, emotional disturbances, or behavioral symptoms. Relevant dialogues and narrative descriptions are then highlighted, coded, and categorized according to recurring patterns or trauma indicators. Supporting data from previous research and theoretical works are also collected through library research to strengthen the interpretation. This process aligns with the qualitative descriptive tradition, which emphasizes careful selection, organization, and contextual interpretation of data rather than numerical measurement.

2.4. Techniques of Analyzing Data

The data analysis in this study follows several stages: data reduction, data display, interpretation, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). First, the researcher reduces the data by selecting only those textual elements that reveal trauma symptoms in Juliet's character. Second, the selected data are organized and displayed thematically according to Cavanagh's classification of trauma—Type II trauma and complex trauma. Third, each datum is interpreted by connecting textual evidence with theoretical concepts from Cavanagh's framework to identify the nature, causes, and manifestations of trauma. Finally, the researcher draws conclusions about how Juliet's psychological trauma is represented and how it reflects broader socio-cultural issues, particularly bullying and emotional marginalization. Through this analytical process, the study aims to construct a comprehensive understanding of trauma as both a psychological and cultural phenomenon depicted in literature.

3. FINDING AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Finding

This study reveals that Juliet Sykes, a key character in *Before I Fall* (2010), undergoes complex psychological trauma from prolonged bullying and social exclusion. Her symptoms—social withdrawal, worthlessness, alienation, and suicidal ideation—develop gradually. Framed by Sheila Cavanagh's trauma

theory, Juliet's condition fits both Type II and complex trauma, underscoring trauma as embodied and socially embedded. Her guarded body language, passive behavior, and emotional exhaustion show how social pressure and peer judgment are inscribed on the body. Her emotional breakdown—marked by hopelessness and a rejection of recovery—shows the cumulative, systemic nature of her suffering. The unsafe school and lack of support frame her trauma as structural, perpetuated by social violence and institutional neglect. These findings confirm Cavanagh's view that trauma is inseparable from its sociocultural context and highlight the need for an interdisciplinary approach in literary trauma studies.

3.1.1. Juliet's behavioral patterns through cavanagh's trauma lens

According to Sheila Cavanagh, trauma should be understood not merely as a psychological wound but also as an embodied experience shaped by social interactions. Its effects manifest not only in emotional states but also in behaviors, interpersonal relationships, and everyday life. Individuals who experience trauma frequently exhibit withdrawal, distrust, emotional instability, and difficulties in forming healthy connections—patterns rooted in unresolved experiences. This framework is exemplified in the character of Juliet Sykes, a victim of prolonged bullying in *Before I Fall*. Juliet isolates herself from others, including her own family, as reflected in her mother's admission that she dislikes anyone entering her room. Such behavior signifies both a protective strategy and an embodied response to trauma. Her sarcastic remark on Valentine's Day further reveals her internalized feelings of rejection and worthlessness, while her statement, *"I can't be fixed. It's too late,"* expresses profound despair and a loss of hope for recovery. Through Juliet's dialogues, it becomes evident that trauma is experienced and enacted through the body, emotions, and relationships. As Cavanagh argues, repeated traumatic experiences shape identity in ways that leave individuals feeling permanently damaged and unworthy of love.

3.1.2. Analysis of trauma symptoms in Juliet's character

Within Sheila Cavanagh's trauma theory, trauma symptoms are understood as responses to recurring emotional experiences that disrupt psychological functioning while simultaneously manifesting in bodily and social dimensions. This study examines the representation of Juliet's trauma in *Before I Fall*, focusing on her experiences of alienation, dissociation, and self-destructive behavior through an analysis of selected dialogues and descriptive passages.

3.1.3. Feelings of being trapped or powerless

The following excerpts are selected for analysis because they reveal Juliet's trauma symptoms and provide insight into the specific types of trauma she endures. One example occurs when Juliet, after mustering the courage to join the party crowd, becomes the target of a humiliating attack by Lindsay and her friends:

"Lindsay start screaming 'Psycho' and making the motion of an invisible knife and screeching and pushing Juliet back and forth. Lindsay grab a half finished beer from the windowsill and dump it on Juliet. Lindsay didn't even realize she's screaming along with everybody else." (p. 70, *Before I Fall*)

This scene illustrates Juliet's public humiliation and profound sense of powerlessness, underscoring her entrapment within social violence and the normalization of bullying among her peers. A comparable traumatic experience can be traced back to her childhood, when Lindsay falsely accused her during a summer camp:

"The funny thing is, it wasn't even me. Lindsay was the one who wet her sleeping bag... But when Ms. Bridges came in and asked what had happened Lindsay just pointed her finger at me and screamed, She did it. I'll never forget her face when she screamed it—She did it! Terrified. Like I was a wild dog and I was going to bite her." (p. 392, *Before I Fall*).

