ARIZONA JOURNAL OF
INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

We are pleased to present the 11th edition of the Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies.

It has been a tremendous honor to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of the Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies. As the last remaining member from the editorial team since the journal's revival in 2021—led by Robert Lowell— I've had the opportunity to witness the journal's growth over the past four years. Volume 11 is especially meaningful to me, as it represents the culmination of years of dedication and evolution. While the journal has always acted as a platform for amplifying undergraduate research, I've watched it become something more: recognizable and connected to the campus community. This year, AJIS received a wider pool of submissions and proudly introduced new opportunities for student engagement with undergraduate research through our Research Showcase.

I am certain AJIS will continue to flourish under future leadership, and I'm excited to see how the journal's legacy is carried forward. With that being said, I'd like to express my deepest thanks to Angela Tatsch (Assistant Editor-in-Chief) and the editorial team for their hard work throughout our rigorous review process. Each of you has made a meaningful impact, and it has been an absolute privilege to serve alongside you. I also want to thank our graphic designer whose creativity brought Volume 11 to life.

The Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies would not be possible without the generous support of our sponsors. On behalf of the team, I extend our gratitude to The Office of Societal Impact and our advisor, Courtney Leligdon. Your mentorship and funding has played a vital role in the success of AJIS, and we cannot thank you all enough. We also thank the Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry for their support in printing hard copies of Volume 11 and past editions. And finally, we are grateful for Ellen Dubinsky, from the University of Arizona Libraries, for her support throughout the publication process.

Leaving AJIS is bittersweet, but I do so knowing that it is being left in strong hands and on an even stronger path. My hope is that AJIS will continue to grow as a space that uplifts undergraduate voices, where bold ideas are celebrated and curiosity never ends. Here's to the future of undergraduate research— and I'm grateful to have left a mark on it.

Ayah Ghannam
Editor-in-Chief, Spring 2025

Introduction from the Office of Societal Impact

The Office of Societal Impact, housed within the Office of Research, Innovation, and Impact, is proud to continue supporting the Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (AJIS). Each year, AJIS provides a critical platform for undergraduate researchers to share their work, challenge dominant narratives, and contribute meaningfully to scholarly and societal discourse.

The 2025 issue features powerful contributions that reflect the journal's commitment to amplifying student voices, particularly those exploring the structural inequities and cultural dynamics that shape lived experience. This year's authors examine the far-reaching impacts of abortion legislation, interrogate gender narratives in children's literature, expose the ethical failures of global art markets, highlight healthcare inequities facing Indigenous communities, and assess the neurological and relational consequences of verbal abuse. These articles take a cross-disciplinary approach to timely and pressing issues, demonstrating both academic rigor and a deep sense of social responsibility.

As a land-grant, American Indian and Alaska Native-Serving, and Hispanic Serving Institution, the University of Arizona is uniquely positioned to support research that engages with issues of equity, justice, and access. The work featured in this year's journal reflects those values and contributes to ongoing efforts to cultivate inclusive, research-rich environments across campus.

We are especially proud of this year's editorial team for their dedication, professionalism, and creativity. Under the leadership of Editor-in-Chief Ayah Ghannam, the team welcomed new members, refined editorial processes, and ensured the thoughtful curation of this year's publication. Their efforts culminated in another successful year of AJIS and continued momentum for the future of the journal.

We are also excited to celebrate the continued tradition of hosting the AJIS Showcase, where authors have the opportunity to present their work to the broader campus and community. These events provide an invaluable space for public scholarship, dialogue, and recognition of the remarkable research happening at the undergraduate level.

To the authors, thank you for sharing your insight, research, and passion. Your work represents the best of what interdisciplinary scholarship can offer. To the graduating editors and contributors, we extend our warmest congratulations and best wishes in your future endeavors.

Please join us in celebrating the publication of the 2025 edition of the Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies and in applauding the incredible efforts of this year's editorial team.

Sincerely,

Courtney Leligdon | she, her, hers
Undergraduate Research Coordinator
Office of Societal Impact

Kimberly Sierra | she, her, hers
Director, Undergraduate Research & Inquiry Office of
Societal Impact

RESEARCH, INNOVATION & IMPACT
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Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry Letter of Support

On behalf of the Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry, we are proud to support the Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies (AJIS) and celebrate the eleventh issue of this student-directed publication. This undergraduate journal strives to build bridges between the arts, social sciences, humanities, and science through showcasing student interdisciplinary work. This journal enhances learning, fosters critical thinking, and prepares students for future academic or professional endeavors.

The Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry is a physical and intellectual home for the arts, humanities, and social sciences at the University of Arizona. We are housed within the Office of Research, Innovation, and Impact. Our programs support faculty and students' artistic and scholarly endeavors, addressing some of society's grand challenges.

The Confluencenter is, now more than ever, committed to support students' creative inquiry into some of society's grand challenges. We are delighted to have met with Editor-in-Chief Ayah Ghannam and her team, who have shown their passion for undergraduate research and have brought the journal to life in creative and innovative ways. We are impressed with the students presenting their accomplishments, their upcoming showcase, and their future plans to grow the journal. This cohort's dedication to cross-collaboration, intellectual curiosity and rigor, and to supporting and promoting the interdisciplinary work of their fellow students, reflects the core values of the journal and of the Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry.

We are proud to participate in this year's edition, by supporting the team with innovative ideas for the future of the journal. Join me in applauding the inspiring student editors, graphic designer, authors and campus partners, as we continue this collaboration toward supporting innovative, interdisciplinary student scholarship.

Sincerely,

Javier Duran, Ph.D.
Director of the Confluencenter for Creative Inquiry

Staff

Volume 11, Spring 2025
Arizona Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies

Contents

Emilee Foster

Abortion Restrictions and Their Impact on Society

Abstract

In the wake of the 2022 United States Supreme Court decision that overturned the long-standing precedent of Roe v. Wade, subsequent anti-abortion legislation has engendered pervasive and lasting consequences throughout society, particularly through harms disproportionately experienced by marginalized individuals and communities. The study draws upon extensive qualitative and quantitative data, synthesized to illustrate the overarching implications of abortion restrictions across communities and state lines. It addresses the classification of abortion as healthcare, the rising number of "maternity deserts", and the compounding economic strain on individuals already vulnerable to poverty. This paper also surveys existing literature on the often-overlooked impacts of abortion restrictions on men and their opportunities for educational attainment and economic mobility, as well as the intergenerational hardships resulting from limited and increasingly restricted access to abortion care. These findings underscore that ensuring access to safe and legal abortions remains a collective imperative. Abortion bans should not be viewed solely as issues affecting women, but urgent policy crises that have wide-ranging impacts on all sectors and members of society.

In 2022, the United States Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, and the consequences will last for generations. For fifty years, Roe v. Wade guaranteed access to safe and legal abortions under the law. The decision was based on the Due Process Clause of the 14th Amendment of the United States Constitution, as it protects the right to privacy. This right to privacy served as the foundation for Roe v. Wade, extending to those seeking abortions, women (and people who could become pregnant) often relied on the precedent of Roe v. Wade to ensure access to a vital component of their reproductive health and their overall societal prosperity. However, concurrently with the era of Roe v. Wade, religious institutions created a cultural atmosphere of fervent efforts to legally chip away at Roe v. Wade to collapse it entirely. In 2022, amidst the backdrop of religious pressures, the Supreme Court ultimately ruled that the right to obtain an abortion is not guaranteed by the Constitution, and a five-justice majority overturn-ed the Court's decision from 1973. This reversal of legal precedent stripped away the right to bodily autonomy for many Americans overnight. Despite common rhetoric claiming abortions are a societal blight and an extreme evil (rhetoric chiefly promulgated by ultra-conservative religious organizations), abortion bans are incredibly harmful to women and families. Such harms include damaging effects on local healthcare systems, adverse outcomes to the physical and mental well-being of individuals, unfavorable setbacks to socioeconomic security, and ingrained and inter-generational cycles of poverty. Therefore, banning access to abortions is not just detrimental to women, but negatively influences all members of society.

Primarily, abortion is a medical procedure and a healthcare issue. Between 2020 and 2021, the number of abortions increased by 5% in the United States and 626,000 abortions were report-ed in 2021 alone (Harris, 2024). Notably, the term 'reported' indicates that this figure may not

account for unreported or self-managed abortions. Given its prevalence, abortion is not only a common medical procedure but also a necessary component of reproductive healthcare. There are two primary methods for administering abortions within a clinical setting: medication or surgical.

According to Jung et al. (2023), medication abortions, which require taking a prescribed dose of mifepristone and misoprostol (that aid in expelling the uterine contents), accounted for 54% of all United States abortions in 2020 (Jung et al., p. 4). Furthermore, Jung et al. detailed the process of a typical procedural abortion and its efficiency:

"The clinician dilates the cervix mechanically, with tapered dilators, and then places a cannula to the uterine fundus. The cannula is then attached to either a manual or an electromechanical suction device and is rotated to empty the contents of the uterus . . . The procedure can be very brief (<5 minutes)"

Surgical abortions can also be effective for treating early pregnancy loss or an incomplete medication abortion (Jung et al., p. 6). Both of these procedures, deemed safe when performed by healthcare professionals, are essential for many women and play a critical role in maintaining their overall reproductive health. Furthermore, the reasons women have for seeking abortions vary but are overall consistent historically. According to a 2009 paper by Kirkman et al., research at that time indicated that decisions to seek abortions were influenced by factors such as personal well-being, timing, material readiness, responsibility to existing children, and the impact on significant others (Kirkman et al., p.13). This research suggests that various factors influence .

the decision to seek abortion care, which are specific to individual needs and personal situations. Ultimately, understanding the complexity of these decisions is essential in providing compassionate, supportive care and ensuring that women have access to the healthcare services they need.

Denying access to this critical component of healthcare has dire consequences, chiefly in communities where abortion care is only one component of an overall suite of services a practice may provide. One of the most destructive outcomes on reproductive health clinics was in the form of Targeted Restrictions of Abortion Providers (TRAP). Before the overturn of Roe V. Wade, TRAP laws were set in place to purposely overregulate clinics to the point of closure by introducing excessively burdensome alterations to clinics on administrative and structural levels, which often resulted in total clinic closures (Calkin, 2019). When local practices shut down, other healthcare services disappeared alongside them, including testing for sexually transmitted infections (STIs), gynecological care, and critical preventative tests, such as cancer screenings (Watkins-Hayes & Adams-Santos, 2023). In states that severely restrict abortion care, established experts and other reproductive physicians tend to depart from those states. Emerson found that from 2004 to 2014, there was a 10% decrease in available obstetric services in rural areas, and these numbers increased exponentially in the following years (McIntyre & Ward, 2024). Furthermore, new physicians seeking to begin their careers tend not to establish practices in rural areas already lacking key obstetric infrastructure (Calkin, 2019). Restricting access to abortion results in an increasingly arduous task of recruiting and hiring physicians in such counties (Kapadia, 2022).

When reproductive healthcare providers are not present in a given location, women residing in those areas are unable to receive the care they require and often face more barriers to accessing their healthcare than they would otherwise. This drain on medical professionals and infrastructure results in what has become known as "maternity deserts." According to McIntyre and Ward (2024), a maternity desert:

"a term used to describe the lack of birthing center or hospital and obstetric provider access by county. The larger the distance between a birthing center or hospital with obstetric services, the more impact the maternity desert has on the residents of that county". (p. 1)

Furthermore, given the lack of physicians and reproductive health resources in regions with severe abortion restrictions, women face few other choices than to seek care outside of their geographic locale. For those compelled to travel out of state for abortion care, the journey can be costly and stressful (Watkins-Hayes & Adams-Santos, 2023). As of 2022, 54% of women in the United States were forced to travel significant distances for their reproductive care (Lenharo, 2022). As of 2019, there were maternity deserts in 27 states, which resulted in women needing to travel over 100 miles to reach the nearest clinic (Rodgers et al., 2021). Additionally, these types of burdens disproportionately affect low-income and other marginalized women who do not have adequate access to time and resources to facilitate out-of-state abortion care (Rodgers, et al., 2021). This overall lack of access to reproductive health— especially in under-resourced states— is a significant barrier to women's well-being and an undue burden that can result in other deleterious outcomes and a significant decrease in quality of life for women. Denying women access to abortion care causes a notable decline in their mental heal-

-th. The psychological effects on women associated with denying abortion care are important to understand. Such effects include increased anxiety, stress, lower self-esteem, and a decreased sense of life centered satisfaction as compared to peers who were able to access abortion care (Worrell, 2023). Women who were already at risk of an adverse mental health condition or those who had previously experienced trauma were at a greater risk of suffering the psychological ramifications of an inability to access abortion care (Tobón et al., 2023). Further-more, Tobón et al. elucidated the societal stigma on women who sought abortions and their anxiety around feeling "looked down upon" (2023, p. 3). These subsequent psychological distresses are a serious issue and can lead to unfavorable out-comes for women's quality of life. It is important to understand the impact on mental health when considering abortion bans.

One must also consider the physical ramifications to women when restricting access to safe and legal abortions. A statistic from a study in Wisconsin concluded that "91% of physicians believed over-turning Roe v. Wade would worsen health care for women" (Kapadia, 2022, p.2). Abortion restrictions could also result in pregnant women seeking more dire measures, including unlawful and unregulated abortion procedures or performing self-managed abortions (Vilda et al., 2021). Furthermore, as pregnancy itself is already a health risk that could result in complications for both mothers and infants, it is important to understand how restricting abortion access can further endanger women. Aside from an increase in other adverse outcomes as a result of being pregnant, the most serious of all risks is death (Lantz et al., 2023). The mortality rate for childbirth in the wake of state-wide abortion bans is expected to increase the mortality rate for pregnant women to 14%, with Black women being the most at risk for

maternal mortality, as they are three times more likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth as compared to their White counterparts (Lantz et al., p. 291). Moreover, women of color, especially Black women, are already susceptible to or living in poverty (Vilda et al., 2021, p.288). The overall consequence of barring access to life saving abortion care, especially given the established risks of pregnancy, is a health crisis.

However, while it is imperative to understand the damage to women's health and well-being, restricting access to abortion also carries additional far-reaching consequences that directly impact other members and components of society. In the wake of abortion restrictions, the economic security of both women and men is at risk. Lantz et al. (2023) described the socio-economic effects of restrictive abortion access on people who are likely to be susceptible to un-wanted pregnancies. This demographic includes people who are less economically solvent, and thus most at risk for unintended pregnancy; access to contraception is not easily obtainable in impoverished communities (Lantz et al., 2023). Again, women of color, especially Black women, are more at risk than other demographics, as are those who are already susceptible to or living in poverty (Vilda et al., 2021, p.288). In a 2022 paper, Everett et al. (2022) expanded on this economic component across demographics by demonstrating that even men are subject to the economic pitfalls of abortion bans. This unique research focused on the impacts on men and the disparate economic prospects and outcomes in the context of abortion bans:

"….Cisgender men may experience the consequences of an unwanted pregnancy in a fundamentally different way than woman as they do not fundamentally different way than women as they do not have to physically carry the pregnancy and are less likely to become single parents or the primary caretaker of a child. Higher SES [Socio-economic Status] men may be more adept at avoiding the financial or economic consequences of unplanned pregnancy than their lower SES counterparts, including financial resources or su-pport from their parents to help pay for an abortion or childrearing costs. Third, men from advantaged SES backgrounds, in general, are more likely to go on to graduate from high school and college. Multiple studies have shown that parents' education achievement are powerful cor-relates of their children's SES." (p.14)

Given that men are typically excluded from the discourse surrounding abortion, Everett's research provides a critical highlight to the widespread socioeconomic pitfalls of abortion bans on men as well as women. In low-income families that adhere to traditional gender roles, men may experience more personal and financial strain from the economic consequences of abortion bans.

Additionally, Ruppaner et al. (2021) detailed further economic damages as illustrated by the expenses of childcare and childrearing with a focus on women who were already mothers.

Existing mothers often encounter extant barriers to upward career mobility. Their prosperity in the workforce can also suffer due to a lack of work-life flexibility and other missing benefits such as paid family leave. These barriers can disproportionately affect women from less privileged socioeconomic backgrounds, and their counter- parts (mothers with higher degrees of education and more financial freedom) are better adept at managing these barriers given their access to added and robust resources (Ruppaner et al., 2021). This contrast in access to resources is especially striking in states with the strictest abortion laws, which tend to be states with poorer, less educated

demographics, and more traditional gender nor-ms (Ruppaner et al., 2021). Madden et al. (2024) illustrated that "the most restrictive state group also had the highest percentage of reproductive-age women with income less than 200% of the federal poverty line"(p. 3). As the costs of childcare continue to rise, overall economic hardship cont-inues to disproportionately disadvantage under-privileged and low-income mothers.

Moreover, given the established economic pitfalls in states with the most severe abortion restric-tions, it may seem reasonable to turn to existing social welfare programs to potentially fill the eco-nomic gaps left by abortion bans. Such social welfare programs are essential to helping families in need, such as the popular Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Child-ren (WIC). WIC is a vital government program that provides food assistance and other family-related services and is a crucial resource for those who may fall below the poverty line. Programs like WIC and others intend to help those in need however, an argument often put forward by religious con-servatives is that these social programs should be the sole support structures for women who are denied access to safe and legal abortions. In a 2023 online article by the National Catholic Regis-ter, author Catherine Hadro extolled the virtues of her Christian religion's idealism for such social safety nets, declaring,

"In states where abortion is illegal or largely banned, lawmakers will need to draft laws that provide more resources for fam-ilies with unplanned pregnancies. And in states where abortion remains rampant, pro-life law-makers will need to be creative in how they can save as many lives as possible in a bipartisan way".

