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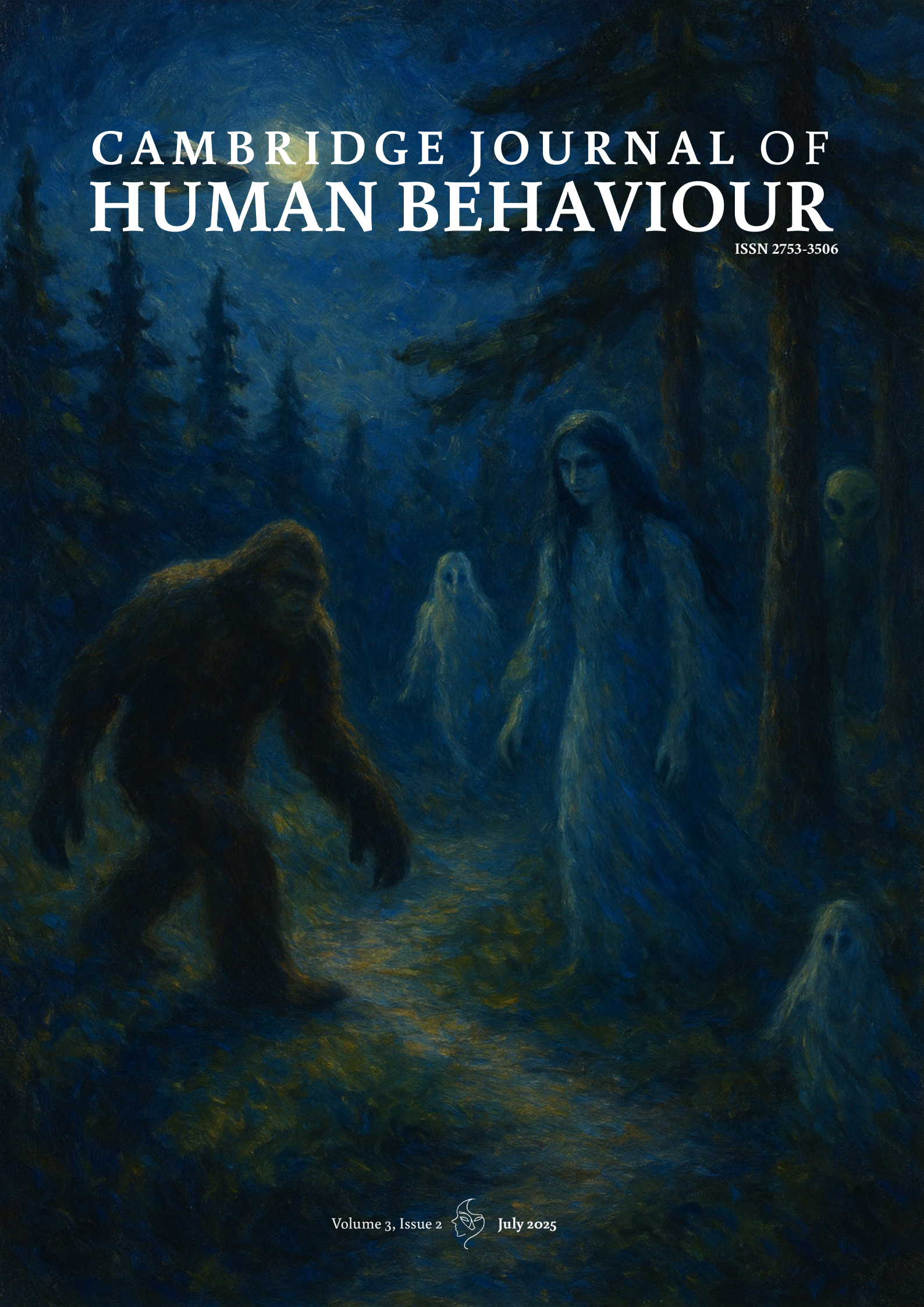

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Contents

Editorial

In the second instalment of the third volume of the *Cambridge Journal of Human Behaviour*, we invite readers to contend with truly interdisciplinary considerations of mental health care, uncover the mysteries of desert kites, and explore the sociality of the "irrational" belief in creatures. The issue, inadvertently, interrogates the uncanniness of the mind and draws out the humanity that drives the unexplainable.

I had the pleasure of joining *CJHB* in August 2024 as Managing Editor of Social Anthropology, taking up the post from the wonderful Raluca Creangă. For this edition, readers will notice the journal has expanded the social anthropology section to now include sociology publications. We felt this a necessary expansion to reflect the interconnectedness of the two fields and to acknowledge the need for a broadened space of engagement with other disciplines at *CJHB*. The journal is excited to announce its first two publications following the expansion of the division to "Social Anthropology & Sociology".

The Social Anthropology & Sociology division, first, is pleased to present Harvey Cross's fascinating essay on "creature beliefs" in the Euro-American West, which was awarded the 2024 Folklore Society's President's Prize. Cross blends ethnographic research with paranormal believers across the U.S. and Europe, and a strong grounding in a wide range of interdisciplinary studies of the paranormal, to argue that the circulation of such beliefs is a reaction to modernisation in the West. Understanding this creates greater capacity to determine what draws people to "irrational" beliefs in wider context and how to challenge the motivating pressures for such beliefs.

Additionally, Inika Khosla's study evaluates how residents of a centre in Delhi, India have experienced the centre's novel rehabilitation treatment for substance abuse. This piece lies squarely at the intersection of sociology, public health, and psychological sciences, utilising research from all three fields to encapsulate the complexity of the centre residents. Khosla details the extensive field on substance abuse and effective treatment models to identify the need to investigate the existence and success of community-based models in India. Ultimately, utilising ethnographic research, Khosla's essay underscores how centre residents can move toward holistic recovery and social integration propelled by structured and community-driven approaches.

Similarly focused on mental health and effective treatment, Sarah Bamford provides insightful psychological research into the need to increase shame recovery among victims of interpersonal violence recovering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). This paper provides a thorough overview of psychological conceptualisations of shame, and therapeutic interventions that positively impact shame, before describing how Van Vliet's (2008) study of "self-reconstruction" (p. 233) as therapeutic intervention reduced PTSD symptoms through targeting feelings of shame. Bamford illustrates the need for further implementation of Van Vliet's work while gathering broader insight into the effectiveness of prioritising shame recovery to improve PTSD therapy and recovery.

Finally, this issue features further clues about the mysterious desert kites of Syria, uncovered through the archaeological research of Zach Weissand and Dr. Kristen Hopper. To determine how this technology was used in the ancient Levantine landscape, their analysis evaluated variation among 350 desert kites through rapid visual surveying techniques applied to a larger remote sensing survey. With reference to the historical, archaeological, and ethnographic accounts of desert kites, Weissand and Hopper generate further answers regarding debates about the construction and function of the kites, as hunting ground or as pasture for livestock, for the ancient inhabitants of the Palmyrides.

Thank you to the diligent editorial and review team at the Journal for this wonderful edition. Thank you to our journal production staff for their work bringing this edition to life. Thank you to our authors whose brilliant, interdisciplinary writing is the hallmark of *CJHB*.

This is Liam McClain's final issue as Editor-in-Chief of the Journal. The whole of our team is immensely grateful for his steady, tireless leadership over the past two years. *CJHB* will continue to flourish due to his work ensuring an expanding global reach of the journal, high-quality publications, financial stability, and robust staffing. Liam's legacy is difficult to overstate and he will be missed, but we send our best wishes for his next endeavours. The Editorial Board is enthusiastic about building upon the solid foundation he created and ushering the journal into new interdisciplinary realms.

I hope you enjoy this issue of the *Cambridge Journal of Human Behaviour*.

Adaiah Hudgins-Lopez

Managing Editor, Social Anthropology & Sociology
Trinity College, University of Cambridge

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CAMBRIDGE JOURNAL OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

FOLKLORE SOCIETY'S PRESIDENT'S PRIZE

Why Do People Believe in Ghosts, Aliens, and Bigfoot? An Anthropological Analysis of Popular "Irrational" Beliefs in the Euro-American West

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Antiscientific beliefs have been becoming increasingly popular throughout 21st century Western societies. Thus, as they have grown some of these beliefs have come to wield considerable power, often affecting political processes. I investigate this phenomenon through the study of "creature beliefs": the extremely popular belief in the existence of creatures like ghosts, aliens, and Bigfoot. To research these beliefs, I reviewed academic literature and engaged with North American and British believer communities, culminating in ten multi-hour interviews. Further research was gathered by attending popular events like a mediumship evening in Herefordshire, and Coventry's Sage Paracon 2023: a paranormal convention during which both Bigfoot and extraterrestrials were regularly discussed. Despite this apparent popularity, such beliefs are commonly ridiculed and criticised as irrational or foolish by the Western social majority. This dissertation explains the motivations of supposedly irrational beliefs vis-à-vis criticism. I conclude that these motivations are increasingly circulated lore, gradually "promoting" antiscientific beliefs as more plausible under specific conditions, and pressures and fears exacerbated by modernisation. This research has important implications for two reasons. Very little anthropology has addressed creature beliefs in a Western context, and thus this study is the first of its kind to provide detailed synchronistic explanations for what draws people to these irrationals. This academic tardiness has proven particularly unhelpful in engaging with similarly widespread antiscience like violent conspiracy theories. To challenge such beliefs they must be understood from the inside-out, breaking them down into motivating pressures, of which this dissertation provides an example.

On a dreary October evening, I arrived at Coventry's Coombe Abbey Hotel for Sage Paracon 2023, my first-ever paranormal convention. I was impressed by the venue. The Gothic architecture of the medieval abbey suited the theme perfectly; however, no signs pointed to the event's location, which I later discovered was hidden away in a function room behind the building. I entered the room to find the event well-attended. "PARACON" was in its sixth consecutive year and has become the most popular event of its kind in Britain, hosting the majority of its speakers from America. I seized the opportunity to mingle with some of the attendees before the first lecture began, but most seemed wary of newcomers and opted for short, one-word conversation rather than the paranormal discussions I had hoped for. Disappointed and feeling somewhat awkward, I took my seat at the back of the lecture hall. Introduced as a "legend", the lecturing paranormal investigator, a middle-aged man dressed in a long black cardigan, took the stage:

> Hello weirdos! The first time I heard the word weirdo I was being called the word weirdo. I was being punched in the stomach. I didn't know what weirdo meant but in my brain at the time I thought 'Well, if a weirdo is a person who is not punching someone else, then I am proud to be a weirdo'. It comes from the English word wyrd, and it means 'those people who manifest their own destiny'. So, when someone calls you a weirdo, they're actually giving you the greatest compliment they can give you; it means that you're an individual who thinks for themselves and does what they want to do. When you're next at work, and someone whispers it under their breath at you, 'weirdo', you can be like, 'You're right! You drone!'
>
> Now, I'm going to ask you a couple of questions. In everyday, polite, normal society you might be a little scared to raise your hand… but since you're in a room filled with weirdos as weird as you are, you can put your hand above your head. How any people here believe in ghosts? Thank you. How many people here believe in UFOs? Thank you. How many people believe in Bigfoot? Thank you.
> (Interview #1)

Throughout 2023, I researched ghost, alien, and Bigfoot belief in Western culture by reviewing academic literature, interviewing experts, and attending popular events across the United Kingdom. The umbrella term Western refers to the shared heritage of ideas and beliefs across the countries of North America, Europe, Australasia, and to a lesser extent, Latin America and the Eastern Orthodox world. Ever since

the Scientific Revolution (1543–1687) and Enlightenment (1687–1815) occurred in Europe, most of these Western societies have emphasised the supremacy of rationality and scientific truth-finding. Today this scenario is more ingrained than ever; what is rational and scientific is thought to be correct and intelligent, while irrationality is criticised. These creature beliefs are commonly deemed irrational and superstitious: they lack scientific evidence and authorities regularly publish research disproving them. Despite this, such beliefs wield surprising power and influence. For example, in 1991 the New York Supreme Court ruled that selling a house without disclosing that it is haunted to new owners is illegal, thus encoding creatures as fact in Western law (Stambovsky v. Ackley, 1991). Today, this influence has only grown, as more Westerners believe in the existence of ghosts, aliens, and Bigfoot than ever before. Thousands of people search for the creatures, attend conventions, and consume related media. Indeed interest in creatures is so popular that the International Cryptozoology[1] Museum "generates $140 million annually in the US alone" (Madden 2018, para. 1). The internet has greatly increased support for such beliefs by making information about them readily accessible. Though these online communities can be accessed internationally, they are dominated by North Americans. This region has become the cultural hub for the belief in ghosts, aliens, and especially Bigfoot.

This scenario, popular irrationality in societies which emphasise the importance of scientific and rational thinking, begs interesting questions. Firstly, why do people believe in ghosts, aliens, and Bigfoot despite ridicule from the rest of society? Rather than being diminished by such ridicule, why do communities of believers continue to grow? What do interactions with these beliefs suggest about the wider disbelieving society? Furthermore, I was drawn to studying this triad of creatures in particular, because of the many similarities in the ways they are imagined. Each of these creatures is thought to dwell in the inhuman edges of our mundane realm, yet draw their nature from an antithetical otherworld such as the realm of death, space, or the wilderness. Because of such similarities and fuzzy boundaries between these otherworlds, this triad often share the same pool of believers and discussions comparing or overlapping ghosts, aliens, and cryptids like sasquatch into the same creature are common. This overlap was reflected by the lecture above and the majority of my interviewees:

> You don't have Bigfoot witnesses, and UFO witnesses, and paranormal witnesses, I think what people have been learning over the years is that you have 'experiencers'. If you start digging into these people who have encounters, they often have encounters of multiple different modalities.
> (Interview #2)

> After the encounter it made me question in my head, 'well, everything must be real: ghosts must be real, UFOs must be real, everything with religion, there's got to be something to it because what I saw wasn't supposed to be real, but I saw it'.
> (Interview #3)

> More scientific as opposed to 'oh, Bigfoot's over here and its orbs and its portals', [which] is really popular.)
> (Interview #4)

> I don't have enough to say I ran into Bigfoot; I ran into something. Until I film it, shit, it could've been a ghost!
> (Interview #5)

This merging suggests an interesting conclusion. The creature itself might be somewhat irrelevant and exist as a symbol or outlet which satisfies one's need to vent their distrust and disagreement with their society or authority. In other words, I wanted to investigate whether these sorts of beliefs could be forms of resistance. However, despite the ubiquitousness of these beliefs and the 21st century turn of the ethnographic lens back towards the West, I found very little anthropological work has been done on this topic. Some recent articles and very few books have investigated ghost belief in Western countries, but this work has come from theology, folklore studies, and statistics rather than anthropology, which has remained more interested in the spirits of non-Western cultures. Furthermore, anthropological investigations of Western alien and Bigfoot communities proved almost non-existent.

One reason for this lack of academic interest could be problems of definition. For example, the terms supernatural and paranormal are deeply connected to this topic yet problematically "imprecise, and the boundaries of the purported phenomena which they denote are fuzzy" (Sidky, 2019, p. 39). What makes something natural, supernatural, or paranormal? Why is an encounter with a winged, androgynous, entity interpreted as a religious or spiritual experience, whereas a similarly androgynous but wingless creature, is an extraterrestrial in a spacecraft? This question cannot be answered simply with definitions that separate supernatural, paranormal, and extraterrestrial, because as we have seen, these boundaries are simultaneously upheld and often merged by believers themselves. Through their enigma, creatures are conceptualised in infinitely varied ways, thus leaving the anthropologist unsure how to approach their object. This is why Needham (1972) has discredited the use of belief as an explanatory concept in ethnography, as "when other peoples are said to 'believe' anything, it must be entirely unclear what kind of idea or state of mind is being ascribed to them… use of this word has [not] in any instance provided a precise of verifiable description" (p. 188).

Conversely, I think these definitional challenges can be useful. They highlight that not even believers know the boundaries between what is extraterrestrial, supernatural, and paranormal, ergo what constitutes a creature is an uncertain amalgamation of changing ideas. Therefore, emphasising the significance of patterns when they emerge from all this variation, since such patterns must serve some charismatic purpose to find purchase among most believers. With this in mind, I adopt Oppy's (2018) term "the non-natural" (p. 32). This term unites all creatures by their shared context of unknowable otherworldliness and deviation from the natural laws of science, reflecting Vallée's (1982) similar conclusion that UFO phenomena, elves, dwarfs, fairies, and other fantastical beings are all different imaginings of the same other. With this shared context in mind, and because so little academic work has focused on Western creatures, I have drawn from anthropological studies of non-Western creatures and compared them against my own research and theories, determining whether they are illuminating about creature beliefs in the West.

The structure of this dissertation is divided into three sections. The first discusses the historical context of ghost, alien, and Bigfoot belief in the West. It also describes their contemporary believer communities and the ways they conceptualise creatures; crucially relevant to the second section, my theories of what motivates these beliefs. The rare pre-existing anthropological explanations that have attempted to answer this question have arrived at the same vague conclusion: that creature beliefs are "maintained by the ongoing uncertainty about their existence" (Clanton, 2017, p. 63) or "the inherent liminality of spirits as constructs accounts for their persistence" (Baker & Bader, 2014, p. 569). These explanations do not capture the full scope of such beliefs, and therefore I posit three often synergistic explanations: 1) "the Unheimlich/World Lore explanation", 2) "Creatures ward away fear and uncertainty", and 3) "Creatures as a response to social change". The final section of this article is my conclusion, discussing my findings and highlighting their implications regarding wider society and studies of other irrational beliefs like conspiracy theories.

WESTERN CREATURES

Ghosts and spirits represent the disembodied soul of a deceased person that lives on after biological death. A concept of spirits similar to the Western one is recorded earliest in the literature of ancient Mesopotamia. The Epic of Gilgamesh (2100 BCE) is an example of such; in the twelfth tablet Enkidu returns from the underworld and describes his horrible, spiritual observations to Gilgamesh (George, 2002). Known

[1]*Cryptozoology is a pseudo-scientific term referring to a creature whose existence is disputed by science*

as gidim (), these spirits were created at the time of a person's death (Al-Rashid, 2022). They maintained one's personality and memories but existed in the underworld, where they lived an existence similar to the mundane realm. Relatives of the deceased were expected to make offerings of food to spirits, otherwise they would curse them with illness. The chthonic[2] spells of the Egyptian Book of the Dead (in use 1550–50 BCE) highlight that their spirit belief reflected similar underworld themes (Faulkner, 1972). The ghost, a non-chthonic dwelling spirit that remains in the mundane realm, is recorded in Greco-Roman literature. Pliny the Younger provides one of the earliest recorded "ghost stories", describing the haunted house of Athenodorus (Eliot, 1910). According to Pliny's recounting of the tale, late at night, a shackled ghost disturbed Athenodorus and led him to a location outside. Excavation here unearthed a similarly shackled skeleton, which was properly reburied and thus the haunting ended.

Though the historical development of modern concepts is an amalgamation, rather than a linear process with geographic direction, such as in an ex Oriente lux type of way, these traditions have influenced the current Western idea of ghosts. The most significant of these influences has been the adoption of such concepts in 19th-century Romanticism. Romanticism was an artistic movement present in painting, literature, and music, which emphasised "a new and restless spirit… a longing for the unbound and the indefinable" (Berlin, 1990, p. 92). It challenged the boundaries between the human, the natural, and the supernatural; ghosts and spirits were a common trope and found popularity among Western audiences. McCorristine (2010) has shown how the cultural impact of ghosts in 19th century German Romanticism (authors like Hoffmann, Schiller, the Brothers Grimm) would influence the development of the investigative ghost hunting that is common today. German philosophical thought connected ghost experiences to dreams and visions (Kant, 1766; Schopenhauer, 1851), and therefore presented these experiences as worthy of investigation (Crowe, 1848). By the late nineteenth century, the British attitude towards ghosts had been changed by these philosophical arguments and organisations like The Ghost Club (1860s), designed to investigate ghastly phenomenon. One member, Charles Dickens, equated ghost experiences to a dreamlike realm, a feature very commonly recalled by ghost experiencers today. In 1869 the London Dialectical Society formed a 33-member committee dedicated to determining whether ghosts exist. The committee's controversial 1871 report garnered much public interest, as half of the members claimed ghosts existed while the others disagreed.

Alternatively, the Western fascination with aliens began at the turn of the 20th century and was greatly accelerated by the Cold War-era Space Race. In 1877, Italian astronomer Giovanni Schiaparelli noticed a series of linear structures on the surface of Mars which he called "canali" (Launius, 2018, p. 248). In 1895, the American astronomer Lowell (1895) would interpret this as evidence that an advanced civilisation lived on Mars and had built irrigation canals across the planet. He presented this argument in three books: Mars (1895), Mars and its Canals (1906), and Mars as the Abode of Life (1908). This work added to public interest and soon newspapers began to describe mystery airship sightings as Martian spacecraft. The novelist H.G. Wells was also influential in popularising Martians and published essays like "Intelligence on Mars" (Wells, 1896). His theories of a more intelligent space-faring species would become the idea behind his extremely popular novel The War of the Worlds (1898).

From the 1950s to the 1970s, the Space Race between America and the Soviet Union dramatically increased interest in intergalactic travel. The Western public became fascinated with aliens; television programmes like Star Trek (1966) were hugely popular and more sightings of UFOs (unidentified flying objects) were reported than ever. These reports drew government interest too. During 1952–1969, Project Bluebook was the United States Air Force's attempt to study the increase in UFO sightings. The project studied 12,000 sightings and judged 6% of them as truly unexplainable (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1969). Governments continue to maintain secrecy regarding their investigations of UFOs (Pope, 2016). Though this is likely to avoid potential international embarrassment, this silence continues to be taken as confirmation of conspiracies. The most well-known example of this might be the existence of "Area 51", an isolated area of Nevada popularly thought to be a secret military base containing alien technology.

