



Unmasking the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Post-Traumatic (2022) Novel

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Abstract

This study explores the portrayal of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in Chantal V. Johnson's *Post-Traumatic* (2022), focusing on the main character, Vivian, through the DSM-5 framework. The objective is to examine how Vivian's unresolved childhood trauma manifests in PTSD symptoms and how these align with the DSM-5 criteria. Using a qualitative research method, the analysis reviews key passages from the novel that depict PTSD-related behaviors, including flashbacks, emotional detachment, avoidance, and self-destructive tendencies. These passages are interpreted in relation to the DSM-5, highlighting how Vivian's traumatic past continues to influence her psychological state, relationships, and coping mechanisms. The findings reveal that Vivian experiences chronic sleep disturbances, paranoia, hypervigilance, and unhealthy behaviors such as smoking and extreme dieting as forms of maladaptive coping. Her unresolved trauma intensifies these symptoms, affecting her ability to maintain stable personal and professional relationships. The study concludes that the portrayal of PTSD in *Post-Traumatic* (2022) strongly aligns with DSM-5 criteria, showing how trauma affects emotional regulation, self-perception, and social functioning. Vivian's substance abuse and self-destructive behaviors serve as coping mechanisms, illustrating the lasting effects of trauma on her mental well-being. By analyzing these dynamics, the study emphasizes the importance of structured psychological frameworks like the DSM-5 in understanding the complexities of trauma in literary characters, providing deeper insights into how PTSD shapes identity and behavior, and illustrating the ongoing cycles of PTSD caused by unresolved trauma.

Keywords: *DSM-5, Literary Analysis, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*

Introduction

Literature includes diverse topics, providing readers with insight into various aspects of human life, including emotional challenges and offering a comprehensive exploration of the human condition (Klarer, 2004). Literature also reflects human conditions, with one example being the portrayal of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), a mental health condition triggered by experiencing or witnessing traumatic events such as violence, accidents, or natural disasters (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). PTSD can significantly affect a person's daily life, relationships, and mental health, often requiring professional intervention to manage symptoms.

Chantal V. Johnson's novel *Post-Traumatic (2022)* centers on Vivian, a lawyer working with psychiatric patients in New York City, who struggles with the aftermath of childhood abuse. The novel explores the lasting impact of trauma on her personal and professional life. Despite her career achievements, Vivian's unresolved trauma causes emotional instability, influencing her relationships and self-perception. The novel provides a complex portrayal of PTSD, exploring how past trauma continues to shape one's identity and attempts at recovery. While PTSD has been widely examined in literature, studies applying DSM-5 criteria specifically to *Post-Traumatic (2022)* remain limited. This research seeks to address that gap by analyzing Vivian's symptoms through a structured clinical lens, offering a more precise understanding of PTSD in literary representation.

Most people will experience a traumatic event within their lifetime. One commonly recognized response to trauma exposure is Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (Mehta et al., 2020). This study aims to analyze the portrayal of PTSD in *Post-Traumatic* using the DSM-5 framework, which offers standardized criteria for diagnosing mental health disorders. Patients with PTSD may not be fully aware of their symptoms (Yehuda et al., 2015). PTSD is an underdiagnosed clinical entity in part due to a lack of awareness in the general population, stigma, and barriers to healthcare access (Hoge et al., 2004). DSM-5's detailed description of PTSD symptoms provides a basis for understanding Vivian's behaviors and experiences. While previous studies have explored PTSD in literature, few have focused on this novel.