However, such comprehensive social systems are not necessarily a viable solution and fall far short of their idealized reality. For example, scholarly literature illustrates this, especially concerning po-orer states and their current wel-fare programs. Lantz et al.(2023) analyzed data from the Turnaway study and concluded that wo-men who were barred from accessing abortion care were more likely to rely upon support from programs such as Supplemental Nutrition Assisted Program (SNAP), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), and Temporary Assistance for Needy Fam-ilies (TANF). Any regular and prolonged reliance on these and other social welfare assistance can put a long-term strain on the programs, parti-cularly in states with strict abortion laws. What is more, poorer states tend to underfund their social programs. Madden et al. (2024) supported this assertion in their analysis using a 3-category rating system for abortion restrictions across the United States. The authors compiled data available from nonpart-isan public organizations and sorted the data into three categories; least, moderate, and severe. This method of data collection enabled them to group all 50 states by their abortion policies and com-pare them to the percentage of the total United States population of reproductive-aged women. This process allowed them to deter-mine how many women were affected by severe abortion restrictions and the state resources available to those who were. They found that in 2020, nearly 32 million women of reproductive capacity resided in the 21 states with the most severe restrictions–states that lacked the most comprehensive public resources (Madden et al., 2024).

Similarly, states with the strictest laws hinder access to contraception, a proven method of preventing unwanted pregnancies. Madden et al. (2024) continued their analysis of state-by-state access to preventative measures, specifically

studying contraceptives. Their research found that states that limit abortion access are far less likely to institute policies that grant pharmacists the ability to prescribe birth control which was at 42.9% versus 82.4% of states with the least restrictive access (Madden et al., 2024, p.8). If public pro-grams that offer affordable and reliable access to contraceptives are not funded in states that already have a poor history of supporting welfare programs, the number of families adversely affected by a lack of access to abortion care will only continue to increase. This reality can be especially detrimental to economically vulnerable mothers and their children who may be unable to escape a subsequent cycle of poverty and overall societal inequity. Poverty is a crisis in the United States that is only worsened by the absence of abortion care. Susceptibility to poverty is particularly common among low-income women who may seek abortion services in the future. Among the number of women who seek abortions, an estimated two-thirds of them already have children (Lantz et al., 2023). A study conducted by the Intergenerational Panel Study of Parents and Children (as cited by Lantz et al.), found that children living in families with the addition of an unwanted child suffer from a lack of important family resources (Lantz et al., 2023). Furthermore, a child born due to a lack of abortion access is "50% more likely to live in poverty," and these circumstances increase the likelihood of childhood neglect and maltreatment which can impact educational prospects and exacerbate future income inequality (Lantz et al., p. 19). In addition to impoverished upbringings, banning abortion may also increase the likelihood of criminal activity for unwanted children. A 2021 comparative study conducted by Rodgers et al. (2021) concluded that legalized abortion coincided with lower crime rates, and in citing a study by Donohue and Levitt (2001), Rodgers et al. detailed a drop in past crime rates as a result of the now overturned Roe v. Wade. They concluded that before abortions were legal, unwanted children who were born into low-income households in underprivileged communities were predisposed to a greater risk of participating in criminal activities as adults (Rodgers et al. 2021). Legalizing abortion reduced the prevalence of unwanted pregnancy and resulted in a subsequent reduction in crime (Rodgers et al., 2021). Vulnerability to poverty and its adverse outcomes are a key impetus for permitting access to safe and legal abortions. The health and socioeconomic consequences for children who are born to families already at risk of poverty increase the likelihood of perpetuating that social inequality. These consequences can have immediate and damaging results in the lives of these children, which can lead to generational cycles of hardship, poor education outcomes, and a risk of engaging in future criminal activity.

The most conservative states uphold the most restrictive policies surrounding abortion access and social services for their residents (Madden et al., 2024). It is in these states where the crisis of poverty is likely to be exacerbated by abortion bans, which jeopardize the overall futures of women, children, and families. Although restricting abortions affects all those who may be vulnerable to such socioeconomic outcomes, members of marginalized communities, particularly Black women, are at greater risk. Access to safe and legal abortions, as well as ensuring ongoing and equitable access to opportunities for economic upward mobility, should be available to all demographics. States should endeavor to provide their citizens with these basic necessities for life satisfaction and overall health. The need for protecting access to these basic fundamentals is critical, especially in a developed nation such as the United States, and failing to do so can have catastrophic consequences on the lives of women and communities far beyond the scope of an unwanted pregnancy.

Scholarly literature proves that the aftermath of abortion bans has drastic effects on all of society. Access to reproductive care is essential for the health and prosperity of individuals, families, and communities. Although the initial damages of restricting abortions affect mothers, they quickly spread to other interlocking components of society. These damages include a depletion of healthcare services by way of professional drain and clinic closures, which leads to an absence of vital healthcare components for women. Abortion restrictions also hinder economic security and may cripple parents' abilities to complete higher education, seek higher-paying jobs, and capitalize on various other economic opportunities. Social welfare programs are subsequently touted as an economic panacea for women and families who are denied abortion access. However, in states with the highest rates of poverty and the strictest abortion bans, these programs are not capable of shouldering that burden. Lastly, the generational ripples of ensuing poverty and childhood neglect begets a negative socioeconomic cycle that is hard to break and can lead to delinquency and criminality. Preventing all of these outcomes is well within the abilities of electorates and governments, and all should aim to keep the spotlight focused on this issue of reproductive healthcare. It is, therefore, incumbent upon all members of communities to ensure that ongoing, safe and legal access to abortion is available to everyone, otherwise, the aftermath may permeate the very foundations of society as a whole.

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Devynn Thurston

"A girl brain but a boy body:" A Critical Analysis of the 'Born in the Wrong Body' Narrative in Children's Literature

Abstract

The widely recognized formula to make elementary education safer, more inclusive, and more supportive for queer and trans students is to expand access to diverse representation. A minimal body of research investigates the nuance of this formula: How does content with LGBTQ+ representation continue to perpetuate boundaries around how children can be in the world? This study examines how children's literature, even when featuring transgender characters, can subtly reinforce narratives that inscribe a one-way medicalized and linear transition across the gender binary. Transition, then, equates to changing a 'wrong' body into a 'right' body. Specifically, this research focuses on the pervasive 'born in the wrong body' narrative and its three themes: gender essentialism, gender binarism, and moving from one fixed destination to another — the dominant means of describing and understanding trans, transgender, and transsexual stories. By conducting critical content analysis of five books marketed as transgender stories, this study investigates how these books interact with the 'born in the wrong body' narrative. The findings will shed light on the potential of both children's literature and education to break down boundaries of beingness and take care of children's (un)gendered creativity. Keywords: born in the wrong body narrative, children's literature, critical content analysis, elementary education, gender essentialism, gender binarism, prefixal trans, transgender studies.

Introduction

For decades, the 'born in the wrong body' narrative has been the dominant means of describing and understanding trans stories (Gill-Peterson, 2018). What is often portrayed in movies, TV shows, autobiographies, documentaries, and children's books is the trans subject looking in the mirror the 'wrong' (gendered/sexed) body reflected back (Dominic, 2021). In turn, these representations reinforce gender essentialism, an idea that inscribes sex and gender as essential or natural truths innate to one's biology/psychology. So too, does it reinforce gender binarism: "[the] idea that there are only two social genders – man and woman – based on two and only two sexes – male and female" (Stryker, 2017, p. 12). Lastly, the 'wrong body' narrative demands the moving from one fixed destination to another, which includes, but is not limited to, moving from one fixed gender/sex to another fixed gender/sex, especially linearly. The enforcement of these three identified themes of the 'wrong body' narrative are, at best, misleading and, at worst, reinforcements of the boundaries of who can be trans and how transness can exist in society.

Research in education points to both the need for and benefit of heightened inclusion of books with LGBTQ+ content in schools to foster supportive environments for all students (Ryan et. al, 2013; Schall & Kauffmann, 2003; Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). However, we have yet to understand how books with LGBTQ+ content are capable of still defining and enforcing how children can *be* in the world. Therefore, this study will employ critical content analysis to identify underlying meanings, assumptions, and larger politics in the selected sources to highlight how children's literature has the potential to define boundaries of how transness can exist in society. By analyzing how books currently interact with the 'wrong body

narrative, this study seeks to more broadly understand the possibilities of how children can enact (un)gendered subjectivity and the capaciousness of transness in the classroom.

Review of Relevant Literature

A Note on Language

Language is a fundamental site – practically, theoretically, politically, and ethically – for the negotiation of meanings in every field of study (Valentine, 2007). Therefore, the terms used throughout this research paper must be defined and relevant literature drawn from to define such terms must be highlighted. Transgender, trans-sexual, and trans may be often thought of as identities or ontologies, but these terms are products of history, thereby social constructions that carry major political and theoretical implications (Valentine, 2007). The language used throughout this study takes a Foucauldian genealogical approach that examines the meanings, values, and investments of naming, labeling, and categorizing. Like Foucault (1978), I am interested in how these categories are not simply a discrete and objective description of the way things are, but rather these categories are productive of the very phenomena they seem to describe. The 'born in the wrong body' narrative carries the same circular logic; it has portrayed self to be a discrete and objective description of the way things are, but it is actually productive of the very phenomena, transness, it seeks to describe. It is vital that I make this point from the beginning because if not, my study would run the risk of producing the same boundaries formed by categorizing and naming that this study seeks to critique.

Transgender, Transsexual, Trans-

First, I start with a brief history of the term 'transgender' in the United States. 'Transgender' originated in the 1970s to describe those who lived full-time in a gender other than the one they were assigned at birth, but without any surgical intervention (Valentine, 2007). In the 1990s, the term evolved into a claim that challenged the notion of 'normal' and constructed a space between, around, or outside of 'transsexual' and 'transvestite' (Stryker, 2017). However, since the mid-1990s, 'transgender' has become widespread in progressive community-based organizations, identity-based political movements, academic debates, and medico-juridical establishments, the very institution to which 'transgender' was originally opposed (Valentine, 2007).

According to Susan Stryker (1994), a definition of transgender, disengaging from the medico-juridical is, "all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries" (p. 251). It is important to note, however, that not all iterations of 'transgender' refer to the process of "queer[ing] socially constructed sex/gender boundaries" (Stryker, 1994, p. 251). It has a very strong meaning in the medical establishment that is strictly limited to a diagnosis of gender dysphoria, which effectively is a medicalized performance of the 'born in the wrong body' narrative. The pathological implications and meanings of 'transgender' are borrowed from its predecessor, 'transsexual' (Gill-Peterson, 2018). 'Transsexual' can be traced back to early sexology research in the early twentieth century. 'Transsexual' is often considered an out-of-date term but has ironically become synonymous with the more contemporary 'transgender' (Stryker, 2017

2017). That is, the two terms have come to mean a "one-way, one-time, medicalized transition across the gender binary" (Stryker, 2017, p. 38). As such, this study uses Stryker's (1994) definition of transgender strategically to disengage with the strong institutional meanings of transgender and to a more broad, all-encompassing sense of the word.

Last, 'trans' or 'transness' is invoked throughout the paper in a capacious sense, referring to how it has been theorized in trans studies, as a prefix or with an asterisk, to mark a political distinction from medical, pathological, and institutional meanings that have been accrued to the term 'transgender' (Gill-Peterson, 2018). This meaning of trans has the capacity to not only mean those who have undergone experiences commonly attributed to transgender people, such as: experiencing constant medical and psychological surveillance; having legislation passed to invalidate one's (gendered) reality; encountering violence on the street because one's voice; body, or manner-isms do not 'match' assessed gender cues (Bey, 2022). But trans also has the capacity to mean those who "deploy their (un)gendered embodiment, (un)gendered intellectual apparatuses, and (un)gendered politics in ways that do the work of transing – a practice that takes place within, as well as across or between, gendered spaces" (Bey, 2022, p. 77). Prefixal trans is a practice that disassembles and reassembles what gender, subjectivity, and gendered subjectivity can mean, functioning as a mode of analysis rather than a mere identity category. This practice does not typically manifest in books marketed to be "transgender" (e.g. featured on a publisher's 'transgender' booklist or put on a front of store display at a bookstore during pride month). Children's books that do the work of transing, as defined above, blur the lines between the real vs. imaginary , possible vs. impossible, powerful vs. powerless, etc. They encourage children to question how things came to be

and show them the tools they possess to create the world around them — some of the most important roles education should play in the young lives of students (Freire, 1970). This includes nurturing (un)gendered creativity, exploring countless ways to be (or not be) (Bey, 2024). Books that do the aforementioned work are already out there (see Jordan, 1971; Limón, 2024 ; Thom, 2017), but by dominant standards would not be considered a "transgender" story. This research paper will utilize all three of these terms: transgender, trans-sexual, and trans (or transness) strategically to carry the meanings described above. While language continues to evolve and meanings of such terms are still under debate, these definitions are strongly rooted in current relevant literature, thereby rooted in historical contextualization, trans theory, gender theory, and queer theory. Recognizing the difference and nuance of each of these terms is important to understanding the 'born in the wrong body' narrative and its evolution.

'Born in the wrong body'

Originating from the medicalized and institutionalized understandings of 'transgender' and 'transsexual,' the 'born in the wrong body' narrative demands, as Stryker (2017) notes, a "one-way, one-time, medicalized transition across the gender binary" (p. 38). This narrative has dominantly defined the boundaries of transness since the mid twentieth century (Gill-Peterson, 2018). It is a historized narrative, not an ontological one, that goes like this: to be trans, transgender, or transexual, one's internal, psychological, or intrinsic gender identity must be mismatched with one's biological sex assigned at birth. Transition, then, is strictly limited to the process of turning one's 'wrong' body into a 'right' body through medical interventions. This narrative is commonly depicted in media where the

trans subject looks in the mirror and sees a body that does not feel like their own, evoking feelings of gender dysphoria (Koch-Rein, 2014). Access to gender-affirming care, space, and the social recognition to move through the world as a *true* and *legible* transgender person hinges on receiving a gender dysphoria diagnosis from a mental health professional (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). This enforcement has made the 'wrong body' narrative the dominant understanding of transness, making it appear to be the most accurate description. Though this narrative is extremely important to some, the 'wrong body' narrative has not become dominant because trans people have made it so; instead, institutions of science, medicine, and psychology have created it. It is a product of pathologizing. To understand how the 'wrong body' narrative became so pervasive, we must look to the invention of sex and gender themselves and their implications for gender essentialism, gender binarism, and the demand of moving from one fixed destination to another. In the mid twentieth century, the concept of gender was introduced to resolve a crisis in the understanding of sex (Gill-Peterson, 2018). Scientific research had revealed that sex was not a simple binary, lacking clear biological or psychological determinants (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). All people are born with variations in chromosomes, genitalia, and gonadal development. Ignoring intrinsic mutability, influential sexologist, Dr. John Money, and his colleagues at Johns Hopkins University invented the concept of gender to reinforce the binary model of sex (Gill-Peterson, 2018). Money (1955) defined gender as the psychosocial dimension of sex, encompassing "all those things that a person says or does to disclose himself or herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman, respectively", (Gill-Peterson, 2018, p. 115). This invention created two dimensions of identity: gender as a psychologically innate 'truth' and sex as a biologically innate 'trut-

'truth,' as well as dictated male and female as fixed destinations to be reached for 'normal' development; however, this notion of gender/sex as an innate 'truth' is flawed, as Bettcher (2014) argues:

How can one take seriously the view that one's self-conception as a bingo player is innate given that bingo and therefore bingo players are cultural creations? To be sure, one might (conceivably) have innate skills that make one a good bingo player (and presumably one would be good at playing similar games as well). But the conception of oneself as a bingo player can't be innate, given bingo itself is a contingent cultural phenomenon. The same is true in the case of gender [and sex]. (p. 388)

While it was Money's gender paradigm that would finally permit medical transition and gender reassignment in the United States on a large scale, ironically, it is the same paradigm that determines the types of trans people eligible for such treatment (Gill-Peterson, 2018). Subsequently, the 'wrong body' narrative and its genesis in gender binaris confines transness to developmental teleologies that culminate in heterosexual masculinity or femininity (Gill-Peterson, 2018). By the end of the 1970s, the 'wrong body' narrative became an inescapable model for trans identity and experience, defining the meaning of legible transness that is now widely represented in children's books.

