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April 8, 2021

In Empathy and Diplomacy: Mediating and Navigating Internal Conflict After Sexual Trauma
through Therapeutic Songwriting

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Abstract

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In this thesis, I articulate an innovative way to provide in-depth, affordable education on the typical outcomes of sexual violence while creating wide access to information about the typical outcomes of sexual trauma for survivors. The Internal Family Systems (IFS) framework for internal dialogue can function in the creative medium of songwriting to showcase psychotherapeutic, internal dialogue which will increase understanding of, and access to, a psychotherapeutic model of healthy internal dialogue after sexual trauma. Lyrics and linguistic theme can help survivors notice their own responses to their trauma by demonstrating polarization within internal communication which can illuminate the seemingly extreme, very normal responses to this type of trauma. In the thesis, I explain the ways in which linguistic theme, psychotherapy, and song lyrics convey internal relationships. In concluding, I invite the reader to think broadly about public scholarship surrounding psychotherapy models so that survivors of trauma can implement songwriting or song-listening strategies for themselves to navigate their own internal headspaces.

Disclosure: The following thesis discusses sexual violence, eating disorders and may cause emotional distress.

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Introduction

It's been months since the encounter, and there's a flashback; you're in a different room. A person who looks like your perpetrator looms in the shadows, and you can no longer move. You twitch in your sleep to rid your body of the visceral memorized tunes. The next day, you continue to relive the memory in flashbacks while simultaneously avoiding anything that reminds you of the encounter(s). This avoidance behavior leads you to internalize misconceptions about yourself and others, such as "I am bad," or "no one can be trusted." You go about your day in unrelenting fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame; over time, activities you previously enjoyed fail to interest you, and you feel detached or estranged from others. You behave recklessly, self-destruct, startle easily, and struggle to concentrate or sleep. The self-harm doesn't take away the sexually transmitted infections, and substance abuse no longer numbs the dissociation. Eating disorders, pregnancy, sleep disorders, and suicide become pressing matters to deal with, and you have no idea how to categorize or respond to your symptoms.¹

These are some common indicators of a posttraumatic stress response to sexual violence, which is the number one cause of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for women². The American Psychiatric Association (APA) defines posttraumatic stress disorder as “a psychiatric disorder that can occur in people who have experienced or witnessed a traumatic event such as a natural disaster, a serious accident, a terrorist act, war/combat, rape or other violent personal assault.” In the United States, an estimated 1 in 11 people will be diagnosed with PTSD, and

¹ Torres, Felix, M.D., “What Is PTSD?” *American Psychiatric Association*, January 2020. Accessed March 2, 2020. <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/ptsd/what-is-ptsd>.

² Chivers-Wilson, Kaitlin A. “Sexual Assault and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Review of the Biological, Psychological and Sociological Factors and Treatments.” *McGill Journal of Medicine : MJM* 9, no. 2 (July 2006): 111–18.

women are twice as likely to suffer from PTSD as men.³ "[S]exual assault is the most frequent cause of PTSD in women, with one study reporting that 94% of women experienced PTSD symptoms during the first two weeks after an assault." However, the population experiencing PTSD from sexual trauma is often neglected for two primary reasons: the origins of PTSD research are rooted in the study of combat soldiers from World Wars I and II, and sexual violence is seriously underreported.^{4 5 6}

This research thesis will focus on helping individuals understand the typical outcomes of sexual trauma that relate to PTSD and other psychological ailments while attempting to define a therapeutic approach that takes into account the nature of underreporting, the difficulty of prosecuting, and the lack of financial access to psychological care options such as psychotherapy or psychiatry. The objective is to create the basis of an approach for educating survivors on the outcomes of sexual trauma without the need to report or access paid help through recognizing, in

³ There are different estimates depending on the source. National Sexual Violence Fact Sheet:

https://www.nsvrc.org/sites/default/files/publications_nsvrc_factsheet_media_packet_statistics-about-sexual-violence_0.pdf

⁴ Katilin A. Chivers-Wilson, "Sexual Assault and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Review of the Biological, Psychological and Sociological Factors and Treatments," *McGill Journal of Medicine: MJM* 9, no. 2 (July 2006):

⁵ Chivers-Wilson, Kaitlin A. "Sexual Assault and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder: A Review of the Biological, Psychological and Sociological Factors and Treatments." *McGill Journal of Medicine : MJM* 9, no. 2 (July 2006): 111–18.

⁶ RAINN. "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics." Accessed March 3, 2020.

<https://www.rainn.org/statistics/criminal-justice-system>.

song lyrics, typical internal conflicts that occur after sexual trauma. The goal is to normalize the post-traumatic response by illuminating common reactions through artistic representations of sexual trauma.

The first section of this thesis will describe in more detail the overall objectives and function of combining Internal Family Systems theory with song lyrics and themes to help survivors better understand the consequences of sexual violence. The second section will more directly address why this approach is necessary given current responses to sexual violence in both the legal and therapeutic communities. This will be followed by a more detailed theoretical overview of the Internal Family Systems model of psychotherapy and an explanation of how to analyze polarizations using this model with empathy and diplomatic representation of the System's parts. As proof of concept of how this might work, the following section provides an analysis of polarizations inside of song lyrics. The results of this analysis lead to a discussion of implications and future directions.

Combining Psychotherapy, Theme, and Lyrics

A promising avenue for educating and healing individuals who have experienced sexual trauma is through music and songwriting. Music can help individuals cope with their trauma because music sits at the nexus of art and science. Music is the "creative and flexible vehicle through which discovery, growth, and change occur."⁷ The strictly mathematical rhythms mixed with the creative freedom of lyrics and sound create an environment where a survivor could engage with their trauma in a safe way (the song will end, and the measures will be predictable), and in a free-spirited way that allows exploration of difficult topics (there isn't a boundary on where lyric topics or scales could go). The structure of music creates safety for the survivor while allowing engagement with difficult, traumatic memories because of the ability to creatively and boundlessly express throughout that anchoring structure.

Thus, I propose that an innovative collaboration of psychotherapy, theme, and song lyrics provide survivors with in-depth, affordable access to understanding some of the outcomes from sexual violence without necessarily requiring them to report their trauma. My argument is that if the various psychotherapeutic parts theorized in Internal Family Systems do occur in existing lyrics about sexual trauma, then it is possible that survivors could be taught to recognize and label their own reactions to trauma in a systematic approach to lyrics. Identifying these parts of one's system through song lyrics could create the potential for widespread access to mental health intervention for both survivors and others. I explore ways in which the approach to internal dialogue known as the psychotherapeutic model of Internal Family Systems (IFS) can

⁷ Waldon, Eric G., Stine Lindahl Jacobsen, Gustavo Schulz Gattino, and Barbara L. Wheeler. *Music Therapy Assessment: Theory, Research and Application*. London, UNITED KINGDOM: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2018. <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/emory/detail.action?docID=5517270>.

function in the creative medium of song lyrics to increase understanding of, and access to, a psychotherapeutic model of typical internal dialogue after sexual trauma (including healthy and unhealthy reactions).

Songwriting that incorporates psychotherapeutic internal dialogue from the Internal Family Systems model can help survivors through their acute stress following victimization by demonstrating the kind of internal communications which can decrease/increase internal harmony. This normalization and validation of these responses could decrease repeat victimizations and improve overall well-being throughout the healing process. Further, such ability to recognize these norms within songwriting has the potential to address recovery dynamics like internal polarizations; cognitive distortions regarding safety, trust, power, self-esteem, and intimacy; and "inner-critic" messages that cultivate self-blame, self-hatred, and self-doubt.⁸ In addition to navigating these toxic outcomes of sexual victimization, this approach will validate the survivors' need to grieve by acknowledging the oppressive nature of this type of violence. These components are all crucial aspects of what Internal Family Systems therapy addresses through an empathetic Self that diplomatically allow parts of the Self to engage in communication and negotiation. I argue that these components can be usefully adapted within creative song lyrics through recognizing when lyrics capture certain parts that could be described with an Internal Family Systems approach. Once a survivor is equipped to

⁸ Bobbi J. Miller, Jose Ruben Parra Cardona, and Michael Hardin. "The Use of Narrative Therapy and Internal Family Systems with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse." *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 18, no. 4 (February 20, 2007): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1300/J086v18n04_01.

recognize the different parts in Internal Family Systems, they will hopefully be able to gain an understanding of their own internal communication styles through the lens of theme and lyrics.

To provide an overview of what will follow, I will first describe the Internal Family Systems model of psychotherapy as a relevant tool for sexually traumatized survivors. The goal of Internal Family Systems therapy is to "ultimately find more positive ways to manage conflicts on your own."⁹ In a population not reporting or seeking help, this model fulfills the need for healthy self-leadership. Songwriting is a medium for engagement with these therapeutic ideas, and the privacy granted from listening to music, along with music's established use as a coping mechanism, position songwriting as a critical medium for navigating internal conflict. Recognizing polarization in themes can all be accomplished virtually and in isolation, making this research useful for overlooked or ignored survivors of trauma. I envision these songs as a form of public scholarship that will make research findings on healing from sexual trauma available to a wide audience, in their homes, cars, or headphones.

In order to demonstrate the powerful way in which IFS, lyrics and theme can be successfully combined for therapeutic goals, I will use examples from existing songs to connect these constructs. More specifically, I offer songs that *normalize* the typical polarizations survivors develop after experiencing sexual violence and *incorporate* therapeutic strategies for navigating these trauma-based polarizations through empathetic and diplomatic mediation. This is accomplished by conveying intrapersonal relationship dynamics through themes and using the creatively mechanical structure of music to anchor the body during the recollection of trauma.

⁹ "Internal Family Systems Therapy | Psychology Today." Accessed October 20, 2020.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapy-types/internal-family-systems-therapy>.

Research on music as a coping aide is widely available as discussed by the National Institute for Health in reviewing the existing literature:

"While little research has been conducted specifically in relation to trauma survivors outside of music therapy contexts, the literature indicates that various self-determined musical activities including listening, playing, singing, dancing and songwriting, are commonly used for coping and mood regulation among both adolescents and adults (Mayers, [1995](#); Shields, [2001](#); Miranda and Claes, [2009](#); Davidson and Fedele, [2011](#); Monteiro and Wall, [2011](#); Saarikallio, [2011](#)). There is also evidence that people benefit from other creative therapies such as reading and writing, and it is important to consider how these therapeutic activities may be used both individually and alongside one another."¹⁰

It has been established that the medium of songwriting regulates mood and builds on coping skills that most adolescents and adults use already, so analyzing therapeutic validity within lyrics and themes will provide an appropriate basis for access to healing from trauma without financial constraint, novelty, nor necessity for reporting to the criminal justice system or a Title IX office.¹¹ Song lyrics can facilitate this access, and Internal Family Systems can build resiliency

¹⁰ Garrido, Sandra, Felicity A. Baker, Jane W. Davidson, Grace Moore, and Steve Wasserman. "Music and Trauma: The Relationship between Music, Personality, and Coping Style." *Frontiers in Psychology* 6 (July 10, 2015). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2015.00977>.