Sandy Prasetyo's research (2019) on PTSD in *Logan* film offers valuable insights into how trauma affects a character's mental health. Similar to this study, Prasetyo's work uses psychological theories to highlight PTSD symptoms. However, while Prasetyo's focus is on Logan's violent past as a fighter, this research examines Vivian, a lawyer coping with childhood abuse. Both studies recognize key PTSD symptoms, but Vivian's role as a professional working with psychiatric patients provides a different perspective, using DSM-5 criteria to explore trauma in a more structured way. The study by Hansen, Ross, and Armour (2017) examines dissociative PTSD using DSM-5 criteria, similar to this research, which explores complex trauma symptoms. Vivian's story offers a unique perspective on PTSD within a legal and psychiatric setting, highlighting its impact on both personal and

professional life. While PTSD has been widely analyzed in literature, this study uniquely applies DSM-5 criteria to *Post-Traumatic (2022)*, filling a gap in existing research by focusing on how PTSD manifests in a high-functioning professional woman.

Previous research on PTSD in literature has primarily focused on trauma in war veterans, abuse survivors, or crime victims, often examining PTSD in male protagonists. This study expands on those perspectives by analyzing PTSD in a female professional navigating a legal and psychiatric environment, providing insight into how trauma affects both personal and professional spheres. By applying the DSM-5 criteria to the novel's depiction of PTSD, this research seeks to fill a gap in the literature, contributing to a better understanding of how trauma is represented in literary works and its societal impact.

This study hypothesizes that Vivian's character exhibits key PTSD symptoms as outlined in the DSM-5, influencing her relationships, self-perception, and coping mechanisms. The objective of this study is to explore how PTSD, as described in the DSM-5, is portrayed in Vivian's character, analyzing her symptoms and behaviors. Furthermore, this research aims to highlight the significance of PTSD representation in literature, fostering awareness of mental health struggles among professionals who may appear high-functioning but carry unresolved trauma. This study marks a significant contribution to the literary analysis of PTSD by being the first to examine *Post-Traumatic (2022)* through the DSM-5 framework, bridging psychological and literary perspectives.

Method

This study uses a qualitative research method to analyze the novel *Post-Traumatic (2022)* using the DSM-5 framework for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The main focus is on the character Vivian and how her words and actions show signs of PTSD. To make the analysis clear, the study picks key parts of the novel where Vivian shows trauma symptoms, such as fear, stress, or avoiding certain situations. These parts are chosen because they match PTSD symptoms in the DSM-5. The study also looks at how Vivian deals with her trauma and how it affects her relationships and work.

The data is collected by reading the novel carefully to understand its story, characters, and themes. Important quotes are taken from the novel, especially those that show PTSD symptoms. Each chosen passage is compared to DSM-5 PTSD symptoms, like flashbacks, avoiding reminders of trauma, or sudden mood changes. This helps ensure that the analysis is structured and consistent. The study then connects these findings with psychological and literary theories to give a full understanding of Vivian's PTSD. It also looks at how the novel contributes to discussions about trauma in literature.

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method. Qualitative research studies people's experiences, behaviors, and interactions (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). A qualitative approach is used because it helps explain complex emotional experiences like PTSD, rather than just counting how often they appear. This method allows for a deeper understanding of how Vivian's trauma affects her thoughts, emotions, and actions. Qualitative methods are important for exploring complex topics in depth (Lim, W. M., 2024). The researchers collected, classified, analyzed, and interpreted the data to understand how PTSD is shown in the novel.

Results and Discussion

The writer found several key symptoms of PTSD depicted in the novel *Post-Traumatic (2022)* by Chantal V. Johnson, particularly through the main character, Vivian, and her psychological responses to trauma. These symptoms are closely connected into the narrative, illustrating how Vivian's emotional and mental state is impacted by her past experiences. The analysis will focus on specific PTSD symptoms presented in the novel, such as flashbacks, emotional numbing, and avoidance, while drawing connections to the DSM-5 criteria and examining how these symptoms manifest through Vivian's actions and thoughts.

Childhood Trauma and Flashbacks

Vivian's experience with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is characterized by a range of weakening symptoms that significantly impact her daily life. These incidents carry her back to her childhood trauma, particularly the abuse she suffered. Childhood trauma is one of the most robust and significant risk factors for depressive and anxiety disorders (Kuzminskaite et al., 2021). A painful childhood can significantly increase Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), particularly when the child is exposed to chronic stress, abuse, neglect, or other traumatic experiences (Stahlschmidt et al., 2020). The impact of childhood trauma adverse experiences can be profound, affecting psychology (De Haan et al., 2021).

