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Speaking to the Inner Child: A Discourse Analysis of Healing Narratives in Digital Therapeutic Culture

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Abstract

Inner-child healing has become a significant genre of self-help discourse on social media, where users share personal narratives of emotional recovery. While this narrative genre is growing, the linguistic strategies through which healing identities are constructed in these non-clinical, digital spaces remain underexplored. This study bridges this gap through a multi-method Discourse Analysis integrating corpus analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics, and Narrative Analysis, applied to 100 Facebook and Reddit posts from 2024-2025. The analysis reveals that narrators consistently deploy agentic first-person positioning, mental, material, and relational processes, temporal framing, and redemptive narrative structures to frame healing as a moral, intentional, and transformative identity practice. The study argues that inner-child healing discourse performs identity work that aligns with broader therapeutic and participatory digital cultures such as commodification and reflective resistance. These findings contribute to understanding how everyday digital discourse shapes expressions of self and well-being online. They offer insights for scholars of discourse, digital and popular culture, and inclusive language in positive-psychology communities.

Keywords: Discourse Analysis, Healing, Inner-child, Trauma, Digital Discourse, Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Narrative Analysis

1 Introduction

The development of digital spaces transformed how people discuss, process, and construct mental health narratives. Social media platforms become interactive spaces where users publicly share struggles, recovery experiences, and self-healing practices. This has given rise to a new genre of self-healing discourse (Hayvon, 2024). Among these discussions, inner-child healing has gained prominence as a therapeutic approach that encourages

individuals to reconnect with their childhood selves to address emotional wounds and cultivate self-compassion (Bradshaw, 1990). Traditionally, inner-child healing has been explored within clinical psychology, self-help literature, and mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs). Its emergence in digital spaces has introduced a new dimension to healing discourse, where everyday users participate in therapeutic storytelling and engage in self-directed healing practices.

Users frequently share highly engaging healing narratives on platforms such as Facebook and Reddit. In the study of Gibbs and Franks (2002), cancer patients often incorporate metaphorical storytelling to frame their experiences. These narratives are expressions of personal healing and discursive acts that shape identity, construct meaning, and generate social validation. While the linguistic and narrative aspects of mental health discourse have been explored in clinical settings (Pennebaker, 2011; White & Epston, 1990), little research has examined how language is used to construct healing identities in non-clinical, digital environments.

In relation to that, social media influencers appeared as prominent actors in shaping public discourse, including in self-healing and wellness narratives. They nurture emotional connections with their followers, shaping their perceptions while navigating commercial interests (Li & Feng, 2022; Zhang & Mac, 2023). Although some of them provide valuable insights, concerns were raised regarding potential public opinion manipulation, particularly when commercial interests are not transparent (Goanta & Ranchordás, 2020). This issue is vital in sensitive areas like mental health and self-care, where some influencers may promote self-healing products, services, or lifestyle changes for profit rather than genuine well-being (Arriagada & Bishop, 2021). In 2024-2025, inner-child healing went viral in Philippine social media, sparking debates on its links to consumerism (Sarza, 2024).

The rise of social commerce has further blurred these lines, with influencers using live broadcasting and interactive engagement to market wellness-related products, thereby influencing how self-healing discourse is shaped and consumed (Alam et al., 2022). While this commercial aspect can provide an avenue and resources to individuals seeking support, it also advances ethical concerns about the exploitation of personal healing narratives for digital marketing strategies (Abidin, 2016).

2 Purpose of the Study

This study examines how inner-child healing is expressed, constructed, and framed in social media narratives. Specifically, it identifies the dominant linguistic features being used in these narratives; examines how narrators linguistically construct their healing identities; and analyzes how these narratives reflect broader cultural ideologies. This study provides insights into how digital platforms serve as spaces for emotional storytelling, healing, and community affirmation. The findings contribute to ongoing conversations on trauma discourse, therapeutic culture, and the role of language in shaping emotional and social recovery in digital spaces.