¹¹ This reference to Title IX implies a resistance from survivors to talk about their experience for fear of "mandatory reporting" in academic institutions, which requires school officials to report instances of sexual violence regardless of the survivor's preference.

and awareness during the access. However, before turning to a more detailed explication of IFS, I first provide evidence of the need for accessible, cost-effective interventions for survivors of sexual trauma by showing the high incidence of sexual trauma, low rates of reporting, and low rates of accountability for perpetrators.

Sexual Trauma: Lack of Response and Resources

The Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), the nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization, documents that most sexual assault survivors either never report the crime, or if they do file a police report, it is never addressed or taken seriously.¹² Quantity of occurrences, underreporting, and ineffective responses are pertinent issues when discussing the consequences of surviving sexual trauma. This data from the Rape, Abuse, & Incest National Network displays rates of sexual assault as they are reported from a National Sexual Assault Hotline:

How Often Does Sexual Assault Occur in the United States?



Figure 1: How Often Does Sexual Assault Occur in the United States?

¹² RAINN, "The Criminal Justice System: Statistics."

Yet, as shown in the following depiction of incarceration, what few reports there are rarely lead to conviction and incarceration:

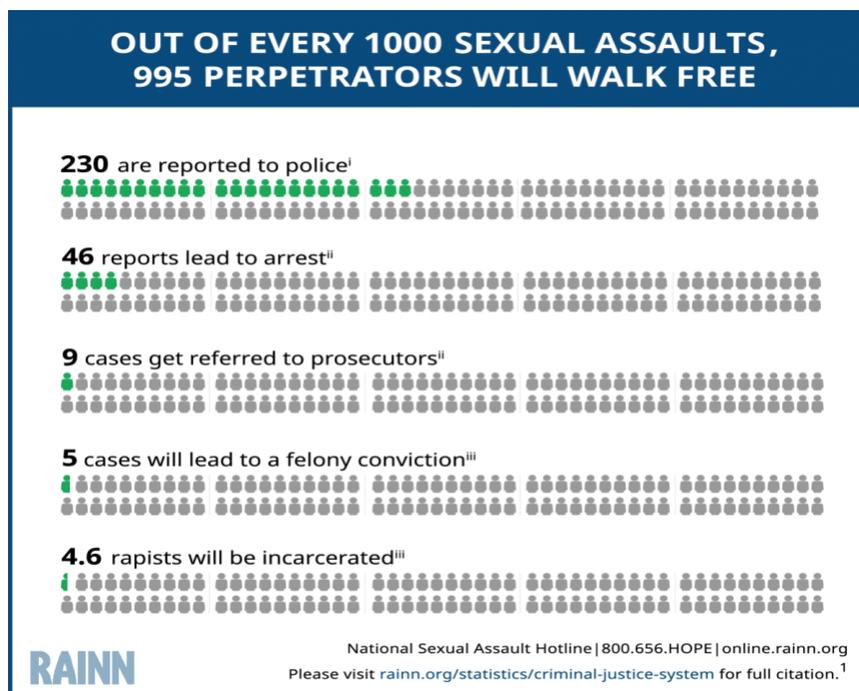


Figure 2: 995 of every 1000 Perpetrators Will Walk Free

Underreporting of sexual assault has several consequences; one of the most significant is insufficient access to psychotherapeutic care within the population. A lack of reporting can create a situation where the survivor suffers in silence, which is the typical response: 230 reports out of 1000 sexual assaults indicates only 23% of survivors are reporting. The 4.6 incarcerations of perpetrators of the 230 reported assaults is a harrowing statistic; this shows that of the 23% of survivors who do report, 2% of the perpetrators are held accountable by the criminal justice system. When reporting a crime doesn't lead to a systematic response from the courts, sexual trauma survivors aren't societally validated as deserving justice. Even if 100% of survivors reported, at the current rate less than 9% of assailants would be incarcerated. The inaction of government to hold sexual predators accountable is partly derived from the difficulty of

prosecuting such a private crime, along with the difficulty in acquiring rape-kits and DNA evidence. However, this lack of successful prosecution culminates in survivors having a more difficult time labeling their experiences as traumatic and understanding their own maladaptive psychological outcomes as part of a normal healing process.¹³

These unacknowledged survivors are then left to live their lives without the proper support needed to cope with the resulting PTSD from sexual trauma. This lack of intervention can contribute to their ongoing mental suffering, self-harm, and cycles of abuse. As evidenced, sexual trauma survivors are clearly a largely neglected population in the justice system. In addition, this population is poorly informed that the aftermath of their trauma could include Posttraumatic Stress (PTSD) as well as increases in other psychological ailments such as depression. These aftereffects are exaggerated when poverty is included as a barrier to access to care.¹⁴ If we fail to broaden access to information and care for survivors of sexual violence, we might never address the silent suffering of sexual trauma survivors and, if that continues, our society will leave sexual trauma survivors to navigate PTSD without medical help, resulting in intolerable mental health failures and repeat victimizations for survivors. If unaddressed, society will continue to silence sexual trauma survivors, depriving our society of the intellect, empathy, and intuition of survivors who could, at the least, enrich society and, at the best, help heal it. Survivors could benefit from in-depth knowledge on what can be expected after sexual trauma, but few survivors have access to that knowledge or to the therapeutic interventions that would

¹³ RAINN, “The Criminal Justice System: Statistics.”

¹⁴ Bryant-Davis, Thema, Sarah E. Ullman, Yuying Tsong, Shaquita Tillman, and Kimberly Smith. “Struggling to Survive: Sexual Assault, Poverty, and Mental Health Outcomes of African American Women.” *The American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 80, no. 1 (January 2010). <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1939-0025.2010.01007.x>.

help them navigate the healing process. There is a better way. One possible avenue to aid survivors in understanding their trauma, and especially the kinds of conflicting thoughts and emotions, called polarizations, that can result, is through the therapeutic use of songs and lyrics, using the framework of IFS.

Analyzing Polarization in an Internal Family Systems Lens

The practice of songwriting allows for the exposition of polarizations within music; polarizations here indicate an extreme conflict or opposition within the mind of one person. To flesh out this idea, I will first describe Internal Family Systems in more detail to showcase the use of parts, the Self, and Polarizations to discuss internal dialogues in survivors. Then, the data from the linguistic, thematic analysis of the 11 songs selected to be illustrative of this process will be presented. I will demonstrate how the song lyrics analyzed from an Internal Family Systems perspective helps create a level of understandable access to pertinent information about typical experiences in survivors which will normalize what otherwise might feel extreme, isolating, and/or crazy. All of this should be achievable regardless of access to a mental health professional. Reading the results from this analysis could equip readers to be able to gain psychotherapeutic meaning from certain thematic clashes between lyrics in music.

Theoretical Overview of Internal Family Systems

The IFS Institute defines Internal Family Systems as:

". . . a transformative, evidence-based psychotherapy that helps people heal by accessing and loving their protective and wounded inner parts. We believe the mind is naturally multiple and that is a good thing. Just like members of a family, inner parts are forced from their valuable states into extreme roles within us. We also all have a core Self. Self is in everyone. It can't be damaged. It knows how to heal.

By helping people first access their Self and, from that core, come to understand and heal their parts, IFS creates inner and outer connectedness. [Read more about the aspects of the Evolution of the IFS model.](#)"¹⁵

Internal Family Systems crucially assumes that every voice, opinion, or agenda that a person hears in their head has positive intent for the Self of that person. This may make you ask: how could a self-injurious voice have a positive intent for me? The short answer is that, it's complicated, and the longer answer is that if one approaches oneself with curiosity and compassion, they will begin to notice the extreme, unhealthy positions they take at times, such as bingeing/purging, sleeping all day, drinking too much alcohol, or dreaming about suicide, as attempts at relieving fears, anxieties, or concerns. From this recognition, the Self can calmly, curiously, and compassionately seek to understand and listen to each part until the connection eases the isolation of panic or worry. It is critical to note that the identification of "parts" within the individual is quite different than the multiplicity of selves in Multiple Personality Disorder. IFS takes the approach that all people have multiple voices or parts inside them. So, in contrast to preexisting ideas that multiplicity indicates a disorder, Internal Family Systems denies the idea of a need for one voice, and rather, it necessitates the connection among differences within a client's internal perspectives from the place of healthy self-leadership. IFS assumes that a healthy person would be able to speak empathically and diplomatically between their parts; whereas, an unhealthy person would not have empathetic lines of communication open between the opposing positions, or parts, within themselves.

¹⁵ "About Us | IFS Institute." Accessed November 20, 2020. <https://ifs-institute.com/about-us>.

So, how do these wounded parts of us communicate with the clearheaded, curious and compassionate Self in all of us? Parts can communicate using any method (words, sounds, symbols, artistic expressions) that the Part of the client has been exposed to and uses to communicate with themselves. For example, parts can express tonally, as in the change in pitch and duration between utterances; physically, as in dance movements that relate to the agenda or thoughts of the Part; visually, as in a painter's expression of emotion or character; and in written text, as in journaling one's emotions or, as in the focus of this thesis, in song lyrics. Parts can also be recollections of memories or flashbacks to a certain event that yields information about the part's agenda or emotions.

It is, presumably, impossible to define all of the mechanisms humans use to communicate their own intentions to themselves, so Internal Family Systems psychotherapy identifies the Self and allows for infinite subpersonalities of parts to express without limitation. This means that the nature of the model is structured dialogue that is interaction specific to cultivate understanding and compassion. The goal is to transform the internal landscape of communication in the client, not just changing thoughts and behaviors as some other leading psychotherapeutic interventions focus on. This focus on internal communication dynamics is my reasoning for integrating this therapeutic modality with songwriting and song lyrics. To make these ideas more concrete, in the next section, I identify the members of the Internal Family using a fictional case study and identify multiplicity in the client; I then discuss how the structured interview provides access to each part in a way that deescalates internal conflict.

The Internal Family

The closest depiction of the members of the Internal Family Systems is from the children's film, Inside Out. Figure 3 shows the parts inside of the movie's protagonist, Riley, with each character representing a specific emotion of the non-imaginary character Riley. The only difference is that Internal Family Systems would allow parts to consider themselves full people without attachment to singular emotions, but an ability to have evolving emotions, each part.



