

ANGLIA RUSKIN UNIVERSITY

**IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN  
THE FURRY FANDOM**

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FACULTY OF ARTS, LAW AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## ABSTRACT

### IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN THE FURRY FANDOM

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Furries are a fandom that has been developing away from the public eye and yet has appeared in a negative way in many media representations. So private are many Furry communities that many people would not know what a furry was if you were to ask them. Although definition can vary, to be a Furry, a person identifies with an animal as part of their personality; this can be on a mystical/religious level or a psychological level. Some Furries see themselves as being something other than wholly human with a personality which encompasses both animal and human traits. This is not entirely a new concept as many cultures such as Indigenous Australians and Native Americans and others engage some form of animal identity, and in both English and Japanese folklore, there are tales of people who really are animals. However, in modern Western society having a spirit animal or animal identity can sometimes be framed by others as social deviance rather than religious or totemic diversity.

This thesis investigates how Furries use the online space to create a 'Furry identity'. This thesis argues that for highly identified Furries, posthumanism is an appropriate framework to use. For less identified Furries, who are more akin to fans, fan studies literature is used to conceptualise their identity construction. This thesis addresses how stigmatization has affected their identity construction and how intra-fandom stigmatization has caused tension within the fandom between different members.

The data for this thesis was collected using mixed methods via a questionnaire online which received over a thousand responses from Furries in the online Reddit community. The data was evaluated using posthuman philosophy using theorists such as Deleuze, Guattari and Haraway. This project argues that the Furries are not a homogenous group and with varying levels of identification within the fandom. The purpose of this project is to show that negative media representations of the Furry Fandom have wrongly pathologized the Furries as deviants as opposed to fans.

Key words: fandom, Furry Fandom, fan studies, posthuman, online communities

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J. A

Signed:

Date:

27/08/2018

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# List of Abbreviations

Bulletin Board System (BBS)

Body without Organs (BwO)

International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP)

Not safe for work (NSFW)

Safe for work (SFW)

Social Networking Sites (SNS)

# Glossary

## **Anthropomorphics**

The adjective is used in two ways to describe human and nonhuman characteristics. Anthropomorphic can be used to explain animal behaviour in human terms i.e. ‘the dog is looking guilty because he was naughty’. It can also be used to describe an animal having human characteristics. In the Furry Fandom this is where their drawing may include animals in clothes or drinking coffee.

## **Fursona**

A fursona is a representation of the Furies anthropomorphic persona which are usually drawn by the Furry themselves or commissioned by an artist. Fursonas have previously been viewed as an important identifying feature of being a Furry with some studies showing that more than 95% of Furies have at least one fursona (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 93). This thesis challenges this statistic in chapter five.

## **Fursuits**

Fursuits are suits that a Furry can wear which is usually of their fursona. A full fursuit will contain full body covering including a head though it is not uncommon to see Furies wearing ears and/or a furry tail if they do not wish to wear a full suit. Fursuits although being a popular stereotype that a lay person will come up with when asked about Furies are actually not that common. There is evidence to show that many Furies would like to own a fursuit given the chance but due to the very high cost in making these custom suits (usually running into the thousands) many Furies will not own one. There are three different main categories of fur suits which are: ‘toony’ suits which are designed to be cartoon-like, usually with large eyes and neon colours, ‘realistic’ suits which are designed to look anatomically similar to the animal on which they are based and then the rarer ‘quad suit’ made for the purpose of being able to walk on all fours.

### **Fur Meets**

This is the informal term that many Furies use to describe their offline meet ups with other Furies. These events are often an opportunity to show off full and partial fursuits and to catch up with friends. A common practice at these events is to wear a lanyard with pictures portraying their Fursona or their Furry name.

### **Yiff**

The word yiff is slang which has common usage in the Furry fandom and is used as ‘a catchall term for nearly anything pornographic in nature within the fandom’ (Hypetaph, 2015: p. 23). Although the origin of the word is unclear it is noted as being similar to the sound a fox makes in real life, reflecting foxes as a very common fursona species. Furry specific sexual slang terms are in common use; Murr is also a slang word used in the Furry Fandom that denotes sexual pleasure in role play (Howl, 2015: p. 50). Unfortunately, as the term Yiff has become known to those outside the fandom it is now also being used to insult members of the fandom by outsiders, most commonly used in the phrase ‘Yiff in Hell’.

### **Cub Fur**

Cub furs are a controversial part of the Furry Fandom as these are typically fursonas or fursuits that depict a new-born/infant version of the animal species that are being portrayed. Although many portrayals of baby Furies are usually benign and often meant to be cute there are some who draw baby or cub fursonas in sexually explicit scenarios. This can cause issues for some as they view baby furs as being under age and so associate a sexually explicit Baby Fur artwork as being paedophilic in nature.

### **Vore**

Vore is a category within Furry Fandom pornography which depicts a fursona eating another fursona as part of sexual gratification. Representations of vore can include a cross section of the ‘inside’ of the fursonas stomach to show the fursona that has been eaten being digested.

Vore can be perceived as deviant, even within the Furry Fandom, as it has been seen as akin to promoting cannibalism.

### **Grey Muzzle**

A term that is typically used by or referred to by older members of the fandom. Typically, it denotes those who have been in the fandom for an extended period or are simply older than the average Furry, which is predominantly under the age of 25. The phrase originally meant to refer to those who were Furies in the pre-internet era but has evolved to include other demographics as well.

### **Fursecution**

A semi-serious term used by members of the fandom to describe how they may feel persecuted particularly for being a Furry. This term has become popular to describe unsavoury and uncomplimentary media coverage for example when Mika Brzezinski laughed and ran off stage when discussing the Chlorine gas attack on the Midwest Furfest in 2014 (Mazza, E., 2014); despite the fact that 19 Furies had been hospitalised during the incident and the use of Chlorine Gas is considered a war crime or terrorist act (Gardner, J., 2014). Furies often view this incident as an example of Fursecution because although a serious crime has been committed and people have been injured it is seen as a joke simply because they are Furies.

### **Therian**

Therians are a sub-group related to the Furry Fandom who experience a very high level of connection with their fursona in that they perceive their fursona to be a part of their psyche. Therians range from those who feel that they have been born in the wrong body and should have actually been their fursonas to those who experience ‘mental shifts’ into their fursonas and so have the feeling of phantom ears and tails.

**Brony**

Bronies are a sub-group related to the Furry Fandom who particularly place their emphasis on the pony characters from *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. They exclusively use pony fursonas rather than other species and take many of their fan ideas from the show rather than the Furry Fandom at large.

# 1.Introduction

## 1.1 Furrries from A-Z

The subject of this PhD thesis centres on the members of the Furry Fandom, colloquially known as the Furrries. The first part of this thesis investigates the way that members of the Furry Fandom construct identity and how what they see online can influence how they construct what it is to be a Furry. The second part of this thesis contains three chapters which discuss Furry identity construction when it comes to stigmatization that they can face as a Furry, how they decide what species can be utilized within the Furry Fandom, and the construction and acceptability of pornography within the fandom. Although there is currently little peer reviewed research on the Furry Fandom, the International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP) states:

Most Furrries would likely agree with the following: A Furry is a person who identifies with the Furry Fandom culture. Furry Fandom is the collective name given to individuals who have a distinct interest in anthropomorphic animals such as cartoon characters. Many, but not all, Furrries strongly identify with, or view themselves as, one (or more) species of animal other than human. Common Furry identities (“fursonas”) are dragon, feline (cat, lion, tiger), and canine (wolf, fox, domestic dog) species. Some Furrries create mixed species such as a “folf” (fox and wolf) or “cabbit” (cat and rabbit). Furrries rarely, if ever, identify with a nonhuman primate species. Many Furrries congregate in cyberspace, enjoy artwork depicting anthropomorphized animals, and attend Furry Fandom conventions. (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 198)

This description of the Furry Fandom comes from their work in 2008 titled *Furries from A–Z*, the first ever peer reviewed study on Furries which was conducted at a Furry convention in the USA. They looked to find common denominators (if any) of the ‘stereotypical’ identifiers of being a Furry compared to actual demographics of the Furry population (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 199; fig. 1). According to the IARP, an almost universal and identifiable part of being a Furry is the creation of a fursona.<sup>1</sup> Their research suggests it is uncommon for a Furry to have more than two fursonas at one given time though this can be subject to change based on species, characteristics and personality (Plante et al., 2015: p. 13). The research in this thesis challenges the IARP’s findings in that data in this thesis found that almost 25% of the respondents did not in fact have a fursona, even though they still classed themselves as Furries.

The IARP regard Furries’ use of fursonas as a process of self-authentication (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 239), using the species of their chosen fursona to personify certain personality traits that the Furry had, or wished to be perceived as having. In social sciences the concept of authenticity can be argued as when ‘one is true to one’s self’ and thus authenticity is a ‘self reflective and emotional experience’ (Vannini and Franzese, 2008: p. 1621). In the Gerbasi et al. study the way that Furries use their fursonas is then a way to experience authenticity in a way that they cannot experience using their own personality in their real lives; the fursona becomes a conduit. There are varying lengths to which Furries self-identify with their fursona, with some Furries considering themselves as not wholly human, that is: ‘a person who is, feels, or believes he/she is in part or whole (non-physically) one or more non-human animals on an integral, personal level’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 115). One such subgroup of the Furry Fandom is a group known as Therians. Some Furries can be Therian in that they also identify as not wholly human but some Furries do consider themselves to be wholly human

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<sup>1</sup> See Glossary terms for definition of fursona.

and so would not be considered Therian which is why in this thesis they are considered a separate group. There is some conflict within the Therian subgroup as in what way identification with the animal is socially acceptable. This issue is seen between Therians who believe they can ‘shift’ into an animal and Therians who identify as not wholly human on a spiritual or psychological level. Some Therian online forums ban posts expressing the belief in ‘p-shifting’ (physical shifting) from animal to human, for example, in lycanthropy (Robertson, 2012: p. 270). The reason why this tension occurs is because Therians who identify with the animal spiritually think the Therians who truly believe they can change into an animal give the group as a whole a bad name. This is seen in the Furry Fandom as well, this is where certain members blame heavily identified Furies as to the cause of stigmatization by wider society. This is discussed in depth in chapter four.

This thesis proposes that instead of suffering from ‘species identity disorder’ (a claim made by the IARP on Furies who highly identify and would be classed as Therian), highly identified Furies are becoming-animal and moving into posthuman identity.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See Glossary for definition of Therian

Table: Presenting common Furry stereotypes tested for consistency by the IARP in Gerbasi et al. study (2008: p. 204)

Table 2. Furry Stereotypes Compared with Results	
Furry Stereotype	Outcome
Males are more likely to be furries than females.	Consistent
Furries recall liking cartoons more as children than others.	Consistent
Furries like science fiction more than others.	Consistent
Common furry species are wolf and fox.	Somewhat consistent
Male furries wear both beards and glasses more than other males.	Inconsistent
Furries are employed in computer or science fields.	Inconsistent
Furries wear fursuits.	Inconsistent
A preponderance of male furries are homosexual.	Inconsistent
Furries consider themselves less than 100% human.	Somewhat consistent
Furries would be 0% human if possible.	Somewhat consistent
Furries are perceived as having behaviors common to personality disorders.	Inconsistent
Furries have specific kinds of connections to their species which parallel aspects of gender identity disorder.	Somewhat consistent

fig. 1

## 1.2 Focusing on Fandom

The negative stereotypes that Furries sometimes experience in wider society is not unique to their own fandom. A prevailing stereotype in most fandoms has focused on the gender of participants as mostly males as the ‘fan’ is often shown to be a nerdy beta male, unsuccessful with women, nervous attitude and spotty complexion (Scott, 2011; Geraghty, 2014). Science fiction fandoms are a good comparison for the Furry Fandom as they share many of the same negative stereotypes. Fans being ‘nerdy’ and beta males is a prevailing stereotype of most science fiction fandoms with mainstream media happy to portray sci-fi fans as this, seen in for example – *Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007-present), *The I.T Crowd* (Channel 4, 2006 – 2013) and *Chuck* (NBC, 2007-2012). Even shows which feature women as the ‘nerds’ like *30 Rock* (NBC, 2006-2013) still show the ‘nerd’ as socially awkward, not conventionally

attractive and obsessed with ‘nerdy things’. In the Furry Fandom this is taken a step further, with Furies being portrayed in mainstream media as beta males with ‘deviant desires’ (discussed at length in chapter four).

A tendency for people outside fandoms to incorrectly pathologize or fetishize members of certain fandoms has appeared not just in the Furry Fandom. Female fans are often accused of fetishizing or sexually desiring their chosen media object. Mark Duffett notes that in the 1940s female fans were evaluated as being under ‘swoonatra’-ism as opposed to being women who could enjoy the music of Frank Sinatra without a romantic component (Duffett, 2013: p. 8). The Furry Fandom has often been presumed to be a sexual fetish fandom, television episodes like the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* (CBS, 2000-2015) episode ‘Fur and Loathing in Las Vegas’ (05/04) broadcast unsympathetic storylines portraying Furry conventions as no more than sex orgies (Plante et al., 2014: p. 2). This kind of portrayal was seen again on *The Entourage* (HBO, 2004-2011) episode ‘The Day Fuckers’ (04/07) which focused on perceived deviant sexual behaviour of the Furies. The Gerbasi et al. study therefore noted that there was in fact an ‘empirical void’ when it came to whether these assumptions concerning Furies were correct (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 199).

Historically, fandoms have often been portrayed by the media as ‘fanatics’ with extreme behaviour (Hills, 2007: p. 459; Duffett, 2013: p. 5). Fan studies scholars are now more careful when it comes to pathologizing fans though there are still issues when it comes to research. Matt Hills notes that academics can sometimes create ‘moral dualisms’ (Hills, 2002: p. 20) where academics drawing an ‘us/them’ distinction can create ‘good’ and ‘bad’ fans. The term bad here does not mean that these fans behave badly as such, just that they may perform fan practices differently from other members of the same fandom. This is what Hills argues concerning the ‘imagined subjectivity’ of academics (Hills, 2002: p. 5) in that researchers can view different fan behaviour within the same fandom as ‘bad’. This has

caused issues in research as it ‘can be used to restrict and pathologize specific cultural groups, while promoting the achieved “normality” and “legitimate” authority of others’ (Hills, 2002: p. 5). In the first peer reviewed study on Furies a hierarchy was formulated from a Furry typology in *Furies from A–Z* (Gerbasi et al., 2008; fig. 2).

Table: Typologies found in the Gerbasi et al. study (2008) created by Jessica Austin

	Attained	Unattained
Un-distorted	They see themselves as 100% human and do not wish to be 0% human e.g. totally an animal	They see themselves as less than 100% human but would not wish to be 0% human
Distorted	They see themselves as 100% human and would become a wholly animal species if possible (e.g. 0% human)	They see themselves as less than 100% human e.g. their personality is an integral real part of their "self" and would become 0% human is possible

fig. 2

This typology does not seem to create a ‘moral dualism’ but it does presume that all Furies are highly identified with being a Furry. This is because it assumes that Furies will all see being ‘Furry’ as a part of their identity. This thesis argues that there are some Furies who only see their membership of the Furry Fandom as a hobby and so is not a defining experience when it comes to how they view their human identity. Furthermore, the typologies usage leads to certain Furies being described as ‘distorted – unattained’ which leads dangerously close to pathologizing fans.

Although no universal definition of ‘what is a Furry?’ is currently agreed upon, a strong indicator of Furry Fandom membership is that the person identifies with an animal as part of their personality. However even this has its problems as a definition because this identification can be on a mystical/religious level, a psychological level, a hobby level and even as being something other than wholly human with a personality (their fursona) which encompasses both animal and human traits.

For the purposes of this thesis a slightly different model will be used to categorise Furry, the Furry Fandom will be discussed as a spectrum. This allows for discussions on how

some Furies can see it as a hobby (hobbyists) and those who come to see it as a lifestyle. This is because fans of the same media object can vary wildly in terms of participation, fan knowledge and access, but all these different people would still consider themselves as fans. This research aim became evident as a gap in literature as academic work by the IARP has presented the Furies as a homogenous group thus far. Their published work has described what they perceive to be the shared norms and values of the Furry Fandom but they have not presented data from fans which discuss hierarchical structures within the group. Work in fan studies has shown that often fan communities are hierarchical – with fans determining who is a ‘better’ fan and who is not (Busse, 2013). Chapter four will argue that in fact there is a breadth of identification and engagement in the Furry Fandom which ranges from being a fan (someone who enjoys engagement with others in the community) and a Furry who follows the Fandom as a lifestyle. Chapter five will identify that within the fandom there are some Furies who are identified as more than a fan, to such an extent that they are presenting a posthuman body and subjectivity. This thesis will actively avoid ‘moral dualisms’ by not making a distinction between which Furies on each end of the spectrum are ‘correct’ in how they engage with the Furry Fandom.

### **1.3 Problems with Identifying Fans**

It is important to bring a more balanced and wider view of identification in the Furry Fandom as there is still evidence that wider society often pathologizes fans who they deem as too identified with a fan object. Among the media, Channel 4 in particular has been conspicuous in pathologizing fans using titles such as *Crazy About One Direction* (Channel 4, 2013), which literally labelled the fans included in the documentary as crazy and overzealous in their participation in the One Direction Fandom. Channel 4 also had a documentary series entitled *World of Weird* (Channel 4, 2016) and in the second episode of the series focused on the Furies. Once again, the inclusion of the word ‘weird’ in the title portrays Furies as ‘not

normal'. These misconceptions have made their way into academic works with researchers associating Furies with plushophilia:

Some persons with plushophilia – and some persons who apparently do not experience this paraphilia – at times wear anthropomorphic animal costumes called *fursuits* (Gurley, 2001). The practice of wearing fursuits to impersonate animal characters is called fursuiting: an erotic interest in doing so could appropriately be called *fursuitism*. [original italics] (Lawrence, 2009: p. 206)

This section in Anne Lawrence's work is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the way it is phrased could suggest Lawrence is unconvinced that not all fursuiters have plushophilia. This suggests that she is pathologizing all Furies as suffering from a sexual disorder. Secondly, Lawrence's reference to the activity of fursuiting comes from an article by George Gurley (*Vanity Fair*, March 2001) entitled 'Pleasures of the Fur'. The article as a reference is problematic as many Furies complained that the piece portrayed the fandom not only inaccurately, but also unfairly, and pushed the narrative that it was solely a sexual fetish fandom. This idea that the Furry Fandom has a sexual fetish for plushophilia and having sex in fursuits has been shown as inconsistent in data collected by the IARP. Although many definitions of Furies in the mass media includes 'wears a fursuit' (Winterman, 2009) studies have found that the vast majority of Furies do not own them, largely due to the huge costs in making one (Plante et al., 2014; Gerbasi et Al., 2008: p. 205). Stereotyping of Furies as sexually deviant has persevered in media as evidenced by the television shows referenced here already. This thesis challenges these misconceptions by, instead of ignoring the sexual part of the fandom (because as with all fandoms there is one), but by addressing it in chapter six. This is because there is a clear literature gap on pornography within the Furry Fandom, and the only way to dispel inaccuracies are to research and analyze them. Pornography has been previously ignored by researchers (not just those who study the Furry Fandom). It is

common practice for fan studies researchers to study their own fandom and there is sometimes an unwillingness to draw attention to the darker side of their own fandom. Duffett states that ‘all stereotypes contain a grain of truth, but it is the generalization and misinterpretation of that kernel that creates the problem’ (Duffett, 2013: p. 40). Due to the stigmatization that they have faced, many Furies have tried to distance themselves as far away from the sexual part of the fandom or immediately fear the worst when research enters into this area. IARP researcher Courtney Plante emphasised this in an email sent to me when making preliminary enquiries for this thesis:

It's more so a knee-jerk reaction I have whenever people start discussing the issue of sex and the Furry Fandom - I immediately brace for the near-inevitable assumption that the fandom is nothing more than a kink or a fetish to Furies (I've had that debate one too many times!) (Appendix E: p. 326-327)

As discovered in the Gerbasi et al. (2008) study there is a wide-ranging plethora of differing sexualities in the fandom and it has been suggested by members of the fandom that this is because it is socially acceptable to have discussions about sex and sexuality freely. Member of the Furry Fandom, Thurston Howl, notes that ‘it is a sexually open fandom, and that openness plays into their art as well as their literature’ (Howl, 2015: p. 51). What is interesting to note is that the Furry Fandom has enforced very strict labelling practices in their Furry erotica from many of the early conventions in the 1990s. As conventions grew and younger members began to attend, Furry stories with one mildly sexual sex scene would be labelled erotica and not sold to younger members.

Fan made erotica is not unique to the Furry Fandom as the art of ‘shipping’<sup>3</sup> has been present in fandoms with ‘slash fiction’<sup>4</sup> being incredibly popular in fan fiction writing

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<sup>3</sup> A term used to describe fan fictions that take previously created characters from a television show or film (for example) and placing them into a relationship which is non-canon. It usually refers to romantic relationships, but it can refer platonic ones as well. These are not

groups such as Kirk and Spock love stories (Lamb and Veith, 2014). Henry Jenkins was one of the first to write academically on the concept of slash fiction in his 1992 book *Textual Poachers*. He noted that ‘the process of sexual fantasy is consciously explored in a large number of slash stories’ (Jenkins, 1992: p. 205). Similar scenes in books and online fiction from other fandoms were not as heavily regulated at this point in time compared to Furry conventions (Gold, 2015: p. 29). Although shipping practices are commonly between two established characters from a media text (such as Kirk and Spock) and so the fan is external to the story, slash fiction offers a chance for an original character to be included. For the Furies, they can use their fursona as the participant character. In other fandoms where a writer places themselves in a fan story, it’s a practice known as Mary Sue.<sup>5</sup> Here the fan story becomes a stage for expressing more than their daily selves.

Many fan fiction websites such as Archiveofourown.com and others now practice similar levels of enforcement to Furry fanfiction websites and conventions. Archiveofourown.com even has an ‘are you sure you want to see this?’ warning for those about to access NSFW content. This is often given as an example of ‘fan policing’ (Busse, 2013) where fans make moral or subjective judgements on what content should be available within the fandom community. Although other fans communities are still stigmatized by the wider population for their shipping practices they do not seem to be stigmatized to the extent that Furies are. The Furry Fandom are still stigmatized for their erotica despite their fan policing and strict enforcement of labelling and the effect that this has on the Furry Fandom and its members is addressed in chapter four and chapter six. Studying the presentation of the shipping of ‘Larrystylingson’ (an amalgamation of Harry Styles and Louis Tomlinson from

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limited to the media texts’ original world with fan sometimes shipping characters from different media together.

<sup>4</sup> A term used to describe erotica (usually homosexual) between two fictional characters who were not sexual/romantic in the original text.

<sup>5</sup> In recent years the term ‘Mary Sue’ has come to mean a character who is too perfect to be believable (Austin, 2018: p. 56).

*One Direction*) from the One Direction fandom, William Proctor found that responses to this were ‘infantilizing’ the girls writing it (Proctor, 2016: p. 71). The common reaction was that these girls were just ‘being silly little girls’ in their erotica whereas Furies are labelled as sexually mature (male) deviants and accused of committing bestiality (Newsgrounds, 2011). A gap in literature which is important to be discussed is erotica because nothing peer-reviewed has been published thus far. As such, we cannot address the stereotype of the Furry as a ‘sexual deviant’ unless we have looked at the pornography itself.

#### **1.4 Why Study the Furry Fandom?**

Two common questions asked of researchers by their supervisors is often ‘Why do this research?’ and ‘what is this piece contributing to the field?’. With other studies on fan cultures, the researcher is often a fan themselves which is their reason for creating their project. The principal rationale for this project was general ignorance of the Furry Fandom and a desire to study a fandom that has so far been largely undocumented. It is interesting that even in current times where 90% of UK households have internet access (ONS.gov: 2017) and despite an increasing participation of Furies in public spaces (such as conventions) in recent years in North America (fig. 3), the Furry Fandom is still largely unknown to many people. Additionally, there are many websites dedicated specifically for these fans like Furaffinity.com, Furation.com and even a Furry dating website: Furrymate.com.

List: Showing attendance data and locations for Furry conventions (2017-2018)

1. 🇺🇸 Midwest FurFest 2017; Rosemont, Illinois (8,771)
2. 🇺🇸 Anthrocon 2017; Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (7,544)
3. 🇺🇸 Biggest Little Fur Con 2017; Reno, Nevada (5,138)
4. 🇺🇸 Furry Weekend Atlanta 2017; Atlanta, Georgia (4,274)
5. 🇺🇸 Furry Fiesta 2018; Dallas, Texas (3,866)
6. 🇺🇸 Further Confusion 2018; San Jose, California (3,415) (peaked at 3,560 in 2014)
7. 🇩🇪 Eurofurence 2017; Berlin, Germany (2,804)
8. 🇺🇸 Megaplex 2017; Orlando, Florida (2,430)
9. 🇺🇸 Anthro New England 2018; Cambridge, Massachusetts (2,050)
10. 🇨🇦 Furnal Equinox 2018; Toronto, Ontario (1,830)
11. 🇬🇧 ConFuzzled 2017; Birmingham, UK (1,645)
12. 🇺🇸 Califur 2017; Pomona, California (1,393) (peaked at 1,451 in 2016)
13. 🇺🇸 Furrpocalypse 2017; Cromwell, Connecticut (1,336) (peaked at 1,455 in 2016)
14. 🇺🇸 Motor City Furry Con 2017; Novi, Michigan (1,291)
15. 🇺🇸 IndyFurCon 2017; Indianapolis, Indiana (1,214)
16. 🇺🇸 Arizona Fur Con 2017; Scottsdale, Arizona (1,101)
17. 🇺🇸 Fur Squared 2018; Brookfield, Wisconsin (1,101)
18. 🇺🇸 Fur the 'More 2017; Tysons Corner, Virginia (1,050)
19. 🇨🇦 VancouFur 2018; Vancouver, BC (1,012)
20. 🇯🇵 Japan Meeting of Furies 2018; Toyohashi, Aichi (998)

fig. 3

The above list is in no way exhaustive of all the Furry gatherings around the world but gives a snapshot that these are not individual people but growing communities both online and offline. The growing participation rates and growing number of countries holding these events makes the Furry Fandom as interesting group to study.<sup>6</sup> One aspect of growing convention attendance is that it may suggest that the Furry Fandom is becoming less secretive and more open to investigation. It is also important to study this fandom as its treatment at the hands of the media and researchers themselves shows that even now fans are still being pathologized as ‘fanatic’ with unhealthy obsessions (Chin, 2010: p. 4; Jenson, 1992: p. 15; Hills, 2007: p. 459; Duffett, 2013: p. 39) even though many works through audience research and fan studies have concluded the opposite (see: Proctor, 2016; Hills, 2002; Hills, 2007; Booth, 2010 and many more).

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<sup>6</sup> As recently as 2015, rankings of the top 15 Furry conventions were limited to locations in the USA and has seen an increase in attendees.

## 1.5 Fan Studies

Fans are, in fact, the most visible and identifiable of audiences. How is it then, that they have been overlooked or not taken seriously as research subjects by critics and scholars? And why are they maligned and sensationalized by the popular press, mistrusted by the public? (Lewis, 1992: p. 1)

Often referred to as the ‘1992 moment’, a breadth of influential texts on fandom studies were released, the most notable of which were *Textual Poachers* by Jenkins, *Enterprising Women* by Camille Bacon-Smith and *Feminism, Psychoanalysis, and the Study of Popular Culture* by Constance Penley. One of the most important research aspects of the texts by Jenkins and Bacon-Smith is that they were the earliest and most prominent researchers who separated fans from the general audience. This allowed fan studies to be established as its own scholarly field of research away from general reception studies. This is significant because many of the previous theoretical frameworks to study audiences ‘dichotomiz[ed] social relations with reference to the scope of the interaction (small group versus large group)’ (Cerulo and Ruane, 1998: p. 398). They also regarded audiences as passive viewers who absorbed any media propaganda without discernment (Duffett, 2013: p. 57). That is not to say that audiences were still being studied via direct effects theories in 1992 such as the ‘Magic Bullet Theory’.<sup>7</sup> By the 1960s the ‘uses and gratifications approach...assumed the audience brought their own needs and desires to the process of making sense of media messages’ (Williams et al., 2003: p. 177). The work of Jenkins and Bacon-Smith showed that fans were different in their consumption of media messages from the general audience, often seeking out further information on their chosen media text (Coppa, 2014a: p. 73).

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<sup>7</sup> Magic Bullet Theory aka ‘hypodermic needle theory’ or ‘transmission belt theory’, implies that audiences received media messages in a uniform way (regardless of socio/economic background) without question (Williams, 2003: p. 171).

The Furry Fandom is interesting because in other fandoms there is almost universally a set media text on which their fan identity is based around. Although this may seem to preclude the Furies from calling themselves a ‘fandom’ this thesis gives a defence as to why they should still be considered under this title. A *Star Wars* fan can be identified because they state that they like an aspect of the media surrounding the *Star Wars* franchise – they may have enjoyed one of the movies or read a good fan fiction (Proctor, 2013). Furies, however, create their own content and media which means that ‘what it is to be a Furry’ stems from multiple sources. There will be some who would still count themselves as Furry but may not go on the same sites or create fan art leaving some of the Furry communities disjointed from one another. It is argued in this thesis that the Furry Fandom does count as a fandom (even without a base text) because they exhibit a fandom community where norms and values that create a Furry identity occur. This echoes similar findings in fan studies that a fandom is created by fans sharing their fan knowledge and creating hierarchies (Busse, 2013; Proctor, 2013). This moves away from studies which have specified a source text around which a ‘community’ is based. A more important part of fandom then, is the interaction between fans and their peers. Janice Radway argued for engage subversive reading of genres where readers were assumed to be passive in *Reading the Romance* (1984).

Scholars note that fandom began in its recognised form in 1929 due to the emergence of fanzines and letter pages as they allowed fans to interact with the producers and other fans (Geraghty, 2014: p. 1; Groene and Hettinger, 2015: p. 2; Moskowitz, 1954). This interaction between fans has been incremental in the spread of fandoms across the World Wide Web today. There has been a move away from the likes of Jenkins and John Tulloch who emphasised that fandoms are important for wider social identity with newer works more likely to focus on ‘enthusiastic but individual engagement’ (Coppa, 2014a: p. 74) than community.

This turn to focus on individual engagement has understandably divided academics into different camps; much of the problem is down to the fact that currently there is no well-rounded, widely accepted definition as to what constitutes a fan. Fan studies is problematic to begin with, in that a fan of one media text is often a fan of other media products as well (Coppa, 2014a: p. 75). This meant that in past research fans were ‘falsely bound[ed]’ [fans] to a fandom as if they were singular entities (Duffett, 2013: p. 29). Fortunately, today it is becoming less likely for researchers to fall into this trap, especially when there are very popular ‘merged’ fandoms such as the SuperWhoLockians – fans of the shows *Supernatural* (The WB, 2005–2006, The CW, 2006–present), *Doctor Who* (BBC, 1963–1989, 2005–present) and *Sherlock* (BBC, 2010–present). This overlap is one of the reasons why creating a description of what constitutes a ‘fan’ is exceedingly difficult. Tom Philips makes the case, when studying the fans of Kevin Smith and his movies, that due to ‘the subjective nature of respective fan cultures’ different fandoms operate in different ways (Philips, 2013: p. 12). It is difficult for academics to define fandom behaviour because social norms differ widely across different fandoms. The visual aesthetic is one mode which changes significantly across fandoms. For example, the brightly coloured fan art which is popular in the *My Little Pony* fandom (Robertson, 2014: p. 22) would not be popular if used by a member of the Bram Stoker fandom whose fan art is often gothic in nature (Reijnders, 2011: p. 236).<sup>8</sup>

It is argued in chapter three that identity construction in the Furry Fandom not only suggests a fandom (rather than a fetish, as proposed by some) but that much of the construction of the Furry identity happens online due to not having a designated media object. In other fandoms, such as those based on a band or a film, online selfhood and identity is less important than the media object to which their fandom is based. As the Furry Fandom

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<sup>8</sup> One research focus of this thesis is the discussion on visual aesthetic within the Furry fandom. As mentioned, the Furies have a self-identified/self-influenced aesthetic design for their characters whereas media-based fandoms have an aesthetic which is often created by the producers/writers/artists of the media text (see chapter five).

does not have a set text, their identity is shaped and developed in the online setting, from interactions with other members of the fandom.

In early pre-modern societies tradition strongly dictated and defined roles for individuals to follow, in current postmodern societies this is less true. Although definitions of 'postmodern' can vary and is often used to describe types of art, Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright argue that 'postmodernity refers not just to a style and a form of subjectivity that emerged in late modernity. It also refers to changes in the social and economic conditions that help to produce these styles and ways of being a subject' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009: p. 311). Within fan studies and indeed this thesis, postmodern is referred to in terms of the way that fandoms are not stagnant institutions and thus there is not one 'truth' and way to being a fan; 'the postmodern is distinguished by the idea that there is not one but many truths and that the notions of truth are culturally and historically relative constructions' (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009: p. 313).

Post-traditional societies grant more fluid options to 'truth' when it comes to identity especially in online space (Gauntlett, 2008: p. 105) as the online space gives a person an opportunity to act out an identity they may not be able to in real life. In the postmodern world sexual identities (not acts) are socially constructed (Haenfler, 2010: p. 74) and some Furies feel their identity is outside the norm. This could indicate why a notable proportion of them do not identify with heteronormativity, compulsory or otherwise (Haenfler, 2010: p. 75). Judith Butler's influential book *Gender Trouble* (1990) famously set about to explain this shift into self-reflexive identity narratives where gender was now no longer set but performed every day. Building on Erving Goffman's notion when he declared in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* that identity was often a 'performance' (1959), Anthony Giddens would expand on this stating that 'A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour...in the reaction to others, but in the capacity to keep a particular narrative going' (Giddens, 1991: p.

54). David Gauntlett supported this theory in that not only was identity a performance but nothing within identity was fixed at all (including gender). Gauntlett stated that identity was ‘little more than a pile of social and cultural things which you have previously expressed, or which have been said about you’ (Gauntlett, 2008: p. 147). With the increased reflexivity that is found in late modernity it not only ‘enables the development of a self-narrative’ (Williams, 2015: p. 20) but also facilitates increased access to the sociological and cultural conditions on which this self-narrative can occur. For Lawrence Grossberg, it has been the abundance of popular culture available in late modernity which has given ground for fans to ‘construct relatively stable moments of identity’ (Grossberg, 1992: p. 59). Therefore, through interaction with their chosen media texts they have been able to ‘organize their emotional and narrative lives and identity’ (Grossberg, 1992: p. 59). However, media texts can change and challenge the ontological security of the fan; when Disney was announced as the new owners of the *Star Wars* franchise pessimistic fans vocalised their concerns on Twitter (Proctor, 2013: p. 200). For some *Star Wars* fans, Disney did not coincide with their preconceived vision of the how the franchise should be run, or indeed the direction the fandom should take. They were concerned that their beloved franchise would be subject to ‘Disneyfication’ (Proctor, 2013: p. 204). This would suggest that Furies meanwhile may have more ontological security than fandoms based on a media text as their fandom cannot be changed via external factors. For example, their fandom cannot be changed by a television show being cancelled half way through a season or a franchise changing directions cinematically or narratively. In this way the Furry Fandom is unique compared to other fandoms but still exhibits the same fan identity construction seen in other fandoms. This leads this thesis to propose that they should be considered as a fandom rather than a fetish making fan studies an appropriate theoretical discipline in which to study them.

This subjective nature of what is deemed ‘acceptable’ fan engagement within a fandom means that fandom hierarchies are also different as to who constitutes a fan and who is just a casual observer. When discussing television fandoms Jenkins made a distinction between ‘zappers’ and ‘casuals’. ‘Zappers’ would flick through different shows compared to ‘casuals who enjoy specific shows but do not make specific effort to watch them live on air’ (Booth, 2010: p. 19). Jenkins would not class either of these people as ‘true’ fans and it becomes much harder to do this when dealing with a non-television or media-based fandom such as the Furies. Although Jenkins definitions of ‘zappers’ specifically refer to television watching the basic principles of casual engagement can be applied in a wider fan studies context.

Other academics do not make this distinction at all with Catherine Driscoll trying to encompass all fans in one definition: ‘Fandom is a web of communities distinguished by type, pairing, and/or genre, with varied degrees of overlapping or interlocking membership’ (Driscoll, 2006: p. 93). At first glance Driscoll’s definition describes fandom well enough to use as a definition when applied to Stephanie Tuszynski’s film *IRL (In Real Life): The Bronze Documentary Project* (2007). Following fans of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (WB, 1997–2003) she found that fans formed online attachments which translated over into the real world, falling into Driscoll’s definition. However, when it comes to relaunched or rebooted shows such as *Battlestar Galactica* (ABC, 1978-1980, Sci-Fi, 2004–2009) and *Doctor Who* fans, studies have discussed the concept of cultural capital as a more prominent consideration. In the *Doctor Who* community Hills noted a fan discourse that many of the younger and new fans who started watching the relaunch in 2005 had been looked down upon by fans of the original run (BBC, 1963–89). These young fans showed ‘a failure to correspond to an imagined ideal that carries fan-cultural symbolic power’ (Hills, 2014: p. 33). This was because many young fans did not share the collective memory of the older show

(many had not even been born by the time the original show had ended). Some of the older fans felt that those who became fans of *Doctor Who* from 2005 reboot onwards were not ‘true’ fans. This attitude is seen in other franchises such as the *Star Wars* franchise with Proctor stating that he found himself occupying ‘the lowest strata of the order’ in *Star Wars* fan hierarchy. This is because, despite being an avid fan of the movies, he had read little of the *Star Wars Expanded Universe* novels (Proctor, 2013: p. 200). He deemed that he would not be considered ‘as much’ of a fan as those who had not only seen the films, but also read the novels. He continued with emphasising those fans who had seen the films, read the novels, *and* collected all the merchandise, for instance, would be seen as higher up the fan hierarchy. Although Driscoll’s definition can be shown to be problematic when discussing the notion of cultural capital, the definition is open enough to accommodate this discourse.

Another consideration when discussing fan definition is economic capital, because many of the ‘requirements’ to become a better fan often need access not just to cultural or social capital but economic capital. The impact of economic capital was very much understudied until the last ten years (McCudden, 2011: p. 12) with scholars now arguing that economic capital has two main effects. Firstly, when describing fans at Comic-Con Anne Gilbert noted that by using economic capital fans can boost their social capital, and possibly push themselves up the fan hierarchy:

Exclusive content, merchandise, and celebrity interaction are incentives that generate positive social capital among fans while reinforcing consumptive practices that have economic benefits for industry producers. (Gilbert, 2017: p. 359)

For Justin Bieber fans in 2015 boosting their social capital as a fan required economic capital of \$2000 for a meet and greet with the star. Although many fans were enraged at this high price (Adejobi, A, 2015), meeting Justin Bieber meant that the fans who could spend this amount increased their social and cultural capital as a Bieber fan. This is similar in the Furry

Fandom as many Furries admire the craftsmanship of a full fursuit but many cannot afford to spend this economic capital. Secondly, for Mel Stanfill and Megan Condis, lack of discussion on economic capital influences in fan studies has meant that fans have not been getting credit for the content they create and have thus been forced into giving it away for free; ‘Calling this work “work” opens up appreciation for the skills involved, much as with feminist insistence on care work as labor’ (Stanfill and Condis, 2014: paragraph 3.4). So how does any academic researching fandom begin to distinguish who ‘qualifies’ as a fan? Does a person have to be outspoken about their fandom to be a ‘proper fan’? Duffett summarises the problem with this line of thinking:

Fandom can begin as a personal and sometimes relatively private experience. To locate fans as designed by their public performance is to progress in a way that implies the centrality of either community, theatrically or perhaps even contagion, none of which seem to offer a firm foundation for defining fandom. (Duffett, 2013: p. 29).

This is especially relevant for this thesis as the fandom being researched is the Furries, who are notorious for being secretive of their membership to this group due to the stigmatization that they can face in both online and offline communities. Despite the secrecy, it is evident that members of the Furry Fandom show similar engagement to other fandoms in constructing a social identity that is representative and accepted by other members of the fandom (Fiske, 1992: p. 30; Lopes, 2006: p. 390). Surprisingly, there has been no research currently published which gives an explanation as to how Furries have established what is ‘normal’ in their fandom .i.e. ‘how to be a Furry’. This is discussed in chapter three. Although the IARP often assert that fursonas, for instance, are popular (and this is consistent with their data) they have not published a reason as to why Furries use this identifier within their fandom. A research aim of this thesis has been to investigate further into why fursonas

have become commonly used in the community and what has influenced Furies when it comes to constructing their Furry identities.

## 1.6 Identity Construction

The connection between cultural, economic and identity capital is explored in Marxist theories. When it comes to identity construction, the earlier model is that ideology created a ‘false consciousness’ (Marx, 1844) in that ideology created an interpretation of how the world functioned based on the owner of production. For Karl Marx, ideology was used to influence the public into believing that separating them from their means of production to create a capitalist society was a positive thing. Louis Althusser is used in this thesis for a contemporarily relevant explanation as he built on Marx’s work. Althusser proposed that ‘ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence’ (Althusser, 1971: p. 44). He suggested that ideology represented the imaginary ties that people created by interacting with the real world and ideological values in a feedback relationship. In terms of a feedback relationship, building on Lacan’s writings, Althusser argued that as the subject is within ideology they are influenced and influence ideology at the same time. This builds on Marx’s view where he believed that subjects were being influenced by an ideology that is forced upon them from above in which they have no say:

There is no ideology except by the subject and for subjects. Meaning, there is no ideology except for concrete subjects, and this destination for ideology is only made possible by the subject: meaning, by the category of the subject and its functioning (Althusser, 1971: p. 44).

In addition, ‘*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*’ [original italics] (Althusser, 1971: p. 47) in that ideology can be so pervasive that social interactions come as ‘common sense’. Althusser uses the example of hailing a person in the street:

Assuming that the theoretical scene I have imagined takes place in the street, the hailed individual will turn around. By this mere one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion, he becomes a subject (Althusser, 1971: p. 48).

Althusser suggests that the reason that the individual who turns around to respond to the hail only does so because they have been conditioned to do so by ideology. He proposes that these behaviours are taught by the ideology and so become the social norms of the society (rather than common sense):

What thus seems to take place outside ideology (to be precise, in the street), in reality takes place in ideology. What really takes place in ideology seems therefore to take place outside it. That is why those who are in ideology believe themselves by definition outside ideology (Althusser, 1971: p. 49)

When studying fandoms, Althusser can be useful in this sense because thus far in research many assumptions on Furies have been made on 'common sense'. It has been taken as 'common sense' that they have fursonas, and fursuits without looking into the reasons why they do this. Because it is just assumed that these are identifiers of someone within the Furry Fandom there has been a lack of research into why this is 'hailing' behaviour. Discussions on this in regards to species choice is analysed in chapter five.

Althusser argued that ideology has a material existence (Althusser, 1971: p. 44) as opposed to Marxist theories that ideologies are performative in nature:

Ideology existing in a material ideological apparatus, prescribing material practices governed by a material ritual, which practices exist in the material actions of a subject acting in all consciousness according to his belief (Althusser, 1971: p. 44)

That is to say instead of being static in nature, ideology is reinforced as ideology in practice. A subject's behaviour is reinforced by their identity performance which is either affirmed or

denied by their relations to others and institutions. Althusser argues that this can mean that identity construction can begin before a person is even born:

It is certain in advance that it will bear its Father's Name, and will therefore have an identity and be irreplaceable. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived. Before its birth, the child is therefore always-already a subject, appointed as a subject in and by the specific familial ideological configuration in which it is 'expected' once it has been conceived. I hardly need add that this familial ideological configuration is, in its uniqueness, highly structured, and that it is in this implacable and more or less 'pathological' (Althusser, 1971: p. 50)

This means that often ideology is self-replicating as those who are born into a higher status will immediately be granted more advantages than those born of a lower status. Pierre Bourdieu built on this theory by describing the area in which people are born into as the habitus and cultural capital as the ideology which self-replicates. Bourdieu is particularly useful for this thesis as his theories have been used within fan studies before:

His work on processes of cultural distinction offers a way for theorists to analyse how fan 'status' is built up. It allows us to consider any given fan culture not simply as a community but *also as a social hierarchy*, where fans share a common interest while also competing over fan knowledge, access to the object of fandom, and status. [original italics] (Hills, 2002: p. 46)

As Althusser wrote that ideology and thus status is reinforced in society Bourdieu (as noted by Hills, 2002) showed that status could also be built up: 'every material inheritance is, strictly speaking, also a cultural inheritance' (Bourdieu, 1984: p. 77). Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital argued that as well as economic capital improving a person's societal class

and social standing, increasing their economic wealth improved their cultural knowledge as well. In fan studies this theory has been applied to the way that fans construct their fan identity, how they become ‘better fans’ in the eyes of other fans. A good example that Bourdieu uses to illustrate the benefits of cultural capital is that of the school system. Bourdieu discusses answers to a survey where participants of different social classes were asked to name classical composers. He found that there was a direct correlation between education level and number of composers answered, with those in clerical and managerial jobs faring the worst (Bourdieu, 1984: p. 12-13). Bourdieu argues that children in a ‘higher’ social class are more likely to be taught about classical composers than other children and thus have more cultural capital. In the Gerbasi et al. (2008) study this idea of cultural capital was applied (even though it was not a primary focus of the paper). When testing ‘typical’ stereotypes of Furries. Gerbasi et al. (2008) noted that there was a consistency in stereotypes that ‘Furries recall liking cartoons more as children than others’, ‘Furries like science fiction more than others’ and ‘Furries are employed in computer and science fields’ (Gerbasi et al. 2008: p. 204). The consistency found with these stereotypes may suggest that Furries grow up in a habitus where it is common to watch cartoons and science fiction shows. Also, it can be suggested that Furries often live in a social class where access to technology is possible. In a collated edition of IARP research over five years it was found that 75% of Furries have some post-secondary education (Plante et al. 2016: p. 12).

In education the idea of cultural capital and, thus, social class has been the focus of much research in critical race theory. In studies conducted in the UK and USA it has been found that white working-class boys predominantly have the least cultural capital, as well as the least academic capital, compared to other races in the same economic group (Ostrove and Long, 2004; Weaver-Hightower, 2003). As well as affecting education attainment, Bourdieu suggested that cultural capital could affect the extra-curricular activity that one indulged in.

In part 3 of his book *Distinction: A Social Critique on the Judgement of Taste* he analysed different attendance rates for activities such as going to the theatre. He suggested that cultural capital did indeed influence a person's taste when it came to leisure activities because often these activities were used to 'prove' a person's social and cultural capital to others:

In the absence of the conditions of material possession, the pursuit of exclusiveness has to be content with developing a unique mode of appropriation. Liking the same things differently, liking different things, less obviously marked out for admiration- these are some of the strategies for outflanking, overtaking and displacing which, by maintaining a permanent revolution in tastes, enable the dominated, less wealthy fractions, whose appropriations must, in the main, be exclusively symbolic, to secure exclusive possessions at every moment. (Bourdieu, 1984: p. 282)

Within the Furry Fandom the way that Furies perform their fandom to each other can 'prove' their Furry cultural capital within the fandom group setting. Good artists and well-known members (popufurs) in the Furry Fandom are an example of cultural capital gains within a fandom. The location where cultural capital really mattered when it comes to identity construction therefore happens in Bourdieu's habitus. The word habitus is used to describe the outside environment in which we find ourselves in due to our life experiences. Habitus refers to the way in which different norms are reproduced depending on the conditions in which the person finds themselves i.e. which society at what time period:

The *habitus*...provides practices which tend to reproduce the regularities immanent in the objective conditions of the production of their generative principle, while adjusting to the demands inscribed as objective potentialities in the situation, as defined by the cognitive and motivating structures making up the habitus. [original italics] (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 78)

Bourdieu puts a disproportionate weight to our early life experiences as being the most influential (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 78). This is similar to scholars such as Herbert Mead who notes that much of identity construction can be found in the way that children play (Mead, 1934). Bourdieu's theory suggests that norms and values are enforced and engendered from the very beginning. He suggests that once a child has learnt these meanings and practices it is unlikely that they will unlearn them. For Bourdieu social mobility is unlikely for the vast majority in society because the habitus is learned behaviour; you can learn a different habitus but it must be earned:

Though it is impossible for all members of the same class (or even two of them) to have had the same experiences, in the same order, it is certain that each member of the same class is more likely than any member of another class to have been confronted with the situations most frequent for the members of that class. (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 85)

This also has an impact on the way Bourdieu describes gender identity. Once again, he puts the importance of the 'learning' gender roles firmly within the family (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 89) and puts the onus of identity construction within childhood:

The child constructs its sexual identity, the major element in its social identity, at the same time as it constructs its image of the division of work between the sexes, out of the same socially defined set of inseparably biological and social indices (Bourdieu, 1977: p. 93)

For Bourdieu then, identity construction is formed due to life experiences but these are directly affected by the habitus within which a person is born and, consequently, the cultural capital that it gives them. That is not to say that Bourdieu thought that these practices were then rigidly formed in identity. Modification of identity could be found in educational practices, Bourdieu still believed that how much this could be changed by the length of time

in education was still correlated to how much economic freedom was afforded to do this (Bourdieu, 2001).

Bourdieu's theories, like Althusser's, mainly focus on identity construction on a macro level meaning that an identity is constructed by outside forces acting upon the body rather than an individual affecting their own identity construction. This is important as it echoes, and in part helps to explain, hierarchies that are found in online spaces as discussed in chapter three. However, Michel Foucault is used to supplement Bourdieu and Althusser as their writings often see institutions and the habitus as repressive. For Foucault 'if power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it?' (Foucault: 1984a: p. 61). Foucault proposed that identity construction theory (such as written by Althusser and Bourdieu) always does three things:

1. It always stands in virtual opposition to something else which is supposed to count as truth.
2. The concept of ideology refers...to something of the order of a subject.
3. Ideology stands in a secondary position relative to something which functions as its infrastructure, as its material, economic determinant. (Foucault, 1984a: p. 60)

Beginning with Foucault's first critique of the notion of ideology, Foucault noted that ideology was often spoken within a binary pair, i.e. in ideology a subject always had a binary opposite with which it would be judged. This was troubling for Foucault because he believed ideology 'subjugated at the level of language' (Foucault, 1984b: p. 301). It was not simply binary pairs of 'what to do' and 'what not to do' that forms identity construction but also what is not said in ideology:

There is no binary division to be made between what one says and what one does not say; we must try to determine the different ways of not saying such things, how those who can and those who cannot speak them are distributed, which type of discourse is

authorised, or which form of discretion is required in either case. There is not one but many silences, and they are in integral part of strategies that underlie and permeate discourses. (Foucault, 1984b: p. 309-310)

Foucault deviated from the view that language should be viewed as the primary point of reference for signs and signification but instead chose a historical viewpoint: 'The history which bears and determines us has the form of war rather than that of a language: relations of power not relations of meaning' (Foucault, 1984a: p. 56). And this brings us to Foucault's second point on the notion of ideology, how ideology orders the subject. Foucault suggests that this is done by discipline through the 'reciprocal adjustment of bodies, gestures, and rhythms; differentiation of capacities; reciprocal coordination in relation to apparatuses or tasks' (Foucault, 1984c: p. 209). Therefore, in society, identity is constructed in a way that will be disciplined if it is deemed as 'wrong' and thus corrected by appropriate measures; a detention for a minor infraction in school to prison for breaking the law (Foucault, 1984d: p. 194). Ideology therefore is not used to punish (Foucault's previous point that there would be no point if ideology always said no) but to 'train' individuals in correct behaviour for a reward of conforming (Foucault, 1984d: p. 188). Within the Furry Fandom, this notion of how ideology works can be discussed in the way that some species are chosen over others. Although it appears that a Furry is not 'punished' for picking a species which is unpopular, the mechanisms of Furry ideology can make it less likely for a Furry to choose a less well known species which may explain why certain species are oversubscribed (see chapter five).

Although other theorists have put subjects and objects in a binary opposition Foucault claims it is possible that by the ordering and disciplining of the subject they can become an object as well:

Discipline "makes" individuals; it is the specific technique of a power that regards individuals both as objects and as instruments of its exercise. It is not a triumphant

power, which because of its own excess can pride itself on its omnipotence; it is a modest suspicious power, which functions as a calculated but permanent economy. (Foucault, 1984d: p. 188)

Which leads onto the explanation for Foucault's third point on the notion of ideology. He proposed that previously it had stood in a secondary position to the infrastructure of institutions. For example:

Psychiatric internment, the mental normalization of individuals, and penal institutions have no doubt a fairly limited importance if one is only looking for their economic significance. On the other hand, they are undoubtedly essential to the general functioning of the wheels of power. (Foucault, 1984a: p. 58)

What Foucault suggests is that relations of power and the influence of ideology must extend beyond the limits of the state (Foucault, 1984a: p. 64). Taking Marxism and oppression from the capitalist state being the main ideological site, Foucault suggests looking at how different institutions interact within it. This is where one of Foucault's important ideas came from concerning the 'regime' of truth:

"Truth" is to be understood as a system of ordered processes for the production, regulation, distribution, circulation, and operation of statements. "Truth" is linked in a circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extends it. (Foucault, 1984a: p. 74)

Completing Foucault's three points on the notion of ideology in a cyclical way, the regime of 'truth' which creates ideologies and thus how one constructs their identity permeates through all interactions in society. This influences how certain identities are viewed as acceptable and how non-conforming ones should be punished. Furthermore, that different institutions can interplay and create multiple ways of constructing identity:

Whereas the juridical systems define juridical subjects according to universal norms, the disciplines characterize, classify, specialize; they distribute along a scale, around a norm, hierarchize individuals in relation to one another and, if necessary, disqualify and invalidate. (Foucault, 1984c: p. 212)

Media institutions have caused issues for the Furry Fandom as they have promoted the idea that being a Furry is ‘deviant’ by spreading unfavourable stereotypes in television programmes. Online this has meant that a regime of truth has been created that being a Furry is a non-conforming identity. This has led to some Furies experiencing stigmatization for their identity and this is discussed in chapter four. Foucault and regimes of ‘truth’ as a concept has been used in fan studies recently with Proctor’s work (2016) in relation to the representation of female fans; ‘fans may actively partake in policing, but media reportage and representation also collaborate in the construction of a (gendered) regime of truth’ (Proctor, 2016: p. 68). When discussing new documentaries on fans Proctor noted that ‘mainstreaming’ opens up previously hidden ideologies for media outlets to mine as evidence of homogeneity and ‘freakishness’ (Proctor, 2016: p. 68). Foucault’s ‘regimes of truth’ can help show how Furies are having to construct their identities in relation to the power aspects of media representations. This is certainly prudent in relation to accusations of Furies being mentally ill or sexually deviant.

This accusation of deviancy is discussed in chapter four and chapter six where it is supplemented by work by Félix Guattari who was particularly interested in how those who were mentally ill constructed their identities. For Guattari, people suffering from psychosis or serious neuroses are often unable to abide by usual norms and values of society, norms and values that aid in our identity construction. In discussions with a patient referred to only as R.A. he encouraged him to write some of his thoughts in a diary, excerpt below:

I do not feel infantile any more. I feel dead, unborn. I have no contact. Everything is mercurial. I am inert. Continuous. I think I will not get over it. I was good at spelling when I was little. I am making myself like this...maybe. (Guattari, 2015: p. 50)

It was answers from people experiencing bouts of mental illness like R.A. which indicated that their identity was essentially nothing, much like being unborn, because they could not construct their identity in the usual way that Guattari felt that 'beyond the Ego, the subject is to be found scattered in fragments all over the world of history.' (Guattari, 2015: p. 211). Guattari theorized that a psychotic patient could not be treated in the usual way of reintegrating them back into society. This is because they have a different relation with the institutions and norms and values of that world. This is an intriguing point for the Furry Fandom, in that their actions as fans are so abhorrent to some that people would qualify them as mentally ill. Society and institutions enforce meaning on people and that is why mentally ill people can be so terrifying to society, they are proof non-meaning concerning identity can exist:

This kind of group is thus involved in a perpetual struggle against any possible inscription of non-meaning: various roles are reified by a phallic appropriation along the model of the leader or of exclusion. One is part of such a group so as to collectively refuse to face up to nothingness that is, to the ultimate meaning of the projects in which we are engaged. (Guattari, 2015: p. 78)

To explain further, Guattari theorized that there is no access to a true self or identity because as soon as we are born institutions and societal norms and values instantly mean that 'the individual can only speak in the context of the discourse of the Other' (Guattari, 2015: p. 66). Guattari's thoughts on identity construction are more antipathetic than other theorists as identity is constructed by what *not* to be rather than who to be. However, Guattari did agree with other theorists that the institutions that create the signifiers for norms and values can be

changed again. Guattari argued that signifiers changing is often for antipathetic or negative reasons: 'identification with the prevailing images of the group is by no means static, for the badge of membership often has links with narcissistic and death instincts that it is hard to define.' (Guattari, 2015: p. 227). This has been seen within the Furry Fandom when it comes to the 'acceptability' of pornography consumption. In chapter six it will be argued that there is a split within the Furry Fandom when it comes to pornography in that parts of the group want to distance themselves from it so as not be stigmatized as mentally ill or deviant.

Guattari was more optimistic when it came to how political groups may be able to change societal attitudes but stated that the drawbacks meant it was often hard to tell how these groups were affecting these attitudes in real time:

But do not forget that the fact that we are convinced that one or several groups hold the key to regulating the latent transversality of the institution as a whole does not mean that we can identify the group or groups concerned. (Guattari, 2015: p. 114)

In later years Guattari's work became far more hopeful that transversality was becoming more possible due to social change. The rise of gay rights and the legal changes that came with it helped to prove to Guattari that some attitudes can change on an institutional level, such as the law system which had previously had homosexuality as illegal (Guattari, 2015: p. 216). In an interview with Jean-Charles Jambon and Nathalie Magnan he explained that transversality would mean that identity would be able to be constructed away from the traditional binary structure of what is good and what is bad:

It is possible to escape the world of discursivity structured by the poles masculine - feminine, object - subject that set of dualist categories forever haunted by a transcendent object. Escapes are possible which allow access to what I call an intensive, existential relation, a relation of immanence that no longer posits a before, an after, a black, a white, a male, a female (Guattari, 2015: p. 216- 217)

Later in the interview he added:

The notion of identity which I call *existential territory*, because we cannot live outside our bodies, our friends, some sort of human cluster, and at the same time, we are bursting out of this situation. The question which poses itself then is one of the conditions which allow the acceptance of the other, the acceptance of a *Subjective pluralism*. It is a matter not only of tolerating another group, another ethnicity, another sex, but also of a desire for dissensus, otherness, and difference. Accepting otherness is a question not so much of right as of desire. This acceptance is possible precisely on the condition of assuming the multiplicity within oneself. [original italics], (Guattari, 2015: p. 216)

Identity construction from a Guattarian standpoint then is that a person must understand themselves not just in opposition to ‘the Other’ such as in Foucault’s work, but in relation to all the multiplicities in their own body. Contrary to other theorists who say identity is constructed from how a person understands how being homosexual is different to heterosexual, Guattari builds on theories of ‘becoming’ he developed with Gilles Deleuze. To be a homosexual is not just within the realm of sexuality (since sexuality will also affect other parts of the person’s identity) and so must be understood as whole and not just by its binary pair.<sup>9</sup> Deleuze (often accompanying Guattari in theory) also looked at identity in an abstract way, not just in binaries. In *The Logic of Sense* he puts forth theories of how people ‘make sense’ of their lived-in worlds.