3 Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is anchored in a multi-theoretical framework integrating Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), Discourse Analysis (DA), Narrative theory (Labov & Waletzky, 1967), and Trauma Theory. The ideational and interpersonal, and metafunctions of SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) provide the foundation for analyzing how language represents experience, performs identity, and organizes meaning to reflect ideology. In SFL, the recognition of the link between language and society has existed as early as 1964, where Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens (1964) stated that language is “a form of activity of human beings in societies”.

CDA (Fairclough, 2013) complements this by uncovering how healing discourse reproduces or resists dominant ideologies, and Trauma Theory (van der Kolk, 2014; Herman, 2015) emphasizes the long-term impact of traumatic experiences on physical and psychological well-being that can lead to difficulties in self-regulation, emotional processing, and relational capacity. Collectively, these frameworks present a comprehensive understanding of how narrators use language not only to articulate

pain and healing but to engage in discursive healing that resonates with collective cultural ideologies.

4 Research Design

This study implemented a multi-methods approach to address the research questions. It integrates Corpus Linguistics for empirical pattern detection and Narrative and Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) for identity construction. SFL provided the linguistic lens for identifying process types, and thematic structure, while CDA revealed the socio-cultural implications behind seemingly personal healing discourse. This integration allows the study to balance empirical linguistic evidence with interpretative depth, making it suitable for exploring both how language is used and what it reveals about identity and healing in digital contexts.

5 Corpora and Data Collection

A corpus of 100 social media posts, along with their comments, was collected from Facebook and Reddit with a total of 20,112 tokens. Posts were selected using purposive sampling, based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) Posts must contain personal reflections on inner-child healing; (b) posts must be user-generated healing narratives; (c) posts must be published between the years 2024 and 2025. Promotional content, clinical discussions, and unrelated mental health posts were excluded to maintain focus on organic healing discourse. Keyword searches such as inner child healing, healing journey, and self-recovery were used to locate relevant data and were translated into English. All collected texts were compiled into a plain-text corpus format for analysis in AntConc, a freeware corpus analysis toolkit.

6 Data Analysis

The inner child healing narratives were analyzed in three main phases based on the study’s research objectives. Phase one focuses on identifying common lexical patterns in the healing narratives through corpus linguistic analysis. Using AntConc, the study generated word frequency lists and collocation outputs to identify frequently used words and phrases and analyzed them through the lens of ideational metafunction. The second part involves SFL’s interpersonal metafunction to examine how narrators position themselves as healing subjects and narrative analysis (Labov & Waletzky, 1967) to examine the structure of the texts. Together, these

phases offer a multi-layered perspective on how language mediates trauma, constructs identity, and enacts cultural values in digital healing discourse.

7 Trustworthiness

Multiple strategies are employed to ensure the reliability of this study. The research upholds anonymity and ethical considerations to protect the narrators' identities and ensure objective analysis. While public social media data may be accessible without consent, researchers still have ethical obligations to protect users' privacy and anonymity (Ford et al., 2021). No personally identifiable information was recorded, and usernames were omitted in reporting findings, avoiding selection and confirmation bias.

8 Results and Discussion

Research indicates that various forms of childhood trauma (e.g., abuse, neglect, and adverse life events) can lead to long-term effects on brain function and mental health (Cai et al., 2023; Hovens et al., 2010). These traumatic experiences can create an “inner child” with unresolved emotional wounds, fears, and maladaptive coping mechanisms into adulthood. People construct their identity through narratives in complex and multifaceted ways, drawing on cultural resources, personal experiences, and social contexts. Research shows that individuals use narratives to make sense of their lives, integrate past experiences with future aspirations, and position themselves within broader societal frameworks (McAdams & McLean, 2013; McLean & Syed, 2016).

