



Healing Through Words: A Literary Analysis of BTS Lyrics Using Mental Health Narratives

<sup>1</sup>Rimsha Khalid -Email- [rimshakhalido98@gmail.com](mailto:rimshakhalido98@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup>Manal -Email- [manal.aqil@skt.umt.edu.pk](mailto:manal.aqil@skt.umt.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup>Laiba Shahbaz -Email- [laibashahbaz60@gmail.com](mailto:laibashahbaz60@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>University of Management and Technology

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, University of Management and Technology

<sup>3</sup>University of Management and Technology

Article Details:

Received on 20 June 2025

Accepted on 15 July 2025

Published on 16 July 2025

Corresponding Authors\*:

Abstract

This study examines the lyrics of BTS, a globally recognized South Korean music group, with a focus on their narratives of trauma, emotional struggles, and psychological healing. The purpose of this study is to examine BTS's selected music using trauma theory as a conceptual framework. The focus will be directed towards how symbolic language, emotional metaphors, and poetic structures are deployed in these songs to express experiences of depression, anxiety, and self-loss, as well as recovery after trauma. The trauma theories used to ground the study will be Judith Herman, who outlines the clinical process of trauma recovery through multiple stages of psychological recovery, and Cathy Caruth, who theorized and developed traumatic experiences as a delayed, and often fragmented, expression of trauma. The study utilizes close reading, as part of qualitative literary analysis, and analyzes seven BTS songs, examining them as literary texts that describe psychological pain, while also implicitly guiding the listener symbolically, through the process of healing. These song lyrics have significance as literary texts because they not only narrate experiences of psychological suffering but also symbolically take their audience members through a physical and emotional healing lens. Responses from fans demonstrate the relevance of the lyrics to fans' lives and the emotional reach of lyrics. These responses have shown how the music of BTS greatly affects the fans' lives, as they too have trauma or mental health issues that are involved, and BTS provides a way to create a space together to heal. The study concludes that BTS's lyrics serve as a bridge between emotional articulation and recovery, demonstrating how popular music can function as both literary art and a tool for healing in the modern world.

**Keywords:** Healing, Literary analysis, BTS Lyrics, Mental Health, Trauma Theory



## Introduction

As the world faces increased emotional turmoil, psychological distress, and social disconnection, the need for mental health awareness and healing stories is more important than ever. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), more than 700,000 people die due to suicide each year, making suicide the fourth leading cause of death among people aged 15–29 years old (“Suicide”). The implications of untreated mental diseases, such as depression, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), are devastating not only for people everywhere, but in many ways, the global mental health crisis has reached a critical stage requiring a more concerted effort to tackle. Traditional therapy may be inaccessible for many, making art, literature, and music powerful alternatives for emotional support and collective healing.

One current example of the therapeutic power of music can be seen in the band BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan), a South Korean music group that has expanded its influence worldwide across all industries. BTS has developed a strong economy and promotion for themselves through their music, but the band has elevated their work to a level beyond music. They have shown strong emotional openness in their music and lyrics, addressing issues such as mental health, identity crises, and trauma. When it comes to commercial pop and hip-hop, BTS stands out by offering a unique blend of lyrical vulnerability and poetic depth. They delve into themes of suffering, survival, and healing in their music. This study takes a closer look at their lyrics as if they were literary works, using trauma theory as a lens, and also considers fan reactions to explore the emotional resonance of their songs.

Trauma is central to this research. Trauma, as psychiatrist Judith Herman observes, is not just a psychological disturbance but a physical rupture in one’s sense of safety and identity. In her book *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman describes three basic steps to healing: 1) Safety, 2) Remembrance and Mourning, and 3) Reconnection to Ordinary Life (Herman 155). These steps provide the basis for thinking about how individuals work through emotional pain and rebuild their lives after trauma. Similarly, trauma scholar and literary studies scholar Cathy Caruth states that trauma is often inexpressible through traditional language, and that time and One’s emotional reaction to trauma is repetitive and their story is fractured due to the unrepresentability of the trauma (Caruth 4). Herman and Caruth’s theories provide valuable tools to examine how BTS’s lyrics reflect and process trauma, often using poetic devices, metaphor, or symbol to represent psychological states that may not be able to be articulated via conventional discourse.

BTS engagement with trauma is not theoretical; it’s deeply personal. The group members have consistently expressed their struggles with mental health in interviews with the public. For example, SUGA (Min Yoongi) shared in a *Time Magazine* interview, stating, “We feel it’s very important for people who are suffering to be able to talk about it, so we try to be the voice of those people” (Chow). Also, RM (Kim Namjoon) stated in a United Nations speech, “I have many faults and I have many more fears, but I’m going to embrace myself as hard as I can. And I’m starting to love myself little by little” (“BTS Speech at the UN”). These statements illustrate how BTS curates a sonic environment where it’s acceptable to be vulnerable; we can help each other heal emotionally, and they offer listeners the opportunity to fight, whatever that battle might look like for them.