Deleuze’s writing takes scientific concepts and turns them into philosophical ones and this is inherent in the abstract way he understands events and the process of time. Deleuze begins with the primordial event (the Big Bang for example) and this singularity then gives

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<sup>9</sup> Although the theories of ‘becoming’ and also the ‘BwO’ are important theories by Deleuze and Guattari, their concepts and their relation to identity construction will not be discussed in this part of the thesis as they are focused on in more depth in chapter four, five and six. The next section will focus on other theories by Deleuze.

rise to subsidiary events. This goes on to create a network of events, that in themselves creates new events and can become primordial events also. To help explain the consequences of this we can use a scientific example used by Deleuze in *The Fold*, that of the triple point of water:

If I say, 'Water boils at 100° C,' the subject is clearly a thing, water, but the predicate is a vaporization curve that enters into relation with the fusion curve and the sublimation curve at a triple point (Deleuze, 2006: p. 61).

When it comes to the nature of water it has three stages of being, gaseous, liquid and solid. Each of these forms is essentially a new territory or singularity but it is still connected to the primordial event of water and it is this interconnectivity which helps explain that of being:

If Being cannot be said without also occurring, if Being is the unique event in which all events communicate with one another, univocity refers both to what occurs and to what is said. (Deleuze, 2004: p. 205)

And therefore:

The univocity of Being has three determinations: one single event for all events; one and the same aliquid for that which happens and that which is said; and one and the same Being for the impossible, the possible, and the real. (Deleuze, 2004: p. 206)

Deleuze does not prescribe to the top down theory where all cultural knowledge is filtered down a hierarchy, but, is in fact due to the interconnection of multiple singularities and so not only compliments Althusser and Bourdieu but also builds upon them. As well as this, it suggests that identity is more complex in that it can be actualised in random ways and is not just garnered from 'real' experience but also that which is experienced unconsciously i.e. the impossible and the possible.<sup>10</sup> This is relevant in discussions on how cultural trauma can

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<sup>10</sup> This is important within fan studies as many popular fandom identities are sci-fi or supernatural in basis; fan identity based on impossibilities seem to be a crucial identifier.

occur with fandom groups. This is discussed in chapter four concerning the effects of stigmatization on identity construction within the Furry Fandom.

Deleuze suggests that signification occurs on a macro level with ‘events’ and goes onto work this theory on a micro level when discussing multiplicities in theories of ‘becoming’ in conjunction with Guattari. It is within events that signification is created and shared and thus where Deleuze’s earlier musings in the book *The Logic of Sense* take place. As Foucault noted the importance of language and how ‘what is not said’ can be equally important in promoting certain discourses, Deleuze identifies three types of relations that occur within propositions in language. The first is that of denotation:

Denotation remains external to the order which conditions it, and the true and the false remain indifferent to the principle which determines the possibility of the one, by allowing it only to subsist in its former relation to the other. (Deleuze, 2004: p. 22)

Denotation then is used as a frame of reference by language users and it determines how people interpret the language that is used to form an understanding, which will be influenced by their cultural knowledge. What is being said does not need to be ‘true’ but it needs to be ‘known’ by those receiving the information. Second comes manifestation when talking about a given object (in this case a tree):

We ought not understand that the noema involves a sensible given or quality; it rather involves an ideation objective unity as the intentional correlate of the act of perception (Deleuze, 2004: p. 24)

Ergo with denotation being used as a frame of reference so that the speaker knows what the object is, their manifestation of the object reflects their beliefs about the object with no regard for whether their views on the object are true or not. And this is influenced by the final relation in proposition which is that of signification:

The law governing two simultaneous series is that they are never equal. One represents the signifier, the other the signified. But thanks to our terminology, these two terms acquire a particular meaning. We call 'signifier' any sign which presents in itself an aspect of sense; we call "signified" on the contrary, that which serves as the correlative to this aspect of sense, that is, that which is defined in a duality relative to this aspect....Thus, the signifier is primarily the event as the ideal logical attribute of a state of affairs, and the signified is the state of affairs together with its qualities and real relations. (Deleuze, 2004: p. 45)

In terms of identity construction in discussions about humour it is the 'aleatory points' (Deleuze, 2004: p. 156) in conversation which convey the signified and simple constructions of language where identity is expressed in language. This does present a paradox in that in language, signification comes first propositionally as we are born into a language whereas in the domain of logic the primary proposition put forward by Deleuze is denotation. Deleuze explains this in that 'paradox is initially that which destroys good sense as the only direction, but it also that which destroys common sense as the assignation of fixed identities.' (Deleuze, 2004: p. 5). For Deleuze signification can only occur because denotation allows the following significations to not be true or false; in terms of identity this means that signification can have different meanings for different people and thus a different construction.

Once an understanding is established of how 'sense' is created through the structure of language, Deleuze can then argue about how sense is generated. Building on Sigmund Freud's notion of the phallic stage in development, Deleuze theorises the way in which this can be used not just to establish a sexual identity but also a linguistic identity and thereby a cultural identity. According to Freud although men have a physical penis no one can in fact possess the symbolic phallus. This is why Deleuze refers to it as an empty object, in that the symbolism of the phallus is not fixed and can change depending on events in the current

society. It can be argued then that Furies and Therians offer an opportunity to argue that identity is an empty object. Furies and Therians who identify heavily with animals and would consider themselves not as wholly human can hold this identity because its significations do not need to be ‘true or false’; Scientifically, medically, a person cannot transform into an animal but that does not mean their identity cannot incorporate it in symbolism. This is discussed further in chapter five.

The symbolism of the phallic stage then is how it affects what Deleuze calls the phantasm. The phantasm is the process where infants first develop their biological urges and then gradually language (and the language concerned with how the phallus is symbolised) begin to impose on the infant’s creation of identity.

The phantasm covers the distance between psychic systems with ease, going from consciousness to the unconscious and vice versa, from the nocturnal to the diurnal dream, from the inner to the outer and conversely, as if it itself belonged to a surface dominating and articulating both the unconscious and the conscious. (Deleuze, 2004: p. 250)

The phantasm is a narrative which an infant must learn (as they do a language) which does not make much sense in the beginning but gradually becomes intelligible. In this way the infant ‘makes sense’ of the world through the process of the phantasm and symbolism. Deleuze’s theories allows for both personal experience and institutional experience when theorising identity creation.

These theorists will make up the theoretical framework of this thesis as many of these theories can be attributed to how people create their identities online (discussed in-depth in chapter three). This thesis will use these theorists to argue that the Furry Fandom acts as an institution to instil ‘how to be a Furry’ to its subjects on a macro level and that the online community works as the habitus on a micro and individual level. This is in keeping with

other works in fan studies which argue the importance of geek hierarchies (Hills, 2002; Busse, 2013; Proctor, 2013). It will be argued that the online community is the habitus in which Furies learn the ‘rules’ for their identity construction.

## **1.7 Research Methodology**

Data for this thesis was collected using survey program Qualtrics, which was distributed online, and ran for one month between October and November 2015. In this month, 1020 individual responses were recorded from self-identified Furies. The Qualtrics questionnaire comprised of questions which recorded both quantitative and qualitative data. This mix of ethnographic methods followed the principles of Netnography as set down Robert Kozinets (Kozinets, 2010: p. 61; fig. 4).

The first purpose of the questionnaire was to obtain demographic data to understand the diversity (or lack thereof) of the online community. The second purpose of the questionnaire was to gain data on ‘stereotypical’ Furry signifiers as investigated by Gerbasi et al. (2008) and later work by the IARP, such as prevalence of fursonas and species choice. The third purpose of the questionnaire was to gain data on stigmatization; the questions applied to both online stigmatization and offline stigmatization to investigate if there was a marked difference. Skype interviews were conducted with respondents who had participated in the questionnaire and agreed to further correspondence with the researcher. These interviews were used as an opportunity to gain clarity on some interesting data points that had appeared in the questionnaire data. Later in this PhD study (April, 2017), an analysis on pornographic images (which were chosen at random from [furafinity.com](http://furafinity.com)) were compiled to gain data on common practices in Furry pornography, such as aesthetics, popular species, and depictions of genitalia.

Diagram: A flow diagram of steps to be taken in a Netnographic study

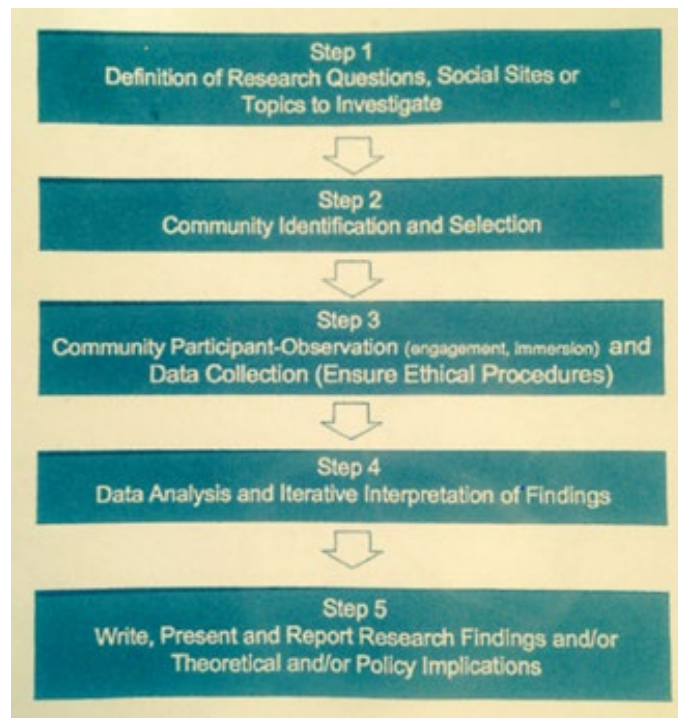


fig. 4

Netnography is particularly relevant for this study as it allows for the studying of online communities and the interrelationships that occur within the online space; Netnography was specifically designed to produce ethnographic studies of online communities (Kozinets, 2010: p. 6). Kozinets (2010) and Garcia et al. (2009) argue that netnographic methodologies are going to become increasingly used, arguing that most of future research needs to include some thought for computer-mediated communication. This is because of how intrinsic technology has become in postmodernity (Kozinets, 2010: p. 3; Garcia et al., 2009: p. 57). In fact, Alan Kirby argues that postmodernity can be considered as such because postmodern methodologies and research methods have ‘successfully, and admirably, brought into the cultural center previously marginalized textual forms from women’s writing to postcolonial literature’ (Kirby, 2009: p. 74); this thesis uses the postmodern definition that there is not one truth to be found in data and that data will be influenced by social and cultural factors. Although using mixed methods was problematic in the past due to technological constraints (Bryman, 2012: p. 629), mixed methods is now more common due to newer data analysis programs (Kozinets, 2010: p. 67). Martin Barker argues that mixed research methods can

bring about clear ways of presenting and analysing complex data especially in audience research such as fan studies (Barker, 2008: p. 153). For instance, in joint work with Ernest Mathijs, the difference between adverbial modifiers such as ‘satisfactory’ compared to ‘Wow!’ are treated as equal in quantitative data even though they show various levels of enjoyment (Barker and Mathijs, 2008: p. 152). Barker and Mathijs suggest that due to this, mixed methods can be more precise when fans are talking about their experiences. For this thesis it was deemed that mixed methods would be an appropriate way to fully gauge fan engagement and enjoyment as argued by Barker and Mathijs.

Quantitative data collection was used to ascertain the demographic data of the participants. Although, as Barker and Mathijs suggest, numbers can never claim to be fully representative, Alan Bryman states that it can provide a good base on which generalisations can be formed by researchers (Bryman, 2012: p. 635). Rich data from qualitative data collection can then be used in triangulation. For example, not only do I suggest that many Furies feel stigmatized, but the data also suggests *why* they feel stigmatized. This means that more conclusions can be drawn from the data which cannot be inferred by using just either method in seclusion.

An approach that is sometimes used within the fan studies discipline is that of the scholar-fan approach as suggested by Hills in *Fan Cultures* (2002) whereby the academic researching the fandom is also a member themselves. An important methodological distinction to note is that I am not a member of the Furry Fandom and thus is researching the fandom as an ‘outsider’. There are both pros and cons to this methodological approach. Jenkins made the argument that he already knew many of the fan behaviours of the tele-fantasy fandom as he was an ‘insider’ (Jenkins, 1992: p. 83). Hills built on this notion by referring to the scholar fan as a ‘map maker’ (Hills, 2002: p. 18). By already knowing and being involved in the fandom these academics find it easier to connect various aspects

together, forming the map of fandom behaviour. Mapping the fandom often uses thick description to put fan behaviour in context that becomes meaningful to an outsider of the fandom (lay person).

Due to the demographics of academia, especially pre-millennial born, there has been criticism as to which fandoms have been deemed worthy of study. Duffett levied this accusation in that it is often ‘privileged middle class commentators talk[ing] about *their* film, record and comic book collections or fan communities’ [original italics] (Duffett, 2013: p. 263). As a researcher, investigating a fandom of which there was no membership was important as it actively invokes Guattarian and Foucauldian principles about power (as described in section 1.6). The issue that comes from being a fan of what you are studying is summarised succinctly by Jenkins that he had ‘high degree of responsibility and accountability to the groups being discussed’ (Jenkins, 1992: p. 7). The power relations involved to being close to the study means that some data can be overlooked in preference for more ‘wholesome’ or gratifying data.

Researchers becoming overtly involved is not an uncommon approach in social studies disciplines with the popularity of ethnographies since the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Bryman notes that ‘postmodern ethnographies’ have become increasingly popular, where the academic becomes overtly involved and ‘often within the data and findings themselves’ (Bryman, 2012: p. 463). However there have been criticisms of this approach in recent years in other academic fields that being ‘too close’ to what you are studying can produce researcher bias and fan studies have seemingly not been immune to this. In the fan studies, early scholars focused on the positives of fandom. In fact, Bacon-Smith’s (1991) work did not even contemplate the possibility of fan hierarchies that are commonly researched today (Busse, 2013; Stanfill and Condis, 2014; Scott, 2013 and many more). Bacon-Smith even viewed fandom as an ‘equalizer’.

As such, there have been remarkably few studies on the darker side of fandom. Although some work on sexism has been addressed towards women in comic book fandoms (Scott, 2013) and potential racism in the *Star Wars* fandom (Proctor, 2017) much research still focuses very much on the positives. For instance, in research conducted by Bethan Jones, it was presented as a performative act of fandom for One Direction fans to act in anti-social manners. Threatening to murder or maim non-fans for insulting one of the band members was viewed as innocuous rather than the serious crimes that they actually were (Jones, 2016). The research undertaken in this thesis was conducted by someone who does not have a direct connection with the Furry Fandom as a fan. It was felt that this would give the researcher good academic distance from the research participants to be impartial with findings but not so far as to 'other' the participants.

Another consideration for conducting the research was to address an issue which concerned how to access members of the Furry Fandom to invite them to partake in the research questionnaires. Due to the negative media portrayals that Furries have encountered there has been resistance to reporters and researchers approaching these groups. In *Furries from A-Z* (2008), Gerbasi et al. asked the head of the convention they were researching to publicly support their research team. This was so that the attendees would know they were legitimately there to research and would not make fun of participants (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 200). When studying vulnerable or stigmatized groups the underlying principle of the research must take consideration of the participant's wellbeing (Pyer and Campbell, 2012: p. 312). To achieve this the following steps were taken to make sure that participants had the capability of understanding their consent to taking part in the research. A questionnaire for this research which was set up on Qualtrics had a very clear research statement that made evident what kind of questions were going to be asked. It also offered contact details of supervisors and the researcher if at any point the participants wanted to ask questions or

wholly withdraw from the study. Furries in other studies have been pathologized as mentally ill people just playing dress up (Bryant and Forsyth, 2012: p. 532). Even the sympathetic study *Furries from A–Z* has tentatively created the term ‘species identity disorder’ in relation to those Furries they identify as ‘distorted unattained’ category (Gerbasi et Al., 2008: p. 206). The data was collected with the aim to provide an ‘initial overview of the area of online communities’ (Kozinets, 2010: p. 43) that the Furry Fandom inhabit. Kozinets does warn of the disadvantages of using questionnaires for exploring ‘a new culture or community topic about which little previously was known’ (Kozinets, 2010: 45). This problem is abated by using the demographics recorded in *Furries From A–Z* (Gerbasi et al., 2008) to create a starting point on which to base the survey questions.

The majority of the Furry Fandom studies that have been conducted thus far have endorsed a preferential use of quantitative methods, mainly the use of online or offline surveys (Gerbasi et al., 2008). This may be because they have mainly been conducted by those in the field of psychology rather than the social sciences. Also, research on the Furry community is very new (the first peer reviewed study was published in 2008), it has hitherto been important to correctly identify the demographic population. This is crucial because there was a possibility that demographic data found in this study could be different from the demographics found in the IARP studies. For instance, many of the studies by the IARP collected their data at conventions in the USA which meant that the majority of data was from Americans and also those who had the monetary wealth to attend. For Johnny Saldana, ‘patterns demonstrate habits, salience, and importance in people’s daily lives’ (Saldana, 2016: p. 6) so by using demographic data it can be possible to see patterns emerge in certain age groups that is useful for study.

As well as completing surveys there has been some attempt to complete interviews with Furries however some have been more successful than others in previous research. In

this research, online Skype interviews were used due to data quality issues that was found in the study by Grivell et al. (2014: p. 133); the study used interviews that were instant messaged (typed out online) and this meant that answers were found to be generally shorter than if they had been spoken aloud. They also found that it was difficult to gauge the emotional context behind certain comments compared to if they had been conducted face to face. Due to this there were only a few 'long' answer questions on the Qualtrics questionnaire. However, there was an overwhelming response of rich qualitative data from the Qualtrics questionnaire; initial data collection produced a huge amount of qualitative data (1020 respondents with 75% filling in at least one qualitative data response). This meant that only three in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted over Skype. These three later interviews were conducted to answer queries that the researcher had concerning the survey data – the survey responses were anonymised, so it was not possible to go back and query specific respondents. These participants were selected at random from those who had already completed the Qualtrics questionnaire and agreed to the possibility of further contact. The three online interviews were used to gain clarification on the random specific meaning of certain words that appeared in responses and to gain more descriptive data on types of fetish that were not elaborated on in the survey data. The interviews were recorded using a microphone and then transcribed into a computer program with all data available from Anglia Ruskin University or the researcher.

Due to the specific nature of this study, the proposed method of finding participants meant the exclusion of maximum variation sampling or any sampling that includes non-Furries. Participants were chosen by inclusion criteria and snowball/chain (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: p. 101) as the research only focuses on usage of online communities of Furries and a control group was not required. The proposed inclusion criteria were that the respondent self-identified as a Furry Fandom member. To increase exposure of possible

participation snowball sampling through social networks and online social media (Bryman, 2012: p. 424) was used. All advertisements of the need for participants in the research were only posted on known Furry communities to decrease the chance of a non-Furry respondent partaking in the study. After ethical consideration, only those over the age of 18 were asked to complete the survey and/or interview. This is for practical reasons such as the fact under 18s are unable to consent as they are not adults. This is also because, as a stigmatized community, asking questions to under 18s who are particularly vulnerable without proper training or support would be unethical.

This may seem limiting as the majority of the Furry Fandom is under the age of 25 (Plante et al., 2016: p. 4). However, looking at responses received by the IARP above the over 18 age range I was confident that there would still be an amount of responses needed to conduct this research. Due to the lack of consensus on what ethical protocols should be used when studying stigmatized fan communities online I decided to formulate them myself (concurrent with the research taken place for this thesis). This led to a peer reviewed article being published in 2017 and will be used as a guideline for possible research into Furies under the age of 18 in the future.<sup>11</sup> The paper addressed the ethical challenges of researching an online community where there is a potential for harm in the real world. The article produced a step by step guide on actions to take if an online participant was threatening to harm themselves due to abuse such as reporting behaviour to the host website, reporting behaviour to a local authority if possible and revealing researcher status in times of crisis.

To make sure that a large breadth of Furies had access to the questionnaire it was hosted on Reddit in the r/furry subreddit messenger board. Reddit was founded in 2005 by Alexis Ohanian and Steve Huffman and has become one of the most popular websites online today, 'with more than 330 million monthly active users, organized by nearly 150K active

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<sup>11</sup> Austin, J. (2017), 'Online Hate and Hurt: Ethical considerations when online research takes an ugly turn', *NTIK*, 6(1), ISSN (ONLINE) 2245-294X

communities, and 14 billion views per month' (Reddit Blog, 2018). Reddit is a significant source of data for researchers due to the breadth of comments from users, with the highest number of comments on one discussion thread reaching 84 thousand (Reddit Blog, 2018). Adreinne Massanari notes how Reddit can be an interesting methodological site describing it as 'a unique, boundary-spanning platform that elicits new questions about the nature of participatory culture and community in the age of social networking' (Massanari, 2015a: p. 7). Although it presents an interesting opportunity for researchers, Reddit has not been without controversy. Researchers have noted that parts of the site have become a hub for misogyny (Massanari, 2015b; Baym, 2015) and media outlets too have called out specific subreddits such as r/theredpill and r/MGTOW (Men going their own way) as examples of toxic web communities (Marche, 2016).<sup>12</sup> Despite the controversies described above, Reddit was still an appropriate forum to conduct the research for this thesis; Massanari suggests that Reddit is interesting because 'the diversity of subreddits dedicated to niche interests would suggest that nothing really binds this community together; however, it is the unspoken politics of the reddit platform' (Massanari, 2015a: p. 15). Reddit became a strong candidate as a research setting because an aim of this thesis was to investigate Furies who considered their engagement on a hobby level and to see how prevalent these members were. By using Reddit (where users often use the whole website rather than focusing only on one subreddit) it was more likely that data would be collected from less identified Furies. For the purposes of this study, it is important to see how prevalent these kinds of fans are within this fandom as previous studies have tended to focus on Furies who are highly identified, which may have given a skewed dataset.

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<sup>12</sup> Massanari's work in particular has focused on events such as The Fappening, where celebrity nudes were leaked onto the subreddit which caused arguments over celebrities right to privacy and the impact of misogynist comments aimed at the female celebrities. Massanari also discusses GamerGate where arguments over ethical journalism in video game reporting devolved into misogynistic comments and attacks towards prominent women involved in the video game industry such as Anita Sarkessian and Zoe Quinn.

This thesis used the idea that the more a key phrase or idea appeared in collected data, the more likely it is to contain some significance (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: p. 212). This would improve the consistency of coding with content analysis utilized as the framework for this (Bryman, 2012: p. 304; Schreier, 2012: p. 58). Conceptual coding was used as an analytical process as it focuses only on what is present in the data rather than preconceived concepts (Schreier, 2012: p. 41). After firstly coding the data to examine themes, and develop theories, axial coding was used to help reflect the ‘commonalities among the codes’ (Marshall and Rossman, 2011: p. 215). Due to the other studies in this area it was predicted that most commonalities would show a negative experience with general culture for the Furies and their social lives. To make sure that interpretations of codes were within a reasonable level of accuracy and trying to cause minimal theoretical bias, peer debriefing to check codes was implemented. This was because peer debriefing is useful as ‘different values regarding interest, time frame, and the use of findings’ can differ between researchers (Cooper et Al, 1997: p. 4).

## **1.8 Outline of Thesis Chapters**

Chapter one titled *The Furry Fandom: A Proper Introduction* provides an in-depth description on the Furry Fandom including an analysis of the demographics found in previous studies and in the research conducted. The chapter also includes a brief history of the fandom so that it is evident how history has shaped the fandom and helped to situate the fandom in terms of historical context. This chapter concludes with an extended literature review. Chapter two of this thesis researches Furry identity construction. *The Furry Fandom: The Online institution* is primarily concerned with how the ‘Furry’ identity i.e. how to be a Furry, is constructed in the online space. Deleuze and Guattari’s ideas on identity construction within institutions are utilised, and related to a modern-day context, to describe internet communities as a type of institution. The chapter then proceeds to ‘map’ the Furry Fandom

online in two parts. This first section looks at how Furies' identity construction may be influenced from outside forces. The first part uses theories from the last twenty years that look specifically at online identity construction which in many ways is different from face-to-face interaction. The second part looks at specific Furry 'fan-signifiers', such as the fursona, and how Furies construct this identity from interactions within the Furry Fandom. Chapter four, *A Stigmatized Lifestyle*, covers an academic gap when it comes to peer reviewed studies on the Furry Fandom. This chapter discusses the hostilities that occur within the community between Furry members when it comes to looking at 'being Furry' as a hobby or a lifestyle. Using qualitative data this chapter examines the way the community has been stigmatized by outsiders and how it has affected construction of the Furry identity as one that sometimes needs to be concealed. This chapter uses the concept of Deleuze and Guattari's Body without Organs (BwO) to discuss the ways in which some Furies feel stigmatized due to the presentation of their body to society. *Species Choice in the Furry Fandom* is covered in chapter five. This chapter looks in detail at one of the constructions that is unique to the Furry Fandom in that their fandom has a basis around anthropomorphising animals and highly identified Furies use different species to create their own animal-based persona. This chapter investigates the reason some species are more commonly chosen than others. For highly identified Furies this is discussed in relation to posthuman theory, using Deleuze, Guattari and Donna Haraway. For less identified Furies their choices can be discussed more appropriately through aesthetic choices in modern art and in relation to theories of myth-making by Roland Barthes and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Chapter six *Sexuality and Pornography in the Furry Fandom* addresses the use of pornography for the Furies as a generic fan practice. Although the general and negative stereotype is that Furies are all about deviant pornography there have been no academic studies that have analysed Furry pornography in depth. This chapter investigates the link between Furry pornography and bestiality and

whether the use of fursonas in pornography is indicative of posthuman identity behaviour. Chapter seven is the *Conclusion* chapter. This concluding chapter brings together the key points that have been made in this thesis and discusses in what ways this research is new, limitations that are found within this study, and suggestions for further research.

## 2.The Furry Fandom: A Proper Introduction and Literature Review

[redacted in this version]

fig. 5

### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a more in-depth explanation of certain aspects of the Furry Fandom to expand on the brief explanation given in the introduction. There is a need for a longer introduction solely focused on the concept of ‘what is a Furry’ as, like other fandoms, there is a range of different fan practices. This chapter will start with the history of the fandom and go on to discuss the common demographics of the Furry Fandom and different Furry identifiers.

It can be difficult to pinpoint a year to when the Furry Fandom started, consensus among Furries themselves suggests that the fandom started in the 1980s. Furries who have been in the fandom since the 1980s often cite an increase in popularity and exposure beginning in the 1990s (Nyareon, 2015: p. 7). There was, however, a small contingent of what would become part of the Furry Fandom in as early as April 1976. This coincided with the launch of *Vootie* ‘The fanzine of the Furry Animal Liberation Front’ which ran until February 1983 (Patten, 2015: p. 36). The first specific Furry publication was not available until May 1987 and was named *FurVersion* but this ceased distribution in November 1990 (Patten, 2015: p. 36). The fandom has now spread around the globe, but its earliest documentable origins is in the U.S.A. Referring to himself as a prominent ‘Furry historian’,

Fred Patten states that he believes that the concept of 'Furry' originated in earnest from Steve Gallacci's *Albedo Anthropomorphics*. This comic strip was being sold at a U.S science fiction convention in 1980 (Patten, 2012).

The internet certainly helped the growth of the Furry Fandom as there is a breadth of Furry artwork and fiction made available online. With increasing technological capabilities, came increased communication with Furries known to use internet services such as Skype to communicate with friends if they are unable to attend Fur Meets (Shoji, 2015: p. 17). Since the 1990s Furry Fandom membership has continued to grow and now Furry conventions are held in several countries over the course of the year.

In the United States there are multiple conventions dedicated to those who are interested in anthropomorphics. Some of the largest conventions include the Midwest Furfest, which in 2017 hosted 8,771 attendees in Illinois and Furry Weekend Atlanta which in 2017 hosted 5193 attendees in Georgia (WikiFur, 2018a). The USA still dominates in terms of attendance compared to the rest of the world, but numbers are increasing at conventions in other parts of the globe, most noticeable in Berlin, Germany. From humble beginnings with an attendance of 19 people in June 1995 Eurofurence has continued to grow in attendance. Eurofurence in 2017 had 2804 attendees making it the largest and the longest running Furry convention outside of the United States (WikiFur, 2018a).

As with other fandoms there have also been several prominent and popular members of the fandom who have helped shape the fandom into what it is today. In 2008 a 'Furry Hall of Fame' was conceived by MiDFur Chairman CynWolfe and several prominent members of the fandom have since been inducted into it. Patten was inducted in 2011 for his work trying to chronicle the fandom history (WikiFur, 2018b). Among the inductees is Uncle Kage who has chaired Anthrocon since 1999 and The Ranting Gryphon who is an amateur comedian and performer who commonly performs at Furry conventions (WikiFur, 2018b). There are

also several well-known publishers of Furry material such as Howl Publications which is run by Furry Thurston Howl; In 2015 Howl published an anthology with chapters written by prominent members of the fandom.

Unfortunately, little is known about the Furry Fandom in the early days of its conception, possibly because of the stigma against not only Furries but fans in general. This means that there are few sources for demographics of what the Furry Fandom used to look like. As time has gone on however Furry communities online have taken an interest in what their communities look now with surveys being undertaken on the larger Furry websites. Accompanied by research completed by the IARP, it is now much easier to see not only the history of the Furry Fandom but how it looks currently as well. We now understand the Furry Fandom to commonly have the demographics described below.

## **2.2 Furry Research So Far – A Literature Review**

The vast majority of current academic writing on Furries has been from the same group with Kathleen C. Gerbasi, Stephen Reysen, Sharon E. Roberts and Courtney N. Plante being the main writers. Much of their work has been heavily cited throughout this thesis as very few other academic sources have been published on the fandom outside their group. This section will review their current literature which is accessible from their organization's website. There will also be a literature review on the Grivell et al. (2014) study on Therians, a group who believe they physically or mentally become animals. Ideologically, they are two separate groups which are interested in anthropomorphism but in different ways and this is discussed at the end of this sub chapter and in further depth in chapter four and five.

**Gerbasi, K.C., Paolone, N., Higner, J., Scaletta, L. L., Bernstein, P. L., Conway, S. and Privitera, A. (2008), *Furries from A to Z (Anthropomorphism to Zoomorphism)*, *Society and Animals*, Koninklijke Brill: NV, 16, pp. 197–222**

In the introduction I spoke briefly of the 2008 peer reviewed study by Gerbasi et al., *Furries from A–Z*. Their research focused on common stereotypes about Furries that have been pervasive on the internet, using these as a measure to find out how ‘consistent’ these were compared to Furries they researched. *Furries from A–Z* was the first peer reviewed study to be completed on the Furry Fandom by the IARP. The first goal of their study was to test the Furry stereotypes and to determine the ‘common denominators’ (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 199). Their secondary goal was to investigate the aspects of possible gender identity disorder but instead of the feeling of being in the wrong body it was being the wrong species, tentatively named ‘species identity disorder’ (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 200).

When it came to the results of the Gerbasi et al. primary goal, it was found that many of the stereotypes applied to members of the Furry fandom were only somewhat consistent with the experiences of Furries (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 204; fig. 1). Many of the stereotypes were typically those that were levied towards other fandoms, specifically – the nerdy ‘fanboy’ stereotype. What was interesting about the study is that they suggested from their results that there was a significant proportion of Furries who could be described as having ‘species identity disorder’. They claimed that most Furries displayed the markers of those who would be classed as having ‘gender identity disorder’ (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 214). Their largest group (n = 77) comprised of Furries who would not describe themselves as less than 100% human and would not wish to be 0% human (later termed as ‘undistorted attained type’). Their next biggest group (n= 52) considered themselves to be less than 100% human and would become 0% human, a type which comprised 25% of the Furries from the study (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 215). Of course, it is acknowledged at the end of the study that as at

that time there were no other peer reviewed papers to compare to, creating limitations on their conclusions (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 220). They expressed an interest in how ‘species identity disorder’ would develop in future research however.

One of the main concerns that I had with the Gerbasi et al. paper was the use of phrase ‘species identity disorder’ for two major reasons. Firstly, it denotes pathologization of a fan and secondly, it uses a human versus animal binary. In a critique of the *Furries from A–Z* study, Fiona Probyn-Rapsey suggested that the use of the term species identity disorder was problematic due to its use of gender identity disorder theory as its basis and that there was little literature review on the topic before the term was introduced (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011: p. 294-295).<sup>13</sup> In a rebuttal to Probyn-Rapsey’s comments Gerbasi et al. responded:

We were not addressing the validity or political correctness of the gender identity disorder diagnosis (which is beyond the scope of *Society & Animals*). Given our word limit and the novelty of research on Furries, it would have been counterproductive to review the gender identity disorder literature (Gerbasi et al., 2011: p. 303)

The above response gives their reasons for the inclusion of the term but this I would suggest that the term is still problematic. To label any fan as having a disorder of any kind is reminiscent of the descriptions of fans ‘as fanatics’. As well as this Gerbasi et al. specifically mention gender identity disorder in their abstract as having parallels with their new disorder construction. In light of this, there should have been at least some explanation as to what gender identity disorder is for the reader to understand the new term. This is especially important as Probyn-Rapsey points out that it is ‘a highly controversial diagnosis that has been criticized for pathologizing homosexuality and transgendered people’ (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011: p. 294). I therefore disagree that a review of the term by Gerbasi et al. would have been counterproductive. The use of gender identity disorder to categorise Furries into solid

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<sup>13</sup> Gender identity disorder is often viewed as a politically incorrect term in more recent years. This is because it infers that transgender people have a mental illness.

categories is at odds with work on fan hierarchies (Busse, 2013). Studies on how *much* of a fan people are show that often fan identification with their fandom can be much more fluid; fans do not always share the same affinity for their fandom object all the time (Proctor 2013; Hills, 2002):

Our cautious suggestion of species identity disorder in some members of the Furry Fandom was based on our finding that many Furies agreed with statements that paralleled sentiments of people with gender identity disorder regarding their biological sex (e.g., “A feeling that you are your non-human species trapped in a human body”). (Gerbasi et al. 2011: p. 302-303)

The main issue that I have with this statement is that this quotation suggests that that the study was speciesist in that Gerbasi et al. are putting the notion of the human above the non-human animal.<sup>14</sup> As will be discussed in far greater depth in chapter four and chapter five, this research will argue that humanity should not be hierarchized over animality. For many people what it is to be human can have different connotations. Consequently, regarding anyone who does not identify as 100% human as suffering from species identity disorder is problematic. This just raises more questions than it answers as Gerbasi et al. did not clarify what they meant by ‘human’. Due to the IARP only including highly identified Furies it would suggest that it is a common occurrence with 46% in their study supposedly having some form of species identity disorder. Also, by using the term less than 100% human it is homogenising all other species into the group of ‘nonhuman’ and so relates back to a dominant human versus nonhuman model which this thesis challenges. Their study suggests that the most identified members of the fandom will ‘definitely’ have species identity disorder but this may not be the case. In this thesis there is some evidence to suggest that there are Furies who greatly enjoy and are heavily involved in the fandom but would not

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<sup>14</sup> Speciesist and Speciesism is the assumption of human superiority leading to the exploitation of animals.

wish to be less than 100% human. There is also data in this thesis to suggest that there are Furies who do not go to conventions or get heavily involved in Furry activities but who would consider themselves less than 100% human. This is contradictory to the idea of who this so-called disorder affects in terms of the Gerbasi et al. study.

Within this research the title of ‘species identity disorder’ will not be used as it is not conducive to the tone or style of this research. The categories as set out by Gerbasi et al. as described in the introduction in fig. 2 will also not be used as; I found these categories too constricted when it came to analysing the data acquired. Instead there will be two very broad categories used of hobby or lifestyle which is discussed in chapter four. This is because, as with every other fandom, there are those whose life is all about being Furry compared to those who dip into the fandom every once in a while and everything in between.

The Gerbasi et al. study has been helpful in many ways, especially as a starting point for this thesis but there were also problems occurring in this study when reviewed from a different theoretical framework, other than psychological. The Gerbasi et al. study was performed using a psychology methodology and literature reviews. Barker and Mathijs (2012) noted the problems with using a psychological methodology to study fandoms when discussing their chosen methodology for researching *The Lord of the Rings* (Jackson, 2001, 2002, 2003) fandom in 2008. They noted that:

In mainstream American psychology (including work in the psychology of entertainment), there is a long tradition of attempting to develop standardised research implements. These are sought not simply for convenience, but because it is believed that underpinning human behaviour and attitudes are a number of significant (probably biologically-driven) universal systems of response. If research could locate these reliably, with an implement that could then be used repeatedly, then the consequences of those universal tendencies, and the possibilities of intervening to

modify their operation, could be tracked. The drive towards developing these is therefore not just a methodological device, but the result of an ontological commitment, with its own distinctive concepts (and a key one is the concept of an ‘attitude’). (Barker and Mathijs, 2012: p. 680 - 681)

As such they followed a cultural studies approach which is also followed in this thesis:

Situated locally within a cultural studies tradition, but more broadly within a critical hermeneutic tradition (but one which has not given up on empirical research and retreated to relativistic circles), we believe that human responses to the world are culturally constructed and oriented, historically framed, and are the sources for people’s desires and actions. (Barker and Mathijs, 2012: p. 681)

*Furries from A-Z* was collected at a Furry convention in the USA. Although it makes methodological sense to go to a Furry convention to collect data from Furries in person there are two main problems with this. Firstly, no data was collected as to the nationality or country of residence of the participants. Therefore, no assumptions can be made as to whether data collected from the Furries at the USA location can be applied to stereotypes of Furries worldwide. Secondly, Gerbasi et al. did not make any consideration for the fact that many of those who participated in the study would be those with a disposable income.<sup>15</sup> The study does not address the problem that they would only be getting data from fans who were highly identified with the fandom and also have the economical means to attend.

In fan studies, discussions on varying levels of fan interaction have caused methodological difficulties. This was acknowledged in *Doctor Who* convention research: ‘we assume that the interview sample is slightly skewed towards the more intense or emotionally-invested fans, and fans of a particular socio-economic class’ (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 60). There were also methodological difficulties where data was lost due to noise levels and

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<sup>15</sup> Although they asked for occupation their study did not identify income related to this (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 206).

recording malfunctions (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 59). For Paul Booth and Peter Kelly, it is still important to research at physical locations:

More fan research into these offline, physical locations needs to take place, to account for all available outlets of fan expression, across all media and levels of connectivity, in order to better grapple with the complex fabric of fan participation. (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 61)

However, because all previous research by the IARP has been mainly on convention attendees it is important to diversify research parameters using mixed methods. Although the IARP have collected some data from Furry dedicated websites, this can also cause problems in that they are only collecting data from the more enthusiastic fans. Once again these are usually those who heavily identify in the Furry fandom.

**Roberts, S. E., Plante, C., Gerbasi, K. C. and Reysen, S. (2015a), Clinical Interaction with Anthropomorphic Phenomenon: Notes for Health Professionals about Interacting with Clients Who Possess This Unusual Identity, *Health and Social Work*, 40(3), pp. 42-50**

This paper focuses on providing notes for health professionals who may encounter Furies in their workplace as they describe being a Furry as an ‘unusual identity’ and so (in their view) needs special consideration. The specific aim of the paper was to describe how Furry social groups work as a support network and not just as a fan activity. They also note how the Furry Fandom had the benefit of allowing its members to explore their identity and develop social skills (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 43). Roberts et al. felt this research was needed as they believed that many Furies were reluctant to reveal their Furry ‘status’ to physicians due to stigma they might encounter (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 43). Their research was aimed at clinicians as other research has suggested that stigmatized groups, such as Furies, can create communities that ‘foster well-being’ and can ‘counter-act’ the effects of being in a

stigmatized group (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 44). The Roberts et al. paper advises clinicians to ‘ensure that fandom participation is a source of positivity for the Furry client while monitoring the Furry carefully for signs of extreme escapism.’ (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 49). They also wanted to advise clinicians to refrain from seeing their engagement in the fandom as a problem, especially when it ‘may be the only source of positivity for the client’ (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 47). For Roberts et al., their study was aiming to make health professionals aware of the Furies’ ‘unusual identity’ rather than pathologize it.

However, the ascription of ‘unusual’ to all Furies *is* problematic in fan studies research terms because this *is* pathologizing the fan. This is more understandable when it is taken into consideration of the IARP’s other work. For instance, they clearly see Furry as an integral part of an identity rather than a hobby; as with their other papers, this paper was produced by collecting data at a five-day Furry convention (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 43) and thus they will have been interviewing the more dedicated Furies. This may be the reason that their data seems to show that 90% of Furies strongly identify with being a Furry (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 45) something that this thesis disputes (see chapter four).

Their research shows some interesting dynamics which is common in other fandoms when it comes to the notion of acceptance in a community. Acceptance is important to many fandoms and has often been a place of comfort for fans, especially in the earlier days when fans were misunderstood (Lamb and Veith, 2014; Coppa, 2014b). In this thesis as well, many Furies have spoken of the acceptance they have felt finding a community with anthropomorphic interests (Appendix A: p. 274). Roberts et al. assert that it can be difficult to find other people interested in anthropomorphism as it is not a common interest leaving them feeling isolated (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 45). But, their research also indicates that many Furies akin disclosure of their furriness to be ‘analogous to disclosing one’s sexual orientation’ (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 48). In this thesis only 23% of respondents felt they

could not disclose their Furry identity to any non-furry groups (including family or friends), (Appendix A: p. 271).

In this thesis, there were some very strong reactions to comparing Furry identity to sexuality or to the notion of 'coming out'. It was those respondents in this research who regarded their Furry identity as a hobby who felt it was not appropriate to associate being a Furry (which they felt was chosen) with a sexual identity. This is discussed in detail in chapter four.

That is not to say that it is not important to write this piece for health professionals. It could be useful for clinicians who come across highly identified Furies or Therians. For those who see being Furry as an integral part of their identity it could be distressing for them to be a Furry as they often 'encounter additional discrimination' (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 47). This is on account of being in the Furry fandom due to negative stereotyping from a range of different sources as discussed in chapter one.

**Reysen, S., Plante, C. N., Roberts, S. E. and Gerbasi. K. C. (2015a), A Social Identity Perspective of Personality Differences between Fan and Non-Fan Identities, *World Journal of Social Science Research*, 2(1), pp. 91–103**

This paper is interesting because one of the items researched was the difference in personality traits between a Furies fursona and their non-Furry identity. This is the only paper by the IARP which considered that there could be a distinct difference between a Furies fursona and their non-fan personality. Therefore, this research did not treat the Furry identity as something all-encompassing and integral. For Reysen et al. study (2015a), their discussion looks at self-categorization theory; 'people are more likely to adopt these stereotype-consistent thoughts, feelings, and behaviours when they strongly identify with the group' (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 92). For the social identity perspective approach they used the 'Big Five' personality traits which is modelled around five factors: extroversion, agreeableness,

conscientiousness, emotional stability, and openness (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 91). They claim little research has been done to show whether a person's prototypical traits from their 'main group' remains salient over time. Their research performed 'in the context of fans, looking at whether the salience of one's personal and fan identity will affect their self-reported personality scores.' (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 92). They started with a hypothesis that Furies' personality ratings when it came to self-categorization would differ. This was depending on whether they felt that being a Furry was part of their personal identity or whether they felt it was part of their fan identity (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 93). They found that many Furies rated their fursona identities more highly than their own personalities suggesting that 'fursonas represent idealized versions of the self that include, among other characteristics, outgoingness and confidence' (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 94). The study then went on to compare their findings to sports fans and found that sports fans' rating of their 'sports fan identity' differed from their own personal identity 'except for openness to experience' (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 96). This suggested to Reysen et al. that 'difference in personality scores caused by identity salience was not unique to Furies and does occur in members of other fan groups' (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 96). They concluded that personality is not stable throughout a lifetime as other papers had suggested (Costa et al., 2000; McCrae & Costa, 1999). Instead they aligned with other studies that it depended on which identity is most important to the individual at that given time instead (see Jenkins et al., 2012; Reynolds et al., 2010; Reynolds et al., 2012; Turner & Onorato, 1999).

For many Furies their fursona is an important part of their identification in the Furry Fandom and in this thesis (as with IARP research) a Furry will often use their fursona as an idealised version of themselves (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 93; Plante et al., 2015; Gerbasi et al., 2008). The Reysen et al. study collected psychological data using the method of the 'Big

Five’ as in Study 1 and 2 in their paper ‘all five personality traits were found to be stronger in Furries’ Furry identity than in their non-furry identity’ (Reysen et al. 2015a: p. 96).

Their paper asserted that ‘more than 95% of Furries have a fursona’ (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 93) as this has been found in their other studies such as Plante et al., (2013). But, as noted previously as problematic with other IARP studies, their respondents largely included Furries recruited at the Furry Fiesta convention (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 94). Although they did recruit Furries online these were from Furry dedicated forums, again these would most likely be visited by those who are heavily involved in the fandom. In this thesis an interesting data point was that around 25% of respondents considered themselves Furry but did not have a fursona which is likely linked to the fact that respondents were recruited via Reddit (see chapter four). What is interesting and relevant for this thesis was that the Reysen et al. study suggests that for Furries who do have fursonas there is a practical use for them. These fursonas are incorporated into their identity in the offline world rather than being art that is bought simply for pleasure. This means that there are ramifications when it comes to fursona design as discussed in detail in chapter five.

**Plante, C. N., Roberts, S., Reysen, S., and Gerbasi, K. C. (2014), Interaction of Socio-structural Characteristics Predicts Identity Concealment and Self-Esteem in Stigmatized Minority Group Members, *Curr Psychol*, 33(3), pp. 3–19**

Stigmatization or the vernacular term ‘fursecution’ is a worry within the Furry Fandom that seems to come up often in the IARP research.<sup>16</sup> Research on stigmatized communities, although counter-intuitive, suggest that identification with one’s stigmatized minority group is positively related to well-being (Branscombe et al., 1999; Plante et al., 2014: p. 4). However, on an individual level, stigmatized members may choose to conceal their community status which can have taxing and harmful psychological effects to the individual

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<sup>16</sup> See Glossary for fursecution definition.

(Plante et al., 2014). As with other studies from the IARP, this paper uses social identity theory as its basis. 'The theory posits that people strive to maintain positive and distinct social identities' and, 'that ingroup members use features of intergroup contexts to direct their behaviour when forming a social identity' (Plante et al., 2014: p. 5). Two interesting points made by Plante et al. in this research mention is that 'members of stigmatized groups were less likely to identify with their group when group boundaries were more permeable' (Plante et al. 2015: p. 5). Plante et al. found that they would identify more with their groups if the status within each group was unstable however (Plante et al., 2014: p. 5) Their paper suggests that a stigmatized member would identify with the group if it was clear what they are being stigmatized for but, they also needed to know that they could move hierarchically within them. Their results suggested that they supported Plante et al.'s hypothesis that Furries do use concealment strategies to cope with 'anticipated stigmatization due to perceived intergroup status differences' (Plante et al., 2014: p. 13). They suggest that using a concealment strategy was a way for a Furry to mediate 'between Furries', in the perception of socio-structural characteristics of intergroup status differences and self-esteem.' (Plante et al., 2014: p. 13).

The Plante et al. study reviewed research which suggested that stigmatized communities have been researched over the years with the majority of them containing a biological or genetic component (Plante et al., 2014: p. 6). This is however highly contested through critiques of biological essentialism. Furries do not fit in either of these categories and come from all walks of life. It has been noted that the 'perception of choice' means that some have trivialized chosen identities, such as fan membership (Chen, 2007). This is despite evidence to show that it can be a very important or even integral part of someone's identity (Chen 2007; Grossberg 1992; Wann and Branscombe, 1993). For Furries, stigmatization seems to come from the mass media and their spreading of negative stereotypes such as associations with bestiality. An interesting claim is made in this study that 'approximately 50

% of Furries believe that their being Furry was not a choice' (Plante et al., 2014: p. 6). Their reference for this is unpublished raw data according to the bibliography and so cannot be confirmed. This is problematic as this would suggest that many of the Furries they have studied viewed their community as coming from a biological or genetic component of their identities. This is opposed to a chosen one as presented in the study by Plante et al. and they do not go deeper into questioning why Furries may feel it is not a choice before moving on.

The Plante et al. study does seem to show that Furries act in a comparable way to other stigmatized communities. They note that Furry communities 'serve a number of important social, self-expression, and identity-forming functions' (Plante et al., 2014: p. 7; Roberts et al., 2015b; Plante et al., 2013). This is also reported in studies focused on those in sexual minority stigmatized groups (Iwasaki et al., 2006; Jones and McCarthy, 2010). Plante et al. did note that there are those who viewed Furry as being a choice, those 'who see the boundary between Furry and non-Furry as being more permeable' (Plante et al., 2014: p. 13). These Furries may see the identity as more easily concealed and so do not suffer the negative effects of doing so. This is thought-provoking because a point of contention in this study was the description of 'coming-out' when revealing to a non-Furry that they participate in the fandom; they do not see it as an identity and so do not want to be associated with high identifying members. There is still evidence to suggest however that Furries often find comfort and support within the fandom due to perceived stigmatization (see chapter four).

**Reysen, S., Plante, C. N., Roberts, S. E. and Gerbasi, K. C. (2015b), Ingroup bias and in-group projection in the Furry Fandom, *International Journal of Psychological Studies*, 7, pp. 49-58**

This research studied a Furry's connection to their fursona and the perceived benefits of their fursona. The Reysen et al. study also investigated whether there was a relationship between chosen fursonas and in-group projection and in-group bias. Using social identity theory as a

base, they noted that in a person's social group there is a hierarchy of favouritism behaviour. Talking about soccer fans, they responded that they are 'more likely to help fans of the same team than fans of a rival team in an emergency situation' (Reysen et al, 2015b: p. 49). There have been suggestions by other academics that ingroup bias is due to self-enhancement or collective action. The Reysen et al. study focuses on 'ingroup projection' (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 50) as being a possible cause. Ingroup projection relates to fan hierarchies (Busse, 2013) when it comes to fans who are not members of a fandom that society views as 'acceptable'. Reysen et al. categorizes these members as 'not-prototypical' and 'experience greater prejudice than members of more prototypical fan groups' (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 50). Their hypothesis was that Furies would strongly identify with both the subgroup (Furry Fandom) and superordinate group (varied species within the fandom). They also theorized that Furies would have an ingroup bias for their own chosen fursona species.

Their aim was to find a psychological reason why some species are more popular than others. They found that there was in-group favouritism present; its 'presence can be explained, at least in part, by ingroup projection' (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 55). They found that a Furry will be particularly biased in favouring their own species and this can be related to fan hierarchies, prominent examples of this are found in research conducted in the *Doctor Who* and *Star Trek* fandoms; it has been found that fans will like their favourite incarnation of The Doctor above other actors portrayals of the character, or a particular series *Star Trek* series or Captain.

It was a shame that this study limited itself to just ten popular species and the fact that they did not include information from the Furry community. This data is easily available regarding the fact that sometimes fursona species choice is related to sexual stereotypes as well, commonly to choose a fox to show that you are hypersexual and submissive or a wolf to show you are wanting to be sexually dominant (Howl, 2015: p. 52). When considering work

by the IARP it is understandable why they chose to omit this information as they would not want their study to be read as a fetishization; the IARP research team contains Furies and so they would be considered as scholar fans.

Participants were recruited from a Furry convention and Furry orientated websites which made them more likely to have a fursona. To gauge how participants identified with their fursona species participants were asked to rate how strongly they agreed with three statements (adapted from previous research):

1. I am emotionally connected to my fursona species
2. I strongly identify with my fursona species
3. My fursona species is part of me (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 52):

In their results they found that identification with one's fursona and identification with the Furry community were 'significantly above the midpoint of the scale' (Reysen et al., 2015b: p. 53).<sup>17</sup> There is a research gap when it comes to fursonas and their purpose and this is discussed in chapter five.

**Plante, C. N., Roberts, S. E., Snider, J. S., Schroy, C. Reysen, S. and Gerbasi, K. C. (2015), "More than skin-deep": Biological Essentialism in Response to a Distinctiveness Threat in a Stigmatized Fan Community, *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 54, pp. 359–370**

This research looks at whether members of stigmatized groups react to 'distinctiveness threats by endorsing essentialism – the belief that group members share an immutable essence.' (Plante et al, 2015: p. 359). Studies have suggested that people's desire for acceptance means they would 'rather identify with a stigmatized but distinct minority than with an accepted majority' (Plante et al., 2015; Ellemers et al., 2002; Jetten et al., 2001; Spears et al., 1997). Using social identity theory, they note that studies have shown that there

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<sup>17</sup> A 7 point Likert-type scale was used in this study.

is a difference in the way that members of stigmatized groups perceive threats. Less identified members are usually less defensive when it comes to threats while ‘highly identified group members, in contrast, are motivated to preserve their group’s distinctiveness’ (Plante et al., 2015: p. 360). The Plante et al. study thus hypothesised that highly identified members of a group usually revert to their community when facing stigmatization (Branscombe et al. 1999; Plante et al., 2014: p. 4). They hypothesised that the Furies would do this and also ‘strategically endorse essentialist beliefs about the group’ (Plante et al., 2015: p. 361).

To test their hypothesis when it came to a distinctiveness threat, the researchers chose to compare the Furies with the anime fandom as they believe that ‘there exists considerable overlap’ between them (Plante et al., 2015: p. 361). However, their reasoning for this is simply that both fandoms interests ‘also manifest themselves through artwork and costuming’ (Plante et al., 2015: p. 361). To me, it seems like a gross over-simplification of the two fandoms. By this argument, if they are similar only via artwork and costuming then the Furry fandom is facing distinctiveness threats from every media-based fandom. According to other research by the IARP a huge proportion of Furies have a fursona (Reysen et al., 2015a: p. 93) In the anime fandom, although they often identify with anime characters such as the idea of having a waifu, anime fans do not usually create anime personas of themselves to use in a similar way to Furies.<sup>18</sup> The Plante et al. study results showed that Furies perceived themselves as distinct from anime fans (and sports fan which was their control group). They found that ‘although participants considered sports fans to be more distinct from Furies than anime fans, ratings did not differ significantly across conditions’ (Plante et al., 2015: p. 363). This study did find that highly identified Furies held ‘greater essentialist beliefs’ because

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<sup>18</sup> Waifu – A fictional character that is treated and spoken about like a wife to the real person. A popular way to express the fact that one has a waifu is to buy a life-size pillow with the character appearance.

highly identified Furies perceived themselves as stigmatized (Plante et al., 2015: p. 365). This may be because one of the things that the anime fandom does share comparatively with the Furry Fandom is how it is stigmatized by the mass media. Negative representations portray boys who like anime as paedophiles and sexual deviants, much like how the Furry Fandom is portrayed.

**Roberts, S. E., Plante, C. N., Gerbasi, K. C. and Reysen, S. (2015b). The Anthrozoomorphic identity: Furry Fandom members' connections to nonhuman animals. *Anthrozoös*, 28, pp. 533-548**

This paper aims to explore the Furies relationship with the animals that they anthropomorphize and its relationship to their 'subjective wellbeing' (Roberts et al, 2015b: p. 534). Three main research foci of the research were to what extent Furies had an:

- (1) admiration or reverence for animals,
- (2) spiritual connection with animals, and
- (3) identifying as an animal' (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 534).

Roberts et al.'s first hypothesis was that the more that a person identified with the animal would correlate to how much they anthropomorphize them, ascribing them with positive secondary emotions (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 536). They also hypothesised that Furies who identify as less than 100% human would view themselves as an animal species as opposed to human and that their psychological wellbeing would then be 'related to the nature of their connection to animals.' (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 536). Their results seemed to affirm their hypothesis to the extent that Furies did tend to ascribe human traits and emotions to their fursona in a positive way as they liked or felt spiritually connected to the chosen animal (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 540). They found that those who felt a spiritual connection to animals '[were] significantly positively associated with both life satisfaction and self-esteem' (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 540).

A concern I had with this paper is that their literature review exclaimed that ‘much of the [previous] research has treated the human–animal connection as one-dimensional’ (Robert et al., 2015b: p. 534). This is astonishing considering that the question of the animal and its relationship to human beings has been debated rigorously (see chapter five). Current literature is far from one dimensional especially as writings by Donna Haraway, 2003, 2008; Matthew Calarco, 2008; Patricia MacCormack, 2012, 2014, all discuss how our relationship with nonhuman animals is changing to a non-speciesist and non-hierarchical one. In fact, much posthuman theory is concerned with demolishing the human versus animal hierarchy.

What was interesting however, is that they determined that ‘those who spiritually connected to animals did not anthropomorphize them, but greater spiritual connection to animals was positively associated with psychological wellbeing’ (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 543). This is inconsistent with other IARP papers. This is because fursonas within the Furry Fandom are anthropomorphised animals, human traits ascribed to animals, rather than zoomorphism. This would suggest that Furries are not using the animals they feel a spiritual connection with as a fursona but an animal they simply like which is not in accordance with other findings by the IARP. The paper goes onto claims that ‘a small (20%) subset of Furries, called therians, have a spiritual connection with animals... believe that they are less than 100% human insomuch that they feel like they are animals trapped in a human body (Gerbasi et al. 2008; Roberts et al. 2015a; Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 535). Firstly, it was not well defined in the paper what Roberts et al. meant by the term spiritual. This is problematic as often ‘spiritual’ notions of animals are human perceptions which have been imposed on animals and are thus speciesist. Secondly, it is argued here that an ‘apparent’ 20% is not a small minority. Thirdly, it can be argued that Therians seem so prevalent because, as with other IARP research, the participants have been found from conventions and online spaces where they are more likely to encounter highly identified Furries. They also interpret their

results as showing that a ‘stronger identification as animals was associated with a decrease in life satisfaction and self-esteem, which is consistent with a species dysphoria interpretation’ (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 540). I would disagree that the small subgroup who are experiencing such a strong identification with animals are suffering from a mental condition because this aims to pathologize. It is argued instead that highly identified Furies are experiencing becoming-animal as theorised by Deleuze and Guattari, and moving into the posthuman, which is discussed further in chapters four, five and six.