Children's Literature and Education

Representations of transness in children's literature are not new; representations of gender that blur the lines of gendered subjectivity and normativity have existed for decades (Matthews, 2023). What is a recent phenomenon, though, is the publication of children's picture books explicitly aimed at helping young children conceptualize sex,

gender, and transness. This first began in 2008 with the publication of *10,000 Dresses* by Marcus Ewert, a book about a trans girl who dreams of wearing extravagant dresses. Since then, research in education has highlighted the need for, and benefits of, including LGBTQ+ inclusive books in schools to foster supportive spaces for all (Ryan et. al, 2013; Schall & Kauffmann, 2003; Souto-Manning & Hermann-Wilmarth, 2008). Education scholars argue for a balance of books that operate as mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors (Bishop, 1990). Books act as mirrors when the reader can see their own lives reflected in a book and self-affirm their lives as part of the larger human experience. Books can also act as windows, allowing readers to view familiar or unfamiliar worlds from the outside. Books act as sliding glass doors when readers can walk through in imagination to become part of the world created by the author. Bishop (1990) argues that an ideal children's book for the classroom can serve as a mirror for some students and a window or sliding glass door for others. Yet, a gap remains in understanding how children's books, serving various functions, still reinforce boundaries around how children can be in the world and become apparatuses for how children categorize themselves and others as different.

Previous literature focusing on the content of the books themselves and their representations of transness have looked at how children's books with transgender protagonists or narrators reinforce gender assumptions: the gender binary, gender essentialism, sex/gender congruency, and gender stability (Capuzza, 2020). Another has investigated representations of race, social class, gender identity, and gender performance (Crawley, 2017). And another has looked at how representations of transgender characters have challenged or reinforced the gender binary (Hill, 2023). However, none of these articles study the representations of the 'wrong body' narrative in children's literature and how this single rigid archetype demands normativity and dampens children's (un)gender(ed) creativity.

Investigation

Drawing from the relevant literature, the following are the definitions of the three identified themes of 'wrong body' narratives that will guide this analysis: (1) *Gender essentialism* is the idea that sex and gender are essential or natural *truths* innate to one's biology/psychology. (2) *Gender binarism* is the "idea that there are only two social genders – man and woman – based on two and only two sexes – male and female" (Stryker, 2017, p. 12). (3) *Moving from one fixed destination to another* includes, but is not limited to, moving from one fixed gender/sex to another fixed gender/sex, especially linearly. This study analyzed elementary school picture books marketed to be transgender stories written in English and published between 2014-2019. Books were chosen using GLSEN's National Student Council's "2021 Elementary School Booklist," as GLSEN's work is often used to inform library purchases and elementary school classroom offerings. Using a slightly outdated list, like the 2021 list, also increases the probability these books are now books are now available in schools. GLSEN's Elementary School Booklist contains ten titles. Of the ten titles, five were excluded for falling outside the scope of the study: *And Tango Makes Three*, *A is for Activist*, *Pride: The Story of Harvey Milk and the Rainbow Flag*, *Prince & Knight*, and *Neither*.[1]

This process of elimination resulted in five books that fit more closely under the scope of the study. In the books *I am Jazz, When Aidan Became a Brother,* and *Sam!*, the word "transgender" is featured in the text itself, the author's note, or

both. So, these three books were automatically included under the scope of the study. The books *Introducing Teddy* and *Julián is a Mermaid* do not explicitly include the word "transgender," but are still considered under the scope of the study because they each fall under Stryker's (1994) definition of transgender: "an umbrella term that refers to all identities or practices that cross over, cut across, move between, or otherwise queer socially constructed sex/gender boundaries" (p. 251). The final booklist resulted in five books as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1

Children's Books from the "2021 Elementary School Book List" (GLSEN, 2021)

Title of Book	Author(s)	Illustrator	Year of Publication	Publisher
I Am Jazz	Jessica Herthal, Jazz Jennings	Shelagh McNicholas	2014	Dial Books
Introducing Teddy	Jessica Walton	Dougal MacPherson	2016	Bloomsbury USA Childrens
Julián is a Mermaid	Jessica Love	Jessica Love	2018	Candlewick
When Aidan Became a Brother	Kyle Lukoff	Kaylanni Juanita	2019	Lee & Low Books
Sam!	Dani Gabriel	Robert Liu-Trujillo	2019	Penny Candy Books

Analysis of the Textual and Visual Content

To analyze the books, the study conducted a critical content analysis of texts to explore the underlying messages within those works, espec- aally related to issues of power. Texts are read against the social/historical background to which they are produced, with particular attention devo- ted to considering the data *with* theory as we analyze, not just before and after the data is reviewed (Short, 2017). Following Paulo Freire (1970), the "critical" lens of critical content analy- sis involves critique (questioning 'truth', what is, and who benefits), hope (asking what if and consi- dering new possibilities), and action (taking action for reconstruction) (Short, 2017, p. 5-6). The initial reading of each book considered both textual and visual content simultaneously in recognition that text and visuals work together to convey deeper meanings (Snipe, 1998). I first approached the texts as a reader, noting personal reactions and reflections. These initial observa- tions were recorded through annotations directly on the book pages (Short, 2017). A second reading focused on uncovering the implicit meanings embedded within the textual and visual content. This analysis draws on Short's (2017) suggested lines of inquiry: focalization (Whose story is told?

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[1] I use the term "destination" strategically to encompass the various signifiers that allude to moving from one fixed gender/sex to another. In this study, it is important to distinguish that these signifiers are not in fact gender/sex. For example, in *I Am Jazz*, the visual content uses blue and pink colors to allude to moving from one fixed gender/sex (blue) to another fixed gender/sex (pink), when color is not gender/sex, it is a color. Instead I understand color, for example, as a more broadly understood "destination." If I were to define Jazz's move from one fixed color to another as moving from one fixed gender identity to another, this would reinforce the assumption that colors do define gender/sex instead of upholding that such distinctions about what a 'boy' is and what a 'girl' is are historicized ideas rooted in social culture and traditions. Additionally, if I were to define this theme as moving from one fixed gender identity to another it would belie the aim of my critique of the 'wrong body narrative' because it too implies that gender inherently engenders a 'right' body and a 'wrong' body.

From whose point of view?), social processes of characters (Who has power? Who has agency?), and closure (How is the story resolved? What are the assumptions in the story closure?) as well as genre and the intended audience. I filled out a worksheet responding to these lines of inquiry for each of the five books. From these steps, I identified key quotes and images that reinforce or challenge each of the three identified themes (gender essentialism, gender binarism, and moving from one fixed destination to another).

Gender Essentialism

The first important theme of the 'wrong body' narrative is the underlying logic that makes the narrative so, gender essentialism. In *I am Jazz*, the protagonist, Jazz, also the co-author of the book, describes the reason why she is different from other "girls" is that "I have a girl brain but a boy body. This is called transgender. I was born this way!" (Herthal & Jennings, 2014, p.10). This quote is full of essentialist assumptions. First, it assumes there is something about her brain that makes it "girl," then it assumes there is something about her body that makes it "boy." However, as the literature review demonstrated "girl brain" and "boy body" are historical ideas, not ontological ones. How can "girl," a social and historical construc-tion, be an intrinsic, natural truth innate to one's brain? The same question can be asked of "boy body." How can "boy," a social and historical con-struction, be an intrinsic, natural truth innate to one's body? From this, the quote also equates the gender essentialist "girl brain but a body body" with being transgender. This rhetorical move implies that the definition of transgender, or a version simplified enough to explain to children, is a girl/boy brain but a boy/girl body. This 'kid-friendly' definition reinforces the 'wrong body' meanings of transgender which only obscures the

nonlinearity, multiplicity, and capaciousness of transness.

In *Introducing Teddy*, gender essentialism is also central to the plot. Firstly, the cover of the book is an illustration of the protagonist looking in the mirror (Figure 1). Teddy's reflection has a bow on the top of teddy's head and a smile, while the non-reflected 'real' body appears sad with a bowtie around teddy's neck. The mirror is an important object for the 'wrong body' narrative as it is often used to visually show what being 'born in the wrong body' looks and feels like. Gender essentialism is also reflected in the text. In explaining to their friend, Errol, what has been making them feel down, the protagonist says: "I need to be myself, Errol. In my heart, I've always known that I'm a girl teddy, not a boy teddy. I wish my name was Tilly, not Thomas." (Walton, 2016, p.15). Phrases like "in my heart" and "I've always known" imply that being a "girl teddy, not a boy teddy" is an innate truth to the protagonist's biology/psychology.

Figure 1

Cover Art of Introducing Teddy

Illustration by Dougal MacPherson from Walton, J. (2016). Introducing Teddy. Bloomsbury USA Childrens.

Gender essentialism is also reflected in the book description of *Introducing Teddy*, demonstrating how central this theme is to the plot of the book: "Girl or boy, only you know who you are on the inside" (Walton, 2016). This phrase of "on the inside" again points to girlhood, in this case, being innate to one's 'insides.' It is implying that being 'born in the wrong body' or, by extension, transness, is lying dormant inside the body. Similarly, in *Sam!*, Sam tells his sister he is transgender by saying: "Maggie, I don't feel like a girl inside. I've never been a girl" (Gabriel, 2019, p. 20). This book also uses the word "inside" implying here that girlhood is not innate to Sam, but boyhood is. These descriptions of transness are in an effort to make transness understandable and digestible to a young audience. However, in doing so, it is reinforcing gender/sex as something innate to one's biology or psychology instead of as a product of history, pathology, and power. In contrast, *When Aidan Became a Brother* challenges gender essentialism, and, in turn, the 'wrong body' narrative. Firstly, the book itself is not so much focused on Aidan's gender transition as it is on Aidan's quest to become the best big brother he can be. The first 8 out of 30 pages focus on Aidan, who he is, what he likes/does not like, and how he feels. Then, the next 22 out of 30 pages focus on Aidan doing things to try to become the best big brother to his unborn younger sibling. In the first 8 pages that do focus on Aidan, gender essentialism is challenged specifically in this quote: "He [Aidan] had always felt trapped in his bedroom before they fixed it, but his new sibling wouldn't have to feel that way" (Lukoff, 2019, p.16). Usually, the word "trapped" refers to being 'trapped in the wrong body,' but here it is re-appropriated to refer to being trapped in what others expected him to be and do; trapped in the regime of gender itself. This is further demonstrated in this quote: "When Aidan was bor-

-n, everyone thought he was a girl. His parents gave him a pretty name. His room looked like a girl's room. And he wore clothes that other girls liked wearing" (Lukoff, 2019, p.2). Using the phrase "Everyone thought he was a girl" instead of simply "he was a girl" implies that gender/sex or girlhood/boyhood or femaleness/maleness are not innate to our ontologies, they are assign-ations. As reflected in this book, it is these assignments that make people feel trapped, not transness. Boyhood or girlhood does not lie dormant trapped inside one's body, it is pre=scribed by societal convention.

Gender Binarism

First, in *I am Jazz*, gender binarism is prevalent in both text and illustrations. In the quote, "As I got a little older, I hardly ever played with trucks or tools or superheroes. Only princesses and mermaid costumes. My brothers told me this was girl stuff. I kept right on playing," Jazz demonstrates the legibility of her girlhood by positioning it in total opposition to boyhood or "boy stuff" (trucks, tools, and superheroes) (Herthal & Jennings, 2014, p.13). The existence, reality, and legibility of Jazz's girlhood throughout the book is based in liking "girl stuff," not "boy stuff," perpetuating the idea that "boy stuff" and "girl stuff" exist in the first place, as well as the idea that it is Jazz's interest in "girl stuff" (princesses and mermaid costumes) that makes her a girl. On the same page as the quote above is an illustration of Jazz next to her twin brothers. Jazz is in a pink, sparkly dress and wear-ing a tiara, which is strategically contrasted by her brothers in blue shirts and khaki shorts, with one dribbling a basketball (see Figure 2). This pink/ blue contrast further reinforces gender bi-narism by placing Jazz's girlhood in opposition to her brothers' boyhood with the purpose of making Jazz's girlhood legible.

Figure 2

Jazz next to her brothers.

Illustration by Shelagh McNicholas from Jennings, J., & Haerthal, J. (2014). *I am Jazz*. Dial Books.

There is another illustration that appears multiple times in the background of the text. It is a drawing of a boy in blue next to a girl in a pink dress (Figure 3). While this background image is not fundamental to the plot of the story, it demonstrates the extent to which gender binarism is a fundamental subliminal logic of the book, the narrative it portrays, and the 'wrong body' .

Figure 3

Drawing of a boy and girl.

Illustration by Shelagh McNicholas from Jennings, J., & Haerthal, J. (2014). I am Jazz. Dial Books.

In *Introducing Teddy*, gender binarism appears in this quote, "I don't care if you're a girl teddy or a boy teddy! What matters is that you are my friend" (Walton, 2016, p. 17). While this rhetorical move is meant to be heartwarming to the reader, it reinforces gender binarism by presenting the only options of gendered beingness as "girl teddy or a boy teddy." This implies that maybe Errol would "care" if his best friend was something other than a "girl teddy" or "boy teddy," or not even a teddy at all. Gender binarism also appears in *Sam!* in a moment when Sam is reflecting on something that happened at school that made him feel particularly sad. Through tears Sam says,

One of the kids in my class kept talking about what boys are supposed to be like. They're supposed to be buff. They're supposed to be good at sports…He said boys are born a certain way and girls are born a certain way. Was I born wrong? (p. 25)

This quote superbly demonstrates the interconnectedness between gender binarism and the 'wrong body' narrative. The gender assignments as described in the quote, boys/girls being "born a certain way," make those who transgress, disrupt, or otherwise queer socially constructed boundaries feel "wrong" (Stryker, 1994). However, this specific quote, as well as the book as a whole, still reinforces gender binarism as a tenet of the 'wrong body' narrative. Sam's feelings of wrongness are misplaced as being 'born in the wrong body' instead of the feelings of wrongness being a product of the boundaries of beingness, reproduced and enforced everyday.

In *When Aidan Became a Brother*, gender binarism is challenged several times throughout both the written text and illustrations. First on page 13, Aidan is shopping for things for his sibling and on the way a lady asks, "Are you having a boy or girl?" to Aidan's mom. Then the text says, "Aidan didn't

like it when people asked if he was a boy or a girl, and he hoped the baby couldn't hear yet. He was glad when Mom just smiled and said, 'I'm having a baby'" (Lukoff, 2019). A similar situation occurs later when Aidan goes with his dad to find paint for the baby's nursery:

"Are you excited for your new brother or sister?" asked the paint guy. "I'm excited to be a big brother," Aidan said. The paint guy looked con-fused. Aidan could tell that he wanted to ask a different question, and was glad to have his dad there. (p.14)

Then on page 18, there is an illustration of books laid out on a table with Aidan writing and coloring in them. One of the books has the title "50,000+ Names for Boys and Girls," but it is covered with tape written over it to read, "50,000+ Names for Babies and Babies" (Figure 4).

Figure 4

50,000+ Names for Babies and Babies

Illustration by Kaylani Juanita from Lukoff, K. (2019). *When Aidan became a brother*. Lee & Low Books.

These Three examples offer an important alternat-ive narrative to the dominant 'wrong body' narrat-ive. Aidan is hurt when others enforce boundaries of beingness, like gender binarism, on him or his unborn sibling. By identifying Aidan's bad feelings as a result of the pervasiveness of gender binarism in society and the quotidian interactions he has with it, it erodes the perceived 'natural-ness' of binarism.

Moving From One Fixed Destination to Another

The idea of moving from one fixed destination to another confines transition (a broad sense of the word, not just referring to gender transition) to a single space, single time. It forces us to show who I *was* to know who I *am*; a stable subjectivity. However, such boundaries constrict how children can be in the world. For example, in *I Am Jazz*, the illustration on the back of the book coinciding with the book description shows "boy" Jazz on the left and "girl" Jazz on the right appearing visually on visually on a timeline that starts on the left and ends on the right (Figure 5). And in the book itself, there is a drastic contrast between sad "boy" Jazz appearing under storm clouds with tears, and a frown (Figure 6) and happy "girl" Jazz who is dre-ssed in pink, under sunshine, smiling, and holding hands with friends (Figure 7). These visual mani-festations of moving from one fixed destination to another portray transition as a linear, uncomp-licated, process marked with a beginning and end, here beginning with Jazz being a "boy" and end-ing with Jazz becoming a fully realized "girl."
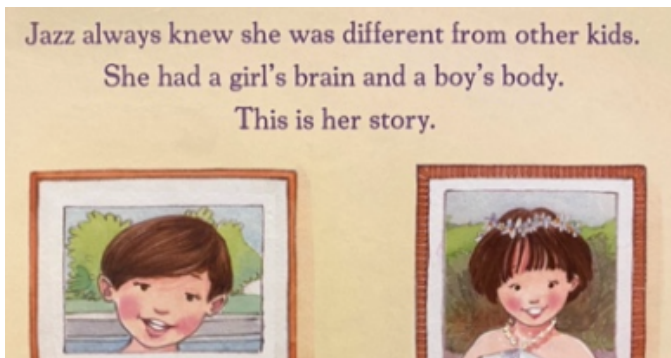
Figure 5

Back cover of I Am Jazz

Illustration by Shelagh McNicholas from Jennings, J., & Haerthal, J. (2014). I am Jazz. Dial Books.

Figure 6

Sad "boy" Jazz

Illustration by Shelagh McNicholas from Jennings, J., & Haerthal, J. (2014). I am Jazz. Dial Books.

Figure 7

Happy "girl" Jazz

Illustration by Shelagh McNicholas from Jennings, J., & Haerthal, J. (2014). I am Jazz. Dial Books.