In this research, I have examined selected BTS songs: “Spring Day,” “Zero O’Clock,” “Black Swan,” “Fake Love,” “Blue and Grey,” “The Truth Untold,” and “Whalien 52.” I chose these songs based on their explicit engagement with mental health themes, and when



approached with trauma theory as a lens, these songs indicate an emotional trajectory similar to the psychological process explored by Herman and Caruth. For example, “Spring Day” metaphorically engages with the grief of longing through the imagery of seasons, “Black Swan” studies the fear of burnout and the resulting emptiness. So these songs provide not just narratives of hopelessness but also opportunities toward self-awareness, hope, and processing emotions.

The effects of BTS’s lyrical content go well beyond simply academic analysis. People all over the world have shared accounts of being able to emotionally heal thanks to BTS. Examples of fans’ authentic accounts posted on Reddit, YouTube, and fan sites illustrate the actual therapeutic usefulness of the songs. A fan on Reddit said, “Spring Day made it easier for me to deal with the aftermath of losing my brother. It’s like someone understood me when I had no way to articulate what I felt.” (u/hopeformorning). These fan testimonies fit Caruth’s conception of trauma as something that is often inexpressible until one encounters a narrative or medium that reflects their experience in some way. The music of BTS is a narrative space where a silence can be ruptured, feelings are legitimized, and healing can begin.

BTS’s openness about trauma and mental health challenges cultural stigma, especially in Confucian societies where such topics are often suppressed. Through their lyrics, they redefine masculinity by promoting emotional openness, self-love, and collective healing, core values in trauma recovery frameworks.

This research demonstrates the value of combining literary analysis with pop culture by treating BTS’s lyrics as meaningful texts. Their use of literary devices such as metaphor, imagery, and symbolism elevates their music beyond pop, allowing language to express trauma and recovery. Through trauma theory, the study highlights how music can serve as a tool for emotional understanding and self-care, reinforcing its interdisciplinary significance.

This study investigates BTS’s lyrics in light of global mental health, trauma, and youth identity. It suggests that their music functions as a therapeutic narrative that cultivates empathy and healing, and self-understanding. The analysis uses trauma theories by Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth, and is enriched by the use of fans’ responses, and makes a song-by-song literary analysis. This study contributes to interdisciplinary research on music as emotional literacy and a source of psychological resilience.

### **Thesis Statement**

Through the lens of Judith Herman’s and Cathy Caruth’s theories on trauma, the study argues that the selected song lyrics of BTS work as therapeutic literary texts that articulate and process emotional trauma, depression, and identity crises. Through textual analysis and authentic fan responses, the study illustrates how BTS’s music conveys unexpressed emotional and psychological struggles as both a confined and remediation process of healing for audiences across the globe. This adds to a broader and multifaceted conversation concerning mental health, self-awareness, and emotional recovery in 21st-century culture.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To analyze the narrative structure and poetry within the narrative elements of BTS song lyrics that reflect emotional recovery and healing.
2. To apply trauma theory, Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth analyze representations of trauma in BTS song lyrics.



### Research Questions

1. How do experiences of trauma and emotional recovery show through BTS lyrics?
2. What insights can trauma theory offer in interpreting BTS lyrics related to trauma and healing?

### Significance of the study

This study connects literary analysis with mental health acknowledgement since investigating the lyrics of BTS as emotionally expressive texts was a means of processing trauma and healing psychologically. It alters the parameters of the academic definition of "text" by considering song lyrics that are metaphor-heavy as part of legitimate material in the study of literary and trauma analysis. The social aspect is highlighted to identify BTS as a culturally normalizing "catalyst" to discuss mental health across a global youth audience. The psychological aspect can be gleaned from the fan testimonials showing how BTS is therapeutic by reducing isolation, which supports healing emotionally. The personal and developmental aspects instantiate the significance of emotionally intelligent media for young youth and adults in thoughts about who can be parents, educators, and youth counselors as they relate specifically to youth mental health issues.

### Literature Review

The global increase in interactions around mental health has inspired media scholars to find out how literature, music and address emotional trauma and treatment. The popular South Korean music group, BTS, stands as a key subject of Literary and psychological analysis for its emotionally honest and socially conscious Lyrics. Their songs often focus on themes of Loneliness, anxiety, and self-loss or harm, providing therapeutic messages that resonate deeply with audiences. Drawing on trauma theory, especially the works of Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth, BTS songs can be analyzed both as a renovation of trauma stories, allowing both artists and their supporters to participate in verbal therapy.