In this context, Juliet becomes the target of scapegoating and social stigmatization, which renders her powerless to assert or defend herself. This episode—similar to the subsequent humiliation at the party—illustrates the profound psychological harm resulting from repeated experiences of betrayal, rejection, and diminished agency.

3.1.4. A Recurring negative experience

Juliet's frustration with the malicious schemes intended to humiliate her reflects the recurring nature of her traumatic experiences. This is illustrated in the following dialogue:

"So what was the plan? What were you going to do with that 'secret admirer' crap? Bribe one of your friends so he'd pretend to like me? Ask me out? Maybe even to go to prom? And then—what? On the night that we're supposed to go, he just won't show up? And it will be so goddamned funny if I freak out, if I go crazy, if I cry or break down in the hallways when I see him in school." (p. 387, *Before I Fall*).

Juliet expresses both anger and fear, illustrating how prolonged bullying has cultivated her distrust and suspicion toward others. Her imagined scenario of public humiliation—being deceived into attending prom only to be abandoned—reflects how earlier traumatic experiences actively shape her perception of present circumstances. Trauma, therefore, is not confined to the past but continually informs her worldview. This pattern of repetition is further evident in Juliet's recurring humiliation during Cupid Day.

"Every year Lindsay and her friends will send Juliet a rose and the same note on Cupid Day. The only note she's ever received from anyone. 'Maybe next year, but probably not.'" (p. 40, Before I Fall).

The recurrent psychological cruelty deepens Juliet's feelings of rejection and worthlessness. The annual sarcastic note, functioning as her sole form of acknowledgment, underscores her social isolation and perpetuates the cycle of trauma by compelling her to repeatedly relive emotional pain.

3.1.5. Difficulties in forming an identity

In *Before I Fall*, Juliet's identity formation is profoundly shaped by repeated verbal abuse and derogatory labeling. This dynamic is reflected in her recollection: *"You remember the name they gave me in fifth grade, right? The name Lindsay gave me? Mellow Yellow?"* Juliet shakes her head. *"I used to dream that name, I heard it so often. Sometimes I forgot what my real name was"* (Oliver, 2010, p. 392). The nickname *"Mellow Yellow,"* imposed by Lindsay since childhood, became so pervasive that it overshadowed Juliet's personal sense of self. Her statement, *"Sometimes I forgot what my real name was,"* underscores the extent to which persistent ridicule distorted her self-perception. This passage demonstrates that bullying-induced trauma not only caused emotional suffering but also disrupted Juliet's psychological development, compelling her to internalize externally imposed identities rather than construct her own. Thus, the nickname functions as a symbolic representation of how social violence shapes self-perception, reinforcing processes of dissociation and alienation in the victim.

3.1.6. Type II Trauma

In *Before I Fall*, Juliet Sykes exemplifies the psychological consequences of Type II trauma, a concept articulated in Sheila Cavanagh's trauma theory. Unlike trauma resulting from a single catastrophic event, Type II trauma develops through repeated and prolonged exposure to distressing experiences, often situated within unequal social relationships. Juliet's experiences reflect this dynamic through recurring symptoms such as entrapment, helplessness, the repetition of negative experiences, and disruptions in identity formation. The sense of entrapment becomes most evident in the public humiliation scene where Juliet is targeted by Lindsay and her peers. Branded as *"psycho,"* subjected to symbolic cutting gestures, and drenched with beer before an audience, Juliet's body becomes the site of symbolic violence. The absence of any protective space intensifies her social and emotional imprisonment. Within Cavanagh's framework, trauma here is not only a psychological wound but also inscribed onto the body and the violent social environment she inhabits.

The repetition of psychological violence further exacerbates Juliet's trauma. Incidents such as the *"secret admirer"* prank, the annual sarcastic notes she receives on Cupid Day, and her betrayal at summer camp establish a persistent cycle of cruelty. These recurring violations leave her in a state of vigilance and mistrust, unable to depend on the goodwill of others. As Cavanagh observes, repeated exposure to such experiences does not merely produce memories of harm but compels the victim to continually re-experience trauma, obstructing closure and healing. Juliet's fractured sense of identity constitutes another enduring effect of Type II trauma. The mocking nickname *"Mellow Yellow,"* imposed since childhood, gradually erodes her capacity for self-recognition. Juliet admits that after hearing the nickname repeatedly, she no longer remembers who she truly is. This demonstrates how her identity is shaped not by personal growth but by derogatory labels imposed externally. Within Cavanagh's theoretical lens, this inability to establish a coherent sense of self illustrates how trauma disrupts the developmental process of identity formation, particularly during adolescence.

