

EXPLORING GRIEF THROUGH MUSIC: ANALYZING THE FIVE STAGES IN JUNGKOOK'S "SHOT GLASS OF TEARS"

Aulia Putri¹, Dian Widya Putri²

¹English Language Education Study Program of Faculty of Teacher Training and Education of Universitas Riau Kepulauan
Universitas Riau Kepulauan
Jl. Pahlawan No.99, Bukit Tempayan, Batu Aji, Batam City, Kepulauan Riau 29425, Indonesia.

²Communication Science Study Program of Faculty of Communication Science of Universitas Islam Bandung
Universitas Islam Bandung
Jl. Tamansari no 1 Bandung Wetan, Bandung, West Java, Indonesia.
e-mail: aulia@fkip.unrika.ac.id

Abstract : *Music is an expression of the emotions of human beings and can often be a tool to deal with complicated feelings like sadness. Jungkook's "Shot glass of Tears" touches on deeper feelings of loss that many listeners can relate to. This research looks into the denials of the song and how Kübler-Ross describes the five stages of grief which includes anger, acceptance and depression. The analysis unveils the minute details expressed in the song portraying sadness, emotions and despair which can act as a therapy for the listeners. The research discusses upon how music can be used to traverse emotions and can aid in the recovery process. This song shows that sadness is a diverse feeling and should not be constrained the idea of being pure linear. "Shot Glass of Tears" bridges the gap of mourning being exclusively a Korean thing and represents it on a broader scale. The research indicates that the song might be useful in guiding and aiding those who are going through the process of acceptance of grief. This research connects the dots between music, mourning and therapeutic practices, elaborating the idea of songs having a meaning in the context of emotion.*

Keywords: *five stages of grief, lyrics analysis, shot glass of tears*

INTRODUCTION

Powerful medium, music, has been majorly useful displays of a whole lot of human emotions ranging from a love joy through a loss's agony. Music was, in all cultures and eras to which the individual may had belonged, a means to express a different yet

intimate human condition. Jungkook of BTS is one such artist who has a very strong emotional experience for telling in songs in contemporary times, implying a very personal one to his listeners. "Shot Glass of Tears", one of his solo albums, tends toward addressing grief in a profound and very

personal manner, deeply touching those listeners together with him in memory of some loss. As Koelsch (2014) states, music lets the individual go through an inner motion through emotional regulation, especially for those emotions regarding death and loss. Moreover, Myers-Coffman (2024) mentions music can assist as a calming tool for directing complex emotional landscapes, particularly in sadness.

Grief is something that is phenomenally human and an exceedingly complex and vastly different emotion for everyone. However, there seem to be typical emotional responses regarding the situation of some major loss. By far the most influential theoretical framework to describe the manner in which people go through grief and loss experience is the Five Stages of Grief by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, published in 1969. This model of stages-denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance-makes no claim to being linear during bereavement; rather, it is a very important lens through which to see the experience of mourning. Because of that, the Five Stages paradigm has influenced how

bereavement is understood in psychological and therapeutic settings (Stroebe et al., 2017). In contemporary popular music, Jungkook's "Shot Glass of Tears" offers a poignant exploration of these stages of grief. The song's lyrics express the emotional intensity of loss, reflecting the personal and collective experience of bereavement. The song's narrative and themes echo Kübler-Ross's stages, offering a raw portrayal of grief. This aligns with the views of Wang & Oldfield, (2018), who argue that music can serve as a "safe haven" for emotional regulation during periods of mourning. By articulating the complexities of grief through lyrics, "Shot Glass of Tears" provides listeners with an opportunity to connect emotionally to the song's themes of loss and healing.

Garrido & Schubert (2015) also suggest that sad music is an effective agent in bringing about emotional catharsis for the listener. Thus, enabling a grieving person to come better to terms with some aspect of that specific mourning or to assimilate it in a more meaningful manner into the emotional states they are undergoing. Furthermore, Bunt and Stige (2014) highlight that music can be available

for using the healing aspect and underlined music's ability to act as a medium exercised in expression and realization in the face of grief.