The creature Bigfoot is likely to have emerged as a vestige of the European Wildman or "Woodwose" (Forth, 2007, p. 262) which is forgotten in Europe but often referenced by North American enthusiasts. A popular mythical and literary figure during the 14th to 17th centuries, the Wildman is described as a naked apelike man completely covered with fur (Novak, 1972). He is the antithesis of civilisation; lurking in hidden uncivilised places like forests and being violently opposed to humanity, fighting knights with his club and kidnapping maidens. As a half-man half-beast, the Wildman represented the Medieval fear of the untamed wilderness surrounding settlements, and the possibility of this animalistic savagery crossing boundaries (Novak, 1972). The creature embodies the "potentialities lurking in the heart of every individual, whether primitive or civilized, as his possible incapacity to come to terms with his socially provided world" (Novak, 1972, p. 35). These descriptions and themes clearly reflect Bigfoot lore. The first purported encounter with this creature occurred in 1924, inside a gorge extending from the southeast shoulder of Mount St. Helens, Washington State. Here prospectors fought apelike creatures, which threw boulders at them from high on the gorge wall (Longview Daily News, 1924). It was in 1958 that these creatures came to be known by a new name: Bigfoot. A bulldozer operator working for a logging company in Humboldt County, Northern California, discovered a set of 16-inch hominoid footprints in the mud of Six Rivers National Forest. Upon telling his coworkers, they relayed other sightings of similar footprints, and soon the whole crew referred to the imagined culprit as "Bigfoot" (Bailey, 2003, para. 50). State and national newspapers sensationalised both of these incidents and interest in the creature grew rapidly. Books like Sanderson's (1961) Abominable Snowmen: Legend Come to Life (1961) were published to capitalise on this interest and promoted it further. Inspired by this book, in 1967 two filmmakers travelled to Bluff Creek, Northern California in the hope of filming a Bigfoot documentary. Frame 352 of their film (the "Patterson-Gimlin Film") has been immortalised as the most controversial image of the creature (Perez, 1994).

Native American folklore has a significant influence on the Bigfoot phenomena. "Almost every indigenous group in the United States has a 'hairy man'" (Interview #4) and these traditions have become synonymous with Bigfoot (Washington National Guard, 2017). This synonymity is not only one-way as Native Americans claim that their traditional 'hairy man' is the same creature, and thus the histories of many tribes are "deeply entwined with Bigfoot" (Moskowitz-Strain, 2012, p. 6). These historical stories often present the creatures as child-eating monsters:

> [Found in] California, Nevada, and Oklahoma… [the] most common Bigfoot story throughout the United States is of a Bigfoot… [which] takes children away and eats them. This cannibalism leads to a battle… and in some places, like Nevada, there are actually landscapes that are associated with where that battle occurred. In Nevada they chased the Bigfoot into a cave and they gave them one more chance if [they'd] promise [they] won't eat children, [to which] they replied "no!" … In this case [humans] set the cave on fire and killed them all. (Interview #6)

Oppositely, clans who believe the Bigfoot were not wiped out, like the Blackfeet of Montana, describe their existence today as peaceful "guardians of the forest who look out for people" (Interview #4), or as "another tribe just like them" (Interview #4) who are sometimes traded with. (Interviewee #4's claims are corroborated by the findings of the Pikuni Bigfoot Storytelling Project, 2025). Pictographic evidence confirms that a wildman figure now equated to Bigfoot has had a central role in the cosmologies of tribes like California's Tule River Indians for at least 700 years (Clewlow, 1978), and this longevity was regularly cited as proof of existence by interviewees:

> Before they should have known about apes they are part of their creation story, so this might make you think 'okay, they are a myth', but the other animals in

[2] *Relating to or inhabiting the underworld*

that story like coyote are all real. Why are we so quick to say Bigfoot is not real and everything else is?
(Interview #4)

If obviously Bigfoot's real then the first people here would know more about him than we do.
(Interview #6)

Before this stuff really went crazy before the shows [it] wasn't so sensationalised… look at the historical native accounts around the globe, that stuff's there and it's there pre-internet.
(Interview #7)

Believer Communities

Creature believers organise into "huge online communities" (Interview #6) found across social media platforms. These groups are dominated by Western, mostly North American men, although women are represented too. The largest of these communities, which can have millions of members (Reddit, 2025), are open to newcomers while smaller subcommunities for adherents of particular theories are password protected and invite only. In these communities members make friends, avidly discuss sightings and theories, comment on expert's opinions, support their own with research, and seek explanation for experiences. Some of these online groups may focus on a singular creature but the majority of them promote discussions and a worldview that includes multiple. For example, discussions in Bigfoot communities often compare the creature to a ghost or an alien, the communities of which mirror this scenario (r/Cryptozoology, 2024). This is because members usually believe in each of these creatures and are thus involved in multiple communities. All of my interviewees emphasised the internet's role in these communities growing "dramatically bigger" by making such beliefs "much more mainstream" (Interview #4). Furthermore, many described how the accessibility of information online has turned beliefs into an addiction:

These people who are in my chats, they have to do Bigfoot at least 20 hours a week, because I know I do it… they never turn off their computer and they're always on Bigfoot channels.
(Interview #5)

It's not healthy for you to think this way, you can't do things healthy because you're polluted. It's like somebody who is a drug addict, this is their drug.
(Interview #6)

I can't take it anymore. My wife thinks I'm crazy, it's almost to the point: divorce or Bigfoot… I need to save the marriage because she's really pissed off about Bigfoot, it's consuming like that for everyone.
(Interview #5)

I drew many of my interviewees from these online spaces. They all highlighted that as communities have gotten larger they have come to be characterised by ridicule. Many describe the ridicule they have faced as a pivotal part of their journey; they find connection with others because "our whole families think we're crazy", and the desire to "prove people wrong who have laughed [at them]" (Interview #5) are commonly described as motivations for enthusiasm (Hill, 2014). Despite the obviousness of their enthusiasm to those around them, to curtail potential outside ridicule every interviewee still assured me they remained sceptical:

Half of my brain thinks this is ridiculous, the other part thinks there is something in this. I describe myself as a hopeful sceptic… they could exist but I'm not a 100% believer.
(Interview #4)

I'm a sceptic, I'm not saying they exist or not. But, I have some bizarre stuff that I can't explain.
(Interview #5)

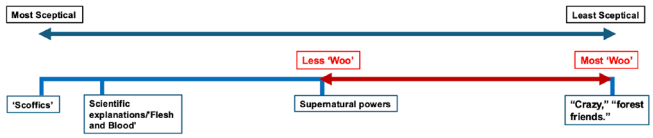
I'm there half the time trying to disprove.
(Interview #7)

The second and even more characteristic type is the inter-community ridicule that occurs between different groups of believers. Tribalism is common, and discussions often become arguments between adherents of different theories. These tribes are bigger than single creatures and can be found arguing across a variety of non-natural creature communities, using smaller invite-only ones as headquarters. Interviewees characterised these groups by their scepticism (**Figure 1**). The Scoffics "are very sceptical… they spend an awful lot of time complaining about believers… they don't believe in [creatures] but they like to complain about people who do, because why, I don't know" (Interview #6).

The next most sceptical category of group are referred to as the Critical Thinkers or Scientists. Some members of these groups are actual scientists. They attempt to posit scientific (usually pseudoscientific) or "flesh-and-blood" (Interview #4) explanations for the existence of creatures, such as Bigfoot being an undocumented descendant of prehistoric apes like Gigantopithecus blacki.

The Woo categorises the least sceptical enthusiasts who support far-fetched supernatural theories. These theories ascribe creatures spectacular powers (such as teleportation, which explains why none of them have been documented yet) or encapsulate them as "one" (Interview #2); all emissaries of a divine or extraterrestrial power. The Woo group has the most presence and support online. Interviewee #5 expressed disdain about this, describing them as "crazy nut-bags", "absolute bonkers", "forest friends", "100% psycho [with] legions of followers", and "90% of the[ir] channels are literally cuckoo-nuts" (Interview #5).

Figure 1
Tribalism in Non-Natural Creature Communities



Note. Tribes and Communities Can Be Placed Along This Scale.

This tribal competitiveness has resulted in "lots of jockeying for position" which many communities "haven't found too welcoming" or have become "jaded about" (Interview #4). Due to the unlikeliness of the creatures' existence there are no concrete rules about them, therefore enthusiasts form an infinite range of opinions which they fight to support.

Otherworlds

Despite these different interpretations, there are clear patterns in the way all believers imagine the existence of ghosts, aliens, and Bigfoot. Understanding the way creatures are conceptualised is key to explaining why they are increasingly believed in. Of crucial relevance is the concept of the otherworld and its opposition to our world. The otherworld has been defined as a "time and space distinct from, but also very closely connected to, everyday reality" (Greenwood, 2000, p. 23). This "everyday reality" refers to our mundane world, the civilised existence that defines humanity and is experienced by many of us. In the same way that death cannot be conceptualised without life, the otherworld serves as a contrast to mundanity. For instance, numerous cultures' afterlife may reflect the world of the living, but they are fundamentally opposites; one is the realm of life while the other is of death, populated by spirits and sharing no scientific laws of material reality. Bader and Baker (2014) have posited an explanation for why we imagine otherworlds like the afterlife. They claim: it results from the natural tendency of the human brain to perceive the 'soul' (or some synonymous construct) and body as distinct and to posit anthropomorphic supernatural agents. The generalised cognitive bifurcation of anima as distinct from material reality intuitively allows spirits to exist or persist without bodily presence (p. 570).

In other words, human cognition is relational and we are naturally inclined to make separations between the material realm, which is the

human existence, and its opposites. Hafstein (2000) describes this well: "the Otherworld is… a counterpart, circumscribing and defining the boundaries of the 'inside'… through its manifestation of an 'outside', the domain of the other" (p.89). We imagine opposites: we are alive, we are not dead. We are civilised, we are not wild. We are human, we are not from space.

Creatures draw their nature from these otherworlds and thus they occupy a liminal identity; humanoid and existing in our mundane reality yet emphasising opposing otherworldliness and fear. This liminality is the type described by Turner (1969) as existing at the threshold between two states. Often playing an important role in the movement from one state to another during rite de passage rituals, "liminal personae" or "threshold people" (Turner, 1969, p. 95) are this liminality embodied into an identity.

They "are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between… the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such; their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols… often likened to death… [or] to the wilderness… they may be disguised as monsters".

These monsters are "attributed with magico-religious properties… so often regarded as dangerous, inauspicious, or polluting" (Turner, 1969, p. 108)

Creatures are these "liminal personae" in the common ways believers have anthropomorphised their existence. Western ghosts are usually imagined in the same way: eerie, pale, and dead-looking with powers like invisibility or the ability to curse the living. The ghostly person reflects cultural images, like spirits of Catholic saints in France "which can be understood as a variation of a ghost" (Mendelsohn, 2022, para. 8), or specific cultural fears like a murdered hitchhiker (Beardsley and Hankey, 1943) or jilted bride (Preston-Ellis, 2024). Ghostly nature is further given away by an inability to properly communicate with language or tattered historical clothing. Thus, ghosts are clearly liminal entities that occupy the threshold between the mundane human realm and the antithetical otherworld, the other in this case being death. Its humanoid appearance, cultural imagery, and previous human existence emphasise mundanity, while its abilities, lack of correct clothing and communication, defining features of humanity, maintain its otherness. This liminal position between mundane and otherworldly is also reflected by different types of ghosts. Invisible poltergeists lack human form, yet believers still claim they are motivated by human emotions like anger (Dullin, 2024).

Other non-natural creatures, like Bigfoot and aliens, reflect the same type of liminal identity. Sasquatch is universally thought of as a large, hairy, half-ape, half-man. Its humanoid appearance and the way believers describe its behaviour (as being closely related to Homo sapiens (Sykes et al, 2014) or able to trade) emphasises humanity, while its fur, apelike face, savagery, and existence in environments hostile to humans reflect animality and opposition to civilisation.

This creature also embodies the threshold between human and other; unlike the ghost, this other is not death, it is wilderness; a hostile existence humanity has left behind. Though ethnography has described spiritually powerful wildmen in Southeast Asia (Steedly, 1993; Bubandt, 2019), Africa (Sharp, 1993; Sarno, 2012), and North America (Moskowitz-Strain, 2008), the most common power attributed to Sasquatch-like creatures are enhanced animalistic attributes, drawn from its wild otherworld. Derrida (2009) argues that this animalism of beasts makes them particularly liminal and otherworldly figures, as they "do not even respect the law of the animal community" (p. 19).

Finally, aliens are similarly liminal personae. Believers have divided the appearance of aliens into various types. These include the Reptilian type (scaly humanoids), the Nordic type (tall and beautiful humanoids), or the most recognisable Grey type (grey humanoids with large craniums; Lepselter, 2023). Those who claim to see aliens also often report seeing ships, the aliens' spacefaring vehicle. These ships exhibit great degrees of technological symbiosis, performing absurd activities like making crop circles, abducting lifeforms, or playing tricks on humans. The appearance of aliens is another variation on the human form, yet their vast technological succession emphasises inhumanity and unknowable otherness. Clark and Coleman (1975) have highlighted this, describing how UFO abductees all report their experiences taking place in an "otherworld which may have seemed 'real' enough, but which could not possibly exist" (p. 236). Thus, aliens have been anthropomorphised in ways undoubtedly mundane yet simultaneously unknowable.

By contrasting our mundane world, the otherworld is hostile to us. Thus, it is feared. By embodying this otherworldliness, creatures become the icons of our fears. Ghosts highlight our inferiority and inability to beat death. Bigfoot highlights our weakness in the wilderness and acknowledges the irony of "the Anthropocene – the epoch in which humans have arguably become a transforming force of nature" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 226) yet are more vulnerable to it and extinction crises than ever. We know little about space and its potential denizens, "what we think, imagine or dream about cultures beyond the earth not only reflects our own hidden fears and wishes, but alters them" (Maruyama & Harkins, 1975, p. vii). Besides from this fear, liminality is the attribute most emphasised about creatures. Encounters with them almost always occur in locations with a similarly liminal identity. My first explanation for why people have such encounters, argues that Western culture has preprogrammed individuals to expect creatures at specific liminal locations.

UNHEIMLICH/WORLD LORE EXPLANATION

The unheimlich/World Lore explanation emphasises the role of Actor Network Theory (Latour, 1987), location agency, and World Lore, (a term referring to knowledge and stories popular in Western culture) in why people believe in non-natural creatures. Actor Network Theory describes how constant interactions between human and nonhuman agents construct networks of shifting relationships, each actor interacting in the network influencing others (Latour, 1987) . A group of local objects and humans who interact with them construct a network that formulates a location, and it is through these networks that whole locations can be agentic (Murdoch, 1998). For example, a room in a house with a bed, a nightstand, a wardrobe, and the observer's pre-existing experiences about what objects constitute a bedroom, inform them that this location is somebody's bedroom, and they behave accordingly. The observer's prior experiences and the specificities of these objects, such as whether the bed is pink or blue, changes the spirit or sensation of this location and thus alters human behaviour further. This argument proposes that humans have preconceived knowledge from World Lore about specific locations with a liminal spirit reflecting the otherworldliness of non-natural creatures. Thus, human interactors expect to find our liminal creatures in these liminal locations, they interpret them as most likely responsible for any unexplainable experiences occurring there. Therefore, such locations act as portals to the otherworld.

As Rieti (1990, p. 8) highlights, "the incursions of the human world and the [other]world into one another are the dramatic nucleus of [believer's] narratives" (p. 8), and liminal creatures are always seen in correspondingly liminal locations. The specific liminal spirit required to turn locations into creature-summoning portals is the unheimlich sensation. The unheimlich refers to the feeling of angst experienced in locations "one does not know one's way about in" (Freud, 1919, p. 341). Atran (2002) has similarly emphasised how creatures are over-detected in "ambiguous" (p. 78) or "uncertain" (p. 78) environments. Thus, inhuman locations like deep forests, mountaintops, or those in darkness, evoke such a sensation and are commonly associated with specific creatures. My interviewees commonly cited the woods, for example:

> Now that I've been out in the woods, I 100% believe that we could have something that has been there for hundreds and hundreds of years… when you get in the woods it's a different place, it's dangerous.
> (Interview #5)

Furthermore, the unheimlich is also evoked when the "familiar and agreeable" (Freud, 1919, p. 341) become "concealed and kept out of sight" (p. 341) or "secret and hidden" (p. 341). Therefore, creatures can be encountered in the familiar too. Miller (2001, para. 8) is correct in claiming that the idea that "one's home is a direct expression of one's

taste is false", as unfamiliarity arises here through problematic social relations with the location. Specific features such as temporal changes (nighttime or closing time) expose the unfamiliar lives of the familiar, as Miller highlights, their "longevity… and the relative transience of their [deceased] occupants" (para. 1). This recognition of locations' social lives results in "feelings of alienation" (para. 15) as the material that encompasses us does not represent us. In the ghost story "we mythologise this problem by positing the agency as belonging to the house itself and its possessions, where these objectify those people who have previously lived within it" (para. 12). Unfamiliarity is similarly important in conjuring alien encounters. The unfamiliar ingredient that is interacted with and creates an unheimlich location is the appearance of a UFO. The flying anomalous light or craft cannot be identified and evokes fear.

The incursions of nature upon the civilised provide another distortion of the familiar. Otherworlds and their creatures often reflect natural themes like death and wilderness. Here "they represent, in anthropomorphic form, the mysterious and numinous in wild nature, the part of the world that is beyond mankind's understanding – 'the raw' of Lévi-Strauss, as against 'the cooked' what man has mastered" (MacDougall, 1978, p. ix). To ward against "man's unreconciled distrust of nature… in the cities [mankind] devised a thousand ways of dissembling natural needs" (Rieti, 1990, p. 7). When nature reclaims infrastructure through dilapidation it "'liminalises" these locations as they become both human and inhuman. The decaying haunted house is an example of this. Death, the ultimate unavoidable natural, has a similarly anti-civilising effect when it occurs at locations; it shatters the veneer of humanity's escape from nature, bringing it inside. Thus, places like hospitals and graveyards are similarly thought to be haunted. Nature also plays a liminalising role in the location of Bigfoot experiences, but they are reversely characterised by humanity incurring upon it. Thompson (2004) and Hafstein (2000) similarly highlight that other creatures of wild otherworlds, like fairies, are mostly reported in natural places encroached upon by urbanisation, like ringforts within towns.

My interviewees spoke of multiple encounters with non-natural creatures, all of them occurred in unheimlich locations where familiar mundane and unfamiliar otherworlds met. These locations were described as "creepy", "satanic", a "haunted occult place", or "hell-town" (Interview #2). The majority of ghost encounters I heard took place in graveyards or hospitals. Two of my interviewees were nurses and described nightly interactions with ghostly doctors and wartime patients. Ghosts also appeared within homes at hazardous locations like stairs, only after the homeowners heard about a death taking place there. Bigfoot was encountered at the threshold of where humanity meets the wilderness. Such locations included a hunting blind, "wilderness and abandoned houses" (Interview #3), a railway embankment that passed through a swamp, a remote reservoir, and while a frozen water tower was being defrosted by a bonfire. Finally, aliens were encountered during unnerving nighttime journeys or dreamlike visions.

Dreams have often been described as liminal spaces existing between awake and asleep, alive and dead, recognisable and impossible (Heijnen, 2005; Mageo, 2022). Anthropologists have discussed these experiences (Sheriff, 2021), claiming that "man reflecting on dream experience, would have inferred from it the notion of a non-material entity — the soul — and would then have attributed this to other beings…finally to lend it an existence independent of all material support, in the form of spirits" (Sperber, 1975, p. 1). In other words, the dream's disconnection from materiality leads to its interpretation as a message from an otherworld. Dream experiences are commonly described as interactions with spirits (Broz, 2018). Interviewee #9 explained it with "your mind is so relaxed that [it is more receptive to] spirit world people trying to contact you, you can accept it more, you're more responsive to it" (Interview #9). Anthropologists like Dick (2006), Dixon (2007, p. 200), and Santo (2023) have also emphasised dreaming's characterising role in alien abduction narratives. During dreams abductees experience their familiar surroundings and objects distorted by omnipotent aliens in a "playful", "absurd", or "paradox[ical]" way beyond human comprehension (Santo, 2023, p. 263).

The unheimlich is not limited to physical expression, nor is it limited temporally. During the festivals of Zhongyuan (China), Obon (Japan), Día de los Muertos (Mexico), and Samhain (Europe) the boundaries between the mundane and afterlife are relaxed, and practitioners expect to interact with ghosts more than often.

Ubiquitous bodies of World Lore associate entering the unheimlich with encountering particular creatures. Knowledge about ghosts and the locations they haunt is so well-known that such places are "instantly recognisable" (Clanton, 2017, p. 98), "even those that ridicule the notion are conversant with the rules of haunting" (Potts, 2006, p. 78). The situation is the same for creatures like aliens and Bigfoot. Entering the unheimlich and encountering the unexplainable, such as strange animal calls or aerial lights, becomes evidence for pre-informed creature knowledge rather than other explanations are sought. Naish (2022) highlights that we "expect [creatures] in the appropriate locations" (para. 6) because "expectations of what [these] monsters are like, has been, and still is, based on images familiar in popular culture" (para. 10). The author analysed 1,688 aquatic monster accounts dating back to 1600 AD, finding that after the 1824 discovery of the plesiosaur family of Mesozoic reptiles, descriptions of creatures like the Loch Ness Monster matched them exactly. Bigfoot enthusiasts similarly reference prehistoric great apes and claim that if such creatures existed then, why not now (The Bigfoot Field Researchers Organization, 2024).