"I have so many memories of my mother dragging me into the bathroom when she was drunk, apologizing to me. But yeah, child abuse comedy" (*Post-Traumatic*, 2022, p. 28)

This narrative reflects Vivian's complex relationship with her past, as she employs dark humor to cope with the emotional scars left by her mother's abuse. The casual tone conceals deep psychological pain, underscoring the long-term impact of her childhood trauma on her current struggles with PTSD.

Trauma survivors often re-experience the traumatic event through flashbacks or nightmares and report heightened emotional and physiological responses to reminders of the traumatic event (Bardeen et al., 2013). These flashbacks can occur suddenly and disrupt her ability to function in social and professional contexts. The intensity of these flashbacks distorts her perception of reality, leading to emotional distress, anxiety, and a pervasive sense of helplessness (DSM-5, 2013, p. 105).

Flashbacks are a dissociative reaction in which the individual feels or acts like they are thrown back into the traumatic event (Van Dongen et al., 2022). Flashbacks play a crucial role in PTSD by flooding individuals with intense, overwhelming memories of their trauma, often distorting the line between past and present, which not only disrupts their sense of reality but also increases the emotional weakness and triggers intense psychological distress. Flashbacks immerse her in past trauma, blurring the line between past and present, intensifying her psychological distress, and impairing her ability to engage fully in daily life.

Fear of Separation and Lack of Safety

After traumatic events like disasters, fear of separation from loved ones is common, especially if separation occurred during the event. Fears are the emotional response to a given stimuli or situation that is identified as threatening or scary (Bagnell, 2011). In PTSD, symptoms focus on intrusive memories and avoidance related to the trauma, while separation anxiety disorder involves worry and avoidance centered on the safety of loved ones and fear of being apart from them (DSM-5, 2013, p. 194).

“In particular, she thought of the day the violent man carried her, on his shoulder, to a secluded part of their blighted city. She remembered the underside of her right leg being scratched by the wrench in his back pocket.” (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 39)

This passage reveals Vivian's traumatic memories, illustrating how past experiences haunt her present. The detailed recollection emphasizes her pain and fear, reinforcing the deep and lasting impact of her trauma on her mental state and further contributing to her struggle with PTSD.

Lack of feeling safe is the main cause of mental disorders, such as anxiety, phobias, depression, and PTSD (Zheng et al., 2016). For Vivian, her fear of separation from loved ones may not only stem from a natural response to trauma but also indicate a deeper emotional dependency exacerbated by her PTSD. Her experiences of loss and betrayal likely intensify this fear, making her more prone to anxiety and avoidance behaviors whenever separation seems imminent. Consequently, her PTSD symptoms become even more complex, as trauma erodes her emotional resilience and fosters a strong reliance on others for security and stability. This suggests that her fear of separation is not solely a reaction to external dangers but also an emotional manifestation of unresolved trauma.

“Vivian grew bored, smoked more, and went to the bathroom to be alone with her phone.” (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 40)

This scene illustrates Vivian’s avoidance behavior, a common PTSD symptom. Rather than staying engaged with her surroundings, she chooses to isolate herself by retreating to the bathroom and smoking, seeking comfort in solitude and distraction. This pattern reflects her struggle to cope with boredom or emotional discomfort, using avoidance as a mechanism to escape potential triggers or distressing thoughts, an all too common response among individuals with PTSD.

“I got so paranoid on the train over here. I thought these random guys were going to like, attack me or whatever. They were just talking, though.” (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 28)

This statement reveals Vivian’s amplified sense of fear and hypervigilance, common in PTSD. Her mistaken belief that strangers were a threat, even though there was no real danger, shows how her past trauma has changed how she sees safety. Even though nothing bad happened, her ongoing fear highlights the lasting effects of her PTSD.