Of the books used for this study, *When Aidan Became a Brother* and *Julián is a Mermaid* challenged the idea of moving from one fixed destination to another the most frequently and consistently. First, in the author's note of *When Aidan Became a Brother*, Kyle Lukoff writes, "Life for Aidan, and for all different kinds of kids, will be full of growth and change. I don't know what the future holds for him, but I hope he lives in a world that supports and believes in him. Thank you for helping create that world" (2019, p. 32). This is drastically different from the back book cover of *I Am Jazz* that consolidates Jazz's (gendered) life to a linear transition.

Instead, Lukoff emphasizes that children's lives are "full of growth and change," implying they don't ever stop transitioning through all sorts of parts of life. Finally in *Julián is a Mermaid*, challenging moving from one fixed destination is central to the plot of the story. The book is almost entirely illustrations and follows a young child named Julián who is also a mermaid. Julián does not just dream of *becoming* a mermaid, the book follows him showing his abuela that he *is* a mermaid, blurring the strict boundaries placed on what is imaginary and what is real, as well as what is human and what is non-human. For example, on pages 37-38, Julián's abuela takes him to join the other mermaids, some look human-like and some do not (Figure 8). Therefore, *Julián is a Mermaid* allows children to take care of their (un)gender(ed) creativity by eroding the borders placed around what is real, what is imaginary, and what is possible.

Figure 8

Julián and the mermaids

Illustration by Jessica Love from Love, J. (2018). *Julián is a mermaid*. Candlewick.

Discussion

Limitations and Future Study

This study used Stryker's (1994) definition of transgender. This definition was used to strategically disengage with the medicalized and institutionalized meanings of the word "transgender" but still limited the books that could be included in this study. When compiling the booklist, books with the most challenges to the 'wrong body' narrative did not fall under this study's definition of transgender and were, therefore, excluded from the study. This major limitation for the study meant that selected books were more likely to reinforce the 'wrong body' narrative. The book selection showcases that transgender can hardly be thought of without the 'wrong body' narrative; they have become almost synonymous.

A large body of work on prefixal trans showcases that there are already other ways to be outside of the 'wrong body' narrative. And as seen from the results of this study, it seems that books dominantly considered to be "transgender" undermine the work of prefixal trans. Meanwhile, books that are not marketed or dominantly considered to be "transgender" books, do the work of prefixal trans, and by extension, challenge the 'wrong body' narrative. The work to be done, then, is to seize and reinterpret possibilities of life and livability that we have been taught and pursue something more than what we have been given. A generation of conceptual and theoretical work that investigates the possibilities of prefixal trans, a transness (as defined above in the literature review) that undermines normative constructs of gender (and race) in the classroom or in children's books, is needed. Specifically, this would involve scholars thinking through, writing about, and excavating questions such as, what power does prefixal trans have as a means of knowledge for early childhood education? To what extent does the current education system undermine the power of prefixal trans? And how can we, as a society, take care of our children's (un)gender(ed) creativity?

Recognizing that children's literature plays an important role in helping children understand the world around them, this research underscores the pervasive influence of the 'wrong body' narrative in children's literature. By critically examining books marketed as transgender stories, this study shows the need for expanding the repertoire of narratives available. When children can understand the capaciousness, illegibility, and radicality of transness, outside of the restrictive 'born in the wrong body narrative,' the boundaries around transness can progressively fade. This work has major implications for the types of books in classrooms and the kinds of stories publications should publish, but also education in general: curriculum, education structure, classroom environments, etc. Children's literature plays a vital role in mediating children's understandings of gender and transness, and, in turn, themselves, peers, and the world around them.

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Jason Carrik

Buyer Beware: How Auction Houses Encouraged The Illicit Art Trade and Modern Changes in Practice

Abstract

In the history of the illicit art and antiquities trade, private auction houses have played major roles in encouraging the theft and smuggling of art. Two major auction houses, Sotheby's and Christie's, have been found on multiple occasions to have violated international law between the 1980s and present day. Tactics such as organized smuggling, anonymous consignment, liability warranties, and insufficient provenance research were used by the houses to facilitate the sale of stolen or forged artworks. In bypassing international law, auction houses acquired authentic art and antiquities that could generate high sale prices, which in turn increased profits for the houses by taking cuts of the sale. In recent decades, Sotheby's and Christie's have attempted to improve their practices by creating their own provenance research departments and by forming partnerships with museums to investigate their collections and organize restitution of stolen material. However, illicit objects still have appeared in recent auctions, and errors are still being made in provenance research that result in issues such as incorrect ownership attribution. Despite attempts at moving past their legacies and improving their standards, both houses have failed to make major changes.

Introduction

The theft and plunder of cultural objects has occurred for centuries. For Western cultures, it is associated with Athens during the Greco-Persian Wars.[1] After the Persian defeat on the sea at the Battle of Salamis, the victorious Athenians collected the bronze ship-rams and weapons of the enemy as trophies and decorated temples with them, then melted down the rest to cast a statue of Apollo.[2] The tradition of war-looting continued with the Romans, who were well-known for their military triumphal celebrations. These huge victory parades featured loot taken from their enemies, which were symbols of Rome's ability to conquer and take whatever they pleased.[3] One well-known illustration of such an event is a stone relief on the Arch of Titus, which depicts Roman soldiers carrying off trophies, including the menorah and showbread table, taken from the rebels of Judea.[4] Cultural items also were considered fair game when it came to prizes during times of war; famous examples include the Horses of Saint Mark, taken from Constantinople during the Fourth Crusade's sack, and the Parthenon Marbles, removed from Greece by Lord Elgin, who allegedly had permission from Ottoman officials, not the Greeks.[5]

1. William Custis West III, "Greek Public Monuments of the Persian Wars", The Center for Hellenic Studies, Accessed March 9, 2025, https://chs.harvard.edu/chapter/william-custis-west-iii-greek-public-monuments-of-the-persian-wars-introduction/.

2. John Hale, *Lords of the Sea: The Epic Story of the Athenian Navy and the Birth of Democracy* (London: Penguin Books, 2009), 72.

3. Mark Cartwright, "Roman Triumph", World History Encyclopedia, May 5, 2016. https://www.worldhistory.org/Roman_Triumph/.

4. Jeffrey A. Becker, "The Arch of Titus," in *Smarthistory*, August 8, 2015, accessed January 29, 2025, https://smarthistory.org/the-arch-of-titus/.

5. Alex Greenberger, "Looting, Plundering, and More: 20 Cultural Treasures That Have Faced Claims of Theft", February 20, 2024, https://www.artnews.com/list/art-news/artists/most-important-looted-plundered-works-1234584727/horses-of-st-marks-constantinople-venice/.

After hundreds of years, cultural theft eventually gave way to influencing the civilian sphere as new flows of cultural material began making their way into modern nations such as Britain and France, known as 'Egyptomania.'[6] This phenomenon had a significant hand in the spread of cultural material, as Napoleon Bonaparte and his savants conducted research and explored the sites and monuments of Ancient Egypt.[7] Tides shifted again, and the British were victorious against the French; Egyptian artifacts, like the Rosetta Stone, made their way to England.[8] It became common practice to disregard the home nations who produced these antiquities in favor of white Europeans. They collected cultural items and displayed them in their cabinets of curiosity, which were collections of rare items that represented their believed "New World" knowledge and would eventually be incorporated into museums.[9] Out of this 18th century milieu, two major companies that had hands in the trade of art and antiquities were born: Sotheby's and Christie's auction houses. Sotheby's was founded in 1744 by British entrepreneur Samuel Baker, who used it initially to auction books.[10] Their sales expanded into art and luxury items, and the company endured both World Wars.[11] They carried on into the latter half of the 20th century, selling contemporary works of art and items owned by world-famous persons.[12] The auction house continued to grow, eventually ballooning to 80 offices worldwide, along with an annual sales turnover of 7 billion USD.[13] Christie's, another British auction house, was founded in 1766. It followed a similar pathway to Sotheby's, growing and selling more famous works of art and antiques. They have grown to have offices in 46 countries and offer highly-prized private auctions and appraisals.[14] The two companies are considered rivals in the art world, and both had strong presences in museum communities until recent years as some shifted toward preferring collection donations. Their current practice is called 'consignment', where clients consign a piece of art or antique to an auction house. The house will conduct the marketing and sale of the piece in exchange for a commission of the sale price. The remainder of the money is paid directly to the

6. Manon Schultz, "What is Egyptomania?", National Trust, Accessed March 9, 2025, https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/what-is-egyptomania#.

7. "Napoleon on the Nile: Soldiers, Artists, and the Rediscovery of Egypt", Past Exhibitions, Frye Art Museum, Accessed March 9, 2025, https://fryemuseum.org/exhibitions/napoleon-nile-soldiers-artists-and-rediscovery-egypt.

8. "Everything you ever wanted to know about the Rosetta Stone," The British Museum, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/everything-you-ever-wanted-know-about-rosetta-stone.

9. Anne Wallentine, "How Cabinets of Curiosities Laid the Foundation for Modern Museums", Smithsonian Magazine, November 16, 2023, Magazine, November 16, 2023, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-cabinets-of-curiosities-laid-the-foundation-for-modern-museums-180983265/.

10. "The History of Sotheby's Auction House - Founding," About Us, Sotheby's, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.sothebys.com/en/about/our-history?locale=en.

11. "The History of Sotheby's Auction House - Early - Mid 1900s," About Us, Sotheby's, Accessed March 9, 2025.

12. "The History of Sotheby's Auction House - 1960s - 1980s," About Us, Sotheby's, Accessed March 9, 2025.

13. "The History of Sotheby's Auction House," About Us, Sotheby's, Accessed March 9, 2025.

14. "About Christie's," Christie's, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.christies.com/en/about/overview.

client.[15] Even without selling to museums, both auction houses continue to flourish with their antique sales in modern times.

The antiquities trade has always been lucrative, in part since exotic items mark social status because of their scarcity and usual high price tag.[16] Indeed, they can be and have been used for money laundering or other illegal activities.[17] To those who participate in this market, the real money comes from the authenticity of the antiquities for sale, with authentic pieces fetching the highest prices possible.[18] These two auction houses have been caught on multiple occasions conducting activities that violate the 1970 UNESCO Convention, which forbids the illegal trafficking of art and artifacts from their country of origin.[19] Countless numbers of objects have appeared in Sotheby's and Christie's' catalogs which were later determined to be fakes or stolen. After intense media scrutiny, both houses claimed to have changed their procedures to avoid these unethical and condemnable practices. However, their success in doing so remains questionable to the present day. If there is a single institution to be blamed for the modern epidemic of trading looted art across international borders, it would be the auction houses that accepted these materials for sale in the late 20th century. There was, and remains, a demand that is facilitated by both the auction houses and looters who raid archaeological sites or peddle fakes.

Smuggling and Complicity

In 1998, investigative journalist Peter Watson organized an undercover operation to expose the illegal activities of Sotheby's regarding their smuggling of paintings. This effort came at a time when the punishments for smuggling were lighter than dealing in narcotics, and the market for art, legal or not, was thriving.[20] The illicit art market was found to be worth somewhere in the ballpark of 3 to 6 million USD, circa 1993.[21] Watson's investigation revealed just how involved Sotheby's was in this market. Sotheby's employees completely admitted to the presence of smuggling and were caught trafficking a Nogari painting out of Italy (Fig. 1). They also confessed that more often than not, Sotheby's themselves organized the effort.[22] These employees also admitted that the reasons

15. "Understanding the Auction Consignment Process: A Comprehensive Guide", Britannic Auctions, Accessed March 9, 2025, https://www.britannicauctions.com/blog/auction-consignment-guide/.

16. Donna Yates, "Value and doubt: The persuasive power of 'authenticity' in the antiquities market," *Parse Journal,* no. 2 (2015): 72.

17. Charlie Pogacar, "How Money Laundering Works in the Art World", August 4, 2023, https://www.artandobject.com/news/how-money-laundering-works-art-world.

18. Timothy Kaiser, "The Antiquities Market," *Journal of Field Archaeology,* vol. 17, no. 2 (1990): 209.

19. "Fight Illicit Trafficking (1970 Convention)," UNESCO, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit trafficking.

20. Lisa Borodkin, "The Economics of Antiquities Looting and a Proposed Legal Alternative," *Columbia Law Review,* vol. 95, no. 2 (1995): 378.

21. Borodkin, "The Economics of Antiquities Looting," 377-378.

22. Peter Watson, *Sotheby's: The Inside Story* (New York: Random House, 1997), 27-28.

Fig. 1: This painting, 'Old Woman with a Cup', was done by 18th century painter Giuseppe Nogari. It was purchased by Watson's team as a test for Sotheby's: would they smuggle it out of Italy to be sold in London? It went to auction without a second glance. Image: art-prints-on-demand, accessed January 30, 2025.

for the smuggling were to avoid the previously mentioned UNESCO heritage law and to create a larger sale price in a city like New York or London. The higher purchase price would generate a higher profit for Sotheby's, who took a percentage of the payout in the form of a consignment fee.[23] Many of these items came from Italy, which is home to a rich cultural heritage. When the Italian government realized how extreme their bleeding of cultural goods was, they put strict regulations in place against trafficking.[24] For decades, these were just corners to cut for Sotheby's.

In the end, Watson's investigation helped reveal the shady underbelly of auction houses. It resulted in a 1997 internal review, which will be discussed later, but by then the damage had been done. Millions of dollars' worth of objects had left their home countries, causing irreparable harm to cultures and history: the most obvious and heinous of the auction house crimes. Sotheby's had created an environment that allowed illicit market activities to survive by letting it become a commonplace and the standard to strive for, all driven by an increased profit.[25] Christies' role in smuggling is more vague, as there was no investigative report on their activities; no solid proof could come to light. Many smuggled items have appeared in Christie's catalogs, but there is no way to prove if the smuggling was intentional or simply overlooked.

Anonymity and Warranties

One of the prime draws of auction houses is their allowance of anonymous consignments and bidding.[26] For some, it's a way to stay low-profile and avoid the ire of fellow bidders. For more unscrupulous characters, it became a way to pass on stolen artifacts and forged art without getting caught. This anonymity was weaponized by the auction houses for a myriad of reasons. When an illicit object was identified post-sale or was reclaimed by its home country, and the purchaser sought recompensation for the loss of money and object, they often would find themselves completely out of luck, since the original consignor was

23. Watson, *Sotheby's,* 26, 31.

24. Watson, *Sotheby's*, 26.

25. Neil Brodie, "Auction Houses and the Antiquities Trade," in *3rd International Conference of Experts on the Return of Cultural Property,* ed. S. Choulia-Kapeloni (Athens: Archaeological Receipts Fund, 2014): 63.

26. Borodkin, "The Economics of Antiquities Looting", 386.

anonymous.[27] The auction houses would be of no help because of their warranties. Anonymity helped shield the auction houses when the press attempted to research the extent of the illegal activities. Because of this defense, it became impossible to identify how many times the sale of illicit material had happened, as the buyers could stay anonymous and never go to the press.[28]

The psychology of anonymity was particularly useful to the auction houses, as the embarrassment of having been duped would lead to a private, out-of-court settlement for the wronged buyer.[29] In the age before Watson's investigation, these private settlements kept the houses out of the limelight, and therefore free to continue putting up illicit objects for bid. Even during the Hodges trial, a case paramount to Watson's investigation, Sotheby's lawyers used their clients' anonymity as a way to protect them and make it difficult for the press to keep up with the many moving parts involved in smuggling, preventing them from making any identifications of key players.[30]

This consistent usage of anonymity allowed sellers and buyers to maintain several degrees of separation from themselves and the illegality of their and the auction houses' activities. When not involved directly, it was easy for buyers to ignore any ethical concerns about their purchase's origins, allowing them to believe that it was the concern of the thief or consignor.[31] One notable character who stayed anonymous for some time was Giacomo Medici, operating through his front company Edition Services (Fig. 2).

Fig. 2: Giacomo Medici, notorious art smuggler, poses here with the famed Euphronios Krater. It was purchased by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1972 for the highest price at that time for an antique: $1 million. It was believed to have been unearthed illegally from Italy and smuggled with Medici's help. It was returned in 2008. Image: Alchetron, October 4, 2024.

Under this guise, he was able to consign upwards of thousands of illicit artifacts to Sotheby's for sale.[32] Allowing anonymity was an advantage to

27. Kai Singer, "Sotheby's Sold Me a Fake - Holding Auction Houses Accountable for Authenticating and Attributing Works of Fine Art," *Columbia-VLA Journal of Law & the Arts,* vol. 23, no. 3 + 4 (1999-2000): 441.

28. Singer, "Sotheby's Sold Me a Fake," 439-440.

29. Singer, "Sotheby's Sold Me a Fake," 443.

30. Watson, *Sotheby's,* 162.

31. Borodkin, "The Economics of Antiquities Looting", 383, 386.2.

32. Christos Tsirogiannias, "Illicit Antiquities in American Museums: Diversity in Ethical Standards," in *The Palgrave Handbook on Art Crime,* eds. S. Hufnagel and D. Chappell (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019): 833.

everyone involved in the chain of illicit art trade. Anonymity kept looters and dealers safe from the authorities and it allowed fooled purchasers to settle their woes out of court and avoid public embarrassment. Both of those factors combined kept the auction house's questionable activities out of public attenti-on. Warranties, as both com-panies define them, are part of the larger sale conditions accepted by buyers when they make a purchase. The conditions state that the auction house guarantees the authenticity of the purch-ased item, as well as offering a potential way to rescind the sale and refund the buyer should it be found to be counterfeit. The power of the warr-anties issued by Sotheby's and Christie's during this period cannot be underestimated. Sotheby's current warranty refers to it as an 'Authenticity Guarantee,' and that any claims against it have to be proven at the buyer's expense, and that the house remains able to reject the claim.[33] Christie's features the same claims, with the added caveat that the seller must make their claim within five years of purchase.[34] Both houses used limited warranties to guarantee authenticity yet can deny any responsibility for the misattribution of said authenticity. The contradiction is immediately striking.