This study primarily aims to analyze how the song "Shot Glass of Tears" can be interpreted as embodying Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief. More specifically, it will study how the lyrics of the song correspond with each of the five stages. This study attempts to open up the lyrics for deeper emotional and psychological processes represented in the song through the study of their correspondence with the emotional stages as outlined by Kübler-Ross. This leads to the following research question: How does "Shot Glass of Tears" reflect Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The Five Stages of Grief

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross introduced the Five Stages of Grief in her work titled *On Death and Dying* in 1969. These stages-now regarded as foundational in the understanding of how one deals with loss-include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and

acceptance. People are not likely to go through these stages in a fixed linear order; nevertheless, they serve a valuable perspective on the study of emotional reactions to grief (Stroebe et al., 2017). Myers-Coffman (2024) underlines that grieving is a individual journey, repeatedly shaped by the relationship of internal and external factors. These perceptions emphasize the changeability and personality of grief. Denial is the ultimate form of strenuous hiding of the event, with the total focus diverted away from its immediate consequences. Anger is that silent cry uttered without words that results from grief. Bargaining is the give and take, here the hypothetical possible actions people consider for negating or returning the lost situation. Depression constitutes the last place in the scale of feelings through which one experiences deep mourning. In the end, the acceptance is a phase whereby a person comes to terms within itself, integrating and reconciling the loss without denying it.

Modern Popular Music and Grief

Grief is painted very brightly through imagery and storytelling in modern popular music. In most cases, artists use such lyrics and instruments

that make listeners realize mourners of different tastes. An example of this is seen in Jungkook's "Shot Glass of Tears," where poetic lyrics blend with a very dynamic musical structure to capture the entire emotional arc portrayed by grieving.

As Arinze & Onwuatiegwu (2020) observe, this is where the beauty of artistic expressions of loss lies: in their universality; such expressions transcend cultural and linguistic barriers, hitting very personal buttons with audiences. McFerran et al. (2018) add that music can offer a safe space for youths to process their grief, making it a controlling device for emotional regulation. The universality of grief and the shared emotions that music evokes with the medium imply that songs such as "Shot Glass of Tears" will be heavy ones for emotional connection and, most likely, healing.

METHODOLOGY OF STUDY

This study pursues qualitative analysis as a means of finding how "Shot Glass of Tears" reflects the Five Stages of Grief. The analysis was directed line by line with themes and motifs categorizing the aspects of denial, anger, bargaining, depression

and acceptance. Some secondary sources such as articles on music therapy and grief were accessed in order to provide enriching context to the findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

Denial: Emotional Numbing and Avoidance

The opening lines-"Tell me, am I ever gon' feel again? / Tell me, am I ever gon' heal again?"-give a truly horrendous picture of the protagonist refusing to completely acknowledge emotional realities. These rhetorical questions word emotions of disbelief and disorientation, quite typically of denial. The metaphor of "diamonds runnin' down my face" introduces the dualism of mourning, that is, tears as expressions of degree pain combined with something precious.

Not squandering these "diamonds" betrays an inner war between acceptance of a void and reluctance to let all of its effects sink in. These reiterative lines further affirm this stage with the line--"Got a shot glass full of tears": here refusal tries to compartmentalize grief. Shrinking a massive emotion to the size of a 'shot

glass' implies that the protagonist would like to reduce the potency of his sadness, pointing to that defensive device of denial. The 'shot glass' metaphor also talks about numbing sensations internally, capturing avoidance defining this phase.

The anger is very clearly illustrated in the lines, "Until I'm driving a hundred / With my hands off the wheel, just to see how it feels." This produces an image of a purging of bottled-up frustrations, almost creating an atmosphere for danger and raw emotionality since it takes up the character's anger while in mourning. The act of letting the wheel go-has also been seen as giving up control and an unconscious revenge against the powerlessness that was created by the loss. According to Tong (2024), music helps to mediate the anger and frustration expressed during the grieving process.

Similarly, Sharman & Dingle (2015) indicate that the songs with intense expressive content could channel the audience's anger positively. Another extension of this stage reads as "Drink, drink, drink, say, 'Cheers.'" The first implies acting out a lighthearted toast while the subsequent becomes a

more ominous ritual of raging, driven overindulgence. Drinking sorrow into the mouth (which is represented by a shot glass), means begging in metaphorical ways for recognition of that suffering while directing hidden anger through using destructive coping mechanisms.