The complex interplay between trauma and narrative has been a topic of significant interest for scholars in both literature and psychoanalysis. Trauma theorist Cathy Caruth states that trauma is an event that a person is not able to fully process and grasp at first. Trauma emerges and is reprocessed later through involuntary memories, flashbacks, and recurring feelings of distress (Caruth 4). This delayed response is important to understand how trauma works psychologically and how individuals try to heal themselves. Judith Herman extends this understanding by emphasizing the role of storytelling as a part of the healing process. According to Herman, identifies that survivors begin the healing process when they can tell their stories in a way that provides Coherence and meaning to their experience. This act of narrative reconstruction is important because trauma interrupts the survivors' experience with time and distorts a potential narrative identity. Through the creation of narrative, survivors can regain control over their sense of memories and feelings tone, which can reduce the power trauma holds over their lives (Herman 175). These fragmented emotions can be communicated and understood by literature, poetry, and music that provides symbolic language. Therefore, trauma theory serves as a great way to begin examining created works that express psychological wounds, including lyrics to popular music.

In recent years, popular music has become a major platform for this kind of emotional expression, especially through songs by the South Korean group BTS. Known for their honesty and vulnerability, BTS's Lyrical work has often addressed subjects like





depression, anxiety, loss, self-hatred, and recovery, especially to make their music relevant in the discussion about mental health.

The interest of scholars in BTS songs has increased as researchers have tried to understand their cultural and emotional effects. Amara and Kusuma conducted a semiotic analysis of the BTS song "Magic Shop," interpreting it as a place for self-comfort and emotional flexibility. He concluded that metaphors and symbols in the song serve as mental shelters for listeners dealing with internal turmoil (Amara and Kusuma 215). Other studies go beyond interpretation and apply songs to medical practices. Yuniswara and Hartini explored how BTS songs can be used as an intervention tool for adolescent women dealing with cognitive rumors, a common symptom of anxiety and depression. His study showed that the song analysis helped the participants reflect on their feelings and ideas, making emotional exploration and self-understanding (Yuniswara and Hartini 67). These studies confirm the strong emotional Connection fans have with BTS words and the way their songs serve as a kind of informal or unpaid therapy.

In addition, BTS members themselves have spoken out about mental health in a more comprehensive way by giving official statements. In a UNICEF "Love Myself" speech to the United Nations on September 24, 2018, RM (Kim Namjoon) stated, "We have learned to love ourselves, so now I urge you to 'speak yourself.'...I have many faults and I have many more fears, but I'm going to embrace myself as hard as I can" (RM UN Speech). In context, this enthusiasm for self-love and self-expression reminds listeners to be vulnerable and develop some self-awareness. Similarly, when RM said in a 2019 Entertainment Weekly interview that the Love Yourself series is "we don't want to preach this way 'Do this or don't do that'...love, the real meaning of it, starts with loving ourselves and accepting some ironies and some destinies, that we have from the very first" (McNamara). In the meantime, Suga stressed mental health care becoming normal, indicating, "Based on physical health, you get an idea... and that same thing applies mentally. Some days you are in a good state; sometimes you are not" (McNamara). This transparency not only normalizes mental health discussions but also aligns with the lyrical conversations in their music. Public vulnerability reinforces the emotional ties between BTS and their fan base, ARMY, and enables fans to relate their hurt to someone else's words.

Despite the growing educational attention on BTS and their impact on youth, most current research focuses on comprehensive subjects. Such as phantom culture, self-empowerment, and social influence. Particularly, a limited discovery of their Lyrical materials through trauma theory. Some studies suggest that their songs can be read as literary narratives that are an emotional pain, loss, and recovery experience. This leaves a gap that the purpose of the current research is to analyze the songs only as more than entertainment, as in the form of careful texts that talk of deep human experiences of trauma.

Fan communities provide further illustrations of the healing properties of music. On platforms such as Weverse and Reddit, fan posts narrate their coping with grief, anxiety, and resilience inspired by BTS's music. This act of joining together, through sharing experiences, resonates with Herman, who described "reconnection". This is the way for survivors to build their social connections and find purpose through shared experiences (Herman 207). In addition, neurobiological studies support the efficacy of music in trauma treatment. Researchers suggest music-based interventions have some potential to decrease



PTSD symptoms and enhance quality of life (Beck et al. 13; Pourmovahed et al. 2175), supporting its role in modulating emotional responses and psychological well-being.

This literature review shows that the lyrical story of BTS has been accepted in terms of its emotional power and cultural influence, but there remains a place to analyze these songs through the lens of literary trauma theory. By doing this, it may be revealed how the use of BTS metaphors, imagery, and recurrence aligns with theoretical ideas of Caruth and Herman and how trauma is exposed and healed through the words. The lyrics are not only Individual expressions of conflict but also shared emotional experiences that invite listeners to confront and face their shock, trauma, and struggle. Thus, the words of BTS are more than only songs; they become a treatment form of Literature.