8.1 Frequency and Collocations

The collocation analysis shows that inner-child healing narratives are highly self-referential and affective, dominated by first-person pronouns (I, my) paired with verbs of emotion and action (feel, want, buy, heal). In terms of agency, narrators present as both experiencers of emotion and agents of change, framing healing as an intentional, self-directed process. Frequent collocates such as safe, enough, happy, and past reveal a movement from vulnerability to empowerment, while inner and child anchor the discourse in the metaphor of emotional rebirth.

8.1.1 Dominant Linguistic Features

This section presents the dominant linguistic features used in inner-child healing narratives on so-

Table 1: Collocates computed in AntConc

Word	Freq.	Collocates	Word	Freq.	Collocates
I	864	proud, happy, grateful, try, buy, afraid, learn, cry, learn, want, love	feel	63	safe, happy, enough, abandoned, emotional, exhausted, pressured, unsafe
You	395	Incredible, amazing, healing	want	41	to try, become, break cycle, explore, heal, start, buy, feel safe
my	386	inner child, mom, parents, siblings, partner, family, siblings, anxiety, kids, self, boyfriend, body, loved ones	buy	40	games, shoes, things, toys, myself
child	324	trauma, inner child, dreams, abandonment, buy, experience	old	37	toy, hobby, beliefs, wounds, self
inner	240	child, healing	back	31	then (historical contrastive structure)
love	70	Compassion, family, peace	past	31	Trauma, pain, self

cial media, drawing on Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the ideational metafunction (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and supported by Corpus Linguistics (Baker, 2006), the analysis investigates how narrators linguistically encode their experiences of trauma, emotional restoration, and identity formation. Ideational Metafunction represents experience. This is how people use language to talk about the world through actions, events, people, thoughts, and feelings. This involves examining how experiential meaning is realized through the transitivity system, which classifies processes into types (e.g., mental, material, relational), identifies participants in those processes (e.g., Actor, Senser, Carrier), and specifies the circumstances surrounding them (e.g., time, place, reason). The ideational metafunction uncovers what kind of experience is being presented, who is

Linguistic Feature	Description	SFL Elements	Narratives
High Use of First-Person Pronouns	Frequent use of I, me, and my positions the narrator as a central participant, emphasizing personal introspection.	Participant: Senser or Actor (in mental or material processes); Experiential Meaning	"I know for a fact that the little kid in me is so proud..." (Post 18) "I booked a solo trip to the aquarium". (Post 43)
Mental and Relational Processes	Used to express feelings, identity, and internal states; reflects emotional recognition.	Process Types: Mental (Senser, Phenomenon); Relational (Carrier, Attribute); Experiential Meaning	"I feel overwhelmed by how much I missed..." (Post 84) "I believe she deserved better. I deserved better." (Post 71)
Temporal Deixis and Contrastive Tense	Narratives are often structured through time markers (e.g., back then, now), highlighting transformation.	Circumstances of Time: Clause Complexes showing Logical Meaning	"Back then, my dream was simple... Now, I can buy..." (Post 4) "Now, I can buy the things I need and afford my own groceries". (Post 26)
Material Processes and Symbolic Reenactment	Healing actions (e.g., buying, giving) are encoded as material processes to represent agency and self-care.	Process Type: Material (Actor, Goal); Experiential Meaning	"Healing my inner child by buying the shoes..." (Post 40) "I gave them P1,000 each... a part of me is also healing." (Post 6)
Lexical Fields of Emotion, Family, Nostalgia	Use of emotionally charged and culturally specific words to evoke sensory memory and social belonging.	Mental Processes: Lexical Cohesion, Experiential Meaning	"I still remember how my toes scrunched up..." (Post 24) "As the breadwinner and eldest among five siblings, my happiness comes from surprising my family." (Post 22)

Table 2: Dominant Linguistic Features used in Inner-Child Healing Narratives

involved, and how it unfolds. From the corpus of 100 social media narratives, six dominant linguistic features emerged.