Betrayal Trauma and Compounded Grief

In addition to her personal trauma, Vivian's PTSD is worsened by the trauma experienced by close relations. Betrayal trauma consists of negative life experiences in which the victims are close to the traumatizing people (Ozturk & Erdogan, 2021). Learning of violent or accidental deaths among family members and friends has deeply affected her emotional state. The loss of several family members in tragic incidents, along with repeated heartbreak from losing romantic partners, intensifies her feelings of grief and insecurity. These experiences create a profound sense of loss that amplifies her psychological trauma and complicates her personal relationships (DSM-5, 2013, p. 271).

“I like my coffee how I like my men. Weak and sweet. But not too sweet, because that’s disgusting” she called to Jane from the kitchen. (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 25)

Vivian’s comment about liking her coffee “weak and sweet” but “not too sweet” reflects her frustration with men, suggesting she prefers a balance in relationships but has grown wary of extremes, hinting at her disappointment with romantic connections.

Vivian’s emotional difficulties reflect the deep impact of her PTSD, particularly in how it shapes her relationships, both romantic and familial. Her struggles with trust and emotional detachment from loved ones are clear symptoms of her trauma, where past experiences of betrayal and unresolved grief make it difficult for her to trust or bond with others. The shame from her family and the pain of losing loved ones make her emotions more complicated, making her feel alone and disconnected.

These layers of trauma not only heighten her emotional distress but also prevent her from forming meaningful, supportive relationships, keeping her stuck in a cycle of instability.

Michael said “You know, Mom had a lot of boyfriends” Before Vivian was born, he meant. (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 29)

Michael (Vivian’s older brother) makes a remark that triggers feelings of shame and resentment in Vivian, reinforcing her sense of instability. This part not only deepens her emotional turmoil but also destabilizes her sense of identity. By hearing others speak poorly of her mother, Vivian’s self-perception is further damaged, complicating her ability to process her own trauma and deepening her struggles with PTSD.

“If pressed, Vivian would say she loved her mother in a biological way, but she didn't like her. The woman was impulsive and petulant, prone to explosive outbursts.” (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 80)

Vivian's statement suggests emotional numbness, a symptom of PTSD where individuals feel disconnected from their emotions and struggle to express love or empathy, even toward close family members. This numbness can result from repeated emotional wounds, leading her to feel indifferent toward her mother. In addition, her conflicted emotions reveal the lasting impact of unresolved trauma, as she acknowledges a biological connection but struggles with genuine affection due to her mother's volatile behavior. The lack of a secure parental bond leaves Vivian emotionally adrift, reinforcing her struggles with PTSD.

“She first noticed the gravestone for their brother, Derron. She slowly grazed it with her fingers” (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 84)

This scene highlights Vivian's enduring grief over the loss of her brother, Derron. The act of grazing the gravestone with her fingers is a silent expression of her sorrow, showing how deeply his death affects her. This moment reflects the PTSD symptom related to grief and emotional distress, particularly when reminded of past losses. According to the DSM-5, learning about the violent or accidental deaths of family members can intensify psychological trauma (DSM-5, 2013, p. 271). In Vivian’s case, this experience rekindles her grief, complicating her emotions and making it difficult for her to maintain healthy relationships.

“Next to Derron in the graveyard was Scooby, a beautiful, sweet, and distinctly nonabusive cousin whom Vivian had liked a lot because he would always sit and color with her and ask her questions” (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 86)

This scene emphasizes Vivian's emotional connection to her cousin, Scooby, through fond memories of their time together. His recollection symbolizes a longing for comfort and innocence, contrasting sharply with the trauma of her brother Derron's death. According to the DSM-5, the mix of positive and negative memories can complicate grief (DSM-5, 2013, p. 271). For Vivian, this nostalgia intensifies her feelings of loss, leading to emotional instability that impacts her ability to form healthy relationships.