This tactic was employed by Sotheby's, specific-ally using their own 1974 limited warranty, which guaranteed authenticity for anything dated after 1869.[35] Likewise, a similar warranty was utilized by Christie's in 1995. A legal suit against Christie's was filed in New York by Jane Koven, one of the many clients who consign art they own to auction. She had consigned a Braques pastel to the house, which had gone on to sell for $600,000.[36] After the sale, Christie's began doubting the authenticity of the work and rescinded the sale, refunding the buyer but demanded the sale price back from Koven, who understandably refused. This case is unique in that Christie's did not use their warranty to protect themselves directly and cover up the fact that they failed their duty to authenticate it. Instead, they used it to blame and punish someone else, since the warranty offered a refund for the buyer, which was the sales paid to Koven. In this case, the warranties relied too heavily on the concept of 'good faith': that the consignor was delivering an object that they knew or believed to be completely authentic, which allowed for too much room for error. By using good faith and simple trust, both auction houses were able to guarantee authenticity with their warranties. If questioned, they claimed what their consignors did was a private matter and none of their concern, as if smuggling or counterfeiting was nothing to worry about.[37] They had the ability to refute the claims and immediately throw blame to those hapless enough to consign an object they believed was authentic. The client would have to foot the bill of a crime they did not commit, as seen in the Koven case. It is a complicated system of legal workings, which could end up confusing

33. "15. Authenticity Guarantee," Conditions of Business for Buyers for New York, Sotheby's, Last modified December 23, 2024, https://www.sothebys.com/en/docs/pdf/new-york-cob-for-buyers-as-of-12-23-24.pdf?locale=en.

34. "7b. Limited Warranty," Conditions of Sale and Terms of Use, Christie's, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://onlineonly.christies.com/terms-and-conditions/39.

35. Singer, "Sotheby's Sold Me a Fake", 442.

36. *Greenwood v. Koven*, 880 F. Supp. 186 (S.D.N.Y. 1995). https://www.unesco.org/en/fight-illicit-trafficking.

37. Watson, *Sotheby's,* 14.

clients and work against them. The intentional diminishing of responsibility raises a larger question regarding Sotheby's and Christie's: why were they themselves not authenticating works? This question is answered with the much more convoluted history of due diligence in the auction houses.

Due Diligence

The concept of due diligence in the art world is accepted as the proper investigation of something being bought or sold to prove its authenticity and provenance. Due diligence is defined as the actions necessary to ensure the origins and ages of antiquities, as well as the legality of how they were acquired.[38] The actions include research and thorough investigation of the objects in question. Primarily, due diligence keeps objects of questionable provenance out of museum collections. It also helps museums examine their own collections, especially those that had been acquired long before proper standards or guidelines were adopted. It is imperative that institutions perform these duties with the proper ethics in mind. All of the necessary efforts have to be made, without any risks of potential conflicts of interest. Any reason for doubt has to be investigated so that institutions like museums can continue to hold the trust of the public and maintain their reputations. Many museums have accreditation from the American Alliance of Museums, and proper collections research is a necessity to retain their membership.[39] However, the lines of trust can blur in the less-publicly visible auction world, when millions of dollars could be on the line if an art piece or artifact is proven to be authentic, fake, or stolen. There may be room for error, intentionally or not. So then, how did the Braques pastel end up on the auction floor if there were concerns of authenticity? As was revealed during the court proceedings, the Braques was investigated only by a team of Christie's in-house experts, who declared it to be an unquestionably authentic piece. The house then went on to market the pastel excessively, repeatedly purporting it as genuine. It wasn't until Claude Laurens, a French official responsible for validating Braques' works specifically, examined the work that the concern of authenticity was raised.[40] The action of due diligence was not executed at all by Christie's, as they had only consulted their own team of experts, creating an immediate conflict of interest that is unethical in the art world. If a third-party group of investigators had been tasked with authenticating the work, there is a high likelihood that they would have discovered the discrepancies. Cases of poor due diligence were rife between the auction houses. In 1977, Iranian businessman Eskandar Aryeh purchased a jeweled Fabergé egg for $400,000 (Fig. 3).[41]

38. "Art Transaction Due Diligence Toolkit," Guidelines on Combating Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, Responsible Art Market, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.responsibleartmarket.org/guidelines/art-transaction-due-diligence-toolkit/.

39. "Core Standards for Museums", Ethics, Standards, and Professional Practices, American Alliance of Museums, Accessed January 29, 2025, https://www.aam-us.org/programs/ethics-standards-and-professional-practices/core-standards-for-museums/.

40. *Greenwood v. Koven*, 880 F. Supp. 186 (S.D.N.Y. 1995).

41. Stuart Bennett, "Fine Art Auctions and the Law: A Reassessment in the Aftermath of Cristallina," *Columbia-VLA Journal of Law & the Arts,* vol. 16, no. 3 (1992): 272.

Fig. 3: This Fabergé egg, purchased by Aryeh, was proven to be fake post-sale. Imperial Fabergés are highly prized, and any fakes cause quite a stir. Image: Faberge Museum: Baden-Baden, accessed January 30, 2025.

Christie's had pronounced the egg as an 'Imperial' genuine, authenticated by Kenneth Snowman, a famed expert on the works of Carl Faberge.[42] Only after the purchase, when doubts were raised, was it found that Snowman had authenticated the egg without ever having seen it.[43] A similar case occurred a decade later. In 1987, art collector Douglas Esposit bid $9,900 on a painting by George Inness, the 19th-century landscape artist. The painting had been authenticated by Michael Quick, an expert on Inness' paintings.[44] Quick had also published the catalogue raisonné for Inness, which is a researched publication which lists all known works by an artist.[45] As the foremost expert

Sotheby's had mailed him a black-and-white photograph of the work to authenticate the work before the painting went up for auction. Quick had simply written 'yes' on the back, but when examining the painting eight years later, he immediately determined that it was, in fact, a fake.[46] These are just two examples of poor due diligence being performed by the auction houses, whose responsibility was to provide the authenticators with the proper materials to make their judgment. Both authenticators did not conduct proper examinations or research of the objects to verify their authenticity, because the respective auction houses did not make the necessary efforts to get a definitive confirmation or give them access to the objects themselves. To modern art and museum experts, these cases are baffling and raise many questions on how this process was historically considered proper practice.

It is a well-known fact in the art world that the authenticity of art and artifacts guarantees a higher value.[47] However, Sotheby's and Christie's appeared to frequently cut corners by ignoring due diligence to get more illicit material up for auction. Due diligence is highly valued in the professional art world, and in-house investigators or simple mailed photographs do not constitute it in the least. It is, of course, impossible to prove whether the poor due diligence practiced by the auction houses was intentional to create a higher

42. Terence Mullaly, "Kenneth Snowman", The Guardian, July 31, 2002.

43. Bennett, "Fine Art Auctions and the Law", 272.

44. "Inness Expert Michael Quick to Lecture at the Clark", iBerkshires, August 7, 2008, https://www.iberkshires.com/story/27985/Inness-Expert-Michael-Quick-To-Lecture-At-The-Clark.html.

45. "What is a Catalogue Raisonné?" New York Public Library, Accessed March 7, 2025, https://www.nypl.org/about/divisions/wallach-division/art-architecture-collection/catalogue-raisonne.

46. Singer, "Sotheby's Sold Me a Fake", 439.

47. Yates, "Value and doubt", 72.

market value. Ultimately, the results have been the same either way: illicit works flow into the houses via poor authentication and anonymous dealers, and then get pushed through the auction floor via claims of authenticity made by the houses. These claims are made confidently as a result of the poor due diligence, and the reputation of the auction houses would likely lead purchasers to trust them inherently. Should the item be caught or questioned by an outside scholar, the houses can avoid all liability through their warranties. If the item is not caught, the cycle is free to continue on, just as with the inclusion of anonymous dealers. Whether an active or passive scheme, the cycle is self-perpetuating, and the money and material flows into the auction houses by getting a cut of the sale price.

Changes in Practice

As mentioned previously, Peter Watson's investigative journalism resulted in an internal review for Sotheby's in 1997. In the wake of the exposé, a review committee was established alongside a department of compliance to monitor the imports, exports, and ensure Sotheby's followed the national rules and regulations.[48] In addition, several executives were suspended and the London antiquities branch of the auction house was shuttered permanently.[49] Despite these sweeping changes, Sotheby's officials still insisted that what had happened were isolated incidents.[50] However,

the question of whether these reforms would turn the company's behavior around were swiftly dispelled. In 2002, only five years after the previously-mentioned internal reforms were implemented, a Southern Arabian stele was consigned to Sotheby's by Phoenix Ancient Art, a well-known art dealership that sells stolen antiquities. While awaiting its auction, it was discovered that the stele had been looted from a museum during the 1994 Yemen civil war. Sotheby's offered to research the museum's claim to the piece so it could be returned if it was proven to have been stolen. Instead, Phoenix opted to return the stele in 2004. Despite their offer to research, at no point during the stele's stay at Sotheby's did they attempt to alert INTERPOL or any other agency about their discovery.[51] Sotheby's fumbled once again in 2019, when a work painted by Giovanni Tiepolo, an 18th-century master painter, was sold with a provenance identifying the previous owner as Wolfgang Böhler. However, a suit was filed by the descendants of Otto Frölich, a Jewish gallery owner who had to abandon the painting in Austria while fleeing the Nazis.[52] The true provenance was that it had been owned by Julius Böhler, who had been identified after the war as a known Nazi collaborator and art dealer. Sotheby's chalked the mistake up to human error, claiming they did not know the full story at the time of sale. Despite this claim, Sotheby's referenced the catalog raisonné of Tiepolo in their listing of the painting, which listed Julius Böhler, not Wolfgang Böhler, as the

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48. Carol Vogel, "Sotheby's to Tighten Procedures Regarding History and Sale of Art," *New York Times,* December 17, 1997.

49. Youssef Ibrahim, "Art Smuggling at Sotheby's: Executives Suspended," *New York Times,* February 7, 1997.

50. Ibrahim, "Art Smuggling at Sotheby's".

51. Brodie, "Auction Houses," 66.

52. *Avni v. Sotheby's*, 2024 N.Y. Slip Op. 30004 (N.Y. Sup. Ct. 2024).

previous owner.[53] The problem of insufficient due diligence had reappeared, as the entirely accurate provenance could have been discovered had Sotheby's done the proper investigation.

Christie's has not fared much better than their rival. To this day, it is unknown what happened internally at Christie's after the Watson exposé. It can be assumed that some reforms also occurred behind closed doors to avoid the scathing media critique and negative publicity that Sotheby's received, and, in doing so, stay ahead of their traditional rival. Just as with Sotheby's, however, it was not enough. In March 2022, an ancient Greek vase and helmet were pulled from auction after being identified by Christos Tsirogiannis, a forensic archaeologist with expertise in trafficked material, as being looted artifacts.[54] He discovered that they had once been in the collections of Gianfranco Becchina and Robert Hecht, both notorious and well-known dealers of illicit antiquities. In response, Christie's claimed they had done adequate research and found no cause for alarm.[55] In January 2024, a painfully similar situation played out. A Roman bronze Hellenistic-style cuirass was pulled from auction after being identified, again by Tsirogiannis, as having involvement with Becchina once again.[56] In another case, Tsirogiannis connected a Greek lekythos for sale at Christie's with Phoenix Ancient Art after a simple internet search, a connection omitted from Christie's provenance research.[57] In each incident, Christie's failed at their due diligence with antiquities tied to well-known individuals within the art and museum world, where the mention of their names alone should shut down an auction sale immediately. While it is admirable that these artifacts were promptly removed from sale by the auction houses, it is still a distinct problem that they arrived on the floor in the first place, and reveals that both auction houses have struggled to make meaningful progress in cutting out all illicit materials in their sales.

Conclusions and Looking Forward

During the latter half of the 20th century, Sotheby's and Christie's engaged in many activities, active and passive, that encouraged illicit art trade to propagate. The high sale prices of objects, when declared authentic, generated a demand for more fake or stolen material to enter the catalogs. More and more stolen or looted items came to auction with insufficient due diligence conducted by the auction houses. When an item was questioned and found to be illicitly transferred, the houses were able to avoid trouble because of the combination of anonymity for clients and limited warranties: the anonymity guaranteed that the looters and dealers could be safe while also giving

53. Colin Moynihan, "Sotheby's Provenance Disputed in Claim by Heirs for Art Lost in Nazi Era," *New York Times,* May 19, 2023.

54. "Christos Tsirogiannis", People, Trafficking Culture, Accessed March 7, 2025, https://traffickingculture.org/people/christos-tsirogiannis/.

55. Eileen Kinsella, "Christie's Hurriedly Withdraws Two Lots from an Upcoming Antiquities Sale That May Have Been Looted," *ArtNet News,* March 25, 2002.

56. Karen Ho, "Christie's Withdraws British Collector's Bronze Breastplate from Auction", *ArtNet News,* January 31, 2024.

57. Christos Tsirogiannis, "'Due Diligence'?: Christie's Antiquities Auction, London, October 2015," *Journal of Art Crime,* no. 14 (2015), Lot 93.

duped buyers an easy way out, and the warranties kept liability from falling upon the houses themselves. If objects were not questioned or closely examined, there was no trouble at all. Combined with the direct organization of smuggling from Sotheby's, the houses created an environment specifically suited for the movement of illicit materials.

There have been positive changes in auction houses in the art world, but the work is far from complete. A provenance department was established within Sotheby's that includes working with clients to find resolutions if the origins of the object are questionable.[58] There is no evidence that either auction house is directly involved in smuggling or trafficking, such as the scandal that Peter Watson uncovered. Even so, many looted objects have still appeared in sales catalogs, even as of 2024. It sometimes takes third-party sources, like scholars or archaeologists, to identify pieces that are stolen. If the auction houses want to keep purporting guaranteed authenticity and legality, it is their responsibility to conduct the proper research. One reason this continues to happen is because the houses use the Art Loss Register for their provenance research. The Art Loss Register is a private online database that records lost, stolen, and looted works of art that are submitted by victims.[59] It is used as a resource for clients in the art world who wish to avoid legal claim issues and for museums conducting due diligence research. The Register is an excellent source for researchers and

scholars because it uses photographic evidence and archival documents of items that have been stolen. When it comes to artifacts that have been looted from unknown archaeological sites, there are no photos of them, since they have yet to be discovered and excavated by professionals.[60] Consulting the database as due diligence for questionable archaeological artifacts is fruitless, because they may never have been documented or photographed in the first place, meaning there is no provenance paper trail. However, the same cannot be said for artworks, which have many resources available to help keep track of their history.

In a 2022 announcement, Sotheby's will be working with the Louvre to do provenance research on items stolen by the Nazis, with the goal of restitution.[61] The results have yet to be seen, but Sotheby's track record is cause for concern. Both auction houses need to improve their due diligence, which is a problem that has troubled them since the very beginning. The changes are being seen now, but they are not entirely sufficient. Without any long-lasting change, more illicit material will enter, and they will be forced to repeatedly remove them from sale. For the auction houses and the wider antiquities market, change is possible if greater care is taken to identify illicit material before it is put up for sale. Keeping stolen pieces out of circulation is a moral obligation for all and important for their countries of origin, as art is an integral

58. "Restitution", Sotheby's, Accessed March 7, 2025, https://www.sothebys.com/en/about/services/art-restitution.

59. "About Us", The Art Loss Register, Accessed March 7, 2025, https://www.artloss.com/about-us/.

60. David Gill, "Context Matters: The Auction Market and Due Diligence: The Need for Action," *Journal of Art Crime,* no. 15 (2016): 73.

61. Garreth Harris, "Louvre Teams Up with Sotheby's to Investigate Provenance of Works Bought During the Second World War," *The Art Newspaper,* February 1, 2022.

part of all cultures. Finding stolen works also opens up the possibility of returning them to rightful owners and heirs, for whom restitution is owed and recompense deserved.

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Aiya Tawakkol

The Psychological Impact of Verbal Abuse: A Scientific Literature Review

Abstract

Verbal abuse can cause significant harm to one's mental health, negatively impacting executive function, cognitive development, and emotional regulation. Research suggests that exposure to verbal abuse, particularly during childhood and adolescence, can alter neurological pathways related to stress, memory, and impulse control, leading to long-term cognitive and emotional consequences. This article synthesizes findings from six general press articles published between 2010–2018 and 15 peer-reviewed studies from 2010–2020 to examine the psychological, neurological, and relational effects of verbal abuse, particularly among youth. By integrating perspectives from psychology, neuroscience, and social science, this review provides an interdisciplinary analysis of how verbal abuse influences relationship dynamics across different contexts, that is, within families, between intimate partners, and across generations. Preliminary findings indicate that a majority of high school students have either witnessed or experienced verbal abuse within their households, reinforcing its widespread nature.