Figure 3: The internal family members of protagonist, Riley: Joy, Disgust, Sadness, Fear, and Anger.¹⁶

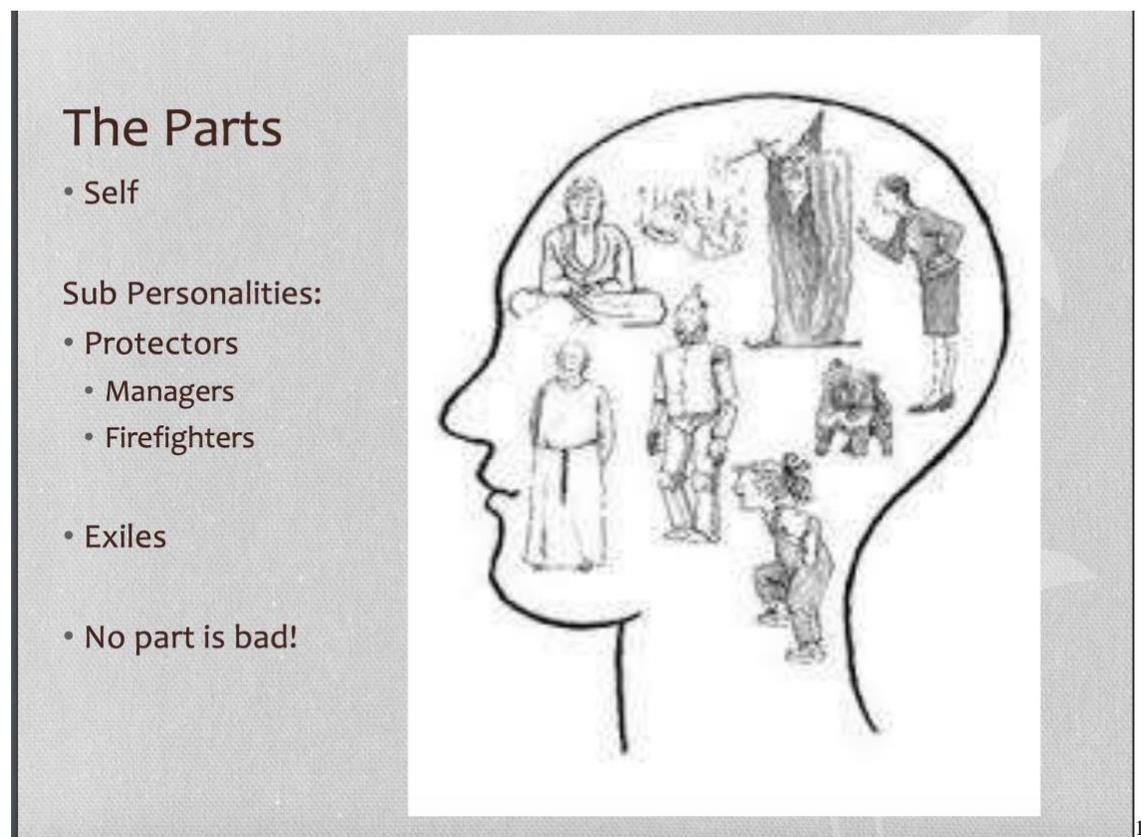
More specifically, the Internal Family is made up of a Self and parts; IFS uses the language of “parts” because clients use that language themselves in therapy: “I feel this way, but a part of me doesn't.” The parts are all considered subpersonalities, and they are either the Self,

¹⁶ Marsh, Jason and Zakrzewski, Vicki. Greater Good. “Four Lessons from ‘Inside Out’ to Discuss With Kids.”

Accessed March 28, 2021.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/four_lessons_from_inside_out_to_discuss_with_kids.

Sub Personalities, or exiles. Some subpersonalities are protectors, which can be managers or firefighters. The absence of an ability to understand, listen, and extend love to one or more parts from a place of Self pushes a Part or parts to a(n) extreme role(s).



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Figure 4: The Parts of the Internal Family System

In addition to parts, however, the **Self** contains the following eight qualities: Compassion, Curiosity, Creativity, Calm, Courage, Connection, Confidence, and Clarity, and is the healthiest and most present part of the Internal Family System.¹⁸ The Self is where all of the empathy for

¹⁷ Warnick, Kristan. "Internal Family Systems and Trauma Treatment." Health & Medicine, 16:22:37 UTC.

<https://www.slideshare.net/healingpathways/internal-family-systems-and-trauma-treatment>.

¹⁸ Beth Rogerson. "What Is Internal Family Systems - IFS." Accessed March 28, 2021.

<https://bethrogerson.com/internal-family-systems/>.

the differences within the system shines through. If an individual is ever unsure if they are communicating with the Self or a part, they can ask, “How do I feel toward this part?” If the answer is anything other than the qualities listed above, it’s most likely a part of the person’s system because the Self lacks an agenda other than that deeply empathetic and diplomatic listening and compassion. A **protector** can be understood as a part of oneself that is alert and looking out for the Self, taking the Self out of dangerous situations, or preventing negative experiences for the Self. A **manager** can be understood as a part of oneself that checks items off of their to-do lists, solves executive functioning activities, and is an administrative necessity in the person's life and Internal Family System. A manager that has been extremized would be a protector part that, for example, engages obsessively in cleaning in order to find control, or staying up all night to finish an assignment even though the work is progressively less pristine as exhaustion takes over. A **firefighter** is trying to remove the Self from a dangerous situation the Self is in and is the essential voice for recognizing danger that says, “hey, I need to get out of this place.” An extremized **firefighter** is a protector part who has resorted to maladaptive coping skills (self-harm, anger, substance abuse, etc.) to diffuse-by-numbing or avoiding a problematic situation the Self has encountered or encounters (sexual trauma, or otherwise). An **exile** is a healthy Part of the Self who doesn't play an active role in the day-to-day activities of the Self but is from a long time ago; for example, a 37-year-old client may have an 11-year-old exile who was formed in a healthy way during a lunch session in middle school. This 11-year-old is essential to the System, but not to the daily life and decision-making of the now-adult person. An exile in an extremized role is carrying **burdens**, which are usually traumatic experiences or

beliefs that protectors build barriers around accessing to prevent interaction with serious pain. Once the barriers of avoidance get really strong, the parts become **polarized**. The polarization that sends parts into extreme versions of themselves is a typical outcome of sexual trauma. Once there is conflict, the diplomatic representation of each opposition is essential to creating harmony in the system; thus, the cornerstone of the applied analysis of this thesis is on whether or not it is possible to recognize this diplomatic representation and identify the parts in ways that might prove helpful for survivors.

Adaptive Internal Communication

Structured interviews form the basis for the client/patient interaction in Internal Family Systems (IFS) therapy. In IFS, the therapist asks specific questions to target mediating the internal parts of a client.

For an Internal Family Systems psychotherapy session, the questions adhere to a strict role for the therapist as an acting “Self” for the client when the client cannot access their Self energy. This is accomplished by the therapist encouraging the client to, "Go ahead and connect with Self energy in whatever way works best for you, breathing or moving a little bit, any approach that works for you. Self will feel like a flowing sensation of compassion and curiosity. Okay, now, who would like your attention right now?" When the client is healthier, the therapist will act as a prompt for the questions the client needs to ask themselves: "At your own pace, go inside yourself and ask who would like your attention right now?"

The parts can be understood as communicating with themselves healthily when the managers and firefighters have not forced themselves nor exiles to take on too extreme of a position. A healthy system like this would have an evenly balanced scale as seen in Figure 5.

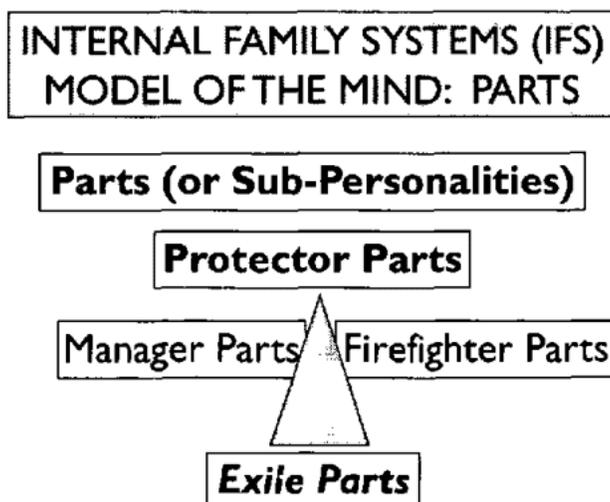


Figure 5: A Balanced, Healthy Internal Family System Prevents Tipping the Scale toward Extreme Positions¹⁹

An adaptively functioning client, from an Internal Family Systems Lens, after exposure to trauma would communicate using the following template led by the healthy Self. These questions of investigation would include the following intentions, but are not limited to the specific wording except for "How do you feel toward that part?" which is a question asked at each interaction with the new Part:

<u>the Self's Curious & Compassionate</u> <u>Questions</u>	<u>the Part(s)'(s) Responses</u>
"Where in my body would like my attention?"	An exile within the person volunteers
How do I feel <i>toward</i> that part? ²⁰ A) Curious and Compassionate	A) Exile can proceed with discussion

¹⁹ Riskin, Leonard L. "Managing Inner and Outer Conflict: Selves, Subpersonalities, and Internal Family Systems." (2013).

²⁰ If the answer is anything other than pursuing understanding or pursuing love, then the Self should assume that the person acting as Self is actually a Manager, and the Self should start the template over and approach that Manager first.

B) I can't talk because a protector has interrupted	B) I have an agenda, and am probably not my Self, but another part of me who isn't the exile
A) Proceed with exile B) Proceed with this Part that has an agenda or feelings other than the Self before talking to the exile that originally volunteered	
Thank you! What more can I understand?	Shares uninterrupted
I understand. I appreciate you sharing that. What more can I understand?	Expresses fear
Thank you for sharing. What are you concerned might happen if (<u>re-states fear</u>)?	Shares uninterrupted
I understand your response. Thank you for sharing. (Extends love physically toward the Part). What more can I understand?	Sharing uninterrupted with compassionate responses from Self; repeats until the Part goes on to be a healthy protector or healthy exile

After significant work, there is another step within the therapy model to relieve burdens. However, this isn't a process that typically happens quickly, nor is the goal of this thesis to complete the therapy process for readers. The goal is to be able to recognize the internal clashes of opinions that eventually will be fully heard by the Self of the internal system. Once those

disagreements are fully understood by the Self, the Self leads a conversation with the part carrying burdens through the process of releasing the burden (toxic belief, traumatic memory, etc.). This is a difficult and often long process, and usually requires therapy in situations with trauma. Luckily, in contrast to that ultimate resolution that takes years of self-discovery, this thesis's objective of the analyses solely aspires to illuminate the conflict within one person and prepare survivors of sexual trauma to identify the different parts that will likely arise in their healing process, so as not to silence them from the beginning.

Maladaptive Internal Communication

To be able to identify those complicated oppositions, conflicts, and polarizations, one must understand how parts can silence each other to the point of ultimate polarization. This silence is often rooted in internal disagreement on how to best proceed when at a crossroads, and the decision-making tactics of parts are often based on past experiences, sometimes past experiences that leave that part of the system in a healthy, manager state; other times, past experiences that have required protection in danger to the point of becoming an extreme firefighter, numbing out a conflict (or many) with avoidance. But the ultimate conflict where survivors get stuck will lead to an internal dynamic where two parts disagree so much that one shuts the other down, creating a polar disagreement that disrupts harmony within the system.