Emotional Detachment and Negative Cognition

PTSD is frequently portrayed through characters struggling with the enduring psychological effects of trauma, such as flashbacks, emotional detachment, hypervigilance, and isolation. Authors often use these symptoms to illustrate how trauma disrupts a character's life, relationships, and sense of self. This aligns with DSM-5 criteria, which outlines PTSD symptoms in categories like intrusion (flashbacks, nightmares), avoidance (avoiding reminders of trauma), hyperarousal (irritability, anxiety), and negative alterations in mood or cognition (guilt, shame, memory issues). Literature often mirrors these clinical aspects to portray the complexity of trauma. People with PTSD often struggle to manage negative emotions (DSM-5, 2013, p. 272).

Furthermore, PTSD is commonly accompanied by intense and painful emotions such as fear, sadness, anger, and helplessness (Birrer et al., 2007). Self-criticism also frequently emerges as a secondary effect of PTSD, particularly in individuals who have experienced trauma associated with feelings of guilt, shame, or a sense of responsibility for the traumatic event (Winders et al., 2020). Individuals with PTSD may be quick-tempered and may even engage in aggressive verbal and/or physical behavior with little or no provocation, such as yelling at people, getting into fights, or destroying objects (DSM-5, 2013, p. 275). This lack of emotional control and aggression shows how trauma makes it harder for people to stay emotionally stable and maintain good relationships, creating a harmful cycle of PTSD.

Recalling the words from the man on the street before.

"You have a nice body but you need to work on your face" It was true that Vivian wasn't as attractive as she wanted to be. When she was alone, without makeup, stoned and crying in the mirror as she was just now, she felt acutely hideous". (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 42)

This moment shows Vivian's deep insecurity and self-blame, which are common for people with PTSD. In this painful moment, she sees herself as unattractive and unworthy, showing how much shame and negative self-thoughts she carries. Her harsh self-criticism shows how her trauma has affected her emotions, making her feel unworthy and hopeless, which makes her mental health even worse.

Unhealthy Coping Mechanisms

Trauma is related to stress in that psychologists understand it to be a more acute form of stress resulting from a particular event or series of events that overwhelm a person's typical coping mechanisms (Van der Kolk, 1998). They may also engage in reckless or self-destructive behavior such as dangerous driving, excessive alcohol or drug use, or self-injurious or suicidal behavior (DSM-5, 2013, p. 275). Individual differences in coping styles may contribute to both positive and negative sequelae of trauma (Peters et al., 2021). Vivian does struggle with unhealthy coping mechanisms, including alcohol and smoking. She uses alcohol and cigarettes as ways to numb her emotions and escape from her feelings of anxiety, shame, and self-blame. These habits show how she tries to deal with her deep emotional pain but instead end up making her mental health worse, trapping her in a cycle of avoidance, one of the main signs of PTSD.

Vivian's reliance on alcohol and cigarettes reflects not only her inability to cope with the overwhelming emotional pain of her trauma but also highlights a wider issue and many trauma survivors turn to harmful behaviors when they don't have the right support. While these habits might seem like an escape, they actually make her emotional struggles worse. This shows how unresolved trauma can push people into dangerous behaviors, proving the strong link between trauma and self-destructive habits.

After a few harsh puffs of her cigarette. Vivian felt her lips peeling. (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 27)

"I wrote papers once." Vivian relit the joint and then inhaled too much, too fast. The smoke scaled her throat" (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 38)

Both passages illustrate how Vivian turns to smoking, whether cigarettes or joints as a way to numb her emotional pain. The way her lips peel and her throat burns show how her trauma also takes a physical toll on her body. These actions highlight her struggle to manage overwhelming emotions, resorting to self-harm through smoking as a temporary escape from the deeper pain of her PTSD.