Studies show chronic exposure to verbal aggression can lead to structural and functional changes in the brain, particularly in the prefrontal cortex and limbic system, which govern decision-making, emotional regulation, and stress responses. As a result, individuals who have experienced verbal abuse are at higher risk for anxiety, depression, impulsivity, and difficulties unemotional processing. This review also explores the link between verbal abuse and the perpetuation of abusive behaviors, demonstrating that those exposed to verbal aggression in childhood are more likely to engage in or tolerate abusive relationships in adulthood. While this review provides valuable insights into the long-term consequences of verbal abuse, future studies should further explore how economic, social, and cultural factors shape its prevalence and impact, as well as the potential for early intervention strategies to mitigate its neuro-logical and psychological effects.

Keywords: verbal abuse, psychological impact, domestic violence, trauma, mental health

Introduction

Verbal abuse is when a person "repeatedly uses words to demean, frighten, or control someone" (*What Is Verbal Abuse?*, 2018). Abuse has significant effects on the human brain and is known to cause serious problems in relationships. Yet, it is only in the last 100 years that society has begun to acknowledge and address abusive behavior. Historically, verbal and emotional abusers were often labeled as "stern" or "strict," especially in parenting and authority roles, implying that their behavior carried an element of discipline rather than harm. At worst, such individuals were described as "difficult," minimizing the damage their words inflicted.

However, as psychological research has expanded, there is now a deeper understanding of how verbal abuse affects cognitive and emotional development. Studies show that persistent exposure to verbal abuse can significantly impact executive functioning, leading to difficulties in concentration, emotional regulation, and decision-making (Pietrangelo, 2018). This shift in awareness highlights how society has moved from normalizing harsh verbal treatment to recognizing its long-term psychological consequences.

The Psychological and Neurological Effects of Verbal Abuse

Many people tend to overlook the consequences of verbal abuse on the brain. When the brains of victims are scanned, their brain scans show similarities to individuals who have suffered head trauma, suggesting that the abuse causes concentration issues for the victim (Weigel et al.,2013). When "[some] people experience verbal abuse, there are some cases where they have no idea that there's anything wrong with it," because it becomes a part of their everyday life (Weigel et al., 2013). Nonetheless, the signs that one has been or is being verbally abused are often overlooked because there is not a physical mark on one's body. Psychologists and psychiatrists say that most child/teen patients are diagnosed with attention deficit disorder (ADD) because of the inability to focus; many times, the victim is conditioned to be on guard and try to stay safe from being yelled at or put down (Weigel et al., 2013). Most verbal abusers are men, and this behavior is often rooted in an emotionally or physically traumatic childhood (Weigel, 2013). Many abusers were told at a young age that showing emotions is a sign of weakness; instead of being nurtured as children, they were often yelled at or ignored.

Verbal Abuse in Romantic Relationships

If a significant other calls their partner names and/or belittles them, then one may be in an abusive relationship (Smith, 2010). There are certain categories of verbal abuse that many experience in their relationship: abusive anger, criticizing, name-calling, threatening, blaming, and other negative ways of belittling another. Conflict styles in verbally abusive relationships are far different from those in healthy relationships. The abuser in an abusive relationship tends to ar-gue about trivial conflicts or consistently blame and criticize the other. In contrast, people in a healthy relationship argue over real issues that can be resolved. While arguments in both types of relationships may involve topics about finances and responsibilities, the key difference is that in an abusive relationship there really are no issues, and the victim is often made to feel that the situation is always their fault (Smith, 2010).

An important aspect when looking at verbal abuse in relationships is the current state of the relationship. For instance, rejection, fights with a partner, and break-ups all cause emotional pain, but learning how to deal with these issues is extremely important to maintain a healthy relationship (Ellis, 2010). When one does not strive for a healthy relationship, conflicts tend to arise easily. Name-calling, ridiculing, threats, constant criticism, and controlling are rooted in the low self-esteem of a partner. Regarding the victim, verbal abuse is rooted in the helplessness, guilt, and confusion of a partner who allows another to treat them in such a negative manner.

Relationship Development and the Risk of Abuse

There are five stages of relationship development, and they all contribute to how long the relationship lasts, the likelihood of abuse, the satisfaction of each partner, etc. (*Relationship Stages,* 2020) The first stage is Initiation, which typically involves making a first impression. The second is Experimentation, where the partners get to know each other. Usually, the partners try to act their best and present their best qualities during this stage. The third stage is Intensifying, when the partners are ready to let their guards down and emotionally invest in the other person. The partners open up and share more intense and

personal information with each other. In stage four, the partners' lifestyles overlap. For example, the partners may go everywhere together, watch all the same movies, and plan trips with each other. During the final stage of bonding, the partners formally commit, and the partners' true colors are revealed (Beckmann, 2020).

Differences in Relationship Expectations

In some cases, females and males view a relationship differently (Ellis, 2010). For example, a partner may have certain expectations and become upset when they don't get what they initially planned for, but their partner may view the relationship in other terms with differing intentions. In situations like this, a struggle for power and control occurs, and as conflicts become more prevalent, this may contribute to verbal abuse

Recognizing the Signs of Verbal Abuse

There are cases where abusive relationships ultimately destroy the victim's well-being. Men and women are both victims of verbal abuse, but because verbal abuse is "just words," it is often not recognized; name-calling, cursing, shouting, put-downs, threats, blame, lack of courtesy, low self-esteem, timidity, and fear of failure are 10 prominent signs of abuse (Scheff, 2011). In all cases, name-calling such as calling one 'stupid', a 'dummy', or other demeaning terms to hurt someone should not be considered a normal relationship dynamic; it shows an extreme lack of respect for the other person in the relationship and should be considered abusive (Scheff, 2011).

Oftentimes teenagers no longer go to their parents to be coddled, specifically because their parents "don't always realize how just one negative comment from them can begin a downward spiral for teenagers" (Deery, 2010, para 1). The University of New Hampshire completed a report that revealed how "63% of 3,000 parents surveyed admitted to using verbal abuse against their children…" and this may cause significant problems in the future for their children (Deery, 2010, para). Some symptoms of abuse include, "self-destructive acts, abnormal/antisocial behavior, negative self-image, and delayed development in younger children" (Deery, 2010). Children who are abused throughout their childhood are just as likely to suffer from for their children (Deery, 2010, para). Some symptoms of abuse include, "self-destructive acts, abnormal/antisocial behavior, negative self-image, and delayed development in younger children" (Deery, 2010). Children who are abused throughout their childhood are just as likely to suffer from mental health issues like depression and anxiety in their adulthood as children who are abused sexually or physically (Deery, 2010). Severe anger and hostility problems are common for victims of abuse.

Specifically in adolescence, abuse can affect the child's long-term "intelligence, memory, recognition, moral development and the ability to feel and understand emotions" (Deery, 2010, para 1). In general, verbal abuse is the least recognized because of how difficult the abuse is to diagnose. Most attention is usually paid to physical and sexual abuse, but verbal abuse has a longer-lasting effect than many people may expect (Schroeder, 2017, p. D2). Commonly among all perpetrators of verbal abuse, the abuser usually has poor communication skills, bad stress management skills, and has not adequately addressed their previous or ongoing trauma or abuse. Background information about verbal abuse can all be found in general audience press articles. Peer-reviewed articles were used to determine what scholars found regarding verbal abuse.

Methodology

A literature review was conducted to examine the effects of verbal abuse on teenage and adult

relationships, specifically regarding the impact of abuse on executive functioning. Introductory material was found in the following general press sources: *Charleston Gazette (WV), New York Examiner, Fort Lauderdale Examiner, Evansville Courier and Press (IN) Anaheim Examiner, The Hamilton Spectator (On-tario, Canada). Searches for information were con-ducted in the following databases: NewsBank, EBSCO, and Gale Academic OneFile.* Search terms for General Press articles include: for General Press articles include: *"Verbal abuse," "Verbal Abuse Effects," "Verbal Abuse in Relationships," "Childhood Abuse," "Teen Relationships," "Symptoms of Abuse," and "Teen Dating Abuse."* Dates of access to introductory materials were: 2/10/2024 and 2/15/2024.

Peer-reviewed journals were used for the main body of the literature review. The 15 journals consulted include peer-reviewed studies published between 07/01/2010 and 02/01/2023. All studies were found in: Ebsco Discovery Service and Gale Academic Onefile databases. Dates of access to peer-reviewed articles were between 3/4/2023 and 3/25/2023. Despite being accessed a year later than the peer-reviewed articles, introductory materials remain essential for providing contextual background, clarifying key concepts, and bridging the gap between academic research and public discourse. These sources help frame the discussion, ensuring that complex empirical findings are more accessible and positioned within a broader societal framework.

Results

The article organizes its findings into nine interconnected categories that illustrate the cyclical and pervasive nature of abuse. The cycle of abuse serves as the foundation, demonstrating how abusive behaviors, particularly verbal and physical aggression, are learned and repeated across generations. The Abuse Effects on Mental Health cate-egory expands on this by revealing the psychological toll of abuse, linking it to mood disorders, anxiety, and self-harm. These long-term effects influence Abuse in Adult Romantic Relationships, where individuals exposed to abuse in childhood often struggle with conflict and emotional regulation in their own relationships. As abuse escalates, it can lead to severe physical harm, such as Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), highlighting the dangerous consequences of intimate partner violence. The Types of Relationship Abuses category broadens the discussion to include child-to-parent and parent-to-child abuse, reinforcing the idea that abuse manifests in different relational contexts. Similarly, the Impact on Motherhood and Child's Experiences with Abuse category emphasizes how maternal abuse affects parenting abilities and child development, perpetuating the cycle of violence. Teenagers' Experiences with Domestic Abuse extend this discussion by showing how adolescents navigate abusive relationships, often mirroring the behaviors they have witnessed. The Perspective of Victims and Perpetrators of Abuse offers insight into the sociological and psychological factors that drive abusive behaviors, including power imbalances and learned aggression. Lastly, Childhood Emotional Abuse ties back to the root of many abusive patterns, highlighting how emotional maltreatment in early life disrupts attachment and shapes future relationships. These categories are relevant because they collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of abuse as a systemic issue rather than an isolated event. By demonstrating the link between childhood abuse, mental health, and adult relationship dynamics, the article underscores the long-term and far-reaching effects of verbal and physical mistreatment. The inclusion of studies on traumatic brain injury and psychological distress strengthens the argument that abuse has both immediate and lasting consequences on one's well-being. Additionally, by addressing different relationship

dynamics—such as parent-child abuse, intimate partner violence, and adolescent experiences—the article highlights the various ways in which abuse is perpetuated, further reinforcing the need for intervention and prevention efforts. The structured categorization ensures that the complexity of abuse is thoroughly examined, making it clear that abuse is not merely an individual problem but a widespread societal issue that requires a multifaceted response.

Cycle of Abuse

Research regarding a reciprocal cycle in violent behaviors in adolescents for both verbal and physical behaviors was conducted by Bartle-Haring et al. (2015). Over two years with an assessment every six months, 161 adolescents were investigated. They all met the criteria for substance/alcohol abuse or abnormal dependence on their caregivers. Adolescent-to-parent violence is more common than most people would expect, and the researchers found that, "between 9% and 14% of parents are physically assaulted by an adolescent child more than once before the child reaches the age of 18, and 50–80% of these adolescents are male" (Bartle-Haring et al., 2015, para 1).

Liu et al. suggests that abuse towards a parent is an adapted behavior developed by the child to cope with their environment. The researchers found a reciprocal relationship between abuse involving children and their parents. For example, if a parent frequently belittles or harshly criticizes their child, the child may internalize this behavior and, over time, respond with verbal aggression toward the parent, mirroring the same abusive communication pattern, so when a parent or caregiver is verbally abusive toward their child, the child is more likely to reciprocate the abuse toward their parents or caregivers. Similarly, Liu et al. (2018) examined a different cycle of abuse,

focusing on the impact of interparental intimate partner violence. Their research suggests that children who witness their parents verbally abusing each other are more likely to replicate this behavior in their own adult romantic relationships. Additionally, children of parents who experience abuse are at a higher risk to encounter abuse in their own adult relationships. The researchers concluded that when parents who experience verbal abuse have their child witness the abuse, the child is likely to experience similar encounters in their relationship.

Prevalence Of Verbal Abuse And Its Effect On Mental Health

Not only does abuse continue in cycles, it harms the mental health of both abusers and victims. Statistically, 600 United States adult patients who averaged about 40 years old were researched by Robert M. Post, who found that domestic abuse, a pattern of behavior used to gain or maintain control, is likely to cause an earlier age of onset of bipolar disorder (Post et al., 2015). Twenty-four percent of patients in the study experienced verbal abuse. The study established that bipolar disorder often involves a history of abuse (physical or sexual), in which research was conducted to explore a possible connection between mental illness and verbal abuse as well. Verbal abuse, like other forms of abuse (physical or sexual), is strongly linked to the earlier onset of mental health disorders, particularly bipolar disorder. The study indicates that individuals who have experienced verbal abuse are more likely to develop mental health issues at an earlier age, highlighting the significant impact of verbal abuse on one's mental well-being. This connection between verbal abuse and mental illness underscores the importance of recognizing and addressing verbal abuse as a serious factor in mental health development. Post et al. found that the age of onset for bipolar disorder was younger

for the increased number of types of abuse experienced. A trend found in their research was that without abuse, one is less likely to have specific illnesses. Without abuse, one is 34% likely to have anxiety disorder, but with abuse one is 52% likely to have anxiety (Post et al., 2015). Problems like drug abuse, alcohol abuse, depression, mania, and mood episode frequency are all likely to increase in severity due to verbal abuse (2015).

Not only does verbal abuse continue in cycles, but it also has profound effects on the mental health of both victims and abusers. Mossige et al. (2016) found a strong relationship between verbal abuse and self-harm in children, reinforcing the notion that verbal mistreatment has long-term psychological consequences. Their study, which surveyed youth in Norway, categorized different types of abuse—verbal, emotional, physical, and sexual—while also distinguishing between abuse victims and witnesses of abuse, as well as perpetrators, including parents and peers.

The findings revealed that verbal abuse is alarmingly prevalent: 30% of surveyed students reported experiencing verbal abuse from their peers, while 11.7% experienced it from their parents. Additionally, 35.1% of respondents had witnessed parental abuse within the past year (Mossige et al., 2016) . These statistics highlight that verbal abuse is a widespread issue affecting children and adolescents in both familial and social settings. More importantly, the study uncovered a clear link between exposure to verbal and physical abuse and an increased risk of suicide and self-harm. Children and adolescents who endure verbal abuse—whether directly from caregivers, peers, or as witnesses to abusive behavior—are significantly more likely to develop depressive symptoms, engage in self-harm, and have suicidal tendencies. This aligns with broader research showing that verbal abuse, despite being non-physical, has lasting effects on emotional regulation, self-esteem, and overall mental well-being.

The study emphasizes that verbal abuse is not just a precursor to other forms of mistreatment but a direct and severe contributor to mental health issues. Verbal aggression from parents or peers can create a hostile psychological environment, leading to chronic stress, emotional dysregulation, and feelings of worthlessness. The data suggest that addressing verbal abuse in early childhood and adolescence is crucial in reducing the risk of self-harm, suicide, and other long-term mental health disorders. This highlights the urgent need for interventions, parental education, and school-based prevention programs to combat the psychological damage caused by verbal mistreatment.

Abuse in Adult Romantic Relationships

Researchers Karakurt and Silver (2013) examined how gender and age influence emotional abuse in relationships. Their study included 250 respondents, with an average age of 27, including both men and women. The findings indicated that younger men reported higher levels of emotional abuse, which decreased with age, while older women experienced less emotional abuse than older men, and younger women faced higher rates of isolation. The study sample consisted of community members and college students, and participants responded to 66 items assessing various forms of abuse, including isolation, degradation, sexual abuse, and property damage. While numerous factors contribute to domestic abuse, the researchers found that evidence for isolation as a consistent form of abuse was inconclusive. Given that verbal abuse often manifests as degradation, manipulation, and isolation, it plays a

critical role in emotional abuse dynamics. These findings reinforce the study's broader discussion on how patterns of abuse differ based on gender and age. Halpern-Meekin et al. (2013) took a different route and looked into young adults' relationships and their developmental perspective. They used the Toledo Adolescent Relationships Study to test how "relationship churning", the volatility of a relationship, is associated with other serious conflicts, specifically verbal abuse. Couples who broke up without reconciling exhibited similar levels of conflict as those in stable relationships. On the other hand, churners that were often involved in an on-and-off relationship were two times as likely to report experiences of verbal abuse in their relationship.