Dewan (2006) provides a perfect example of how World Lore increases the belief in creatures. His study found interpretations of anomalous light experiences as aliens to be "cross culturally uniform" (p. 186). Hearing "other peoples' cases" (p. 190) or seeing "something on TV" (p. 194) contributes to UFO tradition; the "global bodies of lore… serve as the primary context for both the initial perception and subsequent interpretation of these experiences" (p. 188). During an experience, this knowledge is revised immediately and memories are encoded through the lens of these expectations. Thus, when a North American family encountered anonymous lights one night during a drive, the first explanation for this unfamiliarity is the extraterrestrial (Dewan, 2006). Ex post facto absorption of UFO tradition from other sources only adds to the "cultural filter" (Dewan, p. 190) through which memories are recalled. The memory becomes more elaborate, the something encountered, remembered as a creature for certain. What began as an unnerving experience becomes reinforced belief. Santo (2023) similarly found that alien abductees' beliefs were reinforced the more they attempted to understand abduction experiences, constructing increasingly elaborate explanations. Initially these experiences were claimed to be like bad dreams; traumatic operations occurring in a liminal state between asleep and awake. However, the more lore these individuals learned the more complex their explanations became; aliens were no longer threatening but "technological angels" (Santo, 2023, p. 6) and "family" (Santo, 2023, p. 9). Interviews with non-natural creature experiencers highlight how pre-informed knowledge about particular locations made them expect creatures:

> "I already knew that a lady had died on the stairs and knew that she'd been watching me".
> (Interview #8)

> Original Seneca lore saying that there was a big hairy creature in my area of New York… Here I have a book written in the late 1700s saying that there is a legend of something being here in native lore.
> (Interview #7)

In Bigfoot communities there is a term for this pre-informed expectation and it is called having "Bigfoot on the brain":

> People go to the conferences, then they get interested, and then they go out looking and then they see something, people call this 'Bigfoot on the brain', seeing Bigfoot and hearing Bigfoot all over the place. This happens a lot.
> (Interview #4)

The more lore enthusiasts are exposed to, the more likely they are to expect and start encountering creatures. Bigfoot enthusiasts learn the major categories of experiences and enough coincidental interactions with these become as significant as an encounter with the creature itself:

> This day, everything that every big Bigfooter says that happens to you when you are encountering a Bigfoot, happened … The river was flooded and all of a sudden I'm disoriented… I got back to the river and everything looked different and there was owls [hooting] at 2pm in the afternoon… I had Bigfoot on the brain and I said "oh, you know what they say about owls, Bigfoot can mimic an owl [then]… I got hit by ultrasound… I say "oh my gosh I'm being zapped"… I'm going in this direction [toward the swamp and] as soon as I do tree splash goes up… it falls right where I'm walking and most Bigfoot people say that's a warning don't go that way and so of course, I took off… As I go out there I see this about 80 yards away. It's what people would call a 'nest'. Three logs… almost looking like a seat. I got seven major categories right there, most people only have one or two.
> (Interview #5)

Eaton (2018) similarly describes how coincidental events also construct encounters for ghost believers. For one member of an investigation, tripping and falling was enough to prompt the group's leader to believe paranormal influences pushed her, and thus they must have encountered a ghost. Furthermore, interviewees often emphasised how the ex post facto absorption of lore served to reinforce creature beliefs and colour the recall of memories:

> "I found out really quickly that other people had seen the same thing in the same spot".
> (Interview #4)

> A month or two later I would see something that would make me reflect back on what happened and make it make sense. It always seems like the answers to the questions I have, eventually come but in really strange ways. (Interview #2)
> Some of the dreams I've had I tell other people and they say 'oh, that sounds more like an out of body experience' and I'm like 'oh, I didn't even realise that!.'
> (Interview #3)

> He started asking me questions about my life prior to 1995 and that made me realise that I've had stuff going on ever since I was a kid and I've just never realised it because… I never knew there was anything different about it.
> (Interview #3)

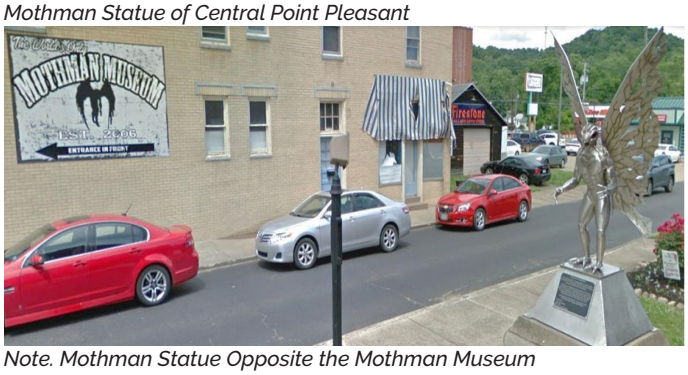
One interviewee even noted how this process of lore exchanging has this effect:

> When you confidently talk about things that have happened to you, it opens up doors for other people who have had strange things that have happened to them.
> (Interview #9)

These interpretations of events to suit knowledge, rather than the other way around, sometimes become influential across larger scales. Daly (2023) uses the term "narrative hijacking" (p. 80) to describe how believers have descended upon historical events and altered the interpretation of them en masse to suit their agenda. In 1967 the Silver Bridge collapse occurred in Point Pleasant, West Virginia. It was the deadliest bridge collapse in American history, but is now mostly remembered for its association with the popular cryptid Mothman (National Geographic, 2021). Over a hundred people sighted this creature just before the bridge collapsed (Keel, 1975). Today, most residents of Point Pleasant do not believe in Mothman, but many thousands of believers come to the town each year and popularise stories that it caused or foretold the disaster (Mothman Festival, 2025). Much to the chagrin of the townsfolk, rather than memorialising their dead, the disaster has been deeply incorporated into cryptid lore, and throughout America it is thought of more as a mystery than mourned (Daly, 2023). In recent years, where there was a plaque memorialising the bridge collapse it has since been replaced by a twelve-foot-tall metal sculpture of the Mothman (Daly, 2023; **Figure 2**).

Figure 2

Mothman Statue of Central Point Pleasant



Note. Mothman Statue Opposite the Mothman Museum

Throughout the West, lore associating locations and creatures of liminal identity is spread and reinforced. This has led to the expectation of creature encounters at these portals to the otherworld. We expect specific houses to be haunted, dangerous creatures to live in deep forests far from civilisation, and for advanced technology to be responsible for anomalous aerial objects.

> I was in my garage taking pictures of some pews in order to advertise them on eBay…on the pictures I saw all these floating white orbs surrounding the pews and I thought 'oh my god, it's the souls of all the people who have sat on these pews'. But then I realised, no, it's actually just a dusty old pew and the orbs are dust particles reflecting the light.
> (Interview #10)

Creature interpretations of events can be refuted with enough contrary knowledge, but when other explanations are lacking they are often upheld. Furthermore, knowledge of the same lore learnt ex post facto becomes reinforcing. En masse, believers manifest even more evidence through the process of narrative hijacking, applying their agendas to historical events. This evidence can be particularly persuasive; encountering the impossible "disrupts the notion of a neatly linear temporality" (Clanton, 2017, p. 67) by suggesting there is something more to life. In reference to the community-binding feasting rituals of ancient societies, Hamilikas (2008) has highlighted that the ability to "disrupt the temporality of normal life has a powerful mnemonic role" (Madgwick, 2019, 03:23), as such irregular experiences last long in the memory. Creature experiences have a similar effect. Nobody I spoke to forgot encounters or found them any less persuasive. Finally, in regard to why creature beliefs rapidly grow, this explanation therefore posits a technologically deterministic argument. Though creature knowledge has been established for decades, as Western life further intertwines with technology like the internet, potential enthusiasts will become only more bombarded with lore and expectations.

Creatures Ward Away Fear and Uncertainty

The previous subsection detailed how creature beliefs emerge from unfamiliar experiences. The following two functional explanations discuss the social consequences of upholding these beliefs. These social consequences motivate creature beliefs in a different way to an outright encounter, as individuals who find them attractive are drawn to upholding such beliefs. For example, creature beliefs are often employed as a way of warding against fear and uncertainty.

Firstly, the places associated with the otherworld in which creatures haunt are usually dangerous. The content of creature stories can serve as a warning not to venture into dangerous places like the forest. Native Americans tell their children stories of the battle with the child-snatching Bigfoots, warning them about venturing away from camp (Moskowitz-Strain, 2008). Bigfoot occupies the bogeyman role: "you better stay in line if you get too far away from me then Bigfoot will come and take

you" (Interview #6). Other creatures find similar expressions. In the northernmost Canadian territory of Nunavut, the Inuit warn of the Qallupilluit, a "strange looking seal" (Tulugarjuk, 2017, 02:37) with "green skin, long hair, and long claw-like fingernails" (04:08). It is also an "expert snatcher of children" (00:39) which is "especially active when the ice breaks in the spring, and, of course, when children go to the beach by themselves" (00:21). This type of warding story about creatures is very common cross-culturally, and while the belief and fear they evoke may be temporary they highlight that creature traditions are often instructional.

Creatures of the otherworld are socially disconnected and perpetually the other, incorrectly interacting with them has the potential to other the human. Broz (2018) effectively illustrates this. He describes the social rejection that befell a foreign man in the Altai community of Kosh-Agach (south-central Russia) when he interacted with spirits. In this community ghost incursions are frequent and locals ignore them to avoid the impurity they bring. This unwitting taboo interaction marked the man as other to the villagers; he had done something one should not do and lost his social position, gaining the same impure identity as the ghosts he interacted with. We similarly observe this in the West when creature enthusiasts expose their interest, they are met with ridicule and avoided. In 2004, Leonid Drachevskii, Russia's president's envoy to the Siberian Federal District, visited the region and heard about these ghosts. In response he said, "we are all educated people and I just feel awkward to hear of awakened spirits as though we live in the period of Middle Ages" (Mikhailov, 2004, para. 2). By judging "education as mutually exclusive with superstition" (Broz, 2018, para. 23), Drachevskii emphasises that ghosts "do not belong to his time" (Broz, 2018, para. 23), othering these Altaians to the inferior "Middle Ages" (Broz, 2018, para. 22). Thus, creatures are impure, the inhumanity and social othering they emphasise is contagious to those who interact with them. Rather than only reflecting Turner's (1969) "liminal personae" (p. 95) but existing outside of the rite de passage ritual, they in fact function in much of the same state-changing way; upon interacting with humans who enter their liminal threshold, they shepherd them from one state of being to another, in this case from social acceptance to otherness.

Therefore, incorrect interactions with creatures can destroy social position, but correct interactions with them can alternatively solidify social identity. Saethre's (2007) study of UFO beliefs across Walpiri Aboriginal communities in Australia highlights this. Many Walpiri uphold the belief that "aliens search for and procure water from the desert [and] while UFOs were capable of abducting humans, Aboriginal residents emphasised that these victims were exclusively non-Aboriginal" (Saethre, 2007, p. 902). As well as UFOs' "association with the presence of water, so were Warnayarra, giant multi-coloured snakes" (Saethre, 2007, p. 906) that laired near water and "recognised individuals 'belonging' in the area… [while] injuring those people who were identified as strangers" (Saethre, 2007, p. 907). Similarly, "aliens were able to recognise Aboriginal people as belonging in the area" and hence "they never harm [them]" (Saethre, 2007, p. 908). Therefore, the aliens mediate the relationship between Aboriginals and Westerners; the concern with finding water "is one way Aboriginal people demonstrate the link between [themselves] and their environment" (Saethre, 2007, p. 910), as this ability secures their belonging in a wilderness which threatens Westerners. Aliens represent this threat. Westerners cannot be harmed by aliens when they travel with Aboriginals, and though these UFOs might not be real, threatening aliens, this performance upholds the boundary between social affiliate and other. This has similarities with the way the Native American tribes of Georgia and Tennessee relate to Bigfoot:

> During the time the government was moving tribes along the trail of tears, the bigfoots wanted to go with their tribes, and the tribe told them 'no, because they'll kill you if they find you'… [so they] came to the agreement, 'why don't you follow us but stay far enough away that these people cannot see you and kill you.'
> (Interview #6)

Today, when these tribes see forested campfires glinting in the distance, they claim this is the Bigfoot still keeping out of the Whiteman's way, but still visible to them (Interview #6; Interview #4). Interactions with ghosts can also result in social fortune. Among the Bayaka culture of the Central African Republic, if one gets lost alone in the forest, thus entering the unheimlich, they "will eventually come across an Aidyo [which] is a ghost" (Sarno, 2012, 00:15). Looking the ghost in the eyes will result in death but talking to it "with enough courage" (Sarno, 2012, 00:38), civilising it with language, will make you its "owner" (Sarno, 2012, 00:55). The ghost then leaves the forest for the settlement, where it performs a dance and brings its owner social prestige.

Alternatively, ghosts also play an important role in maintaining social position. In "many Native American societies, the lack of proper respect towards animals… results in vengeful animal ghosts. The role of the shaman… is to attempt to placate the angry spirits of dead animals who have been disrespected" (Thompson, 2019, p. 44). Tomlinson's (2016) study of Fijian ghosts provides another example. In Fiji, those who break social morals "are very much afraid of the spirits… [who] appear frequently… especially when they are asleep" (p. 19). Tomlinson (2016) relays the story of a man who discovered a human finger bone while digging the foundations for a house. Rather than reburying the bone he tossed it away. That night "he was unable to sleep [and a] large old-style Fijian with buiniga (a traditional hairstyle) indicating that he wanted his missing finger back" (Tomlinson, 2016, p. 20) appeared at his window. Similarly, Presterudstuen (2014) describes an encounter with the ghost of a girl: "it was good that his friend had not been kind to the girl [and told her to leave] because… [ghosts] emerge as indicators or markers of someone having overstepped racial boundaries as well as violated Fijian cultural norms" (p. 127). Refusing the ghost confirmed that this friend had not violated these customs. Therefore, interactions with ghosts encourage confirmation to social morals "by haunting individuals and communities with past ethical failures" (Thompson, 2019. p 45).

Incorrect interactions with creatures sacrifices one's social position, when confronted with this threat one must demonstrate their invulnerability to them to avoid this. This can be seen in the way the residents of Kosh-Agach ignore spirits, in the way Walpiri relate their social belonging to alien immunity, and in the way the Bayaka or Fijians position spirits as their inferiors by dominating or shooing them. Creatures create an opportunity for one to demonstrate the other's lack of dominance over them. The same scenario is reflected in the West. Through the avoidance and ridicule of such beliefs, individuals demonstrate their allegiance to the rational social majority. Those that interact with creatures or believe in their existence are othered. These claims are supported by male enthusiasts' attempts to ward off social othering by incorporating their interest into the value system of wider society:

> All an expedition is that you're camping, but a lot of guys have what I call 'Bigfoot toys': they'll dress up in their camouflage and their cameras and their really expensive walkie talkies. They get a lot of joy from saying 'okay, you go here and you go here' and planning all of it.
> (Interview #4)

> I'm a little different to your average researcher… I consider myself a gunslinger with a camera…there's nobody trying to do what I'm doing at the level I'm doing it.
> (Interview #5)

> I do a lot of survival and law enforcement.
> (Interview #7)

> Everyone wants to discover something. I want to figure it out on my own… if there's anyone to do it it's going to be me.
> (Interview #5)

> Every sasquatch encounter is not some forest creature playing peek-a-boo behind a tree, there's another side to the phenomenon and there's psychological ramifications.
> (Interview #2)

By describing the masculinity and individualism of such dangerous activities, interviewees attempted to justify them and fit themselves into Western social norms. This position grants more social sanction and believers seem less irrational. Regardless of this social appeasement, believers are usually still othered. However, as observed with other countercultures, societies with different worldviews can be formed through the creation of online spaces. Here, experiences with creatures no longer invite othering but they offer ways of building social status:

> When other people have had an experience it makes you feel good that other people share that experience because it makes you feel 'okay, I'm not totally crazy'.
> (Interview #4)

> There is this weird Bigfoot fame.
> (Interview #4)

> A lot of the big conferences are fun, I call them adult summer camp. Like, you are getting together with friends you see once a year and everybody's drinking and everybody's having fun.
> (Interview #4)

> My wife and I did everything together and then once I got into Bigfoot I got a new group of friends and left her.
> (Interview #5)

These communities not only provide sanctuary; they are deeply alluring. Kierkegaard emphasised the reward of "identity derive[d] from believing something which is deeply offensive to reasoning,… the believer feels alive and singularly inspirited in ways which believing something currently plausible could not achieve" (Kierkegaard, 1843, as cited in Overing & Rapport, 2000, p. 369). Commitment to the absurd necessitates utmost conviction, but this conviction evolves into a communal bond and purpose to preserve one's identity vis-à-vis critics.

A secondary way creatures police social morals is by "represent[ing] the past as an 'other' undesired mode of being" (Clanton, 2017, p.76). The past is not remembered as "an absolute quantity but a relative set of values" (Hewison, 1987, p. 135). Creatures "invoke respect for the past and for societal boundaries" (Clanton, 2017, p. 69) by embodying the worst of these historical values and highlighting that they should not be repeated in the present. This effect manifests by conjuring feelings of guilt concerning past injustices. As Parra argues, alien abduction narratives function as a simulacrum of anxieties regarding science, technology, and especially post-colonial guilt (Parra, 2022, as cited in Santo, 2023, p. 255). This conclusion is echoed by Halperin's (2020) study, who found themes of the slave trade in alien experience narratives; Barney Hill, a particularly famous example, reported that throughout his abduction experience aliens were checking his teeth as if in a slave market. Gelder (1994, p. xi) emphasises that indigenous peoples are often the focus of Australian ghost experiences and stories, reflecting feelings of post-colonial guilt about a violent white settlement. Similarly, Bergland (2000) claims the "spectralization" (p. 5) of Native Americans in North American ghost stories is acknowledgement of the government's continued oppression and attempts to remove them from American history. The Soviet government greatly oppressed the Kalmyk peoples of southern Russia, causing almost 17,000 deaths during the 1920s (Pohl, 2000). Today, vengeful Kalmyks are a common feature of the region's ghost stories; they haunt those who moved into their homes after deportations and thus remind inhabitants of this injustice (Terbish, 2019).

Bubandt (2019) describes the colonial and historical anxieties elucidated by wildmen creatures like Sasquatch. On the Indonesian Island of Halmahera "the hairy and barely human giants that are said to roam the jungle are seventeenth-century Portuguese colonisers" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 223). Thus, "the first white colonisers are also the ultimate figure of animality" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 224). This is because these creatures, known as yawas, reflect the colonial brutality enacted on the indigenous population (Bubandt, 2019). They are "really ignorant" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 229), yet they "see themselves as enemies of [the island's] humans" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 229) and are much fiercer combatants than them, "easily outpacing even the fastest hunter" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 228). This tradition highlights the otherness of Western brutality, however, it has changed in response to Indonesian Westernisation. On Halmahera today there is "electricity and TVs and satellite dishes", and the notion that "there are no yawas left" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 230) because the boundaries between Western and Indonesian are now much lessened. Rather, yawas have shifted from an exterior concern to an interior concern with the human potential for animalistic savagery, "a projection of the repressed anxieties of modern self-consciousness" (Bubandt, 2019, p. 236). Though they might roam the jungles no longer, as an idea these creatures still embody the sins of the past and enforce social morals by being an opposite.

Therefore, it can be beneficial to make "contracts" (Lévi-Strauss, 1955, p. 232) with creatures. These ongoing relationships forged by belief ensure one remains on the right side of social boundaries. Such relationships are often characterised by the appeasement of creatures, a demonstration that one does not want to be afflicted by its misfortune. From Spiro's (1953) study of evil ghost appeasement on the small pacific atoll of Ifaluk, to the massive Hungry Ghost Festivals of East Asia, anthropologists have documented these appeasement relationships across a spectrum of scales (Engelke, 2018; Lo, 2022). Known as Zhongyuanjie in China, millions participate in this Hungry Ghost festival, which begins on the 15th night of the 7th lunar month. Zhongyuanjie is thought to be adapted from the Buddhist story of 'Mulian who saves his mother from Hell' which is found in the Yulanpen Sutra of Mahayana scripture. Mulian's mother had been reincarnated in one of the lowest levels of Hell populated by preta, hungry ghosts who suffer through extreme starvation (Teiser, 1988). In order to save his mother, the Buddha instructs Mulian to make offerings of food to the Sangha on the 15th day of the 7th lunar month, after which Mulian descends to Hell. Thus, Zhongyuanjie is a time when the boundaries between realms are lessened and spirits return to the mundane world. It is a dangerous time and practitioners avoid liminal spaces or travelling at night. Reflecting Mulian's filial piety, many Chinese households make large offerings of food to appease the ghosts of their ancestors. This appeasement prevents ghosts from bringing misfortune to the living through impurity and disease (Teiser, 1988).

However, rather than these ghosts haunting humans, Puett (2014) is correct that they "have been domesticated into relationships defined to benefit the living" (p. 226). We do not appease ghosts, we appease ourselves; our anxieties about misfortunes are warded and the acknowledgement of the deceased demonstrates filial piety, conformation to group social morals, and invokes respect for the past. If this gift appeasement is categorised as an exchange, it is negative reciprocity in the Sahlinian sense, as the donor hopes to gain a lot from their gift. However, abnormally this exchange is predicated on the immaterial and by giving and destroying their offering it is essentially an exchange with oneself. Highlighting that through the concept of creatures needing appeasement one gains the Hau, the spiritual influence to reciprocate exchanges, and the satisfaction of it, which in this case brings the feeling of warded misfortune, solely through one's own deception. By acknowledging creatures and the fear they represent as something that can be appeased, this personal exchange provides the continual opportunity to ward away feelings of anxiety. For example, many of China's younger population are atheist, but they still return home to Zhongyuanjie and make offerings to the dead (Kipnis, 2021). In a country where the city-working younger generations have become more unsure about how to demonstrate traditional yet important values like filial piety, this festival supersedes its religious emergence and remains an important way of demonstrating social commitment and warding away the misfortune of othering (Kipnis, 2021).