8.1.2 High Use of First-Person Pronouns

One of the dominant features across the corpus is the dominance of first-person pronouns (I, me, my), which reflect the intensely personal and self-referential nature of healing narratives. In SFL terms, the speaker frequently occupies the role of Senser (in mental processes) or Actor (in material processes), reinforcing discourse of individual agency and introspective labor. According to Eggins (2004), material processes are processes of “doing”, usually concrete, tangible actions. On the other hand, mental processes involve what the senser think, feel, or perceive.

I	know for a fact	that the little kid in me is so proud...
Senser	Mental (Cognition)	Phenomenon (P18)

I	booked	a solo trip	to the aquarium (P43)
Actor	Material (Action)	Goal	Circumstance (Location)

These examples highlight how narrators position themselves not only as experiencers of pain but as reflective agents. In the first sentence, “know” is a mental process, and the speaker (“I”) is the Senser, evidencing internal validation and emotional maturity. P18 stated that, “Some of us didn’t get the chance to enjoy life when we were young, only when we became adults”. The speaker recognized the experienced healing and affirms that her inner child will be so proud of how things changed with her experience.

The second example, on the other hand, is a material process type of transitivity. The actor in this context is checking their childhood goals as an adult when they visit Korea. The consistent use of first-person reference aligns with Pennebaker’s (2011) claim that trauma narratives often involve heightened self-focus and introspection, serving as a vehicle for self-disclosure and identity negotiation. This pattern also reflects the individualistic framing of emotional healing in contemporary digital discourse, where one’s healing journey is not only internal but performed for a witnessing audience.

8.1.3 Dominance of Mental and Relational Processes

Narratives are rich in mental processes (feel, remember, realize, wish) and relational processes (is, was, becomes), which represent emotional states, personal realizations, and identity definitions.

I	feel	overwhelmed by how much	I	missed	as a child (P84)
Senser	Mental (Affect)	Phenomenon	Actor	Material (Action)	Circumstance (Time)

I	believe	she	deserved	better. (P71)
Senser	Mental (Cognition)	Carrier	Relational (Attributive)	Attribute/ Phenomenon

The first example exemplifies a mental process. In Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), mental processes involve sensing. In this case, the verb feel functions as a mental process of affect, where the narrator (Senser) experiences an emotional state (Phenomenon) described as overwhelmed. The embedded clause “how much I missed as a child” further elaborates on the cause of this emotional state and contains a material process, with I as the Actor and missed as the process of “doing” (or in this case, not experiencing something in the past). The phrase “as a child” functions as a circumstance of time, situating the emotional experience temporally. Mental processes are highly prevalent in the narratives as the inner child is a mental concept

perceived by the narrators.

The second example combines a mental process with relational attributive processes to convey both cognitive realization and emotional affirmation. In SFL, relational process expresses states of being, identification, or possession, and it functions to link participants through meanings of classification, attribution, or equivalence (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The first clause contains a mental process of cognition with “I” as the Senser and the projected clause “she deserved better” functioning as the Phenomenon. Within that projected clause, “she” serves as the Carrier, “deserved” as the relational process, and “better” as the Attribute, expressing a judgment about another person’s worth. The second clause, “I deserved better,” follows this structure.

Such process types are essential to experiential meaning because they allow speakers to articulate inner psychological states and relational self-perceptions, both of which are central to trauma processing and therapeutic reauthoring (White & Epston, 1990). The frequency of these clauses across the corpus affirms that healing is presented less as an external event and more as a felt, thought, and narrated process.

8.1.4 Temporal Deixis and Contrastive Tense Structures

From the narratives gathered, narrators often structure healing as a temporal journey, using deictic markers (e.g., back then, now, before, today) and tense shifts to frame their experiences as movement through time such as the examples in Post 4 and 26.