Imagine, that a client has a manager A who gets them to school on time every day and a protector B who assesses their sense of well-being when at school. After the client experiences a trauma that makes them feel as though their life has been threatened, manager A has such a hard time dealing with the trauma that they hyper focus on schoolwork without taking breaks to avoid remembering the trauma; this sends manager A into an extremized role. Protector B stops allowing manager A to get the client up in time for school because manager A's motivation has

decreased, their emotions are consistently sad, and protector B knows that manager A would work until the point of no return if protector B were to allow them to wake up for school, so this is a new extremized role for protector B. Now, a new manager, manager C is starting to believe that the client is a failure at school, which is a valued aspect of their self-identification.

Manager C begins to feel overwhelmed that the Self might feel overwhelmed at school if the manager A doesn't begin to attend classes on time. Now is the crucial moment where the client's internal disagreements create the polarization(s) in the client that eventually create dysfunction and unhealthy settings in the Self's internal dialogue. Protector B has shut down manager A completely from attending school to prevent manager A from overworking their system during the necessary grieving period, and manager C is angry that protector B will cause the client to have extreme anxiety about the client's performance in school. manager C is ignored by protector B to keep manager A safe which leads manager C to adopt a belief that the Self is worthless since the Self values their performance in school. This burden that manager C has attached to, and is now carrying regularly, leads manager C to believe that the trauma would not have happened if the Self was more valuable and was always perfectly meeting their goals, such as performing excellently in school; since, manager C internalized the toxic belief that value was the reason for the disconnection internally. The result of being ignored pushes manager C into the position of an exile carrying burdens.

A polarization occurs when two or more parts in an individual's internal system reach extremely opposite conclusions. Many polarization outcomes could occur in this anecdote, but a typical one might be for the person to interpret and internalize that they're bad while continuing to not attend school on time because the person doesn't have a full understanding of the complexity of relationships within their system. Protector B believes that not allowing manager

A to attend school during the period of processing and reacting to the trauma, is the best thing to do for the system; since, manager A was extremized from a healthy manager in this time period and overworking the system when they went to school. Protector B is numbing the client from feeling pain that overwhelms the client instead of getting out of bed and going to school, which leads to an extreme level of avoidant behavior to neglect thinking about the client's long-term goals at school. This extreme position could lead to manager A believing they're bad if they don't attend school, which might bring up bingeing/purging to try to feel any emotion other than the numbing that protector B has solidified. Finally, manager C is accusing the Self for the Self's failures in school without acknowledging the need for a period of healing, so protector B stops listening to manager C; even though, manager C does in fact have the Self's long-term goals in mind, which causes manager C to become extremized to say nasty, awful things about protector B on repeat in the Self's head in order to convince the System to perform at the potential manager C is used to seeing.²¹ This polarization between the Self and manager C is the second extreme opposition in the system.

The client arrives to therapy and says:

I don't know what to do. I had this terrible experience of trauma, but it's really not about that. I just feel like I hate myself, but I love what I chose to study and learn. I can't get out of bed for school, so I must not actually be strong and smart enough to finish. I'm thinking school may not be for me. I also have been making myself throw up sometimes even though I hate it, but it's because I eat too much when I'm sad. I have thoughts about

²¹ Miller, Bobbi J., Jose Ruben Parra Cardona, and Michael Hardin. "The Use of Narrative Therapy and Internal Family Systems with Survivors of Childhood Sexual Abuse." *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 18, no. 4 (February 20, 2007): 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1300/J086v18n04_01.

hurting myself, and more recently, I've been making a plan to do just that." An initial structured interview for the case above may look like this:

Self (or Therapist): What part of your body wants your attention right now?

Exile C: Me. My part. I need Self's attention because I never get it, and I have so much intense pain. I could talk for hours about all the pain I feel becau-

Manager A: Well because school really matters to me.

Self (or Therapist): Hmm. I see you kind of switched themes there when you started speaking about school instead of pain. Can you ask yourself if this is the same part as before?

Protector B: It's not. It's a different part, but I don't know how to tell you who this is. This is a lot to talk to myself, and I really don't even want to be here. I think that the stress of school must just be too much.

An analysis of the client's response to further use of the structured dialogue may look like this:

<u>Internal Family Member</u>	<u>Quotation from Client</u>	<u>Agenda of Internal Family Member</u>
Self	"I don't know what to do. I had this terrible experience of trauma,	To understand the Internal Family in the context of exposure to trauma
Protector B	but it's really not about that.	To avoid thinking generally or specifically about the trauma (and to subliminally protect the Self from being overworked by manager A)

Exile C	I just feel like I hate myself	To seek help to stop the anger/self-hatred and to acknowledge manager A's desire to perform well in school
Self	but I love what I chose to study and learn.	To be compassionate to original goals before trauma
Manager A (extremized)	I can't get out of bed for school,	A) To admit struggle of protector B preventing manager A from working B) To admit the self-hatred for allowing the Self to eventually feel overwhelmed at school
Manager C (Exiled & carrying Burdens)	so, I must not actually be strong and smart enough to finish.	To self-blame or self-hate
Protector B	I'm thinking school may not be for me.	To reduce current stress
Manager A	I also have been making myself throw up sometimes even though I hate it.	A) To avoid thoughts of failing if unable to go to school

		B) To numb pain of trauma with new, more easily identifiable pain
Manager C (Exiled & carrying Burdens)	but it's because I eat too much when I'm sad	To justify anger at protector B for the harmful dulling of manager A's experience
Protector B (Firefighter)	I have thoughts about hurting myself,	To relieve pain from the trauma by removing the client from the situation, to address the guilt protector B now feels from manager C's beliefs about protector B's well-intended coping response, and to destroy feelings of worthlessness from manager A's coping response that no amount of work was sufficient
Manager C (Exiled & carrying Burdens)	and more recently, I've been making a plan to do just that."	To self-destruct in order to save the client from an alleged never-ending pain; To receive acknowledgment from the system in which

		manager C is constantly ignored
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When the Self is this polarized, the Self is often not in charge. For a polarized exile, an unheard part with a burden, they have to take over to be heard, and they do this by flooding the system with overwhelm, crying for help at unexpected times to the system, and threatening suicidal thoughts as their last attempt at relieving their pain. As the chart conveys, this high-conflict internal dynamic with constant interruptions, distorted self-esteem, and suicidal thoughts is not a safe place for an individual to be at psychologically. A therapist is often critical when the system is at this level of polarity because the Self is significantly less present which makes the person unable to access the curiosity and compassion required to understand why all of their parts are in conflict.

Thus, we might expect to see less occurrences of Self as the point-of-view and more occurrences of polarizations in songs written about sexual trauma due to the high-conflict nature of the grieving process after trauma. A grieving process such as what occurs after sexual trauma breeds higher levels of internal conflict, and it might lead to internal parts in more extreme roles due to less diplomatic representation of all ideas from increased polarization; this would create less space for empathy from the Self within the system. Songs may create the unique space to allow survivors to privately mediate their traumatic experience while also to anchor themselves

in the safety of the rhythmic predictability or lyrical constraints to create close rhymes, other sorts of phonetic patterns, and ultimately tell stories.²²

The Argument for a Thematic Analysis of Polarizations in Songs

Musical lyrics are the focus because of their ability to provide the space for engaging with the messy chaos (showing parts through lyrics), listening to themselves in a loving way (the Self), and abruptly changing patterns and structures to make a statement or produce a narrative (polarizations). In order to see how this therapeutic mode of communicating with one's Self and recognizing how one's polarizations can be displayed in song lyrics, there are two different steps. The first step is to produce a thematic analysis of the lyrics, also referred to as sentiment analysis or mining opinions.²³ The second step is to identify and teach others how to identify the Internal Family Member showcased within those lyrics. There are two main ways of presenting the Self for this analysis (as a listener to the lyrics or within featured lyrics), so the following will describe those approaches.

The singer can be healthy in Self energy or grieving, acting with an agenda, or experiencing conflict in their system. Often, one can consider the songwriter listening to the song as the songwriter acting with Self energy, and other times, the singer will have written the song as their own Self with parts of their system engaging with their Self and polarizations disputing within the context of the utterances. Once the Self or the main conflict causing polarization is

²² Pattinson, Pat. "Prosody: Structure as Film Score." In *Writing Better Lyrics*, Second., 177–88. Cincinnati, Ohio, United States: Writer's Digest Books, 2009.

²³ Zhang, Lei, Shuai Wang, and Bing Liu. "Deep Learning for Sentiment Analysis: A Survey." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Data Mining and Knowledge Discovery* 8, no. 4 (July 2018).
<https://doi.org/10.1002/widm.1253>.

identified in the lyrics, recurring parts in the lyrics are examined to ascertain which Internal Family Members those statements represent based on the model.

The thematic analysis will identify occurrences of the parts, the Self, and polarizations between the parts, with each category defined by the earlier agendas presented for different parts, the qualities listed for the Self, and abrupt differences in topic or opinion for contradictions that are more polarized than interactive. Essentially, the analysis identifies the messages in a song or contradictions between the opposing opinions in themes of the lyrics in order to draw conclusions regarding the experiences of trauma survivors' healing process in their music.

Methods for Thematic Analysis of Polarization in Songs

Because this project is attempting to prove a concept, I chose to analyze popular songs that focus on sexual trauma to examine whether the lyrics could potentially convey relationships and roles discussed in Internal Family Systems. I chose these songs because they met the following criteria: they are written about in op-eds, published on accessible streaming platforms like Spotify and Apple Music, and their lyrics are all listed on Genius.com. Thus these songs can be considered as popular culture based on the level of accessibility and widespread reach. I searched for "songs about sexual trauma" using the Google search engine, and selected nine songs from an article titled, "The Chorus of #MeToo, and the Women Who Turned Trauma Into Songs," from *Pitchfork*. Then I selected Messages from Her by Sabrina Claudio separately since it provided a clear example of remembering an exile and requiring the Self's presence in relating to that exile. Finally, I selected Tina Turner's, "What's Love Got to Do With It" based on her openness with discussing intimate partner violence. This comprised the total of 11 songs. I note at the outset that the selection of songs was intentional and may not represent a full display of ways in which sexual violence is depicted in popular song, but further emphasize that the objectives of this analysis was to provide preliminary data to indicate the feasibility of such an approach.