Thompson (2022) highlights that the same appeasement of creatures happens for Western believers. He claims that we tell ghost stories because "there's a possibility that the ghost can be appeased, that you can acknowledge the wrongs, and give them a proper burial… [it is] a really powerful ethical message to consider: we can't change the past, but can certainly try to do the right thing now" (Thompson, as cited in Mendelsohn, 2022, para, 15.). Ghosts display "the shadow of ethics"

(Thompson, 2019, p. 44) and by acknowledging them we appease the broken ethics of a jilted bride or brutal murder, appeasing our fears that such things are acceptable. This "is not superstition, but rather a sober reflection of the importance of acting ethically now, to avoid being on the wrong side of history later" (Thompson, 2019, p. 53). The stories of believers reflected this. In places like Carlisle Castle's dungeons, ghostly "Spanish prisoners of war" (Interview #8) were seen licking stone walls for condensation, thus the horrors of their treatment were acknowledged. Ghost beliefs can provide more than acknowledgement, creating ways individuals can directly appease past sins, as this Paracon story illustrates:

> She would cry and bang her head on a tree, the next sister would get this red rash from her ankle up to the side of her face, and the mother would collapse on the floor and feel like she was being crushed… there had been a house there in 1810, the owner lived there with two of his daughters. I found a news article about the father's death, he had he shot himself over being depressed about losing his two daughters… one daughter had been chopping wood and [accidently] struck a support and the roof collapsed on her and crushed her… the other daughter had been walking through the kitchen and her dress caught on fire and burned her up the left side of the body… he shot himself in the head under the same tree… [I went] to see where they're buried… and a tree had crushed the three graves… We raised the tree and moved it off the graves, we rebuilt the gravestones, we brought the family and the ancestors out to the cemetery and we had a funeral for the three of them and everything in the house stopped. They just wanted to be remembered.
> (Interview #1)

> These beliefs take the fear and uncertainty out of the other, they show it as something controllable, something that we can know about.
> I was minding somebody who was in a coma, she woke up, her eyes went to the door, she followed something right to the foot of her bed, and then she died. Somebody came for her to take her to the other side. It was eerie. I thought it was lovely really.
> (Interview #9)

> [Spirits] let you know that 'I'm still here' and 'I'll look after you', me personally I've got a lot of comfort in that. During the Falklands War I didn't worry too much because I knew [my husband's] grandad would look after [him].
> (Interview #8)

> When you smash a bug in your house, now it's going to be there forever.
> (Interview #1)

Spirit beliefs imply that there essentially is no death and therefore no need to worry. This was most visible when I attended a popular mediumship event in Herefordshire. The medium went around the room gleaning information about attendee's dead relatives. For one couple whose baby had died she assured them that "she knows you loved her and she knows you wanted her… she loves daddy… everyone out there is looking after her". About parents she said, "in her eyes you didn't do no wrong" and "she is grateful for the time she had, she's not sad". Such performances provide attendees a way of mending trauma, "tak[ing] the absence created by loss and metabolis[ing] it into… a space where relationships can continue developing" (Kontou, 2023, para. 26), "making life more bearable" (Kontou, 2023, para. 26). When the medium could not gather enough information about deceased relatives, the spirits offered different self-assuring advice:

> "Someone in the spirit world says she likes your tattoos".

> "You didn't want to see that he wasn't his true self… [a] narcissist… it's his loss, they say".

> For me, they had some particularly relevant, but foreboding, advice:
> Medium: "Why [are the spirits] looking at computers a lot?"

> Author: "Because I'm writing my dissertation".

> Medium: "They want to keep it going because they're watching you alright. They're saying… keep it so they want to read it".

> Author: "That's definitely relevant".

> Medium: "Well I know that's relevant that's what they've told me! What they're saying is make sure you keep their imagination and hold them to it, so they want to read it. Because, believe you me, they've read loads of it, and, its pretty 'whatever'.

When asked why ghosts linger in the mundane realm, Interviewee #9 told me, "[maybe] they died in such a traumatic way that they have not had chance to say goodbye to people". In actuality, believers make them linger because they want something from them. Ghosts ward away fears concerning death and past morals. Aliens do the same for anxieties concerning technology, space, and the future. Making aliens tangible, understandable, and contactable, creates avenues to negate these anxieties. Many large pseudo-religious Western groups like Scientology, the One World Family, Nation of Islam, and Falun Gong, describe aliens as saviours and promote ways of contacting them through chanting (Santo, 2023, p. 261) or tantric sex (Perdue, 2006, 15:13). These aliens replace religious figures, for example, they are the "universal mind of cosmic consciousness earth people call god" (Perdue, 2006, 02:00), and the "Christian prophets" (Perdue, 2006, 02:37) were "tuned in" (Perdue, 2006, 02:54) and heard "directly from the God Mind" (Perdue, 2006, 03:05). These extraterrestrial connections "empower" (Perdue, 2006, 26:10) believers by giving them comfort.

Alternatively, Interviewee #6 highlighted that their Bigfoot beliefs brought self-assurance about being in the wilderness:

> "Sometimes he's just a friendly giant".

> "He's a friend of the tribe and they have a good relationship… he's just a different kind of brother". "In some tribes if you see a Bigfoot… it's considered a complete blessing, 'this was a sign for me of something great'".

> "[Among the Kwakiutl] the wild women of the woods dance brings good fortune for the year".
> (Interview #6)

However, rather than warding fears about the past or future, I found Bigfoot beliefs mostly warded enthusiasts' present uncertainty about society.

In conclusion, the belief in creatures functions as a way of appeasing one's fears. This is achieved by acknowledging creatures and therefore emphasising the social morals they oppose, or by actively interacting with them to ensure such boundaries remain unbroken in the present. This conclusion reflects previous anthropological studies, which have also shown the seemingly irrational to be methods of warding uncertainty. Evans-Pritchard's (1937) seminal work on Azande witchcraft highlighted its function as complex social performances for warding uncertainty about illness and communal disputes, rather than justification for European evolutionists' models. In countries like Romania, witchcraft persists as a way to repel uncertainty (Coțofană, 2017). Creature beliefs are another seemingly irrational practice achieving this function, as fear and uncertainty grow in Western societies we should expect them to proportionally.

Creatures As Responses To Social Changes

In the previous subsection, I described how creature beliefs ward off anxieties. Though these anxieties may relate to the past or the future, they are all ultimately interpretations of the present state of one's society and its morals. This explanation posits that the belief in creatures is underpinned by anxieties regarding maintaining social values in response to widespread changes in social identity. Anthropologists have recorded multiple examples of this in regard to fay creatures. In Newfoundland, Rieti (1990) has suggested that the function of fairy tradition is

to compare the past with the present, associating the fairies with days gone by and former generations. Like other creatures, the fairies are the ultimate strangers, their otherness reflecting "the human relationship with nature… in a harsh environment, under precarious economic and material conditions, one's niche is ever under siege; fairy narratives reflect the struggles and hard-won survival of culture… and the tenuous imposition of order on the wilderness" (Rieti, 1990, p. 6). Therefore, the nostalgia fairies evoke has translated into a contrasting worldview between the older generations who grew up rurally, and their immediate city-dwelling families. For most, the traditional anxiety that fairies represent is no longer a problem, and therefore the nostalgic belief in them that older generations maintain signifies social change and their resistance to it. Hafstein (2000) provides a similar example of Icelandic elves. These elves "represent nature in the heart of culture" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 89) and live in correspondingly liminal locations like rocks, hills, and ponds found amongst human infrastructure. The presence of the "other" at these places makes them "taboo, they must not be fished in, messed with, moved or mowed; they must not… be brought into culture" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 89). However, these places regularly come into contact with modernisation projects as Iceland urbanises, and therefore elves retaliate with misfortune "directed against development" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 92). Such misfortune has supposedly included hospitalising builders and making bulldozers explode. Development projects like road construction "blur the traditional metanarratives of community" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 94) by bringing the rural outside into the civilised inside, destroying boundaries with otherworlds and evicting elves from their homes. Seeing these evicted, migrating elves has been reported by observers in areas due to be developed. This, and the fact that "elves still have all the material culture of Iceland's pre-industrial peasant society" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 94), has characterised them as "protectors and enforcers [of] pastoral values and traditional rural culture" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 101), "waging battle against the destruction of traditional order" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 96).

Modernisation in Iceland has been rapid, decreasing the rural population from 88.1% to 9.3% in less than a hundred years (Jonsson & Magnusson, 1997, p. 90). These popular folk narratives are interpretations of social identity changes and they raise concerns about them. As Hastrup (1990) states, the "image of the Icelanders, as produced and reproduced in the strategies of identity creation is the image of the Icelander as a farmer" (p. 133). Thus, modernisation, urbanisation, and industrialisation have occurred so rapidly in Iceland that national identity still draws from pastoral values. Oppositely, "fishermen, labourers, and white-collar workers are outsiders in the reigning representations of nationality" (Hastrup, 1990, p. 132). This inversion has transformed these Icelanders participating in modernisation into the "other". They "menace the incarnations of Icelandic identity" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 98) while elves, rural and traditional in urbanised society, embody it. Therefore, the "vitality of elf-tradition in contemporary Iceland may be taken as a sign of orientation toward the past" (Hafstein, 2000, p. 96), an attempt to reunite oneself with their desired identity in a society that has othered them.

Other creatures similarly embody national identity. The national identity of the Solomon Islands has been fractured by long periods of colonial government and continuing ethnic violence. Therefore, creatures like Kakamora have come to "embody places and their pasts in new, hopeful projects of imagination that look for signs of indigenous strength" (Tomlinson, 2016, p. 17). Found on the island of Makira, these Kakamora are widely believed in spirits who are animated parts of the land, living in the ground and embodying "the primordial wholeness and essential power of Makira" (Scott, 2013, p. 59). It is thought an army of Kakamora will one day re-emerge from the ground and reestablish traditional ways. In the meantime, they lurk out of sight and punish those who break traditional social values. Indigenous identity in the Solomon Islands may have become illusive, yet, like Icelandic elves, Kakamora uphold what it means to be Makiran and embody this struggle. They display an ideal, believing in them encodes this ideal into reality and makes it powerful. Thompson (2004) has displayed the power of creatures embodying ideals even among those who do not believe in their existence. He highlights how the popularity of creatures like leprechauns in Ireland is not because they are a touristic image or stereotype, rather they are an attempt to empower native identity. For a long time, these creatures were characterised as the pagan "other" and belief in them was damned by the Christian Church (Thompson, 2004). Christianity is still powerful in Ireland, but it has become "increasingly unfashionable to use the Catholic Church as a symbol of the Republic" (Thompson, 2004, p. 202) among younger generations "interested in promoting secularism, diversity, and cultural pluralism" (Thompson, 2004, p. 202). In contrast, the use of leprechauns as symbols is "staggering" (Thompson, 2004, p. 203). People might not believe in their existence but they believe in them as symbols "of the good old days" (Thompson, 2004, p. 205) ; they show identification with the desire to challenge social values that have been instilled for years in favour of "an idealised past" (Thompson, 2004, p. 205). The colonial English enforced Christianity and attempted to wipe out these creatures. Today they are upheld as "something that the English do not have" (Thompson, 2004, p. 206) and thus embody Irish identity.

Upholding beliefs in creatures like Bigfoot is similarly an attempt to achieve a desired social identity not satisfied by modernity. Believers described this identity as traditional and connected to nature, one opposing destructive urban modernity. Native American accounts precisely reflected this opposition, highlighting Bigfoot's inability to coexist with the modern world:

> One of the things I have been told by multiple different tribes is that once science proves that Bigfoot is real, that's going to be the end of this current world, because he is the protector of the forest.
> (Interview #6)

> Once the Blackfeet started to shy away from the old ways and become more modernised the limoitapi [(Bigfoot)] retreated to the woods. They're still there but they look at them as guardians of the forest who look out for people.
> (Interview #4)

> Many tribes say we have stories [about Bigfoot] but he left a long time ago when Europeans got here, he headed for the hills and never came back because he was afraid of Europeans with guns.
> (Interview #6)

In Indonesia, Forth (2011) has similarly written about the ebu gogo wildmen of Flores Island, whose "locals [also] describe them as either extinct or much rarer than in previous times" (p. 201). With much similarity to the Native American tradition, the Ua people of Flores "decided to exterminate the ebu gogo… by confining them inside their cave and igniting a great fire inside the entrance" (Forth, 2011, p. 208). The Wildman represents the primitive human past which cannot coexist with human modernity, characterised by its most defining tool: fire. Thus, absent or murdered wildmen are martyred; such stories highlight modernity's destruction of traditional ways, upholding these creatures offers a way to reconnect to them. Therefore, the reappearance of Bigfoot has marked the return of tradition:

> In north [California], the Shasta tribe I believe, they're trying to revive their culture… and they're starting to drum and to dance when one of the elders goes over to a bush and has a conversation. He [returns and] goes "well, don't look straight at him but over there is Bigfoot. I said, "what are you doing here?" and he said "I haven't heard this music in a very long time and I just want to stand here and listen to it because I remember this. I remember when you used to dance. I remember when you used to do this drumming"". Bigfoot remembered this ritual and he wanted to hear it again.
> (Interview #6)

Believing in Bigfoot, the "guardian" of traditional ways, is an attempt to uphold them and resist modernity. Many Western believers emphasised similar anti-modernity values, such as establishing reconnection with nature and fears about global warming:

> Bigfoot changed my life in a lot of ways… I have taken survival classes by myself… learned how to survive in the wilderness… all of these things have come from this quest to know more.
> (Interview #2)

> They found the Humboldt Marten again, which they thought was extinct, [and that is] the benefits of this in the bigger picture.
> (Interview #7)

> Dramatic change in the way nature deals with me… I've had two or three mosquito bites. Bees leave me alone… those fears are gone".
> (Interview #3)

> I became very dedicated to things like recycling and caring for the planet… [when] before I didn't care… This space on Earth, this is what we have… we've got to take care of our home.
> (Interview #3)

Simon's (2017) "Sasquatch Pastoral" highlights how individuals are drawn to Bigfoot belief in this way. He claims that Bigfoot represents "humankind in pristine, uncorrupted, natural perfection. He represents the virginal innocence of our species' origins… [and] hark[s] back to the prelapsarian simplicity of life before civilisation corrupted us" (Simon, 2017, p. 118). The allure of Bigfoot is its pastoral idealisation of the past and disillusionment with modern social changes. Thus, "folklore gives form to energies set into motion by some shared or social anxiety" (Abrahams, 1971, p. 19), and upholding creature beliefs becomes a way of resisting modernity's influences.

> Initially I tried to shut this [experience] out of my head because I still led a very selfish lifestyle… I was young, cocky, I wanted to go to war… my whole attitude to violence changed and I didn't want anything to do with it.
> (Interview #2)

> I don't want to be judgemental of other people but they don't realise what they're doing is very selfish… There's a whole movement now that says "you need me-time" and that you have to love yourself first… there's a lot of people who are depressed and unhappy.
> (Interview #3)

> A lot of people who become so enraptured by science and technology… the more science discovers the more people start thinking that we are the creators of our own destiny.
> (Interview #3)

> I didn't grow up in a haunted house or with UFOs… I was just a punk rock kid who didn't like being told what I could or couldn't think about, and people told me not to waste my time thinking about ghosts and UFOs… so because I was a punk rock kid that is what I was going to think about.
> (Interview #1)

Ong (1988) reflects this, highlighting how creature beliefs become forms of resistance when the traditional is replaced by modernity. In Malaysia, rural female factory workers have experienced disruptive mid-shift ghost possessions since the 1970s (Ong, 1988). They claim these ghosts live in the cisterns of factory toilets, and thus they refuse to flush them and throw used sanitary products around the room, frightening ghosts. These rural women come to factories because their own communities hold less opportunity, but when they arrive they are greatly exploited and their experience of modernity is oppressive. They blame this for their possession; citing "the stresses of urban living" (Ong, 1988, p. 32) and its "mounting pressure" (Ong, 1988, p. 32). Therefore, Ong (1988) claims that ghost possession becomes a way of resisting oppressive modernity; female workers draw power from their rural identity and resist employer's oppressions by emphasising their otherness. A "local medicine man can do more good than tranquilisers" (Chew, 1978, p.51), so they are sent back home. These events are not isolated. In India and Sri Lanka, Fuller (1992) similarly claimed "women's possession episodes are culturally tolerated opportunities to complain about female inferiority and subordination" (p. 233).

Like these women, Westerners who become disillusioned with their experience of modernity and its values, uphold creature beliefs to maintain their otherness to it. This maintenance of otherness becomes resistance; creatures offer interpretations of the past, present, and future, which refute the values of modern society and relate to a different identity. Many features of the modern Western lifestyle, such as war or the destruction of nature, magnify the fears that creatures ward. Therefore, as this magnification continues, we should expect creature beliefs to increase accordingly.

CONCLUSION

I offer three synchronistic explanations for why Westerners believe in creatures. They are bombarded with lore associating creatures with correspondingly liminal locations, making them expected there. Secondly, appeasing creatures wards away the fears and negative social values that they represent. For some believers, these negative social values come to represent modernity; upholding creature beliefs offers opportunity for maintaining personal resistance against them.

Overall, I argue that these beliefs are a reaction to a loss of security. This loss can be immediate, as upon encountering the unheimlich, or the loss of social identity which results from upholding creature beliefs. This loss of social identity is not always a reaction, but may pre-exist and drive creature beliefs; they offer an outlet for feelings of disillusionment with wider society. Essentially then, behind these beliefs are future threats and attempts to counteract them. The imagining and anthropomorphising of aliens answers uncertain, fearful questions like, "Are we alone?"and "Can we trust our governments?" providing methods of doing something about these fears. The belief in Bigfoot is organised around the present; determining whether it exists today becomes an attempt to connect to nature and tradition which may be destroyed by modern society. Finally, ghosts represent past values but they do this to "ask questions about what futures might result from avoiding past misdeeds" (Weinstock, 2013), or to threaten us with the opposite. Furthermore, Laqueur (2015) highlights that the lingering soul enables us to keep "part" (p. 64) of our loved ones with us, warding off the fear of a future without them.

It is with these points in mind, I posit that creatures are not just "liminal personae" in the Turnerian sense, but they exactly match his definition and rite de passage ritual that they play a role in. Some people want to be other to society because they find security in it, like fear warding or creating desired social connections. Thus, these creatures are not just liminal figures but involved in a rite de passage; their othering interactions perpetuate the desired change in state and purposefully seeking them enacts this ritual. Alternatively, not all believers desire the same extent of othering, but these beliefs still offer them a form of resistance to modernity through escapism.

Anthropologists have studied other irrational obsessions and drawn similar conclusions. In Rice's (2002) study of Koi-obsessed fish breeders, their "addiction" (20:50) was described as a response to the challenges of modern life: "They're just serene if you watch them, it comes across as therapy if you have had a bad day… it's idyllic, it's wonderful, gives you a great sense of wellbeing" (21:01). One can enter a fantastical world through obsession. However, I found that this escapism could only go so far. Believers felt disillusionment with society but were still invested in the same value systems, ergo their beliefs became avenues to manifest qualities like the masculinity or individualism that had become denied to them by wider society. Their beliefs are unscientific, yet believers commonly expressed continuing faith in science and tried to fit their beliefs into it:

> I remember parts about science and how to do science.
> (Interview #5)

> I try to be a scientist and think this through.
> (Interview #6)

> I'm working on a UV hair study where we're using UV light and different camera filters to look at hair under a digital microscope.
> (Interview #7)

> The technology we're using, cryptids and paranormal [studies] could really benefit.
> (Interview #7)

> The Bigfoot Field Researchers Organisation are notoriously science based.
> (Interview #3)

Therefore, I draw the conclusion that these beliefs are attempts to resist a society one feels threatened by while simultaneously providing ways of "fitting in" to the values believers have been denied.

DISCUSSION

This research is also informative about wider society and why it might ridicule beliefs like these. To elaborate on this, I borrow from the theories of Gender Studies. In Ortner's "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture"(1974), she claims that the subjugation of women by men is due to cultural associations between the former with nature and the latter with superior culture. Ortner (1974) highlights how women are associated with nature in three ways:

The female body and its functions are more involved with "species life" (p. 12) than men, who do not directly create life.

The female body and its functions put her in social roles that are considered more natural and at a lower order of culture, in opposition to the higher orders of the cultural process given to men.

Traditional female social roles, imposed because of her body and its functions, give her a different psychic structure that is seen as being more "like nature" (p. 22).

These claims reference De Beauvoir's (1961) conclusion that a woman's body can make her life difficult because of its adaptations to the needs of the egg and child. Therefore, she is more enslaved to her nature than a man, "her animality is more manifest" (De Beauvoir, 1961, p. 13). Furthermore, while the man is distant from the domestic unit the woman is responsible for it; her role is to transfer children from wild to cultured, and therefore she occupies a "middle status on the hierarchy [between] culture and nature" (Ortner, 1974, p. 25) as not quite fully culturalised herself. Connell's (1987) theory of Hegemonic Masculinity describes how this sociocultural interpretation of behaviour is organised into a hierarchy. At the top of this cultural hierarchy is the behaviour of "a 'real' man or boy and many males draw inspiration from [this] cultural library of resources" (Fitzclarence & Kenway, 1997, p. 120) to know how to behave. Thus, "hegemonic masculinities are located in a structure of gender/sexual power relations, and within these, boys define their identities against the Other. Gay masculinities feature in the Other category, as does any attachment to the feminine" (Jackson, 2002, p. 39) which is associated with nature. By modelling their behaviour against the feminine other, men demonstrate their allegiance to masculinity and culture. Having and labelling the other, then highlighting one's difference to it, cements one's own identity.