<u>Back then</u>	<u>my dream</u>	<u>was</u>	<u>simple</u>	<u>to be able to eat</u>	<u>at Jollibee</u>
<u>Circum-stance: Time</u>	<u>Carrier: Possessor</u>	<u>Relational (Process)</u>	<u>Attribute</u>	<u>Material (Embedded Process)</u>	<u>Circum-stance (Location)</u>

<u>Now</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>can buy</u>	<u>the things</u>	<u>I need</u>	<u>and afford</u>	<u>my own groceries.</u>
<u>Circum-stance: Time</u>	<u>Actor</u>	<u>Material (Process)</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Embedded Clause</u>	<u>Material (Process)</u>	<u>Goal</u>

These examples illustrate how the narrator contrasts past deprivation with present empowerment, establishing logical meaning through a before-and-after narrative arc. In P4, the main clause is structured as a relational attributive process. “My” is the carrier or the Possessor, “was” functions as the relational process, and “simple dream” is the Attribute being assigned. The phrase “Back then” operates as a Circumstance of Time, situating the experience in the past. The adverbial infinitive

clause functions as an embedded material process, expressing a desired but unrealized action, while “at Jollibee” specifies the location. Similarly, P26 presents a material transitivity process.

These types of transitivity processes emerged significantly in the narratives. “I” remains the central Actor or “My” describing possession, affirming agency gained over time. In SFL, the usage of Circumstance of Time following the contrastive tense structure highlights the transformation of the narrators. P4 narrates being able to eat at Jollibee at present, while P26 can now buy things and afford groceries. These highlight the temporal shift from past lack to present empowerment. The narrators use these transitivity structures to linguistically encode the healing journey through agency, time, and material progress. Such contrasts support McAdams and McLean’s (2013) theory of narrative identity, where personal development is organized through time-based storytelling.

Moreover, the statements illustrate clause complexes to construct logical meaning. Clause complexes involve two or more clauses to express relationships such as cause-effect, compare-contrast, and past-future-present (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). These statements form a paratactic clause complex that expresses contrast between the present capabilities and past aspirations of the narrators. This exemplifies the growth of the Actors and Carriers over time of healing.

8.1.5 Material Processes for Symbolic Restorative Actions

Another dominant feature in the narratives of healing inner child is the use of material process verbs (buy, give, treat, recreate), often to describe symbolic or restorative actions aimed at the inner child.

<u>Healing</u>	<u>my inner child</u>	<u>by buying</u>	<u>the shoes</u>	<u>I</u>	<u>wanted</u>	<u>in high school.</u>
<u>Material (Process)</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Material (Process)</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Senser</u>	<u>Mental (Cognition)</u>	<u>Circum-stance: Time</u>

<u>I</u>	<u>gave</u>	<u>them</u>	<u>P1,000 each...</u>	<u>a part of me</u>	<u>is</u>	<u>also healing.</u>
<u>Actor</u>	<u>Material (Process)</u>	<u>Recipient</u>	<u>Goal</u>	<u>Carrier</u>	<u>Relational (Process)</u>	<u>Attribute / Material (Result)</u>

These narratives above show how narrators actively repair past emotional wounds through material process. For example, P40 involves healing and buying with inner child and shoes as the Goals of the sentences. This presents a symbolic act of purchasing a long-desired item as an act of healing or emotional reparation. The embedded clause

introduces the desire of the senser in the past, reinforcing the nostalgic reparative framing of the action. In the same way, P6 provided a direct material process to the recipient.

These actions are not merely transactional; they are symbolic reenactments of unmet emotional or material needs. This resonates with Bourdieu's (1984) concept of symbolic capital, where acts of consumption or giving acquire emotional and social significance. In the context of inner-child healing, material acts linguistically perform emotional restoration, situating physical action as a substitute for emotional closure.

8.1.6 Lexical Fields of Emotion, Family, and Nostalgia

Finally, the analysis reveals recurring semantic domains, emotionally charged and culturally specific lexical fields, that ground the healing narrative in memory, sensory detail, and relational longing.