Each song was analyzed using the coding definitions described in the next subsection to examine if and how polarizations are expressed in songs that are about sexual trauma, and if these parts are expressed, how they are expressed:

1. Outside of That by Bessie Smith (1923)²⁴
2. What's Love Got to Do With It by Tina Turner (1984)²⁵
3. Me and a Gun by Tori Amos (1991)²⁶
4. Silent All These Years by Tori Amos (1992)²⁷
5. Sullen Girl by Fiona Apple (1996)²⁸
6. Cleaning Out My Closet by Angel Haze (2012)²⁹
7. Oblivion by Grimes (2012)³⁰
8. 'Say It' by War On Women (2015)³¹
9. Gatekeeper by Jessie Reyez (2017)³²
10. Praying by Kesha (2017)³³
11. Messages from Her by Sabrina Claudio (2018)³⁴

²⁴ Smith, Bessie. "Outside of That." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Bessie-smith-outside-of-that-lyrics>.

²⁵ Turner, Tina. "What's Love Got to Do with It." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Tina-turner-whats-love-got-to-do-with-it-lyrics>.

²⁶ Amos, Tori. "Me and a Gun." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Tori-amos-me-and-a-gun-lyrics>.

²⁷ Amos, Tori. "Silent All These Years." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/10482395/Tori-amos-silent-all-these-years/Hey-but-i-dont-care-cause-sometimes-i-said-sometimes-i-hear-my-voice-and-its-been-here-silent-all-these-years>.

²⁸ Apple, Fiona. "Sullen Girl." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Fiona-apple-sullen-girl-lyrics>.

²⁹ Haze, Angel. "Cleaning Out My Closet." Accessed February 4, 2021. <https://genius.com/Angel-haze-cleaning-out-my-closet-lyrics>.

³⁰ Grimes. "Oblivion." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/825286>.

³¹ War on Women. "Say It." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/War-on-women-say-it-lyrics>.

³² Reyez, Jessie. "Gatekeeper." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Jessie-reyez-gatekeeper-lyrics>.

³³ Kesha. "Praying." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Kesha-praying-lyrics>.

³⁴ Claudio, Sabrina. "Messages from Her." Accessed March 28, 2021. <https://genius.com/Sabrina-claudio-messages-from-her-lyrics>.

In order to translate IFS to an analysis of song lyrics, I devised a set of specific operating definitions that capture the various parts of a person's system:

	A	B	C	D
1	Parent Code	Subcode	Description	Identifier
2	Compassion, Curiosity, Creativity, Calm, Courage, Connection, Confidence, and Clarity	Self	the healthy leader of the client's system	S
3	to-do lists, solves executive functioning activities, and is an administrative necessity	Protector (Manager)	the healthy administrative assistant of the client's system	M
4	removes the Self from the Situation	Protector (Firefighter)	the healthy body guard of the client's system	F
5	removes the Self from the Situation in a way that harms the Self (numbing out, avoidance, self-harm, substance abuse, eating disorders, etc.)	Protector (Firefighter; Extremized)	the unhealthy body guard of the client's system	EF
6	Does administrative necessities in a way that is unnecessary and for control (obsessive/compulsive repetition, cleaning or organizing an already clean or organized place, not taking a break from goals)	Protector (Manager; Extremized)	the unhealthy administrative assistant of the client's system	EM
7	A forgotten or silenced part of the Self that carries no issues (8 year old who had a sandwich at lunch; 15 year old who went on a routine hike)	Exile (healthy)	the healthy forgotten parts of the client's system	E
8	A forgotten or silenced part of the Self that carries issues called burdens (8 year old who was sexually abused; 15 year old who was called a liar when asking for help)	Exile (burdened; extremized)	the unhealthy forgotten parts of the client's system	EE
9	Disagreement, conflicting perspectives, opposing sides within one text	Polarization	an internal relationship conveying conflict between parts	same color highlighting opposing sides

Figure 6: Description of Coding Methods for Thematic Analysis

Then, I coded each line of lyric with the Identifier based on the Internal Family Systems technical terms: Self (S), protector in a manager role (M), protector in a firefighter role (F), protector in a firefighter role that has been put in an extreme position (EF), protector in a manager role that has been put in an extreme position (EM), exile (E), exile carrying burdens in an extreme position (EE), and Polarization (same color highlighting sides of a conflict).

To exemplify this process, here are examples of coding each line of lyric for each role in the system. In Kesha's "Praying," she says, "I'm proud of who I am." This line conveys courage, connection with herself, confidence, and clarity, so it's identified as the Self with an S. In Tina

Turner's "What's Love Got to Do With It," she says, "But I have to say // I've been thinking about my own protection," and this lyric conveys an administrative task (speaking up about an important safety issue) which is identified as a manager with an M. In Grimes's "Oblivion," she says, "I never walk about after dark." This is identified as a firefighter with an F because it shows her removing herself from a situation. In Sabrina Claudio's "Messages from Her," she references a "girl inside [her]" saying, "If I'm not here for me // She will be there," this line "she will be there," is marked as a healthy exile with an E, but following that line of discomfort, Claudio repeats "Da-da-da-da-da-da" ~ 15 times which indicates repetition to avoid the discomfort of engaging with the exile, so "Da-da-da-da-da-da" is identified as an extreme manager with an EM because of the repetition following a reference to a situation with less control.

It could be argued that repetition in music is just for beautiful sound, and those arguments are exactly why this approach suggests not making claims about the mental health of the singer or songwriter. Rather, this analysis, regardless of the singer's own mental health, indicates how an exile manager would react to a memory of an exile with repetition to control the situation; this may not be the case for Claudio, but it could be the case for a trauma survivor. In Jessie Reyez's "Gatekeeper," the focus of the song is to recall and retell a traumatic story of sexual harassment. She says, "You could be famous // Girl, on your knees // Don't you know what your place is?" These lyric lines were identified as extreme exiles with an EE because they convey the burdens of reliving the memory of a potential business partner sexually harassing the main character like

this when she was trying to collaborate with him musically.³⁵ Then, in Bessie Smith's "Outside of That," she says, "He's heartless and also cruel" . . . "Outside of that, he's sweet as can be."

These lines convey two opposing ideas and thus were identified as Polarizations.

I quantified Internal Family Systems parts in each line of lyric in each song, leaving uncoded the 23 lines that did not seem to fit in the IFS framework. The result was 429 song lyric excerpts which conveyed parts within an IFS model. I then converted each part into frequencies based on the total 429 parts. Any fractions will be out of the total number of parts represented on the figure they are referring to and not the N=11 songs. It's important to emphasize that I'm coding the lyrics as a text, and I'm not making claims about the mental health of the songwriter. It is best to think about this work as a literary analysis and not as a mental health evaluation.

³⁵ Jessie Reyez. *Jessie Reyez - Gatekeeper: A True Story (The Short Film)*, 2017.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gi0Jgtg6SfI>.

Results

With an N=11 songs, the result of the analysis identified 429 Internal Family Members by counting each line of lyric that expressed an agenda of a part, Self, polarization, or exile in Internal Family Systems. The coding indicated that Internal Family Members and their roles are prevalent and identifiable in the lyrics of songs written about trauma.

Figure 7 displays the frequency of each part from IFS on the Y axis and the song in which those parts occurred on the X axis. It shows the frequency of roles expressed in each of the songs analyzed. Although there is variability across songs, all songs that were analyzed did express some roles or parts. Extremized exiles are the most frequent parts overall, then extremized firefighters are the second most frequent, and finally, healthy managers are the third most frequent parts in the songs about sexual trauma that were analyzed. There are many different stages of the healing process that survivors can be in when they write songs about their trauma, and this figure engages with a robust portrayal of the different possible conflict ratios within internal communication through a textual analysis of the song lyrics as they relate to the defined members of the therapy model (parts, Self, exiles).

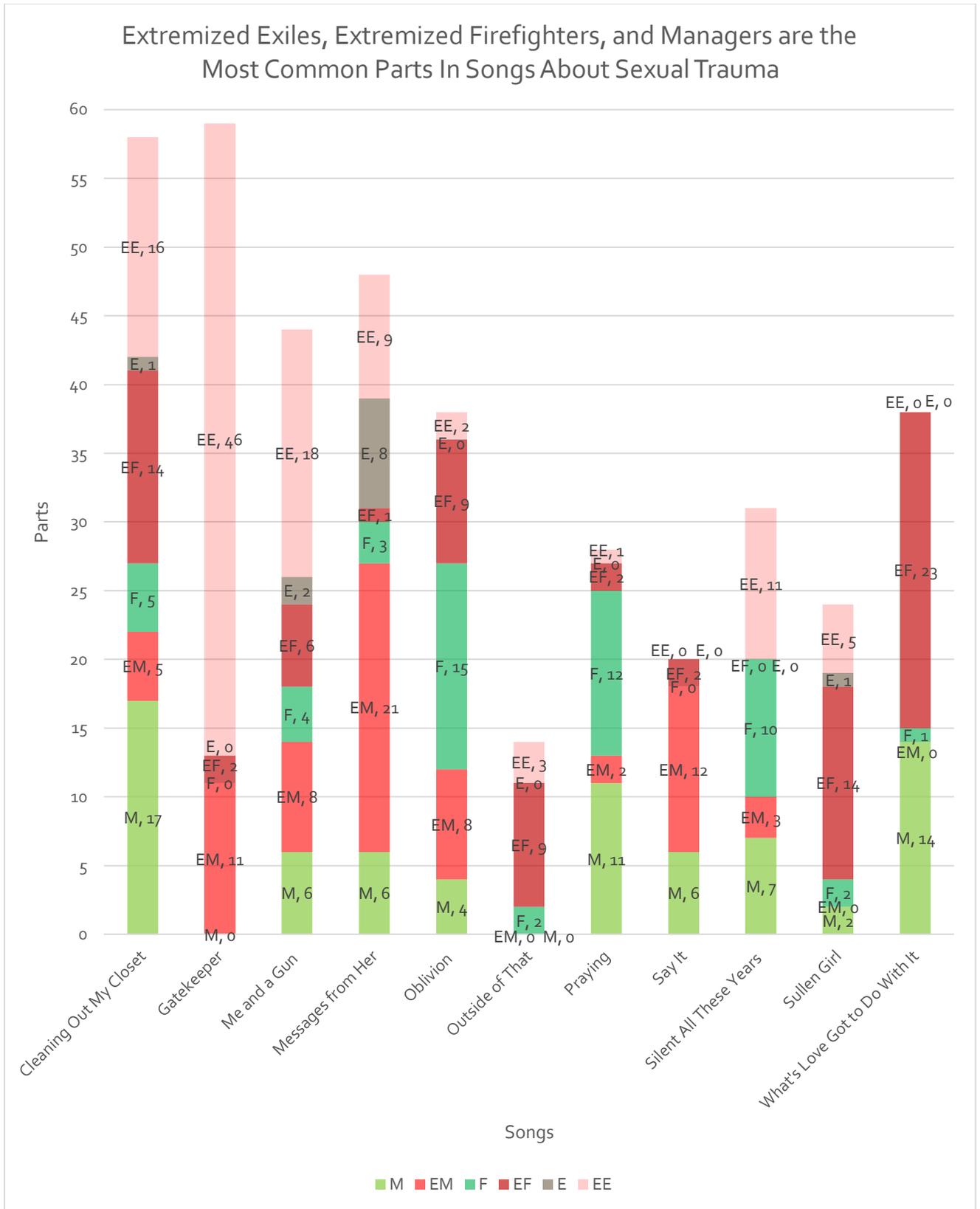


Figure 7: The Most Common Parts in Songs about Sexual Trauma

The extremized firefighters can be illustrated in songs like “Cleaning Out My Closet” by Haze, “Sullen Girl” by Fiona Apple, and “Outside of That” by Bessie Smith. Haze says, “I was afraid of myself, I had no love for myself / I tried to kill, I tried to hide, I tried to run from myself,” which was identified as an avoidant approach toward the trauma within those lyrics. Another example is when Apple transitions from “And there’s too much going on” to “but it’s calm under the waves / in the blue of my oblivion.” This giving in to oblivion is identified as an extremized firefighter whose state of being in Internal Family Systems is too extreme to manage, so this likely creates eating disorders, self-harm, substance abuse, numbing out, or avoidance. As Smith accounts intimate partner violence, she responds to her own account of eyes being blackened to “but outside of that, he’s all right with me,” which is defined as extremely avoidant of the danger in this context, so it’s defined as an extreme firefighter as well. Extremized firefighters occurred second most commonly out of all of the parts as a result of firefighters who were propelled past their capacity to exit a dangerous situation and stuck in a violent moment which created the extreme avoidance.