Sleep Disturbances

Moreover, Vivian suffers from chronic sleep disturbances, a common symptom of PTSD, which often manifests as related to her past traumatic experiences. Her nightmares keep coming back, making her feel emotionally drained and physically exhausted, which increases her anxiety about sleep and worsens her overall mental health. In PTSD, sleep disturbances deepen other symptoms, like mood instability, memory issues, and cognitive difficulties (Kushida et al., 2005). The lack of restorative sleep further escalates her PTSD symptoms, impairing her ability to function effectively during the day (DSM-5, 2013, p. 276).

Based on the literature, chronic sleep disturbances are frequently linked to PTSD and have been shown to maintain a cycle of emotional and cognitive decline, reinforcing the impact of other symptoms. Vivian's repeated nightmares show this link to her bad sleep doesn't just reflect her trauma, but it also makes her emotional struggles and mental difficulties even worse. This creates a never-ending cycle where poor sleep worsens her mental health, matching the DSM-5's idea that sleep problems are a major part of PTSD. Because of this, Vivian's struggles with sleep show how untreated sleep issues can make PTSD worse, stopping her from recovering and living a normal life.

"The next morning, Saturday, Vivian woke up panicked from dark, predatory dreams. Her dreams were terrifying. There were the ones where she was chased by a hidden figure and the ones where she felt up by someone she knew" (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 46)

Vivian's repeated nightmares are clear signs of PTSD-related sleep problems. These disturbing dreams often bring back or symbolize her past trauma, leaving her emotionally drained and physically weak. Not getting enough good sleep increases her anxiety and makes it harder for her to function, creating a damaging cycle where her fear of sleeping makes her mental health even worse.

Interpersonal Difficulties and Emotional Dysregulation

Emotional numbness and trouble in relationships are major parts of PTSD, often making recovery harder. Vivian's struggles to form meaningful connections and regulate her emotions align with this pattern, showing how trauma can disrupt the ability to engage in healthy relationships. These struggles create a cycle of emotional withdrawal, where her inability to feel positive emotions increases her sense of isolation. According to the DSM-5, unresolved social problems can keep PTSD going, reducing emotional support and increasing distress. Vivian's struggles show how untreated trauma affects both her inner emotions and her ability to maintain close, supportive relationships. The DSM-5 also states that PTSD often involves difficulty feeling positive emotions, controlling emotions, and maintaining stable relationships (DSM-5, 2013, p. 276). Research further confirms that interpersonal problems are strongly linked to PTSD symptoms, making social struggles a key part of trauma's lasting effects (Hughesdon et al., 2021).

"Convinced that Matthew would not want to date anyone over 110 pounds, Vivian had mechanically gone on a ketogenic diet in the week leading up to their first date." (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 48)

Vivian's belief that Matthew wouldn't date her unless she was under 110 pounds shows Body Image Distortion, where she ties her self-worth to her weight. Her extreme dieting reflects Self-Destructive Behavior, showing how she is willing to harm her own health to meet an unrealistic standard.

"During the entire afternoon visit Vivian cycled between gently scolding Anita for her irrationality and contemptuousness, quietly resenting those qualities Anita, trying to accept Anita for who she was but failing, and ultimately being disappointed in herself." (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 81)

Vivian's internal struggle in the scene cycling between scolding, resenting, trying to accept Anita as her mom, and ultimately feeling disappointed in herself demonstrates her difficulty in regulating her emotions and managing her relationship with Anita. This aligns with PTSD criteria, where trauma survivors have difficulty controlling emotions and maintaining stable relationships.

"As an adult, Vivian was often depressed while visiting her family, and for the longest time, she'd castigated herself for it." (Post-Traumatic, 2022, p. 83)

Here, Vivian experiences Emotional Dysregulation, where her family visits trigger intense emotional instability. Her depressive episodes are worsened by Self-Criticism, as she blames herself for feeling this way. This pattern is common in PTSD, where returning to environments linked to past trauma like family dynamics can bring overwhelming emotions. Instead of expressing frustration, Vivian internalizes her feelings, increasing her guilt and deepening her psychological distress.