I still remember how my toes scrunched up in those tight, white ukay-ukay shoes.
(Post 24)

In P24, "remember" is a mental process, and the vivid sensory detail (scrunched, tight, ukay-ukay) enhances emotional realism. The choice of words reflects cultural specificity (e.g., Jollibee, Hello Kitty, ukay-ukay) that situates healing within shared Filipino socio-economic experiences. Lexical fields frequently include emotion (safe, happy, proud, overwhelmed), family (mom, dad, daughter, nephew) nostalgia (birthday, toys, cartoons, Jollibee). Lexical items related to emotion frequently appear in evaluative constructions and affirmations, such as:

You are worthy of love and healing. (Post 16)

This statement uses relational process (is, are) to construct identity as evolving, affirmed, and emotionally whole. Words like worthy, enough, and deserve serve as linguistic tools of emotional correction, directly confronting long-held feelings of shame, neglect, or rejection. As seen in the KWIC analysis, the word love is a central affective term, used not only to soothe the self but to forge solidarity within the community. This aligns with Herman's (2015) view that affirmation and relational support are integral to trauma recovery, and

with White and Epston's (1990) framework for "re-authoring" the self through emotionally charged language.

Family terms such as mom, dad, daughter, and child are often used to situate trauma within early relational dynamics. The family is frequently invoked not just as a source of care but also of pain and emotional neglect. Narratives like:

My early childhood felt fuzzy, lonely, and distant. My parents were just trying to survive. (Post 61)

As a child, my mom would give away my favorite toys without asking me. (Post 97)

These reflect the redemptive logic of reparenting, where healing is performed through caregiving to others (especially one's own children) or symbolically to oneself. The frequent appearance of these terms underscores how intergenerational memory is woven into healing discourse, supporting the idea that healing is as much about relational revision as it is about individual repair.

The nostalgic lexicon, including birthday, toys, cartoons, Jollibee, and Hello Kitty, serves as a portal to lost or unrealized childhood joy. These references frequently appear in material process clauses where narrators perform symbolic reenactments of their unmet needs:

Solo trip to the aquarium-healing my inner child with fishy vibes. (Post 43)

I wasn't able to fully enjoy my childhood, but now, even something as simple as buying a Hello Kitty item brings joy to my inner child (Post 38)

These examples demonstrate what Boym (2001) calls reflective nostalgia, not an attempt to recreate the past as it was, but to grieve and reinterpret it through symbolic action.

The findings on dominant linguistic features reveal that inner-child healing narratives on social media are shaped by consistent patterns. Using the framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), particularly the ideational metafunction and transitivity system, the study found that narrators primarily employ first-person pronouns (e.g., I, my) alongside mental processes (feel, remember), relational processes (is, was), and material processes

Identity-Building Strategy	Description	Linguistic Feature	Narratives
Narrative Structure and the Healing Arc	Narratives follow Labovian structure (orientation to coda) to reframe pain into growth.	Chronological sequencing, use of past and present tense, evaluative coda	"My healing journey started 6 years ago... I now send love to every past version of me." (Post 13)
Pronoun Shifts and Solidarity Building	Shifts from I to you to we to express inclusion and build collective identity.	Pronoun variation; audience address	"I'm so proud of the work we're doing, and together, we will heal" (Post 16)
Healing as Mentorship	Narrators position themselves as guides or mentors. Healing identity evolves from personal recovery to a source of help and influence for others, reflecting empowerment and purpose.	Directive language, community outreach phrases	"Click the link in my bio to book a Soul Contract Reading, or message me today!" (Post 27) "If you want to heal your inner child with me, reach out!" (Post 19)

Table 3: Healing Identity Strategy used in Inner-Child Healing Narratives

(buy, give) to frame healing as both an inner experience and a set of symbolic actions. Temporal deixis (now, back then) adds narrative coherence by charting change over time. Corpus analysis highlights frequent use of emotionally rich and culturally specific lexis (love, safe, trauma, mom, Jollibee), which contribute to lexical cohesion and situate personal healing within recognizable emotional and social contexts.