Taken together, these symptoms indicate that Juliet's trauma is cumulative rather than episodic, emerging from layers of humiliation and psychological violence that profoundly shape her body, mind, and sense of self. Her experiences closely align with Cavanagh's conception of Type II trauma: relational, socially embedded, and rooted in structures of unequal power. Beyond these central manifestations, Juliet also exhibits additional symptoms—such as difficulties in regulating emotions and challenges in sustaining stable relationships—that further reveal the enduring psychological and emotional consequences of her prolonged victimization.

3.1.7. Difficulties in establishing healthy relationships

In *Before I Fall*, Samantha attempts to engage in a genuine conversation with Juliet in an effort to support her in coping with the adversities she has experienced. However, rather than being receptive, Juliet responds,

"You haven't always been that nice to me?" she says dully (p. 383).

Articulated in a flat and emotionless tone, the line reveals Juliet's profound psychological distress and the cumulative impact of prolonged bullying. It conveys not only disbelief and despair but also resignation, suggesting that she has internalized her suffering to the extent of emotional detachment. Juliet's trauma is expressed through withdrawal and a diminished sense of hope for change, illustrating how sustained abuse erodes an individual's capacity to trust and maintain meaningful relationships. This interpretation is further supported by a scene in which Ally, a member of the popular clique, ridicules Juliet:

"Does she ever say anything?" Ally puts one hand across her heart, pretending to be upset (p. 40).

The remark, delivered with sarcastic pretense of empathy, undermines Juliet's social dignity and renders her insignificant within her surroundings. Such experiences demonstrate how persistent bullying corrodes self-worth and distorts the perception of social interaction, transforming relationships into sites of humiliation rather than support. As Sheila Cavanagh observes, repeated interpersonal trauma frequently results in self-protective responses, including avoidance, emotional withdrawal, and resignation. Juliet exemplifies this trajectory: she speaks without expecting acknowledgment, remains physically present yet emotionally detached, and increasingly interprets relationships as threatening rather than nurturing. Her dialogues therefore highlight the enduring psychological consequences of bullying, which not only produce immediate distress but also fundamentally impair the capacity to establish healthy interpersonal connections.

3.1.8. Difficulty in regulating emotion

In the scene where Samantha attempts reconciliation by anonymously sending Juliet a bouquet of roses, her gesture is prematurely exposed. Juliet then responds with:

"I knew it. I knew it was you." Her voice is so full of rage and pain. *"What was that? Another one of your little jokes?"* (Oliver, 2010, p. 386).

This dialogue reflects Juliet's intense anger and emotional pain, which have been long suppressed as a result of persistent bullying by her peers. The statement *"I knew it was you"* indicates a state of hypervigilance shaped by repeated experiences of betrayal and humiliation, while her sarcastic remark—*"Another one of your little jokes?"*—illustrates emotional dysregulation, a trauma-related symptom characterized by difficulty distinguishing past harm from present interactions. Juliet's response highlights the way trauma distorts perception, leaving her in a continual state of psychological insecurity. A comparable difficulty in regulating emotions is evident when Juliet recalls the rumors circulating about her:

"My sister heard that rumor. She told my parents. I—" Finally she loses it a little, balling her hands into fists and squeezing them against her thighs. *"I've never even kissed anyone."* (Oliver, 2010, p. 385).

In this context, Juliet not only rejects the rumor but also reveals her vulnerability, as her physical reactions embody the emotional tension she is unable to articulate verbally. From a psychological perspective, this indicates her difficulty in regulating emotions adaptively, with anger, shame, and sadness emerging simultaneously. Such dysregulation is characteristic of trauma symptoms, particularly among individuals who experience prolonged bullying. Collectively, these scenes highlight not only Juliet's immediate emotional outbursts but also the enduring consequences of trauma, manifested in distrust, hypervigilance, and impaired emotional regulation.

3.1.9. Trauma Complex

In *Before I Fall*, Juliet Sykes displays prominent psychological disturbances, most notably her difficulty in establishing healthy relationships and her inability to regulate emotions. These symptoms exemplify manifestations of complex trauma, as theorized by Sheila Cavanagh in her cultural-psychoanalytic trauma framework. Cavanagh emphasizes that trauma should not be understood merely as a psychological disruption of the mind; rather, it is also an embodied experience that profoundly shapes an individual's relational dynamics.