**Grivell, T., Clegg, H. and Roxburgh, E. C. (2014), An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis of Identity in the Therian Community, *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 14(2), pp. 113–135**

For this literature review I thought it was prudent to include a study which focused on Therians as they are often confused as being part of the Furry Fandom. Previous mentions of Therians by the IARP often put these two groups together. This study by Grivell et al. (2014) uses the Furry typology used in Gerbasi et al. (2008). Grivell et al. suggest that Therians are similar to those participants in the Gerbasi et al. study as Therians ‘considered themselves less than 100% human and would like to no longer be human’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 114). Grivell et al. consider this to be where the Therians fit into the Furry Fandom as it seems to fit the definition for Therian when it comes to high identification. They also use the definition by Strill (2008) that a Therian is ‘a person who is, feels, or believes he/she is in part or whole (non-physically) one or more non-human animals on an integral, personal level’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 115).

Using online interviews sourcing participants from a Therian web forum, they discovered that the Therians often described ‘a long-term feeling of being somehow not quite human was described, coupled with expression of animal behaviours or mental states’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 117). This could be revealed in experiencing phantom limbs and less

commonly in experiencing mental shifts into the animal they identified with or ‘theriotype’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 119).<sup>19</sup> Although many of these items are similar within some members of the Furry fandom they found that therianthropy ‘came across as strongly as a personal identity rather than a group identity’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 121). This is very different from the community feeling found in studies specifically on Furies where it is often seen as both a personal and a group identity (Plante et al., 2015, 2014; 2016). Like Furies in IARP studies it was found that the Therians interviewed often kept their Therian identities concealed from certain groups (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 125). Grivell et al. surmised that being Therian could be bad for mental health due to suppression of the identity rather than the identity itself (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 126). This was the conclusion in the Plante et al., (2015) study on concealed identities in Furies.

The main difference that can be taken from this study about the experiences of Furies and Therians is that Therians seem to heavily identify with the animal in a way that the majority of Furies do not. Although many Furies are spiritual (Plante et al., 2016: p. 16), Therians were more likely to endorse a biological component to their identity. Rather than a Therian’s phantom limb experiences being simply in their imaginations ‘the parallels to amputee phantom limbs suggests that these experiences may have some basis in a therian’s biology’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 128). For Grivell et al. this meant that the Therians felt there was a scientific explanation. Compared to many Furies, the Grivell et al. study suggests that Therians view being a Furry as a hobby or a lifestyle rather than something that was biologically determined compared to their Therian identity. This is the major point where Furies and Therians differ. Although the two groups may seem very similar to begin with due to their interests in anthropomorphised animals they are, in fact, different groups. In more recent research by the IARP their ‘available research suggests that while Therians and Furies

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<sup>19</sup> Theriotype – the type of animal with which they ‘shift’ into, similar to lycanthropy but not restricted to the wolf species.

both have a strong affinity for nonhuman animals, Therians may be unique in having a strong sense of identification with them' (Plante et al., 2018: p. 167). However, the IARP are still using the phrase 'less than human' in this work (Plante et al., 2018: p. 168). Their use of 'less' as opposed to other is fascinating and is discussed further in chapter four and five.

The Grivell et al. study gives an insight into the ways in which Therians are both similar and also different from Furies, helping researchers not to get the communities confused. The study cannot be used for generalisation however, only five Therians were interviewed giving a very small data and demographic range (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 116). As well as this, the researchers did concede that their study had limitations due to the methodology of having text interviews conducted online. They acknowledged that this methodology choice meant that 'responses were often much shorter than would have been gained in other types of interviews such as face-to-face' (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 132-133).

## **2.3 The Demographics of the Furry Fandom**

To understand the fandom, it is important to note the demographics of those involved as these can help a researcher examine why certain aspects within the fandom are popular. They can also be used to discuss why certain people would be drawn to those aspects. Noted in the research methodology section of this thesis (1.7), demographics allow us to see the patterns that occur within the fandom and whether these also correlate to age ranges, social background etc. In this way we can research whether these have an impact on the likelihood that someone would join the Furry Fandom and what aspects are important to them. The following section will be using comparisons between results from the IARP, demographic information collected for this thesis, and surveys done by Furies themselves.

### **Age**

The Furry fandom is overwhelmingly under the age of 25 with the IARP finding that nearly 75% of self-described Furies are under this age (Plante et al., 2016: p. 4). In this research it

was found that this number could possibly be even higher. Only 13% of Furies who participated in the questionnaire for this thesis were over the age of 26 (Appendix A: p. 252). The reason why it may be higher in this study is that the questionnaire recruited participants solely from online spaces. IARP studies consider demographic data that is conducted at Furry conventions which may cause a discrepancy between these datasets. To attend a convention can be very expensive which means they are most often attended by those who have a disposable income or do not have to ask parental permission. In the online space, where no money has to be spent to participate (beyond wi-fi costs, however many under 25's will have free internet access at school or the library), the age demographic increases in the under 25s. A Furry poll ran by Adjectivespecies.com has been running for the last 7 years and their 2016 poll closed with over 5,000 responses, with a total of 45,872 results since the poll began (Twitter, 2018). Results from the poll shows that members of the Furry Fandom are overwhelmingly under the age of 25 years old, the last six surveys have had a median age of 19 years old (AdjectiveSpecies, 2017).

Although there is nothing inherently wrong with fandoms being 'young' there has been evidence in other studies where 'there is an implication that there are fan spaces in which age is problematic' (McCudden, 2011: p. 103). This is when older participants may be pushed out. This seems unlikely within the Furry Fandom as many older Furies are highly respected as they are viewed as pioneers within the fandom; it is the older fans who started the conventions that have become popular today. In the glossary provided in chapter one 'grey muzzle' is used as an affectionate term for older Furies rather than a derogatory one.<sup>20</sup> However, age discrimination is not part of the scope of this project and so it cannot be verified in data for this thesis. There was only one respondent in my survey data who felt that there was any negativity toward older Furies:

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<sup>20</sup> See Glossary for definition of Grey Muzzle.

There's a fairly strong negative reaction toward older furries in a surprising number of instances, in my experience. (Appendix B: p. 286)

There are examples in other fandoms where age can become more of an issue than it appears in the Furry Fandom (*Doctor Who* fandom as noted by Hill, 2014). In this research there was far more concern about younger fans and their potentially problematic behaviour than that of older fans. Several respondents were worried about potential problems with interacting with Furries under the age of 18:

I perceive a discomforting amount of affected childishness in the fandom that I do not see in any other of my various nerd-type interest groups and it makes it difficult to want to engage with the fandom to a greater extent than I do. To some degree this is the organic result of the fandom being demographically diverse, and my discomfort is due to being an adult who is not sure if he is interacting with minors or not (Appendix B: p 293)<sup>21</sup>

I've talked to kids who are 14 years old and they already want to erotic roleplay. I wish the fandom would take slightly better care in shielding younger kids from the sexual side of the fandom (Appendix B: p 288)

I don't like the idea that the internet is so anonymous, and members of the fandom are under age and have the opportunity to pretend to be older. If I could change anything, I would find a way to separate everyone 20 years old and younger from the adult group. I do not believe the fandom is family friendly. (Appendix B: p. 286)

This concern about the youthful age of some members of the fandom is not new and Furries have from their early conventions restricted sales and access of adult material to minors

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that although this respondent refers to the Fandom as 'demographically diverse' this research showed that in the demographic of age only 13% of the respondents were over 25. However, they may have been referring to other demographics such as sexuality or education levels which have been found to be quite diverse in this study and those by the IARP.

(Gold, 2015: p. 29). There has been very little law enforcement on fan created fan fiction so the strict labelling by the Furies was not and is still not required by law in the USA. Fan fiction is very rarely regulated when it comes to erotic material and it was only in 2010 where Japan placed a ban on erotica sales to minors was legislated:

The Non-existent Crimes Bill. The bill regulates the sale and renting of ‘harmful publications’ to Japanese youth: material that is ‘sexually stimulating, encourages cruelty, and/or may compel suicide or criminal behaviour’ in people under the age of 18. (Leavitt and Horbinski, 2012)

We can speculate that the discomfort and unease that some have with interacting with younger Furies online could be due to Furies being labelled sexual deviants and perverts. As these respondents have suggested they are not able to discern who is over 18 years of age in online chat. This could lead to accusations of paedophilia and grooming, and, when reviewing the above respondent’s statement that young Furies approach older ones for sexual roleplay, these concerns seem well justified.

## **Ethnicity**

A common trait over the last few years of polling has shown that the Furry Fandom has been consistently white dominated over several years. AdjectiveSpecies.com Furry poll has seen the white ethnicity sitting around 89% of all Furies polled for the last 7 years (AdjectiveSpecies, 2017). The IARP has repeatedly seen the white ethnicity over-represented in their studies as well. However, their research has seen a slightly lower proportion of those who self-identify as white ‘with 15-20% of Furies identifying as an ethnic minority’ (Plante et al., 2016: p. 7). Plante et al. did suggest that due to Furry artwork sharing aesthetic qualities with the anime fandom artwork their online research would possibly have more Asian participants compared to research conducted at US conventions (Plante et al., 2016: p. 7).

Although intra-fandom racism could be a cause for a dominant white demographic there are few studies on this within the Furry Fandom context and so to theorize on this would only be conjecture. Despite this, it is important to recognise research on ethnicity within other fandoms that may be applicable to the Furry Fandom when it comes to future study. In fan studies it is often noted that the default stereotype for a fan, and usually a fan boy, is:

white, middle-class, male, heterosexual (with perhaps an overlay or geek or nerd identity, identities that are simultaneously embedded in emphasized whiteness, and increasingly certain kinds of class privilege, often displayed by access to higher education, particularly in scientific and technical fields). (Gatson and Reid, 2012).

Academics have argued that many fandoms are predominantly white in ethnicity due to many fandoms being a product of capitalism where white men control the product (Stanfill and Condis, 2014). Stanfill has also argued that discourse in fandom has always focused on ‘whiteness’ in that fans have been constructed as white, heterosexual males (Stanfill, 2011). Race in fandom has been researched much later than work on fans in general; *Transformative Works and Culture Journal* devoted a special issue to the discussion of race in fandom in 2011.

There are some important points in the Furry history and survey results that may explain a limited ethnic minority participation. Many of the conventions in the USA where the IARP conducted their research have a high percentage of white residents; Furry Fiesta in Texas has a 70% white population surrounding its conference location of Dallas (Suburbanstats, 2017). The survey conducted for this thesis did include respondents from 30 different countries, including Venezuela and Chile. The most respondents came from the USA (642), followed by the United Kingdom and Ireland (82) and then Canada (65),

(Appendix A: p. 256-257). This study did not include race demographics as this was beyond the scope of investigation for this one body of work.

## **Gender**

In current studies the Furry Fandom has presented as overwhelmingly male in gender with research for this survey totalling 90% male respondents (Appendix A: p. 253). This is consistent with findings by the IARP (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Plante et al., 2016: p. 10). This is also comparable to other related fandoms such as anime fandoms which tend to be predominantly male (Plante et al., 2016: p. 10). What is interesting is that many fandoms which include an element of fantasy roleplay, such as shipping or slash erotica, tend to be predominantly female (Jenkins, 1992: p. 205). The Furry Fandom uses similar elements, such as creating unique characters to tell a story (and sometimes erotica) but it still is demographically male. There is currently no data as to why this difference occurs, and was beyond the scope of this thesis, but would be an area to explore in further research.

Some academics have argued that over-representation of males within fandoms in general has been due to misogynistic practices. Suzanne Scott discusses the discourse of the ‘fan-boy’ (Scott, 2013) who can become angry and aggressive towards anyone who is deemed as not suitable for the fandom. The ‘fan-boy’ also disallows other members or prospective members to have a differing opinion on fandom works. In 2011 research Scott blames the discourse of the ‘fan boy’ on the protests against female *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005) fans attending San Diego Comic-Con. She argues these boys thought the girls were not proper fans (Scott, 2011: p. 59).

In recent years it can be suggested that anthropomorphic and anime fandoms have been progressive in eschewing ‘traditional’ ascribed gender roles. When *My Little Pony* was rebooted to create a new show called *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (Hub Network, 2010-2014 and Discovery Family, 2014-present) the show’s creators were surprised to have

found a huge following, not consisting of little girls for whom the show was intended, but men in their twenties as well. Lauren Faust (who proposed the reboot to Hasbro) attended BronyCon as a guest speaker:

‘I wanted a respectable show for girls,’ Faust explains. ‘Saying something is “for girls” or “girly” is usually equated with being not worthwhile, being stupid.’ She wanted to change that, but she never expected she’d be so successful. ‘I never dreamed adult men would be into the show,’ she tells the crowd, ‘because I didn’t have any faith that you’d give it a try. Now I know better. It gives me the courage to continue.’ (Wilson, M., 2012)

Christopher Bell noted that when ‘fan-boys attach themselves to cultural properties which were “not intended” for them, it can be easy to write the fandom off as a sort of ironic statement. But Bronies exhibit much of what could be thought of as “neo-sincerity”’ (Bell, 2013: p. 9). Bell believes that the Bronies genuinely enjoy the show, rather than using the show as a platform for trolling or for ironic purposes. There is also a similar notion for the Furies in this study who often feel that they can be childish within the fandom as they are not ‘allowed’ to do this in the real world. This can be attributed to ‘childishness’ not conforming to traditional male gender stereotypes for some respondents:

Sometimes it appears (in social media or in public) that maturity is of question, whether it's openly talking about vulgar ideas, behaving childishly in times of responsibility, etc. (Appendix B: p. 281)

Although there is data on the male members of the Furry Fandom there is little data on why women are not more involved in the fandom. IARP research suggests that female Furies who are present are less likely to ‘feel a sense of fandom’. These women were more likely to want to retain non-Furry culture, in addition to Furry culture, but were unable to pinpoint exactly why this was (IARP, 2017). This is not consistent with how women ‘feel a sense of fandom’

in other fandoms; Bacon-Smith noted in her work in the *Star Trek* fandom and their conventions women would often mentor new female members and this created a sense of comradery and membership (Bacon-Smith, 1991: p. 83); Nancy Baym argues that women in soap opera fandom who communicate with each other online also feel this sense of fandom (Baym, 2015: p. 90). The reason why female Furies may feel a lesser sense of fandom is beyond the scope of this thesis but is something to consider in future research.

Although gender relations in the Furry Fandom was not a research focus in this thesis it needs to be highlighted that there was no data that suggested an overt dislike of women in the Furry Fandom. There were no negative comments in any open-ended questions about women in general or female participation in the fandom. This future research could consider the way that animals and women have been theorised by Carol Adams. Adams argues that discourse has meant that negative notions of nonhuman species have been have led to sexist portayals of women, women as chicks, bunnies or bitches (Adams, 1995). She also has argued that black women have been equated to animals in pornography (Adams, 2015). An idea could be explored that women do not feel an affinity with animal based fandoms because of the negative connotations that animals can sometimes represent for women. This could also lead into theorising about why the Furry Fandom is a predominantly white fandom.

## **Sexuality**

In several studies by the IARP it has been found that there is a plethora of sexualities in the Furry Fandom and it is one of the few fandoms which is not predominantly heterosexual (Gerbasi et al., 2008; fig. 6). This trend was present in this research as well:

Table: Showing data about sexualities within the Fandom and their percentage shares

What is your sexuality?	Responses	
Heterosexual	293	29%
Homosexual	218	21%
Bisexual	305	30%
Pansexual	88	9%
Demisexual	29	3%
Asexual	63	6%
Other	24	2%
Total Responses	1020	

Fig. 7

Not only are Furies more likely to not be heterosexual but they are ‘significantly more likely than members of other fandoms to identify as transgender’ (Plante et al., 2016: p. 11). Many Furies reported the fandom as being a safe space for those with non-heteronormative sexualities and gender identities:

Being a Furry has helped me get over my depression issues, and it also helped me to accept myself and my sexuality. I am very grateful to the fandom as a whole for accepting me and showing me that there is a place for me too. (Appendix B: p. 283)

The furry fandom is also a pretty big reason how I really came to terms with / discovered my sexuality. (Appendix B: p 284)

‘Accepting Community’ and ‘Self-Acceptance’ was mentioned 81 times and 53 times respectively in the extra comments in my questionnaire data (Appendix A: p. 274). This may be an important part as to why many people who do not have a heteronormative sexuality feel so comfortable within the Furry Fandom.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The Furry Fandom currently has the problem that was common for fan groups in the early 60s. Much of the general public often bring up ‘uncertain references’ to popular culture when asked about who and what Furies are (Soh and Cantor, 2015: p. 1). This has led to many non-Furies getting their information from unflattering mass media representations and has resulted in Furies in IARP studies choosing to conceal their identities.

This chapter's aim was to provide a literature review on the available research on Furies. Though, there is little peer reviewed work beyond the IARP, and, often this literature has been focused on Western communities (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Plante et al., 2014, 2015, 2016; Grivell et al., 2014). This has been the case even when some data has been collected online. This has led to a risk of the Furry fandom becoming 'falsely bounded' as a breadth of different Furies have not been reached for data collection (Duffett, 2013: p. 29). This has led to one of the main emphases of this thesis; discussing the plethora of different Furies rather than just those who are heavily identified in the fandom which is discussed in chapter four. Although there is not one singular definition of what a Furry is this literature review has gone some way to showing the typical attributes of being a Furry. There have been relatively few Furry Fandom peer reviewed pieces from outside the IARP, so these have not been extensively reviewed here but are evaluated in other chapters.

# 3.The Furry Fandom: An Online Institution

[redacted in this version]

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Fig. 8

## 3.1 Introduction

In this section it will be argued that a fandom is not merely a community of like-minded individuals but that established fandoms have the main hallmarks of a capitalist institution and should be discussed through this conceptual framework.

Although much has been written in fan studies about how fandoms are examples of communities (see Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992, 2006; Sandvoss, 2011; Booth, 2010; Stanfill, 2013a, 2013b; Stanfill and Condis, 2014), the word institution has been seen little. There have been many problems with defining communities, especially virtual ones. Constance E. Porter (2004) describes virtual communities as individuals who interact online around a shared interest; Amitai Etzioni and Oren Etzioni (1999) argue that communities have two elements: affect-laden relationships and a commitment to shared norms, values and history; Catherine M. Ridings and David Gefen (2004) suggest that virtual communities have

three defining features, shared interests and goals, a sense of permanence, and frequency of interaction. In fan studies, the concept of a virtual community becomes even more complicated due to the tendency of virtual fandom communities to end when the media text is no longer relevant, i.e. when a TV show gets cancelled, notably called post-object. These communities cease to fulfil the three defining features suggested by Ridings and Gefen because after the TV shows ends, community members no longer visited; they no longer needed to have discussions over the direction of the storyline, possible romantic attachments, etc. because there would never be any new material on which to speculate or bond over. For Furies, it can be suggested that they have more ontological security because they do not have a source media text that is at risk of ‘ending’ or being cancelled. But where do they establish their fandom? And how do they establish the indicators of being a Furry within a community?

In fan studies, recent work has focused on the word ‘hierarchy’ with Kristina Busse’s ‘Geek Hierarchy’ (2013) being cited often in newer academic work. For Busse, ‘The geek hierarchy thus articulates a strong need and desire within fannish circles to articulate some form of hierarchy, mostly to prove to oneself that there are more intense geeks out there’ (Busse, 2013: p. 79). I found that researching fandoms as an institution rather than a community can be more nuanced than simply focusing on individual fans trying to prove themselves. To reiterate, there is a set hierarchy in each fandom – the dos and don’ts to be a proper fan or Furry, based on criteria where fans decide who is the ‘best’ fan.

It is easier to describe Furry Fandom as an institution than a community because it is different from other fandoms in that there is no set text. Additionally, by looking at the Furry Fandom as an institution we can observe where some behaviours are enforced or accepted when it comes to ‘becoming a Furry’. This is because in the hierarchies often described and used in fan studies, much of the work focuses on how an individual creates social and cultural

capital, rather than the reinforcement and punishment on those who deviate from these norms. This section will argue that the main place these values are judged is in the online space because (1) there is no set text and (2) because most Furies meet up online rather than in a geographical space.

### **3.2 Theoretical Framework**

This section discusses how institutions are theorised. Althusser, Deleuze, Guattari, Foucault and Bourdieu were chosen for this thesis because many of Marx's early work is now too rigid in its criticisms of institutions. These philosophers may never have envisioned a world with communication technology such as the internet but they are still relevant in the digital age; their theories on institutions can be applied directly to many cultural and social community hierarchies we see developing online today.

Althusser rejected many of Marx's early work as being problematic and worked to create a 'theoretical form of existence a little more adequate to its nature' (Althusser, 1969: p. 14). Althusser theorised that although capitalism was important for institution development they were also developed by historical influences. In fact he reminds us of this in his preface to *For Marx*;

To understand these essays and pass judgement on them, it is essential to realise that they were conceived, written and published by a Communist philosopher in a particular ideological and theoretical conjuncture. So these texts must be taken for what they are. (Althusser, 1969: p. 9).

For Guattari, an institution is far more malleable and subject to change:

From the moment when we can shift and disrupt the totalising character of an institution...instead of turning in on itself like a structure, it can acquire subjective consistency and start making all sorts of changes and challenges. (Guattari, 2015: p. 70).

According to Guattari an institution, although having an effect on those within the institution, can in fact also be influenced by those within the group. Transversality is Guattari's theory that investigates how an institution functions. He proposes that institutions should not be evaluated as looking at the hierarchy from top-to-bottom, but must also examine horizontal structuring within it; he states that transversality 'tends to be achieved when there is a maximum communication among different levels and, above all, in different meanings' (Guattari, 2015: p. 113). This is why this research follows transversality when investigating the Furry Fandom. That is not to say that all institutions can achieve this as Guattari admits there are limits to how much real power the subjects have. 'The level of transversality existing in the group that has the real power unconsciously determines how the extensive possibilities of other levels of transversality are regulated' (Guattari, 2015: p. 113). Therefore, although institutions can be changed from the inside in certain situations, they will still run the risk of being 'recuperated' by whatever economic system in which they operate (Guattari, 2015: p. 173). In the case of Western economies in particular 'the production of the institution remains a sub-whole within production as a whole' (Guattari, 2015: p. 214).

In fan studies Bourdieu has been used by Hills to discuss fandom as an institution. Hills developed ideas in Bourdieu's work stating that he 'presents an interesting challenge to fan studies since it suggests that fandoms may be thoroughly reducible to the practices of specific class fractions' (Hills, 2002: p. 47). An excellent argument for fandoms being institutions has been suggested by Stanfill (although she never uses the actual word) in her discussions on the economy within a fandom and fan labour. It is popular in fan studies to subscribe to the 'gift economy' theory (Hellekson 2009; Scott 2009) where fan works are mostly anti-commercial. A gift economy is where fans distribute their own fan works for free rather than asking for monetary payment, such as free access for those who want to view their fan fiction or homemade artwork. Karen Hellekson lists two main reasons for this: many fans

keep their work free due to fears of being sued for copyright infringement (Hellekson, 2009: p. 114); and it keeps fan communities exclusive giving fandoms their ‘own autonomy while simultaneously solidifying the group’ (Hellekson, 2009: p. 117). As Stanfill notes however, there is not a consensus within fandoms over gift economies where ‘one side champions the right of the individual fan author to profit from her labor; the other laments this insertion into capitalist exchange as undermining fan community and its non-commercial traditions’ (Stanfill, 2013b: paragraph 1). Scott expresses her concerns ‘on flagrant instances of the industry's attempt to co-opt fandom’ (Scott, 2009: paragraph 1.1) in that they do not consider that fan value creation is not new (Stanfill, 2013b paragraph 1). Stanfill argues that fandom, like other institutions ‘has never been isolated from market values’ (Stanfill, 2013b: paragraph 11). To me it seems that these debates reinforce the idea that fandom is an institution. For Guattari:

It is not a question of only considering planning from the perspective of production, circulation and distribution, but also planning the “production of institutions”, of all of the forms of social organization capable of serving as a “guarantor” of industrial society. (Guattari, 2015: p. 171).

Fandom is the perfect kind of institution for capitalism because as stated by Stanfill, fans have a certain amount of freedom to do their fan labour and are even ‘wooded and championed by cultural industries’ (Stanfill and Condis, 2014: paragraph 2.3). But if their activities become too profitable then the industry is still able to snatch back the profit using legal means (Gray, Sandvoss, and Harrington, 2007).<sup>22</sup> This echoes one of the main concerns in Marxism that work and product are often separated from the proletariat. By acknowledging that what fans do is work/labour rather than gift economy it is easier to see where the fandom institution is being exploited by capitalism. Kindle Worlds (owned by Amazon) forced fan

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<sup>22</sup>For example, companies can use copyright law to prevent artists from selling their fan art, or they may allow fans to continue but only if they surrender a percentage of profits.

fiction to be monetized through licensing revenue (Stanfill, 2013b) which gave a good example of Scott's (2009) concerns. By viewing fandom as an institution rather than just a community it is easier to understand how fans are being separated from the products they produce. Guattari stated 'The general proliferation of institutions in contemporary society leads only to reinforcing the alienation of the individual' (Guattari, 2015: p. 62) and this alienation is not only from their products of labour but alienation from others even within the fandom.

The process of alienation within fandom has been discussed extensively in fan studies when discussing how fan hierarchies occur and how behaviours of fans are 'policed'. The concept of how fan behaviour is regulated gives another case for why fandoms should be viewed as institutions. For Scott the motivation of fans to police their boundaries is a well-intentioned one, 'about protecting, rather than controlling, the ideological diversity of fannish responses to the text' (Scott, 2009). For others, policing has been to actively silence the 'wrong' interpretations of their chosen text (Jenkins, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Scodari, 2007). Cornell Sandvoss in particular argued that every fandom has a 'policed set of beliefs' rather than a select few more established fandoms (Sandvoss, 2011: p. 60). In her analysis of *Xena: Warrior Princess* (NBCUniversal, 1995 – 2001) fans, Stanfill endeavoured to demonstrate that to exist as a fan required two elements to be understood by the fan themselves: '(a) immersed in dominant ideas about the "right way" to interact with the media and (b) emotionally invested in a subculture that is often understood to violate those norms.' (Stanfill, 2013a: p. 118). I agree with Stanfill over other fan studies academics who can sometimes have a more sympathetic view of fans policing themselves. Booth and Kelly gave an optimistic view when discussing *Doctor Who* fans. They describe fandom as 'offer[ing] a voice to the traditionally voiceless, autonomy to those typically lectured-to' (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 60). But, that fan voice is only allowed to be articulated if it is within the

norms of that particular fandom, those who are deemed as either too involved or not involved enough are often pushed aside as manifesting the ‘incorrect way’ to be a fan (Busse, 2013: p. 84). This is in line with the way Guattari theorizes an institution: ‘it produces signifiers, not signification; it produces the institution and institutionalization, not a party of a line; it modifies the general direction of history’ (Guattari, 2015: p. 219). This is especially relevant for fandoms. The signification for the fandom (the media object) is outside of the fandom and it is fans within the fandom who create their institution by deciding what signifiers are ‘important’. Although Jenkins (2006) and Scott (2013) have argued that fans are now participating in what is known as convergence culture only certain fandoms and certain fan signifiers are accepted by the mainstream (Busse, 2013: p. 77).

To discuss how signifiers are produced in an institution Deleuze and Guattari are used in this thesis. Using Deleuze and Guattari, it can be suggested that it is difference between signifiers, and the way fans distribute and measure other fans in their fandom. Fans not only do this with fans in their group but also when measuring their differences to other fandoms and this has been particularly true for the Furry Fandom. For Deleuze this was to be expected as ‘...difference is monstrous. We should not be surprised that difference should appear accursed, that it should be error, sin or the figure of evil for which there must be expiation.’ (Deleuze, 2014: p. 38). This can also be true for new fans trying to get further involved within fandoms. Being a new fan can bring difficulties as the new fan may not know the ‘correct way’ that fandom expects them to be a fan:

When a subject wants to assert itself on the group level, it must first recognize that there is no place for it in the current state of social mechanics. It is then forced to intrude on, to cause violence to the existing system (Guattari, 2015: p. 64).

Consequently, much like in identity construction in general, a fan’s new identity ‘is discursively established through classifications: It includes and asserts a certain “horizon” of

possible social positions as “positive” and it excludes others as “negative” (Chouliaraki, 2013: p. 304). One of the ways this is significantly done is the way a fan’s behaviour is ratified ‘by what the individual sees in the mirror of other peoples’ reactions’ (McCracken, 2008: p. 282). For this thesis, it is judgment which is one of the most important parts of identity construction in a fandom institution. For Deleuze ‘judgement has precisely two essential functions, and only two: distribution, which it ensures by the *partition* of concepts; and hierarchization, which it ensures by the *measuring* of subjects’ [original italics] (Deleuze, 2014: p. 43) and fandom certainly fulfils these two essential functions.

### **Distribution**

Distribution of popular fan creations can have a strong and sometimes dire effect on the institution of fandom; partition of concepts has even caused violent reactions within the fandom. In October 2015 a user on Tumblr named Zamii070 was bullied into attempting to commit suicide by members of the *Steven Universe* (Cartoon Network 2013-present) online community due to their consensus that her fan artwork was not ‘acceptable’. The reason for why her work was unacceptable was not that it was bad fan art (not technically proficient) but because she had drawn the characters ‘wrong’; her main ‘transgression’ being drawing the character of Rose Quartz thinner than she was portrayed in the cartoon which to some fans made her fat-phobic (Austin, 2017a). The abuse that came flooding onto her Tumblr profile sent a clear indication to other fans that her distribution of ‘unacceptable’ fan art was wrong as it did not adhere to fandom signifiers. Zamii070 should have followed the partition of concepts as set out by the institution and had been be roundly punished. It can be argued that it is unsurprising that many fans who looked up to *Steven Universe* for having diversity in characters to have this reaction. ‘Our construction and presentation of a public persona draws heavily upon the definitional resources that movies [in this case a cartoon] make available’

(McCracken, 2008: p. 119). For fans who felt better represented by having larger set cartoon characters Zamii070's interpretations was seen as deviant and not true to the source material.

## Measuring

There is ample evidence to suggest that fans often separate what they deem as 'good' fans and 'bad' fans by measuring how *much* of a fan others are. Judgement is seen not just within individual fandoms but fandom as a whole. Hierarchization between fandoms has been especially noted by Busse when discussing how *Twilight* (Meyer, 2005-2008) fans were treated at Comic Con in 2011; 'the fannish object itself was dismissible, and the fans' new fan status and their modes of engagement were suspect'. (Busse, 2013: p. 73). Furies, in particular, are seen as a lower order of fandom compared to the now more mainstream fandoms. In work by Busse (2013) and Francesca Coppa (2014b) they both acknowledge that the Furry Fandom is often deemed as the lowest rung on the 'Geek Hierarchy'.<sup>23</sup> Although there is no specific event which has led to why Furies are viewed as a lower order of fandom the IARP have pointed to the way that there are stereotypes of Furies that have been disseminated by the mass media. This may have influenced the view of the Furies from other fandoms and created stigma. Judgement in fandom can change at given points however:

Difference... in no way represents a universal concept (that is to say, an idea) encompassing all the singularities and turnings of difference, but rather refers to a particular moment in which difference is merely reconciled with the concept in general. (Deleuze, 2014: p. 41).

This sentiment is echoed by Guattari: 'Identification with the prevailing images of the group is by no means static, for the badge of membership often has links with narcissistic and death instincts that it is hard to define.' (Guattari, 2015: p. 227).

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<sup>23</sup> Fig. 24 – p. 155.

This issue has occurred in post-object fandom, situations where the fandom's media text (such as a television show) has ended. Judgement changes when media texts come to an end and identity construction as a fan of an ended media text can also end. For Rebecca Williams 'media texts are crucial to the development of reflexive self-narratives' (Williams, 2015: p. 22) and when there is no longer a text to build on the narrative stops. In a study performed by Natasha Whiteman and Joanne Metivier it was found that after the end of the TV show *Angel* (The WB, 1999-2004) the once popular website CityofAngel.com found a massive downturn of subscribers (Whiteman and Metivier, 2013). As well as this there is some criticism made in fan studies that fans are 'so steeped in the rhetoric of the industry that they will say nothing meaningful about the value of their objects; they are consumerist temple slaves of the [music] industry' (Duffett, 2013: p. 57).

For *Resident Evil* franchise fans, cultural referents are important when going from the video games to the film adaptations; they recognise that these texts are in the same universe because there are points in the game which have the same characters from the movie, for example (Lay, 2007). When these cultural referents are not adhered to, such as in the new *Star Wars* movies with a supposedly canonically inaccurate Black Stormtrooper, some fans were less sure about their fan identity because the canon had been suddenly interrupted, getting rid of some of their cultural referents (Proctor, 2017). For Booth, the more dispersed a media text is, the more able a fan is to create a salient identity in which to insert themselves within the fandom (Booth, 2010: p. 162). For Furies, not having a set text means that they are more easily able to construct their identities but that is not to say that Furies can do whatever they want and still be called Furies and be part of the Furry Fandom. As with other fan communities there is still a social hierarchy and a 'map' to follow (Hills, 2002: p. 46). The ways in which cultural and social capital is gained in the Furry Fandom is connected to fan produced artwork in particular. It is important to note that many fandoms have specific

cultural tastes which dictate how to gain status. Pinto found that gamers gained status by being skilled players in *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004) (Pinto, 2015: p. 406). Hills proposed that the investment in fan knowledge and the by-product of fan status is a compensation for low achievement in other areas of life (Hills, 2002: p. 55). Although this statement may seem like a stereotype of fans being ‘losers’ I interpret this statement in a different way. The investment in fan status may be because they wish to gain gratification from their knowledge of the fandom which they can not achieve with non-fans. Many Furries often state that they feel they are lacking in offline areas due to the fact there is no one around who knows what being a Furry is, something that may have been easier had there been a set text.

### **3.3 Mapping Fandom’s Online**

Howard Rheingold is an academic who became one of the early users of the internet and documented his journey along with other academics’ analysis in several books including *The Virtual Community*. For Rheingold, the internet was a utopian instrument in its creation and humanity ‘invented ways of using computers to amplify human thinking and communication’ (Rheingold, 1994: p. 66). Rheingold noted that ‘the definition of “acceptable use” has expanded as the result of pressure by people who wanted access’ (Rheingold, 1994: p. 84). And indeed, it cannot be denied that many technological advances were made by ordinary people who just wanted to make their lives easier:

Global Usenet was created by a couple of students in North Carolina who decided it was possible for computer communities to communicate with each other without the benefit of an expensive internet connection; hobbyists in Chicago triggered the worldwide BBS movement because they wanted to transfer files from one PC to another without driving across town. (Rheingold, 1994: p. 67)

Early academic research on the internet may seem irrelevant in terms of how the internet is used today, however there are some key concepts which are still theoretically relevant to this thesis. As seen in the offline space using the internet and disseminating information well was noted as building knowledge and social capital – ‘I can increase your knowledge capital and my social capital at the same time by telling you something that you need to know’ (Rheingold, 1994: p. 60). This concept of building social capital online has only changed slightly in as much as the technology has allowed it to grow. In Rheingold’s WELL forum he could increase his social capital by sending good information, this has grown in virtual communities with people being able to visually show their social capital; In *World of Warcraft* gamers can show their excellence at the game by using virtual possessions that have high value on their avatars, thus increasing their social capital (Pinto et al., 2015: p. 399). Whether rightly or wrongly, depending on who you ask, social capital can also be expressed online on SNS by using visuals to indicate how much social capital you have; ‘ “it is not what you know, but who you know that matters”, except that network sociality also views the *numbers* of people known as similarly important’ [original italics] (Willson, 2006: p. 80). This suggests that the online space follows the same principles set out by Bourdieu’s habitus. Social and cultural capital can ultimately affect a person’s standing even though they are not sharing the same space.

Geographical space has been an important aspect in traditional identity construction theories such as the Bourdieu’s theory of the habitus; a person is influenced by those around them in their geographical space such as primary socialisation in the family, secondary socialisation in institutions. For Marx and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, close geographical space meant that people could form their identity in binary opposition. For Hegel this was the way in which the ‘master related himself to the servant mediately through independent existence’ (Hegel, 2003: p. 13). A master could distinguish himself as

independent in this society because he was not chained as his servant was and it was in this way he could figure out his social existence in the world. Marx also theorised on binary oppositions:

Even when he proclaims himself an atheist through the intermediary of the state, that is, when he declares the state to be an atheist, he is still engrossed in religion, because he only recognizes himself as an atheist in a roundabout way, through an intermediary. (Marx, 2003: p. 20)

Even when the geographical space is extended to the national level, for Marx and Hegel, a person still constructs their identity via this geographical space and in oppositions. In more modern writings geographical space has been named as important in identity construction:

Space is an important element of ritual and in the homes of families...the space around the television set in the living room was a site for ritual performance and the family's social practice. (Marsh, 2005: p. 42)

For Furies, however, encounters in a physical space can be problematic. This can be due to not having any Furies in close proximity to them, but also due to fear of stigmatization and physical harm:

Respondent: [00:10:42] Are you aware of ... I mean, the people who don't like us, who have taken their [unintelligible 00:10:48] from the media, it's got to a point where we have been physically attacked for this. I mean, I don't know if you've found out about ... there was a convention, it was about a year ago.

Interviewer: [00:11:01] Oh, the chemical attack?

Respondent: [00:11:03] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:11:03] Yes, the chlorine gas attack. Yes, I was very surprised that there was this attack, and it was barely broadcast. There doesn't seem to be much media about it, apart from, sort of, articles downplaying the seriousness of it.

Respondent: [00:11:22] Well, the use of chlorine gas is a war crime. (Appendix B: p. 302)

This chlorine gas attack occurred in the hotel which was hosting MidWest Fur convention and 19 people were injured and required medical attention. Not only did many Furies feel frightened of attending conventions after this attack but many felt even more stigmatized by the media and wider society as it was not taken seriously at all.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, the culprit was never found. In this research and others by the IARP many Furies feel safer having their Furry identity solely online as they are liberated from the normative gaze (Willson, 2006: p. 60-61). This is due to their perception that offline society stigmatizes them and thus many do not want to enact their Furry identity in a geographical space. The mainstreaming of fan identities has meant better knowledge of fan practices in general society so some fans are no longer seen as 'odd' (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 69). However, many Furies feel that this has not happened for them and so are still not welcome in a geographical space. Lev Vygotsky (1978) theorises that identity formation occurs due to collaboration, and for Furies in this study this is certainly not found in the geographical space as many do not know any Furies in real life:

Even though no one knows I am one when I hear people talking about it in real life it's very negative. (Appendix B: p. 302)

Nobody knows that I'm a furry because I want to avoid the stigma. (Appendix B: p 299)

I have not told anyone offline that I am a furry (yet), so have not faced any personal stigma. However, the reactions I have seen to furies in general (particularly when features in the media or on TV shows) is discouraging. (Appendix B: p 299)

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<sup>24</sup> As stated in chapter one, MSNBC aired footage of news anchors laughing when reporting on the chemical attack.

One of the biggest changes that is visible from early academic work today is that, not completely unsurprisingly, early academics did not envision ‘the Net’ being used regularly by non-academic persons. Rheingold theorised that the internet would not come into peoples lives at the young age it does now: ‘in the future, that’s where the net culture in the rest of society will come from worldwide – those who connected with it in college.’ (Rheingold, 1994: p. 68). Rheingold did acknowledge that ‘you can’t just pick up a phone and ask to be connected to someone who wants to talk about Islamic art or Californian wine’ (Rheingold, 1993: p. 23). This is why the online space rather than the geographical space is more important for Furry identity construction. If many Furies do not choose to express their Furry identity offline then there is nowhere for them to collaborate to create an identity *apart* from the online space. There are Furry conventions, which have become quite popular over the last ten years with increasing attendance, but these are not the places where a Furry finds out about Furry identity. A Furry going to a convention already knows what a Furry is and what being part of the Furry fandom entails. A convention or fur-meet only reinforces the Furry identity that the person has already come across in the online space. This means that unlike most other fandoms or even identity construction in general, there is no geographical space to which they can go to find out ‘how to be a furry’ making the online setting the primary site where Furies norms and values are socialised and coded as Furry.

If the site of socialisation and identity formation is agreed upon as the online rather than the geographical space it is then important to look at what important features of the virtual space help form the Furry identity. In studies on other fans it has been found that they use the internet to influence media texts related to their fandom (Booth, 2010: p. 158). This is found in the Furry Fandom because as shown in the previous section dissemination of artwork builds a Furry culture of what is acceptable and also what is deemed as ‘good’. The internet is important for this in that without it there would be little access to Furry art by

Furry artists in geographical space. As well as this, there would be no cultural reference point for most Furies who live a solitary identity to ‘judge’ this artwork in relation to the Furry identity as this is often found by interactions with others.

In sociology it has been common to say that subgroups form their identities in relation to the dominant culture (Stanfill, 2013a: p. 121). What has not been discussed in any academic work thus far is the different subgroups that have occurred within the Furry virtual community. There are splinter groups from the Furry community when it comes to consumption practices: Bronies who specifically like the fursonas which are comparable in style to those found in *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*; those who like baby versions of fursonas and artwork called Cub Furs; and Therians who highly identify with their fursona and believe they are an animal trapped in human body. The cub fur splinter group and the Therians are where the Furry Fandom are very much online rather than offline. Murat Oztok argues that knowledge construction online is often performed in virtual communities ‘whereby participants share, utilize, cultivate, negotiate, and critique knowledge’ (Oztok, 2016: p. 162). This is especially true in online fandom where ‘sharing continues to emerge as an integral part of fannish production’ (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 58). It not only establishes group norms but also increases knowledge around the chosen media text with conversations on canon, what makes good fan fiction, and other knowledge that is important to being a fan (Baym, 2000). What is important to note however is that much of academic research in cultural studies has focused predominantly on English speaking texts. Many of the websites where research has been conducted even in later years have been predominantly English speaking as well; popular blogsite Wordpress.com states that most of their blogs are written originally in English (Baym, 2015: p. 79). This has meant that early internet research failed to really focus on how different ethnic backgrounds used the internet. This is a limitation in this study as well as I am not multilingual and only able to conduct my research in English and on

English speaking websites. However, as much of the Furry Fandom historically can be placed in the USA by Patten (2016) and from research from the IARP, this is only a slight limitation because data points to English being the main language in the fandom.

One of the main issues that occur when academics try to describe online spaces as communities comes when looking at the research of who interacts within the community itself. Research has shown that most participants in online communities generally take three forms:

1. Answer People – These are the people who respond to postings from other members on a regular basis but rarely initiate conversation themselves.
2. Discussion People – People who both partake in conversation and initiate it.
3. Lurker – People who do not participate actively but frequently visit the community without announcing their presence. (Baym, 2015: p. 97)

This creates a problem since the most common group found in the vast majority of communities is that of the role of ‘lurker’. In that respect it becomes incredibly hard for an academic to gauge how much of an influence or importance the community has on that individual: how can it be assessed that someone is part of the community if they do not participate in any meaningful way? This has not been answered in academia thus far. However, for Heidrun Frieze, ‘If reality denotes becoming, then this becoming is not, as will be said later, the unity of being and not-being. For being is not a continuous self-identity unity’ (Frieze, 2002: p. 20). An identity created online in a virtual community is not in an either/or relationship and the internet allows identities to occur that do not have to be in relation to anything else. It can be suggested that lurkers are still enacting an identity, an identity which influences how they act online as a lurker.

We can, however, discuss how meaning is interpreted within these communities. ‘Individuals assume and enact identities based on available material and symbolic resources’

(Oztok, 2016: p. 160) such as movies (McCracken, 2008: p. 119) between discussion and answer people. Following Friese's idea, the identity of highly identified Furries who believe they are part animal or would like to be part animal is still an identity even though it will never be realised (Friese, 2002: p. 26). Michele A. Willson argues that 'loss of departure' due to being able to access the internet seemingly at any time traditionally led scholars to understand online and offline identity bleeding together to make a coherent identity (Willson, 2006: p. 69). Furries may consider they have a 'Furry' part of their identity even though they only interact with it online. This is a new kind of identity that doesn't need to be removed from the online context but still part of identity just accessed at different times. Seminal psychoanalytic theory by Freud helps to explain this in as much as:

We have two kinds of unconscious – the one which is latent but capable of becoming conscious, and the one which is repressed and which is not, in itself and without more ado, capable of becoming conscious. (Freud, 2003: p. 30)

That is not to say that the online identity or in this case the Furry identity is repressed as such (though in some clinical interaction it may seem so, as argued by Roberts et al., 2015a). Instead it is an online identity that can be left at any moment, not engaged or performed in the offline and then immediately picked up back again as part of their identity ten minutes later. This can be demonstrated by 'vernacular creativity' (Burgess, 2006; Milner, 2012). A meme, for example, has to include shared symbolism for the meme to be considered appropriate by the other members (Baym, 2015: p. 70). Figure 9 shows two popular memes used on 4Chan and Reddit from the popular cult movie *The Big Lebowski* (Coen, 1998). Memes were described by Limor Shifman as:

- a) *A group of digital items sharing common characteristics of content, form, and/or stance;*
- b) *That they were created with awareness of each other;*

- c) Were circulated, imitated, and transformed *via the internet by many users*  
[original italics] (Shifman, 2014: p. 6)

*The Big Lebowski* memes include characters and quotes from which anyone who has seen the film (or knows the basic plotline) would probably recognise. However, in work on trolling Whitney Phillips noted that often memes were used as ‘lingua franca’ and that often they had a deeper meaning that would baffle outsiders. For example, when it comes to Rickrolling (tricking someone into clicking a link of Rick Astley’s ‘*Never Gonna Give You Up*’) he states that:

Memes within the troll space compose a holistic system of meaning: memes only make sense in relation to other memes, and allow participants to speak clearly and coherently to other members of the collective while baffling those outside this affinity network. Furthermore, trolls’ ability to reference, recognise, and remix existing memes helps fortify a basic sense of trolling identity (Phillips, 2015: p. 22).

*The Big Lebowski* memes (fig. 9) therefore do not just represent scenes in the movie that someone would recognise but to an insider they can communicate something more by using memes. On Reddit ‘Am I the only one around here....’ is used to convey a multitude of statements which have nothing to do with *The Big Lebowski* scene at all; the meme format is simply to air their grievances around an unpopular opinion including not listening to a popular artist, watching a popular sports event, not liking a popular food etc. To someone who does not understand this meme they would then be confused as to why the film scene ‘has been wrongly quoted’. With lurkers, then, we can assume that they will understand the references being made in their own community and thus show an ‘example of shared practice that requires a sense of group identity’ (Baym, 2015: p. 87). Although they are not ‘practicing’ the memes as lurkers, they understand the meaning of the meme and would be

able to replicate it if they chose to. These shared practices also affect the norms and member expectations of the communities.



Fig 9

Vernacular creativity in the Furry Fandom is mainly conveyed by the way they anthropomorphise animals. But what needs to be made clear in this thesis is that not everything that is anthropomorphised will be related to and liked by the members of the Furry Fandom. There is a distinct style when it comes to anthropomorphising animals which is prominent within the fandom that is often ‘cute’ and cartoonish. Although it is being argued in this section that the internet is the most important space for Furry identity to be realised and learned the Disney effect cannot be ignored. In the Western world it is very common for children across all social classes to grow up watching Disney films.

Although Dick Hebdige noted that the Disney brand was often viewed as innocuous, he suggested that it had more impact than originally believed (Hebdige, 2003: p. 115). Therefore, it is important for this research to address the influence of Disney and anthropomorphic cartoons. Gerbasi et al. (2008) found that many Furrries in the study ‘recalled watching cartoons significantly more hours per week’ (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 205) than the average child, and this was also found in some comments in this research as well:

It really is just something I enjoy and nothing more. I grew up around a lot of anthropomorphized animal characters in cartoons, video games, and the like. And I guess... that just kinda stuck with me. (Appendix A: p 256)

I suggest that although these animals are anthropomorphised they are not inherently Furry in nature. None of the Disney films consciously or subconsciously encourage children to create a Furry identity, although liking these kinds of films may inspire someone to like anthropomorphised images which then leads them to find more online. They may draw characters from the movies because they like them before this but not because they are part of the Furry Fandom just yet.

Peter Wagner suggests that identity is predominantly related to meaning, and that these meanings guide identity construction but can also constrain it (Wagner, 2002: p. 5). The Furies have imposed their own meanings on anthropomorphisations of certain animal species which is specific to Furies rather than to anthropomorphised animals in general. Furies often engage in roleplay when speaking to others online i.e. speaking as if they were the species of their fursona (Shoji, 2015: p. 14) and as such different species have been given different coding. This includes sexual stereotypes such as having a fox fursona within the community signals to others that you are both submissive and hypersexual (Howl, 2015: p. 52). These stereotypes are certainly not learned in the offline space of cartoons or from Disney. The Disney Corporation especially try to keep their brand as ‘family-friendly’ and so would certainly not be encouraging sexual stereotyping of their anthropomorphised characters (Hebdige, 2003: p. 114). They have been more than willing to sue those who use their copyrighted characters in a way that could affect this image (Hebdige, 2003: p. 116). Instead, it could be suggested that Furies are using intertextual knowledge that they have gained from both cartoons and ‘Disneyfied’ characters and knowledge gained from the Furry Fandom. A study on young children and their knowledge of *Rugrats* (Nickelodeon, 1991-2004) demonstrated that they could make a connection between the TV series and the video game, even though they were not able to read (Carrington, 2005: p. 18). They were able to identify visual similarities between the two to know that both were from the *Rugrats*

franchise. For Furrries then, they are able to see an anthropomorphised character and identify whether it is ‘just’ a cartoon character or a fursona i.e. does the character have any of the Furry signifiers such as neon colours, wearing certain fashion, a unique name, is it a popular fursona species?

In Baym’s research on online soap opera communities she found that some of the more revered members were those who gave good advice or those who wrote particularly good fan fiction (Baym, 2015: p. 90); for *Doctor Who* those who were particularly knowledgeable about the show’s history or were fans when the original show came out were higher on the fan hierarchy (Booth and Kelly, 2013). Therefore, online communities mirror that of an offline community in that ‘codes of practice can only be “understood” with the aid of this community’ (Van de Goor, 2015: p. 278). The above communities have reinforced what they consider makes a person a good member of the habitus. This has, however, led to what most would see as negative behaviour being endorsed as acceptable in certain online communities. When it comes to the act of ‘flaming’<sup>25</sup> on message boards, contrary to early opinions in internet research, Baym found that it occurred not due to ‘a lack of social norms...but *because* of social norms’ [original italics] (Baym, 2015: p. 66). Several different online communities have been accused of enforcing misogyny as a social norm such as Reddit and 4Chan (Baym, 2015: p. 67). There is some evidence to suggest that adolescents who were frequent users of social networking communities experience more psychological distress due to negative reinforcement as well (Sampasa-Kanyinga and Lewis, 2015; Hong, Huang and Chui, 2014). This may be because some communities reinforce increased risk taking (Long and Chen, 2007; Ridout et al., 2012) or encourage users to cultivate an image of a ‘perfect life’ leading other users to believe that others are happier than they are (Radovic et al., 2017: 12; Chou and Edge, 2012). Online spaces and fan communities can offer

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<sup>25</sup> Flaming is the act of posting or sending offensive messages over the internet to provoke a negative reaction

opportunities to be more reflexive however. Stanfill argues this is being seen more within the younger fan bases who are demographically more likely to use the internet and online fan communities:

People who have been in fandom for a while, and in several fandoms over time, have been exposed to and/or acculturated into that set of practices and values, but generational turnover is happening in the population that creates fan texts, and from my own limited and anecdotal experience, younger fan bases are often not within the tradition. (Stanfill, 2013a)

Even though the process of enculturation suggests that ‘newcomers are gradually accepted and socialised through interaction with peers and more experienced members’ (Perrotta, 2009: p. 24) and so are lurkers who do not interact see visual cues on what behaviour is acceptable. Online fandoms then still fit in with concepts of institutions in that they are ‘produced and reproduced in cultural practices’ (Whiteman and Metivier, 2013: p. 154) even if they are more fluid and subject to change over time. Due to the norms and values associated with particular online communities the web pages presents the observer visual clues on how to create their online persona in keeping with their chosen community. These practices have to adhere to the codes of behaviour set out by the Furry Fandom and enforced as an institution in two ways: creation and presentation.

### **Creation**

The creation of the online identity is not as easy as just ‘being yourself’, there are several factors to be considered when crafting this which may affect how an online identity is formed. Creation depends on how much of the self a person believes can be fully immersed in any given situation: are we the same identity at all in different moments in time? Grant McCracken writes that identity is cultivated from various parts of a person’s life:

We can occupy a range of people, professions, and predicaments, among them air batonist, aviator, city planner, and museum creator. We can cultivate several versions of the gendered self (McCracken, 2008: p. 277).

This conforms to the theory of 'self-categorization'. This theory argues that a person at any given time categorises themselves in terms of either social or personal identity. This theory helps to explain why we act differently when with friends (personal identity) than when we are with a group such as work (social identity) (Perrotta, 2009: p. 42-43). Creation of an online identity is also as fluid as in the offline world and thus the creation of the identity and the direction in which it goes can be different depending on where the online identity is being produced.

The subject of several studies has been the idea that the online environment and its possibility to be anonymous has meant that some can create an online identity that they are unable to express in their offline identity due to stigmatization. Janet H. Long and Guoming Chen refer to this as 'role confusion' in which the adoption of a negative identity can lead to a 'successful resolution to their identity crisis' (Long and Chen, 2007: p. 100). The word 'confusion' has not been interpreted here as a negative word in that the subject themselves are confused but that their offline and online identities have become blurred. The creation of their identity may mean that some parts of their identity can only be shared in the online space. For Furies this can mean that they can only be Furies online as they feel stigmatized to show this identity offline.

Expressing identity is a strong self-motivator for using the Net. People who feel important aspects of their identity are unexpressed due to fear of a negative reception will often search chat rooms for role relationships in which to engage stigmatized aspects of their identity" (Long and Chen, 2007: p. 100).

In online communities where non-heteronormative users are unable to be gay in the offline world ‘testing out honest self-disclosure and expressing ones “real” self online can be empowering and liberating’ (Baym, 2015: p. 139). Also, it can mean that those who have issues offline with harmful experiences such as self-harm or anorexia can find a unique and comforting space to express themselves (Perrotta, 2009: p. 42). Nevertheless, even in communities that allow those with stigmatized offline identities to be free to express that identity online does not mean that there is not conflict and arguments as to what is the ‘correct’ way to express that identity. In a study looking at BBS users featuring homosexual online communities there can still be a stark difference in the ways users create their gay online identity. Some choosing a more flamboyant stereotypically ‘gay’ personality can sometimes cause conflict with those online who just want to be viewed as ‘regular’ (Coon Sells, 2013: p. 901). For Booth this is because ‘formation of identity hinges on the interactive response of others, on the back-and-forth responses of the community’ (Booth, 2010: p. 164). Creation of an identity is influenced depending in which community they choose to express it. Creation must then also be carefully tailored to that community as ‘in most online encounters, others will have fairly limited cues with which to interpret use, and may or may not make of them the meanings intended’ (Baym, 2015: p. 135). Identity creation must be learned as well as coming from the subject themselves.

For McCracken, the internet has also allowed for the creation of a global self, in that many different identities can be displayed across offline and online scenarios. Using celebrity as an example – they are recognisable not just as being ‘that’ A-list actress but by the roles they have played (McCracken, 2008: p. 296). This can be applied to regular online users, gamers may use a gamer tag and present themselves in online gaming differently to the self they present on social media; this has resulted in two kinds of identity creation of the swift self and the radiant self. While the swift self sacrifices itself for the forward movement of

technology it is the radiant self which helps create the online persona: ‘unless the participant is made more glorious, interesting, or remarkable, there is no interest’ (McCracken, 2008: p. 150).

The radiant self is prepared to cultivate new, delocalized ideas of the body, self, and soul, and to move freely back and forth across once-strict boundaries between humans and animals, between humans and the plant world, between reason and myth, between rationality and emotionality, between the past, present and future. Indeed, in many cases, it protests these distinctions and seeks to break them down (McCracken, 2008: p. 273).

The movement between boundaries is seen online for example when young people create their identities. Linguistically it is found that adolescents use a ‘higher proportion of vernacular’ than adults who share their socio-economic background (Androutsopoulos and Georgeakopoulos, 2003: p. 4) and this is reinforced in identity creation online. This may be since speaking in vernacular mirrors their identity in the offline world in the ‘living dimension of actual experience’ and these ‘socio-cultural activities are significant to the identities of those involved, (Perrotta, 2009: p. 24). For many people the creation of their online identity is not separate from their real-life selves and is influenced by cultural factors but with far more ability to reflexively challenge those aspects if they choose to.

Many online identities, whether knowingly or not, are created in the image of the radiant self in that online identity creation means that people can break down the boundaries of their stigmatized selves or can express themselves in vernacular that they may not use in the real world. This is not to say that their online personas have been created falsely because they may not truly reflect their offline selves but that they are able to present sides of their identity that they otherwise cannot.

## Presentation

One of the greatest fears expressed with the early introduction of the internet was that of presentation: How could you know who was speaking to you if you did not see their face? Before social media many believed it was possible to be completely anonymous online and you could even talk to a different species as the now famous 1993 *New Yorker* cartoon by Peter Steiner ironically exclaimed (fig. 8) There have been different reasons why some have presented as something other than their ‘real-selves’ online.

The concept of ‘passing’, that is to be able to present yourself online as a different gender for example, happens for a multitude of reasons. In her study in 1996, Shannon McRae investigated the concept of ‘netsex’ (or cyber-sex, see chapter six) and how some individuals chose to have this experience by ‘passing’ as the opposite gender. There were those who did it merely for the fun of being able to successfully pass as a woman because they felt that they were less responsible for their actions as they could not see the other person’s face (McRae, 1996: p. 249-255). However, there were more serious themes surrounding identity construction rather than having fun. For one of her respondents named Jel, he found that speaking to other women as a woman meant that he could experience sexual and emotional safety that he lacked in his real-life experiences as a male (McRae, 1996: p. 251). This echoed the sentiments of other users who found that occupying a different gender helped them discover and construct their sexual identity. They did this by ‘playing out a sexual attraction that for one reason or another real life doesn’t allow, or experimenting with roles involving dominance and submission’ (McRae, 1996: p. 252). Many of those in recent studies who have used a different identity to their own have been doing so for fandom role-play reasons. In fan communities it is not unusual to see profiles on SNS like Myspace which are made up to look like the profile of an imaginary character. Real people use these profiles to roleplay characters that they admire on screen rather than believing that they are

that character or trying to intentionally deceive the reader (Booth, 2010: p. 157). These fans are taking part in the concept of ‘passing’ even though these characters aren’t real and often, if their roleplay is convincing, people will compliment them on ‘staying true to the character’.