The managers can be illustrated in the songs “Praying” by Kesha, “Cleaning Out My Closet” by Haze, and “What’s Love Got to Do With It” by Tina Turner. Kesha says, “I’ll just say this / I wish you farewell,” and Haze says, “I had to deal with my shit / I had to look at my truth / to understand that to grow you’ve got to look at your root,” which showcases the administrative skills necessary to seeking healing after sexual trauma. Turner says, “It’s physical / Only logical” and “There’s a name for it / there’s a phrase that fits.” These lyrics all convey the administrative

tasks necessary to continue functioning and were the third most commonly occurring types of parts in this sample.³⁶

Looking at the parts in more depth, Figure 8 displays the overall presence of polarizations and occurrences of the Self. This chart is acutely useful because it provides an indication of adaptive versus nonadaptive communication. In songs with more polarizations and less Self energy, the words are based in traumatic memory more than empathetic and diplomatic presence and elevation of the whole Self and parts' experiences. In short, Figure 8 shows that these songs emphasized polarizations over Self.

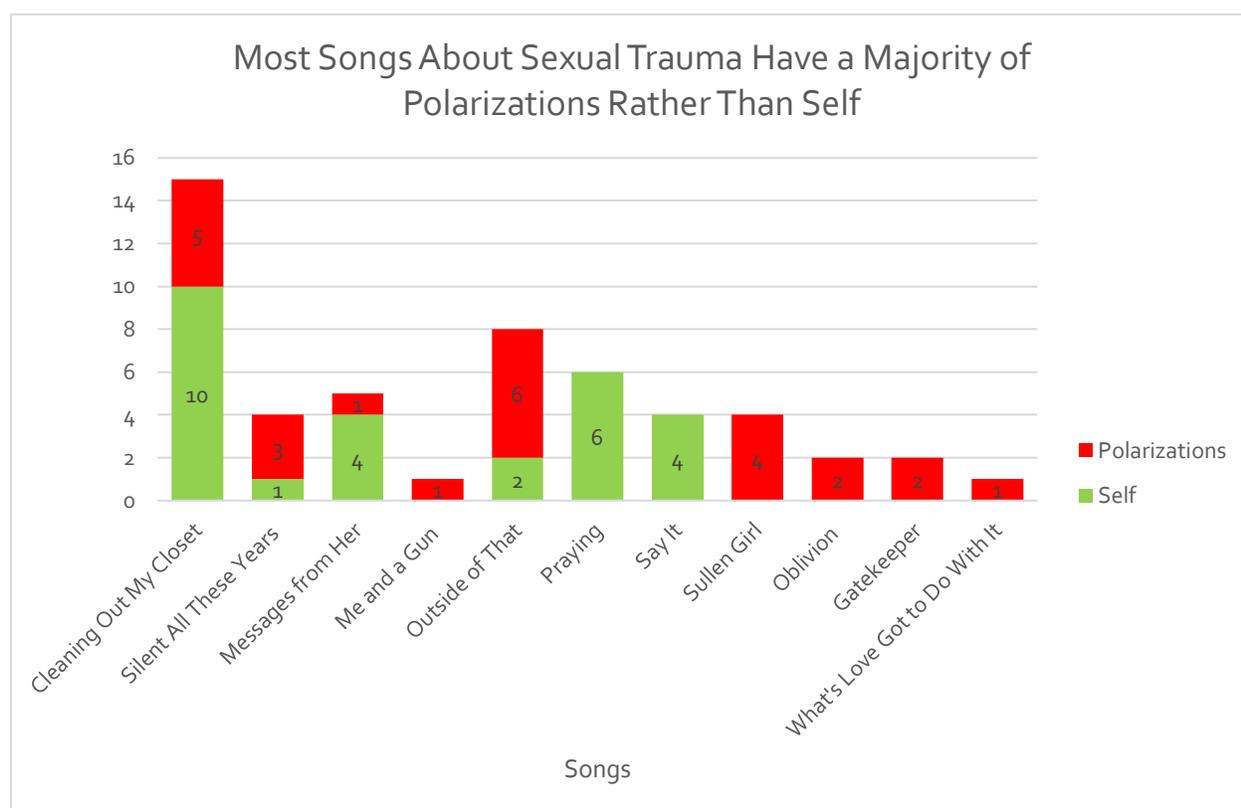


Figure 8: Occurrences of Polarizations and Self in Songs about Sexual Trauma

³⁶ As a matter of interest, Cleaning Out My Closet by Angel Haze is exemplar in many ways because the schematic representation of her lyrics' internal family members are the most diplomatically represented which suggests she is a powerfully empathetic mediator internally with regard to Internal Family Systems.

Within lyrics from a single song, Figure 8 conveys different ratios of polarized conflict to Self-energy. Polarizations occurred more often than the Self in 7 of the 11 the songs, showing consistency with the thesis's expectation that survivors would normally experience internal conflict after sexual trauma. It's possible that songs of any topic have the potential to be based in polarized conflict, but Figure 8 shows 7 out of 11 songs in the sample group showed polarizations more often than Self energy as opposed to only 4 out of 11 songs showing Self energy more than polarizations.

This suggests that through using thematic analysis, song lyrics, and psychotherapy, there is an avenue for educating survivors of sexual trauma on their healing process through a songwriting framework that successfully combines linguistics, songwriting, and psychotherapy. At this point, the question might be looming: How does a song that expresses polarizations and doesn't end in resolution actually help a survivor heal? The answer is that by normalizing and validating the conflict that is expected after trauma, survivors will not be so shocked by their own journey toward healing. No one will finish analyzing IFS parts in a song and continue their daily life as if they had never been traumatized, but when one can understand dynamics of internal reactions, they will harness more compassionate space for themselves to move through their healing process at their own rate.

A low polarization dynamic can be illustrated in Angel Haze's "Cleaning Out My Closet," where you see a lot of harmony within her system. This makes sense with what we should expect after seeing her Self outnumber her Polarizations. This doesn't mean Haze isn't grappling with the horrific realities of sexual trauma, but it does indicate that she has an awareness of the oppositions between her parts. For example, in the semantic polarization, "I mean I'm sane but I'm insane but not the same as before." In Haze's lyrics, you see ample

encouragement for engaging with the Self, “I said I opened my wounds, I had to bleed ‘til I stopped it // Thanks for joining me here as I cleaned out my closet.” This kind of language should be recognized as healthy since it facilitates engaging without judgement, recognizing the pain, and normalizing the events she encountered.

In Grimes’s “Oblivion,” and others, the listener or reader can engage with polarizations but not Self; this may indicate an unhealthy system that is yet to mediate their polarizing reactions to trauma, but it could also indicate that the songwriter, themselves, is acting as their system’s Self during the writing process which allows them to engage with their trauma in a safe way. A lyric example of a polarization from Oblivion is “I never walk about after dark” followed by “see you on a dark night.” Which could indicate a level of conflict between parts that disputes the opponent’s decision-making capability. A quick argument for lyricism here is that this is a dangerous topic to discuss if thought of in the context of revisiting sexual trauma, it would be common for the practice to engage PTSD responses or other reactions of overwhelm; however, the song will end, the bars will be the same the next time you engage with the lyrics, and the musical creativity can empower agency within the chaos of healing from trauma.

Moving past the extremes of internal polarity, Figure 9 displays how frequently a manager is engaged lyrically compared to how often an extremized manager is engaged lyrically. It indicates the overall presence of healthy managers is higher than unhealthy managers in the songs. This indicates that healthy managers may be critical in the process of overcoming sexual trauma for survivors.