This section explores how narrators use language to construct their healing identities in inner-child narratives on social media, drawing from the interpersonal metafunction of SFL (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014) and narrative theory (Labov & Waletzky, 1967; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). In SFL, the interpersonal metafunction focuses on how language is used to negotiate social roles, express attitudes, and manage interpersonal relationships. This includes systems of mood (statements, questions, commands), modality (possibility, obligation, certainty), and evaluation (judgment, appreciation, affect). These features allow narrators to calibrate their emotional stance, claim credibility, and establish solidarity. Complementing this, narrative theory emphasizes sequencing, framing, and audience interaction as mechanisms through which identity is constructed, particularly in contexts where storytelling functions both as personal expression and social engagement.

8.1.7 Narrative Structure and the Healing Arc

Many narrators adopt a redemptive storytelling arc aligned with the Labovian narrative structure-

Orientation, Complication, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda. This form allows speakers to frame their trauma and healing as part of a chronologically coherent and emotionally purposeful journey.

- Orientation: "My healing journey started 6 years ago..."
- Complication: "I kept attracting emotionally unavailable men."
- Evaluation: "I thought if I were better, I'd be good enough."
- Resolution: "I discovered and healed my inner child abandonment wound."
- Coda: "I now send love to every past version of me."

Such structure from Post 13 allows the narrator to claim insight and transformation, positioning themselves as emotionally mature and self-aware. Similarly, Post 20 frames healing through contrastive time expressions:

Before stepping into my inner child healing journey, I was trapped in self-doubt...
I set healthy boundaries and communicated openly."

These temporal contrasts align with McAdams and McLean's (2013) notion of narrative identity, wherein the past is reinterpreted to validate present growth. However, scholars like Frank (1995) and Smith & Sparkes (2008) remind narrators that trauma is often nonlinear and resistant to closure. Even so, in social media contexts, the expectation for hopeful narratives often compels speakers to perform recovery in ways that are inspirational, coherent, and socially desirable.

8.1.8 Pronoun Shifts, Mentorship, and Solidarity Building

Narrators often shift from I to you to we, creating a discursive bridge between self-reflection and community engagement. In Post 16, the narrator stated, "I'm so proud of the work we're doing, and together, we will heal." This signifies a change of perspective to address a wider audience or the community, which is a common theme in social media accounts. This is further exhibited by Post 23, where he acknowledged the "childish" healing by adults. From his personal perspective, he shifted into a collective stance where he stated, "Who are we to make fun of

them?” This shift not only broadens the narrative’s reach but positions the speaker as empathetic, inclusive, and emotionally evolved. According to De Fina and Georgakopoulou (2008), such shifts are indicative of narrators who are aware of their audience and actively perform alignment, transforming the individual journey into a collective one.

Some narrators move beyond personal storytelling to adopt the voice of a mentor, coach, or entrepreneur, turning their pain into a public offering as exhibited in Posts 27, 19, and 30. This shift is supported by Frank’s (1995) “wounded healer” figure and reflects how emotional authenticity becomes a source of authority. At the same time, it raises concerns identified by Baker and Greenhill (2021) about the commercialization of healing, where personal growth is stylized into a marketable identity. The use of imperative mood and promotional tone signifies that healing, once private, is now branded and broadcast for audience consumption.

The analysis of how narrators construct their healing identities presented patterns of interpersonal linguistic strategies and narrative structures. Drawing from interpersonal metafunction, narrators employ systems of mood, modality, evaluation, and pronoun shifts. Pronoun shifts from I to you to we, and the use of directive language further empowers narrators to transition from personal testimony toward collective perspective, mentorship, and marketable healing personas.