The study looks into conflict and the differences between intimate partner violence and family conflict. Estimates range from 25% to more than 50% of men and women reporting aggressive behavior toward their partners (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). Abuse within relationships is often a result of partners poorly managing conflict. In some cases, couples are unable to find the cause for their negative behaviors. For instance, their behavior may stem from traumatic experiences from their youth. Approximately 40% of unmarried young adults experienced an unstable churning relationship and 40% experienced physical violence; five in 10 experienced verbal abuse in their present or most recent relationship (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013)

Traumatic Brain Injury and the Escalation of Abuse

While verbal abuse is often perceived as a less severe form of mistreatment compared to physical violence, research suggests that it can act as a precursor to more intense physical conflict, including domestic violence severe enough to cause traumatic brain injury (TBI). Emotional and psych-

ological abuse, including verbal aggression, can escalate over time, reinforcing patterns of intimate partner violence (IPV) that may lead to physical assault. Studies indicate that individuals who experience persistent verbal abuse are more likely to become trapped in abusive relationships, where the risk of physical violence increases as emotional control and manipulation deepen. A study conducted by Larry Y. Liu and researchers examined over 12 million medical records from 1999 to 2017, to explore the relationship between IPV and TBI, particularly in women. The study revealed that approximately 25% of women experience severe physical violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime, including being slammed, hit, or beaten (Liu et al., 2020). Victims of IPV frequently suffer from mental health disorders, substance use issues, and chronic pain, conditions that are also commonly linked to prolonged exposure to verbal abuse. The study also found that IPV survivors often experience TBI due to repeated blows to the head or violent shaking, which can lead to cognitive impairments, emotional dysregulation, and long-term behavioral challenges. While TBI is primarily a result of physical violence, the role of verbal abuse in enabling or escalating violent relationships should not be overlooked. Verbal abuse may normalize mistreatment, lower self-esteem, and make it harder for victims to leave abusive situations, ultimately increasing their vulnerability to physical harm. Therefore, addressing verbal abuse is a critical step in preventing the progression of IPV and reducing the risk of severe physical consequences like TBI.

Types of Relationship Abuses

Ibabe and researchers conducted a study specifically focused on child-to-parent violence (2010). By examining the psychological and family characteristics of adolescents who physically or

verbally abuse their parents, the researchers investigated the gender differences between perpetrators and victims of aggression. Ibabe and Jaureguizar explain that violence against parents, which is understood as a means to gain power and control, may cause the parent physical, financial, or psychological harm (2010). Research indicates that juveniles who abuse their parents may also show increased violent behavior; abuse toward parents frequently begins with verbally abusive episodes and progresses over time, escalating to emotional and physical abuse (Ibabe and Jaureguizar, 2010). The majority of aggressors were found to be male, aged between 10 and 18, and were generally a part of one-parent families.

An explanation for child-to-parent violence would be the trauma or hardship that comes with custody conflicts, financial difficulties, or little to no social support. A specific profile of adolescents who abused their parents was shown to have lower self-esteem and empathy and had more problems regarding discipline at their school (Ibabe, 2010).

While Ibabe and researchers examined child-to-parent abuse, a study conducted by Beckmann et al. focused on parent-to-child violence. Specifically, Beckmann examined how childhood exposure to parent-to-child physical violence affected family relationships. The study investigated whether childhood exposure to parental physical violence is related to adolescents' recent physical adolescent-to-parental violence (APV) (Beckmann, 2020).

According to Beckmann (2020), about 5.3 % of adolescents (131) had exercised some form of physical violence towards their parents at some time during the last year.

Impact on Motherhood and Child's Experiences with Abuse

Domestic abuse, like verbal abuse, impacts the mother in a relationship. Cort and Cline (2017) researched the correlation between abuse on the mother and its impacts on the family. Domestic abuse negatively impacts women and children, which affects a child's social, emotional and behavioral development and a woman's emotional well-being, parenting capacity, and ability to respond to their child (Cort and Cline, 2017). For the mother, the caregiver's role is often compromised, whether it be through high levels of stress, inconsistent parenting, or a lack of resourcefulness to effectively respond to the emotional needs of her child. Repeated traumatic experiences can affect the development of the attachment relationships between a mother and her children. For instance, the abuse may form a barrier between the mother and the child (2017). In essence, the effects of abuse are varied, and many mothers who have experienced abuse have also used inconsistent parenting styles. Some adult victims cope significantly better even after being abused.

Like Cort and Cline (2017), Blair et al. (2015) also researched the impact of abuse on the mother role, but their findings indicate that children who witness the abuse of their mothers are at risk for serious behavioral problems (2015). Roughly "4.8 million women are assaulted by their partner each year in the United States" (CDC, 2021), and in many cases, their children witness the abuse. The Centers for Disease Control estimates that one out of 15 children have witnessed partner violence in the past year, and 25% of children will witness violence within their lifetime. This equates to about "8.2 million children witnessing abuse each year and 18.8 million children witnessing partner violence at least once in their lifetime" (Blair et al.

2015, para 2).

Both genders are exposed to abuse in their homes, but 92% of abusive perpetrators are male. Children who witness partner violence "show more signs of internalizing: withdrawal, anxiety, depression, and externalizing: aggression, attention disorders, rule-breaking behaviors" (2015, para 3). Unlike other studies conducted, this study examined the effects of abuse on women and their children over seven years.

In the sample of 300 children, male children tended to externalize more than female children after witnessing violence in their homes. The researchers describe a boy's response to conflict as a "*warior* who may react to threats by taking action, whereas girls may be *worriers* who respond to conflict by internalizing their feelings" (2015, para 18).

Teenagers' Experiences with Domestic Abuse

Many researchers have studied how children and adults respond to abuse, but Fox et al. (2014) discussed how teenagers are impacted by verbal and domestic abuse. Research was conducted on 1,143 pupils, aged 13–14 years old, who completed a questionnaire about their experiences with domestic abuse. Overall, 45% of respondents who were in a dating relationship reported that they have been victimized, 25% perpetrated abuse, and 34% of the sample reported that they witnessed abuse in their family. The study claims that there is a "relationship between victimization and perpetration with the vast majority of perpetrators, 92%, also reporting experiencing abuse from a boyfriend or girlfriend" (2014, para 1). In conclusion, the researchers have found high rates of domestic abuse among younger teenagers, and they suggest that it is now time to introduce domestic abuse prevention education.

Perspective of Victim and Perpetrators of Abuse

An interesting idea that Brown et al. (2010) explain is the reason for abuse in families. The study suggests that domestic violence is an early conception of "men's role as the head of the family and women's relative subordination, and the sociological and psychological perspectives of each person in a relationship" (Brown et al. 2010). First, Brown and his colleagues identified the following reasons for domestic abuse, which are:

"socio-political factors related to male entitlement and power, social learning factors promoting differ-ential socialization of males and females as well as traditional expectations for relationships, systemic factors that contribute to the escalation and maintenance of violent patterns of interaction between partners, and psycho-dynamic factors that link childhood attachment experiences with adult romantic-relationships" (2010).

Their method of research consisted of having 66 men who attended men's domestic abuse groups in Australia completing a questionnaire. The study suggests that interventions are needed to assist perpetrators of abuse to work through their trauma. An example of this is "the possibility of using his own victim experiences to enhance and empathize for their current family members who have experienced their violence" (Brown et al., 2010).

While Brown et al. studied possible reasonings for abuse, Boira and Marcuello researched violent behavior within an abusive relationship from the male abuser's perspective. Eight participants were interviewed in-depth to describe and analyze their perceptions of violence. The analysis found that relationship violence

"begins in the early stages of the relationship, is long term, rarely includes serious physical aggression, is dominated by a growing hostility and isolation, is characterized by a lack of awareness and responsibility for the violent behavior, and includes intentional and strategic use of violent behavior…" (Boira and Marcuello, 2013, para 1).

Childhood Emotional Abuse

Riggs et al. researched the contributions of early emotional abuse, adult attachment, and depression, and their impacts on different aspects of romantic relationship functioning (2010). The study examined college stu-dents who were in dating relationships. They completed a survey measuring childhood emo-tional maltreatment, adult attachment style, psy-chological distress, and romantic relationships (2010). In general, emotional abuse is known as the core component of all forms of child abuse, which is violating a child's physical or sexual boundaries, or degrading, frightening, or exploit-ing the child (2010). These are all "more detri-mental to a child's self-esteem than physical a-buse because they 'constitute a direct threat to a child's developing self-worth'" (Riggs and Kamin-ski, 2010, para 4). The research states that when emotionally abused children grow up, they are likely to have high levels of attachment anxiety or the complete opposite and completely stray from attachment figures. When one is "psychologically abused by a partner, this could be associated with mental health problems, such as drinking, depres-sion, and post-traumatic stress" (2010, para 12). The study highlights how early emotional abuse influences attachment styles in adulthood, with many victims developing attachment anxiety (fear of abandonment and excessive need for reassur-ance) or avoidance (withdrawing from relation-ships to prevent vulnerability). These attachment issues can make individuals more susceptible to verbal abuse in romantic relationships as they may either tolerate mistreatment due to fear of abandonment or struggle with emotional regula-tion, potentially engaging in abusive communica-tion themselves. Additionally, the study connects psychological abuse in adult relationships to men-tal health problems such as depression, substance abuse, and PTSD—all of which are also linked to verbal abuse. This reinforces the idea that child-hood experiences of verbal and emotional abuse can create patterns that persist into adulthood, affecting the way individuals communicate, ma-nage conflict, and respond to mistreatment in their relationships. Which in most cases is not commonly studied, and Bartle-Haring et al. in-cluded both the parent and adolescent reports of verbal and physical abuse. Bartle-Haring et al. uses the Conflict Tactics Scale, a well-known sur-vey used for data collection. Other studies like Beckmann (2020) and Fox et al. (2014) also use a questionnaire. Fox et al. (2014) studied young teenagers' experiences with domestic abuse, and the questionnaire asked questions like "has your significant other ever pushed, slapped or grabbed you, threatened to physically hurt you, etc." Even though the questions were straightforward and difficult to dissimulate, some people may take issue with the fact that surveys are being used for qualitative purposes, and the results may be inaccurate. In an article by Anouar El Haji, Haji writes that survey research is only effective if and only if people honestly report their beliefs and preferences (2020). For example, there are many ways one may answer a question depending on how one sees oneself. Haji (2020) explains that respondents might try to show off or try to pre-sent themself as wealthier, happier, smarter, etc., and some may like to answer in ways to please another person. Similarly, some people may be disengaged and answer without much effort, and one may try to adapt their answers due to an incentive. With this, the information that was

collected may be unreliable as the study's findings may be compromised due to potential biases in self-reported survey data. If respondents provided answers that were influenced by social desirability, disengagement, or a desire to project a certain image, the data collected may not accurately reflect their true experiences with domestic abuse.

Karakurt and Silver not only had a survey, but they debriefed each participant after each person responded about the study objectives. This is a critical step-up because the researchers received information and then were able to go into the specifics with their respondents through personal dialogue. Their research question revolved around gender roles and age in an intimate relationship, as well as the impact that gender and age have on intimate partner abuse.

Researchers should follow up with respondents so that more data can be obtained and collected qualitatively. In the Appendix, Study #5, #12, and #13 all used interviews as a means of data collection—Karakurt and Silver (2013), Blair et al. (2015), and Boira and Marcuello (2013).

There are many effective ways that the researchers collected data and implemented them into into their results. An interesting method is Ibabe and Jaureguizar's approach to researching child-to-parent abuse; they examined judicial proceedings of 103 cases of child-to-parent abuse. Some people may take issue with the examination of cases because there is a limitation of the child's perspective. In other words, the case may include very limited information about what the child was experiencing that led to the child ultimately abusing their parent(s). There may have been many factors that played into the reason the child is abusing their parents. Ibabe and Jaureguizar (2010) examined the psychosocial profiles of juveniles who abused their parents, but just looking

at judicial proceedings leaves little room for deeper evaluation of other factors—like the social and economic life of the juvenile. For example, the child may be exposed to abuse at home or at school, or the child may be experiencing chronic stress. All of these possible factors contribute to the limitations of Ibabe and Jaureguizar's study but are not mentioned to a great extent.

While researchers conducted informational studies, there are many encouraging directions that their research could continue. Specific trends in global, social, economic, and political affiliations may affect abuse. Many of the studies that were examined included students in high school and college, and others included older men and women. In a social sense, someone's occupation may be a factor for trends in abuse. Social workers who work to aid people cope with problems in their everyday lives, experience high levels of exhaustion, and verbal abuse. From facing traumatic experiences like a "nine-year-old child self-harming and trying to hang themselves and a very aggressive father making threats," these workers' occupation contributes to their stress and they ultimately face heavy amounts of abuse (Cooper, 2017). Further research may con-sider how occupational differences may affect the cycle of abuse.

Economic and financial crises such as the Great Recession, which is considered the "most severe financial crisis since the Great Depression," wreaked havoc on the general public; it took about 10 years for the chaos to settle down, and millions of jobs and billions of dollars of income were wiped away (*5 of the World's Most Devastating Financial Crises, n.d.).* Even to a personal extent, many Amer-icans experience financial crises in their homes and cannot escape poverty. Researchers may consider how economic and financial crises, whether they are global or personal, affect the home lives of Americans. Home life is important in

jobs and billions of dollars of income were wiped away (*5 of the World's Most Devastating Financial Crises, n.d.).* Even to a personal extent, many Amer-icans experience financial crises in their homes and cannot escape poverty. Researchers may consider how economic and financial crises, whether they are global or personal, affect the home lives of Americans. Home life is important in regards to verbal abuse, because most Americans spend a significant amount of their time at home *(*Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). In essence, it would be important for researchers to include findings about how the economic life of an American may affect their home life, which ultimately impacts the cycle of abuse.

The researchers used effective methods for their research, but in some cases, clear omissions were not included. Surveys are a common method of collecting data, but many times, respondents may answer inaccurately. Studies that used interviews or surveys not only debriefed about the topic of abuse but received personal insight from the respondents. Ideas for further directions in resear-ch include looking into different factors that play a role in households that may contribute to the pre-valence of abuse like occupation and financial problems.

Conclusion

Verbal abuse, as well as domestic abuse, nega-tively impacts the lives of victims. Verbal abuse is often overlooked because of the inability to see physical scars as one would see from a physically abusive situation. In many cases, a verbal abuser belittles, criticizes, and threatens their victim, which is shown in changes in the victims' behavior like anxiety, chronic stress, decreased self-esteem, etc. (Smith, 2010). Many people who experience verbal abuse have no idea that there is anything wrong because it becomes a part of their everyday

life; most child and teen patients are often diag-nosed with ADD, and the victim is conditioned to be on guard from being put down (Weigel, 2013). Abuse is never justified, and healthy relationships are not dominated by one person over the other; for example, name-calling, cursing, shouting, etc. affect relationships in different ways (Scheff, 2011). In teens, abuse causes psychological pro-blems directed to intelligence, memory, recog-nition, and moral development (Deery, 2010). The abuser may have poor communication skills, bad stress management skills, and hasn't adequately addressed their trauma or abuse, etc. and they may be going through something traumatic (Schroeder, 2017, p. D2).

A scientific literature review was conducted to examine the effects of verbal abuse on teenage and adult relationships, specifically the cycle of verbal abusers becoming verbal abuse perpetra-tors. The sources used were: *Ebsco Discovery Ser-vice and Gale Academic Onefile databases.*

Research consistently highlights the cyclical na-ture of abuse and its lasting psychological impact. Studies indicate a strong correlation between reciprocity in violent behaviors among adoles-cents and experiences of verbal or physical abuse in childhood (Bartle-Haring et al., 2015). Similarly, parent-to-child abuse has been found to have a direct positive correlation with child-to-parent abuse, suggesting that violence within families is often bidirectional (Beckmann, 2020). The quality of parental relationships and exposure to abusive behaviors also have prolonged effects on children as they enter adolescence, shaping their future interactions and emotional responses (W. Liu et al., 2018). The mental health consequences of a-buse are profound and far-reaching. Domestic abuse has been linked to an earlier onset of bipolar disorder (Post et al., 2015), while verbal abuse, violence, and sexual abuse significantly

increase suicidal ideation and self-harm (Mossige et al., 2016).

Victims of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) show brain scan similarities to those with Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), illustrating the neurological damage associated with prolonged abuse (L. Y. Liu et al., 2020). Additionally, abused women often experience stress and trauma that impact their mothering behaviors, potentially affecting their children's emotional stability and development (Cort and Cline, 2017). Abuse also manifests in romantic relationships, particularly among young women, who experience high rates of isolation in verbally abusive relationships (Kara-kurt and Silver, 2013). In dating relationships, churners—couples in on-again, off-again relation-ships—were significantly more likely to report verbal abuse (Halpern-Meekin et al., 2013). Additionally, girls are more likely than boys to pressured or forced into sexual acts, highlighting gendered vulnerabilities in abusive dynamics (Fox et al., 2014). In many cases, perpetrators of partner abuse are often fathers or boyfriends of the victim's mother (Blair et al., 2015), and some abusers develop their violent tendencies as a response to their own childhood abuse (Brown et al., 2010). The long-term impact of abuse extends to attachment and personality development. Victims of abuse often struggle to develop positive attachment relationships and may exhibit inconsistent attachment behaviors (Riggs and Kaminski, 2010). Additionally, offenders of abuse do not always show interest in personality traits associated with change or self-improvement, suggesting a deeper psychological entrenchment in abusive behaviors (Boira and Marcuello, 2013). Together, these findings emphasize the far-reaching effects of abuse, reinforcing its cyclical nature and the need for early intervention, psychological support, and systemic efforts to break the patterns of violence. Many studies used a questionnaire or online survey to conduct their research, and this was found to be faulty because of the unreliableness of surveys. However, studies that followed up with their respondents were very effective and showed elevated quality in their findings.