Nature, middle-status, and other, make clear comparisons to creature beliefs' association with the same themes. Wider society sees its ghost, alien, and Bigfoot believers as a liminal other, who has rejected culture to hunt creatures in nature. Choosing to uphold creature beliefs is unnerving in the same way a Western man may be reluctant to wear a dress or admit his queer sexuality, because one has to openly defy societies hegemonies of self-worth. Therefore, the ridicule and social rejection of believers can be explained as a form of hegemonic sociability; by finding them irrational or foolish one reinforces their place within the boundaries of society to themselves and others. Rather than simply ridicule, Kristeva's (1982) theory of abjection captures the personal subtleties of this rejection. She claims encountering something that "disturbs identity, system, and order… the in-between, the ambiguous" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 4), such as a corpse's position between once alive and now deceased, subconsciously forces us to choose our identity. One might react disgusted by the corpse, rejecting it. Thus, "the abject refers to the human reaction (horror) to a threatened breakdown in meaning caused by the loss in distinction between… self and other" (Felluga, 2014, para. 1). Abjection is a reaction to a threat, and importantly highlights that our identity-cementing rejections are a constant cognitive process of how we think about the other. Non-believers categorise beliefs like these into a library of contrasts; resources that oppositely define society's adherence. Most people might not have met creature-believers but they have encountered the concept, the othering way it is thought about, thus cementing their identity.

Finally, this research has further implications regarding the study of conspiracy theories, another group of irrational beliefs not "seen as worthy of ethnographic inquiry in anthropology as of yet" (Rakopoulos, 2022, p. 45). In 1945, Karl Popper coined the term conspiracy theory and argued they came from the death of god; the decline in the charisma of religious explanations for the world and the uptake of new sources of truth. The World Health Organisation has called our current age an "infodemic" (Kramer, 2021), as we live with so many sources of truth that the West has entered a "post-truth era" (Sidky, 2019, p. 1). In consequence, Western conspiracy theories like Qanon and Pizzagate have recently grown to have considerable power, heavily influencing events like the 2021 United States Capitol attack. Such irrational conspiracy theories are present "in the UK [too], people who allegedly believe that 5G cellular networks are the cause of COVID-19 set fire to multiple cell towers" (Slotkin, 2020, para. 1). Like creature beliefs, most conspiracy theories express "concern about a loss of autonomy and challenges to traditional notions of identity" (Butter & Knight, 2018, p. 41), the environmental conspiracies of southeast Italy (Parmigiani, 2021) and Turkey's homophobic conspiracies (Saglam, 2020) providing similar, right-wing examples of this. These conspiracies are attempts to resist the changing world and provide a community mission to do so.

This communal, social aspect has often been misunderstood by academic research underlying methodologies for tackling conspiracies. In 2018, the University of Hradec Králové produced research detailing experiments effective at coaxing Flat Earth Theorists away from their beliefs (Břízová et al., 2018). One experiment utilised the eventual inability of boats to see land due to the curvature of the earth. In 2020, National Geographic replicated these experiments using a long-range camera and a panel that floated across a lake. The Flat Earthers remained "absolutely" (National Geographic, 2020, 08:13) unconvinced, exclaiming "it's still flat" (National Geographic, 2020, 08:19). People with irrational beliefs like these are often described as having passively "fallen down the rabbit hole", implying that scientific logic can pull them out. Yet, my research shows that they actively "jump" down this hole because it provides a desired function. Doing this often necessitates social rejection from wider society and the investment in new online social networks where the irrational is rewarded. Therefore, these beliefs are not opinions that can be challenged with logic, they are ways of belonging, intertwined with social identity. Believer's rejection of persuasion is a performative way conspirators abjectify their other. Showing conspirators their errors only promotes this. As I have done for creature beliefs, anthropologists should analyse conspiracies to determine the social pressures and fears driving them. Only this knowledge and its implementation in social policies will stop conspiracies spreading.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Appendix

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CAMBRIDGE JOURNAL OF HUMAN BEHAVIOUR

ARCHAEOLOGY

Mapping the Steppe: Identification and condition assessment of archaeological sites in arid zones in Syria

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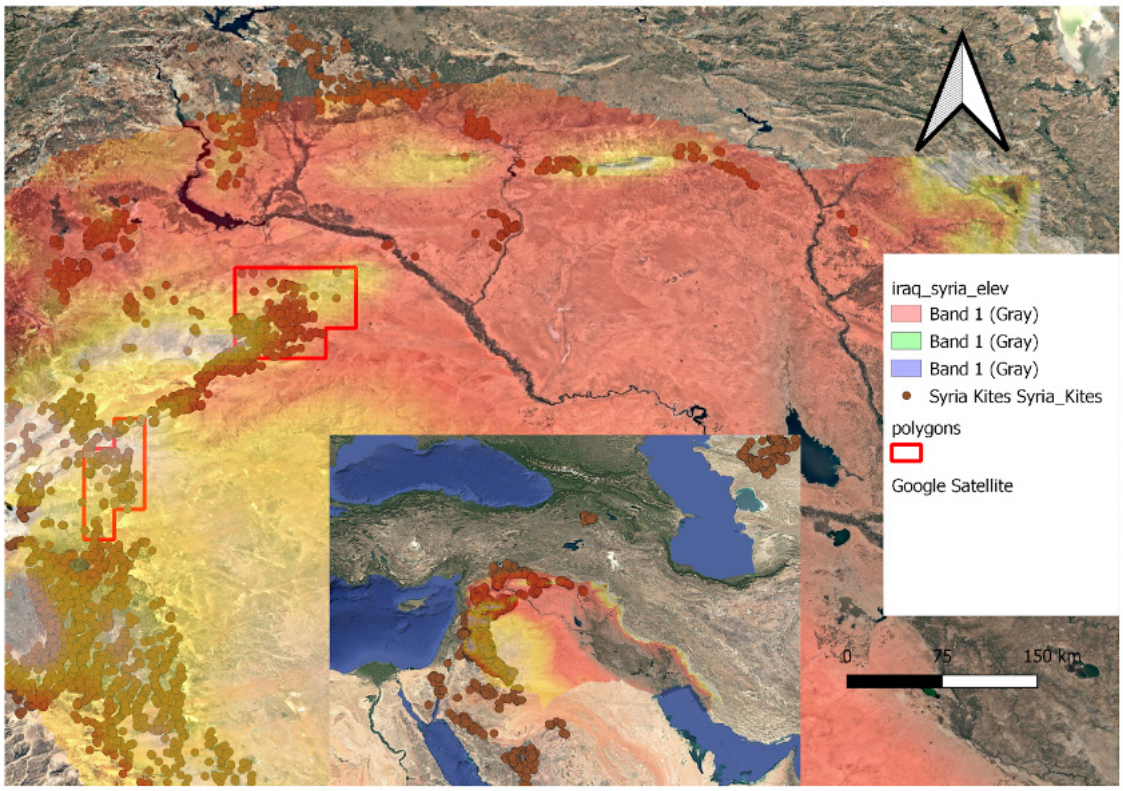
The modern arid landscape of Syria hosts an array of stone-built features called desert kites, which may have been used for hunting from the Neolithic onwards. These desert kites are typically composed of antennae, an enclosure, and cells (Crassard et al., 2022); all indicative of being used as a game drive system; however, this composition is not uniform (Barge et al., 2015). This report collates the analysis of kites and other stone-built features located to the northeast and southwest of Palmyra in the arid eastern margins of Syria. It looks at differences in their complexity, distribution, and geomorphology in order to better understand the use of kites in the ancient Levantine landscape, which was likely more hospitable during the Neolithic (Morandi Bonacossi, 2014).

Figure 1
Map of the dataset situated in the Levant behind a raster of a heat map showing elevation in the region (lighter indicating higher elevation)



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†Author was not an undergraduate student at the time of research.

INTRODUCTION

Kites are an important feature of the Levantine Neolithic as they are a key archaeological record of communal existence, subsistence, and engineering. The two study areas in the arid eastern margins of Syria were selected primarily for their excellent preservation conditions and, secondarily, due to time constraints. Given the six-week time constraint, this 2023 report focuses on less well studied areas than the plateau immediately east of the centre of the Palmyra range, where the density of kites is significant and relatively well researched (**Figure 1**; Hesse & Afinset, 2013; Morandi Bonacossi & Iamoni, 2012; Schou, 2014). Focusing on the edges of the densest distribution of kites, east of the Palmyrides, highlights the factors influencing the kites' construction by assessing why there is a change in the geographical distribution of kites at these points. Future research will assess differences between kite formations in the basalt landscape of Southern Syria and the central Syrian desert through morphological variables such as cells, entrances, funnels, and enclosures using the Barge (2025) index that details variation on the key elements of a kite.

The key elements of a kite are:

Antennae — stone walls leading into the enclosure
Enclosure — a stone-built end to the antennae, comprising cells
Cells — circular stone-faced pits used to trap the animals
Funnels — optional features channeling the antennae into the enclosure

METHODOLOGY

The remote sensing survey began by collecting points associated with kites from the Globalkites Interactive Map (Globalkites, 2023), a map created from a survey project aimed at mapping desert kites across the world using high resolution satellite imagery. The visual representation of kite density allowed for the selection of 17 EAMENA (Endangered Archaeology of the Near East and North Africa) grid squares for remote sensing survey (11 were located northeast of Palmyra and 6 east of Damascus). Using the rapid visual surveying technique with historic and modern imagery, the grid squares were observed visually and systematically to ensure all kites and other notable features were recorded on Google Earth Pro (2023). Polygons were then drawn around these features and this data was uploaded into QGIS (2022). QGIS (2022) and Google Earth Pro (2023) were selected due to their compatibility with the wider EAMENA project, being free and accessible for colleagues across the globe. The kites were then initially analysed and the data recorded in the EAMENA bulk upload sheet, including archaeological categorizations, such as type of feature, chronology, dimensions, location, morphology, and condition assessment. Finally, the data was extensively compared to geomorphological and hydrological data to determine factors affecting the creation and use of these features.

RESULTS

Location Data

Hydrological Data

The research indicates that wadis (seasonal streams) are intrinsic to the decision to construct desert kites. As shown in **Figures 2 and 3**, kites were predominantly constructed near wadis, suggesting wadis were an important factor considered in the location of kite building and therefore play a pivotal role in understanding the nature of their use. These data provide indirect evidence of increased water availability in the region during the Neolithic, corroborating the functional significance of wadis. Consequently, it is likely that seasonal grazing patterns would have occurred, meaning that game returned to the trap locations in the rainy season. Without a clear understanding of when wadis were active as waterways an accurate estimation of the distance between kites and active wadis cannot be established. To account for this historical variability in hydraulic infrastructure, this study focuses on the deepest wadis. These are the deepest due to continued erosion from water flowing through them and therefore are likely to have been active during the phases of kite use. The exact periods during which wadis contain water, taking into account a differing climatic environment and rainy season in the Neolithic, will be addressed in the climactic data section.

The images in **Figures 2 and 3** are intended to provide a representation of the structuring of chains of kites along hydrological paths. While kite chains can be seen near lacustrine water sources, such as lakes (Morandi Bonacossi, 2014), this association is attributed to kites being built near wadis (which drain into these water sources) rather than any functional association between building kites near lacustrine water sources themselves. Animals typically prefer flowing water over stagnant sources due to the higher risk of parasitic infection (Akkermans, 2003), and wadis provide these optimal watering facilities with a low mean velocity and accessible banks. The higher water balance in the arid margins of Syria during the Neolithic is evidenced by the precipitation data of the Soreq Cave (Hewett et al., 2022; **Figure 3**), as well as the higher Lisan Lake Level (Kempe & Al-Malabeh, 2013). Therefore, even the smaller wadis likely provided ample hydration and fertile grazing land around them.

Figure 2
Hydrological Map of NE Palmyra showing distances from kites (points) to wadis (blue)

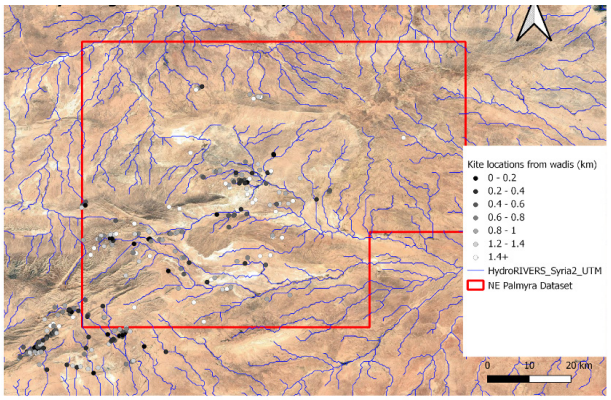
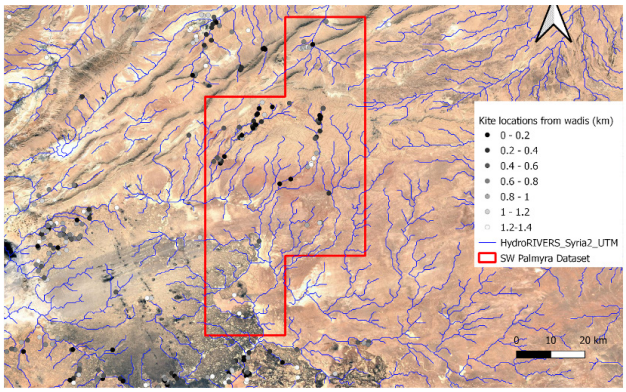


Figure 3
Hydrological Map of SW Palmyra showing distances from kites to wadis



Elevation

Figure 1 shows that the majority of kites exist along ascents into higher elevations. This can be explained by the geological processes of wadi formation and the assumption that kites were being used during the rainy season, likely winter, when the wadis flowed and gazelle migrated to these pastures (Chambrade & Betts, 2021). Wadis form along the alluvial fans underlaid with impermeable coarse alluvial deposits, directing rainwater into streams (Henao Casas et al., 2019). The formation of wadis concentrates water at higher elevations, attracting more animals and hunters. Additionally, kites at higher elevations utilise geomorphological "blinds", hiding traps from the prey (Crassard et al., 2022). The slopes of the Palmyrides appear to have been used to disguise pit traps, increasing capture rates as prey jumped over walls.

Climatic Data

The climate was significantly different during the Syrian Neolithic.

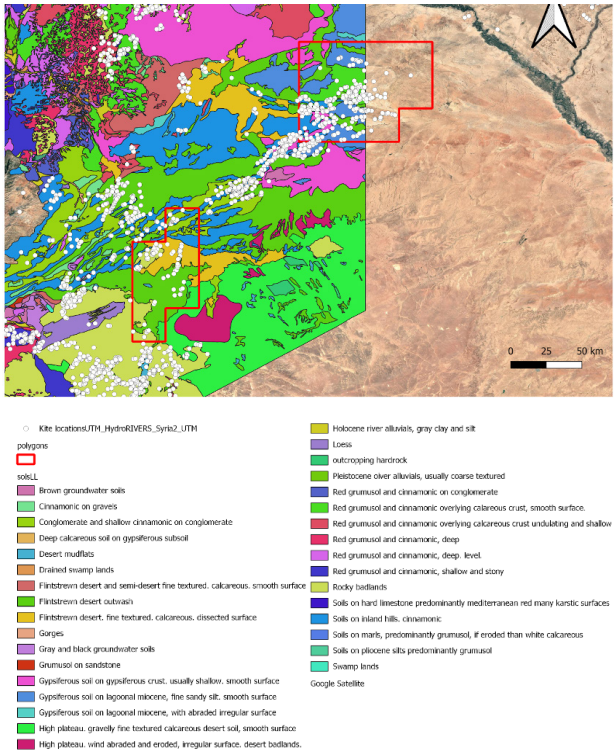
Instead of being the arid margin visible today, the landscape was likely a savannah, a hospitable environment for much of the year (Akkermans, 2003). This is supported by records from the lake of Tayma evidencing the humid period, where there would have been higher rainfall from the African Summer Monsoon during the 4th millennium BCE (Fradley et al., 2022). As a result, it is likely that desert kites were created along the border between moderate pastoralism and marginal agriculture (Fradley et al., 2022). Based on this, the climatic motivation behind building kites was to maintain hydrological balance, as pastoral animals migrated to areas where water was more accessible, enabling agriculture. Given this, animals roaming the savannah would likely remain where they found water, supporting the hypothesis of migration from southern Syria to the Palmyrides. This idea is further supported by data outside of the sample, also showing the presence of kites, and therefore, gazelle at the border of pastoral environments (**Figure 4**).

Soil Data

Figure 4 shows that kites east of Palmyra in study area 1 are most commonly located on inland hills and flint-strewn desert soils. These surfaces are ideal for kite construction as the inland hills provide "blinds" for trapping gazelle and wadis cause gazelle migration. Seasonal migration along wadi paths is supported by their providing greener pastures (Khdery et al., 2019), consistent with modern gazelle migration patterns (Leimgruber et al., 2001). The flint-strewn landscape has abundant sharp and durable stone for construction. In contrast, the gravelly soil south of Palmyra in study area 2 contains basalt from the Black Desert, also suitable for constructing kites. On the other hand, Michael Fradley (2022) contends that there may be desert kites in the southeast of Syria concealed by millennia of sand and gravelly soil. Further remote sensing work to prove the extent of covered kites is necessary.

Figure 4

Soil Use Map of Syria



ORIENTATION

Kite orientation has been attributed to various factors, including topographic orientation of the Palmyrides (facing south-west and north-east according to the slopes of the mountains; Morandi Bonacossi & Iamoni, 2012) , and the migratory patterns of oryx and gazelles (ibid.). These animals inhabited the Al-Hamad in southern Syria (rich in pastures and water) during winter and spring, and utilized Palmyra oases or areas aligned with ancient lava flows in summer (Barge et al., 2015; Chambrade & Betts, 2021). Analysis of modifications made to funnels revealed no consistent patterns in orientation shifts indicating large-scale changes in gazelle migration; however, most face south-east, the same direction as the playa-connecting wadi system water discharge (Kempe & Al-Malabeh, 2013) suggesting alterations due to seasonal changes in watering spots (Morandi Bonacossi, 2014). Animals usually avoid stagnant water and return to the same watering spots seasonally (Morandi Bonacossi, 2014), which may explain the orientation. Stones from the original openings and funnels were rarely recycled, suggesting a need to retain the original structure for periods of higher wadi flow. Further research analysing all orientations of kites in relation to wadis would expand this understanding.

Use and Notable Examples

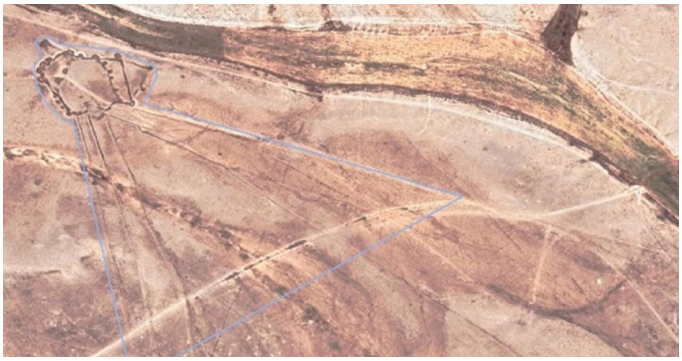
In the remote sensing survey, a series of structures was found with masonry connecting local meandering walls to kite architecture (**Figure 5**). These appear similar in construction to the architecture of the site. However, in person prospection is required to establish a stratigraphy and contextualise these features. This site has the potential to shed light on the lives of kite builders, if it is found to be contemporary with the kite construction and not just incorporating established masonry.

Figure 5

Settlement in the Southern Syrian Desert

Figure 6

Modified Desert Kite SY1023



Classification

Simplicity was a key factor in classifying kites, ensuring accessibility and recognisability for all researchers. Antennae,often the least visible sections of kites, due to their materials being recycled, modern threats, and weathering, were not suitable for classification. Enclosures, he most visible and robust kite sections, presented three common distinct variations in their morphology.

First, the keyhole model, the most common and basic variation, consists of a simple funnel and enclosure with several independent, tangential pit traps. There is some variation within this category in which enclosures are not always in line with funnels and, instead, curve around into a foetal position; however, whether this was a strategic design difference or an adaptation to the geography is unclear. This type appears to be the most basic form of engineering, relying on the active drive function of the antennae.

Second, the star-shaped model involves independent pointed traps dispersed at a distance. The incorporation of funnelling within an

enclosure likely indicates a later, possibly more advanced design as it is more complex and integrates two levels of game drive. The morphological classification adopted the wheelhouse model (Crassard et al., 2022; Kempe & Al-Malabeh, 2013), lacking pit traps and having a series of smaller enclosures inside the main enclosure. These may have originally been keyhole designs where the enclosure was used for pastoralism by later communities.

Finally, the pearl-string variation consists of serial or contiguous nascent-point pit traps, designed for either increased prey capture or compensate for ineffective enclosure walls. Kite modifications and superimpositions (**Figure 6**) over millennia of use and upkeep, were noted in the classifications. These variations likely optimised functionality.

The distribution of these types is addressed in **Figures 7** and **8**. The southwest Palmyra sample area shows a pattern of increasing complexity and variation, while the northwest Palmyra area demonstrates a more homogeneous dispersal of keyhole and modified keyhole kites. This indicates a chronological shift in kite use towards the East, in the direction of the Harrat al-Sham leading into the Jebel Druze.

Since this research was conducted Barge (2023) has developed a more substantial and comprehensive typology of kites.