The first symptom becomes apparent when Juliet responds to Samantha's attempt at reconciliation with the flat, expressionless remark: *"You haven't always been that nice to me?"* This response points to a deeply embedded emotional wound that has remained unaddressed to the extent that Juliet has lost the capacity to fully articulate or display her emotions. Cavanagh argues that complex trauma frequently arises within unsafe social environments, particularly in situations characterized by recurrent betrayal and rejection. Juliet's reaction suggests a profound mistrust of interpersonal connections, in which every attempt at intimacy is perceived as a renewed threat that reactivates past wounds. Consequently, her relational experiences foster a defensive mindset and emotional withdrawal—hallmark features of complex trauma.

The second symptom is evident when Juliet exhibits an emotional outburst in the dialogue: *"I knew it. I knew it was you... What was that? Another one of your little jokes?"* This reaction demonstrates emotional dysregulation—an incapacity to manage the anger and pain she has long suppressed. As Cavanagh notes, complex trauma impacts the individual holistically, encompassing both psychological processes and bodily responses to emotional stimuli. Juliet's reaction is not confined to the immediate situation but also reflects unresolved traumatic memories. Her voice, bodily movements, and facial expressions embody a suffering that cannot be fully verbalized. The excessive and impulsive nature of her response indicates that her emotional system has been shaped within an environment devoid of safety and stability.

Taken together, Juliet's inability to form healthy relationships and her struggles with emotional regulation reveal the depth of her complex trauma as outlined by Cavanagh. This trauma does not originate from a single event but rather from the cumulative effect of prolonged and repeated harmful experiences during her formative years. Its impact extends beyond the psyche to the body and the broader structure of her relational life, rendering Juliet a vivid illustration of how complex trauma permeates an individual's entire being.

3.2 Discussion

Lauren Oliver's *Before I Fall* (2010) illustrates the profound psychological impact of trauma through the character of Juliet Sykes, a teenager subjected to prolonged bullying during her formative years. Juliet's trauma arises not only from persistent mistreatment by her peers but also from the absence of emotional support within her social environment. Consequently, she develops a range of psychological symptoms, including anxiety, depression, nightmares, emotional instability, and difficulties in forming meaningful interpersonal relationships. These symptoms can be analyzed through Sheila Cavanagh's trauma theory, which highlights the lasting psychological consequences of repeated exposure to damaging events. Cavanagh argues that trauma accumulated over extended periods—particularly during critical stages of identity development—can result in severe psychological disturbances. In Juliet's case, the repeated victimization she endures fosters maladaptive cognitive and emotional patterns, leading to heightened anxiety and impairing her ability to function in everyday social contexts.

Juliet's experiences in *Before I Fall* exemplify both Type II trauma and complex trauma, as they stem from prolonged and repeated exposure to painful events. Drawing on (Cavanagh S. L., 2007) cultural-psychoanalytic trauma framework, trauma is understood not only as a psychological phenomenon but also as something inscribed upon the body and manifested in social dynamics. One striking instance of Juliet's Type II trauma occurs during a school party, where she is publicly humiliated. She is labeled a "*psycho*," mocked with imaginary knife gestures, shoved, and drenched in beer by Lindsay in front of a crowd. In this moment, Juliet loses any sense of safety and power, illustrating the interplay of symbolic and physical violence that is socially orchestrated and recurrent. Similar experiences date back to her childhood. In a flashback, Lindsay falsely accuses her of wetting herself during a fifth-grade camping trip. Lindsay's public declaration—"She did it!"—constitutes an early betrayal that left a lasting impression. Juliet not only feels powerless but also internalizes these false accusations, constructing her self-image around imposed identities. She compares herself to a "*stray dog*," perceived as dangerous when, in fact, she is the victim. This moment demonstrates how trauma is embedded within manipulative and imbalanced social relationships. Juliet is also subjected to cyclical ridicule during the annual Cupid Day celebration, when she receives a single rose with the note, "*Maybe next year, but probably not.*" This recurring humiliation underscores the systemic nature of her trauma, rooted in social behaviors deliberately designed to inflict long-term psychological harm. Such experiences profoundly affect Juliet's identity formation. The childhood nickname "*Mellow Yellow*" becomes so ingrained that she admits she "*sometimes forgets her real name.*" This reveals how her social environment coerces her into defining herself through mockery and externally imposed labels rather than through her own lived reality.