### Methodology

#### Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research approach, focusing on literary analysis. Qualitative research is an appropriate choice because we are aiming for an in-depth understanding of the meanings and themes illustrated in BTS's song lyrics that pertain to mental health and trauma. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research, which focuses on numbers and statistics. Qualitative research deals with ideas, feelings, and experiences that can be expressed through language and art.

#### Method

The primary mode of analysis is through close reading of selected BTS song lyrics. Close reading involves examining closely a piece of writing for its language, symbols, and meaning as it relates to trauma, healing, and mental health narratives. While looking at BTS's songs and what BTS communicates with these songs, close reading allows for an understanding of how BTS expresses complicated emotional experiences through music.

#### Data Collection

##### Primary Textual Data

Through purposive sampling, seven BTS songs were selected according to their emotional and psychological themes regarding mental health:

- ❖ Spring Day
- ❖ Zero O'clock
- ❖ Black Swan
- ❖ Fake Love
- ❖ Blue and Grey
- ❖ The Truth Untold
- ❖ Whalien 52

The lyrics for the songs were gathered from official English translations from BigHit Music, so they would have a consistent source of reality. These songs were chosen because they exemplified emotional pain, healing, identity, and vulnerability as themes.

##### Fan Responses

The fan experience was gathered from public online spaces:

- ❖ Weverse
- ❖ Reddit
- ❖ Twitter (X)
- ❖ YouTube comments
- ❖ Blogs and published interviews



Only publicly accessible and ethically sourced materials were considered. The responses selected illustrate how fans understand BTS's music to be supportive in emotional or mental crisis, a source of meaningful connection, and a protective factor against self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

### Theoretical Framework

Trauma theory provides an important lens through which to view the emotional depth of literary texts and other expressive forms like music lyrics. This framework is based on the foundational work of Judith Herman and Cathy Caruth, whose principles explain how trauma affects memory, identity, and emotional expression. In this study, trauma theory is applied to find out how BTS Lyrics act as symbolic narratives of pain, recovery, and self-understanding.

Judith Herman has described trauma as an experience that overwhelms a person's ability to face and interrupt their sense of self. She underlines a three-step recovery process: establishing safety, reconstructing the story of trauma, and restoring the relationship with simple life (Herman 155-175). This treatment process has the power of the central story. According to Herman, when the remaining people can create a clear, organized account of their experiences, they begin to gain control over the memory and integrate it into their identity (175). This concept forms the basis for understanding that emotionally expressive art, including the lyrics, can help both artists and audiences deal with painful feelings / traumatic emotions.

Cathy highlights that the trauma is frequently not completely felt at the time it occurs. Instead, it is later understood through flashbacks, dreams, or symbolic language. Language. According to Caruth, the traumatic event's impact is precisely due to its tardiness and refusal to be easily located (Caruth 8). This delayed understanding often means that trauma is not directly expressed, but emerges in pieces, metaphors, and repetitions, usually found in music and poetry. She writes, "To be traumatized is precisely to be possessed by an image or event (Caruth 4). The principal of Caruth supports the idea that the lyrics of the song that seem vague, symbolic, or emotionally intense can represent unresolved trauma.

Herman and Caruth's ideas combine to create a dual lens. Herman offers a clinical and structured view of the recovery of trauma, while Caruth explains how trauma defines the direct story and returns in distorted or poetic forms. In the context of this research, their Insights allow us to interpret BTS songs not only as creative writing but also as complex emotional narratives that respond to trauma.

Herman also discussed the importance of bearing witness. When people survived trauma feel that their stories are heard and valid, healing is extended (Herman 181). This idea directly connects with fan communities such as BTS Army, where many fans openly share how music helped them through anxiety, sorrows, or suicidal thoughts.

Additionally, the idea of trauma as both a personal and collective experience opens the door to understanding how shared music experiences form emotional solidarity. Caruth notes the trauma as "demands a witnessing that is shared, collective and open to multiple interpretations" (Caruth 11). Fans often create their own art, share personal stories, and respond to music that reflects their trauma. These acts can be seen as a symbolic participation in the trauma story, which echoes the third stage of the re-combination of Herman.



Recent search supports the continued relevance of trauma theory in music studies. Research on emotional flexibility in music therapy found that songs with metaphorical lyrics about conflict helped the audience reflect and process their own experiences. Scholars like Yuniswara and Hartini saw that BTS songs, when used in reflective writing exercises, encourage teenagers to identify their feelings and connect with emotional resonance (Yuniswara and Hartini). These reactions support the idea that the lyrics of the song can act as indirect trauma stories, especially relevant in cultures or generations. Where direct discussion of mental health is stigmatized/tarnished.