Today many SNSs force people to join under their real name and identities, Facebook for example restricts accounts which they believe are using a false name. That is not to say that the online personas under those real names are not carefully cultivated impressions in what Ridout et al. described as their ‘hoped-for possible selves’. It is unsurprising that 82% of university students ‘untagged’ pictures of themselves that they did not like (Ridout et al., 2012: p. 21) as online personas are carefully maintained; even showing friendship connections can run the risk of ruining a well cultivated reputation if they are friends with the ‘wrong’ people (Baym, 2015: p. 133). Presentation is also likely to mirror the norms of the offline space as found in the study by Ridout et al., university students were found to ‘openly present themselves as drunks’. The Ridout et al. study felt that this reflected the normalization of binge drinking found at many universities around the world (Ridout et al., 2012: p. 21). In that way the university students presented an exaggerated ‘drunk’ identity to present a ‘cool’ persona that fit in with their offline identity. Though some would argue that this careful presentation of the self-identity online leads to people just out right lying, Baym is more concise when she wrote that ‘most lies are minor strategic manipulations rather than malevolent falsehoods’ (Baym, 2015: p. 128).

Presentation of the online identity is also affected in a limited way by what technology is available. For homosexual men in a study by Elija Cassidy (2013) it was found that SNS Facebook was structured in a way that means that they were able to build their identity around their entire selves compared to Gaydar. Even though Gaydar is a gay dating app these men found it frustrating that the profiles only allowed them to create their profile solely around their sexual identity which meant many chose to try and date via Facebook

instead (Cassidy, 2013: p. 80). Due to data collection and the interconnectivity between different SNSs it has become harder to present a completely false persona. For instance, a person can link their Facebook to a new Instagram account which would then be immediately provided with information such as name and age on the new account already; This led to the updated rebuttal of figure 8 with a new *New Yorker* cartoon by Rob Cottingham in 2010 (fig. 10). Enhanced and improved technology has also meant that we have come a long way from early internet interaction which was solely text based. Avatars are often used in chat rooms which are used to give a visual on the person who is writing. These avatars are also carefully chosen to present a certain aspect of their identity and Tamara G. Coon Sells study (2013) found that often these visual communications do not deviate massively from the norms of the community they are communicating in (Coon Sells, 2013: p. 905). Avatar usage has thus been described as not having an effect ‘of representing identities as much as they allow[ed] positioning of those identities’ (Long and Chen, 2007: p. 101) and this ability to present certain identity traits has only appeared with the improvement of technology.

[redacted in this version]

Fig. 10

Presentation of an identity online therefore is not an unconscious act but has two separate parts. Firstly, there is the conscious act of careful cultivation where the subject consciously chooses pictures or avatars or websites that best suit their intentions for online use, such as choosing a Facebook profile picture which makes them look nice or ‘cool’. Secondly, there is the unconscious act where the subject is influenced into choosing the Facebook profile

picture ‘which made them look nice’. This comes unconsciously where they recognise that they (for example) look thinner in this picture and that quality is prized in Western society. Presentation of online identity is therefore subject to societal change and is constantly monitored by the owner.

### **3.4 Mapping the Furry Fandom Online**

The above theories are not used to conceptualise Furry identity construction but online identity construction on a macro scale. This section will look at how Furry behaviours are enforced and why on a fandom scale (microcosm). This is done in part from data from this research and from data collected by the IARP. This chapter addresses Furry signifiers found in the online space such as fursonas and fursuits and Furry vernacular that is used.

#### **Age**

Age is an important demographic to consider when conceptualising when identity construction occurs. Victoria Carrington noted that in early education research, children were considered as ‘unworldly’ and ‘experiences of childhood, including interactions with textual landscapes, are predicted and limited’ (Carrington, 2005: p. 21). Before the internet, traditionally children learnt from school or the family (Carrington, 2005: p. 13). For Carrington, new media has led to the creation of the ‘worldly’ child who ‘creates and distributes information and who has the capacity to independently access expanding sources of information’ (Carrington, 2005: p. 22). This change in how children are viewed when it comes to knowledge and practices is not surprising because, as with adult identities, children’s identities are context specific and dependent on the society they are living in (Marsh, 2005: p. 29). Growing up in a multimedia world is certain to affect a child’s identity. Meaning-making for a child cannot be seen in isolation or just simply from the traditional primary sources of socialisation (Marsh, 2005: p. 36).

For Herbert Mead, the time where a child begins to construct their identity is when they have unstructured downtime; a child understands and utilizes their own responses to stimuli while they are playing (Mead, 2003: p. 34). A child ‘responds in a fairly intelligent fashion to the immediate stimuli that come to him, but they are not organized. He does not organize his life as we would like to have him do, namely, as a whole.’ (Mead, 2003: p. 35). Mead recognises that a child is inherently different from theories of identity construction concerning adults. This is because they have not had enough information (namely life experience) to be able to construct a coherent identity so instead they play, and play with identity. In this play time a child is also able to evaluate the attitudes that are given towards him towards other children and adults (Mead, 2003: p. 37). In this sense children understand a fundamental aspect about identity in that ‘staying the same person then means, in this case: remaining the same even when conditions, and even one’s orientations, have, precisely, not remained the same’ (Straub, 2002: p. 65); a child adapts to the condition around them and the way that people react to them continuously.

Yet some scholars put identity formation as occurring in earnest in puberty; Erik H. Erikson (1968) suggests that identity formation usually occurs between the age of twelve and twenty. This is the age where many Furries have suggested in this research was the time where they ‘discovered’ or started creating their Furry identity (fig 11).

Table: Showing how old respondents were when they ‘realised’ they were Furry

Age	Respondents	
Under 10 years old	39	4%
11-15 years old	518	51%
16- 20 years old	382	38%
21 years or older	70	7%
Total Respondents	1,009	

Fig. 11

What is interesting to note is the correlation between the times that Furies in this study ‘realised’ they were a Furry and when they discovered and began to access Furry websites shown on (fig 12).

Table: Showing a cross-section of Furies when they accessed Furry websites for the first time compared to the age they realised they were Furry

At what age did you realise you were Furry	At what age did you start to use Furry Websites			
	Under 10 years old	11-15 years old	16-20 years old	21 years or older
Under 10 years old	4	21	6	3
11-15 years old	4	397	97	4
16- 20 years old	1	44	301	14
21 years or older	1	1	15	49
Total Responses	10	463	419	70

Fig. 12

There were respondents in this study who alluded to knowing that they were a Furry before they had heard the term:

I'm a furry because I'm species dysphoric. I'm a fox (kitsune, more specifically) stuck as a human. The fandom is awesome, and accepting of me. (Appendix C: p. 304)

But most respondents in this thesis were the opposite and started to consume Furry media and then became part of the Furry Fandom:

I was connecting to the internet on a Windows 98 computer with a modem. Effectively, I found out about, you know, you go from link to link and you find out there are these people who are interested in all the same games, and the TV shows and books that I am....You find out all these things, and then you start realising that these people are basically interested in all the exact same things as you, want to talk about these things, and they have a name for themselves. (Appendix B: p. 281)

A hypothesis of this thesis, and what has been argued in regards to the online space being the prime site for learning ‘how to be a Furry’, was to test whether the age of internet use and ‘finding out they were a Furry’ was connected (fig. 12). A Chi-square test was used to determine whether there was a significant probability that these two variables were related (Fig 13).

Table: Chi-Squared results showing ‘the age that people realised they were a Furry’ as the x-value and ‘at what age did you start using Furry websites’ as the y value

Results						
	Under 10	11- 15 years	16- 20 years	21 years or older		Row Totals
Under 10	4 (0.35) [37.62]	21 (16.36) [1.31]	6 (14.81) [5.24]	3 (2.47) [0.11]		34
11 - 15 years old	4 (5.22) [0.28]	397 (241.61) [99.94]	97 (218.65) [67.68]	4 (36.53) [28.97]		502
16 - 20 years old	1 (3.74) [2.01]	44 (173.26) [96.44]	301 (156.80) [132.62]	14 (26.20) [5.68]		360
21 years or older	1 (0.69) [0.14]	1 (31.77) [29.80]	15 (28.75) [8.57]	49 (4.80) [406.75]		66
Column Totals	10	483	419	70		962 (Grand Total)

Fig. 13

The results of the Chi-squared test showed the result as significant at  $p < .05$ . I would suggest that the Furry identity is not a natural occurring state. Instead it is specifically influenced, as other fans in other fandoms are created, by coming into contact with the media content and then developing a fannish identity from there. This conclusion would be in keeping with the research by Reysen et al. (2016) who felt that their own results ‘highlight the normality of the furry fandom, in so far as Furries are motivated by the same psychological needs as members of any other group’ (Reysen et al., 2016: p. 641). This would go against other IARP research that views it as an identity you are born into and their presentation in their research that being a Furry is likened to ‘coming out’.

## Fursona

According to other current research on the Furry Fandom an almost universal part of being a Furry is the creation of a fursona. In opposition, this study found an astonishing 24% of respondents of 1,011 results did not have a fursona at all (Appendix A: p. 260). Other research has shown that it is uncommon for a Furry to have more than two fursonas at one given time. The IARP state that most Furries typically identify with a single fursona. This is

mirrored to some extent in these results. But, this thesis does also show that a Furry is more likely to have no fursona over having two or more. This may be because in other studies a fursona has been described as having two functions when it comes to identity construction: showing a social identity and a representation of a possible self (Roberts et al., 2015b: p. 45). One respondent had this to say about fursonas:

Some people have multiple fursonas and use them as their original characters. Some have only one and they identify as their fursona, often feeling trapped in a human body. I, on the other hand, identify strongly with my fursona and see it as an extension of myself, but I'm not delusional about it. I am, for better or worse, a human being after all. Although, if I had the possibility and chance to become my fursona, I'd take it in a heartbeat. I love the community because of its general acceptance, social "warmth" and the feeling of belonging somewhere. It is also, personally, a form of escapism. (Appendix C: p 304)

This respondent echoed several responses in the data which showed that there is a difference between those who see their fursona as an extension of themselves and those who see their fursona as a character they are playing, not a part of their identity. There were some clearly negative sentiments to those who were deemed 'too highly' identified with their fursona (distorted unattained type from Gerbasi et al. study, 2008; fig. 2) and this is discussed further in chapter four. There did seem to be a fluid social approach to the two groups in other comments from those who either use it as a representation or as a performance. It would suggest that when it comes to constructing the fursona identity there is flexibility without 'choosing sides' within the fandom, though as with other fandoms the super involved fans i.e. highly identified, can be viewed as weird.

The difference in results in this research could be due to differing forms of fan engagements as one of the aims of this study was to research less identified Furies. This

survey endeavoured to include a plethora of different countries as a lot of other studies have been solely based in the USA. A point of interest came about when looking at whether Furies without a fursona go online for Furry related activities a lot less than Furies with fursonas. Although non-fursonas were less likely to go on daily (52.6%) compared to those who had fursonas (70.9%) or those who had two or more fursonas (77%) they were still likely to go online regularly. Another 33.9% of non-fursona Furies go online for Furry related activities at least 2-3 times a week. When looking at Furies in general who go online 2-3 times or more a week the results were very comparable. 91.8% of Furies with fursonas were in this category, 93.5% of Furies with two or more fursonas, and 86.5% of non-fursona Furies also going online more than 2-3 times a week (Appendix A: p. 267). Consequently, there is not a huge variation with heavy online Furry activity between those with fursonas and those without.

These results raise interesting questions about identity construction as it is contrary to IARP research that previously thought the fursona as an integral part of Furry identity construction. The fursona is still common but it raises the possibility that a Furry can be one without a fursona. Once again this highlights a gap in academic literature due to the sole focus of other research on highly identified Furies. One of the respondents in interviews drew fursonas on commission for other Furies long before considering themselves a Furry:

Respondent: [00:06:42] When I was on more of the art, I would attend conventions, usually as a vendor. But, I would also just attend just for fun. Now, I'd say, probably, I haven't really been a physical part of the community, maybe for about seven years, I would say.

Interviewer: [00:07:05] Oh, so you've been in the fandom quite a long time then?

Respondent: [00:07:10] Yes. I mean, I would say that I started doing artwork, let me see, maybe in 1999/2000. But, I didn't really consider myself a real Furry until, maybe, 2005 even. (Appendix A: p. 260)

Additionally, respondents who did not have fursonas when they joined were open to the possibility of eventually having one:

Am a very casual Furry, no irl furry friends, no fursona (yet) (Appendix A: p. 260)

This suggests instead that fursonas are an important indicator that someone is affiliated with the Furry Fandom but that does not mean that a person is highly identified with their fursona and may not see it as an integral part of their identity at all.

## Fursuits

In studies by the IARP fursuits have been consistently popular with Furies. Fursuits are well liked even by those who do not own them. This was evident in the data for this thesis:

RE: fursuits: they're super neat and I like them a lot but I don't really have a reason to own one (I don't go to a lot of conventions, I don't like to dance and perform very much, and besides, good lord are they expensive). I am in the market for an ear and tail set though, as I may be attending a small con later this year. (Appendix A: p. 265)

But as with other studies, they are less common than many outsiders would presume. Only 81 respondents out of 995 owned full fursuits with 60% of respondents saying that they would like to own one (fig 14).

Table: Showing the percentage of current fursuit owners in this study

Do you own a Fursuit?	Responses	
Yes - and I wear it in public	49	5%
Yes - but I don't wear it in public	32	3%
No - But I would like to own one	593	60%
No - But I wouldn't like to own one	321	32%
Total Responses	995	

Fig. 14

As with other studies the reason many gave for not owning one yet was often due to the huge cost of making a full suit (Plante et al., 2014: p. 15; Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 205). For the best

suits animatronics are often used which are highly complicated for a layperson to make. In one of the interviews a respondent spoke of his own moving fursuit:

Respondent: [00:25:26] The ears and the tail are both robotic, and they're basically controlled hand gestures. I had things on my hands [00:25:36].

Interviewer: [00:25:38] What turn the ears and stuff?

Interviewer: [00:25:47] Yes.

Respondent: [00:25:53] And, this is completely custom made, I printed this on my 3D printer, and the electronics are my own design.

(Appendix C: p. 305)

This respondent turned out to have studied electrical engineering at university and so was able make his animatronic fursuit himself using the skills he learned through his degree but for many Furies this would be impossible. What is interesting to note is that this study found that 32% of respondents would not even want to own a fursuit. This may be because of the different environments that these studies were conducted; *Furries from A-Z* (Gerbasi et al., 2008) and many other IARP studies were conducted at conventions. Participants may have bought their fursuits or Furry articles of clothing for making their own full fursuit for the convention (as it was a special occasion) or even at the convention itself. Though the data shows that there are Furies who do not want to own a fursuit it does suggest a trend towards ownership in the majority. This study suggests that fursuiting is a common phenomenon within the fandom, whether it be watching others do it or owning one themselves. This is supported by similar findings by the IARP. Fursuiting is clearly a social characteristic within the Furry Fandom and thus to want to aspire to owning these suits is a social norm.

## **Artwork**

Other studies by the IARP have shown that content creation (like Furry art) is very popular (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 198). Although from the data that is present it cannot be said whether

all the Furies who are using DeviantArt are uploading their own art onto it, it can be suggested that some are using DeviantArt to look at the Furry media created by others (fig. 15).

Table: Showing activity on non-Furry websites

Have you used any of these non-Furry focused websites for any Furry related activity?	Responses	
Reddit.com	922	96%
4Chan.org	205	21%
Deviantart.com	592	62%
Facebook.com	212	22%
None of these	48	5%

fig. 15

Due to a methodological oversight in this study no conclusions can be drawn on why the websites mentioned above are so popular, apart from the fact that the questionnaire was posted on reddit.com. This is because it was only later it was realised that by putting 4 website options meant that I was putting too much onus on these four rather than allowing the respondents to put in their own websites. As such, 4Chan and others may be over-represented here. In one of the extended qualitative interviews a respondent came into the Furry Fandom via content creation:

Interviewer: [00:04:19] Yes. So, did you get involved in, sort of, drawing the Furry artwork, when you were talking about, you know, doing some illustration on the side, was that commissioned?

Respondent: [00:04:31] Yes. I mostly did colouring work on other people's illustrations, [unintelligible 00:04:35]. But, I mean, honestly, it wasn't really my thing at first, but I really felt good with the community. The people are pretty nice generally, and easy to talk to, so as opposed to some other communities that are, kind of, not very welcoming to outsiders, and things like that. (Appendix A: p. 274).

Throughout this research Furry artwork was mentioned extensively as one of the regular activities that made someone a Furry. Due to the fact that there is no set media text for the Furry Fandom on which to base their fandom, the Furies have created their own consumption culture when it comes to commissioning artwork. They have decided among

themselves to establish norms for Furry art rather than being influenced by advertising and branding. That is not to say that Furry artwork has not been influenced by the mass media as many pieces hold a similar style to anime or the animated style of cartoons:

Respondent: [00:03:45] Yes. I found out about the fandom through Second Life, I didn't realise there was a fandom. Although, I guess, if I'd known much earlier I would have been in it sooner, but I'm just from a small town, and there wasn't a whole lot of anything like that going on, any sort of fan group, kind of, activity. So, yes, I didn't really find out about it until 2005, but I've been a big fan of Anthropomorphics, gosh, since I was probably ten or eleven.

Interviewer: [00:04:12] Oh, okay. So, I mean, you say you were a fan when you were ten or eleven of anthropomorphic things, like, what kind of anthropomorphic objects did you have your hands on, sort of thing, were they story books or ...

Respondent: [00:04:26] Mainly just the animated shows, the cartoons and colouring books, that sort of thing. (Appendix A: p. 259)

What was also interesting to note though when it came to artwork was the boundary setting practices within the Furry Fandom and the split that occurs between Furries on their views on it. There were concerns by Furries that some artwork was too sexualised or that people had failed to separate NSFW art and SFW art online and these comments are discussed in detail in chapter six:

An uncomfortably large number of artists neglect to tag fetish art - especially non-explicit art. I enjoy browsing furry art, but having to deal with such a large amount of subject matter that I simply do not want any part in tends to get annoying. (Appendix B: p. 283).

Despite the oversexualization, the fandom really is a great thing to be a part of. Everyone is very friendly and it gives me a great excuse to practice my art skills, since the creative aspect of the fandom is absolutely fantastic. (Appendix A: p. 273)

### **Vernacular**

As shown with other subcultures that have been researched over the years there is an established Furry vernacular (as referenced in the glossary in the index) which is used across the fandom. This use of slang is common in online spaces in fandoms as online spaces ‘encourage less formal interactions’ (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 64). Although slang and vernacular has traditionally been associated with adolescents (Androutsopoulos and Georgeakopoulos, 2003: p. 4) it is common to see slang terms used in fandoms. In fan studies it has been discussed that having knowledge of the common vernacular of any group provides others with the knowledge of whether the person is an ‘insider’ or not (Van de Goor, 2015: p. 276). This can be related to geek hierarchies as discussed by Busse (2013) that using appropriate vernacular shows ‘how good of a fan’ a person is and thus cements their position within the fandom. The role of vernacular has been important in queer subcultures as well such as isiNgqumo spoken by black, Zulu men (Rudwick and Ntuli, 2009) and Polari, spoken by predominantly white British gay men (Blake, 2010: p. 136). These languages allow members of these communities to communicate without the fear of being outed as these sexualities in a time where they were illegal. For the Furies, vernacular is a useful tool for them to communicate with other Furies when they may not wish to be seen or associated with the fandom by a lay person.

The Furies even have a name for part of their vernacular known as ‘yiffing’ which is a way of talking when engaging in cybersex online (Howl, 2015; Hypetaph, 2015). There are specific terms when Furies engage in cyber-sex which are only used in the Furry Fandom such as the word ‘Murr’ which is used to express sexual gratification (Howl, 2015: p. 50).

Furries' use of Furry vernacular in cyber-sex is very much the same as those engaging in heterosexual or homosexual cyber-sex with the respondents; 'becom[ing] conscious of having "bodies" and, just as they do in "real life", express themselves with physical gestures as often as they speak' (McRae, 1996: p. 247). Furries may use extra indications of movement by referring to 'their' ears or tail moving in sexual arousal.

### **3.5 Furry Fandom – An institution at odds?**

Though much has been discussed throughout this chapter of the way the fandom as an institution operates as social control that does not mean that it works all the time. In the Furry Fandom there are several points of contention of the way in which Furries should act that have not yet been pinned down by the institution and been made social norm. This may be because although they have more freedom due to the breadth of texts available for them to base their fandom around there is then more text in which to argue over the 'correct' way to be in the Furry Fandom.

In this study, the main issues were those of openness and acceptance; some Furries lauded the community for its pleasant attitude of being open and accepting of all walks of life. Some Furries were more cautious, citing their views that some behaviour should not be accepted no matter how nice and open the community would like to be. One of the main topics that came up in this research was the word 'acceptance' which had both positive and negative connotations. In this research acceptance was mentioned 81 times when asked whether the respondents had anything to add and 'self-acceptance' appeared 53 times (fig. 16) with comments mentioning how the fandom had helped them come to some form of self-acceptance. Several respondents stated that being part of the fandom had helped them accept their own sexuality and had improved their self-image.

Table: Showing comment themes collected from the data

Comment Themes	Responses
Making new friends	66
Accepting community	81
Self-acceptance	53
Casual fandom	41
Stigmatization	42
General positive	90
General negative	31
Nothing to add	101
Other	44

fig. 16

Although Furies come from many different countries there are some desires that are unequivocally and universally unacceptable forms of behaviour by institutions. In the case of Western countries, paedophilia is not just socially controlled but legally controlled as well. In the Furry Fandom there have been concerns raised over whether these extreme fetishes occur in the fandom with one respondent having this to say:

It's too inclusive to people who express an extreme fetish publicly under the guise of it also being furry (babyfur...for example) (Appendix B: p. 283)

Cub Fur (or baby fur) is a type of Furry activity where there is an interest in anthropomorphic animals who are under age, e.g. a baby version of the animal.<sup>26</sup> These are animated or drawn figures rather than an interest in a physical baby animal. For some Furies, this may be a form of paedophilia. The bigger debate is usually the appropriateness of pornography in general rather than specific examples of genres. When asked about what they disliked about the fandom one respondent had this to say:

Probably how one sided it can be on issues. For example, a big part of the Furry Fandom for a lot of people is porn. And let's face it, it's a huge part in general. There are Furies who will ridicule and harass you if you are into these sorts of things, and the Furies who ARE into it can sometimes act the same way towards others. People

<sup>26</sup> This is specifically discussed in chapter six.

pushing their morals and prerogative on others is something I do not like. (Appendix B: p. 282)

For some Furies, pornography is a normal part of the fandom experience and indeed on many of the popular Furry websites it is common to see pornographic Furry art. However, there are strict controls on many of these websites clearly labelling the pornography as NSFW or as explicit. Despite this regulation there is a portion of the fandom who find the Furry Fandom over-sexualised and dislike the pornographic side and label it as sexual deviancy. Some Furies place the blame squarely on the shoulders of Furies who may act within the policed parameters of the Furry Fandom but then act how they would in the Furry Fandom in institutions outside of it:

When there are public meetings of Furry groups (furmeets), some people mix up the things acceptable in the fandom with things acceptable in the general public, which leads to embarrassment. (Appendix B: p. 285)

Outright pushing of fetishes in public places. (Appendix B: p. 285)

Although fetish talk is often acceptable in Furry forums many Furies are aware that social conventions are in place to make it unacceptable outside these designated spaces. Therefore, as the respondent above notes, some Furies are taking fetish talk which can be acceptable in Furry spaces online into the real world. Additionally, there is a split within Furies as to the level of identification as a fan which is deemed appropriate, mostly those who act as a Furry outside of the Furry Fandom and take their 'Furriness' into other institutions.

There have also been issues raised about criminal deviancy within the fandom concerning some of the more prominent Furies and attendees at conventions, one respondent claimed:

A lot of leeway given to popular furs who are either not nice individuals or criminals, such as rapists, victim blamers, zoophiles. (Appendix B: p. 286)

This could be in reference to issues at Furry conventions where criminal activity has taken place. One well publicised event was RainFurrest (2015), a convention that no longer runs as the hotel which had hosted the event since 2011 cancelled their contract with the Furies. This was due to ‘multiple examples of flamboyant drunken and other inappropriate public behaviour from new teenage attendees, including severe vandalism’ (Patten, 2016). RainFurrest board members took partial responsibility for failing to hold attendees to ‘standards of behaviour’:

We as a convention were entirely unwilling to hold people accountable to standards of behavior. Although we laid out policies to create a healthy and respectful space, we didn’t enforce them. We didn’t need to raise our standards in 2015; we needed to adhere to the standards we already claimed to have. More importantly, we needed to have been doing so consistently all along. Other cons have almost identical language regarding expected public dress and behavior in their codes of conduct, but they don’t seem to have the problems we did with people using the headless lounge as a petting zoo or having to summon the ambulance multiple times per con for drug overdoses. We had become a “safe” space to violate the rules, because we had a long history demonstrating that there would be no consequences (Buni, 2016)

The board member noted one of the problems that has been echoed by Furies in this study when it comes to criminal deviancy. As a result, because they were not able to constrain behaviour within the parameters deemed appropriate they were forced to shut down. This example demonstrates that when an institution does not ‘enforce’ it often fails.

Sexuality is also an issue within the Furry Fandom. Although it is often cited as one of the more positive aspects of the Furry Fandom in that they accept many different sexualities, there is an issue for some Furies when discussing Furry *as* a sexuality. For Deleuze and Guattari the ‘correct’ sexuality and view of it is imposed by the institution:

The body is stolen first from the girl... The girl's becoming is stolen first in order to impose a history, or prehistory, upon her...That is why, conversely, the reconstruction of the body as a Body without Organs, an organism of the body, is inseparable from a becoming-woman, or the production of a molecular woman. Doubtless, the girl becomes a woman in the molecular or organic sense. But, conversely, becoming-woman or the molecular woman is the girl herself. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 322)

Foucault, too, theorises how sexuality has been controlled and repressed by institutions:

The affirmation of a sexuality that has never been more rigorously subjugated than during the age of the hypocritical, bustling, and responsible bourgeoisie is coupled with the grandiloquence of a discourse purporting to reveal the truth about sex, modify its economy within reality, subvert the law that governs it, and change its future (Foucault, 1978: p. 8)

In fan studies the concept of 'acceptance culture' has been suggested as to why certain sexualities may be oversubscribed in certain fandoms. Jenkins wrote *Out of the Closet and into the Universe* in 1995 about gay *Star Trek* fans who named themselves Galaxians. In their fan community they felt it was a space where they could feel accepted and this has been in other science fiction fandoms such as gay fans of *Towards Tomorrow* (Duffett, 2013: p. 201). Plante et al. (2015) wrote a paper on biological essentialism within the Furry Fandom and concluded that as Furries in their study felt stigmatized for being Furries they were more likely to react to a threat by falling back into the safety of the group (Plante et al., 2015: p. 3). For Furries, acceptance has meant that, as an institution, there is little discrimination towards those of different sexualities. However, the term 'hug-box' was used several times, which suggests that the community is based on unconditional tolerance to the point that it is detrimental as all opinions (including negative or harmful ones) are accepted. This general

complaint that because the fandom was based on being open to everyone that sometimes Furries would ignore extreme behaviour that they should have regulated was seen multiple times. There is also a debate among different Furries within the fandom as to whether sexuality should be important to a Furries' identity at all:

Some folks treat it like it's a sexuality that requires 'coming out' to friends and family.

It's not. It's a group who share an interest in anthropomorphism. That's it. Our interest level might in most cases go beyond, say, a fan of knitting (in some cases way beyond), but at its core, it's just a shared interest / hobby. (Appendix B: p. 284)

This split is seen most commonly between within those who see Furry as a lifestyle and those who see Furry as a hobby. For those who see the fandom as an interest rather than part of their identity it is seen as almost abhorrent to them that it would even be seen as a sexuality, usually because they are keen to distance themselves from the stereotypes of the FurFag.<sup>27</sup> As we have seen in Busse's work there is often a stratum, not just in the Furry Fandom itself but between other fandoms, and mostly Furries are seen at the lower end of 'acceptable' fandoms to be a part of. Comments showed that not only was there a split in acceptance over different sexualities but also what extent Therians were accepted within the fandom as well:

People who think they are actually a 'Furry' trapped in a human body. (Appendix B: p. 281)

The Furries are not alone in these arguments as level of fan engagement is often argued between fans in other fandoms. It is often the question over 'authenticity', who is the real fan and who would be described as a 'fan boy'? (Locke, 2012). 'Acceptance' in general being a common trend in the Furry Fandom has been found in previous studies by the IARP. They found that nearly 80% of Furries in their studies believe acceptance is 'a fundamental component of the community' (Reysen et. al., 2015b: p. 42). This important finding in this

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<sup>27</sup> FurFag – A derogatory term used by those outside the Furry fandom who believe the Furry in question is a sexual deviant (usually into homosexuality or bestiality).

study establishes and categorises a social norm in the community and therefore it can be said that the Furry Fandom promotes tolerance and acceptance in their collective identity.

### **3.6 Conclusion**

The Furry Fandom is a prime site of identity construction in many ways but a number of these echo those found when identity construction is formed within an institution. It has been argued here that the internet virtual community space is the most important aspect of facilitating a Furry identity. This is the primary site where they learn the social norms that are required to be a ‘good’ Furry within the fandom.

However, the Furry Fandom is constantly shifting. It shares many of the hallmarks of an institution as shown through fan policing of social behaviour like in other fandoms but it has no set text from which to draw these behaviours as some other fandoms. For a Furry their information about what it is to be a Furry can come from a variety of conflicting sources; for how similar is the anthropomorphic animals of *Zootopia* to that of anthropomorphic ponies in *My Little Pony*? The Furry Fandom has an even harder challenge as an institution as they have more options to choose from when fans create their identity and not all Furies are choosing the same texts. As well as this, for some Furies, their Furry identity is part of themselves but is only enacted online rather than offline. I would still argue that these internal struggles within the fandom show it to be similar in nature to those found in other fandoms. This reaffirms my view that the Furry Fandom acts much like an institution when it comes to forming identity within these structures

This research suggests that the Furry Fandom is an institution, though in development, as they perform all the labour and fan creation of other fandoms. Their identity creation within an institutional system is comparable to other fandoms in method. This conclusion will end with a quote from a respondent which succinctly sums up studying the Furry Fandom as an institution:

While it is a fantastic and liberating experience to be a part of, an important thing is to never forget 'Furry' is not a monolithic construct. We are as diverse as it gets and even more, seeing the openness to all manner of quirks. It is important to know what 'shard' of a fandom you belong to and stick with the like-minded. A thing that many tend to forget about. / And, by extension, to be aware of these sub-clusters when performing studies like these. (Appendix A: p. 274).

## 4.A Stigmatized Lifestyle

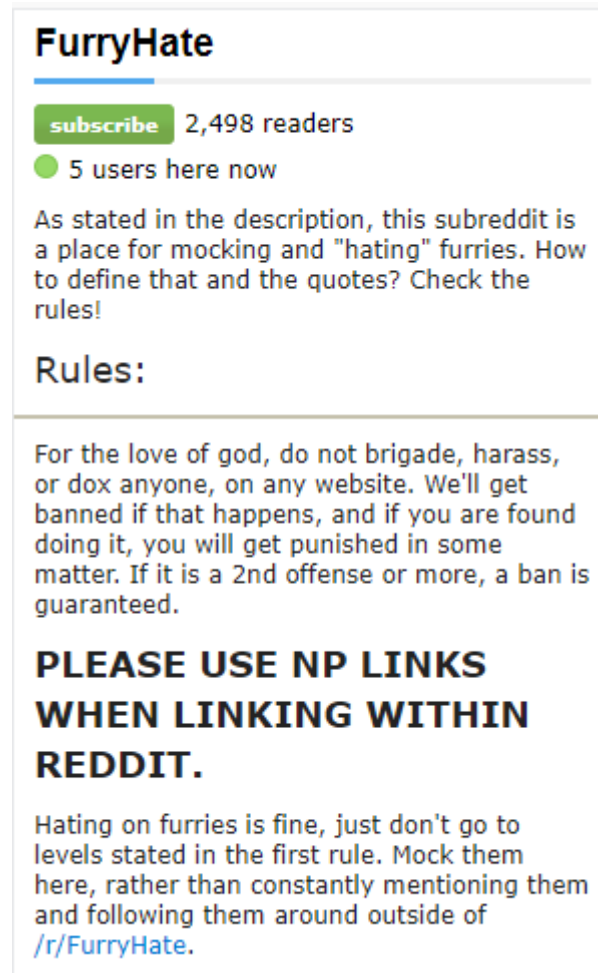


fig. 17

### 4.1 Introduction

Stigma is an associated characteristic or stereotype that resides in a social context. Oppression and prejudice are what comes after a stigma has been established in the social setting. Much has been written about the effects that stigmatization can have in both group settings and on an individual level (Alexander, 2004; Smelser, 2004). Scholars have shown that stigmatization can greatly affect identity construction on both, macro and micro scale (Harper, 2009; Thio, 2010).

This chapter looks at how perceived stigmatization has affected identity construction and what this has meant for the Furry Fandom. This is framed by Deleuze and Guattari's

concepts of the BwO and how cultural schizophrenia can affect stigmatized individuals. This chapter addresses a literature gap in the current work on stigmatization that has been carried out by the IARP. Much of their work has focused on highly identified Furies and as research has shown, highly identified individuals are often at more risk of suffering from the effects of stigmatization in minority groups. The data collected for this thesis suggests that those with no fursona felt less stigmatized than those who were more heavily involved with the fandom. This is at odds with research by the IARP who do not distinguish between highly-identified and less-identified Furies, seeing them as a homogenous group, and thus proclaiming all Furies to be stigmatized.

## **4.2 Identity and Stigmatization**

Although many people can be stigmatized by others expressing prejudice this does not always become traumatic for them or affect their identity personally or with their group on a cultural level. There has to be special circumstances for an event or traumatic occurrence to leave a permanent mark on the psyche. For Alexander, cultural trauma (and thus a stigmatizing event) only occurs when:

Members of a collective feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways (Alexander, 2004: p. 1).

Alexander argues that it is not the event itself that causes the collective trauma but it is what happens afterwards with the ‘socially mediated attribution’ that makes it so (Alexander, 2004: p. 8). This may seem counterintuitive as without the event there would be no trauma at all, but Smelser describes this effect as ‘trauma event plus context’ (Smelser, 2004: p. 34). For example, the black community in America is a stigmatized community because the ‘event’ of their enslavement before the American Civil War has the ‘context’ that they are

still the targets of brutality and discrimination and frequently the target of political rhetoric today; male homosexuals were targeted through legal sanction in most countries into the second half of the twentieth century (the event), and there is evidence that the response to HIV was slow and poorly supported by governments because it was associated with the gay community (context). Thus, by using traumatic event plus context, the Furies were attacked by chlorine gas at a convention in 2014 (the event). However, the trauma was established through context, for example when MSNBC reporter Mika Brzezinski ran off set laughing at the fact this had happened. Additionally, there was a perceived lack of coverage on other major news outlets for such a serious incident.

The examples above show how the ‘socially mediated attribution’ theory of Alexander (2004) makes these events a cultural trauma. Although Deleuze and Guattari do not use the word ‘stigmatization’ specifically, they describe many of its effects in *Anti Oedipus* which discusses neurosis brought about by, in their opinion, the capitalist system. In a post-modern society Deleuze and Guattari believe that illnesses such as schizophrenia become more prolific as capitalism enforces a certain way of life on people. Deleuze and Guattari note that in an effort to ‘appear normal’ to others, many people hide parts of their identity and this causes illness. Some criticize Deleuze and Guattari for seemingly valorising ‘schizophrenia while downplaying the seriousness of psychological suffering’ (Harper, 2009: p. 7). I would argue that they are not talking about schizophrenia as the condition but in relation to the schizo body, the masochist body and the BwO.

The BwO is a concept first used by Deleuze, inspired by Artaud’s radio play *To Be Done with the Judgement of God*, and then developed in partnership with Guattari. For Deleuze and Guattari, the body which has been most privileged in society is that of the ‘healthy’ body, and that what is considered healthy is often decided by the state (and usually benefits capitalism). In society the body is considered an organ (machinic) part of the greater

societal machine so the BwO can be considered as a form of resistance. Discovering what constitutes as a BwO can be different to diverse cultures or societies. A BwO is looking far beyond the simple functions of the body and as such an organ is nothing by itself, it only becomes useful when it has a purpose on the planes of consistency with other functions.<sup>28</sup> For Furies who are heavily identified with their ‘Furriness’ the BwO is the plane on which they create their identity. For many this is a harder process than with other fandoms as they have not benefitted from the mainstreaming of certain fandoms and have certainly not gained the title of ‘geek chic’ (Proctor, 2016) yet as others have.<sup>29</sup> This may be in part due to the concept of faciality as put forward firstly by Deleuze before developing further with Guattari. The face represents a political polemic, in that contemporary media often infers certain powers on different kinds of faces. For Deleuze, particularly in *The Logic of Sensation* (2003), it is important to see the face as an abstraction:

Sensation has one face turned toward the subject (the nervous system, vital movement, ‘instinct,’ ‘temperament’ a whole vocabulary common to both Naturalism and Cezanne) and one face turned toward the object (the ‘fact,’ the place, the event). Or rather, it has no faces at all, it is both things indissolubly...And at the limit, it is the same body which, being both subject and object, gives and receives the sensation.

(Deleuze, 2003: p. 34-35)

For Furies, faciality has been used in a negative way by the contemporary media, this may be because they are ‘confusing’ the ‘acceptable’ usage of the face. Deleuze noted in work by Francis Bacon that Bacon’s portraits where the face has melded in the body makes faciality

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<sup>28</sup> Deleuze and Guattari explain planes of consistency to be the alternate reality in which the BwO operates. Planes of consistency are where the elements of BwO (schizo, masochist etc.) are experienced. The rate and intensity of the BwO in the plane of consistency is affected by differing socio-cultural effects such as the war machine (state power) and capitalism.

<sup>29</sup> It can be suggested that the rise of ‘geeky’ nerd as something to emulate is apparent with the roaring success of *The Big Bang Theory* (CBS, 2007-present), and that fandoms such as *Star Wars* have increasingly been seen as less ‘fanatic’ and more normal activity to be associated with in recent years (Scott, 2013).

fractured. Deleuze argued that previous importance of the head (as figure-head) becomes simply meat in Bacon's work (Deleuze, 2003: p. 26). As the Furies misplace the figure-head in their artwork by creating becoming-animal then they also displace faciality. Deleuze and Guattari argue that faciality is a process whereby a face is shown to conform to the dominant standards of society:

Faces are not basically individual; they define zones of frequency or probability...the form of subjectivity, whether consciousness or passion, would remain absolutely empty if faces not form loci of resonance that select the sensed and mental reality and make it conform in advance to a dominant reality. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 196)

A Furry wearing a fursuit head displaces the human head in this way and becomes an empty signifier for a non-Furry. For Furies then, they are still trapped with negative connotations to their different masks in faciality and so mainstreaming has been much harder for their fandom as they are 'less palatable' due to their schizo BwO. To explain these categories further, Deleuze and Guattari believe that different modes of the body are enacted as follows:

- The hypochondriac body – the organs have been destroyed and there is nothing that can be changed about it.
- The paranoid body – the organs are continually under attack by outside forces.
- The schizo body – wages its own internal struggle against its own organs.
- The drugged body – the body is ineffective and inefficient and should be changed.
- The masochist body – The organs must be flayed and pain must take place to reach their full potential. The 'wants' of each body without organs are not uniform and so cannot be compared well against one another (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013b: p. 174).

Much of this is put down to the process of the desiring-machine where Deleuze and Guattari oppose the traditional Freudian idea of the unconscious and instead propose that desire is a

real productive force that people consciously seek. They went away from traditional Marxist thought by arguing that desire was not merely symbolic but was constructive e.g. machinic and so produced desire as material reality. In capitalism, they discerned however, that desire became destructive due to the repression by the state in which the desire was being carried out:

There are no desiring-machines that exist outside the social machines that they form on a large scale; and no social machines without the desiring machines that inhabit them on a small scale. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 373)

Those in society whose 'desire' to be able to present as homosexual in public (rather than having to keep this identity hidden due to legal recourse for example), which as Deleuze and Guattari explain is positive by itself as a desire, becomes a destructive force. Because the homosexual is unable to escape from the heteronormative system of capitalism they have to repress their homosexuality to 'appear normal' which can have harmful real-life effects:

The homophobic nature of society does make lesbians and gays more likely to develop some psychological problems, such as constant tension, self-hatred, and depression, which in turn lead to higher rates of suicide and alcohol and drug abuse among gays and lesbians than among straights. Running through these problems is the failure to achieve a harmonious integration of one's diverse identities. (Thio, 2010: p. 253)

For Deleuze and Guattari the masochist body can only be fulfilled through 'intensities of pain' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013b: p. 176) and for the Furies this is best done through the notion of 'attraction and repulsion' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 19):

Attraction and repulsion produce intense nervous states that fill up the body without organs to varying degrees...becoming a woman and many other things as well, following an endless circle of eternal return. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 19)

For some Furies their BwO is hard to define and is in constant struggle and pain especially when they have to explain their identity to others:

It's very hard to explain to someone what being a Furry is. And any time I have tried they always slightly misunderstand something (completely accidentally) and it can make it seem like something quite different very easily. The fact it's tough to understand what it is, (you basically have to live it to know what it's like), is likely what makes others struggle to understand/empathise with us (Appendix A: p. 272)

For the masochist body compared to the other BwO modes, there is a risk that it will become what Deleuze and Guattari refer to a 'cancerous'. As often the wants of the masochist body are not uniform it can struggle to fit within the institution. This is where attraction and repulsion come into play and thus the masochist body will 'resubmit it to its rule or restructify it, not only for its own survival, but also to make possible an escape from the organism, the fabrication of the "other" BwO on the plane of consistency' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013b: p. 189). In the Furry Fandom (acting as an institution) it has been dictated to the Furry what is and is not acceptable for their identity. Their masochist body will, to avoid becoming cancerous, have to restructify itself into this Furry social order to be accepted by the institution, often with discomfort to the individual. For Deleuze and Guattari the masochist body is far from ideal as it is seen as destructive and in psychoanalytical terms is harmful to the person pursuing it. Sadly, there are many Furies who are not happy with their Furry identity. In this way they enact a masochist BwO which is harmful to their identity and psychological wellbeing:

No one I know in real life knows I'm a furry. It would be social suicide for me to reveal it, so in an indirect way I guess I am stigmatized (Appendix B: p. 297)

Yes. I've been around people quite a few times insulting or making fun of the group who didn't know that I identify as a furry. It's sort of like it's the last thing it's still okay to make fun of. (Appendix B: p. 298)

Talking to people who aren't in the fandom about the fandom...there's always a layer of awkwardness in the conversation. The general public just doesn't know what the fandom is. There's no corporation or movie studio branding what being a 'Furry' means. There are entertaining parodies in today's media, but their viewers don't really know what's being exaggerated. How do you describe such a diverse fandom to someone outside the fandom when members of the fandom will debate what being a Furry means? (Appendix B: p. 299)

For Deleuze and Guattari the schizo body is that which escapes the Oedipal, in that it resists the ascription of traits imposed on it by the familial 'I'll no longer say daddy-mommy – and he keeps his word' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013b: p. 411). The schizo body is revolutionary as it goes in the other direction:

That of microphysics, of molecules insofar as they no longer obey the statistical laws: waves and corpuscles, flows and partial objects that are no longer dependent upon the large numbers; infinitesimal lines of escape, instead of the perspectives of the large aggregates.' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013b: p. 278).

The schizo body makes it possible for seemingly incompatible or perverse elements of an identity to co-exist much like what can happen in highly identified Furies. These are constantly in conflict with the notion of their human body, for some they reject this body and see themselves as something not entirely human (Gerbasi et Al., 2008; fig 2).

As one of the first things ascribed to BwO is 'races, cultures and their Gods' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 85) highly identified Furies construct their schizo body in direct opposition to this. Even those who do not identify themselves as 'not entirely' human and

thus accept their species for what it is think about their identity in a very posthuman and thus schizo bodied way. For many respondents to the research there was a very real awareness that often the body is ascribed traits that may not be complementary to the identity:

It's helped me be more open with myself. It's helped me be more accepting of other people and the 'mask' that we all wear from day to day. I've learned to really look at people's personalities, not just their features and surface traits (Appendix A: p. 274)

For a lot of respondents recognising the 'mask' that they were supposed to wear in ordinary society as opposed to their Furry body was a big issue. The mask is important when it comes to faciality with Deleuze and Guattari particularly conflating the schizo body with the rhizomatic processes of maintaining all the different faces that society makes people present; 'Schizos lose their sense of the face, their own and others, their sense of landscape and the sense of language and its dominant significations all the time' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 219). They point out that multiple sub-identities or masks are able to co-exist with the dominant identity that the person has to present. But, this creates the schizo body without organs in those with marginalized identities who have to then struggle internally over which masks to show and which to keep hidden. The Furry Fandom understands that their fandom's values in cultural capital is not the same as 'real-life' institutions and this conflict is fought internally on their BwO. This is one of the prime reasons why the Furies fit the concept of BwO as set out by Deleuze and Guattari: highly identified Furies are rejecting the subjectivation of imposed social constructs via their identity construction. It can be argued, then, that many who suffer from stigmatization are presenting a schizo body because they are unable to relate their body to their environment. This is due to the systems (whether it be institutional or societal) that insinuate they are not 'allowed' to be that person. The schizo body is present in those who are in stigmatized groups and once again it can be argued as to why Furies are representative of the schizo body. Frosh states 'using psychosis as a

metaphor for normal postmodern functioning produces a pessimistic reading' (Frosh, 1991: p. 133). However, for those who suffer from stigmatization due to this system, it is the only way that they *do* see it.

As we have established how stigmatization is created on a group level, it is important to understand how stigmatization occurs and presents itself on an individual level as well. Distinguishing between group and individual experiences has been stressed by Son Hing when researching the effects of physical health in stigmatized people. Son Hing notes weak correlations that have occurred between stigmatization and actual health only appear that way due to methodological failures in the studies conducted (Son Hing, 2012: p. 149). Son Hing discusses the difference between life expectancy between African-Americans and White Americans, with African-American males life expectancy being 6 years less than a white American male (Son Hing, 2012: p. 151). Sidanius and Pratto (2001) was noted by Son Hing as one of the few studies (at the time of writing in 2012) focusing on the connection between stigmatization and physical health. They theorised that because of the disadvantages that African-Americans face as a stigmatized group, they tend to have more stressful and dangerous employment and they have less access to quality health-care. They surmised that this comes from being stigmatized because of their race and that this eventually affects their physical health (Sidanius and Pratto, 2001).

Newer research on obesity and stigmatization seem to support Sidanius and Pratto and Son Hing that physical health can be affected by stigmatization. In recent studies, it was found that those who were stigmatized by people who believed that obesity was in that person's control and so 'their fault' led to the obese person having worse health. Being stigmatized led to the obese person having increased risk of depression, isolation, social withdrawal, negative body image, and, counterintuitively, to binge eat (Bannon et al, 2009: p. 118). This, in turn, affected the obese person's physical health due to side effects from binge-

eating and being depressed. This response may be linked to the fact that there is evidence that suggests in test conditions that when the participant is aware of the stereotype against them their performance is affected in a negative way – e.g. a woman is told she will not do well on a maths test simply because of the stereotype that ‘women are bad at maths’ or a black person is told they will not do well on an intelligence test because ‘blacks are less intelligent than whites’. This indicates that a participant gets so worried about confirming this stereotype that they perform badly due to the stress (Spencer et al., 1999; Steele and Aronson, 1995; Hess et al., 2003). It is not, then, surprising that an obese person in the Bannon et al. study reaffirms this stereotype that obese people binge eat.

There has also been work on how individuals can combat these negative effects of stigmatization, investigating ways to strengthen their own identity and increase their mental wellbeing. This is done by changing the context of their ‘negative’ stereotype and how it relates to their individual identity. The paper ‘Coming Out in the Gay World’ (1975) was one of the first to explore how people transition into a homosexual identity rather than previous works which focused on the ‘learning’ of homosexual behaviour (Dank, 1975: p. 215). Written at a time where homosexuality had been decriminalised in Britain for less than a decade, he noticed that to improve their wellbeing many gay men had to recontextualise certain words. They did this by placing themselves in a context where being a gay man was not a negative trait in what he called ‘neutralization’:

The meaning of the category must be changed because the subject learned the negative stereotype of the homosexual held by most heterosexuals, and he knows that he is no queer, pervert, dirty old man, and so on. (Dank, 1975: p. 224).

By doing this he theorised that:

‘I am homosexual, not mentally ill’. The cognitive category of homosexual now becomes socially acceptable, and the subject can place himself in that category and yet preserve a sense of his self-esteem or self-worth. (Dank, 1975, p. 225).

This neutralization can mean, however, that the homosexual (or other stigmatized group individual) no longer identifies with their group for self-preservation reasons. In a study by Major et al. (2003) it was found that Latino Americans who had a strong ingroup identification were more depressed than Latinos who did not identify much with the community. In that study, Latinos who found prejudice towards Latinos worrying but did not have a strong ingroup identification were able to psychologically separate themselves from the ‘Latinos who were being discriminated against’. This mind-set can have negative effects when an individual in a stigmatized group begins to blame or scapegoat other members of their group (Smelser, 2004: p. 45-47). This has also been found in the Furry Fandom where those who see it as a hobby can become aggressive towards those who see it as part of their identity. Stanfill saw this trend when investigating other fandoms:

Members of non-normative groups will subdivide their group into (a) themselves and others like them, whom they classify as normal, and (b) a deviant subgroup they declare actually deserves the stigma or pathologization to which the entire group is subjected (Stanfill, 2013a: p. 121)

In the Furry Fandom this group split may be because of the difference in experience between different Furies. As we know construction of identity is often learned ‘when socio-cultural activities are significant to the identities of those involved, that is, when they resonate with the living dimension of actual experience (what is relevant for whom).’ (Perrotta, 2009: p. 24). Some highly identified Furies feel that they have a real spiritual connection with animals, especially Therians who sometimes believe that they have an animal soul in the

wrong body (Grivell et al. 2014: p. 119). Less identified Furies do not share this lived experience.

Studying stigmatization can be a difficult subject due to not only the differences that are found on a macro to micro scale but also the widely varying coping mechanisms that are found. Although this may seem that this is not a valuable research area I would agree with Son Hing that ‘such a conclusion would be erroneous’ (Son Hing, 2012: p. 153). This is because weak effects over time can create and influence larger phenomenon. The following section will thus discuss Furies as both a group and on an individual level because by looking at both frameworks we can get a clearer picture of why Furies feel stigmatized.

### **4.3 Furies and Stigmatization**

One of the most prolific cases on Furry Fandom presentation in popular media has been the *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* episode entitled ‘Fur and Loathing in Las Vegas’ which was first broadcast on October 30, 2003. Ahead of the airing of the episode producers of the show approached a Furry named Sabre Fox who was then head of the Southern California Furies Yahoo network. After being shown a copy of the script Sabre Fox expressed his concerns that Furry conventions were just being portrayed as sex orgies in animal costumes and nothing more. Sabre Fox was told by the producers that the show would go on with no changes to the original script. For the members of the Furry Fandom, the release of an episode which made them look like sexual deviants made them feel stigmatized and laughed at by the outside community.



Fig. 18

The episode begins with a woman driving late at night and having to swerve to avoid a Furry dressed in a full racoon fur suit and ultimately driving head-on into a semi-truck. The CSI team arrive to investigate the dead woman's accident and find animal footprints leading to the corpse of the Furry. When the pathologist arrives he seems disturbed at the dead racoon character due to his childhood love of a cartoon racoon called 'Stripey'. This seems inconsistent with a show which often celebrates lack of emotion as scientific distance.

Presentation of the Furry (it is late in the episode when we find out his name is Robert Pitt) as the 'other' is consistent throughout the episode. Character Warrick Brown (Gary Dourdan) states to Catherine Willows (Marg Helgenberger) that 'If I had to walk around like Rocky Racoon, I'd be drinking too'. When it turns out the man had not been drinking the pathologist casually states that 'your manimal died sober'. The show devalues the Furry further by adhering to stereotypes commonly associated with the Furry Fandom. For example, Gerbasi et al. argue that a prevailing stereotype for Furrries is that 'Furrries are employed in computer or science fields' (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 204). Robert Pitt was a computer programmer and also filled the 'nerdy fan' trope of having no family or friends.

The producers show that they have done no real research on what fursuits look like as one scene had an ape suit (Furrries are very rarely primates) and many of the costumes look like Halloween costumes rather than fursuits. The only character who defends the fandom is Gil Grissom (William Petersen) likening their involvement with the fandom to the Jungian

archetype, or like the connection that Native Americans have with spirit animals.<sup>30</sup> At one point, Catherine Willows, after finding semen on a fursuit that has been seized as evidence states: ‘but humping in an animal suit? Whatever happened to normal sex?’. Grissom replies with the Freudian notion that no sex is the only unnatural state of sexual arousal, once again being the only character not to ‘other’ the Furies.

The episode has a preoccupation with Furies going to conventions for the purposes of sexual gratification as when they first walk into PAFcon (Plushies and Furies Convention) they walk into a room full of people scratching each other sexually, known as scritchng. They later see one of their suspects, a cat called Sexy, in a fashion show wearing a skimpy bikini over their fursuit. A later scene reveals that Sexy the cat is actually Bud, a balding middle-aged man who admits that ‘If I don’t have my costume on, I pretty much can’t get yiffed’ – This establishes Furies as being deviant with the episode inferring that Furies are unable to get sex from ‘real’ people.



Fig. 19

The conclusion of the episode is that Robert Pitt’s death was actually a tragic accident and that while he was being sick at the side of the road, he was shot by a ranger who thought he was a coyote. This led to him running out into the road for help and getting hit by the woman in her car. When discussing the unlikelihood of these events occurring with Captain Jim

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<sup>30</sup> This is less about writers trying to be sympathetic to Furies in their subject matter but more to do with the conventions of CSI in general. A common theme is that the head scientist is old, male and white and shows more objectivity than other team members (Jenner, 2016).

Brass (Paul Guilfoyle), the fate of the ranger is also spoken of: there will be no charges brought against him even though he killed a human being.

After the show, a range of points were raised inside the Furry Fandom. Some Furies were amused by the portrayal or found it insulting or misinformed enough for them to not be bothered by the content. KinkyTurtle wrote:

Perhaps the silliest thing about the show was the PAFcon schedule as it was full of lectures rather than events that usually take place at a convention like art panels; They also made the point that providing breakfast, lunch and dinner for all attendees was a bit of a stretch! (LiveJournal, 2003).

There were also those who did not blame the producers for wanting to ‘sex up’ the action for a better story with popular Furry novelist and artist Ursula Vernon stating:

I really don't blame the show for taking the weirdest possible angle, because if I were writing the show, I'd do it too. Why? Because a bunch of weirdos in costumes writhing around to porno music is waaaaay better for the ratings than an hour of slightly geeky people in T-shirts with wolves on them arguing about whether the Lion King was a better movie than Watership Down (WikiFur, 2017).

The perceived damage of the episode is still mentioned by Furies today. In an interview with one respondent, he mentioned the show specifically as the beginning of media attention on the Furry Fandom:

Respondent: [00:41:32] But, the whole, sort of, media attention on the Furry Fandom started some time in the 1990s, early 2000.

Interviewer: [00:41:41] Yes.

Respondent: [00:41:41] One of the earliest ones, there was an episode of *CSI*.

Interviewer: [00:41:45] Fur and Loathing, yes, I've seen it.

Respondent: [00:41:48] And that, sort of ... and, there were all sorts of things around that point, there was a couple of other shows that went into it. And, all of them portrayed us as entirely sexual deviants.

Interviewer: [00:42:01] Yes.

Respondent: [00:42:04] And, that's a lot of the media. The thing is, with media, harassing normal people who are just enjoying interests, doesn't sell newspapers or make good viewing.

Interviewer: [00:42:17] Yes.

Respondent: [00:42:18] So, they want us to be freaks, and so they will only report on us being freaks. The people who are Furies who aren't ... who are relatively hostile to Furies actually displaying this, are people who are desperately trying to not give the media any fodder against us. (Appendix B: p. 286)

This episode of *CSI* is still being mentioned 14 years after it aired because it had a profound effect on the way that Furies perceived the media and outsiders' view upon them.

As the IARP almost exclusively speak about the highly identified Furies they also see it akin to 'coming out'. Due to this, looking at how non-heteronormative identities can be stigmatized and its effects on individuals can be useful, but only when discussing those who are highly identified Furies. Thus, it was deemed important to investigate whether those who are less identified with the Furry Fandom feel stigmatized at a similar level.

From research into sexual and gender minorities by Vicky M. Mays and Susan D. Cochran, those who are subjected to stigmatization due to their non-heteronormative sexuality or non-cis gender have an increased vulnerability to psychological co-morbidities (2001). There have been several studies to suggest that the homosexual community suffers under the minority stress model (APA, 2012) which suggests that, due to homophobia, gay men suffer greater physical and mental health problems than straight men (Williams et al., p.

2003). One of these stress factors that has been investigated by the IARP is the use of concealment strategies, where a Furry has concealed their identity as a Furry to avoid the negative stigma that may come with being part of that group. Concealment strategies have been found to be harmful among gay men concealing their HIV positive status due to constant self-monitoring by the individual to stop themselves being exposed (Pachankis, 2007). The IARP found that ‘approximately 50% of Furies believe that their being Furry was not a choice’ (Plante et al., 2015). In this research they set out to discover whether these groups adopted concealment strategies. Their research found that many Furies would endorse the use of identity concealment ‘to cope with anticipated stigmatization due to perceived intergroup status differences’ (Plante et al., 2014: p. 12). They found that in many cases this affected the Furies’ self-esteem (Plante et al., 2014: p. 12) and thus could put Furies using concealment strategies in the same group as those suffering under the minority stress model. In this research when asked ‘do you feel stigmatized online?’ and ‘do you feel stigmatized offline?’ many respondents who said they did not feel stigmatized personally qualified that statement with not disclosing their Furry status to anyone (fig. 20). Thus, in this research, it was suggested that concealment strategies are relatively common within the Furry Fandom as also found in the work by the IARP.