Bargaining: Hypothetical Scenarios

The lines: "She got some dangerous hobbies / Like chasing after the sun, and making me fall in love," encapsulates the theme of bargaining effectively. In this case, the character enters a daydream when he recall some lost times with his beloved, wishing to make it a reality, this evokes feelings of lost love. The Role of Meaning and Narrative Reconstruction in Grief, Neimeyer et al. (2010) discuss how meaningful stories and reconstruction of events are part of a certain process.

The phrase 'chasing after the sun' has an elusive quality to it and this is in reference to an eternal hope, to an ever-waning degree of possibility. Additionally, the phrases "Drink, drink, drink" becomes a cry for folly and mess to make these negotiating arguments over pain. Here, the act of drinking could symbolize an imaginary purchase – soothed by what was lost in

order to lessen the loss. The closure conflicts the character and centers him into deeply regretting the loss hence, recall, the character is suppose to bargain.

Depression: The Weight of Loss

Depression is the emotional heart of the song, crystallized in the lyric: “I was cold, now I’m freezin’ / Stuck in a permanent season.” These images powerfully communicate how grief can leave people feeling frozen. The word “permanent” implies a stagnant emotional state in which time literally stands still in sorrow. This is expanded upon through the lyrical structure of the song being very understated and repetitive, as a reflection of the cyclical and trap like nature of depressive thoughts.

The refrain, “Got a shot glass full of tears,” becomes really grim at this point. The protagonist still grapples with the pain, an internalization of the grief and as if the loss was a pain that will stay, a companion for life. The metaphorical ‘shot glass’ is turned from a mechanism of coping into an embrace of the emotional weight that rests with them. Bonanno & Diminich (2013) emphasize that miserable experiences during grief are intensely

personal, needing personalized tactics for support and healing.

Acceptance: A Glimmer of Resilience

Acceptance starts in the line: “And I ain’t letting any of ’em go to waste.” This is a minor detail, yet a very important modification of the character’s attitude. By focusing on the tears as ‘gems’, the character begins to accept the loss of love as strength. This line points to the fact that he is beginning to accept some of the emotions associated with the loss and to some extent find meaning in it rather than trying to deny it or run away from it.

This verifies the assertion made by Stroebe et al. (2017) that loss integration into identity, represents acceptance. The last refrain of the song, “Drink, drink, drink, say ‘Cheers’”, goes hand in hand with the idea of acceptance by ceasing the need to escape grief into something else, moving towards celebrating the ability to feel (Wang & Oldfield, 2018) The move to acceptance stands out again by the last refrain: “Drink, drink, drink, say’ Cheers.” It was in the beginning of the song meant to portray an idea of escape. In the later parts of the song

however, it has taken on a more celebratory meaning as it aids the 'healing' process of grief. The great aspect of one's ability to 'toast' their feelings is the desire to embrace their pain and be able to start their healing process.

Discussion

In conjunction with the Kübler-Ross's Five Stages of Grief, the analysis of Jungkook's *sip of sorrow* 'Shot glass of tears' takes a closer look into grief as a more dynamic entity. Grief is a multifaceted experience and this song seems to capture the essence of it, through its powerful imagery, elaborate narrative as well as beautifully melancholic music. While grasping the complexities of grief, the song gives the listeners insights into loss that are both personal yet profound.

Emotional Resonance and Shared Experience

"Shot Glass of Tears" resonates with grief, tapping into emotions that most people go through such as denial, anger, love, or depression. Then the song becomes more engaging as the audience feels empathy. The pain of loss coupled with love is an experience that everyone encounters, and this is

beautifully demonstrated in the work while simultaneously giving the listener a beautiful emotional experience. This is similar to Arinze & Onwuatiegwu (2020) which explain the pain of loss while also linking it to art and several cultures.

Rhetorical questions such as: "Tell me, am I ever gon' feel again?" come useful in guiding listeners into their own inner emotional universe, as they are always in need of an answer. This form of questioning is representative of how music might articulate emotions that may otherwise be left unsaid, the kind of disorientation that one experiences when denying something. In addition, the shift of the main character from violent rage to burning anger and then reconciliation indicates the impact one's grief can have.

Many music therapy approaches support this notion that music can help ease grief in many ways. By instilling an atmosphere ready for self-reflection, songs such as "Shot Glass of Tears" provide listeners with the opportunity to feel the highs and lows of a broken heart with both depth and catharsis. As pointed out by DiMaio & Economos (2017), as the

person dealing with grief, music serves as an effective aid for emotional expression and processing.