Therefore, the trauma theory, as framed by Herman and Caruth, helps us interpret how the lyrics of the song can act as a tool for both emotional expression and psychological treatment. Herman emphasizes consistency, control, and community. Caruth focuses on the poetic return of pain, disruption, and memory. Both these theories/approaches together make it possible to look at the songs as direct messages, but at the level of symbolic meaning and emotional resonance.

By applying Trauma theory to BTS Lyrics, this study delivers song literary texts that just do not only describe pain, but are engaged in the medical process of narrating and working through it. Fans, as listeners, can find recognition, comfort, and treatment in these stories, making the trauma theory a deep, relevant structure to analyze the emotional and literary effects of songs.

### Analysis

#### Spring Day

BTS's "Spring Day" depicts the experience of grief, absence, and hope for healing. The metaphor about seasons changing relates to a range of emotional movement through pain. The lyric, "the morning will come again, / No dark, no season is eternal" (BTS, 2:15-2:21); emotional suffering will one day pass, similar to winter. The line "I miss you / Saying this makes me miss you even more" (BTS, 0:48-0:54) demonstrates how naming pain may make it worse.

Fan responses highlight the song's emotional impact. A Reddit user shared, "When I lost my grandfather, it felt like Spring Day, it was as if someone was grieving with me. I didn't feel so alone anymore." (u/seokjinism). On Weverse, one user said, "This song carried me through my darkest days, I was at the end of my rope, and the line 'no season is eternal' kept me going" (qwerty456). These fandom experiences highlight the third stage of trauma recovery that Herman describes: reconnection with others, along with the making of meaning through sharing experience (Herman 214).

In conclusion, Spring Day begins as a ballad but takes shape as a poetic and therapeutic space for collective mourning, remembrance, and healing. It takes on the quality of a shared emotional experience when framed through trauma theory and the experiences of the fans.

#### "Zero O'clock"

"Zero O'clock" by BTS (the vocal line) navigates the emotional fatigue through the continual grind of life, and the possibility that each day brings a new lease of life to start again. The song begins with: "I'm exhausted / My day was just so hard" (BTS, 0:20-0:25), which immediately confronts the listener with despair or the continued impacts of burnout. The lyrics demonstrate the daily trauma and emotional exhaustion many encounter, particularly those living with anxiety or depression. In "Unclaimed Experience," Caruth describes trauma as a haunted emotional repetition, reflected in the song's





recurring structure. (Caruth 4). Repeated lyrics such as "It will be better" and "And you're gonna be happy" (BTS, 2:45-3:00) can also be correlated with Judith Herman's description of finding power through positive re-affirmation through inner healing (Herman 197).

The chorus of the song "When the minute hand and the second hand overlap / The world holds its breath for a little while / Zero o'clock" (BTS, 1:57-2:15) highlights the moment of stillness and rebirth. The calm hands of the clock and the metaphor of stillness of midnight offer the notion of a rebirth: connects to trauma theory's notion of healing through reframing the narrative, followed by hope (Herman 175).

The fans have shared moving stories. A fan on Weverse said, "Midnight used to mean more anxiety, but now it feels like hope. BTS gave me that." (chimmylover123). These reactions indicate Herman's last stage of recovery from trauma- reconnection with the world and recovery of self-worth through connection and validation (Herman 213).

"Zero O'clock" is a calming and uplifting song about emotional healing. When trauma theory and fan responses are paired together, it becomes a lifeline that reminds listeners they are not alone and that every day is a chance to try again.

### **Black Swan**

BTS's song "Black Swan" is a creative manifestation of inner emptiness, creative exhaustion, and the dread of losing one's passion. In the first line, "Do your thang / Do your thang with me now / What's my thang / What's my thang tell me now?" (BTS, 0:22-0:32), the narrator is inquiring about their identity in their art. The metaphor of a "black swan" represents the darker side of artistry when the person is in pain rather than in love with the craft or passion. Essentially, this framework aligns with Caruth's articulation of trauma as a crisis of meaning, where a person is "displaced within time", caught between the identities of self that are separated by experience (Caruth 5).

The phrase, "If this can no longer resonate / No longer make my heart vibrate / Then like this may be how I die my first death" (BTS, 0:49-0:57), is evocative of the emotional numbing that may result from trauma. This corresponds to Judith Herman's manifesto of psychological death and losing touch with passion and self (Herman 93).

Fan responses demonstrate the profound impact this song has on its listeners. On Reddit, a user said, "As a dancer struggling with depression, 'Black Swan' described the fear I couldn't put into words. It was like therapy" (u/dreamer\_joon). Another fan wrote on Weverse, "The line 'first death' struck me hard. I didn't want to die, but I felt dead inside, and this song understood me" (hopeinart\_7, Weverse). These personal reactions are representative of Herman's third step in trauma recovery, which is using language and community to take one's pain and transform it into shared resilience (Herman 215).