However, a gap in research was found when it came to investigating stigmatization in those who self-identified as Furies but did not have fursonas. It was investigated in this thesis as to whether stigmatization within the fandom changes with how heavily identified a Furry is. It was hypothesised that Furies with no fursona (and so less of an identification with the fandom) would feel less stigmatized than highly identified Furies. The data revealed (fig. 20) that those with no fursona did feel less stigmatized online and offline compared to Furies with one fursona or two or more fursonas. Interestingly, Furies with two or more fursonas did not experience stigmatization as strongly as those with one fursona. This may be

because, as noted by the IARP, Furries use their fursonas as authenticating an ‘idealised’ self; it could be argued that those with two or more fursonas do not feel the same levels of attachment to their fursonas as Furries who focus on having one fursona. Although the data does not reach a level of statistical significance between the no fursona group compared to the one or two or more fursona group it suggests an interesting trend which could be explored further in later research.

Table: Showing how stigmatized Furries with different numbers of fursonas feel online and offline

<b>Number of fursonas</b>	<b>% stigmatized online</b>	<b>% stigmatized offline</b>	<b>non-disclosure or other (% of total responses)</b>
0	48.36%	42.00%	19.27%
1	57.94%	50.00%	13.25%
2+	56.99%	45.88%	11.44%

Fig 20

Many try to conceal their status of being in a minority group and often these minorities will identify with other group members, usually for support. The IARP found ‘that highly identified Furries are motivated to strongly identify with the Furry Fandom because the group affords members the psychological needs of belonging and intergroup distinctiveness’ (Reysen et al., 2016: p. 641). This phenomenon, even though it seems counterintuitive to want to identify with a group that you do not want others to know you are a part of, can produce positive effects. In highly identified Furries it was found that they were also more likely to endorse essentialist beliefs about their fandom, especially when compared to anime fans (Plante et al., 2015: p. 365). Having a group to fall back on is highly important for many minorities as studies have found that without this support network they may experience negative effects due to social and emotional isolation (Grossman and Kerner, 1998; McNicholas, 2002).

For some Furries, the frustration about stigmatization comes because they feel that people are basing their opinions on Furries on flawed stereotypes that they received from the media:

The hate really isn't as bad as a lot of people make it out to be. The problem is when someone is not fully/correctly educated on it. For instance: *CSI & 1000 ways to die*: fuck those "Furry" representations.<sup>31</sup> Sure, there are people who look at the porn (sure, I have, too), but it's really not about that at all, that's just a side effect of any fandom, really (there's a reason rule34 holds so well). I really hate it when something bad happens to a furry, and nobody really takes it seriously (see: MFF2014 evacuation. Plenty of news anchors were just laughing at the fact that someone had tried to kill, or at least seriously injure, a whole bunch of people. But other than that event: good luck finding reputable sources on other furcon evacuations. Sometimes it's just a vine, or a short youtube clip, or a footnote in a blogpost.). We're basically seen as inhuman because either: it's not something they see everyday, so they're just kinda shocked, or they equate Furry to bestiality. You basically have to either have thick skin, or be good at building a big 'ol metaphorical pillow fort around yourself to last in this fandom. (Appendix B: p. 285)

Having to create 'a thick skin' implies that there are elements of the Furry identity that they feel they are supposed to be ashamed of. For Eve Sedgwick this can be one of the defining problems of identity construction as a minority (Sedgwick, 2003: p. 64). She suggests that it is often paranoia about deviant activity from outsiders that causes problems, 'simply put, paranoia tends to be contagious' (Sedgwick, 2003: p. 126). Due to the stereotypes put out by the examples as mentioned by the Furry respondent above (*CSI* and *1000 ways to die* [Spike 2008-2012]) Furies may feel that paranoia has been induced about their identity by the media. For McCracken:

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<sup>31</sup> *1000 Ways to Die* (Spike, 2008-2012) showed an episode (1/4) where a man dies after coming across a Furry 'orgy'. He tried to join into the orgy, but was rebuffed, and then mistook a nearby brown bear as a human participant; he was then mauled to death.

In a world that conforms to the theories of George Herbert Mead, identity is ratified by what the individual sees in the mirror of other peoples' reactions. The individual knows herself as she is known by others. (McCracken, 2008: p. 282)

So for Furies who see the horror of those who have watched the *CSI* episode dedicated to the deviancy of the Furry Fandom; or those who have read a *Vanity Fair* piece which labelled all Furies as nerds with glasses who were molested (Gurley, 2003), it is unsurprising that many Furies then look at their own identity as something to be concealed. There was a considerable proportion of respondents (83%) who felt that the Furies had been portrayed negatively by the media (fig 21) which echoes sentiments in other studies (Plante et al., 2014; Gerbasi et al., 2008).

Table: Showing responses of Furies to 'Do you feel Furies are portrayed negatively in the media?'

	Responses	
Yes	749	83%
No	121	13%
Unsure	36	4%
Total Respondents	906	

Fig. 21

In Roberts et al. (2015a), many of their participants argued they would be uncomfortable with raising their status with a clinician. In this thesis data, there were 23% of respondents who would not disclose their Furry Fandom participation to anyone and only 20% would to their family, most choosing to disclose their Furry identity only to close friends (fig. 22).

Table: Which of these non-Furry groups are you happy to be openly Furry Around? <sup>32</sup>

	Responses	
Close Friends	585	65%
People I have met on Social Media	322	36%
None of these	205	23%
Family	182	20%
People I haven't met on Social Media	162	18%
Acquaintances	141	16%
Random people on the street	79	9%
Other	62	7%

Fig. 22

This is in line with IARP research which has suggested that up to 90% of Furies selectively disclose their identity due to fear of stigmatization (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 47). For Roberts et al., this can cause psychological trauma:

Furies are in the perilous position of having their interests form an integral part of their identity while simultaneously experiencing stigmatization from the world around them. For many, the fandom is their only source of social interaction and social support (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 49)

As well as asking specific questions about perceived negative media attention this research also aimed to look at whether there was a difference between online and offline stigmatization. It was expected that Furies who were open about being a Furry in the offline world would have experienced more stigmatization. This is because much of the general public only know what they have seen on television (Soh and Cantor, 2015: p. 1) when asked about who and what Furies are.

Interestingly, respondents in this study felt that they were more likely to feel stigmatized in the online space, often mentioning harsh backlashes to their online Furry avatars. This may be because several of the respondents mentioned that they had felt a lot of stigmatization online by trolls and anti-Furry forums like r/Furryhate- this led to some even

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<sup>32</sup> Respondents were able to use multiple choice to click as many groups as they felt they were happy disclosing their status with, hence, there are more answers listed in the table than respondents in the study.

creating alternative accounts for Furry use and non-Furry use. Data results were at odds with my hypothesis, which presumed that there would be a much higher rate of stigmatization offline and much less online. This was due, in part, to other studies that have been conducted by the IARP showing more stigmatization offline. This research then, suggests that Furies use specific sites to disclose their Furry identity. In keeping with much internet research which shows that people cultivate certain ‘online personas’ dependent on what site they are on. Long and Chen (2007) suggest that people often choose to disclose their identities in environments where they will receive a positive reaction. It is unsurprising that many of the respondents in this thesis who said they did not feel stigmatized online had further clarified that this was due to non-disclosure; they were only disclosing their Furry status on Furry websites and using non-Furry avatars on other sites (fig. 20). This phenomenon of fearing stigmatization in the online rather than the offline space is not unique to the Furies but has also occurred in another fandom. In research done at the Chicago Tardis Convention (*Doctor Who*), the researchers found that much fan activity was still taking place in person ‘partly out of a fear, it seems, of being exposed to ridicule or mockery online’ (Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 65).

Furies are still facing stigmatization online, and this is broadcast to others when the online dissemination of ‘The Geek Hierarchy’ which put Furies squarely at the bottom (Coppa, 2014b: p. 224; fig. 23). As Baym points out, hierarchies that form online usually end up with one group having ‘more say than others in creating and regulating behavioural standards’ (Baym, 2015: p. 90). As Furies are at the bottom of the geek hierarchy it has made stigmatizing Furies an acceptable behaviour by other groups. Research has been done to show how good behaviour can gain a person bridging or social/cultural capital in a group. But, it can also mean that capital is gained by trolling or bullying or ‘flaming’ in ‘the correct way’ (Baym, 2015: p. 92). In the One Direction fandom, for instance online, threats to those



## 4.4 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to analyse previous research by the IARP which has predominantly labelled the Furry community as a whole as stigmatized. Papers such as Roberts et al. (2015a) present Furies as a homogenous group who all feel stigmatization at the same level whereas this thesis' research would suggest is not the case. The main reason for this is that much of their data has been taken from fan conventions and Furry dedicated websites. This means it is more likely that highly-identified Furies will attend due to monetary reasons, and from websites that are aimed specifically at Furies, with those who see it as a hobby visiting on a less regular basis.

There is no doubt that Furies are a stigmatized group, as shown by reactions to them in the online space from trolls and the portrayals of them in the media such as 'Fur and Loathing in Las Vegas'. However, labelling all Furies as stigmatized is problematic as different levels of identification can affect the levels to which a fan can feel stigma; 'a strong sense of group identification can, in some ways, make people more vulnerable to stigmatization' (Major et al., 2003: p. 155). Highly identified Furies may perceive stigmatization against Furies as more damaging to their wellbeing than those who see it as a hobby. Going back to research by Dank on homosexuality in which he states that a gay man 'knows that he is no queer, pervert, dirty old man, and so on' (Dank, 1975: p. 224), echoes the way that many less highly identified Furies place themselves cognitively in the community. For example, 'As I am not a Furry who (going from the stereotypes) is sexually deviant, interested in bestiality etc. then I am not like *those* Furies'. Following on, those who position themselves as 'a hobbyist' protect themselves from stigmatization because they perceive that it is not their version of 'Furry' that is being stigmatized. This may help explain why those who view the Furry Fandom as a hobby feel less stigmatized in this research compared to that of the IARP.

Highly identified Furies are suffering from stigmatization as suggested by the IARP as they are flitting between the masochist body and schizo body more than the other forms of BwO. That is not to say that the other forms of BwO do not affect the Furry Fandom but that the schizo and masochist body were the most common modes. 'BwO is what remains when you take everything away. What you take away is precisely the phantasy, and significances and subjectifications as a whole' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 174). If you strip a Furry out of their fursuits and fursonas and are just presented with the naked body they become simply that, a body. Their identity of the Furry cannot be represented through the simple means of their actions or words which come from the body but from their identifying of Furry signifiers. 'There is nothing more useless than an organ' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 174) as much as a Furry is nothing when they are a singular entity, as with other fandoms, they only become a fan through looking at the interactions between other fans. The BwO:

Is not the proof of an original nothingness, nor is it what remains of a lost totality. Above all, it is not a projection; it has nothing whatsoever to do with the body itself, or with an image of the body. It is the body without an image. (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 19).

However, the limitation with this study is that, as with other studies on stigmatization, 'when it is detected, devalued group members are often reticent to report that they have been victims of stigmatization' (Crocker et al., 1998). Some of the Furies in this study, although it was anonymously collected data, may feel that they did not want to report stigmatization as they did not want to reinforce negative stereotypes from outside society. Also, because many complained about others causing 'drama' (Appendix A: p. 273) they may have not want to be seen as 'causing drama' themselves. 'Drama' was often quoted in relation to those moaning about being stigmatized in response to the question 'Is there anything you dislike about the Furry Fandom?':

There is plenty of 'Furry' drama that occurs in this fandom. Some people are extremely sensitive and look to bend words to start drama (Appendix B: p. 287)

The people who use slang like "Fursecution" and all that, also the drama that many try to cause. (Appendix B: p. 280)

Maybe we should try to learn to be better at handling drama or adversity from others outside of the group... (Appendix B: p. 288)

We should not ignore, however, that there are a proportion of Furies who still feel stigmatized. Online abuse is rife with specific Furry hate groups. It is unsurprising that data from this study concluded that many Furies now feel more stigmatized online than they do in the offline environment, the opposite of the hypothesis of this study. Many of the stories focused on anonymous abuse they would get for simply having a 'Furry' looking avatar. In a question about whether they had suffered any online stigmatization one respondent replied:

I hadn't until I opened a twitter account for my art. I wanted to have a more personal space to "reveal" the artist behind the art. Less than 20 posts to the account when I posted some questions and words of encouragement when FurAffinity's website went down. Within 24 hours someone without my consent stuck me into a Twitter "list" (no idea what that is) that was labeled as "animal rapists." I'm a somewhat devout buddhist that will take the time to stop talking to move an earthworm off pavement or asphalt onto grass or dirt. It hurt to be thrown into the fray JUST because my twitter avatar was my fursona - an art piece I made myself, and just because I posted positive words on a furry associated twitter account. It also set off feelings and memories of my own childhood sexual assault that I had thought I moved past and gotten over. Since then I've made my twitter account a little more private but, I do try to market myself as an artist so I can't exactly lock everyone out. (Appendix B: p. 291)

Unfortunately for the Furry Fandom, whether an individual is highly identified or not, they are still being stigmatized for their interests. For highly identified Furies who are already unhappy with the prospect of being 100% human (and thus the prospect of being posthuman or Therian) this can have a detrimental effect on their self-esteem and thus their identity construction. Researchers should be aware in future research that, as with many other fandoms, Furies are subject to a geek hierarchy. This means that those at the bottom (hobbyists) will have different experiences when it comes to stigmatization which thus far had not been addressed.

## 5.Species Choice in the Furry Fandom

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the current gap in academic literature surrounding species choice when choosing a fursona. The IARP have put forward evidence that fursonas are incredibly popular throughout the fandom but they have not touched upon the reasons why certain animals are chosen. This is even though they have acknowledged that some species, especially primates, are very rare as fursonas. In this study it was found that, consistent with data obtained by the IARP, canines are the most popular species for fursona use within the fandom (fig. 25). The next most popular category was to have a species mix but even in this instance out of 133 mixed species fursonas, 20 were canine mixes, 15 were canine and feline mixes and 44 were canine and other species mixes.

Table: Different Fursona Species

Species	Respondents
Canines	280
Multiple Fursonas	133
Felines	87
Mythical/Fictional Creatures	83
Small Mammals	72
Large Mammals	25
Winged Animals	21
Reptiles	13

fig. 25

This thesis takes a posthuman non-speciesist approach to animals. There have been arguments between academics regarding what point animals can be considered ethical subjects (Calarco, 2008: p. 131). This leads to questioning in what way we define animal welfare when considering Jeremy Bentham's contentious question of not 'can they talk?' but 'can they suffer?' (Bentham, 1781). For Emmanuel Levinas, Immanuel Kant and Martin Heidegger arguing the question of the animal is 'what makes us human?' by comparing our relations to animals in a hierarchy. This thesis differs and looks at how the interplay between

species makes us fellow creatures, and that human identity is not superior but influenced by the play of human-nonhuman relationships. This thesis research argues that a prime example of this is the Furry Fandom. The work in this thesis is placed in a posthuman animal studies context as seen (and using work from) Adams, Haraway, Cary Wolfe, Calarco, MacCormack and others.

Calarco makes the point arguing that if ‘animal life’, including humans, is created by multiplicities and relations, then how is it that many humans argue that they are above these relationships that effect every other form of life? (Calarco, 2008: p. 142). For Furies, it will be argued that species choice is, in fact, influenced by myth, and that this myth has been passed on within the fandom through the online institution. Furies’ opinions on popular fursona species did not simply come out of autopoiesis<sup>33</sup> because myths understandings of animal species are anthropocentric. This chapter makes a point to be aware of the anthropocentric use of myth when discussing ‘the animal’ and argues two main points:

1. Myth itself is not sentient, any negative connotations with myth have been created by those who have ‘passed on’ the myth. Therefore, any bad myths in the Furry Fandom have been created by the fandom itself.
2. Myth has helped to create popular species choices within the fandom: that is not to say that members proclaim ‘bad species’ but it has influenced why the top fursona species have been chosen.

## **5.2 Theoretical Basis**

It can be easy for some people to disregard the importance of myths as in many instances they can seem devoid from reality, but as Lévi-Strauss once noted ‘nevertheless, they seem to reappear all over the world’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: p. 8-9). Lévi-Strauss noted that some

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<sup>33</sup> Autopoiesis is used here in the philosophical sense in that opinions are not ‘self-making’ and influenced by outside forces rather than the literal biological process in living cells being self-sustaining (Haraway, 2008: p. 32).

academics claim that myth ‘can only be interpreted and understood in the framework of the culture of that given population’ (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: p. 22). However, this research subscribes to theories of transnationalism in that ‘social structure is becoming transnationalized; an epistemic shift is required in concurrence with this ontological shift.’ (Robinson, 1998). This research contains data from participants in over 10 different countries. As suggested in chapter three, the Furry Fandom is an institution which operates online. The importance of the internet in creating a ‘global self’ as mentioned by McCracken (2008) shows that myth can in fact be shared and disseminated online; ‘the internet in particular has contributed to specific ways of “becoming a public” of creating collectivities’ (Aouragh, 2011: p. 28). This research is confident that although the participants do not share a geographical space they have shared Furry myths in the online space. As many of the respondents came from Western Countries these countries often share very similar myths in regard to animals. The stork for example, was a symbol of blessing in Roman times, in Italy they are considered harbingers of good fortune, in Germany and in the Netherlands a stork resting on a family home is viewed as a good omen. The Raven also shares a similar myth across national lines in that in Swedish and Germanic folklore there are considered representations of damned or lost souls, and in English, Celtic and Scandinavian traditions are symbolic of death.

Heidegger claims that, despite certain anatomical similarities between human and animal, we are made of a different ‘essence’ and so cannot be compared when it comes to human-nonhuman relationships (Heidegger, 1996: p. 43). This research takes a non-speciesist approach and uses MacCormack’s definition of animality and the word ‘animal’ in that it is: ‘nothing more than organic life which is shared between myriad organisms, their expressions and affects’ (MacCormack, 2014: p. 1). This is because the flaw in work by the likes of Heidegger and Levinas is that their distinction between human and animal is not always

clear. Levinas becomes problematic when he talks about the empathy he received from a dog called Bobby while he was in a prisoner of war camp. This dog could not speak but treated him like a human being rather than the ‘subhuman beings’ he was made out to be by the German army officers (Levinas, 1990: p. 152). The fact that Levinas remembered the ethical treatment that Bobby the dog gave him and was inspired to write about his encounter surely shows how important the interaction between animals can be. Bobby, despite being perceived as a ‘lowly’ dog, created a multiplicity for Levinas where his (Bobby’s) reaction to Levinas was to humanize him once again from being the subhuman the German’s had created. This would seem to undermine Levinas’ view of animals not being worth much (as evaluated by Wolfe, 2003: p. 18) even though this dog managed to make him human again. This interaction, where Levinas illustrates the importance of Bobby humanising him but then dismissing him as a mere animal, is why a posthumanist perspective is a better theoretical framework to work from.

For Barthes ‘myth is a system of communication’ (Barthes, 1957: p. 131) and the Furies use different animal species as a conduit for these traits; without myth to tell a Furry ‘a lion is brave’ or, to paraphrase a well-known cartoon advertisement that ‘a tiger is great’, they would have limited reasons for choosing species. Assigning animals important roles in interpretation across the centuries with animals appearing in dreams, symbolism, and poetry across cultures has been pointed out by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 275). They use three main archetypes when discussing the question of the animal: Oedipal, state (also referred to as the Jungian archetype) and demonic. Oedipal animals are the animal which have become too anthropomorphised (specifically as a substitute child) in animal studies, in its ‘tendency to remain too close to animal rights discourse with its liberal, Oedipal vision of the subject’ (Bednarek, 2017: p. 52). The Oedipal animal is to be resisted in theory as it often imposes a familial hierarchy on certain animal species (Gardner and MacCormack,

2017: p. 3). Instead, using the Jungian and demonic archetype theories utilised by Deleuze and Guattari becomes a more appropriate way to resist this oedipal reading in animal studies. In their discussions on ‘becomings’ in a *Thousand Plateaus*: They are described as the ‘process of mimesis [that] brings nature and culture together’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 275), which is an excellent place to start when first exploring the ascribed traits of animals. The Jungian and demonic archetypes are important to consider with the highly identified Furies in the Furry Fandom as they suggest becoming rather than *imitation* of the literal animal – resisting the Oedipal structure and thus launching a becoming-animal.

A human will see a lion, a predator, almost silently sneak up on a gazelle before it strikes it down. The human seeing this anthropomorphises the animal to explain the chain of events - the lion ‘sneaking’ up on the gazelle as cunning and the killing of the gazelle as powerful, traits that many humans would like to emulate themselves. The proposition as to whether the lion knew it was being ‘cunning’ by sneaking up on the gazelle does not matter as there is no true or false interpretation of the Jungian archetype. Therefore, it does not matter whether an animal ‘truly’ has the traits that have been ascribed it by humans as the signification of the character trait ascribed becomes more important than mere truth. Heidegger sees animals in a restricted sense of ‘us’ and ‘them’ which held back his analysis of the animal. By seeing the animal in distinct categories or distinct ‘essences’ he does not understand that it is not resemblance that should be interpreted but the experience, or for Deleuze and Guattari, the intensities by which they live. MacCormack writes: ‘Commonality can be interpreted not as resemblance but by an openness of each element to experiencing the other as self and thus self as other, “now rejecting this way of defining by kind and specific difference”’ (MacCormack, 2014: p. 2). Again, to ensure as not to restrict the analysis of Furry myth into a moral duality seeing nonhumans as more ‘tactical’ in categorization is necessary (MacCormack, 2014: p. 6). It can be argued that there is no reason why animals

could not have both negative and positive traits, because ultimately these are human perceptions which do not represent the 'real' animal. And, although animals are signified sometimes in a negative way in myth that does not necessarily transcribe over into people's real-life knowledge and feelings on the animal. It could simply be a useful narrative tool.

This does, however, mean that different species have been given varying levels of importance depending on which culture (geographically) the myth has appeared in. For Lévi Strauss it was extremely important to look at why these differences occur between similar myths (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: p. 31) as it gives an indication to why certain animals are higher in this speciesist hierarchy. For example, in *Structural Anthropology 2* (Lévi-Strauss, 1976) the function and nature of an owl changes from clan to clan in old Native American myth. One myth describing the owl as a ruthless killer who stole children to eat them compared to a different tribe's myth which had the owl stealing women in which to make them his wife. Haraway favours challenging the 'existing ontological order' (Maher, 2014: p. 26). Though when it comes to the question of the animal some scholars suggest she does not go far enough (Maher, 2014: p. 28). It can be argued that for Haraway, companion animals tend to get a favoured status, thus remaining oedipalised, that of comfort and sitting at their masters' feet rather than species on a par with humanity. Haraway is important for this thesis as in her most recent book (*Staying with the Trouble*) she invokes the image of Cthulhu and its tentacles to describe the ways in which we, humans and non-humans, are all connected:

The tentacular are also nets and networks, IT critters, in and out of clouds. Tentacularity is about life lived along lines – and such a wealth of lines – not at points, not in spheres “The inhabitants of the world, creatures of all kinds, human and non-human, are wayfarers”; generations are like “a series of interlaced trails”. String figures all. (Haraway, 2016: p. 32).

She invokes the idea of string figure games and their similarities with tentacles, and how the string figures become more and more connected and mixed up the longer the game continues. Using Haraway and tentacular ideas is important for myth as it represents a posthuman framework for how myth transfuses across these lines – not being influenced from a human/non-human hierarchy as previous theories suggest. For the Furry Fandom this is important because they do not have a set media text and so it is not one myth (or canon) being passed between Furies when it comes to species choice but myths shifting from all different areas.

### 5.3 Furry Myth-Making in Popular Media

Although Furies do not share a singular set media text then, there are items in popular media which are very popular in the Furry Fandom due to being perceived as sharing similar qualities with the fandom, such as style of artwork. One is the film *Zootopia* (Bryon Howard, 2016), (also known as *Zootropolis*) and this provides an excellent example of where Furry myth-making occurs.<sup>34</sup>

*Zootopia* is a typical example of animals being anthropomorphised with qualities that have attributed to them from human myth. The first portrayal of crime in the movie is when Judy Hopps witnesses a con pulled by Nick Wilde and his sidekick Finnicks (a Fennec fox). It is no coincidence that these species have been chosen as foxes have long been ascribed the trait of ‘cunning’ and being a trickster in tales such as *The Fox and the Stork* (Aesop, 620BCE) or *Reynard the Fox* (De Saint Cloud, 1170).<sup>35</sup> It would make little sense for Nick Wilde to have been, for example, a donkey which in many stories are portrayed as stubborn

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<sup>34</sup> Synopsis: *Zootopia* is an anthropomorphic film starring a bunny called Judy Hopps who wishes to become the first rabbit police officer in the capital city of Zootopia. Judy struggles to be accepted by other members of the police force as they are much bigger and ‘stronger’ animals such as bison, cheetahs and elephants. While on duty she meets a con artist fox called Nick Wilde who hustles her, she later relies on his help to solve 14 missing animal cases.

<sup>35</sup> There are many versions of *Reynard the Fox* but the reference used is of the oldest and most extensive first use of the character.

or stupid – Aesop’s *The Ass in the Lion’s Skin* (620BCE) portrayed donkeys as stupid and so did Shakespeare’s popularisation of the donkey as an ‘ass’ in *A Midsummer’s Night Dream* (1595/96). The use of a donkey as a con man would not have fit in with popular representations of the anthropomorphic donkey and so it would be seen to not have the ‘finesse’ to orchestrate such a clever crime.

This hierarchy is seen in *Zootopia*, too, firstly as a narrative tool. All the animals portrayed in the movie are strictly carnivore or herbivore (no animals which are omnivore in nature) with a clear animated (and narrative) line with animals who are either predator or prey. Secondly, and the most striking point, is that there are no primates in the movie at all. When director Byron Howard was asked about what animals would be appearing in the movie, he stated:

One mammal you won’t see is simians or apes. Apes are too much like us, so as soon as we put them in the story, everyone goes, oh the ape is the smart one. And we wanted all these mammals to seem like more or less equal intelligence, more or less.  
(Frost, J., 2016)

As mentioned in this chapter’s introduction, there has never been an explanation as to why apes have not been popular when it comes to anthropomorphisation within the Furry Fandom. It can be suggested that the similarity between humans and apes is likely to be one of the reasons for this. For Deleuze, signification often creates what he calls ‘the event’ and this piece is created from the ‘results from bodies, their mixtures, their actions, and their passions’ (Deleuze, 2004: p. 209). Therefore, it could be harder to introduce apes into the Furry Fandom myth making as the groups most involved in the fandom have created their preferred styles of anthropomorphisation from interactions within their own culture, a culture which is lacking in myths of apes (most Furies in studies so far come from Western countries with little to no ape population). As shown in *Zootopia*, myth is biased in that it has prescribed

value on certain species over others. That is not to say that species cannot be positively represented, *Gorillas in the Mist* (Michael Apted, 1988) won 5 academy awards for its sympathetic portrayal of gorillas and how they should be protected. However, these gorillas were not anthropomorphised and the film was meant to shed a positive light on real life conservation. In recent years, the most popular and commercially successful representations of ape have been in the *Planet of the Apes* franchise (Arthur P. Jacobs, 1968-1973) with a successful remake (Tim Burton, 2001) and then a complete reboot of the franchise in 2011 with *Rise of the Planet of the Apes* (Rupert Wyatt, 2011), *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2014), and *War of the Planet of the Apes* (Matt Reeves, 2017). Although these films were popular among viewers they do not shed a good light on primates. The film narrative shows the apes destroying most of the human population via simian flu and then later waging war on the last remaining humans. Current myths surrounding primates in western countries usually take a darker turn when it comes to anthropomorphisation and so their myths are not as inviting as more positive myths about animals in contemporary film.

Another point to consider is that the Furry Fandom is predominantly white and so they may not wish to associate with apes due to racist connotations that have been attributed to apes in the past (whether they knowingly do this or not). For hundreds of years there has been a ‘vigorous tradition which linked the Negro with the ape’ (Jordan et al., 2012: p. 32) which Jordan et al. note is often due to the a sexual connection attributed to the ape; ‘the sexual connection between Negro and ape has served to express the deep-seated feeling that the Negro was more animal- and accordingly more sexual- than the white man’ (Jordan et al., 2012: p. 491). Sara Silah argues that ‘race-thinking is a form of speciesism that is highly invested in notions of the animal and the human’ (Silah, 2007: p. 96). She argues that Haraway is correct in her assumption that primatology has led apes to being coded as representations of black people by white discourse (Haraway, 1989: p. 117). For Silah she

argues that 'Haraway suggests in her inclusion of "the obscurity of colour"...simian orientalism is a thoroughly racialized discourse, in which the boundaries of a gendered, white western self are secured through the construction of a dark, furry, ape "other"' (Silah, 2007: p. 98). It can be argued then that in western countries, myth about apes often have racist connotations which could result in why many of the white members of the Furry Fandom have not chosen apes as fursonas.

Although a researcher could point to *Cujo* (Lewis Teague, 1982) as a very negative representation of dog, this film was only a modest financial and mixed critical success.<sup>36</sup> In comparison, there is a huge plethora of positive dog-myth films including, but certainly not limited to *Air Bud* (Charles Martin Smith, 1997) which spawned five movies, seven spin off movies and two Christmas specials about dogs playing sports and, of course, helping humans through trials and tribulations; 11 movies in the *Lassie* franchise spanning from 1943 – 2005; and *Beethoven* (Brian Levant, 1992) also becoming a successful franchise which included its own TV series and seven movies. Additionally, unlike the ape, there are far fewer racial connotations with humans being associated with dogs, although there are sexist ones with women being referred to as bitches.

Although written before the internet this phrase by Deleuze encapsulates the internet environment: 'there are dimensions here, times and places, glacial or torrid zones never moderated, the entire toxic geography which characterizes a mode of thought as well as a style of life' (Deleuze, 2004: p. 146). With the internet, the world has in a sense become smaller and culture has permeated international boundaries but it is still Furies from similar backgrounds sharing the same culture. For Barthes the 'function of myth is to empty reality' (Barthes, 1957: p. 169). However, in this case it is better to look at Furry media such as

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<sup>36</sup> The movie performed modestly at the box office, only earning \$21 million on a film budget of \$8 million. The film currently sits at 58% fresh rating on Rotten Tomatoes which is a mixed reception.

*Zootopia* from Lévi-Strauss' theories that myth gives man 'the illusion that he can understand the universe and that he *does* understand the universe' [original italics] (Lévi-Strauss, 1978: p. 13). Ludwig Wittgenstein once declared that if the lion was capable of speech we would not be able to understand it (Wittgenstein, 1958: p. 225). Even though they were speaking the same language one party was unable to understand, much in the same way Wittgenstein believes that even if a lion could speak English we would have no way to understand its conversation. What does the human know of laying on the Savannah and eating Zebra? Guattari put it simply with "*A point. What is it? How can it be defined except by reference to something else? A crossing of lines. It does adrift....*" [original italics] (Guattari, 2015: p. 179). However, even if a human is unable to experience the Savannah, they can imagine how dreadfully hot it is, and empathise with the lion's hungry belly. When Deleuze talks of the abyss, a chasm in understanding between human and animal he forgets to turn away from hypothetical questions and look what has happened in real-life and the way humans communicate with animals. Deleuze improves upon Wittgenstein and Heidegger as he does admit that 'people who really like cats and dogs obviously do have a relationship with them that is not *human*' [original italics] (Stivale, 2014: p. 79). Interspecies communication is all around us. Although we share no cultural reference points with a dog he/she can still communicate their experiences with us, with a whine when they are hurt, a bark when there is danger. Furries know this too which is why the anthropomorphisation of certain animals comes easy in their art and media. There is of course a fine line between mastery of the animal and interaction them. The majority of Furries (not including the small percentage of Therians, Grivell et al., 2014) know that it is not physically possible to change into an animal. But, what *Zootopia* and other Furry media (such as popular artwork) does very effectively is teach life lessons using signification of anthropomorphic traits given to animals that can be ascribed to real life. What the Furries do differently from Disney and films such as *Zootopia*

is that they infantilize viewers whereas highly identified Furry artwork utilises the animal as an equal.

## 5.4 Fursona Species

It has been argued in the previous section that highly identified Furies resist the Oedipal by forming their fursona identity around the Jungian and demonic archetypes. Less identified Furies (those who see the fandom as a hobby rather than an identity) are more likely to use the Oedipal animal for their fursona creation.

Canines and felines are some of the most commonly used fursonas across the Furry Fandom and typically referred to as ‘companion animals’ by Haraway (2003). It may seem obvious as to why this is when looking at pet ‘ownership’ (with dogs and cats being the most prevalent) across the world. In 2016 it was estimated that 70-80 million dogs and 74-96 million cats are owned in the United States; 37-47% of all households in the United States have a dog, and 30-37% have a cat (ASPA, 2018). In the UK it is estimated 40% of households have pets with pet population standing at around 57 million (PFMA, 2018). New Zealand is the leader worldwide with a pet ownership rate of 67% and 83% of Australians have owned at least 1 pet in their lifetime (Pet Secure, 2018). The relationship between animals and humans goes far further than the relatively recent history of domestic pet ownership, especially when it comes to dogs and cats. Canines have been the subject of domestication for at least the last 15,000 years, possibly longer (Bradshaw, 2011: p. 31). And, although modern dogs look very different from their wolf ancestors they still share 99.96% of their DNA structure (Bradshaw, 2011: p. 3). Cats too have been the product of domestication with archaeological evidence being found in China dating between 5,500 to 4,900 BP, revealing the leopard cat (*Prionailurus bengalensis*) being subject to a ‘domestic’ relationship with humans (Vigne et al., 2016: p. 1). Similar to domesticated canines, the behaviour that led to domestication of cats is the ability ‘to adapt to human modified and

cultivated environments' (Vigne et al., 2016: p. 5) which is why they have been domesticated over other 'untameable' species.

There is a speciesist issue with the idea of tameness when it comes to the animal. There are scientific and evolutionary reasons why some species will not be tamed; cockroaches are disgusted by humans to such a degree that if they are touched by us they run away and then wash themselves (QI, 2018). There are also cultural reasons why humans have decided that some species are 'untameable' creating a preference for certain types of dogs, for example, over others. Even if the cockroach did not find us humans disgusting, it has no aesthetic value for speciesist people and so it would be unlikely for anyone to attempt to tame it, thus labelling the animal 'untameable' instead. Maher examines this issue when looking at legal personhood for animals, 'the possibility of an inclusive justice for animals is an illusion as long as humans define species-based ontologies' (Maher, 2014: p. 45). The exaltedness of 'tameable' creatures over 'untameable' ones is a symptom of this. There has been criticism in recent years that many observations of wolves, and then comparisons of these communities to modern dogs, have been flawed. Jacques Derrida and David Willis have noted that these observations do not understand the social communiqué between animal packs as the researchers 'fail to meet the gaze' of the animal (Derrida and Wills, 2002: p. 382). Many dog trainers would look to the wolf to emulate the 'alpha male' status that they believed they needed to make their dog obedient. However, this ontology has mostly come from observations of wolf packs in zoo enclosure, creating artificial aggressive behaviour where as in the wild a wolf would depart from its previous pack rather than fight (Bradshaw, 2011: p. 21). Although this would seem to be an anthropocentric perception of 'avoiding a fight' there is evidence of covertly observed wolves producing this avoidance behaviour which has led to a change in the way scholars have looked at 'typical' animal behaviour (Bradshaw, 2011: p. 20).

As understanding of animal behaviour has changed, so too has humanity's relationship with them. Long gone are the days where cats were important signifiers in religious practices. Ancient examples of cat worship such as anthropomorphisation of the Goddesses Bastet and Sekhmet were example of this<sup>37</sup>. Interestingly, cat worship has continued in unprecedented ways. In the strange and wonderful world of the internet subcultures you are just as likely to have a cat ask you whether it 'Can Has Cheezburger?'<sup>38</sup> and tell you whether it is particularly grumpy<sup>39</sup> that day than a bland conversation about the virtues of cat ownership. Online memes certainly followed Barthes' notion of communication as many of the animal memes follow 'traditional' animal myths. For example, Advice Animal memes show wolves being represented as courageous and dangerous (Phillips, 2015: p. 141). As Phillips noted in their research on trolling, memes used to require basic technological skill (Phillips, 2015: p. 143). However, with meme generating platforms removing this requirement since 2009 animal memes have exploded and became mainstream internet lingua franca (Phillips, 2015: p. 145). The Furry Fandom being situated well and truly in the online space also use memes to communicate such as the Reddit sub-forum r/furry\_irl, where they share memes which lament or celebrate aspects of being a Furry.<sup>40</sup>

For dogs, also well and truly part of the internet meme culture, their relationship has changed with humans in that many dogs do not 'work' for a living while there are still some species that do. Haraway's beloved Australian Shepherd breed is still used in sheep herding in the US and in the UK, bloodhounds are still used by farmers for hunting and small dogs are still used for ratting. Although these dogs are essentially commodities and labourers

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted here that this was archetype worship in that cats were not exalted as gods but were killed in worshipping practices.

<sup>38</sup> A popular internet meme which is usually with a picture background of a domesticated cat with the words, spoken by the cat (misspelt of course) "I can has Cheezburger?"

<sup>39</sup> In reference to the internet sensation and real life feline Grumpy Cat (real name Tardar Sauce) whose photo of her looking particularly grumpy sparked a viral meme with the cat ending up with her own movie on Lifetime.

<sup>40</sup> Acronym – r/furryinreallife.

(Haraway, 2008: p. 55) they are usually considered pets as well, which is certainly different from even 50 years ago. As a species, humanity has been cultivating domesticated animals for at least 10,000 years for whatever the purpose at the time is required and thus enslaving them into servitude. In premodern societies dogs were bred smaller and smaller for work purposes, such as making a ratter dog fit down the vermin's holes to flush them out into the open. Today, some breeds are becoming smaller for aesthetic reasons, such as the 'Teacup Yorkie'. Size is not the only thing that has changed and genetic breeding for 'pure-bred' or 'pedigree' dogs has not always been in the best interests of the animal. Selective breeding has caused epilepsy in Australian Shepherds (Haraway, 2008: p. 126), breathing and skin problems in pugs (Davis, N., 2016) and puppy mills mate dogs in harmful conditions to sell 'fashionable' breeds. But humanity's meddling in the dog genome has also unexpectedly pushed dogs into the posthuman. In 2003, Haraway wrote that she did not wish to '[alienate her] old doppelganger, the cyborg' but that she thought that dogs were perhaps a better way to investigate the posthuman and 'technobiopolitics' of the future (Haraway, 2003: p. 9-10).

Cyborgs and companion species each bring together the human and non-human, the organic and the technological, carbon and silicon, freedom and structure, history and myth, the rich and the poor, the state and the subject, diversity and depletion, modernity and postmodernity, and nature and culture in unexpected ways (Haraway, 2003: p. 4)

Dogs have been moulded by humanity's play with nature and culture, as have humans been changed with their reactions to their changed companion species (Haraway, 2008: p. 62). This is certainly what has happened when it comes to the Furry Fandom and species choice. Psychological studies have shown that our perception of dogs and cats has often been aesthetically driven. In a study on the perception of the physical appearance of dogs, physical attributes such as coloured irises and an 'approximation' of a smile ranked highest when

participants looked at doctored pictures of dogs. It was concluded that ‘certain physical attributes such as symmetry and averageness, have been demonstrated to influence judgments of attractiveness...These preferences can extend to nonhuman, inanimate objects’ (Hecht and Horowitz, 2015: p. 153-154). Current research suggests that humans find it easier to anthropomorphise mammals (as they are closer to our taxonomic group) due to their aesthetics creating an emotional reaction which we find familiar – it is much easier to create an aesthetic in photo-shop or artwork of a dog smiling than it is a bird (the beak makes this awkward). This may be why current study shows that there is a ‘significant difference in emotion attribution across all taxonomic categories of animal, with mammals receiving the highest attribution of emotions, followed by birds, reptiles, fish and invertebrates, respectively’ (Wilkins et al., 2015: p. 363).

The Furry Fandom is not a closed unit and the context of why certain species are oversubscribed can be found within the fandom and cultural influences from outside the fandom. The relationship with companion animals can be shown in ‘human cultural matters such as empathy, ethics, respect and morality’ (Mills, 2017: p. 5). Although our relationship with dogs and cats can suggest why Furrries are drawn to those as popular fursonas, real life logistics when it comes to fursuit building must also be considered, even though only 8% own physical fursuits in this study (Fig. 14). For a fursuit to be wearable it has to fit around the human body (at least in the present moment) which (in most cases) means space for two legs and two arms. Although many of the most popular species are quadrupeds, a human can still ‘wear’ the animal by making it bi-pedal i.e. stand up on two legs when they wear the costume. This could indicate why animals such as snails, snakes and the plethora of other limbless vertebrae are rare, to the extent that they were not found in this study at all. This makes sense from a cosplay standpoint as it would be incredibly difficult to create a fursuit, for example, of a fish because a human would not be able to ‘wear it’. As noted by Debra

Ferreday, even those only wearing partial fursuit pieces find it important for these pieces to be wearable. When discussing cervine pieces she noted that the antlers were ‘designed to blend in with the wearer’s clothing, look less like trophies taken from dead prey than like prosthetics’ (Ferreday, 2011: p. 222). There has been an increasing interest in cephalopods in posthuman research, tentacular animals (Haraway, 2016), and indeed non-mammalian popular culture with *The Shape of Water* (Guillermo Del Toro, 2017) winning an Oscar for Best Picture. But this interest has not transferred over to the Furry Fandom in this study; part of the enjoyment of becoming-animal in the Furry Fandom is the prospect of physical transformation.<sup>41</sup>

In artworks such as art video *Rompers* (2003) by Motohiko Odani (fig. 26) a woman has incorporated animalistic eyebrows, a forked tongue and webbed hands onto her frame; this incorporation melds together with the human and the non-human aspects. The examples of fursuits given also show examples of incorporation such as that by Odani, in that the fursuits have melded the animal so that it is ‘wearable’ as a fursuit. This is rather than keeping to the true ecological nature of the species they have chosen i.e. colours, how they walk in nature. The very name, ‘Furry’, suggests mammalian creates should be chosen, which may suggest why most fursuits are made of furlike materials.

Rompers by Odani



Fig. 26

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<sup>41</sup> The data collected for this thesis precedes the film so this may have changed since the data was collected. This could be a point for future research.

[redacted in this version]

Fig. 27

It can be suggested, then, that the most popular fursonas are also the species which are easier to wear in real life if the Furry wishes to one day take part in fursuiting. For those who see being a Furry as a hobby, a fursona is a useful way to incorporate human and animal traits into an original character:

I love the Furry community and I have a fursona myself, but I know that I am a person first and foremost. That my fursona is just a character, not something that is actually real or physically a part of me. (Appendix B: p. 280)

One of the main research aims in this thesis was to present evidence that, unlike previous IARP research implies, the Furies are not a homogenous group. Although it has been argued in this chapter that all Furies are influenced by myth, highly identified Furies are also moving into the posthuman and are subscribing to the process of becoming-animal. For Deleuze and Guattari 'A becoming is not a correspondence between relations. But neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or at the limit, an identification' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 277). This precludes Furies who see the Fandom as a hobby from the process of becoming-animal as many of them in this study cite just 'identifying' with the animal. For those highly-identified Furies and the subgroup Therians, their fursona choice is co-opting

the animal into their human identity rather than identifying or imitating it, examples of a Jungian or demonic archetype. Ferreday likens those who highly identify with a canine fursona to the idea of the werewolf:

The most visible human/nonhuman trans figure is the werewolf, whose violent transformation from human to animal is often held to embody the expression of an innate animal nature which has been repressed. (Ferreday, 2011: p. 219)

For Therians and highly identified Furies, transformation is at the forefront, in that these real animals can transform their human selves. This is also similar to Haraway's notion of the cyborg (1991) and then her later addition of companion species (2003).

Haraway now considers the cyborg to be the 'junior siblings in the much bigger, queer family of companion species' (Haraway, 2003: p. 11). She also put forward to notion that kin is not just for genealogy 'My purpose is to make "kin" mean something other/more than entities by ancestry or genealogy...kin making is making persons, not necessarily as individuals or as humans' (Haraway, 2016: p. 103). Dogs are at their very essence real, something that is material and can be touched, something that is far easier to envision than the cyborg. The fact that they are considered kin to many people regardless of the fact that they are a different species is evidence of this (Hodgson et al. 2015). In fact, so much so that many people who believe in an afterlife also believe there is one for their animals (Royal et al. 2016: p. 413).

Unlike the cyborg, we have been bioengineering dogs through breeding programmes for decades before we even began using artificial technology. Haraway notes that 'optimization does not mean perfection' (Haraway, 1991: p. 64) and as humanity has strived to create the 'perfect breed' it has sometimes led to unhealthy consequences for the breed itself. Haraway has in the past complained about the work of Deleuze and Guattari unnecessarily pushing aside the generic love of animals from humans as 'mundane'

(Haraway, 2008: p. 27): ‘Anyone who likes cats or dogs is a fool’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013: p. 281). However, these theorists work surprisingly well together in discussions on the Furry Fandom even though Haraway has been criticised for her selective use of citations from *A Thousand Plateaus* (Stivale, 2014: p. 76). This is because, as suggested by Joanna Bednarek, ‘it is worth mentioning here that the source of [Haraway’s] bias is the fact that she has different premises and priorities than the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus*’ (Bednarek, 2017: p. 56). Haraway’s critique of Deleuze and Guattari’s attitude to animals is because she suggests that they are taking a speciesist approach towards them, however I am inclined to use the interpretation of Bednarek; ‘The negative attitude towards dogs and cats touches here only on the cultural meanings associated with them; the role fulfilled by actual animals depends on the case, that is, on the way they function in the assemblage’ (Bednarek, 2017: p. 54). With this in mind, Deleuze and Guattari and Haraway together makes a compelling theoretical framework.

When Haraway asks ‘what do feral cats have to do with community college students?’ (Haraway, 2008: p. 281) the question is reminiscent of Deleuze’s work on Lewis Carroll whose famous conundrum asks ‘Why is a raven like a writing desk?’ (Carroll, 1865). Her answer is that ‘both classes of beings are being “educated” through their intra-actions within historically situated technology’ (Haraway, 2008: p. 281), an idea that is echoed through most of Deleuze and Guattari’s teachings. Animals and how they are represented are important in that ‘for Deleuze, the animal has a privileged and very specific relation to the notions of territory and world, one that is based on a relative number of affects and on a process of selections’ (Lambert, 2017: p. 255). Like becoming, understanding the body is much deeper than understanding the simple relation between ‘tongue making you talk’ and the simple fact that you have ‘legs with which you walk’, there must be an understanding of why humans do not ‘sing with your sinuses’ as they suggest (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 175). A BwO is

looking far beyond the simple functions of the body and, as such, an organ is nothing by itself, it only becomes useful when it has a purpose on the planes of consistency with other functions. Going back to the feral cat and college students, both are assigned numbers for tracking purposes and both are required to get vaccinations (Haraway, 2008: p. 281). Both are thrown into a new place where they do not know anybody and so could be considered as the same body if you were considering them as just that, a body. Haraway, Deleuze and Guattari all bring the crucial aspect of what is now termed the posthuman to the forefront which is that nature (the feral cat and the college student) profoundly altered by interactions and environmental relations. In this case, technology and the body are shaped by this environment. It is imperative to look at the assemblages to find out how the feral cat or the college student *become* a feral cat or a college student rather than just assuming that they came to be simply because they are: 'In short, symbolic understanding replaces the analogy of proportion with an analogy of proportionality' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 276). This can be applied to the understanding of species choice in the Furry Fandom.

As discussed in chapter three, if you strip a Furry out of their fursuits and fursonas and are just presented with the naked body they become simply that, a body. Their identity of the 'Furry' cannot be represented through the simple means of their actions or words which come from the body but from their identifying of Furry signifiers. For Therians, Grivell et al. (2014) used a definition that 'a person who is, feels, or believes he/she is in part or whole (non-physically) one or more non-human animals on an integral, personal level' (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 115). This would be in keeping with Deleuze and Guattari in that this splinter group from Furies is not imitating the animal but has been produced through filiation. This would also be in keeping with Haraway. The animal has been incorporated by optimising their identity as non-human or ahuman rather than a speciesist approach valuing their human identity more than their animal identity. The animal has been important within postmodern

artwork. In the introduction chapter of this thesis I used a definition from Sturken and Cartwright to note that the term postmodern is not just applied to art, however Sturken and Cartwright note that there is a certain style to art which can be considered under this title:

We could argue that postmodernism defines an ethos, a set of sensibilities, or a politics of cultural experience and production in which style and image predominate.

Thus, although postmodernism may not be about style alone, style is one of the chief characteristics of a postmodern ethos. (Sturken and Cartwright, 2009: p. 313)

For the purposes of the rest of this chapter when referring to postmodern artists, I am following the definition from the Tate Modern Gallery in London concerning what can be considered postmodern art:

Postmodernism refused to recognise the authority of any single style or definition of what art should be. It collapsed the distinction between high culture and mass or popular culture, between art and everyday life....it can be confrontational and controversial, challenging the boundaries of taste; but most crucially, it reflects a self-awareness of style itself. Often mixing different artistic and popular styles and media, postmodernist art can also consciously and self-consciously borrow from or ironically comment on a range of styles from the past. (Tate.org, 2018)

The animal has been used as a metaphor for postmodern artists for varying reasons, some of which aim to 'cast[s] the fixity of identity as an inhibition of creativity' (Baker, 2000: p. 18). It has been in this way that they 'consider new forms of existence' (Thompson, 2005: p. 9). Considering new forms of existence is prominent in highly identified Furies. In the questionnaire data respondents explained that creating a new identity for themselves using an animal as a template was a way to improve (Appendix C: p. 303).

In the Gerbasi et al. study (2008) they asked their research participants 'do you consider yourself to be less than 100% human?' (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 213). Before

discussing the results, I would suggest that the question is flawed as the use of the words ‘less than’ indicates a speciesist rhetoric. This is because it places being human at the top of a hierarchy and any identity which is non-human as worth ‘less than’. This careless wording meant that the results showed that of the 214 people who answered this question 99 (46.3%) answered that they felt ‘less than’ human (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 213). But, only 29.2% of the 99 of those felt they had a ‘non-human species’ in their body (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 214). Without following up on these responses we have no idea what else is the ‘other’ part of their identity. Despite this, we can say that the 29.2% of those who felt they shared their identity with a non-human species are an example of becoming-animal. In this research 133 responses to why someone’s fursona was changed was due to their identity changing (Appendix C: p. 303-304). This suggests that the incorporation of a non-human species into a fursona is not static and as identities can change throughout a person’s life it follows that the animal with which they chose to incorporate can also change.

For postmodern artists keeping the form of the animal is a mark of ‘respect for the otherness of the animal’ (Baker, 2000: p. 96) and this is seen widely in Furry artwork. Fursonas keep the form of the chosen species sometimes with added extras such as clothing or colour changes. For postmodern artists ‘becoming-animal’ is about ‘draw[ing] the animal in’ (Baker, 2000: p. 134) and this is the intention behind ‘becoming-animal’ for Deleuze and Guattari as well. ‘Drawing the animal in’ is meant in the sense that the animal is incorporated into the identity rather than used in a hierarchical structure. The animal is just as important to their identity as their humanness because it has been anthropomorphised and thus on a level par with the human part of the identity as they have ‘assimilated’. This is why highly identified Furies, as studied by the IARP often see the fursona as ‘integral’ to their identity. This may be why challenges to how much they see their fursona as a part of their identity can cause ‘additional discrimination’ (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 47). Unfortunately for members of

the Furry Fandom as well as suffering stigmatization from the media, they have also been stigmatized by postmodern artists and academics. Authors such as Baker write intelligently on the way postmodern artists use anthropomorphism in artwork, but there is a clear indication that he had not thoroughly considered fans of anthropomorphisation such as the Furies in his work. In fact, Furies are reduced to a mere sentence when he is describing the ‘understandable’ desire for the proper artists to not be associated with:

The bizarre goings-on of the people who now call themselves “Furies”, spend their lives dressed as cuddly animals and whose fantasies “sometimes extend to actual bestiality” which they are keen to discuss on a growing number of internet sites (cited in Baker, 2000: p. 172).<sup>42</sup>

This violent reaction to human becoming animal is succinctly summarised by philosopher Simon Critchley who noted that ‘There is something charming about an animal become human’ but goes on to state that ‘when the human becomes animal, then the effect is disgusting’ (Cox, 2005: p. 19). This may be because there is seemingly a bias from some artists about what is considered high art or low art. For some high art should be considered as ‘real art’ because it requires ‘active spectatorship’ compared to popular/mass art which generates ‘broad appeal and accessibility’ making it formulaic and passive (Fisher, 2005: p. 533). At a glance, fursona art may be seen to contain these ‘low art’ qualities as they do have mass appeal with the cute, Disney-like aesthetics. However, artists such as Baker, who have only heard negative stereotypes about Furies and thus do not understand the identity construction a fursona entails, do not understand the active participation that Furies can often

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<sup>42</sup> STEVEN STERN, “BRIGHT EYES”, FRIEZE, XLV, (1999), PP. 45-46 – When trying to find the original work by Stern it was not available on the Anglia Ruskin University database, or the University of East Anglia library database. As well as this, the citation only produced 8 results in a Google search – 6 of which were unrelated and 2 which were referencing the citation in Baker’s book. This strengthens the argument made here that many references to Furies in academia, postmodern art, and popular culture are often based on references which are incorrect or lacking in background.

have with their fursonas. It can be argued that if we use the Tate's definition of postmodern art then, that fursonas could be ironically using Disney and cute aesthetics to make a controversial statement on what it means to be human, especially if they are highly identified and envision their fursona as an extension of themselves.

Another reason why people (as well as artists) may be hostile to Furies is that they may also have prejudices that have been consigned to certain 'kinds' of animal and also certain 'kinds' of humans. For Adams:

While it goes without saying that 'humans are animals' the way this insight has been used has been hierarchically, i.e., racial and sexual distinctions were used to equate people of color and women with other animals or to impute animal characteristics on those who were not white, propertied men. 'Human' became a definition not only about humans versus (other) animals, but also defining who among Homo sapiens would have the power to act as 'humans'. (Adams, 2006: p. 120)

For Marla Carlson it is because Furies inhabit an identity which is posthuman in that it challenges what is typically 'human'. When writing about the Furies, she also uses Haraway to suggest why their identity is put at the bottom of hierarchies: 'Like the cyborg and the animal, the freak performer inhabits the borders of the Human – and that is why these categories exist, because they bracket off varieties of life in order to define humanity' (Carlson, 2011: p. 199). The animal has been positioned as lower than humans in a great deal of Christian writings (King James Bible, Genesis 1:26-28) and this was only reinforced by Darwinism and many science fiction plots have shown the 'consequences' of de-evolution. It can be argued that these narratives about the animals being 'lower' than humans has affected the way we look at animals, especially in artwork.

Speaking of postmodern artists Steve Baker states that the 'artists do not try to turn the animals into versions of their own secure human selves, even when an element of

anthropomorphism is deliberately engaged' (Baker, 2000: p. 46). He later goes on to discuss '*the look*' of the postmodern animal as 'fractured, awkward' and generally wrong, and even presupposes that there are 'no surprises here' when it comes to his assertion [original italics] (Baker, 2000: p. 54). Form is notoriously difficult to 'get right' when it comes to animals, Deleuze and Guattari were incredibly suspicious of form when it came to becoming-animal. A solution was not provided in *A Thousand Plateaus* but rather Deleuze's book on the work of artist Francis Bacon. This is where Deleuze suggested that 'painting has to extract the Figure from the figurative' (Deleuze, 2003: p. 8) with 'isolating the Figure [will] be the primary requirement. The figurative (representation) implies the relationship of an image to an object that it is supposed to illustrate' (Deleuze, 2003: p. 2) hence moving from the figure to the figural. What is meant by this is that for art to become more than just a picture of the object in question it has to be able to invoke a thoughtfulness rather than an immediate emotional reaction (Deleuze, 2003: p. 34).

Deleuze is suspicious of form because in his discussion of what Bacon stated about photographs 'it is not a figuration of what one sees, it is what modern man sees' (Deleuze, 2003: p. 11) with so much art being seen through a culture-laden lens of the viewer. It can be suggested, then, that Furies' species choices are influenced by popular myth, but the aesthetics and care that is taken to create Furry artwork of their fursonas is far deeper than simple appreciation for a popular species. Baker is convincing when he suggests many postmodern art installations of animals are bastardized versions of the animals which are used to make a point to the outside world.<sup>43</sup> This would, indeed, remove the figure to the figural. He is also convincing when stating that Deleuze was also suspicious of form because 'artists are merely imitating "the animal from a safe distance"' (Baker, 2004: p. 139). But highly identified Furies are, instead, incorporating the animal into their own identity in such a

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<sup>43</sup> See the work of Patricia Piccini for example.

successful way that they have the empathy to draw becoming-animal into reality. This is also similar to the way that Ferreday views Furies with cervine fursonas: ‘It is more useful, I think, to think in terms of what the longing to become deer, always imagined as a *partial* becoming, might tell us about the ways in which boundaries of the human are constructed and maintained’ (Ferreday, 2011: p. 222). This may be why postmodern artists have failed to take the Furry Fandom seriously. That is not to say that Furies use animal species in the same way as postmodern artists as it is argued here that they do not, but, Furies and postmodern artists use animals in different ways for the same purpose, for becoming-animal.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Species choice is very important when it comes to the Furry Fandom and it has been argued here that it is not a natural one but has been influenced by myth. It is unsurprising when considering theory by Haraway and others that companion animals dominate popular Furry species of choice, and that animals which are often ‘meat’ (bovines, swines, fowl) are rarer.

There will be proponents of this who will argue that this is a negative conclusion. This is because this conclusion could be construed as saying that Furies are not complicit in the animals they choose but have been forced into choosing certain animals via culture. However, the very point of posthumanism and ‘becoming-animal’ is that it is not a ‘natural’ process in the way society would want us to behave. Only when the subject has moved away from the traditional and into the cyborg culture does this happen.