Figure 7
Map of Kite Morphologies NW Palmyra

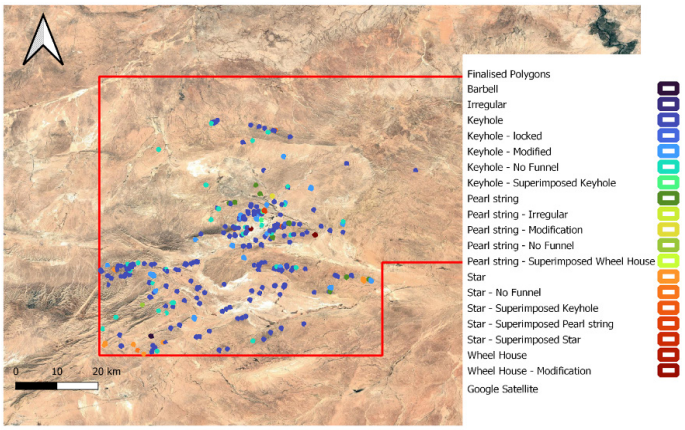
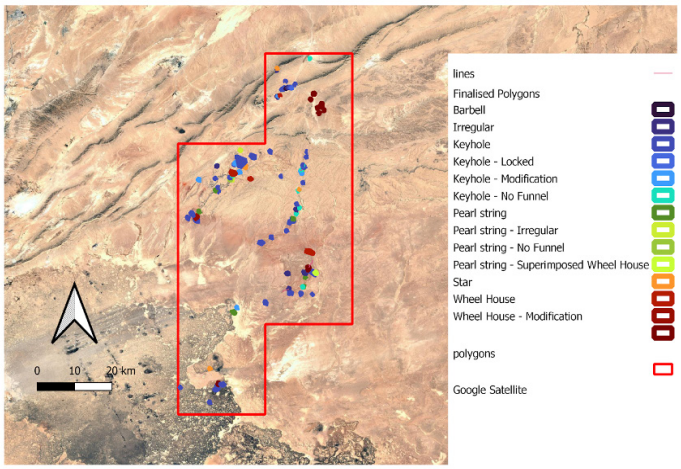


Figure 8
Map of Kite Morphologies SW Palmyra



Condition Assessment

As the arid margins of the Syrian desert range are typically far from urbanisation, there are few modern threats to the kites; however, occasional roads intersect funnels and desert-based industries such as oil refineries or wadi gold prospecting can sometimes threaten sites. While a few cities are scattered across the region, they do not appear to coincide with areas of kite formation and were most likely not constructed on top of kites. Weathering has minimally impacted kites compared to other structures of similar age, thanks to the durability of the basaltic construction material (Rowan & Hill, 2014). Some antennae are missing, and it is uncertain whether they were originally present. Funnels exist on a wide spectrum of visibility with some only existing as a shadow on satellite imagery, making it unclear whether alterations were deliberate, or due to natural processes over time.

DISCUSSION

This project aimed to uncover information about the use of kites and the lives of those who built them. The key questions concern the subsistence practices of those using the kites, the chronology of the kites, and any a priori ideas that were connected to their construction.

First, this study considered evidence for a nomadic subsistence strategy, where kite users followed the migration patterns of game mammals and subsisted off hunting and gathering, with a limited reliance on trade. Alternatively, a semi-pastoral existence is possible, using kites when the harvest was insufficient or to supplement agricultural production. Allusions to this subsistence strategy have been made at the Bronze Age site of Jawa with faunal remains primarily consisting of gazelle, despite archaeological evidence of a primarily herding economy (Betts & Burke, 2015).

Varying levels of evidence for a nomadic subsistence strategy are expected in the archaeological record, depending on the visibility and extent to which they relied on a pastoral subsistence (Morandi Bonacossi & Iamoni, 2012). Semi-nomadic subsistence, involving seasonal movements from settlements to kite regions, would likely leave evidence of permanent or semi-permanent settlements near agriculturally productive regions. Settlements such as Jerf el Ahmar and Tell Aswad which are believed to have been occupied since 9500 BCE (Weiss et al., 2006) are suitable for dry farming as there is no evidence of irrigation systems this early, and could have sustained seasonal occupation. Settlement evidence near several desert kites further supports semi-pastoral subsistence. **Figure 5** shows a small settlement located parallel to two keyhole desert kites which exist within the meander wall of the settlement (Kempe & Al-Malabeh, 2013). This suggests at least semi-permanent residence for the use of desert kites, as stone-built homes would have taken substantial effort and have acted as a permanent base for hunting expeditions to the Palmyrides from the basalt desert; however, the settlement's contemporaneity with the wide-spread use of kites is uncertain without ground-truthing.

The chronology of kites is contested, but most scholars suggest a peak in their use around the 7th millennium BCE (Akkermans, 2020). This coincides with a shift of the African Summer Monsoon towards the Levant, increasing rainfall and wadi usage (Fradley et al., 2022). While the arid environment of the desert does preserve a lot of the archaeology, later use of the same environment complicates the archaeological record (Chambrade & Betts, 2021) . Ethnographic accounts up until the 19th century describe the ongoing use of kites such as Wright in 1895 (Wright, 1895 as cited in Betts & Burke, 2015, p.77), although their validity is questionable. Neolithic rock art from the Hemma Plateau, Syria depicts kites used in hunts (Picalause et al., 2004), evidencing the long-term nature of these features. This raises the question of whether the kites are original or the result of restorations over the years. Addressing this archaeological Theseus's Paradox requires examining amendments and modifications made to kites to determine a relative chronology. The kite depicted in **Figure 6** exemplifies common modifications, such as a narrowed enclosure with more pit traps and widened funnels, possibly in response to varying wadi flow. However, the variations can only be dated relative to stratigraphic iterations of construction (earlier or later), which obscures the original construction dates of the kites.

There have been suggestions that diversified kite architecture correlates to expressions of identity as there appears to be no increase in hunting efficiency through variations (Fradley, 2022); however, this cannot be verified without experimental archaeology (e.g., recreating kites to test hunting efficiency) or using AI modelling. Presuming a priori ideas surrounding kite construction from the remnants is speculative, but the central assumption is that significant communality was necessary for kite construction and use.

CONCLUSION

Overall, this research project has created a dataset identifying and analysing nearly 350 desert kites surrounding the Palmyrides, a valuable resource for further investigations of kites. The conclusions in this report are based on limited data and with a lack of ground truthing; however, the data suggests that the construction of desert kites was influenced by wadi formation and the subsequent migrations of gazelle and oryx to these sources of water. This explains the presence of kites at higher elevations, where wadis form, and aligns with the hydrological data visualising kite chains alongside wadis. Determining the seasonality of gazelle migrations to the wadis is difficult as the climate was considerably different several millennia ago. While limited migration, with herds staying close to the Palmyrides is possible, land use data shows that the southwest of Syria, more suitable for vegetation, was likely used for pasturing more than the central areas where the kites appear.

The historical use of desert kites remains unclear. Radiocarbon dates going back to the 8th millennium BCE suggest that kites were used periodically (Fradley, 2022). This likely depended on gazelle population levels, as evidence of indiscriminate killing from the Tell Kuran excavations (Morandi Bonacossi, 2014) suggests that kites were only used once populations recovered from being hunted to the brink of extinction; however, given that this evidence is from several thousand years later than the suggested peak of kite hunting (Akkermans, 2003), population maintenance may have been less important. The lifestyle of those using the desert kites is largely speculative due to scarcity of settlements associated with kites, suggesting that hunters may have migrated from distant pastoral settlements. The distance to some kites from known settlement areas promotes the hypothesis of nomadic hunters leaving minimal archaeological traces. Future investigation involving the ground-truthing of the settlement in **Figure 5** can potentially yield more conclusive answers. Kite use likely took place over several millennia as a subsistence strategy during periods of reduced crop abundance. This is supported by advanced classifications of kites, along with their modifications and superimpositions, and ethnographic accounts (Wright, 1895 as cited in Betts & Burke, 2015, p. 77).

This report documents desert kites in two study zones, using design differences to categorise their structure and assess their preservation conditions, which were found to be generally fair. Recent socio-political changes in Syria, such as the lifting of sanctions (Debusmann & Smith, 2015), may open opportunities for ground-truthing that were previously unavailable. Assessing and excavating kites in Syria will help verify findings and refine interpretations.

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PSYCHOLOGY

The Impact of Shame on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms in Victims of Interpersonal Violence

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Despite advancements in therapies to treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), many individuals continue to experience symptoms after completion of these therapeutic interventions. Recognising shame as a critical barrier to healing is an essential part of resolving this gap between therapeutic intervention and mitigation of PTSD symptoms. This review analyses empirical evidence linking shame to psychopathology. Specifically, it focuses on the heightened symptoms of shame and PTSD following trauma, in cases involving interpersonal violence. A substantial body of research illustrates the significant influence that interpersonal violence has on PTSD and shame responses (Andrews et al., 2000; Beck et al., 2011; Lopez-Castro et al., 2019; Badour et al., 2017). Numerous approaches to shame reduction have been explored, but a comprehensive and integrated model for shame recovery is yet to be established. This review underscores the necessity for targeted research to develop and implement effective intervention strategies. Ultimately, addressing shame within trauma-informed therapeutic interventions could enhance PTSD recovery outcomes, reduce symptom persistence, and improve overall patient wellbeing.

THE IMPACT OF SHAME ON POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER SYMPTOMS IN VICTIMS OF INTERPERSONAL VIOLENCE

Shame and its association with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and victims of interpersonal violence has been documented at an increasing rate over the past two decades (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019). Gold standard therapies have been developed to treat PTSD, such as Prolonged Exposure Therapy (PE), Cognitive Processing Therapy (CPT), and Eye Movement, Desensitisation, and Restructuring (EMDR) (Schrader & Ross, 2021). However, approximately 30–50% of the individuals who receive these therapies continue to be symptomatic after therapeutic intervention (Bradley et al., 2005; Saraiya & Lopez-Castro, 2016). This has led researchers to examine the possible disturbances that may be interfering with the individual's healing process, such as the experience of shame.

Shame has been psychologically studied for several decades now, with Lewis (1971) being one of the first to present a clear definition of shame. Lewis highlighted the difference between shame and guilt, suggesting that in guilt, the individual judges an action, whereas in shame, the individual judges the self. Arguments for whether shame has a positive or negative impact on individuals' psyche has been debated; however, in more recent years, many researchers have identified it as a barrier to healing from trauma and PTSD, leading to both empirical and theoretical research focusing on the relationship between shame and PTSD (Matloub (Lepak) et al., 2024).

As the area of research has grown, some psychologists have suggested ways to reduce shame in partnership with existing approaches for PTSD recovery (Van Vliet, 2008; Salter & Hall, 2020; Gilbert & Irons, 2005; Gilbert & Procter, 2006; Dolezal & Gibson, 2022); however, very few have developed clear approaches specifically aimed at shame recovery. Some researchers have developed new approaches designed to encourage shame recovery (e.g., Van Vliet, 2008, 2009; Dolezal & Gibson, 2022), but there are still gaps within this research, and at present there is limited to no data to demonstrate these approaches being implemented. To improve recovery from PTSD, it is vital to understand the underlying processes that exacerbate symptoms, such as shame. As well as this, it is important to investigate possible solutions to the negative effects that these underlying mechanisms have.

SHAME

Shame is seen as a prosocial construct that involves a negative view of the self (Tracy & Robins, 2004). It can play an important role within development and psychosocial functioning; however, this does not always lead to positive resolution within the self, but rather can become a debilitating belief that oneself is entirely flawed (Van Vliet, 2009). Research into shame has demonstrated a significant variation in how shame is defined and perceived, as well as how its components can be subcategorised (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019; Lewis, 1992, 2000; Velotti et al., 2016; Gilbert, 2007). To develop a well-rounded understanding of shame, it is important to acknowledge the scope of the emotion.

Shame can be categorised into two primary types. The first is dispositional shame, also referred to as "trait shame" or "shame proneness" (Velotti et al., 2016, p. 172). Dispositional shame occurs through frequent recurring feelings of shame that are not directly associated with any particular event, such as believing one is inherently bad or by

putting oneself down repeatedly, even for minor mistakes (Velotti et al., 2016; Lopez-Castro et al., 2019). The second type is state-dependent shame, which refers to an individual's experience of shame as a discrete, present-moment phenomenon, characterised by the immediate emotional response and associated feelings of shame (Robins et al., 2007). As an example, the State Shame and Guilt Scale (SSGS; Marschall et al., 1994) was created to measure state shame and uses items such as "I feel remorse, regret" and "I feel tension about something I have done".

Several approaches to understanding shame have emerged over time, including functionalist, evolutionary, and attributional. These can have some difference in perspectives but generally follow a common theme that shame is a functional emotion to protect oneself from social outcast and ensures survival (Gilbert, 2007; Tracy & Robins, 2004); however, it can develop into a maladaptive response that can evoke negative mental health responses (Ferreira et al., 2022; Mills, 2005; Van Vliet, 2009; Lopez-Castro et al., 2019). Functionalism views shame as holding a protective pro-social, survival role, and it can be either adaptive or maladaptive, depending on the circumstances (Dempsey, 2017; Mills, 2005). The evolutionary biopsychosocial perspective similarly considers shame to be an involuntary defensive response that has developed to aid an individual's social survival (Gilbert, 2007). Through this perspective, shame can be separated into two distinct dimensions: internal and external shame.

Internal shame relates to the inner dynamics of how one judges oneself, with cognitive processing being inwardly directed towards one's attributes, behaviours and emotions, often focusing on their failures, flaws and shortcomings (Gilbert & Andrews, 1998; Gilbert, 2003; Lewis 2003; Ferreira et al., 2022). External shame is understood as the experience of the self being viewed negatively in the minds of others, with cognitive processing being outwardly directed and behaviours such as appeasing or submission occurring for the purpose of positively influencing others view of you (Gilbert & Andrews, 1998; Gilbert, 2003, 2007; Ferreira et al., 2022). This distinction between internal and external shame is referred to by other psychologists who emphasise the importance of attributions (Lewis, 2003; Van Vliet, 2008, 2009).

Attribution theory suggests individuals decide, consciously or otherwise, whether they should experience shame as a result of their internal narrative (Etherson, 2023). Attributions, specifically, refers to the process of inferring causal explanations for events and behaviours (Van Vliet, 2009) and is considered to have a strong effect on psychological adjustment (Feiring et al., 2002; Wall & Hayes, 2000) and emotions (Petrocelli & Smith, 2005). Lewis (1992, 2000) formed a cognitive-attributional model of self-conscious emotions and within this model, shame is considered to stem from internalised cultural standards and evaluations of internal and external circumstances and events. Cultural standards are shared beliefs and expectations within a specific society (Wilson-James, 2021). An example of a cultural standard that can impact survivors of interpersonal violence comes from Jamaica. In Jamaica, the stigma from being labelled an "informer" (Wilson-James, 2021, p. 57) can influence individuals to be apprehensive about reporting their abuse and this can also lead to shame (Caribbean Policy Research Institute [CPRI], 2018; Yuce et al., 2015).

The idea of shame stemming from evaluations of internal and external circumstances and events and internalised cultural standards has been supported by others, such as Tangney and colleagues (see Tangney et al., 1998; Tangney & Fischer, 1995; Tangney, 1995; Tangney & Dearing, 2002). They have conceptualised shame as involving an individual's evaluation of themselves, considering negative events and outcomes, and using internal and global attributions. Negative internal attributions, such as blaming oneself for negative events, often lead to blame and feelings of being powerless to change who they are (Van Vliet, 2009). Taking an alternate perspective, several psychologists argue that shame can occur without blaming the self (Gilbert, 2004). Regardless of these differences, it is consistently believed and evidenced that shame can produce a variety of negative consequences.

SHAME AND MENTAL HEALTH

Through its stress-related physiological effects and associated increases

SHAME AND MENTAL HEALTH

Through its stress-related physiological effects and associated increases

in cortisol and proinflammatory cytokines, shame can have a negative toll on physical and mental health (Dickerson et al., 2004; Scheer et al., 2020). Shame's impact on mental health is perhaps more complex, and a clear understanding is still in the process of being developed and evidenced. There is significant evidence for shame being associated with psychopathology, (Gilbert & Andrews, 1998; Tangney & Dearing, 2002; Lopez-Castro et al., 2019) including increased suicide risk (DeCou et al., 2018), depression (Van Vliet, 2009; Andrews et al., 2002; Thompson & Berenbaum, 2006), addiction (Dearing et al., 2005) and of particular relevance to this review, PTSD (Lee et al., 2001; Leskela et al., 2002; Wilson et al., 2006).

Shame's relationship with PTSD has been further researched in recent years (Saraiya & Lopez-Castro, 2016), with more emphasis placed on addressing shame in trauma treatment and recovery. It has become evident that shame can be considered an important emotion, that is both greatly influenced by traumatic experiences, as well as being significantly negatively influential to PTSD symptom recovery (Øktedalen et al., 2014). This dynamic between shame, trauma, and PTSD requires substantial focus because it is hindering the recovery of individuals with PTSD, so it must be addressed to improve their health, wellbeing, and therapeutic outcomes.

PTSD

PTSD can occur in individuals who experience trauma, with symptoms involving elements of re-experiencing the event, negative thoughts/feelings produced or worsened by the trauma, trauma-related arousal and avoidance, and distress or functional impairment lasting longer than one month (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). The DSM-5 diagnostic criteria for PTSD was edited in 2013, adding shame to the list of persistent negative states (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). PTSD can occur following a variety of traumatic experiences and the differences between these experiences can alter the association of symptoms with shame (la Bash & Papa, 2014; Ginzburg et al., 2009; Velotti et al., 2014; Seah & Berle, 2023). Therefore, for the purpose of specificity, this review will focus on the relationship between PTSD and shame within victims of interpersonal violence.

Interpersonal violence can be defined as intentional use of power or force directly inflicted by an individual or small group of individuals against another person. This violence may be sexual, physical, emotional/psychological or neglectful (Mercy et al., 2017). The reason for this specific focus on interpersonal violence is, in part, due to the higher intensity and impact of shame found in victims of interpersonal violence in contrast to non-interpersonal violence, such as natural disasters, non-interpersonal injury, and war (Ford et al., 2006). Moreover, excluding other types of trauma, such as from being involved in war, limits some of the complexities within the understanding of shame that can arise, such as moral injury. Moral injury is often related to experiences of guilt and shame that arise when an individual feels that their actions have violated their moral values, which is a different experience to shame that arises from experiencing interpersonal violence (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019).

Survivors of interpersonal violence may experience autonomic hyperarousal, an active stress response that is a common symptom of PTSD and can be characterised by difficulty concentrating, hypervigilance, irritability, exaggerated startle response and irregular sleep patterns (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Traditionally, the autonomic hyperarousal in survivors of interpersonal violence has been attributed to fear, but recent research has led to the revelation that shame also contributes to the development of autonomic hyperarousal (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019). Some research has found that shame was a stronger predictor of increased autonomic arousal than fear (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019; Freed & D'Andrea, 2015; Badour et al., 2017).

SHAME AND PTSD

Significant empirical evidence has been found to implicate the varying

negative impacts of shame on PTSD (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019). Multiple studies provide evidence that shame is a significant mediator for PTSD symptoms from interpersonal violence, such as childhood abuse and domestic violence (Andrews et al., 2000; Beck et al., 2011). Individuals exposed to childhood sexual abuse, amongst other high impact types of trauma and abuse, often relate negative attributions to the trauma, which can influence PTSD symptoms, such as blaming the self or believing everyone is the same as their abuser (Feiring et al, 2002). In relation to this, where there is social stigma surrounding the trauma/abuse, such as sexual abuse, greater shame is experienced (Aakvaag et al., 2016). Victims of childhood abuse/maltreatment are often prone to high levels of self-criticism (Sajjadi et al., 2022) which can significantly relate to shame, as it reinforces the sense of continuing threat (Ehlers & Clark, 2000).

There is also evidence for individuals with higher trauma-related shame to experience more severe and persistent PTSD symptoms (Matloub (Lepak) et al., 2024). It is also important to note that PTSD symptoms may occur immediately after the traumatic experience, with the majority arising within 6 months of the event though for some, symptoms can start weeks, months, or years later (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2021). Shame has been found to predict both immediate post-traumatic stress reactions to trauma (one to six months after the trauma) as well as future reactions (one to six years after the trauma; Feiring & Taska, 2005). A longitudinal study has demonstrated that children who experience consistently high levels of abuse-related shame during a one-year period showed the highest levels of PTSD symptoms (Feiring et al., 2002). These PTSD symptoms were measured using The Children's Impact of Traumatic Events Scale—Revised (CITES–R; Wolfe et al., 1991), rather than being directly based on clinical diagnosis (Feiring et al., 2002). Since shame has been implicated in the maintenance of PTSD symptoms, it is possible that shame may also decrease effectiveness of therapies designed to reduce these symptoms and heal PTSD (Oktedalen et al., 2014; Saraiya & Lopez-Castro, 2016). This leaves the important task of reaching an understanding of how to remedy this. Whilst some researchers have attempted this, there remains limited literature at present.

THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS THAT IMPACT SHAME

There have been multiple therapies developed that indirectly have a positive impact on shame reduction and recovery (Van Vliet, 2010). These include social fitness training (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001), Emotion-Focused therapy (EFT; Greenberg, 2002), and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT; Hayes et al., 1999). The Social Fitness Model conceptualises social anxiety and shyness as deficits in social fitness and social skills. Whilst PTSD was removed from the anxiety disorder category in the DSM-5 due to considerable evidence demonstrating the broader range of emotions associated with PTSD (e.g., anger, shame, guilt; American Psychiatric Association, 2013; Resick & Miller, 2009; Pai et al., 2017), it is still evident that PTSD involves elements of anxiety, and there are similarities between PTSD and anxiety-related disorders (Williamson et al., 2021). Experiences of shame also relate to symptoms of anxiety; for instance, they have similar resulting behavioural manifestations such as avoidance, withdrawal, and submissive behaviours (Swee et al., 2021; Gilbert, 2000; Piccirillo et al., 2016). Social fitness training focuses on building confidence, social skills, and developing social fitness through the three core areas: cognitive restructuring, simulated exposures, and social skills training. Collectively, these involve challenging negative beliefs and thoughts, developing self-compassion whilst reducing self-blame, practising social interactions in a safe and controlled environment, and learning specific skills that aid the effective navigation of social situations (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001). The reduction of shame and self-blame are directly emphasised within this model (Henderson & Zimbardo, 2001). Additionally, challenging negative thoughts and beliefs, developing feelings of self-compassion, reducing self-blame, and the encouragement of developing safe social connections could also be effective on shame reduction (ShamsAlam et al., 2025; Van Vliet, 2008).