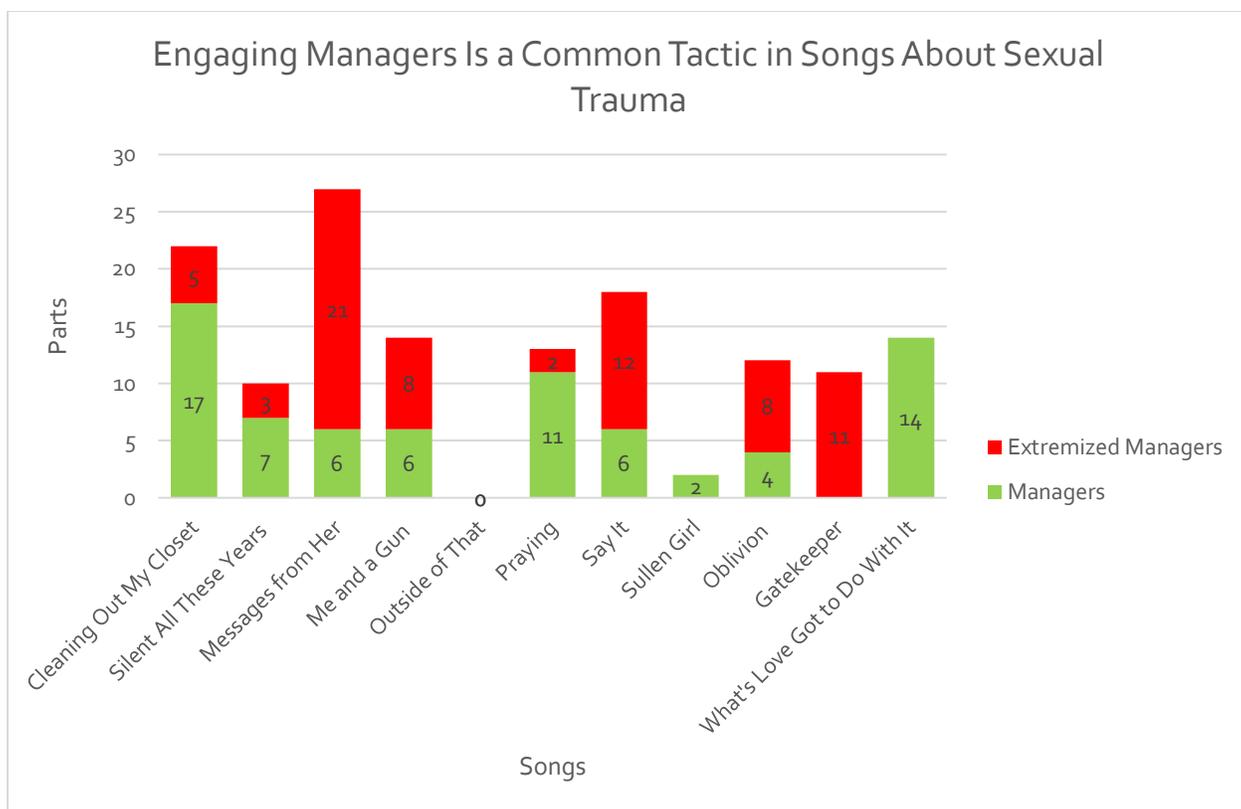


Figure 9: Healthy and Unhealthy Managers in Songs about Sexual Trauma

In Kesha’s “Praying” and Tina Turner’s “What’s Love Got to Do With It” managers (and healthy ones at that) are the overwhelming majority. An example of this is in “Praying” where the lyric states, “Cause I can make it on my own” and “I hope you find your peace” to socially interact with an abuser. Other conveyances of managers are in “What’s Love Got to Do With It” when Turner writes, “It’s physical // Only logical” and “there’s a name for it // there’s a phrase for it” to answer questions when the lyrics are otherwise moving through extreme firefighters questioning love’s relevance when protection is becoming more important. Those extreme firefighter lines say, “What’s love got to do, got to do with it? . . . Who needs a heart when a heart can be broken?” followed by “but I have to say // I’ve been thinking about my own protection.” There are a number of reasons that this could be the case, but one that seems most likely is seen in Figure 7 where the reader can see all of the internal relationships because

Turner's lyrics showcase healthy managers handling all conflict until extreme firefighters demand protection.

War on Women's "Say It" showcases the prevalence of managers in extreme roles through repetition of direct orders and questions that would validate their need to grieve. As discussed earlier in the paper, this longing for validation of the healing process and validation of the traumatic nature of the sexual violence itself is a common reaction in survivors.

An argument for exceedingly high rates of healthy managers in lyrics may relate to unique positions at the time of one's traumas. Experiences that legally silence the discussion of trauma or trap an individual in a relationship could strengthen managers in the system in order to deal with the administrative necessities of getting through each day without the economic, psychological, legal, or physical ability to grieve or exit a traumatic situation. Some individuals stuck in their traumatic situation would be drawn to having healthy managers administer traumatic realities if the possibility of firefighters don't have an easily facilitated exit.

As opposed to "Praying" and "What's Love Got to Do With It," there are no managers present in Bessie Smith's "Outside of That." An argument for that lack of healthy managers could be the severe consequences of polarizations outweighing Self energy (6 to 3) that is seen in Figure 7. Smith conveys the polarization lyrically with a story of a perpetrator she happens to like in some ways. Smith says, "he blacked my eyes, I couldn't see // then he pawned the things he gave to me // but outside of that, he's all right with me." In the chart below on firefighters, Smith's song "Outside of That" has a 9:2 ratio with extremized firefighters to healthy firefighters; this ratio suggests that the lyrics convey a system which is numbing out and/or avoiding the trauma more frequently than engaging with its horrors. This is that extreme

firefighter can be further understood for its high frequency in this sample pool of songs about sexual trauma.

Figure 10 displays that, when accounting for firefighters alone, extremized firefighters are occurring about twice as likely as their counterparts. In other words, of the 136 expressions of firefighters, 54 were healthy (60%) and 82 were extremized (40%). This indicates that even with the coping skill to engage managers healthily, trauma survivors may have a common reaction of an extremized firefighter that is integral to normalizing and validating their trauma response. There is variation between artists, but the high frequency of firefighters in general compared to other parts conveys that these songs written about sexual trauma are emphasizing engagement with parts of the survivor that desire to exit dangerous situation(s).

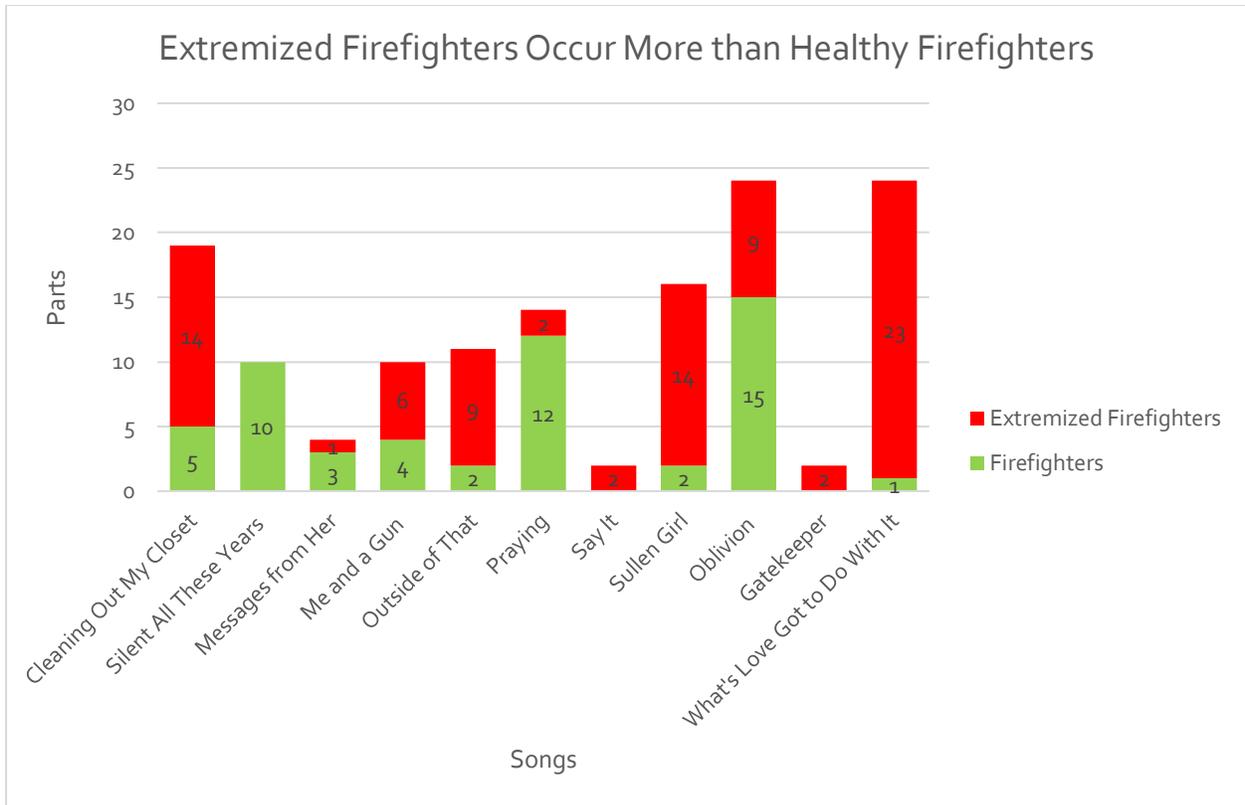


Figure 10: Healthy and Unhealthy Firefighters in Songs about Sexual Trauma

This can be illustrated in Fiona Apple’s, “Sullen Girl,” where the reader or listener can engage with the concept of a protector numbing out the system of the survivor. Amos writes, “and there’s too much going on // but it’s calm under the waves// in the blue of my oblivion.” This lyric exposes the role of a firefighter in an extreme position to numb out the experience of overwhelm that so typically follows sexual violence. The extreme firefighter can also be illuminated by Tina Turner’s song, “What’s Love Got to Do With It,” where the reader or listener will see that Turner’s lyrics engage with extremized firefighters in order to numb out or avoid the trauma she has lived through.

Figure 11 displays the jarring prevalence of exiles carrying burdens as opposed to healthy exiles. Out of 123 total exiles, there were 111 extremized exiles carrying burdens. Figure 11

indicates that these songs are engaged heavily in aspects of the Internal Family System that are struggling and in need of diplomatic representation of their voice within the survivor's system.

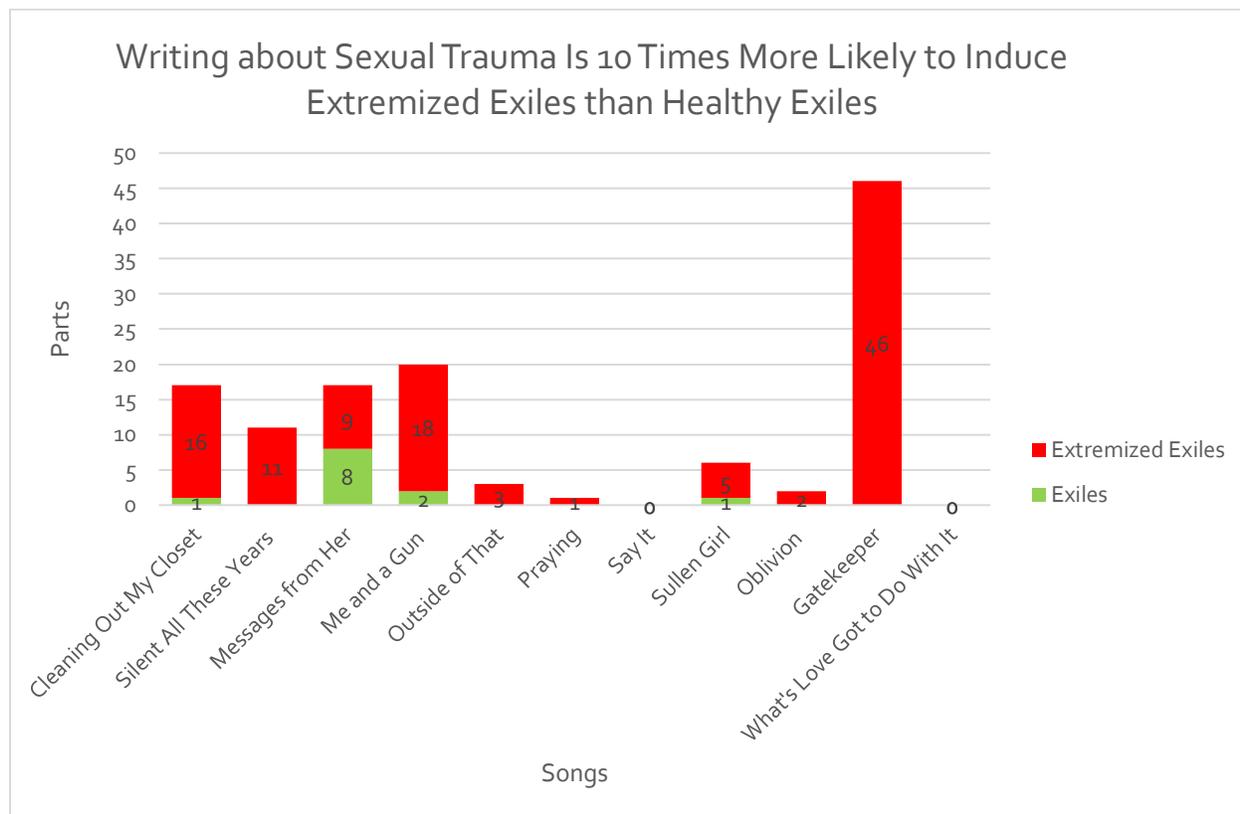


Figure 11: Exiles and Burdened Exiles in Songs about Sexual Trauma

Sabrina Claudio's "Messages from Her," is a unique example of exiles in an Internal Family System because she communicates directly to her listeners that there is a young girl inside of her that will stay if she isn't there for her: "That girl inside me stays // if I'm not here for me // she will be there." This idea is incredibly similar to the idea in Internal Family Systems that if you ignore an exile, they become exiles carrying burdens which leads to them disrupting the survivor's day-to-day functioning until they are heard.