The Role of Acceptance in Grief Narratives

The subtleness and realism behind the acceptance showcased through the song is its most worthy characteristic. The song portrays acceptance not as an end, but rather as part of an integration process. This is best encapsulated by this one line “And I ain’t letting any of ’em go to waste.” Grief as the song implies can be painful, but then again it can also be used as a tool for personal development. The statement is also true to Stroebe et al. (2017) view of acceptance as coming to terms with a loss and move on with life.

Additionally, the combination of softer harmonies with the elements of reflection has assisted the song’s end to feel like a resolution, all without belittling the emotional intensity of the previous parts. This interplay or contrast of sadness with hope is what underlines the therapeutic function of music, which can, for many, be an outlet for resolution of emotion. As Wang & Oldfield (2018) put it, music can be a ‘refuge’ in time of mourning,

helping to connect one another in the search for peace in the feeling of loss.

Cultural Context and Universality

Though “Shot Glass of Tears” is specific in its cultural context-Korean lyrics and delivery-it emphasizes grief’s universality while presenting particularities of cultures in mourning. This dichotomy, in line with what Mattfeldt (2024) describes as digital expressions of grief and mourning, is expressed in one’s music as a form for processing complicated feelings and personal stories online.

Such works would allow listeners from all other backgrounds to find at times commonality and novelty as they come together to experience empathy and shared understanding. Above-and-beyond simply the existence of the song across language and culture, it represents the capacity of the song to unite audiences under experience and emotion.

Engaging with music has been shown by a systematic review by Fancourt and Finn (as cited in Clift, 2020) to hugely contribute to an individual’s ability to regulate emotions, offer comfort, and create a means of connection in emotional vulnerability.

Music Therapy Implications

As an articulation of the intricate dynamics of grief, "Shot Glass of Tears" bears therapeutic potential. It has been found by research that music therapy greatly helps in emotional regulation and the grief process. For example, music therapy has been shown to be helpful in recovering from psychological trauma for bereaved families, thereby recommending intervention as a possible solution for the improvement of psychological health issues which might represent a future beneficial direction in making music therapy more effective in such contexts (Wang et al., 2024). Evidence also shows that music therapy supports the informal carer of adults with life-limiting illnesses, providing an emotional outlet for grief and increasing preparedness for that death of another (Gillespie et al., 2024).

The structure of the song possibly goes along with those Five Stages of Grief, prompting listeners to mirror their emotional course and validation to the personal experience and offer a stepping stone towards emotional healing. In clinical situations, "Shot Glass of Tears" can be one of the useful songs to be used in

music therapy as a path through which clients walk through their emotions concerning grief. Bradt & Dileo (2014) state in their work about music interventions for grief and emotional well-being that using music reflecting the emotional needs of the individual during the process would work well in fostering an improved therapeutic relationship while advancing emotional expression.

Music serves as a non-verbal medium beyond which a client can explore bewildering emotions relating to loss, and it elicits often overwhelming memories and emotional responses that may serve as healing. Taking this dimension further, when a client can reference music as belonging to his or her cultural world, a state of safety and belonging is engendered, which assists in that client's interpretation of grief. As Bradt & Dileo (2014) oppose, music interventions may serve to facilitate a moment, during which an individual may release suppressed emotions, such as expressing anger toward a lost loved one.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

This study has examined the representation of Kübler Ross grief model in the Jungkook's song "Shot Glass of Tears", that deal with grief in a very nuanced way, as there is a strong emotion attached to mourning. The song does have lyrics which includes metaphors like 'shot glass of tears', which very forcefully describes the five stages of grief model: denial anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance and so forth. The song emphasizes more the multifaceted nature of grief and the models that treat grief as linear, entirely overlook the other dimensions of the grief process. This song makes it clear that an artist uses music as a mechanism for self-healing as it serves a purpose for emotional expression. The song is apparently a dedication to someone but as it deeply connects with the audience and makes it all about loss that needs to be dealt with making the song a form of loss but now it serves and an art of grief and a means of heal. This study suggests that music has the potential to assist people in dealing with loss by normalizing and contextualizing the experience of loss. In other cultures further research might determine whether loss is expressed in

musical terms and if such music acts as a form of therapy.