The Long-Term Effects of PTSD on Vivian's Emotional Maturity

Her frequent experiences of overwhelming feelings, such as depression and frustration during family interactions, demonstrate her difficulty in processing emotions in a healthy manner. Instead of expressing or working through these emotions, Vivian internalizes them, leading to harsh self-castigation. Vivian's PTSD significantly impacts her ability to manage emotions, particularly through emotional dysregulation and intense self-criticism. Emotion dysregulation in individuals with PTSD is characterized by difficulty managing and controlling emotional responses, often resulting in heightened emotional reactions and mood swings (Pencea et al., 2019). This lack of emotional regulation stunts her emotional growth, as she remains stuck in cycles of self-criticism rather than developing healthier coping strategies. Her struggle to handle emotionally charged situations reveals an emotional immaturity directly linked to the long-term effects of her trauma.

Additionally, Vivian's tendency to engage in avoidance and emotional detachment further highlights the toll of PTSD on her emotional maturity. By isolating herself and relying on habits like smoking or retreating to the bathroom to escape stress, she avoids confronting uncomfortable emotions. Avoidance and emotional detachment are common coping mechanisms in individuals with PTSD, where they distance themselves from thoughts, feelings, or situations that may

trigger traumatic memories, often leading to social isolation and emotional disconnection (McDevitt-Murphy et al., 2020). This avoidance behavior prevents her from addressing emotional challenges and deepening her connections with others, reinforcing her emotional stagnation.

Emotional detachment in PTSD often manifests as a protective mechanism, where individuals shut down or disconnect from their feelings to avoid reliving painful emotions, ultimately impairing their ability to form meaningful connections with others (Ford & Courtois, 2021). Her emotional detachment from her mother, driven by anger and the effects of past trauma, underscores her inability to process complex feelings, leaving her disconnected and emotionally numb. These behaviors illustrate how PTSD not only inhibits her ability to confront emotional pain but also hinders her growth towards emotional resilience and maturity.

Conclusion

Vivian's experience with PTSD reflects many of the criteria outlined in the DSM-5, particularly through her intrusive memories, avoidance behaviors, emotional dysregulation, and self-destructive tendencies. Her frequent flashbacks, triggered by past trauma, show how clearly, she recalls painful events, disrupting her daily life. The emotional detachment, paranoia, and chronic sleep disturbances she suffers further align with PTSD symptoms, as detailed in the DSM-5, revealing the depth of her psychological struggles.

In addition, the novel's portrayal of Vivian as the main character closely aligns with the DSM-5 criteria, particularly in how it depicts her unhealthy coping mechanisms, such as smoking and extreme dieting. These behaviors underscore her inability to manage the deep emotional wounds caused by her unresolved childhood trauma. Vivian's struggles clearly reflect the destabilizing impact of untreated PTSD, as her past experiences continue to shape her mental and emotional state. This novel highlights how PTSD can affect different aspects of a person's life, emphasizing the need for better awareness and support for trauma survivors. The narrative's focus on her coping strategies highlights the profound and lasting effects of trauma on her overall well-being, reinforcing the DSM-5 framework's emphasis on the complexity of PTSD.

This study helps deepen the understanding of PTSD in literature, showing how fictional portrayals can reflect real psychological struggles. Future research could explore the representation of PTSD in contemporary literature, focusing on how diverse narratives depict the intersection of trauma, gender, and societal expectations. Examining different literary works that feature female protagonists dealing with PTSD could shed light on how gender influences coping strategies and societal perceptions of mental health. Additionally, exploring the role of social support systems, or the lack thereof, in these narratives might provide insights into the importance of external factors in the recovery process.

Further studies could also consider how literature can be used in educational or clinical settings to raise awareness about PTSD and encourage discussions on mental health. A cross-cultural analysis of PTSD portrayals could also reveal how cultural differences shape both the experience and management of trauma in various societal contexts.

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