Therians claim that their identity includes shifting mentally into that animal state, such as ‘feeling their tail wagging’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 115) and this has led to some to label them with a mental illness (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 113). Although not speaking about Furies or Therians specifically, Deleuze and Guattari predicted psychoanalysis would become a terrible thing for those ‘becoming-animal’ as many would be pathologized. Highly identified Furies have been pathologized in their identity as it has been reduced to fetishism

or masochism, even gaining scorn from less identified Furies. This has unfortunately been the way of many parts of posthumanism which have pushed beyond the organic concepts of the body and into the cyber world. Species choice, when it comes to fursonas in the Furry Fandom, are well and truly in the posthuman sphere for highly identified Furies and Therians, as they exhibit the signifiers mentioned by Haraway and Deleuze and Guattari.

Furies choose animals because of their affinity with them, much like Haraway would argue that women had an affinity with using the internet as it was a space where they could explore identity away from the oppressive nature of patriarchy. Species choice is the way that Furies are able to do this, by playing with the very nature (or 'essence' as Heidegger would put it) of the animal they are able to create their companion species. Although there may be an Orwellian sense of 'All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others' much quoted from *Animal Farm* (1945), this is not a negative judgement that has been made by Furies but has been influenced by myth and aesthetic choices rather than judging some species as 'better' for incorporation. Furies are still very much human and so they cannot be judged too harshly for starting incorporation of animals that are familiar and aesthetically pleasing for 'becoming-animal'. Maybe in the future this will evolve to different species but for now companion animals reign supreme in the Furry world but not for the similar reason of simple affinity and geographical closeness that has been suggested in studies so far.

## **6. Sexuality and Pornography in the Furry Fandom**

TW: SEXUAL CONTENT, PORNOGRAPHIC IMAGES, REFERENCES TO CHILD

### **PORNOGRAPHY**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Who is watching pornography? According to statistics in multiple countries the answer to the above question is ‘apparently all of us’ (Williams, 2004: p. 1). This is probably why pornography revenues usually come to between 10-14 billion a year around the world (Williams, 2004: p. 2). Despite the vast number of consumers of pornography, pornography is still culturally situated as a practice that is ‘morally wrong’ in many cultures and religions; a Gallop Survey in 2013 reported that 66% of U.S. adults held this view (Durham, 2015: p. 1). If general pornography is viewed as morally wrong it is, therefore, unsurprising that Furry pornography has come under fire from commentators who dislike their pornography, not just because it is pornography, but because they believe it promotes bestiality.

Furry pornography displays fursonas in erotic situations and for the layperson it may seem that these fursonas represent a literal animal. For Laura Kipnis, ‘A culture’s pornography becomes, in effect, a very precise map of that culture’s borders: pornography begins at the edge of the culture’s decorum’ (Kipnis, 2006: p. 120). This is in opposition to the generally more acceptable genre of erotic art which is said to ‘define[s] the boundaries of allowable sexual representation in modern Western culture and is where the depiction of sex can be given moral and social value.’ (Nead, 1993: p. 146). For Joanna Russ the distinction between pornography and erotic art is problematic:

Well, let’s just say that to call something by one name when you like it and another when you don’t is like those married ladies we all know who call what they do “making love” while what is done by singles in bars is “shallow and trivial sex,” and

what homosexuals do is “perversion”. (There are also those folks who call a work of art that supports the status quo “art” and works that questions it “political”). (Russ, 2014: p. 82)

Many anti-pornography arguments led with the ‘assumption that pornography expressed the power and the pleasure of heterosexual men’ (Williams, 2004: p. 7). Arguments that pornography objectified women and made men more likely to rape were not as convincing when it came to later analysis of non-heteronormative pornography. This is the same for Furry pornography: Who is being objectified? Is it possible to objectify the fursonas? There is a current gap in research related to Furry Fandom pornography which has not yet been investigated academically. This is important to investigate because in pornography, as well as erotic art, there are ‘classifications of those who view the images: they are social, cultural and moral designations of people as well as objects.’ (Nead, 1993: p. 145). This is why Kipnis theorises that ‘the fantasy pornography consumer is a walking projection of upper-class fears about lower-class men’ (Kipnis, 1993: p. 126).

Pornography often shows images or acts which are deemed inappropriate for the public space and is described by the term of on/scenity a term created by Linda Williams; ‘the gesture by which a culture brings on its public arena the very organs, acts, bodies, and pleasures that have heretofore been designated ob/scene and kept literally off-scene.’ (Williams, 2004: p. 3). For the Furies, and other fandoms, their pornography/erotic art has the potential to not only present a breaking of norms in society, but, as will be argued here, they reinforce cultural norms of the fandom. This chapter will present an analysis of Furry pornography, suggesting social and cultural values that are present within the pornographic themes found in Furry pornography.

## 6.2 Methodology and Theoretical Basis

The images that were analysed for this research were chosen at random from the furaffinity.com database using the Mature and Adult categories with 55 images being analysed in total (Appendix D: p. 306-315). One image was removed from analysis because it had been labelled as Mature/Adult due to the fursona wearing a shirt with a drug reference rather than it depicting pornography. Furaffinity.com was chosen as the website was cited in research as one of the most popular Furry artwork forums (Appendix A: p. 268). Data from their website noted that total submissions have grown from 19,200 in 2009 to 71,964 in 2012 (fig. 28), as well as having clear labelling on mature and adult fan art. As such, Furaffinity.com was an appropriate choice as there were plenty of submissions which fit the selection criteria. Coding through analytic memos was used because, as noted by Johnny Saldana, ‘coding and analytic memo writing are concurrent qualitative data activities’ and can help a researcher by triggering ‘deeper and complex meanings’ than when restrained by the parameters of a field note (Saldana, 2016: p. 44). This was chosen as it is compatible with coding and interpreting visual data:

Repeated viewings and analytic memo writing about visual data documented in field notes or maintained in a repository are more appropriate approaches to qualitative inquiry because they permit detailed yet selective attention to the elements, nuances, and complexities of visual imagery, and a broader interpretation of the composition totality of the work. (Saldana, 2016: p. 60)

The paradigms that were chosen are specifically those which deal with ‘fantasy’ pornography and pornography from the anime fandom. This is because the anime fandom has been found to share certain visual aesthetics with the Furry Fandom and share similar demographics in research by the IARP (Plante et al., 2016: p. 5). This paper also acknowledges and follows the paradigm shift in pornography studies, as described by Feona Attwood:

Work that has emerged from the paradigm shift has, in one way or another, marked the development of attempts to contextualize pornographies – in relation to other media genres, aesthetics and hierarchies of cultural value, in relation to a variety of consumer groups and in relation to the broader frameworks of cultural regulation and the lives of their producers and consumers. The value of this approach is that pornographies are conceptualized in line with theoretical accounts of cultural and sexual construction, discussed in terms of their social and political significance, and investigated with methodologies that have been shown to be appropriate for research that deals with issues of media production, representation and consumption. (Attwood, 2011: p. 14)

The use of analytic memos with which to research pornography is therefore appropriate. As Saldana notes:

Just as no two people most likely interpret a passage of text the same way, no two people will most likely interpret a visual image the same way. Each of us brings our background experiences, values system, and disciplinary expertise to the processing of the visual, and thus our personal reactions, reflections, and refractions. Spencer (2011) advocates that readings of the visual should adopt a sociological lens with a critical filter through “thick description” analytical narratives. (Saldana, 2016: p. 60)

By situating the use of Furry pornography within the cultural aspects of the Furry Fandom this avoids previous work which has situated all kinds of pornography together without contextualising the consumption in the culture or subculture in which it has appeared. This will situate this work in the new paradigm rather than viewing this pornography consumption as part of a tenacious ‘media effects’ theory that has been used in the past (Attwood, 2014: p. 1191).

The negative stereotypes and criticisms of the fandom has been the idea that the fursonas used in Furry pornography represent literal animals and is, therefore, promoting bestiality. It will be argued that it is not the case and that these fursonas are an amalgamation of animal and human persona as suggested by research by the IARP. Due to this, posthuman paradigms will be used to discuss how this is represented in their pornography. Additionally, bioethics will also be discussed in relation to using animals to represent someone's identity. Some of the more problematic categories (cub fur and vore) raise questions of how ethically we use these animals even though they are in the realm of fantasy.

### 6.3 Furry Pornography<sup>44</sup>

Before beginning the analysis of data from this research it is important to note that, already, the stereotypes about excessive availability of pornography in the fandom have been shown to be inconsistent in this research. Fig.28 is a table using data drawn from Furaffinity.com. Furaffinity.com data from 2009 -2012 shows mature and adult artwork submissions are well in the minority compared to general submissions.

Table: showing total submissions to the Furaffinity.com website and the percentage of which were labelled as Mature or Adult

Fur Affinity Submissions	Total Submissions	Label: Mature	Label: Adult
2012	71,964	7.87%	8.63%
2011	56,604	8.01%	8.76%
2010	37,836	8.49%	9.47%
2009	19,200	9.35%	10.69%

Fig. 28

<sup>44</sup> All images in this section are in the public domain and so ethical clearance or asking for copyright for use in an academic work was not required. Although to view the images a log in was required, the Furaffinity.com terms and conditions state that ANY artwork is to be considered public: 'When you upload content to Fur Affinity via our services, you grant us a non-exclusive, worldwide, royalty-free, sublicensable, transferable right and license to use, host, store, cache, reproduce, publish, display (publicly or otherwise), perform (publicly or otherwise), distribute, transmit, modify, adapt, and create derivative works of, that content.'

This trend is seen across many other Furry artwork websites with SoFurry.com, InkBunny.com and other content of adult and mature Furry artwork in the minority compared to general, non-pornographic work in 2014 and 2015 (fig 29. and fig. 30).

Table: showing labelled content across 4 Furry artwork websites in 2014

2014 Submissions	Label: Mature	Label: Adult
Furaffinity	10.80%	12.70%
Weasyl	6.90%	15.80%
SoFurry	4.90%	39.70%
InkBunny	14.20%	36.80%

Fig. 29

Table: showing labelled content across 4 Furry artwork websites in 2015

2015 Submissions	Label: Mature	Label: Adult
Furaffinity	10.90%	13.20%
Weasyl	7.20%	17.00%
SoFurry	4.90%	39.70%
InkBunny	14.10%	37.70%

Fig. 30

Although no conclusions can be drawn as to what level of consumption of pornography the average Furry engages with, these figures indicate that the vast majority of Furry artwork is not erotic. Since the 1990s Furry Fandom fan-fiction and artwork being heavily self-regulated; one semi-erotic scene in the media text will be labelled as mature/adult whereas in other fandom spaces these would still be sold under general (Gold, 2015: p. 29). In this research Furaffinity.com required a registered account to access any of the Mature/Adult labelled material. This means that the statistics given here could be considered as mildly inflated due to the strict regulations the Furies impose upon themselves, often to try and avoid the stereotype of being sexually deviant. From their early conventions they also restricted sales and access of adult/mature material to minors (Gold, 2015: p. 29). They have done this without it being required by law in the USA or the UK. In the UK for example fan works do not fall under Obscene Publications Act 1857, Obscene Publications Act 1959, or Obscene Publications Act 1964. In the USA fan-works are only covered in terms of copyright issues rather than any regulation on erotic images.

## Art Style

The first and most obvious aspect of Furry pornography is that it is drawn in a cartoon or anime style, and why the IARP have often likened Furies to the anime fandom which uses similar art style in their fan work. In Japan, anime is flourishing with pornographic comics ‘constitut[ing] a large and significant genre’ (Shamoon, 2004: p. 78). Deborah Shamoon’s study found that different genres catered for many different sexual preferences but the borders between genres such as *yaoi* and *shoji* manga are permeable and many readers read both homosexual and heterosexual stories (Shamoon, 2004: p. 86).<sup>45</sup> There have, of course, been critics of pornography for not representing ‘real sex’ with real sex being argued as usually just between a man and a woman who are married (Durham, 2015: p. 2; Clover, 1993: p. 1; Ellis, 1992: p. 147). Cartoon pornography, therefore, certainly falls into these ‘criticisms’ that the content of Furry drawn pornography is not ‘real sex’. Ellis noted that:

The metaphors of “health” hovers over the report: healthy sexuality is a sexuality which is functional within a relationship: a healthy attitude towards representations is one of contemplation and uplift; a healthy society is one that contains no disruption of its tranquillity (Ellis, 1992: p. 150)

Scott McCloud and Shamoon argue that cartoon pornography is popular for the very reason that it is *not* ‘real sex’ or that it can visually show parts of sex that are hidden in traditional pornography. For McCloud:

When you look at a photo or a realistic drawing of a face, you see it as the face of another. But when you enter the world of cartoon you see yourself...the cartoon is a vacuum into which our identity and awareness are pulled, an empty shell that we

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<sup>45</sup> Yaoi – also known as ‘Boy Love’ which focuses on romantic or sexual relationships between male characters, typically aimed at a female audience and usually created by female authors.

Shojo – this manga has a variety of narrative styles, from historical drama to science fiction, often with a focus on romantic relationships or emotions. It is particularly targeted at a young female demographic.

inhabit which enables us to travel in another realm. We don't just observe cartoon, we become it (McCloud, 1993: p. 84)

When compared to shooting human pornography queer artist and pornography director Bruce LaBruce stated that:

I must confess that I always lose interest in the explicit scenes when I'm shooting a porno. I guess that probably isn't a good sign. The mechanics of porn really aren't very sexy at all, and it's very difficult to shoot sex in a novel way, so it always seems like the same thing every time you do it (McGlotten, 2014: p. 372)

The benefit of cartoon pornography is that 'only the imagination of the artist can limit the action' (Shamoon, 2004: p. 87). Due to the nature of cartoon pornography they can show instances that are often hidden in human pornography such as the view of penetration and ejaculation from inside the vagina (both male and female) (Shamoon, 2004: p. 78). Laura Mulvey argues that cinema often portrays 'a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on their voyeuristic phantasy.' (Mulvey, 1992: p. 25); it is the same for cartoon pornography, it allows viewers to put themselves in the fantasy if they choose to. In pornography as well as erotic art there are 'classifications of those who view the images: they are social, cultural and moral designations of people as well as objects.' (Nead, 1993: p. 145). By using animals in their pornography Furies are taking sensibilities about the human form from the argument completely. For Artist John Issacs:

So this is where the animal works, for me. It has this ability to be the viewer, for the viewer to project into it...Identity is something that I don't want for something like this, I don't want it to be a man with a moustache, or glasses, or no hair, I want it to be the person who's looking at it. So it has to be without an identity. (Baker, 2000: 76).

Baker posed the question then of how the postmodern can ‘address becoming-animal, as much art which deals critically with identity may wish to do, what could the animal in such art possibly look like? How could it be recognizable as animal, without resorting to form?’ (Baker, 2000: 137). I would suggest that the art style that the Furies choose to engage with in their pornography (and general artwork) is the way that this is achieved. The use of cartoon to present their pornography allows the consumer to not imitate the animal but to incorporate the traits of ferality (which is often associated with sexual desire) of the animal to produce sexual pleasure.

By using a cartoon art style Furies can demonstrate any desire, their ‘fantasy pornography’, without getting bored or frustrated. For Jenkins, slash and erotic fiction are used to ‘stretch to accommodate a range of desires’ (Jenkins, 1992: p. 156) which is certainly what cartoon artwork is capable of doing. Speaking about ‘poaching’ from media texts, Jenkins suggested that erotic fan fiction authors can create ‘an alternative sphere of cultural experience that restores the excitement and freedom that must be repressed to function in ordinary life’ (Jenkins, 2006: p. 42). It can be suggested, then, that by ‘poaching’ animals from their place in the animal kingdom Furies create an alternative idea of the animal, which they use in both pornographic and non-pornographic practices, and this is particularly shown in the form of the animals which are used.

## **Form**

Form in pornography is one of the main philosophical and ethical issues anti-pornography feminists have in regard to pornography is that they argue that the female form was often objectified by the male gaze (Williams, 2004: p. 7). Although it was later counter-argued that this was a reductive objection as homosexual and transgender pornography would not seem to have this bias (Williams, 2004: p. 11). Despite this, form is still an important factor to investigate when researching pornography. For Patterson:

The habits of looking at internet pornography are as constitutive of the viewing experience as the images themselves, but, likewise, that these habits of looking insistently participate in inscribing power relations and social relations directly onto the body of the subject through gesture and repetition. (Patterson, 2004: p. 108)

In this research it was found, looking at the analytic memos that Furry pornography, that specific power relations in its artwork are visible. IARP research has found that certain species are more popular as fursonas than others, with *canidae* being the most popular (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 198). This trend seems to also transfer over to pornography (Fig. 31). This can be explained due to the way that Furies themselves have given meaning to form in that species are coded, such as a wolf is seen as sexually aggressive and foxes considered submissive (Howl, 2015: p. 52). In this research if the fox was portrayed with another fursona, it was suggestive that the fox was submissive.

Table: showing species of animal appearing in the pornographic images in descending order

Species	
Canines	33
Felines	6
Mythical/Fictional Creatures	7
Small Mammals	5
Large Mammals	4
Winged Animals	1
Reptiles	0
Unidentifiable	12

Fig. 31

Furry Pornography also suggests social and power relations when it comes to beauty standards. In the examples fig 32 and 33, there is a surprising similarity between poses in the Furry porn and human pornography. For John Ellis ‘objects prone to fetishization are those which are already sexualised: underwear, visible parts of the body, the sound of clothes rustling, the smell of sweat.’ (Ellis, 1992: p. 163). Using Ellis’s example, it can be suggested that this is why many Furry pornography poses are similar to those found in human pornography. Several fursonas were wearing erotic lingerie, some had drawn sweat, some

had an emphasis on showing eroticised parts of the body; thirty images in this study were similar to human pin-up poses. Kipnis notes: 'Neither the culture nor the individual have had their particular borders for very long. These aren't timeless universals.... all the motifs that obsess pornography – shift from culture to culture and throughout history.' (Kipnis, 2006: p. 122). Pornography has cultural and aesthetic style which changes over time and Furry pornography is following the popular pornography motifs; although they are furry all over there is a lack of hair to function/act as pubic hair, five images used human sex toys, six images showed different kinds of bondage displays, and ten images featured as provocative clothing in pornography such as lingerie and school girl outfits. The fact that the 'animals' in Furry pornography seem to be adhering to cultural norms of human pornography such as lack of obvious pubic hair is unsurprising when taking readings from Adams's *Neither Man nor Beast: Feminism and the Defence of Animals*. For Adams, there is a historical alliance of sexual exploitation of both woman and animals:

Empirical connections [that] reveal the intersection of the abuse of animals and the abuse of women expose another layer of intentional infliction of suffering by violent men, another way of comprehending the phenomenology of sexual violation (Adams, 2015: p. 146)

Adams notes in her chapter concerning abortion that women are often considered to have no moral agency over their bodies in contemporary debates. She links this with the way in which animals are also considered to not have moral agency and that it is down to humans to decide 'what is best for them' (Adams, 2015: p. 55). Carlson makes this connection in *Furry Cartography: Performing Species* (2011):

We consider Woman to occupy the same position as Animal, both being categories that serve to define Man by opposition....an embodied critique of the ways in which

women are coerced into adhering to an impossible standard of beauty (Carlson, 2011: p. 198)

When it comes to pornography black women, for example, are equated with animals and thus are insinuated to have less moral agency over their bodies (Adams, 2015: p. 153). We could suggest that the incorporation of animal and human in pornography highlights this, as when looking at representations of genitalia for example.

[redacted in this version]

fig. 32

fig 33

Genitalia in Furry pornography tends to be like human anatomy rather than the depicted animal. Artists are following human beauty standards. All images with a female fursona where the chest area was visible had enlarged breasts (examples in fig. 33, 34, 35) compared to the mammary glands of the actual animal. Monique Wittig argued that ‘We have been compelled in our bodies and in our minds to correspond, feature by feature, with the *idea* of nature that has been established for us.’ [original italics] (Wittig, 1969: p. 158). She suggested that often ‘people understand the world according to how their physical bodies

engage with/in the world' (Wittig, 2006: p. 95). It can be suggested that a Furry drawing and being attracted to these forms is doing so because of social cues they have found in the real world, cues described by Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) and *Bodies that Matter* (1993). In human pornography large breasts are common in many of the different sub-genres. Many of the poses (fig. 32 for example) are also indicative of common human poses for pornographic magazines. An argument can be made that due to the Furry Fandom being predominantly male, there is a patriarchal reason why these genitalia are preferred in Furry pornography. Meredith Jones argues that 'the vulva and the vagina are sites of high anxiety in hetero-dominant patriarchies' (Jones, 2017: 31). All the female genitalia present in the study (Appendix D: 308) have 'perfect' vaginas and vulvas. Although Jones was discussing post-labiaplasty vulvas due to her discussion on screen images, her views on how the fursonas vulvas have been minimized here are apt:

A post-labiaplasty vulva is one that has been positioned, visually and viscerally while its participation has been minimalized because its multiple folds have been whittled away leaving a single, accessible plane that simplifies its mode of being and diminishes its capacities. (Jones, 2017: p. 32)

Further research is needed to gain a wider set of image data to investigate representations of vulvas in Furry pornography as it could be suggested that some of the cultural referents used for the human genitalia in Furry pornography comes from sexist representations of women.

It can be argued that in general, common form in Furry pornography is a symbiosis between human and animal rather than trying to present simply a sexually attractive animal. This may be why some Furry pornography seems to recreate sexist human attitudes. However, in Deleuze's analysis on work by Francis Bacon he noted that when a human head was replaced by an animal 'it is not the animal as a form, but rather the animal as a trait' (Deleuze, 2003: p. 21) and this is the form that occurs in Furry pornography as they are not

portraying a literal animal. This argument is suggested because many common forms in Furry pornography are not representative of the actual animal; every image in this research showed all species form as bipedal rather than representing how these species live (which is often with four feet on the ground).

[redacted in this version]

fig 34

fig 35

There is no doubt that these pictures are meant to excite sexually but Furry pornography is laden with meaning as ‘a body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject...a body is defined only by a longitude and latitude’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2013a: p. 260). Much like in the work of Bacon, the pornographic persona constitutes a ‘is a *zone of indiscernibility or undecidability* between man and animal. Man becomes animal, but not without the animal becoming spirit at the same time, the spirit of man, the physical spirit of man’ [original italics] (Deleuze, 2003: p. 21). Arguments that these pictures constitute bestiality and that those who find them sexually exciting want to have sex with animals is a less than convincing argument when you analyse the form. In their

visual composition, they have more commonalities with form in human pornography than with real life animal sex.

### **Depictions of Sexuality and Sex Acts**

In studies by the IARP, a Furry's fursona is seen as performing two major functions when it comes to identity formation: social identity and representation of possible selves (Roberts et al. 2015a: p. 45). I would argue that the fursona may also have the function to act as a conduit for sexual and gender identity. In the same paper, it is stated that '20 percent of Furies report having a fursona that is a different gender than their non fursona self' and that 'the average Furry's fursona is more likely to be bisexual than they are' (Roberts et al., 2015a: p. 46). This suggests that some Furies use Furry pornography to act out a sexuality or gender that they do not live in real life.

Furies are more likely to identify themselves as transgender than compared to members of other fandoms (Plante et al, 2016: p. 11) and this may be why there is a plethora of gender-bending found in Furry Pornography. Ferreday found that cervine characters in the Furry Fandom 'often display transgender characteristics as well as having the ability to shift species'. (Ferreday, 2011: p. 221). It was found that a Furry is just as likely to be homosexual or bisexual as heterosexual as well as transgender (Gerbasi et al, 2008: p. 206). As such it can be suggested that gay erotica is seen as more normal and acceptable in the Furry Fandom than in sci-fi fandoms (Gold, 2015: p. 30) and many hold the view that 'sex and sexuality are simply not taboo topics for Furies' (Howl, 2015: p. 49). This may seem to be at odds with some of the evidence collected in this study as a proportion of Furies suggest that the sexual part of the fandom is something they do not enjoy or even dislike. The data collected in this thesis suggests that there is a significant proportion of non-heteronormative pornography which would suggest that the sexuality of the Furry in the fandom as a whole is accepted whether it is heteronormative or not.

As seen in discussions surrounding form, many of the sexual acts that occur in gay Furry pornography are similar to sex acts seen in human pornography. The poses in fig. 36 of holding back the hands/arms of one participant to gain leverage while penetrating from behind is not an occurrence in the animal kingdom. That is not to say that animals only engage in one sexual position – Bonobo monkeys are known to engage in the missionary position for example (Hird, 2009: p. 349) – but that sexual acts depicted in Furry pornography are framed in a way that it is only possible with the dexterity of a human-like bipedal anatomy and human-like thumbs for grip.

[redacted in this version]

fig. 36

Research into how animals have sex has been limited due to researchers focusing on ‘traditional evolutionary paradigm [with a] focus on reproduction’ (Hird, 2009: p. 349). In this way, activities such as masturbation and oral sex have been largely ignored by animal behaviourists with books only beginning to address this very recently, such as *Animal Homosexuality: A Biological Perspective* (Poiani, 2010). Transspecies sex has also largely been considered impossible or ignored despite the fact that this does, indeed, take place (Nead, 1993: p. 350). For Noreen Giffney, writing about new queer cartoons (of which she considers the *Shrek* franchise to be a part of), states:

Anthropomorphism, a staple of the animated feature, is again employed with new queer cartoons but is turned in on itself so that the analogy of humans becomes a

critical lens through which societal norms are exposed to scrutiny and with the potential for change. (Giffney, 2009: p. 368)

Furry pornography and other fantasy pornography can also be suggested to provide this function. For Giffney 'the cartoon as a cultural product is often used to indoctrinate children and re-institute adults in the (correct) ways of heteronormativity.' (Giffney, 2009: p. 368). By co-opting the cartoon which Giffney believes is used to indoctrinate into heteronormativity, Furies are instead using it as a form of resistance, a way to address sexuality they cannot express in real life due to societal pressure. Furry pornography tends to ignore limitations concerning interspecies relations and non-heteronormative relations. It is common to see pornographic images with two different species of fursona engaging in sexual activity; eleven images in this study showed interspecies sex. It is argued here Furry pornography is not showing animals engaging in sexual activity but is meant to represent human and animal hybridity and represent possible sexual desires of the consumer, not literal bestiality.

#### **6.4 Furry Pornography as Posthuman**

Furry pornography allows the consumer to engage in an identity which is not achievable in real life, much like the posthuman:

It is at the site of the collapse between reality and fiction, referent and image, that I locate the posthuman as a figuration that reformulates identity as a process of transformation (Toffoletti, 2007: p. 17)

The Furies are currently enacting a work of fantasy, fusing together both human and animal in their general artwork as well as their pornography. The sexuality shown in Furry pornography is not entirely human and it has, thus, been labelled as unnatural and deviant (Soh and Cantor, 2015). The way that Furies have fused together human and animal biology also has implications of Haraway's cyborg and later her companion animals theories. Furry

pornography displaces the human as the object of desire, by choosing to sexualise a human-nonhuman hybrid the Furies are disregarding the humanist hierarchy which always puts human firmly at the top. It could then be argued that, as Furies are gaining gratification from this pornography rather than the human, that they have ‘replaced actual human bodies in the public imagination’ making the human body as obsolete in their pornography (Springer, 1996: p. 40). For MacCormack ‘The posthuman is a direct challenge, not to the former human, but what it means corporeally and discursively to be, or more correctly to count as, human’ (MacCormack, 2009: p.112). I would suggest that Furry pornography is posthuman: although it replaces the human as the object of desire it does not create a binary between human and animal, instead fusing them together. For MacCormack the posthuman:

Collapse binary mechanisms which create human in opposition to non-human, living entity against inorganic matter and life against death. As humans and society become increasingly technological and virtual, is life itself able to be understood independent of the apparatuses and concepts which bring it to be and extend it, and through which it is negotiated? (MacCormack, 2009: p. 112)

The ‘negotiation’ seen in Furry pornography not only negotiates the body but also the social values of society. As Haraway noted in her discussions on the cyborg ‘biology has intrinsically been a branch of political discourse, not a compendium of objective truth’ (Haraway, 1991: p. 98); Furry pornography can be seen to enforce social norms (such as beauty aesthetics) but also challenge them with non-heteronormative couples for example. Answering MacCormack’s question in part, I would suggest that fantasy pornography and indeed Furry pornography, cannot be understood independently from the society from which it has emerged. Fantasy pornography is often such because the desires within it are seen as deviant and the Furies use their pornography to exhibit an identity or sexuality that is stigmatized in real world society. When Haraway moved onto the notion of companion

species she surmised that ‘trans-species encounter value is about relationships among a motley array of lively beings, in which commerce and consciousness, evolution and bioengineering, and ethics and utilities are all in play’. (Haraway, 2008: p. 46). It is unsurprising that the Furry Fandom commonly uses canines as their species choice as ‘they are not a projection, nor the realization of an intention, nor the telos of anything. They are dogs; i.e. a species in obligatory, constitutive, historical, protean relationship with human beings.’ (Haraway, 2003: p. 12). Dogs as non-humans are not given any rights due to speciesism (Maher, 2014: p. 27) so serve as a conduit for a community that feels stigmatized (Plante et al., 2015). This is important because Furies have combined the cyborg and the companion species by using technology to produce their posthuman identity. For some online users:

Occupying another gender, playing out a sexual attraction that for one reason or another real life doesn’t allow, or experimenting with roles involving dominance and submission are all ways to discover that sexual identity is much more complex than we allow ourselves to think. (McRae, 1996: p. 252)

McRae states that for some boys trying to ‘pass’ as women online they are ‘motivated by a sense of self-exploration, to see what sex is like from a different viewpoint’ (McRae, 1996: p. 249). Often, it is found that ‘When one’s sexual identity deviates from the norm, it may create identity struggles for the individual and, as a result, sexual minorities tend to seek out social and emotional support for their sexual orientation’ (Coon Sells, 2013: p. 894). What makes the difference for the Furies, however, is that they are no longer choosing between coming out as a gay human man/woman or staying in the closet but choosing a non-human identity and reproducing a posthuman one instead:

For the reproduction of human identity that the choice is no longer between the natural body and the culturally constructed body, but between different fields of

bodily (re)construction bearing different social and cultural implications. (Squier, 1995: p. 119)

Furry pornography can be suggested to exhibit both human and animal traits associated with ferality, and, thus, desire. It could be suggested that the Furies are then creating a *machinic heterogenesis* (a notion put forward by Deleuze and Guattari) in that their becoming-animal transgresses species boundaries as well as that of nature and science. Furry pornography could be suggested as indicative of a BwO instead. Furry pornography is able to escape traditional views and inhibitions on sex without requiring the Furry to act on these desires. This is because the fursona which is used is not a real body and it is not a projection of a literal animal body either. It is important to keep in mind that unlike Robin Morgan's declaration that 'pornography is the theory, rape is the practice' (Williams, 2004: p. 12) Furry pornography cannot be carried out in real life. Furry pornography is posthuman because it is 'without an image': as it is fantasy, there is no requirement to follow any sort of societal or cultural rules when creating it, which has led to an amalgamation of a human and nonhuman image of pornography. However, as noted in the Furry pornography section there are some societal and ethical 'rules' which have permeated the fandom when it comes to inner fandom reaction to the genres of cub fur and vore.

## **6.5 Cub Fur and Vore – The Ethical Quandary**

Although this research has argued that the majority of Furry pornography is not indicative of bestiality and is fantasy pornography there needs to be discussion of the ethical quandary that has occurred for me when it comes to genres such as cub fur and vore<sup>46</sup>. Respondents who mentioned these were resoundingly negative:

The growth of the 'cub' and 'baby fur' group causing the rest of us to be seen as paedophiles. (Appendix B: p. 284)

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<sup>46</sup> See Glossary Terms for Cub Fur and Vore

I do not like the fact that child pornography depicting furies is legal on some websites. I do not use web sites or support artists that allow ‘cub porn’. I would prefer it if the community would shun/ excommunicate this part of the fandom, I would not advise bringing the community to a common knowledge level in the media until they are eliminated. (Appendix B: p. 283)<sup>47</sup>

I dislike how widespread the extreme fetishes seem to be. I do not want to see the very extreme fetishes such as scat<sup>48</sup>, vore, whenever I am trying to look at normal furry art and stories (Appendix B: p. 283)

Although the legal status of computer generated pornography varies around the world, many Western countries (where the majority of the Furry Fandom is based) have strict laws regarding this. In the UK, for instance, a computer generated or ‘virtual’ child created for use in a pornographic sense is criminalised as well as cartoon pornography which aims to depict characters under the age of 18 (Durham, 2015: p. 18). The strictest of the laws in the UK has led to multiple prosecutions including an interesting case in Scotland:

In February 2001, a Renfrewshire social worker was charged with possession of pornographic pictures made up of photographs of children’s faces cut from magazines and pasted on to pornographic images downloaded from the internet. (Taylor and Quayle, 2003: p. 37)

The reason this case is so interesting is because it goes against the traditional definition of child pornography where ‘to produce it, someone has to assault a child, or pose a child in a sexualised way, and to make a photographic record of it’ (Taylor and Quayle, 2003: p. 21). And as many opponents of computer generated or ‘pseudo-child pornography’ point out, there is no real human child physically harmed in these instances (Taylor and Quayle, 2003: p. 38).

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<sup>47</sup> Answers in response to question ‘Is there anything you dislike about the Furry Fandom?’

<sup>48</sup> Scat- pornography including the use of fecal matter.

The rationale for equating cub fur to child pornography is that the representations made in the drawings are that the fursona contained in the images are meant to be under-age. In the UK, child pornography is covered by the Protection of Children Act 1978 and pseudo-child pornography was updated in the Sexual Offences Act 2003. In Section 7 of updated Protection of Children Act a child was defined in pseudo-pornography as the following:

If the 'impression conveyed by a pseudo-photograph is that the person shown is a child' then it shall be treated for the purpose of the offence as showing a child. This is so where the predominant impression is to this effect notwithstanding some of the characteristics shown are those of an adult (s.7(8) of the PCA).

As the law specifies 'person' cub fur is currently legally allowable in the UK and fursonas, as has been argued, are not people or literal animals. However, Maher has argued that speciesism has meant that animals have not been granted the legal rights they should (Maher, 2014: p. 27). And that using the word person or personhood 'reinforces speciesist chains through an artificial science-based relocation of a speciesist legal ontology by expanding the class of subjects in relation to the human' (Maher, 2014: p. 36). This is also noted by Wolfe who notes that 'the language in which bioethics is discussed revolves around largely quasi-legal notions such as consent, competence, rights to refuse...' (Wolfe, 2010: p. 54). As I have used a posthuman theoretical framework, using posthuman bioethics was deemed the appropriate way to approach the quandary I had with the two genres. MacCormack argues that:

An anthropomorphic ethic would attempt to bring the nonhuman up to a level of the human – equality feminism, animal rights based on how animals are 'like us', the validation in all politics of similarity over difference and reification over transformation. (MacCormack, 2009: p. 117)

To argue that animals are ‘like us’ and to use such an ethic would suggest that because the animals represented in cub fur are underage then it should be considered as pseudo-child pornography. For posthuman theorist Wolfe, this is supported by Bentham’s contention that, when it comes to ethical consideration for animals, it is about suffering rather than consciousness (Wolfe, 2010: p. 81). As today simulated human children are counted as pseudo pornography then the same rights would be argued for fursonas in posthuman bioethics. Using this framework then although this chapter has shown examples of Furry pornography the researcher decided against showing images presenting cub fur activity.

In a study by Tim Tate, it was suggested that just consuming child pornography produces a reinforcing effect that could well be applicable to computer generated child pornography as well:

All paedophiles need to reassure themselves that what they are doing or want to do is OK. It [child pornography] validates their feelings, lowers their inhibitions and makes them feel that their behaviour is pretty normal in the context of this pornography they see other people doing it in the videos or the magazines and it reassures them. (Tate, 1990: 24)

However, it should be noted that Tate’s study seems to endorse a media effects theory which is criticised by Attwood (2014: p. 1191). This is because it seemingly ignored much research which has ‘concluded that there was no connection between pornographic consumption and either change in sexual practices or an increase in sexual violence’ (Segal, 1993: p. 9). This is despite, as mentioned by Lynne Segal, that in many studies ‘repeated exposure to slides showing highly “deviant” sexual activity, subjects showed no tendency to copy such practices’. (Segal, 1993: p. 9).

We can never be sure of the effects of viewing pornography such as cub fur or vore has on the consumer because they are not physically possible to re-enact in the real world.

Although someone may have a penchant for these infantilized baby animals, they are not real animals as they have been anthropomorphised. These are baby cartoon characters who can give affirmation that they are ‘enjoying’ the behaviour by speech or gesture, and that makes it very different from trying to perform an act of bestiality on a real baby animal. As for vore, pornographic scenarios can include the eaten fursona being shown as still alive in the stomach, gaining sexual gratification having been eaten, which can be argued as akin to cannibalism. This creates a conundrum in that normal society eats animals but comments surrounding vore label it as offensive due to it being cannibalistic.

What is important, however, is to listen to Furies themselves: fandoms create boundaries and socially police what they find acceptable (Busse, 2013).

## **6.6 Conclusion**

It is important to talk about pornography in the Furry Fandom because there are very strong reactions to it within and outside the fandom and one of the main stereotypes about the Furies is that they are sexually attracted to real animals.

This chapter attempted to analyse a practice which seems to be a ‘normal’ part of the fandom addressing a research gap found in current literature. This research argues that many of the common motifs in Furry pornography are found in human pornography. I would suggest that Furry pornography performs the function of allowing repressed non-heteronormative identities experienced by some Furies to be engaged with; Furies who feel unable to be homosexual or a different gender in real life are able to live out this fantasy through their pornography, away from societal stigma. Conversely, this pornography is strictly fantasy, fantasising about cartoon animals and trying to engage in an act with a physical animal are completely different things.

Although further analysis is needed, I would suggest that consuming Furry pornography is not really that different from consuming human pornography. I have found no

evidence of bestiality but the research was small scale and so cannot be used to make generalisation. However, due to studies in pornography using the new paradigm as set out by Attwood it would be highly unlikely that someone would start to perform bestiality due to consuming Furry pornography, as we have moved on from direct media effects theory. However, academics such as Tanya Horeck have noted that due to the immediate nature of the internet a fresh lens may need to be applied when looking at violent pornography: 'There is an immediacy of response that has shifted the political terrain considerably, raising new questions about our personal and affective relationship to representations of sexualized violence.' (Horeck, 2014: p. 1). Due to the availability of vore and cub fur pornography, because it is not covered under any legal legislation thus far, there may be ramifications that will need to be researched in the future. In conclusion, Furry pornography, as researched here, may actually be a useful and imaginative tool for fantasy roleplay rather than a call to action or promotion of 'deviant' behaviour, but more research is needed.

There were some limitations to this chapter. Although some species in the research were easily identifiable some were less so. Subsequently, the researcher may have identified some animals as a species other than what the artist intended. Additionally, the contention has been made that some of the poses in the images are practiced by humans as opposed to animals due to the evolutionary sex paradigm (lack of research on sexual practices over research on evolution). This may prove to be incorrect with further research on the animal kingdom. This chapter is essentially acting as a pilot study (being the first on Furry pornography) and so a limitation is that it is relatively short in scale and so no concrete conclusions can be made. But, these are limitations of textual analysis in general rather than a failing in the study as a whole. I am confident in the suggestions made in the chapter however as they create a starting point and create hypotheses for further research.

## 7. Conclusion

The Furry Fandom was chosen as a research topic because of the researchers own experiences with a friend. In 2013 a friend ‘came out’ (as they termed it, but as a hobby rather than a sexuality) as a Furry to the researcher and was desperately worried that the friendship would end. They explained that they believed that the bad media attention the fandom had received would mean that the researcher would wrongly label them as a sexual deviant. In fact, the researcher had not heard of the fandom at all. The friend then introduced them to the other Furries they had met in the local town that day and the researcher found them to be nothing more, nothing less, than normal people. This led the researcher to wonder why this group had been so badly stigmatized by the media, and thus led the researcher to research and investigate, starting off with a pilot study in their master’s degree at UEA, eventually becoming this PhD thesis.

This thesis addressed identity construction within the Furry Fandom that has been neglected in previous research. This thesis used Deleuze and Guattari and other posthuman theorists throughout as highly identified Furries are examples of posthuman embodying becoming-animal. This thesis has situated itself in the tradition of fan studies because, although the Furries are often seen as different from fans the Furry Fandom shares many traditional functions of other fandoms. For example, they have a thriving gift and commissioning economy just like other fandoms and adhere to a geek hierarchy.

Chapter one gave a brief introduction to the Furry Fandom and identity construction theorists that were used throughout this piece. The backbone of this thesis are theorists such as Althusser, Bourdieu, Deleuze and Guattari. These theorists were chosen as they often resist binary oppositions and as the Furry Fandom presents as a postmodern fandom they were

appropriate for the piece. The following chapter gave a thorough literature review of current IARP research, as these were the most prevalent researchers in the area. The IARP used a psychological framework that was resisted in this work as it often homogenised the Furies into one group and sometimes pathologized them. Chapter three was split into two main parts, where fandom practices in general were evaluated and then applying these practices to the Furry Fandom. Chapter three situated the fandom as mainly online and this created the framework of theories that were presented in chapters four, five and six.

As an overview of a fandom not commonly discussed in academic literature, this thesis has made a range of original contributions: It has developed an understanding of Furies as fandom and positioned it within the concept of the posthuman. This framework allowed for an in-depth analysis of self-reported<sup>49</sup> data on the use of experiences of intra-stigmatization, fursonas, and Furry pornography. Work by the IARP has been conducted on the way that Furies use concealment strategies because they feel stigmatized. This thesis built on this to address the fact that Furies also suffered from in-group stigmatization that had not been investigated by the IARP. Although the IARP had identified popular species within the fandom, there had not been any academic work on the influences of popular species. Chapter five focused on explaining the importance of fursona choice and how it relates to posthuman theory for highly identified Furies. Throughout this thesis, and other research by the IARP, it became obvious that Furies are often stigmatized for being sexually deviant. However, there had been no acknowledgment about pornography as a practice within the Furry Fandom academically. It was important to test the stereotype that Furry

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<sup>49</sup> Self reporting has been found to be an important methodological approach with stigmatized communities. Studies have found that by allowing respondents to self report, it increases the chances that they will disclose information that they would not have done if asked directly, such as HIV status (Johnston et al., 2016) and experiences of weight stigmatization (Depierre and Puhl, 2012).

pornography promoted bestiality, as this may prevent Furies being stigmatized by these stereotypes in the future.

One of issues that the Furry Fandom has had is that many people do not know what a Furry is, and some of those few who have heard about them only heard negative stereotypes about them. From a fan studies perspective, it has become important to investigate these stereotypes due to the pathologization and stigmatization that has occurred unjustly in other fandoms. An issue that occurred in the literature review was that the IARP had a definition of the Furies that assumed homogeneity within the fandom. Furies in their research always presented members of the Furry Fandom as highly identified. This left little representation for Furies (as presented in Chapter four) who identified with the fandom as a hobby. They had also argued for the term ‘species identity disorder’ to be applied to members of the Furry fandom which seemed to be pathologizing them, and again, presented all Furies as highly identified. This was contradicted here as the data suggested that a substantial proportion of Furies in this study would not consider ‘Furry’ as an identity but as a hobby.

The data collected by IARP research was invaluable in providing a baseline on which to collect demographical data for this research. The demographic data presented in chapter two was comparable to data that has been collected by the IARP in their various studies. This gives this thesis validity in that Furry signifiers found by the IARP have also been found here. The literature review of IARP work, however, showed that they may have been mistaken in some of their claims; as much of their data has been collected at Furry conventions and thus much has been collected from highly identified Furies rather than those who see it as a hobby. For example, their data on fursuits may be inflated because many Furies at conventions will have bought fursuits at these events or bought them specifically for the event.

The aim of chapter three was to map the fandom. Although the IARP have collected demographic data of the Furry fandom they had only partly identified Furry signifiers as Furies. They had not discussed in depth where the fandom is situated (in the online space) and the implications of this. In chapter three, Bourdieu was used to situate this debate as his work has been used in fan studies (which is also used as a framework when describing Furies as fans) so was deemed appropriate. The concept of the habitus situated how the Furry Fandom online community establish and enforce Furry signifiers and ‘acceptable’ fan practice. Other fan studies theorists were also used to describe how the Furry Fandom potentially works as other fandoms do in an online setting such as Busse’s geek hierarchy. It was important to address the fact that more recent online research suggests that many people now present themselves on the internet as ‘themselves’ rather than creating a false persona. As such it was discussed how highly identified Furies use the online space and their fursona to enact their Furry identity which they cannot achieve offline (becoming-animal).

An original contribution to knowledge was that current IARP research had not investigated why certain behaviours had become common within the fandom – how Furies learned how to be Furry. An important correlation was found between the age that Furies began using Furry websites and when they became Furry. This goes against IARP research which has suggested that a Furry identity is a natural one, or is not chosen, rather than being influenced by popular culture which is suggested in this thesis. The concept of the geek hierarchy (Busse, 2013) which has been used extensively in fan studies was used to explain this behaviour. Furies tell other Furies what does and does not make them a Furry, and thus how to be a better ‘Furry’. By mapping the Furry Fandom in chapter three it was argued that the online space is the most important one for this fandom as they do not have a set media text. As such this thesis was able to suggest where Furies learn their fandom values. It was suggested that because they do not have a set media text, the internet is the only place in

which Furies can engage with artwork or other Furies the majority of the time; this can be due to the fact many do not wish to be Furies in the real world as they are worried about stigmatization or as mentioned several times, some Furies are not geographically close to any others.

Chapter three used Busse's geek hierarchy to explore the notion that fandoms (including the Furry Fandom) essentially work as institutions rather than simply communities. This is because fandoms fulfil two functions: distribution and measurement. Using Deleuze and Guattari, it was suggested that Furies distribute fan work (sometimes for profit) and that fandom participants are 'measured' for how *good* a fan they are. How fans perform their 'measuring' is done via the geek hierarchy within each fandom. This gave this thesis scope to discuss issues within the Furry Fandom that had not yet been addressed by the IARP. One of these issues was the acceptability of viewing and use of pornography, especially that of cub fur and vore, which was in dispute in the fandom which was discussed extensively in Chapter six. In IARP research acceptance was often used solely as positive, whereas the data in this thesis exposed that some Furies thought the fandom was too inclusive and so too accepting. The examples in this thesis suggested that there are intra-fandom disputes as to whether Furry is a sexuality. Also, it showed that there was displeasure at other Furies behaviours such as criminal acts at Furry conventions by others.

Chapter four dealt with stigmatization and tried to build on work already done by the IARP. The original contribution is that the Furies were not treated as a homogenous group and so resisted IARP readings that all Furies are stigmatized. To do this it, was investigated as to whether Furies felt more stigmatized online or offline and whether those who were less identified with Furry as an identity over a hobby felt more stigmatized. This was done by comparing stigmatization levels with whether they had a fursona or not.

It was important to address stigmatization in this thesis because there have been clear indications in academic work by the IARP that Furies are stigmatized and this was also found in data collection for this thesis. To build on the IARP work ‘event + context’ was used to explain that it is not just the fact that Furies can be bullied online or offline, but the fact that it is deemed acceptable by media examples. The notion of ‘event + context’ meant that it can be easier to situate marginalised communities with trauma that has affected their identity construction. By identifying the context for why the Furies feel they are stigmatized it is easier to see how it developed within the community.

For highly identified Furies, stigmatization is suggested to come from the fact that they are currently enacting the modes as identified by Deleuze and Guattari of the BwO—specifically those of the masochist body and the schizo body. Deleuze and Guattari (although they do not mention stigmatization by name) have noted that those who have ‘undesirable’ traits are often persecuted by the institutional system. Many critics of the Furies often judge the Furies as having a mental illness and Deleuze and Guattari noted that those who enacted becoming-animal or BwO would be deemed as such. Further study would be needed to analyse whether stereotype reinforcement could be occurring in those who do feel highly stigmatized. This is because one of the main complaints from less identified Furies was that they felt these Furies were ‘acting out the stereotypes’.

An original contribution to research on the Furry Fandom was to build on the idea of fursonas and to explore why certain species are so common within the fandom in Chapter five. Although the IARP’s research had highlighted that canines are particularly common as fursonas and primates were incredibly rare they had not conducted any research into why this was. Data was collected for this thesis which included fursona demographics and it was found that, like IARP data, canines were extremely popular. After analysing comments and popular Furry texts it was suggested in this thesis that the concept of myth was appropriate in

which to analyse why species were chosen. This was because many of the Furry signifiers attributed to fursonas were found in common western myths concerning animals.

Additionally, practicalities and artwork were also discussed in this chapter which have previously been neglected in IARP research on Furies. For Furies who see the Furry fandom as their hobby, especially those who like to make or wear fursuits, species choice is influenced by practicality and economy. Furies who want to ‘wear’ their fursona must pick a species which can ‘walk’ on two legs because otherwise it would be impractical to wear. Popular Furry artwork has also influenced which species are chosen and there has certainly been a preference across the fandom for ‘cute’ or Disneyfied characters.

Although the concept of myth worked well for Furies identifying across the spectrum, it was important to note that highly identified Furies were also identifying with their fursonas on an abstract level. Deleuze and Guattari were used as it was suggested that highly identified Furies chose their fursonas in a way which personified ‘becoming-animal’. To compliment Deleuze and Guattari, Haraway was also included with her notion of companion species as an exploration of the historical link between animals considered as ‘pets’ rather than those used in agriculture, meat industry, science labs etc. Companion species theory worked well for this thesis because it helps explain how the historical relationship between canines/felines and humans has influenced species choice within the Furry Fandom. It was suggested in this piece that companion species are popular choices within the fandom because these are the animals that are most commonly available in positive representations in myth, popular culture and as pets.

An interesting data point in this study, in reference to species choice, was the finding that nearly 25% of Furies who identify themselves as members of the Fandom do not have fursonas at all. This would be completely at odds with previous IARP research such as Roberts et al. (2015a) which sees a fursona as an ‘integral’ part of Furry Fandom

membership. Hence, further research would be needed to help redefine the definition of a Furry if fursonas are not as popular as first thought.

Although many of the stereotypes surrounding Furies refer to sexual deviancy, there is no academic research which investigates this very prevalent stereotype. This is not limited to the Furry Fandom as in fan studies on pornography and its use of within fandoms, has been severely lacking. This may be due to the sense of protection that some fan scholars hold when researching their own fandom.

The study conducted for this thesis using analytical memos, with data collected from the Mature/Adult tags on Furaffinity.com. This study addressed the gap in literature on Furry pornography and presented some conclusions and trends on which further study can be based. It was found that Furry pornography has a certain aesthetic style similar to that found in anime and in cartoon. One of the most important aspects of this research suggested that, unlike the bestiality stereotype, Furry pornography is not representative of a literal animal. The stereotype that Furry pornography is of ‘animals’ having sex was found to be unfounded. By using theorists such as MacCormack and Maher (and others) it was possible to argue that posthuman pornography does not need to provide a realistic representation, and upon textual analysis of the images, it became more credible that these pictures represented human desires. This has the interesting implication that the Furies pornography is not immune to human cultural and social standards when it comes to ‘what is hot and what is not’!

A potential point for further research on Furry pornography could build on the suggestion within the chapter that Furry pornography represents an aspect of posthumanism. What some members of the Furry Fandom have done in their production and consumption of Furry pornography is replacing the human body as the site of desire. When it comes to the concept of ‘passing’ online many people often take the role of a gender/sexuality/etc. which they are not able to enact in real life, for assorted reasons. Further research could discuss the

act of 'passing' in Furry pornography, especially as there is a proportion of Furies who state that their fursona is a different gender and/or sexuality from themselves. This indicates that they use their fursona as a conduit in which to 'pass' in the online Furry world.

Although this chapter argued that highly identified Furies could potentially be using pornography as posthuman, that does not mean they have gotten rid of hierarchies. What is interesting is that they seem to be reproducing a species hierarchy. Canines and felines are regularly used as fursonas and also appeared most commonly in the pornographic images randomly selected for analysis. Further research could focus on the aesthetics of these animals and how they might relate to zoomorphic projections rather than anthropomorphic ones. This is because Furies seem to be taking traits of the animals, such as pretty fur coats, doe eyes, nice pointy ears, and projecting these onto their fursonas to make them 'sexier'. This is in opposition to what is mainly discussed in the chapter which discussed how Furies anthropomorphised the pornography (such as using human breasts and genitalia).

Further theory will need to be formulated on the ethics of the more problematic categories within Furry pornography. In this thesis two of those categories, cub fur and vore, were discussed but there are several other categories that could become ethical and even legal quandaries. 'Feral' pornography is something that I have come across (though not when randomly selecting images for this study). In these categories fursonas can sometimes be presented as non-anthropomorphic and so this could easily be construed by an outsider as a Furry enjoying animal sex. There are also categories which include rape fetishes. These could be included in current research which has investigated rape fetishes (Horeck, 2004).

This chapter offers to fill a gap in current research on the Furry Fandom but also offers ideas that may be applicable to other cartoon pornographies. This work has opened the Furry Fandom up to not be talked about or researched as a homogenous group as has previously been done. This means that more research can focus on how highly identified

Furries are becoming posthuman as well as being able to discuss less identified Furrries within a fan studies theorem. As well as this it has suggested that some of the Furry signifiers identified by the IARP may be conflated so more research is needed on the Furrries in general.

This thesis could point towards different ways to theorise fan erotica, particularly pairings involving animal characters, but can also have greater implications for other areas of study as well. Due to the theoretical context of this study, which combines posthumanism and fan studies, it cites and analyses many pieces that would be relevant for other fandoms which have not yet been thought of within fan studies. Currently, there is little academic work applied to *hentai*, which often has anthropomorphised monsters and fantasy characters. Consumers of hentai are also heavily stigmatized as having deviant fantasies and the work in this chapter may be applicable to them. Using the framework presented in this chapter – such as looking at the art style, whether sexual organs are depicted as human or animal (or in this case monster) – research could end up revealing that *hentai* is also posthuman. This would help to de-stigmatize *hentai* consumers as well.

In conclusion, this thesis has mapped the Furry Fandom and its fan hierarchy in a way that has not been before. It has opened up the way that pornography can be examined within a fandom context, from a posthuman context. This thesis has brought together fan studies and theories of the posthuman to analyse data gathered from members of the Furry Fandom. In this, it offers an overview of a previously under-studied fandom, which offers insight into online behaviour, posthuman identity construction and fan-produced online pornography.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Data analysis from Furry Questionnaire

What is your age range?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">18 - 21 years old</a>	643	63%
2	<a href="#">22 - 25 years old</a>	245	24%
3	<a href="#">26 - 30 years old</a>	100	10%
4	<a href="#">31 - 40 years old</a>	25	2%
5	<a href="#">Over 40 years old</a>	7	1%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,020</b>	<b>100%</b>

fig. 1

Castells et al. argued that the heaviest users of the internet in Western Countries were mostly male and under 25 (Castell et al., 2004: p. 235), this is less accurate today. Although older people are still less likely to use the internet than their younger counterparts many surveys have shown that between the ages of 16 and 44, use of the internet is comparable. In the UK, internet use has risen dramatically in all age categories (ONS, 2015a; figure 2). As well as this, in the UK almost all people in the UK (both men and women) have used the internet in the last 3 months from between the ages of 16- 54 (ONS, 2015b; figure 3).

Table: showing percentage of people in each age range using the internet

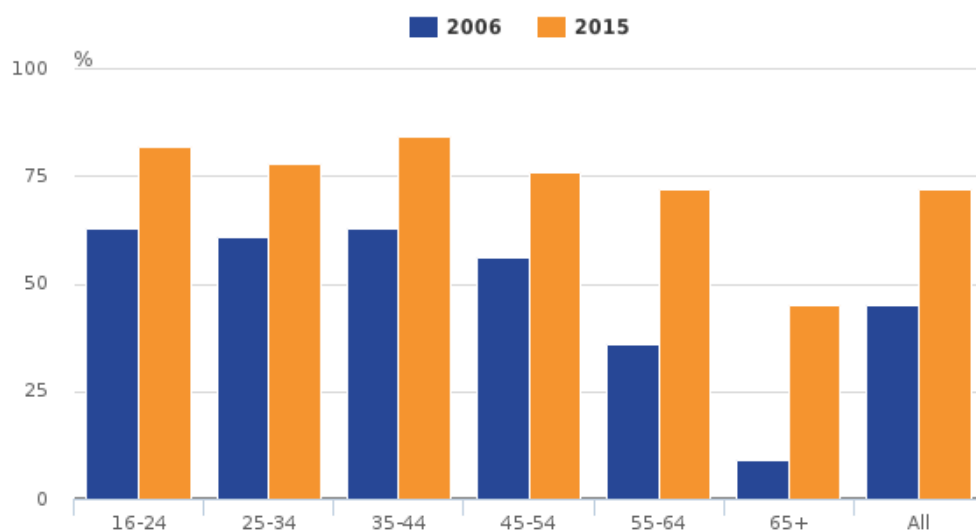


fig 2

### Recent internet users by sex and age group, quarter 1 (Jan to Mar) 2015

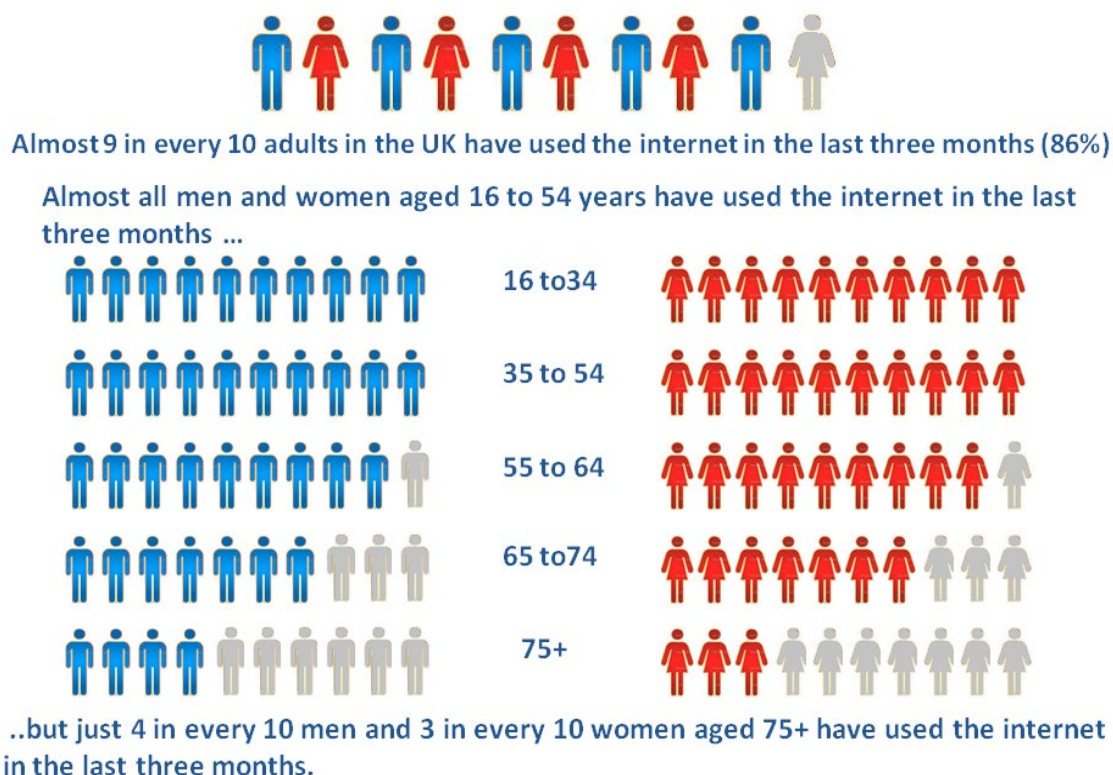


fig. 3

Internet usage has gone up in older age categories and more people over the age of 25. But the under 25s still dominate the Furry Fandom. This may be because more younger demographics use the internet, especially more niche sites such as Reddit.