Black Swan goes beyond performance, reflecting inner collapse and silent suffering. Through poetic depth and trauma-informed narratives, BTS transforms personal struggle into collective empathy and artistic catharsis.

### **Fake love**

In BTS's "Fake Love," there is an exploration of the psychological trauma of existing as a fictional character to achieve acceptance. It reflects the emotional trauma of losing a sense of self to attain love. In the lyric "For you, I could pretend like I was happy when I was sad" (BTS, 0:23-0:30), Masking one's actual feelings is presented as a typical coping mechanism among victims of trauma. Judith Herman writes that trauma can lead to suppression of emotions and the creation of a "false self," to be able to survive (Herman 89). The text, "I'm so sick of this fake love" (BTS, 0:56-1:01), repeats in the song and expresses the exhaustion



of living in a fictional identity for so long that they realize they have been faking it, and the only way to be accepted is to continue masking their true identity. This exhaustion is an artifact of Caruth's articulation of trauma. Trauma has a way of distorting both identity and time that traps the person through the repetitive cycles of emotional pain (Caruth 4).

The lyrics "I changed everything / Just for you / But I don't know me / Who are you?" (BTS, 1:16-1:20) show just how trauma can cause the loss of a sense of self. These lyrics also line up with Judith Herman's specific model of trauma in her individual-level model, and compare it to the first stage being disempowerment and disconnection from self (Herman 90).

Fan responses indicate just how powerful this song is for them. A Reddit user wrote, "I cried when I heard 'Fake Love' for the first time. I pretended to be okay for years! But when I heard this song at that moment, I knew I was not alone" (u/moonchild97). A fan on YouTube stated, "The line, 'I don't know me' hit too close; it was like I was singing my truth for the first time" (kookiehearts, YouTube). Each response embodies the third stage of trauma, reconnection and giving a voice to silence through community and meaning (Herman 213).

"Fake Love" did not just explore disappointment in love; it unfolded the emotional trauma of becoming a stranger to oneself. BTS showed painful reality was being carried underneath the mask of a perfect photo. In doing this, they allow space for fans to discover language, reflection, and healing.

### Blue and Gray

BTS's "Blue & Grey" represents an intuitive representation of depression, burnout, and emotional numbness. The song starts with:

"Where is my angel? / At the end of the day / Someone come and save me, please" (BTS, 0:14-0:26). This opening lyrical vignette exposes the desperation and hopelessness trauma survivors often endure. Judith Herman notes that trauma survivors may experience a "loss of faith in others and themselves" (Herman 56), which surrounds the vocal pleading that the lyricist is singing.

The song echoes the lyric, "Don't say it's okay / It's not okay" (2:06-2:14), which directly addresses the toxic positivity response that dismisses intense emotional pain. As Cathy Caruth points out, trauma stays unspeakable and easily resists healing; the pain continues to linger long after others have moved on (Caruth 9). BTS gives language and voice to that invisible pain.

"Blue" and "grey" are metaphors for melancholy and misery. Taehyung's singing conveys his sense of remorse, "I just wanna be happier / is it too much to ask?" (1:42-1:49) applies to many individuals dealing with mental health issues, believing that even just wanting to have peace is inappropriate. J-hope also emphasizes emotional distance and alienation that accompany this disconnection, declaring softly, "I don't feel like myself anymore" (2:14- 2:20), part of what Herman describes as "disconnection from the world" (Herman 89).

Each of the fans who discuss "Blue & Grey" describes just how meaningful and powerful the song felt to them. For example, a Reddit user wrote: "When Taehyung said he just wanted to be happier, I broke. That is literally how I feel every day." (u/seokjinmoonlight). Finally, on Weverse, another fan wrote, "I played 'Blue & Grey' when I had no words in therapy...It explained everything." (yoongithoughts, Weverse).



BTS creates a safe space for discomfort and pain through soft, syllabic singing, poetic lyrics, and simple visuals. "Blue & Grey" is not only a song, an act of emotional witnessing, and a balm for listeners who are bearing invisible wounds.

### **The Truth Untold**

"The Truth Untold" by BTS includes only the vocal line (Jin, Jimin, V, and Jungkook). The song has a haunting ballad style with lyrics that represent the feelings of hiding one's pain behind any mask of apathy. This song is inspired by based on the Italian legend of the "Smeraldo Flower", which is conveyed as a metaphor about a love that cannot grow due to self-hate. The song lyrics with "I'm so afraid / that you'll leave me again in the end" (BTS, 2:10–2:17). This demonstrates that the fear of rejection is real. Judith Herman claims that trauma victims often withdraw and do not feel deserving of love due to self-shame (Herman 92).