Suggestion

There are many ways to further build on this study by looking at grief and music in conjunction. Further study can such as try to see how other modern musicians within other musical styles have portrayed the Five Stages of Grief through their music, and whether those representations coincided with the Kübler-Ross model. There can also be study into how various cultural settings influence the representation of grief portraying emotions and the underlying value systems in picture how such emotions are expressed through music. One direction in which it would be interesting to proceed would be the use of the song "Shot Glass of Tears" for music therapy in supporting grieving people. Finally, finding out if indeed there is a difference in the effect of music used for emotional regulation during various stages of grief provides an approach towards more precisely targeted and effective methods of treatment through the use of music therapy.

REFERENCES

- Arinze, A. T., & Onwuatiegwu, I. N. (2020). The Notion of Absurdity and Meaning of Life in Albert Camus Existentialism. *Open Journal of Philosophy*, 10(4), Article 4. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2020.104037>
- Bonanno, G. A., & Diminich, E. D. (2013). Annual Research Review: Positive adjustment to adversity--trajectories of minimal-impact resilience and emergent resilience. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines*, 54(4), 378–401. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.12021>
- Bradt, J., & Dileo, C. (2014). Music interventions for mechanically ventilated patients. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, 12. <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.cd006902.pub3>
- Clift, S. (2020). Fancourt, D. and Finn, S. (2019). What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. *Nordic Journal of Arts, Culture and Health*, 2, 77–83. <https://doi.org/10.18261/issn.2535-7913-2020-01-08>
- DiMaio, L. P., & Economos, A. (2017). Exploring the role of music in grief. *Bereavement Care*, 36(2), Article 2.
- Garrido, S., & Schubert, E. (2015). Music and People with Tendencies to Depression. *Music Perception: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 32, 313–321. <https://doi.org/10.1525/mp.2015.32.4.313>
- Gillespie, K., McConnell, T., Roulston, A., Potvin, N., Ghiglieri, C., Gadde, I., Anderson, M., Kirkwood, J., Thomas, D., Roche, L., O'Sullivan, M., McCullagh, A., & Graham-Wisener, L. (2024). Music therapy for supporting informal carers of adults with life-threatening illness pre- and post-bereavement; a mixed-methods systematic review. *BMC Palliative Care*, 23, 55. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12904-024-01364-z>
- Koelsch, S. (2014). Brain correlates of music-evoked emotions. *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 15(3), 170–180. <https://doi.org/10.1038/nrn3666>
- Mattfeldt, A. (2024). Digital Expressions of Grief and Mourning between Music, Language and Speechlessness. *Zeitschrift Für Literaturwissenschaft Und Linguistik*, 54(3), 531–557. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41244-024-00347-0>
- Mcferran, K., Hense, C., Koike, A., & Rickwood, D. (2018). Intentional music use to reduce psychological distress in adolescents accessing primary mental health care. *Clinical Child Psychology and*

Psychiatry, 23.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1359104518767231>

Biomechanics, 21(2), Article 2.

<https://doi.org/10.62617/mcb.v21i2.401>

Myers-Coffman, K. (2024).

Intersections of trauma and grief: Navigating multilayered terrain in music therapy to support youth through bereavement. *The Arts in Psychotherapy*, 89, 102166.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.aip.2024.102166>

Wang, S., & Oldfield, A. (2018). The

Effect of Music Therapy Sessions on the Interactions between Children and their Parents and How to Measure It, with Reference to Attachment Theory. *Psychiatria Danubina*, 30.

Neimeyer, R., Burke, L., Mackay, M.,

& Stringer, J. (2010). Grief Therapy and the Reconstruction of Meaning: From Principles to Practice. *Journal of Contemporary Psychotherapy*, 40, 73–83.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10879-009-9135-3>

Wang, Z., Guan, X., Li, E., & Dong, B. (2024). A study on music

therapy aimed at psychological trauma recovery for bereaved families driven by artificial intelligence. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 15.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1436324>

Sharman, L., & Dingle, G. A. (2015).

Extreme Metal Music and Anger Processing. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 9.
<https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2015.00272>

Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Boerner, K.

(2017). Cautioning Health-Care Professionals: Bereaved Persons Are Misguided Through the Stages of Grief. *OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying*, 74(4), 455–473.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0030222817691870>

Tong, F. (2024). Human motion and

musical expression: Exploring the link between physical movement and emotional resonance in performance. *Molecular & Cellular*