Relatedly, EFT is the practice of informing therapeutic intervention with an understanding of the role emotions play in psychotherapeutic change (Greenberg, 2017). This approach uses strategies that promote regulation, expression, acceptance and awareness of emotions with the goal of "strengthening the self, regulating affect, and creating new meaning" (Greenberg, 2017, p. 3). EFT has been shown to significantly improve symptoms of depression, PTSD, low self-esteem and interpersonal problems (Paivio & Nieuwenhuis, 2001; Paivio & Pascual-Leone, 2010). EFT changes emotions by understanding and transforming maladaptive emotion schemas, such as shame and fear, that underlie the presenting symptoms. It encourages clients to process their emotions and painful experiences whilst evoking more adaptive mechanisms, such as self-compassion, assertive anger, and self-soothing (Greenberg, 2017). Evidence demonstrates that EFT can effectively improve self-compassion and self-reassurance while reducing self-criticism (López-Cavada et al., 2025). This evidence, and the underlying processes of EFT, suggest it could be an effective treatment for shame recovery.

ACT is a form of third-wave cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) that involves six interconnected processes: acceptance, cognitive defusion, being present, values, self as context (the observing self), and committed action (Hayes et al., 1999; Harris, 2019). Gloster et al. (2020) conducted a meta-analysis of ACT involving 133 studies and 12,477 participants. Their findings demonstrated that ACT is consistently effective across an extensive range of intervention targets, involving varied mental health conditions and other health conditions, such as chronic pain. Whilst there is limited research of ACT being used specifically for shame, it has been proposed as an effective approach for reducing the negative symptoms of shame (Linde et al., 2023). ACT can effectively increase psychological flexibility and decrease experiential avoidance and has been shown to weaken the effect of self-critical thoughts (Luoma & Platt, 2015). Psychological flexibility is the ability to accept, cope with and adjust to a diverse range of situations, positive and negative (Burton & Bonanno, 2016; Harris, 2019; Kashdan et al., 2006; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). Experiential avoidance is the tendency to avoid difficult internal experiences and is associated with higher levels of shame (Luoma et al., 2006; Mitmansgruber et al., 2009).

Another therapeutic intervention that was created to reduce shame and self-criticism is compassionate mind training (CMT), which works by cultivating a self-soothing system (Gilbert & Irons, 2005; Gilbert & Procter, 2006); however, research revealed that CMT did not significantly impact components of shame such as self-criticism and self-correction in an initial pilot study (Gilbert & Procter, 2006). More recent research into the effectiveness of CMT has yielded mixed results. There is evidence that CMT can significantly decrease depression and anxiety, with some evidence for decreased self-criticism and shame and increased self-compassion (Matos et al., 2017), but many of these results were not statistically significant (Noorbala et al., 2013; Gilbert & Proctor, 2006; Halamová et al., 2020). Consequently, compassionate mind training is not referred to often in the literature around shame and PTSD, which may be due to its limited effectiveness on shame specifically.

As well as exploring the impact of specific therapeutic interventions on shame reduction and recovery, several researchers have argued for a focus on recovering from shame as part of a trauma and/or shame informed approach (e.g., Dolezal & Gibson, 2022; Van Vliet, 2008; Salter & Hall, 2020). This includes approaches that can be used within existing therapies that reduce shame, including developing quality therapeutic relationships. This is vital, because without a positive therapeutic relationship with their practitioner, they could feel at risk of further shame. Therefore, having a trustworthy, quality therapeutic relationship is essential in PTSD and shame recovery (Cordess et al, 2005).

It has been noted that shame can cause individuals to feel powerless, withdraw from others and isolate themselves (Van Vliet, 2008). Therefore, receiving empathetic responses can increase an individual's sense of power and connection (Brown, 2006) and reverse some of the effects of shame. Shame-sensitivity as part of therapeutic practice has also been suggested as essential for recovery. This involves practitioners being competent in their understanding of shame at an individual and organisational level, being able to recognise shame and shaming, and

appreciating individual differences in shame (Dolezal & Gibson, 2022). Salter and Hall (2020) argue for the promotion of dignity as the resolution to shame in complex trauma, basing this on the idea that dignity can be seen as the opposite of shame and humiliation (Statman, 2000; Salter & Hall, 2020). Promoting dignity in therapeutic practice would also aid the therapeutic relationship between client and practitioner, further assisting the process of shame recovery.

Self-compassion and mindfulness also have uses, reducing negative experiences through interrupting rumination and removing negative judgements of the self and their experience (Ehret et al., 2015). Along a similar line, acceptance and resilience have been identified as helpful processes, as acceptance plays a key role in mental wellbeing in general (Hayes et al., 2011) but also in the healing of shame (Clark, 2012). Emotional resilience can also be shown to protect from shame or can be developed to heal shame (Van Vliet, 2008).

All of the approaches discussed above have individual merits and evidence for their positive effects, but there is a noticeable disconnect between these approaches within the literature. This disconnection can be seen in the range of suggestions made for shame recovery, whereby no coherent or cohesive approach is recommended consistently across the literature. The majority of these therapies and approaches are designed for other purposes, yet have elements applicable to shame and PTSD recovery. Therefore, assessing the aspects of these and individual approaches that are effective at reducing shame and improving symptoms would be helpful for the development of a complete and specific approach to shame recovery.

There are plenty of connections and similarities between these individual approaches. These similar themes include promotion of mindful and self-compassionate processes, such as acceptance, reduction in rumination, and a curtailment of negative judgements of experience and the self (Ehret et al., 2015; Hayes et al., 2011; Clark, 2012). Furthermore, there is a repeated importance placed on therapeutic relationships. Demonstrating empathy, trust, a strong understanding of shame and promoting dignity within therapeutic practice can help improve effectiveness of therapeutic intervention (Brown, 2006; Cordess et al, 2005; Dolezal & Gibson, 2022; Statman, 2000; Salter & Hall, 2020). These ideas prompt the question of whether an integrated approach could be developed specifically to work with improvement in shame and PTSD symptoms. There is one notable paper that somewhat fulfils this task. Van Vliet (2008) outlines a dedicated process for shame recovery that involves several steps that relate to many of the suggestions that other psychologists have made.

A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY OF SHAME: STUDY INFORMATION

Van Vliet (2008) conducted a grounded theory study, aiming to contribute to the understanding of shame and emotional resilience and develop a theory of shame recovery. This study consisted of qualitative analysis of interviews with 13 adults (9 female and 4 male, aged 24 to 70 years old) recalling experiences of intense shame. Whilst small, the sample was reasonably culturally diverse, with 8 participants identifying as Caucasian, 2 as South Asian, 2 as Aboriginal Australian, and 1 as Middle Eastern. Amongst this selection, 5 considered themselves Christian, 3 as other, 3 as agnostic/atheist, 1 as Muslim and 1 as Buddhist. All participants had a significant shame experience in adulthood (ranging from 10 months to 26 years prior to the interview) and perceived they had made significant progress in overcoming and recovering from the situation or event involved in the shame experience (with varying experiences in accessing therapy at the time of or after the shame experience).

Shame experiences were dependent on the perspective of the participants, with some being classed as trauma or abuse, but all shame experiences referred to a specific event or situation that induced significantly distressing shame (Van Vliet, 2008). Whilst the participants did not need a PTSD diagnosis to participate in the study, the focus on shame experiences, including those induced by trauma and interpersonal abuse such as sexual assault, could be applicable to the broader field of shame and PTSD.

All participants were interviewed at least twice, mostly in person but sometimes over the phone, with the focus of the interviews being to understand the characteristics of shame and the impact it has, as well as how shame was overcome by the individuals. Keeping in tone with grounded theory methodology, certain questions and directions of the discussions were unique to the participant, with the researcher naturally exploring the topics using information and ideas that arose from the flow of conversation. A selection of questions that were asked to all participants in some capacity included variations of the following:

Please describe the specific situation or event in as much detail as you can. What was the experience like for you at the time? What about the situation made you feel shame? What helped you overcome or heal from the shame? What didn't help? What tells you that the shame has healed or lessened?" (Van Vliet, 2008, p. 235).

Themes that occurred in participant's discussions of the impact of their shame experience included: shame as an assault on the self, attack on self-concept, attack on the self in relation to others, and avoidance and withdrawal behaviours. Individuals experiencing intense shame described themselves as "bad," "worthless," "disgusting" (Van Vliet, 2008, p. 237). Many of these negative self-judgments were accompanied by self-blame, involving participants describing the belief that the event occurred because "It's my fault" (Van Vliet, 2008, p. 237). This sometimes resulted in disruption or destruction of the self-concept, with participants describing the experience "a shattering of who I am" (Van Vliet, 2008, p. 237).

Shame experiences also impacted the self in relation to others, with participants feeling exposed and, in response, being desperate to escape from view. They described wanting to "run", "disappear" or "feeling completely lost, like there was no one to turn to" (Van Vliet, 2008, p. 237). There were also themes of individuals withdrawing from other people in an attempt to cope, but this only worsened their feelings of isolation. Behaviours aimed at avoiding the pain of the shame experience were common, with participants describing their attempts at this avoidance as "going into denial," and "suppressing," (Van Vliet, 2008, p. 237) as well as engaging in destructive behaviours such as drinking alcohol to numb the pain (Van Vliet, 2008).

Drawing upon these prevalent themes within participant responses, the study identified three specific types of impairments developed from shame: undermining positive self-concept, damage to individuals' ability to connect with others, and a feeling of diminished power and control. These impairments can also be seen in survivors of interpersonal violence who experience PTSD (Hyland et al., 2017; Gilbert, 2015; Li & Liang, 2023). These similarities between shame experiences and traumatic experiences resulting in PTSD demonstrate how the theory of Van Vliet (2008) can be applicable to PTSD symptoms as well as shame. These similarities could also reinforce why evidence suggests shame worsens and maintains PTSD symptoms (Andrews et al., 2000; Beck et al., 2011; Matloub (Lepak) et al., 2024; Feiring et al., 2002).

THE PROCESS OF SELF-RECONSTRUCTION

Van Vliet (2008) conceptualised shame recovery as a process of "self-reconstruction" (p. 233) made up of five underlying processes: (1) connecting with others, which includes talking to others, socialising with others, finding allies, repairing relationships, participating in counselling, and connecting to a higher power, (2) refocusing on positive actions, which includes clearing away negativity, working on self-improvement, focusing on the positive, shifting priorities, and focusing on action, (3) accepting vulnerable feelings, which includes accepting the situation, facing one's feelings, and expressing one's feelings, (4) understanding shame triggers, which involves separating from the shame, understanding external factors, developing insight into oneself, and creating meaning, and (5) resisting rejection of negative judgements, instead asserting oneself and challenging others where appropriate (Van Vliet, 2008; Plante et al., 2022).

This study is an important contribution to this subject area as it is one of the only papers to conceptualise a clear theory for shame recovery. By using a grounded theory design, Van Vliet (2008) was able to develop an understanding of how people interpret shame events, construct meaning from them, and how individuals then behave based on these constructed

beliefs and interpretations. This approach enables a wide scope and deep understanding of the subject area. Other strengths of this study include the cultural diversity within the sample and the extensive number of shame events studied, demonstrating strong external validity and generalisability. Although, it should be acknowledged that whilst there was a diverse sample used, most of the minority cultural groups were acclimated to Western society, therefore non-Western cultures may show differences if studied. Additionally, due to the data collected being from retrospective reflection of participants, it is possible that certain events and experiences may have been recalled differently to how they perceived the event or experience as it occurred. This theory could be the basis for a future shame intervention being developed.

To gauge the accuracy and implications of this theory, it would be wise to apply the steps of the "self-reconstruction" (Van Vliet, 2008; p. 233) process to a sample of participants and study the impact these steps have on shame recovery and mental wellbeing. Utilising Van Vliet's (2008) theory of self-reconstruction, in combination with aspects of other interventions that affect shame and PTSD, could be key to addressing the negative effect of shame on the maintenance and severity of PTSD symptoms, particularly in survivors of interpersonal violence. Aspects of therapies such as Social Fitness Training, ACT, EFT, and CMT hold similarities to certain steps of the self-reconstruction process, and already have evidence supporting them. It could be possible to collate these applicable aspects into one therapy that follows the steps of self-reconstruction, and then implement this as an intervention and study its effectiveness.

CONCLUSION

The research discussed in this review has been particularly varied, including both quantitative and qualitative analyses, meta-analyses, systematic reviews and more. Despite this, there has been a consistent understanding throughout that demonstrates the importance of shame's influence on PTSD symptoms, particularly in victims of interpersonal violence. The research into this subject is still in relatively early stages with the majority being undertaken within the past 20 years (Lopez-Castro et al., 2019). Within most of the literature reviewed, the authors make some suggestions for reducing shame and improving PTSD treatment outcomes; however, these recommendations are predominantly basic processes that are only briefly touched upon. There are very few approaches specifically dedicated to outlining a shame recovery approach (Dolezal and Gibson, 2022; Van Vliet, 2008), and even where there are specific approaches, there are issues with limitations and a lack of empirical evidence to support them. Van Vliet (2008) makes the most persuasive proposal for a complete approach to shame recovery; however, this approach would benefit from being implemented and tested to gain a full understanding of its relevance and effectiveness.

Future research should focus on understanding shame recovery to better support PTSD treatment, as this area remains underexplored. Developing a coherent approach to integrating shame recovery into existing therapies or creating a dedicated shame-focused program would be highly beneficial. This approach can be studied to show effectiveness and altered as needed so that it could be administered in therapeutic practice. In theory, this would aid PTSD recovery and effectiveness of PTSD specific therapies, reducing the rates of long-term continuance of symptoms and improving overall quality of life. Based on the wider literature, shame recovery would also benefit many other psychopathologies as well. It would also likely have a secondary benefit of relieving some of the strain on therapeutic services, as patients would be more likely to make full recovery in a shorter space of time. Overall, it would be highly beneficial to develop, assess and implement a shame specific therapeutic intervention particularly aimed at those recovering from PTSD.

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SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

Exploring Community-based Alcohol Rehabilitation in India: A case study of a community rehabilitation and support centre

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Substance dependence and addiction continues to be a growing problem globally, with India being no exception. Despite the availability of patient-centred services, accessibility remains a challenge, especially in terms of community-based treatment centres for substance abuse. Through a series of case studies, this study examines the Community Rehabilitation and Support Centre (CRSC), a therapeutic community-based de-addiction centre in Delhi, India. Via thematic analysis of in-depth interviews with eight male patients and observational data, it explores the rehabilitation programme's structure, relapse management, and the role of communal living. The findings reveal the effectiveness of the centre's approach in fostering holistic recovery. Key elements contributing to its success include structured programming, extended stays, and a nurturing environment. The study highlights the advantages of CRSC's methods and enriches the literature on therapeutic community frameworks in addiction recovery. It underscores the significance of structured programmes and communal living for successful rehabilitation while offering insights for enhancing substance abuse treatment outcomes in India.

INTRODUCTION

The global rise in substance use, particularly alcohol dependence, has become a pressing concern, including in India, where socio-economic and cultural factors influence patterns of addiction. Rapid lifestyle changes and associated stressors contribute to increasing substance use, leading to significant health and social consequences. According to the Health and Family Survey (2019–21), alcohol consumption rates among urban Indian men and women stand at 18.8% and 1.3%, respectively (Ministry of Health & Family Welfare Government of India, 2021).

However, alcohol-related harm is not evenly distributed across populations. The alcohol-harm paradox suggests that individuals from low socio-economic status (SES) experience greater alcohol-related problems despite similar or even lower consumption levels compared to higher SES groups (Probst et al., 2020). Gender disparities further compound these risks, with women from low SES facing a 27% higher likelihood of alcohol-related harm (Porth et al., 2020). These inequalities limit access to healthcare and treatment services, exacerbating the challenges in addressing substance dependence.

While substance abuse treatment centres exist, they have often been criticised for limited accessibility (Bashara et al., 2014). Research suggests that community-based interventions, particularly therapeutic community models, can help bridge this gap by offering patient-centred support that includes vocational training, group therapy, and counselling (Balhara et al., 2014; Allen & Campbell, 2011). Despite their potential, such community-based models remain underdeveloped in India, with limited literature exploring their effectiveness and operational mechanisms (Porthe, 2020).

This study aims to address this gap by examining the Community Rehabilitation and Support Centre (CRSC), a therapeutic community-based substance abuse treatment centre in Delhi, India. Through an in-depth analysis of its rehabilitation processes, with a focus on communal living and relapse management, this research provides new insights into how structured, community-driven approaches can foster holistic recovery and social reintegration. By highlighting the effectiveness of such models, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on accessible and culturally relevant addiction treatment frameworks in India.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Impact of Alcohol abuse in India

Alcohol abuse, according to the American Psychological Association, is characterised by a pattern of compulsive alcohol consumption that persists despite recurring consequences stemming from an individual's personal, social or financial activities (APA Dictionary of Psychology, n.d.). A report by the National Drug Dependence Treatment Centre and All-India Institute of Medical Sciences (2019) highlighted that 5.2% of 473,569 individuals surveyed were affected by harmful or dependent alcohol use, raising concerns about the health and social consequences of excessive drinking in India.

Despite the availability of treatment programmes, access and engagement remain significant challenges. Many individuals do not seek help, even when treatment options are available, due to psychological barriers, lifestyle factors, and physiological stressors (Barman et al., 2011; Ahmed, 2009); however, these studies often fail to consider the socio-cultural contexts in which these barriers manifest. Anderson's conceptualisation of healthcare utilisation serves as a helpful paradigm for understanding these challenges (Anderson, 1995; Barman et al., 2011), highlighting systemic stressors such as financial limitations and restrictive admission criteria; however, this model overlooks the unique struggles of rural and marginalised populations in India, where low socioeconomic status,

lack of education, and stigma further restrict access to care (Appel et al., 2004; Barman et al., 2011). These limitations underscore the need for alternative, community-based models that address practical barriers to treatment, and highlight the importance of developing holistic care frameworks tailored to India's diverse socio-economic and cultural landscape.

EVOLUTION OF TREATMENT FOR SUBSTANCE ABUSE: FROM ALTERNATIVE PRACTISES TO COMMUNAL PRACTICES

The treatment for substance abuse in India evolved from spiritually rooted traditions to modern, evidence-based approaches. Historically, addiction was stigmatised as a spiritual weakness or moral failing, leading to treatment through ritualistic healing practices (Church et al., 2018, p. 220). Many communities relied on practices administered by a spiritual healer like chanting or herbal remedies to restore the imbalance between one's spiritual and emotional well-being (Winkelman, 2001). These methods, although lacking scientific validation, provided holistic care that encompassed not only the individual but also communal support, playing a vital role in recovery.

While the Western medical model dismissed these traditional practices, it led to a missed opportunity to integrate culturally significant therapeutic methods into addiction treatment. As biomedical frameworks become more dominant, traditional healing was replaced with clinical practices, which often failed to address the emotional and communal dimensions of addiction. This oversight contributed to gaps in holistic care, which modern rehabilitation systems are now beginning to address by reintegrating communal and culturally relevant practices (Ray et al., 2020). The shift toward Community-Based Rehabilitation (CBR) reflects an effort to balance scientific rigor with psychosocial aspects of recovery, ensuring culturally attuned treatment options.

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have played a critical role in developing these models, which emphasise participation, communal healing, and accessibility, particularly in areas where government rehabilitation services are insufficient (Thara & Patel, 2010; Balhara, 2011). Over time, CBR programmes have transitioned from a medical focus to a rights-based approach, advocating for community inclusion and mental health awareness (Pande & Dalal, 2004). Countries such as Italy, Finland, and Australia have successfully reduced alcohol consumption-related harm by implementing community mobilisation strategies (Porthé et al., 2020).

The central premise of these interventions is that substance abuse affects the whole individual, requiring an approach that addresses all dimensions of their life. Treatment models emphasising structured activities, social integration, and personal development foster long-term recovery (Bunt et al., 2014). Winkelman (2001) argues that traditional healing practices offer valuable insights into the emotional and spiritual dimensions of addiction, aspects often overlooked in biomedical models. By integrating these elements into modern rehabilitation frameworks, treatment programmes can better address the complex needs of individuals, particularly in culturally diverse contexts like India.

INSIGHTS FROM COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS AND THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY-BASED CENTRES

Despite the growing recognition of community-based interventions for addiction treatment, India continues to face significant gaps in implementation and accessibility (Balhara, 2014). Much of the existing research has focused on the prevalence and causes of alcohol abuse (Singh et al., 2007), while studies evaluating the effectiveness of community-based rehabilitation (CBR) models remain scarce. This lack of empirical evidence limits the ability of policymakers and practitioners to scale and refine these interventions to better serve individuals with substance use disorders.

Balhara (2014) examined a "soft-entry" (p. 2) approach that integrated treatment services into community settings, offering both pharmacological and psychosocial interventions such as motivational enhancement and family sessions. The programme showed a high retention rate (67.03%), attributed in part to the close proximity of services to patients' residences; however, Balhara also highlighted that many individuals, particularly in urban slums, were not actively help-seeking and required treatment delivery at their doorstep (Singh et al., 2007). He further emphasised how physical distance, limited awareness, and motivational barriers could undermine the effectiveness of community interventions.

Furthermore, most existing models failed to accommodate the needs of rural populations or dual-diagnosis cases, highlighting the need for comprehensive frameworks that integrate accessibility, inclusivity, and holistic care. This study builds on these limitations by examining CRSC's community-based rehabilitation model, which integrates residential care, communal living, and structured interventions to address barriers identified in previous research. Unlike many urban-centric or fragmented approaches, CRSC's approach prioritises accessibility, relapse management, and family reintegration, creating a sustainable model of rehabilitation. Importantly, this study redefines "community" not just as an external support structure, but as a core element embedded within the methodology and therapeutic interventions of residential rehabilitation (Balhara, 2011; Porthé et al., 2020).