### What is your gender?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Male	915	90%
2	Female	79	8%
3	Other	26	3%
	Total	1,020	100%

fig. 4

As with other studies on the Furry Fandom by the IARP my data has returned a 9:1 majority of males in the fandom (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Plante et al., 2014; Plante et al., 2015; Sob and Cantor, 2015; Robertson, 2014). A large percentage of male Furies were seen in the Gerbasi et al. study with 86% of their respondents classifying their gender as male (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 204). It is important to note that the Gerbasi et al. 2008 study only had 408 respondents which went down to 270 when 134 eventually refused to share their data and 4 indicated that they were minors and so their data could not be used. In terms of validity it can be suggested that the data here that those who identify as male is significant and may be even more male dominated than previously thought. However, this study did

not have as many gender-fluid identifying individuals as with other studies. For example, Sob and Cantor found that their study had a higher proportion of transgender people compared to the population at large (Sob and Cantor, 2015: p. 1). This could be due to differing cultural attitudes found in some of the countries/nationalities that appeared in this data; data from those from Poland suggested that transgenderism is unacceptable.

Research so far has not found answers as to why female participation is low in the fandom (it has been suggested it could be due to discrimination and sexism). However, scholars suggest that ‘fans may adapt to changes in texts even if they appear to contradict their own ideological views of issues such as gender, nationality and so on’ (Williams, 2015: p. 23). Consequently, many fans may take views in the fandom on popular species, for example, and incorporate those into their fursona even if it wouldn’t be their first choice of animal. As for the fandom is so male dominated, female fans may not have adapted texts to increase their participation yet. In studies conducted by the IARP, and expressed by the community, itself the Furry Fandom has been welcoming and accepting of different genders and sexualities. This may be because older fans are able to instil in new fans what good fan practices are (Hills, 2002: p. 2). Castells argues that ‘internet use follows people’s dominant patterns of behaviour, derived from their social characteristics’ (Castells, 2004: p. 239). This could be a reason why certain demographics are overly subscribed. Another example of this could be that, due to the costs involved in the Furry Fandom with fur suits and conventions younger Furies are likely to congregate online. Having such a large online community younger people are able to get more involved at no cost. The Furry Fandom simply requires an interest in anthropomorphic animals, material of which can be found online.

However, the IARP did ask the question at Furry Fiesta 2015 ‘are women less Furry than men?’ which presented some interesting results which could help to explain why women are less likely to participate in the fandom. Although they found that women did not differ significantly from men in either length of time in the fandom or level of identification, they did differ statistically when it came to a sense of belonging within the fandom. Women were found to more likely retain more aspects in their lives of non-Furry culture and less likely to want to be more fully involved in Furry Fandom compared to men. The IARP is considering whether this was because ‘the fandom may seem less welcoming to them, or less like a place that fulfils their social needs entirely’ (IARP, 2015). They went on to ask participants whether experiences differed between men and women within the fandom. Although women and men had comparable results when it came to the ability to ‘be themselves’, women found that their gender was more likely to be brought up when interacting with the fandom. Women also stated that they were far less comfortable about the portrayal of women in Furry artwork. Although their research argues that interaction is different depending on your gender, it doesn’t give any clear indication of sexism and whether women are actively pushed away from the Furry Fandom. This will need to be researched far more in the future.

## What is your sexuality?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	<a href="#">Hetrosexual</a>		293	29%
2	<a href="#">Homosexual</a>		218	21%
3	<a href="#">Bisexual</a>		305	30%
4	<a href="#">Pansexual</a>		88	9%
5	<a href="#">Demisexual</a>		29	3%
6	<a href="#">Asexual</a>		63	6%
7	<a href="#">Other</a>		24	2%
	Total		1,020	100%

fig. 5

In *Furries from A-Z*, one of the main stereotypes that lay persons ‘knew’ about the Furry Fandom was that Furries were homosexual and this was one of the hypotheses that Gerbasi et al. tested. It was argued that in their study that Furries are a lot less likely than the majority of the population to identify as heterosexual; however this didn’t mean that the majority of Furries identified as simply homosexual, there was a large plethora of different sexualities. This plethora of sexualities was not only found in IARP studies but was also found in the master’s research of this PhD researcher. In the masters data it was found that 32% of respondents stating their sexuality as heterosexual; 25% identifying as homosexual; 30% as bisexual; 13% responding as other, with 10 of those responding as pansexual, 4 as asexual, 2 as not sure, 1 as hetro-flexible and 1 as a-romantic. In this PhD study this trend seems to have continued which suggests that Furries may be placed think in a more post-modern way about sexuality. This was offered in the questionnaire with selection categories but also the option of a free text answer so a whole plethora of sexualities could be included.

In fan studies the concept of ‘acceptance culture’ has been suggested as to why certain sexualities may be oversubscribed in certain fandoms. Henry Jenkins wrote *Out of the Closet and into the Universe* in 1995 about gay Star Trek fans who found that the fan community was a space where their sexuality could be accepted. This has been in other science fiction fandoms such as gay fans of *Towards Tomorrow* (Duffett, 2013: p. 201). Plante et al. (2015) wrote a paper on biological essentialism within the Furry Fandom and came to the conclusion that as Furries in their study felt stigmatized for being Furries they were more likely to react to a threat by falling back into the safety of the group (Plante et al. 2015: p. 3).<sup>50</sup> Does this mean that Furries are more likely to accept different sexualities in their fandom because they understand what it feels like to be stigmatized? Something interesting to note is that there were 127 comments in the data which specifically mentioned how ‘accepting’ the fandom was but with negative connotations rather than positive. The data suggested

<sup>50</sup> This is discussed in more detail under: ‘Have you ever felt stigmatized for being a Furry offline?’

that some Furies felt that because the fandom was too accepting of different lifestyles it meant that some behaviour which they felt shouldn't be tolerated was not policed by other fans properly. There were also 95 comments which also stated that they believed that the Furry Fandom was over sexualised.<sup>51</sup>

On a more positive note, there were also comments from Furies throughout the questionnaire who stated that they believed that being part of the fandom had positively affected their views on their own sexuality. Some stated that being part of the community helped them 'come to terms with it' and this would make sense because there is such a plethora of different sexualities Furies are more exposed to different lifestyles. Could this be due to the community? If the Furies cannot talk about their sexuality to their parents, people in real life, wouldn't it make sense for them to revert back to this online community which isn't as heteronormative as the demographics of offline society:

It really is just something I enjoy and nothing more. I grew up around a lot of anthropomorphized animal characters in cartoons, video games, and the like. And I guess.. that just kinda stuck with me.

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<sup>51</sup> Discussed further in relation to: 'Is there anything you specifically don't like about the Fandom?'

## What is your Nationality?

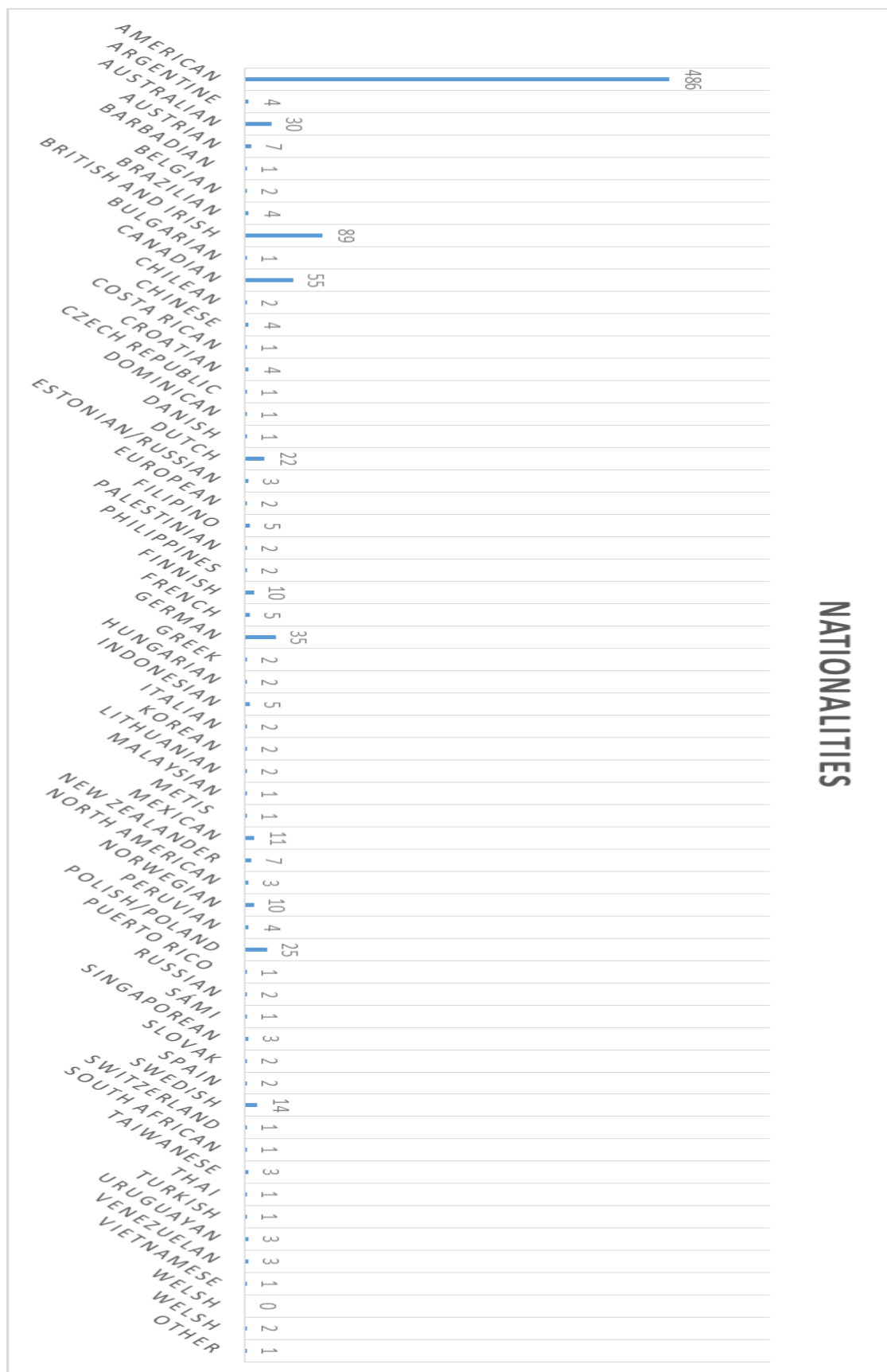


fig. 6

## What is your Country of Residence?



fig. 7

### At what age did you realise you were a Furry?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Under 10 years old</a>	39	4%
2	<a href="#">11 - 15 years old</a>	518	51%
3	<a href="#">16 - 20 years old</a>	382	38%
4	<a href="#">21 years or older</a>	70	7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>1,009</b>	<b>100%</b>

fig. 8

There have been many arguments and generalisations as to the how and why fan communities use the internet. Convergence culture has been used as an argument to explain how several fandoms have seemingly moved into the mainstream (Williams, 2015: p. 17; Booth and Kelly, 2013: p. 57; Proctor, 2015). Not only were fan communities early adopters of the internet, but structures of fan membership have changed (Duffett, 2013: p. 236) and this may have been the case with the growth in membership of the Furry Fandom online.

From the data in this thesis, there seems to be a strong correlation between the ages that people realised they were a Furry and the time when they began to visit Furry websites ('At what age did you begin to use Furry Websites?'). There also seems to be a strong correlation with puberty with 51% of respondents 'realising' they were Furry between 11 and 15 years old. 38% of respondents 'realised' with later puberty which is interesting if you agree with Erikson (1968) that identity formation usually occurs between the age of twelve and twenty. In a psychological study by Long and Chen (2007) they found that internet usage impacted identity formation in three ways: increased risk taking, enhancement of communication when constructing personal views, and perceptions of influence on plans for a future role (Long and Chen, 2007: p. 104) in their subjects who were between the ages of 12 and 18 (Long and Chen, 2007: p. 99). In relation to Furies, this could mean that their Furry identity construction was enhanced because in this study they 'discovered' Furry content (fig 19; fig 20) at 'peak' puberty age (see 'at what age did you begin to use Furry websites'):

Respondent: [00:03:45] Yes. I found out about the fandom through Second Life, I didn't realise there was a fandom. Although, I guess, if I'd known much earlier I would have been in it sooner, but I'm just from a small town, and there wasn't a whole lot of anything like that going on, any sort of fan group, kind of, activity. So, yes, I didn't really find out about it until 2005, but I've been a big fan of Anthropomorphics, gosh, since I was probably ten or eleven.

Interviewer: [00:04:12] Oh, okay. So, I mean, you say you were a fan when you were ten or eleven of anthropomorphic things, like, what kind of anthropomorphic objects did you have your hands on, sort of thing, were they story books or ...

Respondent: [00:04:26] Mainly just the animated shows, the cartoons and colouring books, that sort of thing.

What needs to be investigated in the qualitative data in this thesis is whether and/or to what extent being a Furry is a sexual identity as well. From the quantitative data, there seems a strong resistance from a sizeable number of Furies to their 'Furriness' being anything to do with their sexuality; out of 627 comments, 95 of those comments were grievances about over-sexualisation of the fandom and another 49 comments were made from Furies who didn't like the 'lifestylers' who made Furry their identity over it being a hobby activity. This will go into some controversial territory in regards to transgender theory, as although some of the material may be problematic the ideas may be borrowable.

### Do you have a Fursona? And Do you use one of your Fursona's more often than the others or as your "main" fursona?

Table: Do you have a fursona?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Yes</a>	635	63%
2	<a href="#">Yes - I have 2 or more different Fursona's</a>	129	13%
3	<a href="#">No</a>	247	24%
	Total	1,011	100%

fig. 9

Table: Do you use one fursona more often?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Yes</a>	108	86%
2	<a href="#">No</a>	18	14%
	Total	126	100%

fig. 10

According to IARP research on the Furry Fandom an almost universal part of being a furry is the creation of a fursona. This is a specific persona that is created using a species of animal with anthropomorphic characteristics and without the requirement to base their fursona on one particular media text. However, this study found an astonishing 24% of respondents of 1,011 results did not have a fursona at all. Other research has shown that it is uncommon for a furry to have more than two fursonas at one given time, so most Furies typically identify with a single fursona. Though, this can be subject to change such as species, characteristics and personality over time (Plante et al., 2015: p. 13) which is mirrored in these results; Data here suggests that a Furry is more likely to have no fursona over having two or more.

This may be an indication of the 'hobby vs lifestyle' difference that is beginning to show in my results. The Kinsey scale may be utilized in further study to gage just 'how' engaged someone is with their fursona:

Respondent: [00:06:42] When I was on more of the art, I would attend conventions, usually as a vendor. But, I would also just attend just for fun. Now, I'd say, probably, I

haven't really been a physical part of the community, maybe for about seven years, I would say.

Interviewer: [00:07:05] Oh, so you've been in the fandom quite a long time then?

Respondent: [00:07:10] Yes. I mean, I would say that I started doing artwork, let me see, maybe in 1999/2000. But, I didn't really consider myself a real furry until, maybe, 2005 even.

Am a very casual Furry, no irl furry friends, no fursona (yet)

The difference between IARP data and this thesis could be because the questionnaire had been much wider in numbers and also has had a much wider reach in concern of countries; IARP studies have been mainly based in the USA. A point of interest came about when looking at whether Furies without a fursona go online for Furry related activities a lot less than Furies with fursonas. Although non-fursonas were less likely to go on daily (52.6%) compared to those who had Fursonas (70.9%) or those who had two or more ursonas (77%) they were still likely to go on regularly (fig. 11); another 33.9% of non-fursona Furies go online for Furry related activities at least 2-3 times a week. When looking at Furies in general, those who go online two to three times or more a week, the results were very comparable. 91.8% of Furies with fursona's were in this category, 93.5% of Furies with two or more fursonas, and 86.5% of non-fursona Furies going online more than 2-3 times a week. There is not a huge variation with heavy online Furry activity between those with fursonas and those without (fig. 11).

		How often do you go online for Furry related activities?						Total
		Less than once a month	Once a month	2-3 times a month	Once a week	2-3 times a week	Daily	
Do you have a Fursona?	Yes	10	4	12	23	128	433	610
	Yes - I have 2 or more different Fursona's	2	0	1	4	20	94	121
	No	5	3	11	12	78	121	230
	Total	17	7	24	39	226	648	961

fig. 11

This has been one of the more surprising parts of the results and this needs to be investigated further. Like other research, it was expected that fursonas would be, not only important, but integral to being a Furry but the results would argue that they are not. There is evidence to suggest that this is because those who do not have a fursona see being a Furry as being a 'fan of anthropomorphism' rather than those who have a fursona who see being a Furry as integral to their identity.

### **What animal or animals is your fursona based on? And Has your fursona changed over the years? (If Yes, Why?)**

There is evidence to suggest that common species chosen for a fursona are from the canine family such as a wolf or a fox (Gerbası et al., 2008: p. 205; Grivell et al., 2014: p. 114) and rarely from the

ape family (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 198) - although a mixture of two species can sometimes be seen. Gerbasi et al. (2008) regard Furries use of fursonas as a process of self-authentication (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 239), using the species of their chosen fursona to personify certain personality traits that they themselves had or wished to be perceived as having. This has shown to be somewhat consistent with the results from the question below as many who answered the question: ‘Has your fursona changed over the years?’ replied that it was because their own personality and likes/dislikes changed (fig. 13).

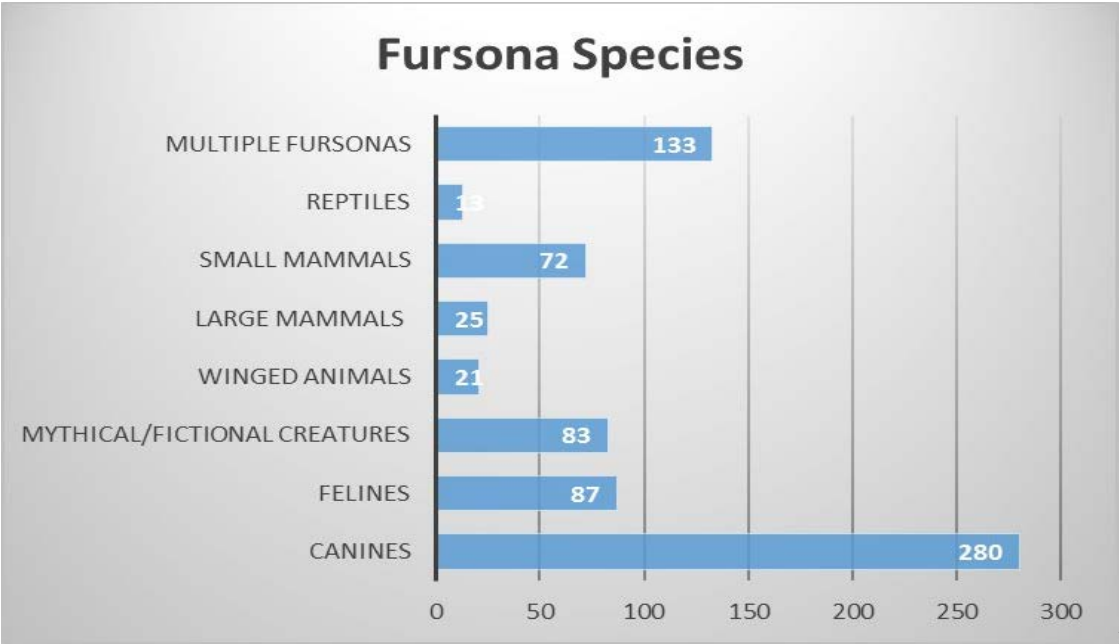


fig. 12

Thus far there has been little analysis on why certain species are oversubscribed, the briefest of analysis was given Gerbasi et al. (2008: p. 198) as to why apes were very rare ‘for obvious reasons’ in that they are too close to humans. This is conjecture and would need more research there are some reasons why canines in particular are over-represented. Harold Herzog of Western Carolina University in the US, says these differences show that pet-keeping is purely cultural and Western countries are far more likely to own a dog as a ‘pet’ rather than a working animal (BBC Earth, 2015); as most of the people in this study come from Western countries where dogs are popular as pets this could help explain why this popularity is transferred over to fursonas. Unfortunately, there was insufficient data to see whether the opposite was true i.e see if dogs were unpopular in countries where dogs are seen as ‘dirty’ like China and Korea. As well as this, there is also scientific evidence which emotional bonding by gazing into a dogs eyes actually increases oxytocin levels meaning that there is a chemical component to how we feel about dogs (Nagasawa et Al, 2015).

I	A	B		
dentity	esthetic	oredom		ther
Change	Choices			

	1	1	1		
33		42	1		5

fig. 13

Another point of note is that although reptiles were unpopular in this study. Dragons (categorised as fictional/mythical creatures in this study) were somewhat popular with 44 pure dragon fursonas and 22 dragon mixes. Mythical creatures including griffons, phoenix's, various fursonas based on Pokémon, were almost as popular as feline fursona's (83 mythical versus 88 felines) (Fig. 14). This is interesting as many of these animals are not 'furry' in the aesthetic sense but scaly or rough skinned.

Canines	Felines	Mythical/Fictional Creatures	Winged Animals	Large Mammals	Small Mammals	Reptiles	Multiple Fursonas
88 Wolves	28 Domestic cats	2 Argonians	2 Unspecified Birds	10 Bears	1 Chinchilla	1 Alligator	20 Canine mixes
111 Foxes	3 Unspecified Feline	1 Avali	1 American Kestrel	1 Bison	3 Ermine/Ferrets	1 Bearded Dragon	15 Canine and Feline Mixes
77 Dogs	6 Cheetahs	1 Braixen	5 Bats	3 Cows	5 Goats	1 Crocodile	44 Canine and Other Specie Mixes
1 Tasmanian Devil	1 Jaguar	44 Dragons	1 Crow	11 Deer	1 Jerboa	1 Veiled Chameleon	22 Dragon Mixes
4 Wolverines	14 Leopards	4 Gryphons	1 Common Pheasant	3 Horses	1 Kangaroo Rat	6 Unspecified Reptiles	32 Various Mixes
	6 Lions	1 Hippogriff	1 Duck	1 Jackalope	12 Otters	2 Raptors	
	10 Lynx's	1 Jakkai	1 Moth	2 Kangaroo	1 Pig	1 Turtle	
	1 Ocelot	1 Kobold	5 Owls	1 Panda	9 Rabbits		
	2 Panthers	2 Leviathan	1 Pine Marten	1 African Waterbuck	14 Raccoons		
	1 Polecat	4 Phoenix	1 Penguin	2 Zebra	2 Rats		
	1 Sabertooth	7 Pokemon	1 Raven		13 Red Panda		
	14 Tigers	1 MLP Pony	1 Black-backed Seagull		1 Sheep		
		1 Digimon			4 Stoats		
		12 Sergal			4 Skunk		
		1 Wusky					
Total	280	87	83	21	25	72	13
							133

fig. 14

## Do you own a Fur-suit?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Yes - And I wear it in Public</a>	49	5%
2	<a href="#">Yes - But I don't wear it in Public</a>	32	3%
3	<a href="#">No - But I would like to own one</a>	593	60%
4	<a href="#">No - And I wouldn't want to own one</a>	321	32%
	Total	995	100%

fig. 15

Currently, the stereotypes is that Furies are members of a sexual fandom that wear fur suits and have deviant sexual relations in these suits; although the vast majority of Furies do not own them (largely due to the huge costs in making one) (Plante et al., 2014; 2015; Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 205). These inconsistent stereotypes are widespread as being an identifying Furry characteristic. In the master's study of this PhD researcher, only 14% of those who answered the questionnaire had a fursuit (with 1% of those who owned one not wanting to wear it in public). This is compared to 63% of respondents in this PhD study who stated that although they didn't have a fursuit they would like to acquire one. In this study there was a huge number of Furies who would like to own a fursuit compared to those who already owned one:

RE: fursuits: they're super neat and I like them a lot but I don't really have a reason to own one (I don't go to a lot of conventions, I don't like to dance and perform very much, and besides, good lord are they expensive). I am in the market for an ear and tail set though, as I may be attending a small con later this year

This study found that 32% of respondents would not even want to own a fursuit. This may be because of the different environments that these studies were conducted; because *Furries from A-Z* was conducted at a convention, participants may have bought their fur-suits or furry articles of clothing for making their own full fur suit for the convention (as it was a special occasion) or even at the convention itself. Despite this, this research may mean that societal stereotypes of most Furies wearing fursuits is statistically wrong and that there may be a larger contingent of Furies who do not find the fursuiting activities as important. This should be researched further as it goes further away from the negative deviance stereotype of people just 'dressing up' (Bryant and Forsyth, 2012: p. 532). This may lead research towards the fursona itself being more important than the physical owning of Furry objects for the fandom members. What is interesting is that this result has shown to be quite consistent with other studies in that although the stereotype is incorrect that all Furies have a fursuit and there is certainly a large group of Furies who at least like the idea of owning one.

### Do you use the internet for Furry related activity? And How often do you go online for Furry related activity?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Yes</a>	988	99%
2	<a href="#">No</a>	5	1%
	Total	993	100%

fig. 16

A majority of Furies used the internet in general for Furry activity with only 5 respondents stating they did not use the internet for Furry activities at all. The respondents in this study also use the internet on a very regular basis for Furry related activity across all different age ranges (fig 18). This reflects surveys in the UK at least which show that people between 16 and 44 years old use the internet in comparable amounts (ONS, 2015a; figure 2). Interestingly, 100% of over 40s use the internet at least two to three times a week for Furry activities in this study. However, this may be because there were only five people in that age category who answered this question. The other categories were very comparable with 90.7% 16-21 years old using the internet at least 2-3 times a week, 92.1% of 22–25 year olds, 88.5% of 26–30 year olds and 91.6% of 31–40 year olds.

Possible explanations for the importance that Furies put on online usage within the community has been recording by many putting an emphasis on online communities ‘providing a safe haven’ (Grivell et al., 2014: p. 121). There have been problems within other fandoms when it comes to over-emphatic boundary policing in online communities by fans on what is acceptable fan behaviour and what is ‘over-feminization’ and also the problem of ‘geek hierarchies’ (Busse, 2013: p. 75). However, the Furry community is different from other fandoms in their online spaces as there are no media texts on which they have to test each other’s knowledge to find the ‘true fan’ and who should not be there and there is seemingly no geek hierarchy. However, some respondents in this survey have lamented the affordability of fursuits and wish they could own them as others do and the fandom created the word ‘pop-furs’ to describe the most popular and well known members of the fandom.

Table: How often do you go online for Furry related activity?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Less than once a month</a>	17	2%
2	<a href="#">Once a month</a>	7	1%
3	<a href="#">2-3 times a month</a>	24	2%
4	<a href="#">Once a week</a>	39	4%
5	<a href="#">2-3 times a week</a>	226	24%
6	<a href="#">Daily</a>	648	67%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>961</b>	<b>100%</b>

fig.

		What is your age range?					Total
		18 - 21 years old	22 - 25 years old	26 - 30 years old	31 - 40 years old	Over 40 years old	
How often do you go online for Furry related activities?	Less than once a month	13	3	1	0	0	17
	Once a month	6	1	0	0	0	7
	2-3 times a month	14	7	3	0	0	24
	Once a week	23	7	7	2	0	39
	2-3 times a week	144	54	22	5	1	226
	Daily	406	158	63	17	4	648
Total		606	230	96	24	5	961

17

fig.

18

These results are not overly-surprising as one of the main hypotheses about this thesis is that the Furry Fandom extensively use the internet and especially internet communities for their fandom behaviour. There is little information available on life for Furies before the internet but the search will continue as it may give an insight to how the fandom has grown. The internet has certainly been important in the creation of different Furry fan communities with most recently the rise of the Brony fandom which started on the popular online forum 4Chan (Robertson, 2014: p. 23). When the newest cartoon reboot/remake of the *My Little Pony* franchise hit the screens with its use of intertextuality, it garnered an unexpected audience in young men; Robertson suggested that men began to watch the show ironically as ‘a strategic device to express their hetero-normative masculinity while retaining deniability’ (Robertson, 2014: p. 27). However, there was no explanation by Robertson what proportion she believed or knew to be straight. By using the internet, the young men who were able to produce ‘authentic self-expression and reification within the bosom of a community that supports and shares these goals’ (Robertson, 2014: p. 34 ). Interestingly, there doesn’t seem to be a huge difference between people with different sexual orientations and how often they go online for Furry activities (fig 18). This is interesting because it raises the question that if some people watch and enjoy Furry media like *My Little Pony* ironically due to their hetero-normativity, why do people of other orientations watch it? Are they also watching ironically even though they are not needing to achieve ‘deniability’?

### At what age did you start to use Furry websites?

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="#">Under 10 years old</a>	8	1%
2	<a href="#">11 - 15 years old</a>	463	48%
3	<a href="#">16 - 20 years old</a>	420	44%
4	<a href="#">20 years old and older</a>	71	7%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>962</b>	<b>100%</b>

fig. 19

		At what age did you start to use Furry websites?				
		Under 10 years old	11 - 15 years old	16 - 20 years old	20 years old and older	Total
At what age did you realise you were a Furry?	Under 10 years old	4	21	6	3	34
	11 - 15 years old	4	397	97	4	502
	16 - 20 years old	0	44	301	14	359
	21 years or older	0	1	15	49	65
	<b>Total</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>463</b>	<b>419</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>960</b>

fig. 20

As discussed earlier (At what age did you realise you were a Furry?), There is a strong correlation with puberty age and usage of Furry websites and therefore consumption of Furry media on these sites (fig. 20). Although further research would be needed, this suggests that there could be a connection and that by being exposed to Furry Media at the time when their identity is being formed (Erikson, 1968) that it has had an impact on them creating a Furry identity.

A difficulty is that because the Furry Fandom can be secretive due to perceived stigmatization, there is no way to accurately find out whether there was any sort of Furry community before the internet. Although there were some comments in the data that the person 'always had felt' their Furriness in one way or another before finding out about it online, there is no way to tell whether they would have developed Furry tendencies without access to the internet or not.

### Have you used any of the below Furry websites? and Have you used any of these non-furry focused websites for any Furry related activity?

Table: Commonly used websites

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="http://www.furaffinity.net">www.furaffinity.net</a>	888	93%
2	<a href="http://www.furcation.com">www.furcation.com</a>	51	5%
3	<a href="http://www.furriesxtreme.org">www.furriesxtreme.org</a>	33	3%
4	<a href="http://www.sofurry.com">www.sofurry.com</a>	347	36%
5	<a href="http://www.furrymate.com">www.furrymate.com</a>	33	3%
6	<a href="http://www.furry4life.org">www.furry4life.org</a>	19	2%
7	<a href="#">None of these</a>	108	11%

fig. 21

		Have you used any of the below Furry websites? (If you do not use any of these, please type in we...							Total
		www.furaffinity.net	www.furination.com	www.furriesxtreme.org	www.sofurry.com	www.furrymate.com	www.furry4life.org	None of these	
What is your age range?	18 - 21 years old	551	10	11	185	12	8	73	604
	22 - 25 years old	216	17	9	94	11	5	23	230
	26 - 30 years old	93	10	7	50	7	2	9	96
	31 - 40 years old	23	10	4	14	2	2	2	24
	Over 40 years old	5	4	2	4	1	2	1	5
Total		888	51	33	347	33	19	108	959

fig. 22

This question was asked to get some general background on what were popular Furry websites. This may help in further research as it helps to know where to find the Furry media. From the results it is evident that Furaffinity.com is by far the most popular with 93% of all the respondents having used it and most popular website across all the age groups. This suggests that there is not a huge split between old and young on what dedicated Furry sites they use.

Reddit was the most popular non-Furry site (fig 23) that is used for Furry activities, however this result is skewed because this was the primary site where the questionnaire was distributed so was obviously going to be over-represented. Therefore, it cannot be argued that Reddit.com would be the most popular if the questionnaire has been distributed elsewhere.

Table: Non-Furry websites used for Furry related activity

#	Answer	Response	%
1	<a href="http://www.reddit.com">www.reddit.com</a>	922	96%
2	<a href="http://www.4chan.org">www.4chan.org</a>	205	21%
3	<a href="http://www.deviantart.com">www.deviantart.com</a>	591	62%
4	<a href="http://www.facebook.com">www.facebook.com</a>	212	22%
5	None of these	48	5%

fig. 23

		Have you used any of these non-furry focused websites for any Furry related activity? (If you do...					Total
		www.reddit.com	www.4chan.org	www.deviantart.com	www.facebook.com	None of these	
What is your age range?	18 - 21 years old	586	128	369	121	29	606
	22 - 25 years old	214	50	137	51	10	229
	26 - 30 years old	93	22	61	27	6	96
	31 - 40 years old	24	3	19	10	2	24
	Over 40 years old	5	2	5	3	1	5
Total		922	205	591	212	48	960

fig. 24

Other studies state that content creation (like Furry art) is very popular (Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 198) and creative site Deviantart.com has been very popular in this study. Although from the data that is present it cannot be said whether all the Furies who are using Deviantart are uploading their own art onto it, it can be suggested that 62% at the very least have used Deviantart to look at the Furry media created by others.

## Internet Access

#	Question	Not important at all	Not important	Undecided/Neutral	Important	Very important	Total Responses	Mean
1	How important was internet access when you first became a Furry?	11	30	73	287	557	960	4.41
2	How important is being able to access Furry media online? (art, stories)	8	50	139	359	492	956	4.15
3	How important is being able to speak to other Furies online?	55	191	252	303	289	960	3.61
4	How important is it to be able to access Furry online groups to you?	50	116	267	333	192	958	3.52

F

ig. 25

Recent research would indicate that there is a real importance to online fan hubs. Stephanie Tuszynski focused on participants of the online forum known as ‘The Bronze’ which was dedicated to *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* fans. The respondents noted that there was a large sense of community that they could not forge in real life because their offline friends were not fans of the show. Some respondents even went and met each other in real life and exchanged gifts (Tuszynski, 2011). Another online group are the Brony Fandom who perform solidarity with one another by calling themselves ‘the herd’ (Robertson, 2014: p. 26). Being a Furry is certainly an identity that is not easy to share and to find others with whom to share it. As Rheingold states ‘you can’t just pick up a phone and ask to be connected to someone who wants to talk about Islamic art or California wine’ (Rheingold, 1993: p. 23). This is certainly true, also, with the Furry Fandom. Due to the fear of stigmatization, the allure of the anonymity of the internet makes it a more likely place for their activities rather than the offline world and this is one of the reasons why the internet has been so important for the Furry community. In relation to this, although opponents of online communities claim that the web facilitates people withdrawing away from society and is infantile in nature (Bell, 2001: p. 105) they fail to think broadly in terms of minority groups. For example, some previous academic writers such as Kevin Robins in the essay *Cyberspace and the World We Live In* (1995) does not address the fact that traditional communities are usually exclusive in their members; ‘The place where everybody knows your name is also the place where everybody knows your business’ (Robins, 1995: p. 106) has meant that for those who are not accepted into society, membership of an online community gives in a space where they can receive the solidarity and community values that they do not get in real life.

## Furry in the Media and Do you think that Furries have been portrayed negatively by the mass media?

#	Question	Label 1	Count 1	Label 2	Count 2	Label 3	Count 3	Total Responses	Mean
1	Have you seen Furies in the news (paper, internet articles) this year?	Yes	724	No	112	Unsure/Can't remember	69	905	1.28
2	If yes, was the news positive or negative about Furies?	Positive	323	Negative	244	Unsure/Can't remember	285	852	1.96

fig. 26

Table: Do you feel Furies have been portrayed negatively by the media?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	<a href="#">Yes</a>		749	83%
2	<a href="#">Unsure</a>		121	13%
3	<a href="#">No</a>		36	4%
	<b>Total</b>		906	100%

fig. 27

There is still a huge amount of Furies who feel that they are portrayed negatively by the media which echoes sentiments in other studies (Plante et al., 2013; 2015, Gerbasi et al., 2008).

### Which of these non-Furry groups are you happy to be openly Furry around?

#	Answer		Response	%
1	<a href="#">Family</a>		182	20%
2	<a href="#">Close Friends</a>		585	65%
3	<a href="#">Acquaintances</a>		141	16%
4	<a href="#">Random people on street</a>		79	9%
5	<a href="#">People I haven't met on Social Media</a>		162	18%
6	<a href="#">People I have met on Social Media</a>		322	36%
7	<a href="#">Other</a>		62	7%
8	<a href="#">None of these</a>		205	23%

fig. 28

Recent research conducted by the University of Waterloo has shown how the Furry community is similar to other stigmatized communities. From their research they have found that even though Furies do belong to a stigmatized group, 'identification with one's minority group is positively related to well-being' (Plante et al., 2013: p. 4) rather than being detrimental. As with other groups, the Gurry community is also likely to strategically revert to methods of biological essentialism when faced with a threat to group identity (Plante et al., 2014: p. 2). Biological essentialism in general theorises that the more stigmatized a group a person belongs to, the more the person will react to a threat and thus make fall back into the safety of the group (Plante et al., 2014: p. 3). Many Furies see their group as highly stigmatized (Plante et al., 2015: p. 2; Gerbasi et al., 2008: p. 199; Healy and Beverland, 2013: p. 229) which may show why Furies are likely to have essentialist beliefs (Plante et al., 2014: p. 3). This is why the IARP argue that Furies may choose to 'adopt concealment strategies to manage the stigma of belonging to a minority group' (Plante et Al, 2013: p. 5) which is very different from other fandom groups which have seemingly moved into the mainstream public eye due to convergence culture (Scott 2013: xv). Also, unlike other fandoms which are now being described as 'geek-chic' (Proctor, 2015: p. 1), the Furry Fandom has not been as successful as moving into the mainstream. This may be why 23% of respondents would not be happy being openly Furry around any of these groups.

What is encouraging however is that there was not as much concealment as had been hypothesised so it may be that the feelings of stigmatization are starting to lift and why Furries are becoming more open to sharing the fandom.

### Have you ever felt stigmatized for being a Furry online? And Have you ever felt stigmatized for being a Furry offline?

YES	NO	CONCEALMENT	C THER	T OTAL
374	268	101	6	749

Fig 29 - Online

Y ES	N O	CONCEA LMENT	C THER	T otal
246	305	177	14	742

Fig 30 – Offline

Once again there has been a lot lower levels of stigmatization than hypothesised, especially with stigmatization in the offline world. It was expected that Furries who were open about being a Furry in the offline world would have experienced more stigmatization. This is because much of the general public only know what they have seen on television and often bring up ‘uncertain references’ to popular culture (Soh and Cantor, 2015: p. 1) when asked about who and what Furries are. However, less Furries had felt stigmatized in the offline world than had felt stigmatized and more Furries felt stigmatized online. This may be because several of the respondents mentioned that they had felt a lot of stigmatization online by trolls and anti-Furry websites like r/furryhate, this lead to some even creating alternate accounts for Furry use and non-Furry use:

It's very hard to explain to someone what being a Furry is. And any time I have tried they always slightly misunderstand something (completely accidentally) and it can make it seem like something quite different very easily. The fact it's tough to understand what it is, (you basically have to live it to know what it's like), is likely what makes others struggle to understand/empathise with us

This result has created a quandary for the research as it was presumed that there would be a much higher rate of stigmatization in offline and much less online due in part to other studies that have been conducted; mainly Plante et al., 2013 on biological essentialism in Furries. This view in part was created because there are very few academic studies on the Furry Fandom and so stigmatization is under-researched. What to do next will need to be discussed with further with supervisors as this result is so different from previous studies.

**Is there anything you specifically don't like about the Fandom? And Is there anything you would like to add about your experiences of being a Furry?**

Over Tolerance	Over Sexualisation	Stigmatization	Casual Fandom	Other Fans	No Dislike	Other
127	95	49	49	265	93	42

Fig 31 – Dislikes of the Fandom

Academics have been criticised in fan studies for looking at studied fandoms through ‘rose-tinted glasses’ and have sometimes ignored the ‘inappropriate’ characteristics that can be found within them (Stanfill, 2013: p. 125). This is in part due to fan studies own bias as often the researcher has been a ‘fan’ of the fandom they are studying. Despite the lack of research, there is evidence that fans often regulate themselves to discourage this behaviour and to protect their fandom. This seems to be very prevalent with Furies are often categorized as a bad fandom due to their ‘sexual deviant’ stereotyping by wider society. The erotic side of the Furry Fandom such as with the Brony Fandom with ‘clop-fic’ (Robertson, 2014: p. 31) or ‘yiff’ with the general Furry population (Sob and Cantor, 2015: p. 2). Most Furies mentioned ‘disliking’ this aspect and trying to distance themselves from it due to sociocultural stigma. Not only this but many Furies complained of over-sexualisation in general and complained that sometimes it seemed that all other Furies would talk about was sex.

Another type of comment that came up was that the Furry Fandom is too tolerant; studies have shown previously that there is a plethora of different sexualities and lifestyles in the Furry Fandom and some Furies have said that this has had a negative impact. The term ‘hug-box’ was used several times and the general complaint was that because the fandom was based on being open to everyone. that sometimes Furies would ignore extreme behaviour. They mentioned behaviour which they felt that the fandom should have regulated, paedophilia and rapists were some of the examples given. However. when asked if there was anything you would like to add ‘acceptance’ in the community was mentioned 81 times in a positive way.

A very common word that was found in the analysis was ‘drama’, when speaking about other fans there were vast amounts of comments that indicated that they felt some fans were either perpetrating ‘drama’ or, were too immature to handle situations properly thus causing ‘drama’. This attitude may be related to the fact that as there is no ‘set’ media text for Furies to base their fandom on there is a much wider demographic range compared to other fandoms. Different demographics such as age ranges, have different ways they react to situations, many of the comments insinuated that the ‘drama’ came mainly from the younger spectrum of the fandom. But there are also many who found the fandom comforting:

Despite the oversexualization, the fandom really is a great thing to be a part of. Everyone is very friendly and it gives me a great excuse to practice my art skills, since the creative aspect of the fandom is absolutely fantastic.

Interviewer: [00:04:19] Yes. So, did you get involved in, sort of, drawing the furry artwork, when you were talking about, you know, doing some illustration on the side, was that commissioned?

Respondent: [00:04:31] Yes. I mostly did colouring work on other people's illustrations, [unintelligible 00:04:35]. But, I mean, honestly, it wasn't really my thing at first, but I really felt good with the community. The people are pretty nice generally, and easy to talk to, so as opposed to some other communities that are, kind of, not very welcoming to outsiders, and things like that.

As the Furry Fandom isn't as homogenous as other groups in why they are in the fandom this could cause more friction between fans. This was mentioned in (fig 32) several times but not often enough to merit its own category and so was put in just 'general negative':

While it is a fantastic and liberating experience to be a part of, an important thing is to never forget 'Furry' is not a monolithic construct. We are as diverse as it gets and even more, seeing the openness to all manner of quirks. It is important to know what 'shard' of a fandom you belong to and stick with the like-minded. A thing that many tend to forget about. / And, by extension, to be aware of these sub-clusters when performing studies like these.

Another interesting point that was brought up in these comments and also (fig 32) was that some Furrries wanted to make it clear that they felt it was only a hobby; some were even openly hostile to those who saw Furry as an identity i.e. 'took it too seriously'. Casual Fandom was mentioned 49 times in (fig 31) and 41 times in (fig 32).

Making New Friends	Accepting Community	Self- Acceptance	Casual Fandom	Stigmatization and Concealment	General Positive	General Negative	
66	81	53	41	42	90	31	

Fig 32 – Extra Comments

One of the interesting types of comments that was made (fig 32) is that 53 comments mentioned how the fandom had helped them come to some form of self-acceptance. Several stated that being part of the fandom had helped them accept their own sexuality and had improved their self-image:

It's helped me be more open with myself. It's helped me be more accepting of other people and the 'mask' that we all wear from day to day. I've learned to really look at people's personalities, not just their features and surface traits

What is important to note is that although the extra comments are overwhelmingly positive this may be because the previous question had asked them their dislikes already so they felt they did not need to reiterate these in the final question.

## FINAL COMMENTS AND SUMMARY

1. Nationality and Country of Residence were purposefully left blank from analysis in response to Farah's comment on the draft to discuss the best way to use this data when we next have a meeting
2. The results for stigmatization were widely different than hypothesised and a discussion will need to be had on what to do with these results and where to go from there
3. Use of internet and Furry websites was very high and in keeping with stereotypes and hypotheses
4. The Furry Fandom is still overwhelmingly male even though this is the largest academic survey on the fandom.
5. There is a plethora of sexualities in the Fandom rather than mainly heterosexual which is in keeping with results from other studies.
6. There seems to be a strong correlation with puberty and a strong correlation with when people first visited Furry websites.
7. Another shock result was that 24% of Furies do not have fursonas – This goes against previous studies who have asserted that Fursonas are an important part of the Furry identity. A discussion on identity construction within the fandom will need to be had with supervisors but currently it seems that this study will end up with two different types of Furies – The casuals and the lifestylers.
8. Fursuits are still popular among the majority who would like them but few actually own them, in keeping with the results from other studies.
9. There is a struggle between two types of fans who see the accepting nature and open-mindedness of the Fandom a good thing or a bad thing.

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## Preface to Appendix, B, C, and D

The following appendices contain the coding taken from the raw data collected for this thesis. The reason why these have been split from Appendix A is because they contain the qualitative, descriptive data from both the Qualtrics data and interviews conducted that are specifically relevant to stigmatization, species choice and pornography chapter. The appendices have been laid out this way because each of those chapters are an original contribution to knowledge and thus it was prudent to include the data for each of those points.

To analyse the qualitative data for each chapter was achieved through inductive reasoning via grounded theory. For Kozinets; ‘induction is a form of logical reasoning in which individual observations are built up in order to make more general statements about a phenomenon’ (Kozinets, 2010: p. 119). This works well with grounded theory in that this framework aims to build up observations in a logical and understandable way. Bryman notes that within grounded theory ‘if the aim is to see through the eyes of those whom one studies, the expectation of some consistency of findings is not unreasonable’ (Bryman, 1988: p. 74-75). Grounded theory has been used from an interpretative perspective and so the qualitative data has been analysed considering three issues:

In other words, the researcher, the discipline, the culture to be translated, and the culture into which it is translated form an interwoven amalgam of elements. ...the way in which the natives view the world; the ethnographer’s interpretation of how they view the world; and the ethnographer’s construction of his or her interpretation of the native’s view of the world for the ethnographer’s own intellectual and cultural community (Bryman, 1988: p. 80).

The coding that was chosen to interpret the data within grounded theory was axial coding. Axial coding is a ‘set of procedures whereby data are put together in new ways after open coding, by making a connection between categories’ (Bryman, 2012: p. 569). The way this is presented in Appendix B and C is by presenting the final coding categories which were present within the data with corresponding quotations. Appendix D differs only in that these codes are presented alongside the visual data analysis that was done. Analytical memos were used as they are useful tools in grounded theory where their purpose is to be ‘notes that researchers might write for themselves and for those with whom they work’ (Bryman, 2012: p. 573). These memos were useful in this research as their ‘goal is not to summarize the data

but to reflect and expound on them. Future directions, unanswered questions, frustrations with the analysis, insightful connections, and anything about the researched and the researcher are acceptable content for memos' (Saldana, 2016: p. 45). This was important as Appendix D was the last chapter written for this thesis and so axial coding was appropriate, as even though the data was not collected with the Furry questionnaire, data from this was connected to the visual data collected at a later date. As such, axial coding was able to be applied to all sections.

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# Appendix B – Stigmatization Analysis

## Coding on Stigmatization

### *Lifestyle vs. Hobby*

1. A lot of things. People tend to be easily offended if you don't agree with them or everything they do resulting a lot of drama. There is also a minority of people that tend to take it too far, referring to being a furry as a life style or identity as opposed to being a hobby.
2. The over-the-top attitude with people and their characters. / People whose life is based upon furies.
3. There are some who take the escapism that the furry fandom provides too far. These people believe that they are actually part animal or are animals reincarnated. Generally, they blame their own personal problems because of these. I love the furry community and I have a fursona myself, but I know that I am a person first and foremost. That my fursona is just a character, not something that is actually real or physically a part of me.
4. The fact that a minority of members take it super serious, as in wearing fursuit and acting like their fursona in public, and then being outraged when people react negatively.
5. People too serious about it
6. Lifestylers who make their involvement in the fandom nothing but PORN, PORN, PORN. Yes, porn is a considerable amount of the fandom but holy shit those people just turn everything and everything into "so where's the porn/hey these are my fetishes/wanna fuck" moments after talking to them.
7. Some people try to "live furry" like incorporate it in to every aspect of their lives. That's a little annoying, but same can be said for any person in a fandom that does this, sports, anime, or games.
8. Not knowing when to act like a normal person/ making the fact that they are a furry central to their life
9. When people take it to an obsession
10. Some people really don't know when to keep the 'furry aspect' to themselves; the recent Tony the Tiger debacle for one. It makes us look weird, which usually ends up making us look bad in the public eye.
11. I'm sure it's a case of the vocal minority, but I don't like how it seems everyone has to tell everyone they're a furry. I view the fandom as a very niche hobby, not a lifestyle. Another thing I don't like is that the fandom seems to have more than the average percentage of bad apples. While the community is great, I feel that the best comparison is having a picnic in a minefield. You're enjoying yourself one second, but one wrong move and suddenly things are exploding all around you.
12. People who seriously believe that they are actually animals, they are the ones painting a bad image of the fandom by being obnoxious about it in public and online.
13. Seeing people treat being a furry as a lifestyle rather than a hobby is rather stupid in my eyes, some people just take it too seriously or get into it too much. Other than that, it's a relatively cheery thing.
14. Most of my issues come from young people who publicly roleplay, make animal noises, or people who talk about inappropriate things. There's a right time and place for all that.
15. Some people don't really understand where the limits in social interactions go. Random role players, people who act as animals in public and the likes really gives the fandom a bad reputation. And they give me the creeps.
16. People who have to "come out" as a furry. For some reason, that is just weird to me as saying a person comes out to someone that they like anime and manga.
17. The people who use slang like "Fursecution" and all that, also the drama that many try to cause.
18. The hardcore fans / Sex in fursuits
19. The persons who are the extreme 10% and rub it in your face etc because they aren't ashamed. Nobody cares, keep it in the bedroom, stop waking us look bad.
20. There are too many people who take it too seriously. There are too many people who share too much personal stuff (of a sexual nature) too freely.
21. A lot of weird and whiny people who take their image as a furry far too seriously. Also, weaponized fursonas who seek to destroy the eyes of the enemy with their blindingly bright colours.

22. The weirdoes in it. I'm a very professional normal person, and I don't like being associated with the stranger side of the fandom. We aren't all dysfunctional basement dwellers. I hate people who make it their sole identity. It defines them and is their lifestyle
23. The other thing I really don't like about the Fandom is the people who take it too seriously. (Example: The people who think they are an animal trapped in a human. AKA. The Other-kin.)
24. The ones that bring everything into real life like it is all role playing. "Lifestylers"
25. I don't like the extreme furies that make us look bad. The ones that try to shove the fandom down non-furies' throats and just act in an inappropriate manner. Although every fandom has those types of people.
26. Some folks treat it like it's a sexuality that requires "coming out" to friends and family. It's not. It's a group who share an interest in anthropomorphism. That's it. Our interest level might in most cases go beyond, say, a fan of knitting (in some cases way beyond), but at its core, it's just a shared interest / hobby.
27. Some seriously depraved furies out there, and some seriously crazy furies out there. The otherkin and porn addicts could be considered separate groups entirely.
28. as much as i enjoy the fandom and all the cute people there are some that are JUST in for the sex and weird kinks and doesn't care about no community or creativity. It clogs up the roleplaying part of the community in areas and fuels the stigma against the furry fandom
29. People that take it too far... And you know exactly who I'm talking about. Or the people that force it on you. Other than that, I love this fandom.
30. Yes, there are people who take the fandom too seriously and/or get in people's faces about it. /
31. How much people define their lives by it. Like so many things I believe that people place far too much value on it when it comes to identity. People go out of their way to oversexualize everything as well, so many people on the Internet's first experience with the fandom is through the vast quantities of pornographic artwork, leading to the idea that all furies are just sex crazed deviants playing dress-up
32. People who don't embrace the spirit of open-mindedness and individuality that is perhaps the fandom's most unifying characteristic, for instance, homophobic, transphobic, and (especially) zoophobic furies. On another note - furies who have taken so strongly to their online fursona identity that it is impossible to get to know them as a person. People who won't converse with you beyond "bark, scritch, yiff, wanna see my new fursuit?"
33. There doesn't seem to be much room for casual Furies, i.e. people who are interested in Furry matters but don't see it as the largest part of our identities. Most Furry spaces seem to be largely populated by folks who are big into the lifestyle. It's really cool that safe spaces for that kind of expression exist, but it does make furry socialization feel really top-heavy, which can actually make it more intimidating for people just dipping their toes in the water for the first time.
34. Otherkin and the extremely eccentric people that think that what they're doing is alright but really it's not
35. I specifically do not like how close some furies think sharing a mutual interest may make you. Being a furry does not mean I will find one interesting or likable, but it is at least one thing we have in common which makes it an okay starting point. I also do not like the over-sexualization in some circles. I am not trying to disconnect sexuality from being a furry, but it's a big part of the stigma. It does not always have to be about sex, or cuddling, or anything like that. In fact, the willingness to do that so easily makes me uncomfortable very often.
36. I don't have any major issues with the fandom specifically. Maybe some people look down others who aren't quite as involved in the fandom; people who don't have reference sheets or commission.
37. People who think they are actually a 'Furry' trapped in a human body.
38. I was connecting to the internet on a Windows 98 computer with a modem. Effectively, I found out about, you know, you go from link to link and you find out there are these people who are interested in all the same games, and the TV shows and books that I am....You find out all these things, and then you start realising that these people are basically interested in all the exact same things as you, want to talk about these things, and they have a name for themselves.
39. The need for a small minority (seems to be specifically louder in the U.S.) of people who have to bring 'furriness' into their everyday life rather than treat it as a slightly quirky hobby.
40. Sometimes it appears (in social media or in public) that maturity is of question, whether it's openly talking about vulgar ideas, behaving childishly in times of responsibility, etc
41. A lot of people seem to make the fandom sort of their religion, and will try to put down anyone who doesn't embrace it fully, they are almost evangelic in their pursuit of making you openly furry to everyone around you. / / also people fight too much about miniscule things.

42. Offline, it's not important to me at all. Furry 'culture' is almost non-existent where I live, no one knows what it is anyway. For this reason, being a "furry" has no influence on my daily life. It's really only something I'd call myself in regards to online activities, and the type of art I like.
43. Not everyone likes the community, some people are here for the art and that's it.
44. Not sure if I'm keen on being labelled a "furry" due to the social stigma. I see it as just another fandom, much like you think of a Trekkie for Star Trek fans or just regular Star Wars fans. Fur-suits are just another form of cosplay - cosplay of people's alter egos and original character creation. As an artist, it's great!
45. It really is just something I enjoy and nothing more. I grew up around a lot of anthropomorphized animal characters in cartoons, video games, and the like. And I guess.. that just kinda stuck with me
46. "Furry" is not an identity or way of life. It is a name for a fandom that is unfortunately shared with the name of people who are in the fandom. If you like Star Trek, you may not immediately be called a "Trekkie," because Trekkies are often associated with people who are obsessed with (rather than just normal fans of) Star Trek. But in the furry fandom, there is no different word for a "furry" who happens to like furry things and a "furry" who identifies as such and makes it their way of life. There is a large difference between the two and I'm sure I'm not the only one who is uncomfortable being labelled and stereotyped as something they are not (and in my case, I am just a fan and this is just a hobby. I don't identify as anything animal-related).
47. Don't overdo being a furry
48. I see it as a hobby. Not much more. It doesn't define me, it is ONE of the 100's of things that defines me.
49. I see a lot of people wondering if they should 'come out' as a furry - this has always seemed odd to me, as it isn't something you -are- but rather something you are interested in. It doesn't make sense to 'come out' as a basketball fan or a Trekkie, and likewise it doesn't make sense to do so as a furry.
50. I don't see it as a large part of my identity. It is just something I take part in to escape my real life. I don't imagine myself as an actual anthropomorphic animal for example. I just like to roleplay as one occasionally.
51. I treat it like anything that isn't part of the professional world, something I enjoy privately as part of my personal life that as long as it doesn't harm anyone or impede on people I can enjoy as far or as much as I want. I have and always have had an active detest for those in the 'fandom' who push it onto others. It's a hobby not an identity. It can be a lifestyle but I find that anyone I've interacted with who is known as 'the furry' in their social group or by observers is as two dimensional in personality as anyone who does the same with sexuality, gender or race. It's overly clung too as a sense of identity when there should be more to a person.