Beyond Type II trauma, Juliet also displays symptoms of complex trauma, particularly in her social relationships and emotional regulation. When Samantha attempts to initiate a genuine conversation, Juliet responds flatly: "*You haven't always been that nice to me?*" Her detached tone suggests that she has lost the energy to hope or feel hurt, reflecting emotional withdrawal and mistrust caused by repeated interpersonal wounds. Similarly, when she learns that Samantha sent her a flower, Juliet erupts in anger: "*What was that? Another one of your little jokes?*" Her reaction, marked by fury and pain, illustrates the resurfacing of unresolved emotional injuries. Even when denying the rumors about herself, Juliet struggles to regulate her emotions, clenching her fists as a physical manifestation of internalized tension. According to Cavanagh, this illustrates trauma's inscription upon the body, where suffering becomes lodged somatically in ways that language cannot fully articulate. Overall, Juliet's experiences demonstrate how trauma develops and persists as a result of repeated psychological and social violence beginning in childhood. The trauma she endures is not confined to isolated incidents but unfolds continuously, shaping her worldview, her perception of others, and her sense of self. Viewed through Cavanagh's theoretical lens, Juliet emerges as a trauma survivor marked not only by psychological wounds but also by social and bodily ones. Her case exemplifies how systemic social violence produces deep and enduring psychological scars that are extraordinarily difficult to heal.

The effects of Juliet's trauma—classified as both Type II and complex trauma—extend beyond her personal identity to her broader relational world. Her impaired emotional regulation, fragmented sense of self, and mistrust of others underscore how trauma restructures an individual's psychosocial framework, severely limiting the capacity to form and sustain healthy relationships. Ultimately, *Before I Fall* challenges the assumption that trauma is solely the result of singular, catastrophic events. Instead, it presents trauma as an accumulation of persistent and socially mediated harms that accrue over time. This depiction emphasizes the devastating psychological consequences of chronic emotional wounds, which may rival or even exceed those of sudden traumatic incidents. Moreover, the novel underscores the vital role of empathy, inclusion, and emotional support in mitigating the effects of trauma. Juliet's story highlights the reality that psychological pain, though invisible, can be as debilitating as physical injury. In doing so, Oliver's novel calls for collective responsibility in fostering emotionally safe environments where survivors of trauma feel acknowledged, supported, and empowered to heal. In conclusion, *Before I Fall* functions not only as a depiction of suffering but also as an appeal for compassionate, inclusive communities that provide healing spaces for those grappling with long-term trauma. It emphasizes the importance of social awareness and collective action in facilitating

psychological recovery, urging sensitivity to the hidden wounds that often lie beneath ordinary social interactions.

4 CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

4.2 Conclusion

This study finds that Juliet Sykes's trauma in Lauren Oliver's *Before I Fall* (2010) is shaped by ongoing bullying and exclusion, greatly affecting her psychological growth, behavior, and relationships. Juliet shows signs of Type II and complex trauma, such as low self-esteem, mood swings, and social withdrawal. Although a supporting character, Juliet is vital to the protagonist's psychological transformation, illustrating how unresolved trauma affects both characters and the plot. Her story highlights the unseen realities of adolescent trauma and underlines the importance of treating trauma as both psychological and social. These findings confirm the value of trauma theory in literary study, especially for young adult fiction, where psychological challenges are often overlooked.

4.3 Suggestion

Future research should be directed toward a more nuanced examination of how specific adolescent social dynamics—such as peer pressure, social hierarchies, and the culture of popularity—shape representations of trauma in young adult literature. A particularly crucial area for investigation is the depiction of "invisible trauma"—psychological suffering that lacks outward signs but profoundly impacts an adolescent's emotional well-being. Juliet's portrayal, for instance, powerfully demonstrates how this unacknowledged trauma, often stemming from social alienation and bullying, connects directly to severe outcomes like suicidality. This form of suffering is amplified in the modern adolescent world, which sociologist danah boyd (2014) identifies as "networked publics" where the relentless pressure to navigate complex social hierarchies can become a source of chronic stress.

This aligns with what trauma expert Bessel van der Kolk (2014) describes as developmental or complex trauma, which arises from prolonged interpersonal stress and can fundamentally alter an individual's sense of self and emotional regulation. By portraying these hidden struggles, YA literature serves a function beyond mere reflection; it provides a framework for adolescents to understand their own experiences. This concept, known as bibliotherapy, suggests that reading can be a therapeutic process, offering validation and a language for inarticulable feelings (Sturm, 2011). Therefore, targeted studies analyzing how these literary narratives manifest hidden trauma could clarify the powerful links between literature, psychology, and adolescent mental health, ultimately illuminating how stories provide a crucial mirror for young readers who may feel isolated in their own experiences.

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