Thus, expanding research on CBR models is essential, as these frameworks hold great potential for improving addiction treatment outcomes in India. By addressing existing gaps in the literature, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on the role of community-based approaches in rehabilitation, with the goal of informing future interventions.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This qualitative case study examined CRSC's rehabilitation framework, focusing on its structure, processes, and outcomes. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews and direct observation; chosen to provide a comprehensive understanding of both the lived experiences of patients and the Centre's operational environment.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with patients to explore their experiences with the rehabilitation programme. This method allowed for flexibility in questioning while ensuring key themes were addressed (Yin, 2018), provided first-hand narratives on the programme's impact, and perceptions of the therapeutic community model.

Direct observation documented real-time interactions, communal activities, and the overall structure of the Centre's environment. This method captured implicit behaviours, such as social dynamics, peer interactions, and adherence to daily routines, providing deeper insights into the communal support structures shaping recovery. The observational report provided context for the interviews, ensuring a comprehensive analysis of the rehabilitative environment.

Sample

This study employed purposive sampling, selecting eight male participants aged 25–50 based on their time at the Centre and active involvement in its operations. As the Centre caters exclusively to men, the sample reflects the programme's gender-specific nature.

Methodological and observational notes were maintained throughout data collection, and findings are context-specific, not intended for broad generalisation.

Ethical considerations included informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality. Participants were fully briefed on the study's aims, given the opportunity to ask questions, and informed of their right to withdraw at any time with the option to request data deletion. Given the sensitive nature of discussing addiction and rehabilitation, steps were taken to minimise distress. Interview questions were structured to avoid triggering emotional discomfort, focusing on the rehabilitation process rather than personal trauma. The researcher remained attentive to verbal and non-verbal cues, pausing or redirecting the conversation when participants exhibited signs of distress. Pseudonyms are used to

ensure anonymity in all direct quotes.

Figure 1
Participant Pseudonyms and Corresponding Interview Numbers

Interview Number	Pseudonym
Interview 1	Arjun
Interview 2	Rohan
Interview 3	Vikram
Interview 4	Kabir
Interview 5	Rahul
Interview 6	Kiran
Interview 7	Amit
Interview 8	Sameer

Method of Analysis

Data analysis, concurrent with the data collection phase, was an iterative process whereby initial observations were reflected upon and shaped through subsequent data collection. The data was analysed through "thematic analysis" utilising epistemological frameworks to provide comprehensive data accounts. Thematic analysis was well-suited for several key reasons, providing a robust framework to examine the multifaceted processes within the therapeutic community-based substance abuse treatment centre. By focusing on recurring themes correlated to one another, it allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the research position, while also understanding the positive impacts this programme had on its participants. Thematic analysis also allowed for delving into the personal narratives which could be further linked to the comprehensive overview of the programme's effectiveness from the observational data as well (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

RESULTS

The following section presents the findings from the case study of the CRSC, focusing on the key themes that emerged from the data. The results are organised around the following areas: (1) the structure and duration of the programme, (2) the management of relapse and the role of family involvement, (3) behavioural changes and habit formation fostered by the programme, (4) the benefits of communal living, and (5) the participants' subjective understanding of success. Each theme highlights how CRSC's approach contributes to holistic recovery and long-term rehabilitation. Additionally, the study underscores the importance of cultural relevance in treatment frameworks, particularly in the Indian context, where family and community play central roles in an individual's recovery journey.

Rehabilitation Programme Structure and Duration

A key theme that emerged was the structured four-stage approach undertaken to facilitate a holistic recovery and reintegration into society. Bahara (2011) substantiates the structured approach by highlighting the importance of tailored, comprehensive set-ups within community-based intervention models. The programme's success lies in its ability to address addiction through a combination of personal accountability, communal support, and gradual reintegration, which are embedded in its four-stage framework.

The first stage (forty-five days), focuses on self-improvement where patients engage in input sessions and receive feedback from each other. These foster self-awareness, emotional healing, and accountability, with counsellors tracking progress and updating families. Subsequent stages are completed within a discretionary period of time up to the progress of the patient.

In the second stage, patients take on entry-level roles, such as managing housekeeping or laundry, before progressing to leadership positions like Heads of Department (HoDs). This structure instils a sense of responsibility and purpose, as noted by Rahul: "First, an individual is made a general member in a department… after that individual has been with that department for a while, the counsellors will consult one another and make him the HoD of that department". By gradually increasing responsibilities, the programme helps patients rebuild their self-esteem and develop skills that are essential for long-term recovery.

The third and fourth stages of the programme introduce increased responsibilities and volunteer opportunities for patients, including mentoring new members and engaging in external tasks such as procuring supplies for the Centre. These activities serve as a bridge to reintegration, allowing patients to step outside the Centre while remaining within a supportive framework. Many patients emphasised that the fourth stage provided a crucial transition period, enabling them to navigate real-world triggers with confidence and reduced risk of relapse. This structured yet flexible approach ensures that patients are not abruptly forced back into society but are instead gradually prepared to handle the challenges of daily life without reverting to addictive behaviours.

With the completion of the four stages, patients can transition into staff or outreach roles, further supporting their reintegration; however, participants expressed concerns that the current six-month duration is insufficient, advocating for at least eighteen months to reinforce growth and ensure sustained recovery. Additionally, they highlighted the importance of flexible durations and greater biological family involvement to further their recovery journey before reintegrating into society.

The findings underscore the importance of structured, staged approaches to rehabilitation, demonstrating how communal responsibilities, and gradual reintegration contribute to sustained recovery. By addressing the physical, psychological, and social dimensions of addiction, the programme creates a supportive environment that not only rehabilitates the individual but also empowers individuals to rebuild their lives. This highlights the need for further research into multi-stage frameworks within Indian rehabilitative contexts, particularly those that prioritise holistic and community-driven approaches.

Relapse Management and Family Involvement

Managing relapse is a critical aspect of the Centre's rehabilitation process. While the programme does not differentiate based on their substance use history or dual diagnoses, it employs specific interventions to support those undergoing relapse or struggling with complex psychological needs. As Rohan noted, "the treatment is the same for everyone, and everyone is treated together;" however, additional measures are in place to help relapsed patients reintegrate into the programme and address the underlying causes of their relapse.

One of the primary interventions for relapsed patients is the provision of "detoxification beds," specialised spaces where patients can rest and receive medical supervision during withdrawal. Located in the main hall, these beds allow relapsed patients to receive peer and counsellor support, reinforcing a sense of belonging and accountability. The "caring department," comprising patients further along in recovery, assists with medication management and emotional support, fostering mutual responsibility.

Another significant intervention is the use of companions for both relapsed and new patients. Companions help newcomers acclimatise to the Centre's routines and communal living, ensuring they understand the workings of the "family" structure. Reflecting on the arrival of new patients at the rehabilitation centre, Rohan explained that a newcomer "has no idea how the house works or how the family functions. So basically, the companion is important to introduce him to the workings of the household and the family." This fictive kinship (Osborne & Leone, 2024; Wang, 2023) modelled after a family dynamic, fosters a supportive environment where patients learn to care for one another and take collective responsibility for their shared space.

Individual counselling further aids relapse management with in-house counsellors dedicating additional time and effort to relapsed patients, providing them with the motivation and guidance needed to

re-engage with the programme. Despite setbacks, relapsed patients quickly reintegrate, demonstrating the effectiveness of structured communal support.

Family involvement, both within the CRSC "family" and the patient's biological family, is integral to the recovery process. CRSC educates biological families on the risks of premature programme withdrawal, since premature withdrawal significantly increases relapse likelihood (Rolová et al., 2023). Through this integrated approach, the Centre not only addressed the immediate challenges of relapse but also equipped patients with the tools and relationships needed for sustained recovery and reintegration into society.

Behavioural Changes and Habit Formation Fom the Programme

The Centre's structured daily routines significantly impacted patients' behaviour and lifestyle, and fostered mutual respect and accountability, which are essential elements for long-term recovery and personal growth.

A typical morning began with a fixed wake-up time, followed by a morning session with in-house counsellors to address communal problems. Patients then engaged in a series of structured activities, including group therapy, individual counselling, and skill-building workshops, as well as assigned tasks such as cleaning, or managing supplies. These tasks are not merely chores but integral to the programme's philosophy of fostering responsibility and self-reliance. Throughout the week, patients participate in varied activities, such as vocational training, creative workshops, and family visits, ensuring they remain engaged and purposeful.

Interviews with patients revealed how these routines helped them realise the differences in their attitudes and lifestyles compared to their lives before joining the Centre. Small but impactful habits, such as waking up on time and actively participating in assigned tasks, allowed patients to regain a sense of structure and direction, elements often missing in their lives prior to treatment. Patients were also allocated duties and responsibilities in roles not initially skilled at or interested in, which helped them appreciate and hone new abilities. By participating in chores, participants became aware of their shortcomings prior to treatment. For example, Vikram reflected on how participating in chores made him aware of his previous selfish behaviours:

"If my sister is mopping and yelling that I am walking around, I'm not really paying any attention to her. Today, I tend to understand that if I'm mopping the floor and someone is walking over it, then you are going to be irritable. The smallest things are basic manners that are recently forgotten when you are so addicted are what are taught here."

Counsellors regularly remind patients to consider not only their own needs but also the well-being of those around them, further reinforcing this sense of communal accountability.

The programme's interventions also worked to address the root causes of addiction, emphasising behaviour and personality modification. Patients struggling with impulsivity are taught to pause and reflect before acting, often through mindfulness exercises and role-playing scenarios. Those with low self-esteem are given opportunities to take on leadership roles, such as Heads of Department, which helps rebuild confidence and a sense of purpose. As Kiran noted, "the main aim of the treatment is towards your behaviour…working towards correcting those [behaviours] that had gone astray during your [substance] using."

These changes aligned with Mamba et al.'s (2020) argument that while medication-assisted treatments (MAT) are effective in reducing opioid use, many individuals with opioid use disorder also have complex psychological and social needs that MAT alone cannot address. Behavioural interventions, like those employed at the Centre, provide a more comprehensive approach by tackling the underlying psychological and social factors contributing to addiction. By instilling habits and creating a supportive environment, the programme equips individuals for long-term recovery, offering a model for enhancing rehabilitation frameworks.

Benefits of Communal Living

Communal living, within this context, refers to a shared structured environment where patients reside together in a family-like setting. This model emphasises mutual support, accountability, and collective responsibility, creating a nurturing space for individuals to recover from addiction. By engaging in communal activities, patients learn to cooperate, and develop a sense of mutual accountability. As Rahul noted, "Here, they are teaching you to eat with one another, take care of one another—be aware of things happening around you…All of these things are something you start to consider when living with one another."

One of the key benefits of communal living is the connection it fosters between patients and the outside world. Through community-based activities, patients gradually reintegrate into social norms and responsibilities, preparing them for life beyond the Centre. Tasks such as cooking and managing supplies are not just chores but opportunities to practice teamwork, responsibility, and accountability, helping patients re-establish a sense of purpose and direction, often lost during addiction.

The findings underscore the significance of communal living in creating a supportive and accountable environment, where patients develop a sense of responsibility and connection. While existing research highlights the importance of peer support in addiction recovery (Horvath et al., 2019; Eddie et al., 2019), there is limited evidence on how communal living facilitates such support within structured rehabilitative frameworks. At the Centre, the communal living model is designed to replicate a family dynamic, where patients take on roles and responsibilities that mirror those of a household. This fictive kinship (Osborne & Leone, 2024; Wang, 2023) structure fosters mutual care and accountability, creating a sense of belonging that is crucial for long-term recovery.

The support provided by this community-rehabilitation system is particularly vital for patients recovering from addiction, as it helps them remain focused and motivated throughout their journey. Participants reported that living in communal settings allowed them to move beyond self-centred behaviours, which they often associated with their addiction. By taking on roles such as caring for others, managing household tasks, and supporting peers, patients developed a sense of empathy and responsibility. As Kiran explained, "Living here has allowed me to look beyond myself and take care of others. It's made me think about how I can care for my own family and children in the future."

Communal living also connects patients to the outside world through activities that mirror real-life responsibilities. This fosters a sense of ownership and reliance on peers, creating a network of support critical for overcoming addiction. Research by Beaudoin et al. (2022) supports this, showing that peer engagement significantly promotes treatment adherence.

Understanding of Success

The concept of success within the CRSC's rehabilitation programme is deeply personal and subjective, reflecting individual rather than collective definitions. Moving beyond conventional metrics (e.g., sobriety rates), success is framed as an abstract and ongoing process, encompassing milestones like living in the present, gaining familial recognition, and reintegrating into society. This shift away from outcome-driven measures aligns with the programme's holistic approach, which prioritises the emotional, social, and psychological dimensions of recovery over rigid clinical benchmarks.

A recurring theme among interviewees was the importance of living in the present, with many defining success as the ability to navigate one day at a time. As Rohan noted, "Success is the passage of one day." This focus on the here-and-now reflects the programme's emphasis on mindfulness and self-reflection, which help patients avoid repeating past mistakes.

Others highlighted self-awareness and the willingness to seek help as pivotal moments of their recovery. For some, success also meant the ability to replicate structured routines in their daily lives after leaving the programme.

Familial acceptance also emerged as key markers of success. Amit explained, "I put more focus on improving myself so that my family can be confident enough to say that I am much better." This emphasis on familial acceptance aligns with the cultural values of collectivist societies like India, where family plays a central role in an individual's

identity and well-being.

By framing success as an abstract and personal concept, CRSC empowers patients to define their own paths to recovery, fostering a sense of ownership. This approach enhances the programme's effectiveness reinforcing broader goals of community-led, holistic rehabilitation.

A key point that emerged through direct observation was the absence of women patients at the Centre, highlighting broader systemic issues relating to the availability and accessibility of treatment for women in India. Discussions with in-house counsellors revealed that societal barriers, such as stigma, privacy concerns, and familial opposition, often prevent women from seeking treatment. Counsellors also expressed a preference for working with male patients, citing past experiences where female patients were perceived as more likely to manipulate systems to leave treatment prematurely. This observation aligns with Balhara's (2014) findings, which report higher dropout rates among female patients due to societal stigma and restricted access to care. The underreporting of female substance abuse and its consequences, such as domestic violence, further exacerbates the issue (Singh et al., 2007). These findings underscore the urgent need for gender-sensitive interventions that mitigate stigma and create inclusive, supportive rehabilitation models for women.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study offer new insights into the effectiveness of community-based rehabilitation models, especially in the Indian context, where such research is scarce. While existing literature (Gururaj et al., 2020; Balhara, 2011) document the prevalence of substance abuse and the barriers that exist to treatment, few explore the operational mechanisms of these community-based rehabilitation models. This study addresses this gap by providing a detailed examination of CRSC's therapeutic community model, highlighting how structured routines, communal living, and family involvement contribute to holistic recovery.

One of the key contributions of this research is its emphasis on the cultural relevance of the rehabilitation framework. Unlike many Western models, prioritising individualistic approaches to treatment, CRSC's model aligns with India's collectivist social structure, where family and community play central roles in an individual's identity and well-being. This differs from previous research (Hubbard et al., 2003; Kleber, 2008; Balhara, 2014), which often overlooked cultural dimensions of treatment, particularly in non-Western contexts. By demonstrating then, how communal living and "family" involvement can foster a sense of belonging and accountability, this study provides a nuanced understanding of how culturally relevant frameworks can enhance treatment outcomes.

The subjective definitions of success within CRSC also are important aspects of the research. While existing literature tends to prioritise measurable outcomes such as sobriety rates (Bunt et al., 2014), this study highlights the importance of personal growth, self-reflection, and reintegration into society as markers of success. This perspective allows us to better understand addiction recovery that goes beyond clinical metrics, emphasising the emotional and social dimensions of healing. For example, participants in this study defined success in terms of living in the present, gaining familial recognition, and developing a sense of responsibility, elements that are often overlooked in traditional outcome-driven models.

That said, the study's reliance on a small sample size, many of whom were batch-holders (e.g., Heads of Departments), limits the generalisability of the findings. As Degenhardt et al. (2019) and McKnight et al. (2018) highlight, smaller sample sizes in addiction research can restrict the ability to generalise findings and detect significant effects. Additionally, the potential for social desirability bias among participants, who may have felt pressured to present the Centre positively, could lead to an overestimation of the programme's effectiveness. Furthermore, the study did not account for confounding variables such as co-occurring mental health issues or socio-economic differences, which can significantly influence treatment outcomes. For instance, Kelly et al. (2020) found that individuals with co-occurring mental health issues were less likely to complete addiction treatment programmes and more likely to experience relapse. These limitations underscore the need for future research with larger, more diverse samples and robust methodologies to validate these findings.

Despite these constraints, the study sheds light on the role of communal living in fostering long-term recovery, an area that has received limited attention in existing research. While peer support is widely recognised as a key factor in addiction recovery (Eddie et al., 2019; Horvath et al., 2019), few studies have explored how communal living environments facilitate such support within structured rehabilitative frameworks. The Centre's use of a family dynamic, where patients take on roles and responsibilities that mirror those of a household, provides a unique model for fostering mutual care and accountability. This differs from previous research, which often focuses on individual therapy or medication-assisted treatments without considering the broader social context of recovery.

This study also brings to light the systemic barriers faced by women in accessing rehabilitation services, a critical issue that has been under-researched in the Indian context. While existing studies have documented the stigma and societal challenges that prevent women from seeking treatment (Balhara, 2014; Singh et al., 2007), few have explored the practical implications of these barriers within community-based rehabilitation centres. By drawing attention to the absence of female patients at the Centre and the counsellors' preference for working with male patients, this study underscores the urgent need for gender-sensitive interventions and inclusive rehabilitative models.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the field of substance abuse and community-based rehabilitation by offering insights into how culturally relevant frameworks can enhance addiction recovery. It highlights how communal living, family involvement, and structured routines foster long-term recovery within the Indian context, where collectivist values shape individual well-being.

By examining the Community Rehabilitation and Support Centre's therapeutic community model, this study underscores the importance of social integration in rehabilitation, moving beyond only clinical, outcome-driven approaches. The findings suggest that community-based interventions, when effectively structured, can address emotional, social, and psychological dimensions of addiction, offering a more holistic alternative to traditional treatment models.

However, the study also reveals systemic barriers to accessibility, particularly for women seeking treatment. The absence of female patients at the Centre highlights gender disparities in rehabilitation access, emphasising the need for inclusive, gender-sensitive interventions that account for stigma, privacy concerns, and familial opposition. Addressing these barriers is critical for ensuring equitable access to addiction treatment.

Moving forward, future research should focus on scaling community-based rehabilitation models, evaluating their long-term effectiveness, and adapting them to diverse populations, including rural communities

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Appendix
Research and interviewees

1. Paracon 2023 lecture by internationally renowned speaker and ghost and alien investigator.
This individual is particularly influential across online supernatural and extraterrestrial communities, and is responsible for some of the television media other enthusiasts attribute to initially drawing their interest.
North American. Male. Theories adhered to 'Woo' ideologies.

2. Interview with Bigfoot believer and experiencer.
Interviewee regularly attends Bigfoot conventions and maintains a strong presence in large, and small, tribal online communities.
North American. Male. Theories adhered to 'Woo' ideologies.

3. Interview with believer and experiencer of ghosts, aliens, and Bigfoot.
Interviewee and his family claim to regularly encounter such creatures, they are deeply entwined with their worldview. Furthermore, Interviewee is involved in organised creature hunts, and is an active member of online 'Woo' communities.
North American. Male. Theories adhered to 'Woo' ideologies.

4. Interview with Bigfoot experiencer, expert, and public speaker.
Interviewee regularly attends conventions, and chairs a group dedicated to the scientific study of cryptozoology. Members of this group include many anonymous scientists concerned that their pseudoscientific interests will damage their academic credibility.
North American. Female. Theories adhered to scientific/ 'Flesh-and-blood' ideologies.

5. Interview with Bigfoot hunter and public speaker.
Interviewee is influential across online Bigfoot communities as his YouTube Channel has thousands of subscribers.
North American. Male. Theories adhered to supernatural ideologies.

6. Interview with published anthropologist and notable Bigfoot expert working as Tribal Relations Manager for the United States Forest Service.
Interviewee is a Bigfoot believer and hunter, and has written multiple books about the belief among Native Americans.
North American. Female. Theories adhered to scientific/ 'Flesh-and-blood' ideologies.

7. Interview with Bigfoot hunter.
Interviewee also uploads to a YouTube Channel and co- hosts a cryptozoology podcast.
North American. Male. Theories adhered to scientific/ 'Flesh-and-blood' ideologies.

8. Interview with Ghost believer and experiencer.
Interviewee engages in practices of interacting with ghosts, such as seance and astral projection.
British. Female. Theories adhered to supernatural ideologies.

9. Interview with Ghost experiencer, medium, and clairvoyant.
Interviewee reported encountering and communicating with ghosts throughout their life, attributing this to some sort of familial attribute, as his sister is also a medium.
British. Male. Theories adhered to supernatural ideologies.

10. Interview with Ghost believer and experiencer.
Interviewee told me experiences with the ghosts of dead relatives and how such events have changed their life.
British. Male. Theories adhered to scientific/ 'Flesh-and-blood' ideologies.

11. Spirit medium of a mediumship evening I attended in Herefordshire.
The event was well- attended, the medium moved around the guests until she felt a strong enough "connection", at which point she would discuss the opinions of an individual's spiritual relatives with them for an estimated period of eight minutes.
British. Female. Theories adhered to supernatural ideologies, although, this is inferred from the way the medium discussed the spirits and the spirit realm's interactions with our own. She did not offer any specific explanation for what a spirit is, beyond the sustained personality of someone who has died.