8.2 Ideologies Emerging from the Narratives

8.2.1 Healing through Play and Nostalgia as Reflective Resistance

Narratives such as “Watching cartoons in my 30s” (P76) and “Back then, my dream was Jollibee with my parents” (P4) highlight how speakers use nostalgia and play to reclaim joy. These posts often begin with circumstances of time or setting (e.g., “Solo trip to the aquarium”), suggesting that emotional reconnection is staged as ritualized action. However, Boym (2001) differentiates between restorative nostalgia, which seeks to reconstruct the past, and reflective nostalgia, a form of longing that dwells in the pain and longing itself, rather than seeking a return to a past that is impossible to recreate. While nostalgia provides validation, it must be balanced with present-day emotional work to avoid sentimentality replacing genuine healing.

These narratives challenge cultural ideals of ra-

tional adulthood and reclaim childlike pleasure as a valid healing tool. The textual metafunction emphasizes setting and agency, making symbolic gestures (e.g., eating at Jollibee) central to the healing narrative. Humor and whimsy also function as protective discursive devices, softening emotional disclosure and making trauma more socially acceptable (Goffman, 1959).

8.2.2 Consumerism in Healing and the Commodification of Trauma

Social media influencers have emerged as powerful forces in shaping consumer behavior and public discourse. Their ability to affect purchase behavior and raise awareness on various topics stems from the emotional bonds and perceived authenticity they cultivate with their followers (Li & Feng, 2022; Zhang & Mac, 2023).

Posts such as “I bought the shoes I wanted in high school” (P32) use material processes (buy, own, treat) to present healing as acquirable through consumption. CDA exposes this as a byproduct of capitalist wellness discourse, where emotional needs are addressed through retail therapy and self-gifting. These actions become emotionally loaded forms of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1984), where ownership equals recovery.

Some narrators also express discomfort with this trend, asking, “Why is it that when someone says they’re ‘healing their inner child,’ it has to involve consumerism?” This internal contradiction points to the ethical dilemma in commodifying healing. While material purchases can offer a sense of empowerment and self-worth, they also raise questions about accessibility and the commodification of trauma. Hooks (2000) argues that when self-help and therapeutic practices become commodified, healing becomes less about internal transformation and more about participating in consumer rituals. This critique underscores the tension between consumer-driven healing and authentic, internal processes of recovery.

In consumer-driven societies according to psychology, inner child healing is often commodified, with products and services marketed as quick fixes. While acquiring childhood desires may offer nostalgia or brief fulfillment, material possessions cannot address deeper wounds. Such commercialization risks reducing healing to a transaction, distracting from the introspection and emotional work necessary for genuine recovery (Feinstein, 2023; Morris & Barrera, 2024).

9 Conclusion and Implications

The findings of this study reveal that inner-child healing narratives on social media are shaped by patterned linguistic strategies and broader cultural ideologies that collectively construct healing identities as emotionally expressive, morally responsible, and socially visible. Drawing from Systemic Functional Linguistics, the corpus analysis shows that narrators frequently use first-person pronouns, mental and material processes, temporal deixis, and evaluative language to frame healing as a deeply personal yet symbolically performative journey. These narratives follow a redemptive arc, often contrasting past deprivation with present agency, and use modality to project varying degrees of certainty, vulnerability, and empowerment. Pronoun shifts and imperative moods signal the transformation of personal healing into mentorship and solidarity, while lexical choices rooted in emotion, nostalgia, and familial memory reinforce therapeutic coherence and relational alignment. Thus, inner-child healing narratives are not merely introspective expressions but socially and ideologically shaped emotional storytelling. Narrators reclaim agency while also negotiating pressures of performative authenticity, commodification, and social conformity. These linguistic patterns, narrative strategies, and ideological framings highlight how language is used in inner child healing narratives, building a ground for discussing broader complex therapeutic culture and consumerism in digital spaces.

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