This can be illustrated in Tori Amos's, "Silent All These Years," the data conveys that her healthy firefighters have been protecting her through silencing her system until enough Self

energy is created to engage with her trauma. She has only healthy firefighters in her lyrics, but her exiles carrying burdens are running the show in this song with its most popular line, "Sometimes I hear my voice and it's been silent all these years." Songs like Jessie Reyez's "Gatekeeper" and Tori Amos's "Me and a Gun" exemplify the freedom survivors can obtain from engaging with their exiles which are carrying burdens; these songs are an example of songs the reader or listener might acknowledge as the Self being the listener. Reyez and Amos create an environment for their exiles in extreme roles to be heard as their Self is the listener while they're singing. The famous lines from "Gatekeeper" and "Me and a Gun" relive some of the most horrific experiences of Reyez's encounter with sexual harassment and Amos's encounter with rape, and it only makes sense that these would convey exiles carrying burdens as the majority of their content. Again, to be clear, this does not mean the writers are less healthy; it could mean that the writers were acting as their Self while hearing their experiences they lived out while singing, which otherwise may have remained exiles. This is why the thesis doesn't make claims about the mental health of the writers but only the relationships expressed in the lyrics.

These extremized exiles can be illustrated in songs like "Gatekeeper" by Reyez, "Cleaning Out My Closet" by Haze, and "Me and a Gun" by Amos where the main themes of the songs are a re-experiencing of the traumatic event. Reyes relives her perpetrator's words saying, "Drink up bitch we got champagne by the cases / . . . we are the gatekeepers / spread your legs / open up / you could be famous." While Haze says, "See I was young, man, I was just a toddler, a kid / and he wasn't the first to successfully try, but he did." When Amos showcases her entrance to the past vis a vis her exile by saying, "5 a.m., Friday morning / Thursday night, far from sleep," in a backward order to enter into her re-living an experience of rape. Extremized exiles

occurred most frequently as a result of this approach to come from a place of re-experiencing the trauma in the writing in the songs.

Given that there are many representations of Internal Family Members in each song's lyrics, it seems likely that the basis for teaching survivors to recognize parts within themselves already exists in songs written about a survived sexual trauma. These representations include adaptive forms of communication and maladaptive forms of communication, and each song is unique as it pertains to Self-energy leading the way or polarizations necessitating the topic of the song. Regardless, if survivors were taught to recognize these internal relationship dynamics within song lyrics, it's possible that at least the most common reactions of avoidance/numbing out, using managers, and remembering exiled traumas could be normalized and validated by identifying the commonality of such responses to this trauma.

Conclusion

Sexual trauma is rampant. Most survivors don't get help. Internal Family Systems seems to be a viable therapeutic tool for helping these survivors. One way of using Internal Family Systems to reach more individuals and survivors is through music and songwriting. To demonstrate that this could be a useful tool, I analyzed existing songs about sexual trauma and mapped the technical terms of Internal Family Systems on to lyrics to convey a possible learning approach that survivors could take toward identifying their own internal parts and conflicts. The analysis indicates that songs expressive of sexual trauma also express the multiple roles and parts identified through IFS. It is possible, therefore, that these songs may be a useful tool for teaching survivors to identify the uniqueness of each part in their own system and the nature of polarizations between parts as opposed to Self's energy.

Building understanding of a survivor's psychologically informative internal communication within other survivors' song lyrics may normalize the healing process for sexual trauma survivors. As survivors react to their common experience of sexual trauma, the existing songs convey ample instances of the painful relationships and roles an individual's system is forced to take on in order to cope with the nature of such tragedies, including extremized parts and polarization and conflict-based internal narratives. When future survivors are no longer surprised by these horrifying intrapersonal relationship dynamics, they will be given the opportunity to understand their own psychological system and respond with curiosity and compassion. Song lyrics provide the foundation for such critical, deeply reflective internal work by providing the space for individuals and communities to explore their grief in safety, which was seen in the lyrics analyzed in this work through the openness of survivors to explore difficult memories alongside the finitude of the format of a song. This introduces homeostasis into the process of talking about trauma because where there is danger, safety is also present.

Internal Family Systems encourages empathetic and diplomatic representation of these internal conflicts, and thus could be an important and effective intervention for this overlooked population. As referenced early on in this paper, courts cannot yet hold perpetrators effectively accountable, so there is often a gap in the justice survivors seek after sexual trauma.

Additionally, mental health access is even lower for sexual trauma survivors than for the general public because being able to speak about violence following sexually traumatic events often takes years to master. Through allowing individuals to gain healthy self-leadership, an awareness of the Internal Family Systems model of psychotherapy will empower survivors to identify their multiple positions, adapt to their conflicting responses, and validate their grieving responses as perfectly acceptable following horrid treatment.

Limitations

This analysis was meant as a proof of concept, and there is no way of knowing the extent to which other popular songs may present these kinds of representations. Also, of course, it is unknown how survivors of sexual violence may actually hear these songs or the ways in which these songs can be used in the healing process. Related to this, there are no mentions of male or nonbinary sexual trauma survivors, but this does not mean that they do not exist. I was unable to find examples in song lyrics of these demographics of sexual trauma survivors, but this could be for any number of reasons. The first possibility is that these groups are more societally stigmatized for speaking about their victimization in sexual trauma, and this may lead to them not writing songs specifically about their trauma, or it may lead to their songs about trauma not entering the mainstream as frequently as females. Another possibility is that males and nonbinary individuals use other mediums for expressing and engaging with their traumatic memories such as poetry, film, theater, or others. More research is needed in order to fully include these groups

in a way that does justice to their experience of sexual trauma and proves that they also can interact with their systems using Internal Family Systems.

Other limitations are that I, as the author, developed the coding scheme and applied it without any reliability checks. I hand selected the songs in order to prove the concept which prevented the benefits of a random selection within a pool of songs about trauma. Other than opinion articles, I didn't find large databases of songs about sexual trauma specifically. I consider this lack of an unbiased aggregate of variables to be a limitation to the full vitality of the project as well. The result of these constraints is descriptive statistics rather than any statistical tests, which will serve the thesis well but prove only foundational for any further work.

Despite the self-selection of data within songs about sexual trauma and lack of an independent reliability tester for the coding system, the work could eventually serve as a safe tool for educating survivors on their own internal dynamics. There would need to be clinical trials to test this idea before teaching it to other survivors, but to see how someone else has identified and described Internal Family Systems parts in song lyrics could pave the way for affordable and life-saving education for sexual trauma survivors. Eventually, the answer to whether or not this therapy model can exist within song lyrics will be the result of that further work on this project.

Implications

The implications of this research suggest that survivors of sexual trauma could recognize the components of the Internal Family Systems psychotherapy model including the Self, parts (sub-personalities, protectors ((managers, firefighters)), and exiles (healthy or burdened). This recognition could be translated to the creative medium of song lyrics, and those survivors could experience less ostracization from their experiences through a deeper acceptance of the typical

outcomes of sexual violence, such as intense conflict between different roles within their internal system, paired with the empathetic listening and diplomatic representation of these inner dynamics following trauma. This normalization of the healing process could benefit survivors who otherwise are unseen by the justice system and/or cannot afford the psychotherapy that would relieve their negative experiences during the healing process.

Additionally, the structure of music creates safety for the survivor while allowing engagement with difficult, traumatic memories. Because the relationships between IFS parts can be expressed in songs, the findings imply that the modality of songwriting is suited to address the coping needs of a survivor while holding in tandem the capacity to creatively and boundlessly express ideas lyrically that reflect burdened exiles, managers, extreme firefighters, and more throughout that anchoring structure. It is promising that so many survivors have already used songwriting as a means for diplomatically representing their polarizations and traumatic memories, and it is also promising that these songs represented Internal Family Members without those survivors actively promoting Internal Family Systems. This implies that songwriting is a useful tool and lens for coping and labeling the grief that one must process after living through rape, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and other forms of agency-minimizing traumas.

Future Directions

This analysis lays the foundation for other survivors to recognize these psychotherapeutic parts in listening to other people's songs. Other aspects of songs, such as rhythm, structure, beat, and tonality, could be analyzed for inclusion of Internal Family Systems parts in their songs. More specifically, how sexual trauma survivors create their own music and lyrics would need to be examined from the perspective of a psychotherapist using the model for labeling parts created

in this thesis. Then, that analysis would need to be reliability tested by individuals who had no part in the process of choosing the songs.

To progress this research, additional analyses of songs about trauma could be conducted using the same chart of Parent Codes > Identifiers to replicate this work and test the reliability of the coding scheme to cement this approach as a viable concept within academia. Once this research is completed, a therapeutic approach for teaching this methodology would then be the essential next step in order to do no harm when educating individuals about how to identify the technical components of the IFS model; critically, this educational approach would need to be in a mass-media format without cost to survivors, otherwise the accessibility of using songs and popular culture would be mute.

To differentiate this work from a model for teaching others, I defined this project as a proof of concept. However, once the additional work discussed in the future directions is completed, survivors could be taught to recognize other survivors' responses to sexual trauma, label their parts and relationships between parts, and validate their own grieving process as they move through the unpredictability of suffering that is normal for this experience. Then, survivors could be taught to write their own songs in order to hold an empathetic space for their internal communication to take place and to diplomatically represent their internal oppositions in a creative format that provides the anchoring structure needed to recall trauma alongside the creative freedom to engage with hidden parts of themselves.

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