Other studies used interviews that were semi-structured and gave insight into the lives of each respondent and the original study's research question. Some studies used both interviews and surveys which were extremely effective for data regarding the personal lives of respondents. Researchers should examine all factors that may cause or affect abuse in households, like social, economic, and global trends.

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Socioeconomic and Cultural Determinants of Access to Musculoskeletal Healthcare Among Indigenous Populations Worldwide: A Systematic Review

Background: Indigenous populations globally face challenges in medical care. The socioeconomic and cultural determinants that this demographic faces include systemic discrimination, geographic isolation, and poverty, amplifying disparities in healthcare access and outcomes, contributing to cycles of disability and a diminished quality of life for patients. This review examines the socioeconomic and cultural barriers to musculoskeletal healthcare among Indigenous populations, evaluates the common disparities in musculoskeletal healthcare outcomes, and identifies actionable strategies to address these inequities.

Methods: A systematic search using PubMed was conducted using predefined terms related to Indigenous populations, musculoskeletal healthcare, and socioeconomic factors. The inclusion criteria focused on studies from the previous 20 years involving Indigenous adults undergoing or seeking orthopedic treatment. Data extraction and quality assessment followed PRISMA guidelines to explore disparities in healthcare access and outcomes.

Results: Of the 148 articles, 15 articles met the inclusion criteria. Key findings highlighted the systemic barriers for Indigenous populations such as geographic isolation, economic challenges, and a lack of cultural understanding between healthcare providers and Indigenous patients. Disparities in postoperative outcomes, recovery rates, and complication rates were evident. Gaps in culturally competent care and healthcare infrastructure were identified, with more common trends in rural and remote areas.

Conclusions: Indigenous populations face continuing healthcare inequities, driven by their socioeconomic and cultural barriers. Addressing these disparities requires systemic reforms, beginning with educational systems and expanding to culturally inclusive care models, with targeted policies to improve access to musculoskeletal care. Future research should prioritize longitudinal studies and equity-focused methodologies to develop sustained solutions for improving healthcare outcomes among Indigenous communities in the United States and other areas of the world. Enhancing cultural competency within healthcare services is recommended to ensure these challenges are addressed.

Keywords: Indigenous populations, healthcare disparities, musculoskeletal health, orthopedic care access, socioeconomic factors, cultural competence

Introduction

In the United States and around the world, Indigenous peoples comprise about 6.2% of the population (Birika, n.d.). Throughout history, Indigenous settlements have endured trauma including colonization, assimilation, and displacement. Their human rights have been and continue to be compromised by state authorities in some areas, and they tend to face marginalization and discrimination. In healthcare, the major issues experienced by Native Americans include poor health, low-quality medical care, suicide, drug and alcohol use disorders, depression, and sexual violence (Amnesty International, 2024; Findling, 2019).

For Indigenous populations, neighborhood conditions, geographic location, and residential segregation have affected their health, social mobility, and quality of life. Prior research has been conducted to analyze the experiences of Native Americans in healthcare. Reports made by Native Americans show that they experience pervasive discrimination during healthcare visits; racial discrimination; lack of accessible; afford-able; and culturally appropriate care; and have higher rates of reporting institutional discrimination overall (Newman & Velez, 2014). Trends such as an increase in the size of Native American populations caused White populations to become more biased against them (Newman & Velez, 2014). Overall, these factors contribute to Indigenous populations reporting such discrimination.

Globally, healthcare access issues faced by Indigenous populations share common socioeconomic and cultural barriers. Studies have highlighted how factors such as limited healthcare awareness, geographic isolation, and cultural differences contribute to significant delays in care as well as a lack of competent treatment.

Socioeconomic challenges, such as homelessness, low education, and unemployment, further amplify these barriers, inevitably limiting access to necessary care for conditions like arthritis and chronic pain. Geographic disparities, particularly in rural and remote areas, contribute to Indigenous populations having less access to specialists and culturally competent care (Nguyen et al., 2020).

Musculoskeletal care is a critical area of investigation because these conditions are among the leading causes of disability worldwide. Easy and adequate access to effective orthopedic treatment can prevent long-term disabilities, reduce chronic pain, and improve overall quality of life.

Disparities in postoperative outcomes, recovery rates, and complication rates remain poorly studied. Federal policies and agencies have not been successful in addressing the needs of Indigenous populations. This study reviews the barriers Indigenous populations face in accessing musculoskeletal care.

Methodology

PubMed was used as the database to complete the preliminary literature search. Afterwards, studies were selected in a two-step process (Figure 1): first, titles and abstracts were independently screened by two reviewers against the inclusion criteria, which included focusing on Indigenous populations and reporting data related to musculoskeletal healthcare access, utilization, or outcomes. Full-text reviews of selected studies were performed to confirm eligibility.

Database Search Strategies

Studies were included if they met the following criteria: the main study population consisted of Indigenous peoples, such as Native Americans, First Nations, Aboriginal Australians, Māori, Inuit, or other Indigenous groups; the subject group underwent or sought an orthopedic procedure related to musculoskeletal healthcare; only human subjects were evaluated; participants were aged 18 years or older; and the study was published within the last 20 years (2004–2024).

The final search of PubMed was conducted on November 12, 2024. The search strategy employed the following terms listed in Table 1. No filters or language restrictions were applied to the search. The strategy ensured the comprehensive identification of relevant studies addressing socio-economical and cultural factors in orthopedic healthcare access among Indigenous populations.

Articles meeting the inclusion criteria were categorized based on key elements (Table 2), such as the Indigenous population studied, the type of musculoskeletal condition or orthopedic procedure discussed, and the socioeconomic and cultural factors impacting healthcare access. This organization facilitated the identification of recurring themes and patterns relevant to understanding healthcare disparities in orthopedic services among Indigenous populations.

Selection Process

The search yielded 148 articles, which were screened independently by two reviewers. Titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess alignment with the inclusion criteria, followed by a full-text review of eligible studies. Those studies that focused only on pediatric

populations had less than 30 in their sample size, or did not have clinical applications, were excluded. Disagreements between reviewers were resolved with discussion and consensus.

Figure 1

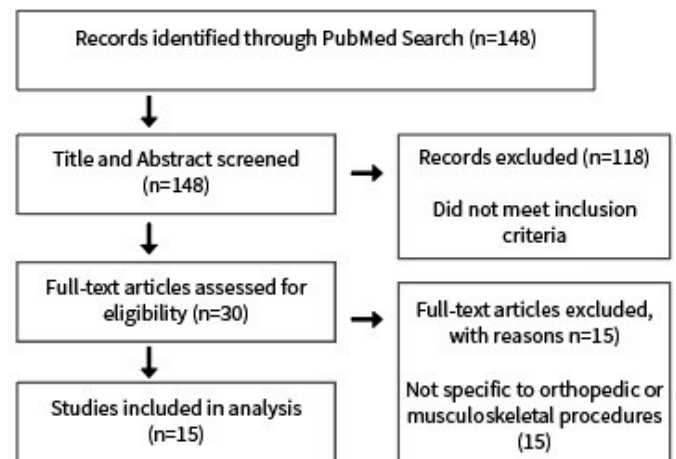*Flowchart of the systematic research in PubMed*

Table 1

Keywords used in the PubMed search

Category: Keywords
Indigenous Groups: Indigenous, Native American, First Nations, Aboriginal, Maori, Inuit, Indigenous People
Social Factors: socioeconomic factors, social determinants, economic status, poverty, health disparities, access to care
Orthopedic Terms: orthopedic surgery, joint replacement, knee arthroplasty, hip arthoplasty, postoperative outcomes, surgical outcomes

Selection Result

Studies included in this review focused on healthcare disparities and access issues among Indigenous populations. These studies were cross-sectional analyses, observational cohort studies, and mixed-method designs. Inclusion criteria emphasized the following populations: Māori, Pasifika, Aboriginal Australians, and Indigenous groups in Canada and Latin America. The selection process highlighted geographic and systemic

inequities in healthcare access, often targeting underserved or marginalized groups. 15 studies were selected for this analysis, and the results are summarized in Table 2. During the categorization of articles, parameters were included to distinguish the analyzed articles and whether they were applicable or not. The chosen studies focus on a wide range of health-care themes, including the prevalence of musculoskeletal conditions, barriers to care, culturally tailored interventions, and

disparities in access to specialist services.

Risk of Bias in Studies and Certainty of Evidence

The search strategy used in this review ensured a credible methodology that contributed to the reliability of the findings. However, several limitations justify consideration. The reliance on a single database, PubMed, may have excluded relevant studies that are available in other databases. By restricting the search to musculoskeletal treatment, the specificity of this review was significantly increased, but the results were particularly limited. There was a lack of studies from the United States and other countries with a notable Indigenous population.

Selection bias was inherent due to the select population targets included, which limited the generalizability of this study. Attrition bias was noted, given that most studies did not have longit-

-udinal follow-ups. Reporting bias may be present due to underreporting, such as a lack of data on comorbidities or specific impacts of culture. The wide range of musculoskeletal diseases and procedures included in the studies posed challenges, making direct comparisons and comprehensive analyses difficult. There were limited details in the reporting of some outcomes, with many studies failing to provide detailed statistical measures that could enhance the precision of findings.

The certainty of the evidence varied greatly among the studies, some providing strong data on systemic inequities, while others were either small in sample size or methodologically limited. Numerous studies relied upon self-reported data. Nonetheless, consistent identification of barriers and disparities across multiple studies reinforced the validity of overarching themes.

Table 2

Summary of The Included Studies

Study	Category
Barnabe et al, (2008)	Rheumatoid arthritis, degenerative arthritis, unspecified arthropathy
Harcombe et al. (2016)	Hip and knee total joint replacement surgery
Vindigni et al, (2006)	Musculoskeletal conditions in Indigenous Austrlians (screening and assessment)
Adams et al. (2019)	Chiropractic care for musculoskeletal and spinal conditions in urban and rural/remote areas
Wyeth et al. (2018)	Rehabilitation and work participation post-injury among Māori workers

Case Studies

Significant disparities in musculoskeletal health and access to care were noted for vulnerable Indigenous populations, which emphasized large systemic barriers and inequities. For example, Aboriginal Manitobans in Canada have a significantly higher rate of rheumatoid arthritis, degenerative arthritis, and unspecified arthropathy (Barnabe et al., 2008). These disparities reflected system-wide inequities in access to musculoskeletal care among these communities and pointed out the need for targeted programs to narrow these gaps.

Total Joint Replacement Surgeries in New Zealand

Geographic disparities are evident in access to publicly funded total joint replacement (TJR) surgeries in New Zealand. Despite the increase in procedure volume and rates of publicly funded TJR surgeries, availability has not kept pace with the growing population's demand. This situation disproportionately affects underserved communities and necessitates systemic reforms to improve equity in orthopedic care, and an increase in barriers to adequate patient care, such as prolonged clinic visits and economic burdens, has been identified (Harcombe et al., 2016).

Challenges and Adaptation of Healthcare in Australia

Indigenous Australians who live in rural communities experience high levels of musculoskeletal conditions that negatively impact their day-to-day tasks (Vindigni et al., 2006). This exemplified the difficulties that the Indigenous populations in Australia faced.

The role of chiropractors in managing musculoskeletal conditions was also explored in rural and remote Australia. However, it was noted that this population of doctors faced unique challenges, such as high workloads and limited diagnostic tools, highlighting the structural barriers within rural healthcare systems. Rural and remote-based chiropractors are more likely to treat a variety of musculoskeletal cases, which include Indigenous populations, in comparison to their urban colleagues (Adams et al., 2019).

The cultural adaptation of diagnostic tools is one of the most important strategies in enhancing musculoskeletal health assessments. A screening tool specially adapted for one Indigenous Australian population has demonstrated improved diagnostic accuracy and emphasized the need for culturally sensitive approaches in reducing health inequalities in rural settings (Vindigni et al, 2006).

Cultural and Socioeconomic Barriers to Healthcare in New Zealand and Latin America

Cultural and linguistic barriers hindered access to health care for certain musculoskeletal conditions, including carpal tunnel syndrome (CTS), especially among the Māori and Pacific populations in New Zealand. Culturally appropriate healthcare systems were needed to remove disparities in disease outcomes. Policy changes that reduced the individual burden of proof in injury compensation claims processes, enabled time off work to attend health appointments, and increased public funding for surgical resources were recommended to improve early access to CTS care, particularly for Māori and Pacific populations and those in small and rural workplaces, which would ultimately benefit this Indigenous population (Bűhler et al., 2024). A syndemic model of musculoskeletal health among Indigenous people in Latin America drew on interrelations between socioeconomic factors such as geographic isolation, poor educational attainment, and

inadequate health resources. There was a higher association for health inequ-ities in patients with rheumatic and musculo-skeletal diseases (RMD) in Indigenous populations (Peláez-Ballestas et al., 2018). These findings suggest the need for interventions that take into consideration the complex impact of inequity on musculoskeletal health disparities.

Understudied Disparities of Healthcare Outcome in Australia

High rates of rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, and systemic lupus erythematosus among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia called for targeted strategies that seek to improve access and health outcomes in mus-culoskeletal health for Indigenous and tribal populations (Sines et al., 2024). It was concluded that further studies with local Indigenous pop-ulations were necessary to determine the burden of musculoskeletal diseases.

Within the realm of surgical procedures, the studies we examined found that Indigenous populations have significantly higher rates of 30- and 90-day post-operative mortality compared to Europeans, particularly for elective procedures, which include musculoskeletal procedures. In ad-dition, systemic disparities in surgical practice, including joint replacement surgeries for Abor-iginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, were documented (O'Brien et al., 2021). The findings have underlined the need for targeted reform efforts toward overcoming remaining barriers to surgical access and improvement in health out-comes overall for the Indigenous population.

Common Problems Across The Globe

The review identified healthcare disparities am-ong Indigenous populations in terms of musculo-skeletal care globally. Various barriers included geographic isolation, socioeconomic challenges, cultural mismatches, and inadequate patient care. Systemic racism, poverty, and lack of culturally competent care were identified across studies as the most contributing factors to disparities (Barnabe et al., 2008; Bűhler et al., 2024; Peláez-Ballestas et al., 2018). Geographic and rural limitations com-pounded access to necessary services like ortho-pedic surgical treatment (Harcombe et al., 2016; O'Brien et al., 2021). These shared challenges between Indigenous populations emphasize the importance of learning from international con-texts to understand and address disparities (Gran-ados et al., 2023; Peláez-Ballestas et al., 2018).

The major socioeconomic determinants that were noticeably consistent included income, employ-ment status, and educational attainment, and they were frequently identified as critical barriers to healthcare access for this population (Granados et al., 2023; Peláez-Ballestas et al., 2018). Indi-genous populations often reside in rural areas, further compounding these challenges through their geographic isolation and limited availability of specialist care (Adams et al., 2019; Vindigni et al., 2006). Studies consistently reported delays in receiving timely orthopedic treatment, essentially exacerbating conditions like arthritis and frac-tures, ultimately leading to long-term disabilities (Barnabe et al., 2008; Sines et al., 2024).

Cultural factors played a significant role in this healthcare problem, as Indigenous patients repor-ted distrust in healthcare systems due to historical and ongoing systemic discrimination (Bűhler et al., 2024; Peláez-Ballestas et al., 2018). Similarly, claims of healthcare providers' lack of understan-ding of Indigenous values and traditions further discouraged Indigenous people from seeking care (Bűhler et al., 2024; Vindigni et al., 2006). This lack

of culturally competent care highlights a pressing need for healthcare systems to integrate Indigenous perspectives and practices into services, even as early as the medical education system (Vindigni et al., 2006).

Disparities beyond access to care extended to post-operative outcomes, including poorer recove- ry rates and higher complication rates among Indi-genous patients (Gurney et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2021). These findings, supported by the studies, point to a systemic issue that requires multi-level interventions, for instance, improving healthcare infrastructure and policy reforms in rural areas and targeted training for healthcare providers to deliver culturally sensitive care (Adams et al., 2019; Bűhler et al., 2024; O'Brien et al., 2021).

Conclusion

This review highlights the disparities in access to musculoskeletal healthcare services among Indigenous populations, driven by socioeconomic and cultural barriers, systemic racism, and geographic isolation. These inequities result in delayed care, higher complication rates, and poorer outcomes, which perpetuate cycles of disability and reduced quality of life. Inadequate culturally competent care was consistently identified as a critical barrier. The findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions to improve healthcare equity for Indigenous populations. Healthcare providers, researchers, and policymakers must collaborate to develop culturally competent care models, enhance healthcare infrastructure in underserved areas, and implement systemic re-forms to address these inequities. Integrating Indigenous perspectives into healthcare educa-tion and training can build trust and improve pro-vider-patient relationships while expanding access to specialist care in remote areas can mitigate

geographic barriers. Longitudinal studies with lar-ger and more diverse samples are needed to capture the full scope of disparities in musculo-skeletal healthcare, especially in the United States. Future research must deepen our under-standing of healthcare disparities and implement methodologies to achieve health equity for Indigenous populations. Enhancing cultural compe-tency within healthcare services will aid in the development of patient-centered medical care.

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