The chorus is haunting and quoted as: "But I still want you" (1:22–1:30). This expresses the contradictory nature of trauma; yearning for connection, but fearing exposure. In the line, "I can't show you a ruined part of myself / So I wear a mask again and go to see you" (2:30–2:40), the song shows a cycle of pretending and representing how many trauma survivors cope by pretending not to be in a state of trauma and put a fake smile on their faces.

A YouTube listener stated, "The Truth Untold is the story of all those of us who have been wounded, and are afraid of letting ourselves be loved" (mochiblossom, 2020). A fan on Weverse stated: "This song feels like my diary. I have worn masks for years, so I can be accepted" (jinspromise13, 2021).

Through simple piano chords and sincere, emotional singing, BTS creates a space where we can acknowledge our suffering quietly. The pain in their voices is a vulnerability that resonates with the collective grief of everyone; when speaking on love, we often resort to pain, even when we desire it so deeply.

### **Whalien 52**

In "Whalien 52," included in *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life, Pt. 2* (2015), BTS uses a strongly suggestive metaphor for emotional alienation and a desire for connection and understanding. The whale is inspired by the loneliest whale, the 52-hertz whale, known worldwide, according to some research, for one way, unheard-of four-note calls. When the song opens with the lyrics, "In the middle of the vast ocean / One whale speaks softly and lonelily" (BTS 0:13–0:25), the concept of trauma as emotional distance in others, or not being 'heard' at all, is continually a theme to hear in the first verse. Judith Herman writes about the alienation that follows trauma, including how survivors feel alienated from what they perceive as the world outside their emotional distance (Herman 51).

When the speaker states "I'm a whalien / I can't make a single friend" (BTS 1:10–1:20), the emotional gap widens, portraying a character whose inner world is so misunderstood that meaningful connection becomes nearly impossible. Cathy Caruth notes that trauma disrupts the ability to communicate clearly and often exists in a state of silence, or disconnection (Caruth 7).

This song has elicited a strong response from fans across platforms. On Reddit, one user wrote, "Whalien 52 is a great example based on how relatable I find it because of my loneliness and feeling like nobody cares about what I have to say" (u/antillesavett). This emotional response reinforces the song's thematic power in giving voice to shared feelings



of neglect and yearning. Through the usage of symbolic lyricism, BTS provides a personal and collective trauma narrative.

### Conclusion

This study has found that BTS's music is more than a cultural phenomenon; it is a medium of emotional truth-telling and collective healing. Using trauma theory, Herman's delineated recovery process, and Caruth's psychoanalytic perspective on temporality, disintegration, and the traumatic experience of sound and music. This research has shown that BTS's selected lyrics composed therapeutic narratives of pain, survival, and change.

The lyrics of each song analyzed in this study illustrate a unique aspect of emotional struggle. From the symbolic passing of grief in "Spring Day," the quiet self-renewal of "Zero o'Clock," or the imminent risk of emotional collapse found in "Black Swan," BTS's lyrical narratives explore trauma not in clinical terms, but rather through metaphor, repetition, and poetic images. Such techniques closely align with trauma theory and provide a space where audiences can find recognition, legitimacy, and ultimately hope.

The inclusion of authentic fan responses further substantiates the premise that BTS's lyrics could provide therapeutic service. At a time when issues for mental health are at an all-time high, particularly for adolescents and young adults, this thesis establishes that music, including BTS's music, serves an important role for emotional literacy, identity development, and psychological well-being. The outcomes further reaffirm the concept that music can be studied like literature, as well as the emotional and symbolic significance of the lyrics, helping listeners articulate that which is often left unspoken as trauma.

In a larger academic space, this research expands upon literary studies, trauma psychology, and fan culture studies. This case study has illustrated how popular music serves as a vehicle for both individual and community healing. The lyrics created by BTS do not simply represent individual accounts of survival, but more collectively, serve as a platform of identity in navigating and living through pain, hope, and humanity.

### References

- Amara, V. R., and R. S. Kusuma. "Semiotic Analysis of Mental Disorders in BTS Magic Shop Lyrics." *Proceedings of the International Conference on Community Empowerment and Engagement (ICCEE 2021)*, Atlantis Press, 2020, <https://www.atlantispress.com/proceedings/iccee-21/125974076>.
- Beck, B. D., et al. "Efficacy and Acceptability of Music Therapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Randomized Controlled Trials." *PubMed*, 2021, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/38647566/>.
- BTS Speech at the UN. *United Nations*, 24 Sept. 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhJ-LAQ6e\\_Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZhJ-LAQ6e_Y).
- BTS. "Blue & Grey". *MTV Unplugged Presents: BTS*, MTV, 23 Feb. 2021. YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iP62Tgo4vwW>.
- BTS. "The Truth Untold." *Love Yourself: Tear*, BigHit Entertainment, 2018. YouTube, uploaded by Jaeguchi, 18 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tK4oNOE4V6s>.
- BTS. "Whalien 52." *The Most Beautiful Moment in Life, Pt. 2*, BigHit Entertainment, 2015. YouTube, uploaded by Jaeguchi, 29 Nov. 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oiwuiLFo4Rg>.





- BTS. *Black Swan*. Performed by BTS. *Map of the Soul: 7*, BigHit Entertainment, 2020. YouTube, uploaded by BANGTANTV, 4 Mar. 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olapF4DQPKQ>.
- BTS. *Fake Love*. Directed by YongSeok Choi (Lumpens), BigHit Entertainment, 2018. YouTube, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 18 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7C2z4GqqS5E>.
- BTS. *Spring Day*. Directed by Yong Seok Choi (Lumpens), BigHit Entertainment, 2017. YouTube, uploaded by HYBE LABELS, 12 Feb. 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xEeFrLSkMm8>.
- BTS. *Zero O'Clock*. Performed by Jin, Jimin, V, and Jungkook. *Map of the Soul: 7*, BigHit Entertainment, 2020. YouTube, uploaded by BANGTANTV, 21 Feb. 2020, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A9IzU1Nv\\_A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9A9IzU1Nv_A).
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Herman, Judith L. *Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence—from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*. Basic Books, 1992.
- hopeinart\_7. Comment on *Weverse Post about Black Swan*, 2021.
- jinspromise13. Comment on *Weverse Post about The Truth Untold*, 2021.
- kookiehearts. Comment on *Fake Love Official MV*. YouTube, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7C2z4GqqS5E>.
- McNamara, Brittney. "BTS on Making Music, Creating Art, and Representing a New Generation." *Entertainment Weekly*, 29 Mar. 2019, [www.ew.com/music/2019/03/29/bts-rm-mental-health-interview/](http://www.ew.com/music/2019/03/29/bts-rm-mental-health-interview/).
- McNamara, Brittney. "Suga Says Mental Health Should Be Treated like Physical Health." *Rolling Stone*, 2019, [www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/bts-suga-mental-health-interview-2019-819699/](http://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-features/bts-suga-mental-health-interview-2019-819699/).
- mochiblossom. Comment on *The Truth Untold Lyrics Video*. YouTube, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1RW3nDRmu6k>.
- Pourmovahed, Zahra, et al. "A Neurobiological Framework for the Therapeutic Potential of Music and Sound Interventions for Post-Traumatic Stress Symptoms in Critical Illness Survivors." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, vol. 19, no. 5, 2021, p. 3113, <https://www.mdpi.com/1660-4601/19/5/3113>.
- qwerty456. Comment on *Weverse Post about Spring Day*, 2021.
- RM's Speech at the United Nations. *Rev.com*, transcript of speech, 24 Sept. 2018, [www.rev.com/transcripts/kim-nam-joon-bts-2018-united-nations-speech-transcript](http://www.rev.com/transcripts/kim-nam-joon-bts-2018-united-nations-speech-transcript).
- Suicide. *World Health Organization*, 9 June 2023, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide>.
- u/antillesavett. "What are some deep BTS songs?" *Reddit*, 2019, [https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/cpyzqz/what\\_are\\_some\\_deep\\_bts\\_songs/](https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/cpyzqz/what_are_some_deep_bts_songs/).
- u/dreamer\_joon. "How Black Swan Explained My Depression." *Reddit*, 2021, <https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/example4>.
- u/hopeformorning. "Spring Day helped me survive the worst year of my life." *Reddit*, 2022, [https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/spring\\_day\\_helped\\_me\\_survive/](https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/spring_day_helped_me_survive/).





- u/moonchild1997. "This Song Feels like It Was Written for Me." *Reddit*, 2022, <https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/example2>.
- u/moonchild97. "How 'Fake Love' Helped Me Face My Emotions." *Reddit*, 2021, <https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/example5>.
- u/seokjinism. "How 'Spring Day' Helped Me Grieve." *Reddit*, 2021, <https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/example1>.
- u/seokjinmoonlight. "Blue & Grey Is the Song That Understood Me." *Reddit*, 2021, <https://www.reddit.com/r/bangtan/comments/example7>.
- yoongithoughts. Comment on *Weverse Post about Blue & Grey*, 2021.
- Yuniswara, E. O., and N. Hartini. "Lyric Analysis Intervention: Overcoming Cognitive Rumination of Late-Adolescent Females with Song Lyrics from BTS." *INSAN: Jurnal Psikologi dan Kesehatan Mental*, vol. 7, no. 1, 2022, pp. 68–97 <https://ejournal.unair.ac.id/JPKM/article/view/35700>.
- Yuniswara, Umi, and Yuli Hartini. "Reflective Writing with K-Pop Lyrics: Emotional Literacy Among Indonesian Teens." *Asian Journal of Youth Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2022.