### *Sexuality and Sex*

1. Some people get very sexual like Baby-Furs
2. Mass of Homosexuality but I can live with this ohh and of course Fetishes
3. How open people are about unusual fetishes.
4. How sex oriented it is.
5. Too accepting of extreme fetishism and other advanced irregularities in the human psyche
6. I think some of the sexual components could be reign in.
7. I hate the openness of fetishism. Sure, we all look at a little furry porn every now and then, but most of us keep it to ourselves, as a civil person should whenever they look at pornography. But the people who don't keep it to themselves, and feel obligated to make their taboo sexual fetish into their identity are the people I have a problem with. What's even worse, are the people who don't do that, but just think that it's perfectly fine for that one guy to post an extreme fetish picture right next to the actually good SFW furry art. Those incidents are why we have the stigma that we do. They have been happening less and less as time goes on, but events like these at conventions paint the entire picture of out fandom for a person who has never heard of us before.
8. All the "cub" stuff
9. I would prefer people to be less open by yiff.
10. Probably how one sided it can be on issues. For example, a big part of the Furry Fandom for a lot of people is porn. And let's face it, it's a huge part in general. There are Furies who will ridicule and harass you if you are into these sorts of things, and the Furies who ARE into it can sometimes act the same way towards others. People pushing their morals and prerogative on others is something I do not like.
11. The prevalent porn atmosphere, thirsty people that can't keep it in their pants. I don't mind that there is porn, that's whatever. It's that people seem to have no sense of propriety.

12. Creepy people, VERY inappropriately open about fetishes in public. I am okay with sharing sexual preferences around willing parties, but do not believe it needs to be a public or semi-public thing.
13. How a few groups with paraphilias led to the entire fandom being tarred with the same brush.
14. The pornography, (yiff or whatever). I am disgusted by humans having sexual affairs (if one could call it that) with animals, however looking at a picture of two animals having sex simply does not appeal to me. Also, I am fairly certain yiff is also a decent amount of the reason outsiders are wary, (to say the least) about the community as it affects them in the same way it affects me. Secondly, I also dislike those in the fandom, (though not specific to the fandom, this group seems to be everywhere) who think the fandom is the only way of life - the people who are anti-nonfurry.
15. The sexual side (as in common porn).
16. Some people are only sex-driven and further contributing to a negative image of the fandom.
17. I dislike how a large a proportion of the online content is pornographic in nature. I however don't personally interact with this content and wouldn't particularly want to be associated with it. I also feel that at least in the online space being at least partially associated with this is almost unavoidable.
18. There's too much people interested mainly in pornographic arts and gays.
19. How it's always thought to be a sexual thing. That every furry is in the fandom for a weird kink
20. I dislike how widespread the extreme fetishes seem to be. I do not want to see the very extreme fetishes such as scat, vore, whenever I am trying to look at normal furry art and stories
21. Some pornography. Some people just come for odd fetishes, but, I'm not too big on those, like bloodplay and such.
22. All the NSFW part of it. And the level of equality about sexuality. First, NSFW: Porn, be it "yiff" (furry artwork with sexual content) or fursuit sex (sex disguised as an animal) and sexual deviants among the community. There are many furry accounts in Twitter, I own one myself (my fursona), it is not hard to find another fursona account, which tweets are yiff pictures, faving porn actor's content, and so on. I believe this is the main reason because why people think at first, furies as a fetish or sexual behaviour. Another example would be the Kellogg's Tony the Tiger scandal, where many furies accounts started tweeting him obscene stuff, filling the comment section of each family-friendly tweet of them with sexual content, yiff, erotic messages, and so on. Secondly, sexual equality, all the reports I've seen show the presence of sexual minorities members in a ratio of 3:100, while in the fandom it is 50:100. Be it, in a group of 100 furies, 50 are heterosexual, 50 are a combination of homosexuals, bisexuals, gender fluids, queers, and other denominations i don't know of. I consider myself a LGBT ally but when people see this statistic, they jump to the conclusion: "The furry fandom makes you gay". It makes me mad.
23. People who sexualize everything.
24. Being a furry has helped me get over my depression issues, and it also helped me to accept myself and my sexuality. I am very grateful to the fandom as a whole for accepting me and showing me that there is a place for me too.
25. Cub furs, or those who associate with toddler-like behaviour.
26. Some individuals are excessively free about wearing fetish gear/diapers/etc in public
27. Fetishes, "all the single furies," cringey things that make the fandom look bad
28. I hate the amount of people who drag sex into a conversation that's not about sex. I really hate when people drag sex into a completely inappropriate setting. This happens with the Kink/fetish community sometimes too but not nearly as often as it happens with the furry community. What's worse though is how young the ages can be in the furry fandom - little kids really shouldn't be seeing or reading some of this stuff.
29. Yiff
30. Extreme fetishes and pushing porn in the face of others
31. I do not like the fact that child pornography depicting furies is legal on some websites. I do not use web sites or support artists that allow "cub porn". I would prefer it if the community would shun/ excommunicate this part of the fandom, I would not advise bringing the community to a common knowledge level in the media until they are eliminated.
32. over sexualization
33. It's too inclusive to people who express an extreme fetish publicly under the guise of it also being furry (babyfur...for example)
34. The obscene amount rape and un-consensual sex depicted in art, writing, etc...
35. I feel many people in the fandom are very obsessed with sex and use it as a means of becoming friends. Whereas, I only reserve sexual relations for those I trust a great deal. Also, I feel that many other furies are not mature.

36. too focused on alternate sexuality
37. Abnormally high presence of fringe fetishists.
38. That some members of the fandom are way too much into Yiff (pornographic anthropomorphic artworks).
39. An uncomfortably large number of artists neglect to tag fetish art - especially non-explicit art. I enjoy browsing furry art, but having to deal with such a large amount of subject matter that I simply do not want any part in tends to get annoying.
40. I do not like the fact that child pornography depicting furies is legal on some websites. I do not use web sites or support artists that allow " cub porn". I would prefer it if the community would shun/ excommunicate this part of the fandom, I would not advise bringing the community to a common knowledge level in the media until they are eliminated.
41. It's extreme comfort with certain fetishes. While it usually isn't a problem in a vetted community like Reddit (the moderators and community members actively clean the submitted art), websites like Fur Affinity can have fetish content even with the clean mode enabled. Sometimes it just makes me a bit uncomfortable as a furry. Considering non-furies might see it makes it worse.
42. Honestly I'm OK with most of it. The only thing I really dislike is that there is a minority of people in the fandom who seem interested in bestiality and I'm not cool with that. There are not a lot of them as far as I know, though.
43. There seems to be people who are too open about sexuality to point minors get involved and despite it being illegal (in my country) people take it for granted because the authorities are not constantly monitoring anything and everything.
44. The all-encompassing acceptance of outlandish fetishes, but I'm most angered by the presence of members who have paedophilia-like tendencies, and defend their art and stories by saying "it's not real". This aspect of the fandom in particular needs to be exposed and abolished without mercy.
45. The open-ness about sex and sexual/fetish related subjects.
46. Fetishes
47. Some folks treat it like it's a sexuality that requires 'coming out' to friends and family. It's not. It's a group who share an interest in anthropomorphism. That's it. Our interest level might in most cases go beyond, say, a fan of knitting (in some cases way beyond), but at its core, it's just a shared interest / hobby.
48. Baby furs are creepy sexual deviants.
49. It's too inclusive to people who express an extreme fetish publicly under the guise of it also being furry (babyfur...for example)
50. Yiffing
51. cub and diaper fetishes
52. The growth of the "cub" and "baby fur" group causing the rest of us to be seen as paedophiles.
53. Creeps that enjoy bestiality and get in trouble with law making a headline like "furry caught engaging in sexual acts with ####" to put a bad name on us because not everyone is like that
54. Extreme sexual fetishes. (Vore, baby play/little play, scat related or water sports. Nty lol) personally I don't judge those who like it, but it's not my thing.
55. It's too inclusive to people who express an extreme fetish publicly under the guise of it also being furry (baby fur for abdl for example)
56. Over sexualization of everything, even though most furies will tell you it isn't true.
57. The creeps, baby furs, and the ones into bestiality.
58. Some very weird fetishes (ex: Vore, Cubs, Diapers, Snuff, etc.)
59. It seems like 90% of the fandom is about sex. Sure, there is plenty of safe for work content, but it seems like you can't go more than two feet without running into the fetishized side of the fandom.
60. High amount of porn, some of which is hard not to see
61. Probably it's association with fetishes that are generally not considered to be ok.
62. Too much sexual content
63. we are too open in public with our sexualities. the open display of fetishes at cons and meet ups
64. Baby furs
65. The furry fandom is also a pretty big reason how I really came to terms with / discovered my sexuality.
66. Hyper sexuality surrounding it.
67. Furies love to downplay the sexual aspect of being a furry. That is to say, sexualizing anthropomorphic animals. In my personal experience, some of the most vocal among us are too obsessed with the sexual aspect. If this is a result of having this reputation, and attracting these people because of said reputation, I cannot say. I will however state that I believe the furry fandom has gotten

more sexual in nature in the years I've been a part of it, and it seems to be a rather important aspect for a lot of people. Personally, I just think animal people look cool.

#### *Media and non-Furries*

- The only thing I don't really like is all the hate towards the fandom.
- People thinking it's associated with abnormal sexual desires. Within the fandom I guess there are some sociopaths but I have not encountered them...yet.
- The small percentage of people who do bad things such as harassing someone or just simply seek attention. Those people are what I believe the mass media picks up on the most, and that gives us a bad reputation.
- I dislike how the activities of a small minority of the fandom are taken as representative of the whole fandom.
- The outside controversy. If it's a personal choice then its live and let live.
- The stigma portrayed by media and yiff
- The insane negative stigma around it. The public is ignorant to what furies actually are.
- The fact that people outside of the fandom think that all of us are some strange sexual deviants that have sex in the Fursuits. where as that's only about 10% of the global furry population with one of the costumes that fit that description.
- It gets a lot of bad press because some people might take it too far.
- Outright pushing of fetishes in public places.
- The way people portray it as some sort of Sex fandom. People assume its allllllll about Sex and Bestiality.
- I don't like the stigma attached to us, which creates a lot of misconceptions that people both outside and sometimes inside the fandom hold.
- When there are public meetings of furry groups (furmeets), some people mix up the things acceptable in the fandom with things acceptable in the general public, which leads to embarrassment.
- There's aspects of all fandoms in general that I don't really like, but furries especially can be difficult to explain to someone misinformed about them due to news stories and general bad press.
- The poor public image that is generally based off of deviant sex and porn with little focus on the 'normal' or more socially positive parts of the fandom such as charity work.
- We're a strange bunch of people, sometimes too strange and too open about it. So we get stigmatized, and I don't feel comfortable telling even close friends that I'm a part of the fandom.
- I don't like the negativity that comes from attaching the word 'furry' to my artwork. At worst, it's targeted me for online harassment. At best, I've been told the only reason I've achieved any kind of success is because I'm "pandering" to a fandom with "extremely low standards."
- All the drama or harassment some other furs get.
- The hate really isn't as bad as a lot of people make it out to be. The problem is when someone is not fully/correctly educated on it. For instance: CSI & 1000 ways to die: fuck those "Furry" representations. Sure, there are people who look at the porn (sure, I have, too), but it's really not about that at all, that's just a side effect of any fandom, really (there's a reason rule34 holds so well). I really hate it when something bad happens to a furry, and nobody really takes it seriously (see: MFF2014 evacuation. Plenty of news anchors were just laughing at the fact that someone had tried to kill, or at least seriously injure, a whole bunch of people. But other than that event: good luck finding reputable sources on other furcon evacuations. Sometimes it's just a vine, or a short youtube clip, or a footnote in a blogpost.). We're basically seen as inhuman because either: it's not something they see everyday, so they're just kinda shocked, or they equate Furry to bestiality. You basically have to either have thick skin, or be good at building a big 'ol metaphorical pillow fort around yourself to last in this fandom.
- The overall negative image from the public
- I can't tell anyone for fear of being ostracized
- A lot of people assume that we are all exactly like our extreme cases seen on the internet/mass media. That's like seeing a picture of a serial killer that came from a city and thinking all residents of that city have sociopathic tendencies.
- Over-exposure into other sources of media and entertainment. For example, something that is not directly associated with or pertains to furry media somehow becomes "furry-esque"! For example, the popularity of the acclaimed Undertale game. Many furries, from my perspective, seem to be drawn towards the game solely because of the fact that it has anthropomorphic protagonists. They may never have played the game but find a reason to over-glorify it just because it has something with animals in it.
- Lots of negative stigma

- The stigma that furies are social outcasts
- The extreme amount of homosexuals, bisexuals, transgenders and yiffs.
- The gigantic clusterhell of people assuming: / / Furry = sex addicted maniac.
- I don't like the way that we are viewed by the general public, and I don't like that there is a loud minority of furies who are the cause of the assumptions made.
- The people that think that all furry art is porn/NSFW
- The way that we're portrayed
- When people complain about the media negatively portraying us and saying that we're all perfect little angels. No we're not, but we're not as bad as the media seems to think
- I don't like that people outside the community focus on the porn and use it to make everything furry look bad/sexual.
- The fact that the whole fandom is sort of represented and judged by the most visible, and more often than not, inappropriate and annoying furs.
- The fandom's sexual stereotypes portrayed in the media. /
- the fact that most people see it as a fetish when it isn't.
- The association with zoophilia. While yes, there many members (more than 50%) of the community that are sexually attracted to anthropomorphic beings/characters, that does not mean those people want to have sex with their dogs. (And though research has only shown 40% and below for those who openly say they look at sexual furry content, the actual numbers are higher but not prevalent in most surveys because people feel a stigma confessing to such a thing A) in a face to face setting and/or B) admitting so would be harmful to the already bad image many people have of furies.)
- Scrutiny from non-furies
- How we are portrayed as perverts. People completely over look great art because they are afraid of being associated with the furry stigma. Do you know how long it takes to make a fursuit? Months. No one cares, its 'disgusting' to them.
- My experiences have mostly positive. I just wish the misconceptions about the fandom weren't there as it would make meeting other furies and expressing myself much easier.
- I feel that the members of the fandom portrayed in media are often the minority, and don't reflect the majority of the group. I still am not 100% how much of a furry person I am, but I feel that I'm enough to be included in the fandom. I hope your research goes well.
- The first time I researched what a furry was I found a negative article in the form of a parody on Encyclopaedia Dramatica. It very negatively affected me, being an impressionable 13 year old and gave me a poor self view as far as having a fascination with anthropomorphs. The article led me on to believe that being a furry was a disease that had no cure other than to end oneself. Eventually I learned that most of the online contempt for the Fandom stems from an online war between early furry groups and 4chan founder Christopher Poole aka moot. Personally I feel his view on the furry Fandom was prejudiced by a group that was a misrepresentation. And due to this there is an outdated impression on furies that instills the malice we see today on the internet.
- Respondent: [00:41:32] But, the whole, sort of, media attention on the furry fandom started some time in the 1990s, early 2000.
- Interviewer: [00:41:41] Yes.
- Respondent: [00:41:41] One of the earliest ones, there was an episode of CSI.
- Interviewer: [00:41:45] Fur and Loathing, yes, I've seen it.
- Respondent: [00:41:48] And that, sort of ... and, there were all sorts of things around that point, there was a couple of other shows that went into it. And, all of them portrayed us as entirely sexual deviants.
- Interviewer: [00:42:01] Yes.
- Respondent: [00:42:04] And, that's a lot of the media. The thing is, with media, harassing normal people who are just enjoying interests, doesn't sell newspapers or make good viewing.
- Interviewer: [00:42:17] Yes.
- Respondent: [00:42:18] So, they want us to be freaks, and so they will only report on us being freaks. The people who are furies who aren't ... who are relatively hostile to furies actually displaying this, are people who are desperately trying to not give the media any fodder against us.

#### *In-group stigma*

1. Nothing particular. Things like people judging others, being dicks to each-other and so forth, while annoying, isn't specific to the fandom, and if anything it's less of a problem within the fandom. / However, it seems furies are more hungry for drama, and at times that is downright terrible, but from experience, it seems the biggest "drama-queens" are trolls posing as furies for just long enough to "get in" only to instantly attempt at making drama.

2. A lot of leeway given to popular furs who are either not nice individuals or criminals, such as rapists, victim blamers, zoophiles
3. There's a fairly strong negative reaction toward older furies in a surprising number of instances, in my experience.
4. I don't like the idea that the internet is so anonymous, and members of the fandom are under age and have the opportunity to pretend to be older. If I could change anything, I would find a way to separate everyone 20 years old and younger from the adult group. I do not believe the fandom is family friendly.
5. On how quickly people please get butt hurt about anything. It's sad when the fandom acts the same way you would expect Tumblr to act.
6. It's pretty rare that people in the fandom act like bullies or are judgemental. I mean we're into some odd things, so that's understandable. However, there is a very strong "you can't tell me what to do"/"you can't be negative at all" sentiment and I think it is detrimental. I think we need to set the bar a little higher 1) just overall 2) if we ever want to stop being the laughing stock of the internet. / Specifically, I believe we should do a better job self policing the age of legal majority surrounding mature content. That is understandably difficult online, everyone knows that, but the attitude is still pretty lax. For example, when someone is found to be under age in areas they should not be, you may see a verbal warning, but there is no teeth, and no repercussions. / / Another thing is sorta similar in terms of "don't tell me what to do" is regarding mature content that features real humans. There was a push to tag the submissions as male/female, but it got defeated after a vote because there wasn't a supermajority of users participating despite the overall vote being in favour. It was heralded as a victory because of some trans members being very vocal about "everyone here is into weird stuff, you have no room to judge, don't tell me what I am" and how not enforcing the tagging rule makes them not feel oppressed. which completely disregards the fact that when I'm going to a porn site, I don't care about gender identity, I care about genitals. It's all well and good to be born a female and be pre-op trans, but if you tag yourself as male, there better be a male sex organ. / / So my problem is how there is such a strong "you can't tell me what to do" and I think it prevents us from having firm social norms, which means as a social/sub-culture group, we will continue to be undefined which means we will never be taken as more than children or "special"
7. The insane amount of drama
8. The vocal minority tends to give us a bad rep, and some people really don't know when it's appropriate to speak about stuff / how to be discrete. Maybe that's just a general problem with people, but it seems to be more prevalent with furies.
9. The obnoxious and vocal 0.01% that make the entire Fandom look like a bunch of perverted, delusional freaks.
10. There is plenty of 'Furry' drama that occurs in this fandom. Some people are extremely sensitive and look to bend words to start drama
11. I feel many furies are immature, even those that are in their 20s and 30s. Many I know also are ignorant of how to behave in public. Things like conversing very loudly, playing music in public areas (like a grocery store), talking about vulgar things. / / While I don't mind these behaviours when among friends and in our own homes, I feel like these actions are rude to other people in public when done so.
12. It's best quality is also it's flaw. It's very accepting of anyone, which has lead to issues in more than one occasion. I head up a local group and we just recently had to kick out a member for ongoing harassment and sexual comments in a safe-for-work chat that has minors in it. After we banned the problem member, we still had many other members defending him and saying that we should have given him more chances to improve his behaviour, and I think that's a problem. The furry community as a whole is willing to give too many chances to people who have already shown themselves to be an issue. This doesn't just affect local groups, but conventions too. Just recently we lost a con because of inappropriate public behaviour from just a few individuals. And furies are defending them and saying the host location shouldn't have broken the contract.
13. There are a lot of mentally unstable persons in the fandom, as well as a lot socially "challenged" ones.
14. Socially inept idiots who do dumb things in public. Sure, they might have some kind of disability but they're just making us look bad.
15. At times I feel that inconsiderate or destructive actions by a very small amount of people within the Furry fandom make the majority of those in the fandom to be portrayed in an unjustified, negative light. A "the few ruin it for the many" type of situation.
16. Yes, how extremely overly hug-boxy it can get at sometimes.

17. The attention whoring, easily-offended furs that ruin the whole fandom by being annoying and obnoxious all the time.
18. Mostly the drama. There are a lot of furies that are constantly depressed and self loathing and often only talk about their problems to others. Then there are the ones that are only interested in sexual roleplay, and I cant even make meaningful friendships with them. Then there are the ones that are always complaining about the fandom's reputation to the point where you cant even make a dirty furry joke around them without them getting angry. There are just a lot of furs where I find it hard to hold extending conversations or forge meaningful connections with.
19. The assumption that everyone wants to talk about sexual stuff just because you're a furry. Also the openness toward cuddling/invading personal space by people you hardly know just because you're part of the fandom. I also think the acceptance everyone has toward one another in the fandom is a double edged sword. While it's nice to be accepting and inviting, it also can go to far. Sometimes people will be extremely inappropriate and no one will tell them so because we're suppose to be accepting almost no matter what.
20. How naive and "accepting" people are. I put "accepting" because it's more of the fact that majority of people in the furry fandom seem to have their head up in a cloud, dishing out only positive comments or support. It's a good thing, but also detrimental in some ways. For example, I've seen people give advice in the furry community to "not care about what others think, be who you want to be!" Sure, it's a nice supportive advice, but sometimes real life situations would require more tact and subtlety than just "believing in yourself." Sometimes it's better to keep things hidden than flamboyantly shoving things in people's faces. Maybe I'm just cynical and negative.
21. It is dominated by white, cissexual, gay men, and as such there is a lot of misogyny, racism, and transphobia. People who are popular can essentially do whatever they want - Fur Affinity, for example, employs and defends rapists. Anthrocon continues to host a comedian who encourages people to kill themselves. Some people in the fandom also have difficulty understanding boundaries, especially physical/sexual ones.
22. Maybe we should try to learn to be better at handling drama or adversity from others outside of the group...
23. It's too much of a hug-box. It attracts people from all walks of life, but often times caters a bit more to weirdos who don't understand social norms. Since the furry fandom is so nice, when these people do something inappropriate no one chastises them, reinforcing their negative behaviour.
24. I've talked to kids who are 14 years old and they already want to erotic roleplay. I wish the fandom would take slightly better care in shielding younger kids from the sexual side of the fandom
25. This fandom because of it's open tolerance and acceptance does play host to a larger percentage of predators, like those who rape dogs and children. I would love to tell you it is all good but we do have a fringe who are terrible people who hide in the Furry Fandom because it is a "safe space". Of course not everyone remembers the Burned Furs movement or the push to rid this fandom of known paedophiles, animal abusers, or rapists. In fact the biggest website for furies has a known dog fucker and another rapist on staff. Bad Dragon, a big furry company has an inner ring tied to a bestiary ring in Maricopa County. We have fandom "famous" people who are convicted paedophiles and go to cons and continue their predatory rapes there. People in the fandom usually don't talk about it because that small percent of bad people can give the whole fandom a bad reputation. But we can't get rid of these people until we are open about the problem and face it head on and start reporting more of this scum to the police.
26. Whiny, victim complex. Takes itself too seriously, can't accept that furies are weird. Gets upset when the rest of the world pokes fun at them for being weird.
27. The constant victim complex and lack of social awareness displayed by some members
28. I think most furies would agree with me that the largest problem are the so-called "trolls" and the "bad furies" who come onto people aggressively or in a creepy, perverted way, which just makes the person generalize and hate furies as a whole. Basically, the biggest problem of the fandom are the aforementioned bad apples which drag all of us down into the mud.
29. There are people within the fandom that draw too much attention to themselves from the outside while also "confirming" the stereotypes that furies are just sex crazed animal fuckers
30. It would be very easy for me to say the porn, especially since I do not consume it myself, but I find that there isn't any more than I experienced in a similar fandom (that fandom being the Brony fandom), so it doesn't bother me too much. Instead, I will pick on those that don't have that capability of recognizing when it's not appropriate to dress up, goof off, or otherwise "show their fur". Though few, these individuals are the ones that give us a poor image. If someone expresses disinterest, don't make a point of pushing your furriness onto them! Lastly, the fandom is caring and supportive of all kinds of things. This I like, of course, but some things really shouldn't be encouraged. It brings out

some weird and some wrong tendencies. Ultimately, I think we might be too open to anyone of any interest.

31. Weirdos that fuck it up for the rest of us. Sure those kind of people exist in any circle, but in a more obscure culture that the general public would consider weird. They don't help our image.

32. I still see discrimination against subgroups within the fandom (cub furs, bronzies) which is unsettling to me even though I don't consider myself a part of those subgroups. It bothers me that people who are used to persecution and finally have a safe space would use that space to in turn persecute others.

33. I pretty much despise a large majority of the people that's in the furry fandom, but the very small amount of people that aren't totally broken and immature plus the good art is why I'm still around.

34. All the stereotypes are accurate. The fandom does suck. I just like the concept of humanized animals is all.

#### *Experiences of stigma online*

1. Not personally, no. However there is a lot of negativity directed towards the fandom. Namely it appears to be that way because of the lack of understanding many have of what the fandom is actually about. Things I've personally noticed which I feel contribute to this would be the fact that most furrys want to run away from the media. Leaving the less savoury few to poorly represent the fandom. The reason why a lot of furrys run from the media is mostly because, they focus on the sexual side of the fandom. Almost becoming obstinate in their own ideas of what the fandom is, opposed to what it actually is. To note, I won't deny like all fandoms there is a sexual side to it. However that is a very small portion of the whole fandom. In short, yes overall we're stigmatized as a whole, due to the actions of a few people.

2. YouTube comments section, on furry related videos.

3. Yup, but I don't let it bother me.

4. Not directly, but you do see a lot of hate for them.

5. Not especially, I accept that there will always be parts of any fandom that spoil the experience/public view. / /

6. Not so much recently. Nobody's ever acted negatively towards me in particular because I don't show it all that much. When I was first finding out what a furry was, though, it was through the anti-furry 4chan stuff and Encyclopaedia Dramatica, so that coloured my opinion of myself for a while.

7. To a very low degree if any. A few years back it was a lot worse.

8. Minorly, more an annoyance than an actual problem when it does happen.

9. Not directly to me

10. Not really. Online, we can all be weird in one way or another, and people online can be harassed for the stupidest of things. I don't think feel like it's worth their time anymore to go and hate on furrries. We keep doing what we do, and there's nothing someone over the internet can do about that. I have felt a little stigmatized as someone who wants to have sex with animals, but it never bothers me for more than a moment.

11. Yes. Various derogatory terms, "All furrries should die", and general misunderstanding of what it is (eg, thinking furry = zoophilia)

12. A few times, mostly back when I was fairly new to the fandom and I was bullied by others simply for being in the fandom.

13. Not directly, no.

14. Occasionally teased by MMO guildmates

15. No, aside from friendly banter nothing like this happened. However, many times I have been drawn away from online participation seeing others being stigmatized; the best example are the infamous YouTube comments, where one can face strongly negative reaction for as much as having a furry avatar on their profile.

16. No, because I usually keep my interests to myself privately because I believe that it isn't something that should be shoved down people's throats.

17. yeah, it's pretty annoying to just be playing counter-strike and have someone call me an animal fucker.

18. I have not told anyone online; so I have not been personally shamed. But I have felt stigmatized from stumbling upon a 'anti-furry' blog post.

19. Yep! I've been called "furfag" many-a-time.

20. Me personally, no. But there is a sigma about being a furry for sure.

21. People post heavy amounts of hate and I have separate "furry" accounts on everything to not be stigmatized.

22. Online slightly, but I don't care.

23. Yes, specifically on online multiplayer video games.
24. I have felt stigmatized for being a furry online. Hateful comments on furry related subject matter, attacks on furry related websites, and direct harassment have contributed to this.
25. Yes - Not personally, but "furry hate" is abundant.
26. Not particularly. I consider myself to be a minority within the furry community, meaning that I love looking at the artwork and participating in a few general discussions however I go no further than that into the fandom.
27. yes, mostly in comment section conversations that I make a point to stay out of.
28. Not really, though I have gotten more than a few hateful comments about it. I always just assume those comments come from kids that think it's funny to troll the furry, not any real issue.
29. A lot actually, called furfag or told to yiff in hell, sadly on some of my favourite games or online places
30. No, not at all. I'm rather new though and only mention it on Furry sites.
31. Yes, a lot, but I have been a furry since I was nine, I've green such a thick skin none of these insults.
32. There's always going to be negative reaction to any subgroup of fans from elsewhere, and with the negative publicity that furry has received over time, especially online, it's hard to get away from.
33. I've been called "zoophile"
34. All. The. Time
35. Yes, heavily, things were much different for us 10+ years ago.
36. Yes, mostly general insults like "furfag," but it usually came from people who were upset at something else (during online video gameplay)
37. Yes. A few online "friends" insulted me for it
38. Yes - I have been made fun of for being a furry mostly on World of Warcraft and other gaming platforms.
39. Yep, usually downvoted on Reddit or other forms of media.
40. A few times. But most of the time I've been able to avoid all the toxic communities hating on fandoms for whatever reason.
41. Yes. A redditor once claimed that I had a mental illness, which wasn't nice.
42. Yes. I've often denied being a furry because of the stigma surrounding the fandom.
43. Second-hand, seeing hate or abuse thrown at either specific people, or the fandom in general, or just other smaller parts of the fandom has made me extremely cautious with who I inform of my involvement.
44. Maybe. Just random comments about how weird the "furry fetish" is, among good, pro-furry comments.
45. I've seen being furry stigmatized and that can carry over but never directly.
46. Yes, although not to an extreme degree.
47. No, I tend to avoid places which others have noted to be aggressive or unwelcoming towards furries.
48. Once, while under an older alias, i was harshly harassed when a few members of an online forum discovered my account on FA and attempted to use it against me to have my moderator powers removed. This came about after banning one of their friends for spreading Neo-Nazi propaganda on the forum. Fortunately the owner of this forum happened to be a furry as well and a close friend, simply just deleted the series of posts, removed them entirely by banning their IP address. That is primarily it, although short lived, it was fairly difficult to deal with as some of my creative works were used as negative publicity. It has been somewhat difficult rebuilding from that point but that is primarily due to the fact i was so attached to my original alias. I switched to a new alias after some other incident that had nothing to do with being a furry, it was drama between several groups and they were using me as a neutral point. In order to get away from it, I dropped the alias entirely.
49. Yes, in most places someone will insult you for being furry. It tends to be low-effort trolling, so it's really easy to ignore or dismiss those people. It's much improved over the last decade though. It seems that perhaps as the fandom grows and pushes closer to being mainstream pop culture, people are getting more used to seeing people posting with obviously furry usernames or with anthro character avatars.
50. Not directly, but hearing people talk about the fandom in general is often discouraging. I've never been personally insulted for it.
51. Yes, because often people judge me on preconceived notions.
52. Back in the day, particularly in my friend group on DeviantArt, but any teasing I received was generally meant in good faith; I tended to interpret criticism as harsher than it actually was.

53. Yes, when I was younger it was an easy thing to make fun of and be ridiculed for. People still talk trash but I'm older now and do not care in the slightest.
54. Not personally, but yes for the fandom in general
55. Yes, being called a fag is common.
56. Yeah. Sometimes. I don't really care about it though, since most of the people making a fuss out of it are people I don't like to begin with. It's their problem, not mine.
57. A large number of people assume it's nothing but a fetish. Sigh.
58. To some extent. I have had people be randomly rude to me for having an anthro avatar on accounts just for furry related things.
59. Yes, I have had many people both directly and indirectly look down upon me as a person for having something as simple as a picture of a line drawn anthropomorphic Fox as an avatar on forum sites.
60. Yes. Read the comments section for any article talking about furies.
61. Not personally, but I've certainly seen it happen.
62. Not personally. But I often see the fandom being criticised on non-furry websites.
63. Yes. Furies are judged harshly and discriminated online.
64. not individually, but yes when reading negative comments or opinions on the fandom
65. Yes. Harassment a few years ago.
66. No personally, but negative generalizations exist.
67. Most people on non-furry websites have a baseless dislike of furies and shoot down anything furry related
68. Yes and no. The answer is complicated due to the variance in attitude from site to site. Overall, no. There seems to be a general 'disdain' towards flurries, however the percentage of people who actually hate them as much as the Internet is stereotyped to is probably quite low.
69. Not directly - I'm not very open about it outside of a few communities, and I'm not as invested in it as most people. But I do see insults thrown around from time to time, and, much like any stereotype or slur, their continued use can be somewhat alienating.
70. I generally, other than user icons being that of a dragon, don't advertise being a furry to places not specifically for that, so no.
71. Many times, but it's starting to reach a point where it's hard to take any people who are antagonistic about furies seriously. More often than not, it comes off as low-effort trolling, or the work of a preteen who spends too much time around 4chan. I don't believe I have ever had issues with any reasonable individuals, especially in the last few years.
72. Yes, people usually assume its some weird kink/fetish when it's really all about the community.
73. Yes, but never directly. I overhear in games, chatrooms etc about people who "hate furies"
74. It's a big stigma. Just having a profile picture that resembles a "fursona" will usually get your request to join groups/organizations online denied. Especially ones that are geared for "mature audiences" such as adult gaming clans or groups.
75. Yes. People look down on Furies constantly.
76. Not personally, but I've seen and continue to see people of the community being harassed because most people don't understand or they don't want to understand.
77. I used to visit 4chan a lot, and I still do, but not as much. A lot people there, especially those that frequent /b/, like to bash on the fandom, mostly christening furies with such graceful names as "autists" and "cancer". I also have seen it on Reddit a few times, as well as on other sites, especially in light of Zootopia being less than a month away from release as of Feb 12.
78. A little, but more "not directly." I'm more in the casual group and I tend to keep it to myself or people who already know about the fandom and generally either approve or don't care. I generally keep it out of my professional life.
79. Rather often. / I have been told i have a mental disorder. I have been told I should go kill my self for the good of humanity, as well as that I am the most disgusting thing on the planet / I have also been informed I have sex with animals. / Everything on the internet is a fact when it relates to furs and is negative it seems.
80. Well, there is a lot of that, but I personally try to ignore it. / It's annoying to try to have a conversation with people who won't take you seriously/will insult you because of your (appropriate) profile icon, however. /
81. When you're gaming people will just call you a faggot or a furfag and be a dick to you sometimes, but hey it happens lol
82. Yes. To make a long story short I posted about loving Robin Hood (the Disney version) and some books by Kyell Gold. The reaction was less than supportive.

83. Groups that are different always get criticized online. Furies are an easy target because they are very open with their sexuality and high concentration of unusual fetishes.
84. Yes. There are whole communities based on making fun of furies and similar "weirdos".
85. I hadn't until I opened a twitter account for my art. I wanted to have a more personal space to "reveal" the artist behind the art. Less than 20 posts to the account when I posted some questions and words of encouragement when Fur Affinity's website went down. Within 24 hours someone without my consent stuck me into a Twitter "list" (no idea what that is) that was labelled as "animal rapists." I'm a somewhat devout Buddhist that will take the time to stop talking to move an earthworm off pavement or asphalt onto grass or dirt. It hurt to be thrown into the fray JUST because my twitter avatar was my fursona - an art piece I made myself, and just because I posted positive words on a furry associated twitter account. It also set off feelings and memories of my own childhood sexual assault that I had thought I moved past and gotten over. Since then I've made my twitter account a little more private but, I do try to market myself as an artist so I can't exactly lock everyone out.
86. Not personally, but a member of a gaming group I belonged to said he'd kick anybody who was a furry out of the group (he wasn't aware of my activities).
87. Yeah, all the time. Not exactly uncommon ya know?
88. Yes, once when I made a post on my city's subreddit looking for friends, and someone presumed that because I said I was looking for more furies, that I was looking for sexual partners, and then was rude when I corrected them.
89. Of course I have. We all have. It's the nature of the internet. Not just furies. Any given person, at any given time, for any given reason, has felt stigmatized on the internet for enjoying something they love. Sure, furies have it pretty bad when it comes to this, but I feel that we learn to filter it all out over time. I no longer feel as aggressively stigmatized today because I know how to avoid and/or deal with it. Not to mention the fact that animosity adds a great deal of freedom. To both the lovers, and the haters, of the furry fandom.
90. Yes. I don't reveal my furry status to just anyone anymore.
91. Not me personally, but I have seen it happen to others.
92. Yes, being that I have a furry-related username for most platforms it has garnered minor spats about my ties in the fandom.
93. What furry hasn't? Furies are one of the more popular fandoms, so we are an easy target.
94. Yes furry can be a punching bag of the internet.
95. Yeah, with things people say to each other casually. Never call it out, though.
96. While the broader online community, especially the gaming subsections for some reason, seem to be more critical and negative regarding the furry fandom, I have not personally felt stigmatized for being a furry through any direct actions. There is, however, always the general indirect attitude prevalent throughout the Internet community against furies most of the time.
97. Not directly, no. But I have felt the overall reaction towards furies online.
98. Not me personally. But furriness in general, yes.
99. Yes, furies seem to be treated as easy targets, probably because they are so easy to recognize.
100. Yes, but very rarely. Sometimes when I'm in an online game, people will harass me for my furry icon on my profile avatar. Sometimes it's just insults, other times it's disrupting the game in efforts to upset me. It's often balanced out from the complements that random furs or anthro-art admirers give. It's a weird mix and I find myself surprised by the responses, both positive and negative.
101. Yes, people have a tendency to act far more aggressively online as they have anonymity, as a result revealing yourself as a furry outside of furry-based communities very often leads to hateful messages being received.
102. Yes regularly insulted in the online games I play/
103. Not entirely. More so for being a Brony, however there still is a noticeable online social stigma concerning furies
104. Although furies are still a favourite target of internet trolls, general views towards the fandom seem to be less hostile than used to be. The fandom is still seen as weird and even completely non-sexual furry art is often unfairly labelled as "fetish art", but an increasing number of people online seem to accept that it is a harmless quirk. More concerning are the views aired by the minority of people who seem to genuinely think furies are a danger to children or animals. Of course, on the internet you can never be 100% sure a comment is sincere.
105. Yes. In online games people make fun of me for being a furry. On my steam page (service used to play digital copies of games and chat with other uses) sometimes I'll even get random people I've never met comment to call me a furfag, autist, etc. I don't feel bothered by it honestly, I just find it funny at this point.

106. Of course. Last year, a forum I operate for a furry-themed comic was accessed by a troll who spammed several topics with dozens of messages repeating 'Burn in Hell, Furry Fags'. Even after he was banned it took over an hour to find and remove them all. I'd heard of similar things happening on sexually-oriented websites, but I'd worked so hard to create a SFW, family-friendly environment on that forum, I didn't think mine would be targeted.
107. Quite a few times, but only on places where cliques and stereotypes are abundant.
108. Not directly, but for a long time whenever I saw furies mentioned in a non-furry setting/site/group it had consistently been very negative. I have not been insulted personally only because I don't make it obvious that I am a furry myself.
109. Nobody hated me when I told my friends, but I have seen the hate online.
110. Yea, people see your steam avatar or w/e and immediately dislike you, even if you never actually bring it up
111. Since my username is /u/furrythrowawayaccoun. Yes. I felt it a lot.
112. Yeah you get the odd, usually derogatory, comment about it. Especially if you're in an argument and they can find furry stuff somewhere on your profile or you're playing with a friend who uses a furry pic for a profile picture. Then people try to just denounce everything you say with "Furry Faggot" or some other derogatory phrase.
113. Yes, reading comments under YouTube videos or various forums
114. It depends on the website and the people you around. So Yes and No.
115. Yes. When I post my art on Imgur, I get comments such as "ugh a fucking furry" and "keep your fetishes to yourself". I only draw "safe for work" art, and the characters that I draw are clothed.
116. No. I have not, personally, felt stigmatized, alienated, isolated, intimidated, threatened, offended, rejected, excluded, insulted, abused, or otherwise treated differently from the perceived norm, either consciously or not, premeditated or not, or maliciously or not, by other entities, on the Internet-at-large, on account of my affiliation with self-confessed Furies, the Furry fandom, and their respective media/events, or the people and media/events commonly associated with Furies and the Furry fandom.
117. Yes. Usually I try to hide it unless I'm on something furry related. A lot of people online don't take well to furies and usually label us as sexual deviants or freaks. Although, there is more support online since the internet is a place for furies to connect.
118. Not any specific examples, or any directed at me. Usually when furies are brought up it's in a very negative light, and I have seen examples of that
119. Occasionally, on forums. Although about as equal to standard website "trolling"
120. Yes, Usually at Online games
121. Yes, in certain social circles I do not make it obvious that I'm a furry simply because it would bring negative attention. In most of these cases it isn't relevant anyhow.
122. There is an unfortunate connection between furies and bestiality. From most of the ones I have met bestiality is not something they are interested in.
123. Yes, I have felt stigmatized online. I face stigmatization when I play games online.
124. Definitely. It seems like most people don't know what a furry is in the first place. However, if they do, there's a good chance that they will have a negative opinion based on stereotypes unless they happen to be a furry themselves.
125. Yes. It seems most online communities are averse to furs.
126. yes, especially on steam games (ex: Garry's mod)
127. Yes, in a way that makes me feel bad about myself. Most other furies in the group seem to make me look bad. Since I'm quite a bit more reclusive about my behaviour, and other's aren't so much, it tends to set a bad image for me, yet keep me in the same stigma. So, perhaps always, and victimized for it, if that's a good word.
128. A furry artist and a glass blowers artist page got merged by Facebook, with about 400 of each group in it. The glass blowers were openly hostile against furies, calling us 'dog fuckers' and using many profanities against us, before the issue of the merging got resolved.
129. I haven't felt personally stigmatized, but I have seen furry hate on Reddit and other places online.
130. Yes; furies are overall not seen in a positive light online. I think most of this stems from people using us as a target because our interests are different from theirs, or because of misconceptions generated by things they've seen online or from the media, or a general misunderstanding of the furry fandom, rather than an actual dislike for us or our interests.
131. I've never been attacked personally, but I do see a lot of hate/misunderstanding directed towards furies in general.
132. Sometimes, people can be hostile.

133. Yes, most people believe furrys are the loud minority.
134. Not directly, but seeing comments and negative attention others/the community has received does make my being Furry something I keep to myself
135. A bit since furry in the internet is almost always seen as creepy neckbeards that want to fuck someone's dog. The negative furry stereotype is pretty big on the internet
136. Extremely. I've had managers/supervisors automatically assume being a furry equals to wearing an animal based suit and having sex or not safe for work relations in public. Most do not even bother to do a quick google search to verify if what the media says about furs is real or not. they assume its accurate.
137. Somewhat, but predominantly only by other, specific cultural groups online. Mostly to the tune of "eww", and other such expressions of disgust. It also makes it difficult to join role-playing groups, as many have probably been burned by predecessors who had no capacity for self-regulation.
138. A little. Not personally, but the misinforming negative publicity can be a bit painful at times.  
/
139. Not personally, however I feel that I would be if I made it clear to people that I was Furry. The media seem to focus on the pornography aspect a lot, but this is a little unfair as there's a porn aspect to every fanbase (anime, as an example).
140. Maybe a little when I see it portrayed as a freakish sort of thing, like on clickbait websites with top ten lists. The phrase "fucking furrries" comes up quite often, but I don't really consider myself the target for that because it's usually in response to rule 34 related things.
141. Yes, internet forums and image boards.
142. Yes, general social media and even some parts of reddit are very anti-furry.
143. Yes. Most notably on 4chan but that is to be expected due to the nature of 4chan
144. Yes, the stereotypes make those unfamiliar with furrries repulsed.
145. I perceive a discomfoting amount of affected childishness in the fandom that I do not see in any other of my various nerd-type interest groups and it makes it difficult to want to engage with the fandom to a greater extent than I do. To some degree this is the organic result of the fandom being demographically diverse, and my discomfort is due to being an adult who is not sure if he is interacting with minors or not
146. Certainly, it seems whenever there is furry related content in a popular reddit post we are talked about negatively. For example, somebody had made an incredible Anivia cosplay (a character from the MOBA League of Legends) and people were reacting negatively because the image was hosted on fur affinity.
147. Yes, when I was 12 I received many threats for being a furry which caused me to leave the fandom for a few months.
148. While I take terms like "Furfag" lightly, and even use it myself. there is a lot of undeserved hate towards furrries in general.
149. Yes, there are places on Second Life you cannot go if you are a furry. There are also message boards where being a furry would have you mocked relentlessly.
150. Not very often. Usually when I see people expressing anti-furry sentiments it was directed to the fandom in general rather than to me specifically. Plus I'm used to hanging around in certain online communities where abrasiveness is the cultural norm rather than the exception, so it rarely bothers me much anyway.
151. Yes, furry hate was very prevalent online ten years ago, but it's calming down now.
152. I have been referred to as a "furfag" before.
153. People tend to generally have a default negative view of the whole fandom based on a few bad apples. It's basically the same as with any other such group. Generalization is a very large problem, along with the unwillingness to even try and understand.
154. Sometimes, as most people online have a negative view on furrries
155. Yes, it is very difficult to be open about being a furry. 'Coming out' in a public way is a sure-fire way to be alienated. Most people are conditioned to think being a furry is a bad thing.
156. Of course - the fandom is rather difficult to understand from a completely "normal" person, but part of the hate comes from the furry-hate bandwagon the internet manifests, causing actual furrries to reject their title and newcomers to be ashamed. I can absolutely guarantee that there are many people who have become a furry simply off looking into the fandom after reading all the unwarranted and unguided hate.
157. Yes, its common to see in the comments of anything even vaguely furry related massive walls of hate and insults and even alarmingly often, death threats. having a furry related username or avatar will also bring in random hate even when commenting or talking on non-furry related things or forums.

158. Not personally, but I have read comment chains that tell Furies to kill themselves, and have seen threats of murder and terrorism on many sites when Furies are brought up.
159. Yes, but not personally. Just in general because of some people spewing stereotypes about Furies.
160. Of course, as a competitive player I get crap for it all the time. I could care less about it.
161. On certain occasions when there was a great deal of hate on a post for furies or their lifestyle as identifying as a furry.
162. Only by stereotypes, but nothing personally against me.
163. I make a point to not go into places online where I would be subject to stigmatism, so generally I haven't been solely on the 'Furry' aspect of myself. Though I don't doubt I could easily find places to go where I would be treated this way.
164. Frequently noted and insulted when using furry images for profile pictures.
165. Yes. Several people have attacked furies for no other reason than the fact they don't understand them. /
166. There is a pretty vitriolic stigma on the internet against the furry fandom, often categorizing us as cringe, weird, etc, and those pockets exist alongside furry zones, such as Reddit or 4chan. That said, those pockets never made me feel bad about myself for liking it, so I guess the answer here is no. It's nothing like the gay stigma, even though we've seen great strides with that over the past decade. / It's a non-issue online for me, I think, because if someone on the internet is making fun of me for what I masturbate to, then they're wasting their time while I don't lose any porn.
167. Yeah, I've had random trolls occasionally. I ignore them though, feeding the trolls just makes them troll you more
168. Yes, and on some sites people will tear you apart for it (ex. on YouTube).
169. Greatly. It is quite often that people such as atheists, gays, or extreme liberals pick on me for not being like them, and then southern esque people dislike me because they do not understand what I actually do, say, and behave.
170. Yes, by certain Youtubers or other people on the internet but not that much and it doesn't bother me in the slightest.
171. Hell yes. Some people I encounter daily in school think I am disgusting, but they never justify their over reactions. I am victimized by arrogance.
172. Most people keep to themselves about it unless you go somewhere you know people dislike furies. A lot of people online don't care anymore.
173. yeah, on a vexillological subreddit a furry made flags for his friends and people in the comments called him a fag or told him to leave
174. yes I unfortunately cannot express myself entirely online I've gotten the usual, "Yiff in hell furfag" and such.
175. Sometimes yes. I posted a recent conversation on Tumblr relating to the new movie "Zootopia" as a screenshot onto 9gag ( <http://9gag.com/gag/a0p7XGn> ) and I received some good and some bad as a result.
176. I hadn't until I opened a twitter account for my art. I wanted to have a more personal space to "reveal" the artist behind the art. Less than 20 posts to the account when I posted some questions and words of encouragement when FurAffinity's website went down. Within 24 hours someone without my consent stuck me into a Twitter "list" (no idea what that is) that was labeled as "animal rapists." I'm a somewhat devout buddhist that will take the time to stop talking to move an earthworm off pavement or asphalt onto grass or dirt. It hurt to be thrown into the fray JUST because my twitter avatar was my fursona - an art piece I made myself, and just because I posted positive words on a furry associated twitter account. It also set off feelings and memories of my own childhood sexual assault that I had thought I moved past and gotten over. Since then I've made my twitter account a little more private but, I do try to market myself as an artist so I can't exactly lock everyone out
177. Yes, there is a general tone of dislike for furies on reddit outside of the furry subreddits, and on the internet as a whole.
178. Yes, the internet is always an unforgiving shithole when it comes to thing that aren't perceived as 'normal' by the majority.
179. No, not personally but it's not hard to find others bashing the community or attacking others.
180. Yes, people like to throw the term "Furfag" around a lot. At this point, I just take it as a compliment
181. Yes, I have been kicked and even banned from online multiplayer games for having my fursona as my avatar.
182. Yes, alot of the people I will run into will automatically associate with me negatively.

183. Only passively, I only discuss furry fandom with other people who have identified as furies first. Any stigma I see is usually third party (for example someone harassing another furry.)
184. Furies tend to be the butt of mean jokes on the internet... Kind of has dissipated somewhat with new fandoms appearing, such as Bronies
185. A little, there seem to be a general dislike of furies online by non furies for no good reason.
186. Yes. On several websites, including [www.reddit.com](http://www.reddit.com) I have encountered hostility, and aggressiveness towards furies.
187. Quite recently in the "Willamette week", there has been an article calling furies "[...] adults doing sex stuff with stuffed animals [...]". This kind of uniformed stigmatization is in my opinion not as common as it used to be, but it still hurts to see people with an audience write such things.
188. Yes. Pretty much any time there's discussion of Furry matters in a place that's not specifically reserved for Furies, at least one person is going to grab the open mic to let you know how disgusted they are by us. The whole culture is a prime target for people who want to be toxic, and we don't get people from outside the culture stepping up to help most of the time.
189. Yes, I have. The internet is full of people who hate each other, so this is not very surprising.
190. Sure, mainly on non-furry websites.
191. Some negative comments about furies in general, nothing specificity about me.
192. Yes. Down voted and disapproved of solely based on my furry username.
193. No, but I tend to avoid troll feeding or hateful advances.
194. No. Being a furry is only a side interest/hobby to me. It isn't part of my actual personality, so there is nothing for me to get personally upset over. Besides, people on the whole of the internet can be pretty nasty. You need a thick skin or you're going to feel stigmatized about a whole lot more than being a furry.
195. Only through rude comments which, despite not being provoked, told me to, for example, kill myself.
196. Yes. Multiple communities have stigma around being a furry.
197. People will occasionally begin name-calling or use profanity at me.
198. No. I deliberately try to avoid making it known that I'm Furry online wherever reactions to me being Furry are likely to be negative. There are enough specifically Furry places to socialize online to satisfy my social needs.
199. Sometimes. People have made assumptions about my personal character based upon my interest in the furry fandom, and these character judgments were typically negative.
200. I have. I've been gotten comments like "Wow I feel like throwing up just reading this" when I post things furry-related (SFW stuff).
201. No, not online. I realize that the stigma exists and I have had conversations with people about them but I have never felt directly targeted.
202. Not personally but furies are quite evidently persecuted most of the time.
203. Yes, as I realized I was more than just "temporarily intrigued" with anthropomorphic material, many of the insults and condescension's I had seen towards furies over my internet-centred adolescence began to weigh on me retroactively. Luckily, in the past couple years, those sentiments seem to have become much quieter.
204. Regularly playing games with a picture depicting that of a furry character, people feel the need to point it out. This is intended to make you feel bad about being a furry.
205. the people i usually talk to are okay with it but you see a lot of hate against the fandom everywhere, mostly from the mass media portraying the fandom wrong.
206. Not personally. I've seen rude comments directed at others but they tend not to bother me much.
207. Yes, all too often. I've even been told I should die.
208. Not personally, although I know people who have been.
209. A few times. As more of a joke than anything, I often enter a custom game on StarCraft 2 with the title 'ThatWeirdFurry'. The game (an advanced remake of the party game 'Mafia') is completely anonymous, so it's interesting to see how some people react. Sometimes another stranger will name themselves something furry related, and other times I'll get killed with a death note hating on furies. It's quite an interesting experience! / TL;DR: Sometimes, but paradoxically the internet can be more accepting than real life
210. I think there is a lot of misunderstanding surrounding the fandom/community because of A) the "bad apples/loud-mostly-seen-by-the-public-but-not-an-accurate-representation-of-the-community-as-a-whole" you get in every group and B) the mass media sensationalizing furies as people who dress up in fursuits to commit acts of bestiality at the conventions they attend. And because the furry community is tries to be accepting, they end up with people that a lot of other people would not choose

as their first choice to be associated with. This results in a skewed view from the public of the furry community only to be confirmed by the loud minority that continue to worsen the furry image. Also people online love to pick people apart and watch "cringe"-y videos for entertainment where communities like furies are often picked on.

211. Yes, generally comments about furies online are very negative and close-minded.
212. yes, furies are at the bottom of the internet totem pole so to speak
213. Sometimes when I read comments and posts that are "anti-furry"
214. Extremely often. Most of the time as a pervert/zoophile/paedophile/faggot, you name it I've been called it
215. People randomly come up to me and insult me for being a furry, which is funny to me, as they never have good Grammar or spelling skills to go with it.
216. Sadly, yes. / Come on, we're just humans too :(
217. Yes, when furies are brought up, someone usually says a negative comment about them.
218. I use a furry profile pic drawn by a friend and I'm often harassed online
219. Not exactly stigmatized, but I have felt a temporary change in someone's conversational manners when they discover the person they're talking to is a furry. It's subtle, but it's like they think /about/ you differently. / Then shortly afterwards they completely forget about it since in most cases it's completely irrelevant.
220. Yes, generally it is brought up as a negative factor or people use it to disregard my opinion often.
221. Yes, but it happens so often that it doesn't bother me anymore.
222. For sure, people always think that furies want to have sex with animals. It's sad that people believe that as it isn't the case.
223. Yes. Friends I had once thought of as close turned my back on me simply because I had an opinion. Youtubers I used to enjoy watching made comments on how furies are "disgusting" and how we should kill ourselves.
224. Yes. I'm assumed to be mentally ill, a pervert, homosexual or not capable of separating my hobby from my professional life.
225. In general: no. It's becoming decently accepted by a lot of people online. I feel a lot of the hate comes from misconceptions about the fandom (see: "they're all just animal fuckers"). Sure, most people don't identify as a furry, but in general, it's just a hobby, and a lot of people get that. While I have gotten my fair share of hate comments when it gets brought up, more often than not: there are plenty of other people who will step up to defend me. It doesn't really bother me. I'll admit it's kinda weird (heck, I felt fursuited was kinda weird when I started in the fandom, but eventually I warmed up to the idea of a partial.), and so people's comments don't really get under my skin.
226. Sometimes people assume furry means furry erotica, so in that sense yes
227. I have seen a lot of hateful comments on various social media websites, yet I choose not to take these seriously.
228. Yes. Numerous of times. It's really improving tough. Almost seems like the world is getting used to us XD
229. There is a fair bit of a stereotype in place, but most average people tend to be relatively understanding. The trouble comes from the usual people who don't particularly go out of their way to think about things outside of their own bubble. Painful bubble people that they are and all.
230. Yes. People treat it like a perverted fetish online, you're the scum of the internet. When really it's no different than any other hobby. Star Wars, Warcraft, Fantasy Sports. It's just fantasy. Sure there are people who take it more serious or only in it for the perverted things, but it is like that with any hobby.
231. Yes, when I'm in non-furry communities I find it's often easier to avoid the subject entirely. Being furry is not "necessary," so to speak, in those situations, and bringing it up would more than likely cause confusion. It's doubtful - though possible - that it would invite intolerance, but when around non-furies I find it's better to avoid the risk entirely.
232. Some widely read articles online have given a very negative outlook on furies (i.e. Vanity Fair). A lot of internet users also seem to see the fandom as purely sexual, but fortunately this idea seems to be shifting (or perhaps that's wishful thinking on my behalf).

#### *Experiences of Stigma Offline*

1. I was beaten in the street with baseball bats by my brother and 3 of his friends. Yes.
2. Random people will say some remarks about how something is weird sometimes but most people just don't care enough.

3. Yes. When I was first finding out what a furry was, it was through the anti-furry 4chan stuff and Encyclopaedia Dramatica. My actual friends showed me this stuff, so I didn't mention it to anyone for a few years.
4. There is a lot of prejudice, but with my RL friends, I was always able to clear it up so far.
5. No one I know in real life knows I'm a furry. It would be social suicide for me to reveal it, so in an indirect way I guess I am stigmatized.
6. Somewhat, I know the social issues, actual or perceived, and thus remain in the "closet" except for very close friends.
7. All the time. I don't hide, or express my furry identity offline. Almost nobody knows because of this, and I'm perfectly fine with that. But whenever someone sees my reddit account name (it screams furry), they ask jokingly "What? Are you a furry?" I tell them that I am in a casual way. People think I'm telling a joke when I say that. People see me as a cool, outgoing person, and I think it's impossible for them to visualize me as a furry.
8. No, but my friend has for simply wearing a tail to school once.
9. Father tried to have me committed to a psychiatric hospital, fortunately my psychiatrist talked him out of it.
10. Yes. Family freaked out, mostly my mother. Though what she objected to the most about it was the nudity/pornography, since she seemed to feel that people shouldn't want to see nudity or sex in media/art and if they do there's something wrong with them. So I probably would have gotten a similar reaction if there'd been digital copies of Michelangelo's David and The Birth of Venus on my hard drive.
11. Yeah, I woke up one morning and my brother had blocked me on steam/skype/etc and when I went over to his room he called me a "degenerate furbag" and pretty much doesn't speak to me as often.
12. Heavily. I'm not into the NSFW side of the fandom, but I like art and I admire fursuits for the skill they take. Telling one person I was a little bit into furry stuff has turned into a year and a half of nonstop teasing, particularly about the sexual side and it's really frustrating. New people I meet that learn about it view me in a really negative light and it's really crappy.
13. I have felt stigmatized for being a furry offline. Examples of stigmatization offline are less common than those online, but they feel much more significant. For example, I overheard some of my old co-workers making remarks about a customer they had identified as a furry. As a furry myself, I suddenly became afraid of sharing this side of myself with people who were otherwise good friends of mine. Another example is when I told my mother that I would be attending a convention. Despite having no idea that I was a furry or that it was a furry convention, she made the comment "Well, I hope it isn't a furry convention." After explaining that it was, in fact, a furry convention and clearing some misconceptions, she ended up being supportive of the idea. Regardless, it was quite disconcerting to see just how far-off some people's misconceptions about the fandom are.
14. Yes - But only slightly, from friends that had only heard rumours online but then changed their opinion once being educated more about the fandom.
15. yes. I've overheard conversations from people talking about how furies are evil deviants.
16. Yeah, family hates it, 'friends' make plenty of jokes, sometimes accused of worse stuff
17. slightly yes. though not as harsh as most other experience
18. yes, by family
19. Yes, living in Texas made it hard to be open about it years ago.
20. yes when someone finds out they usually criticize me
21. Yeah, actually. A guy I met lost his faith in me as a human being.
22. Yes- wore a collar to school once a few years ago, got made fun of.
23. Yes- I am bullied and many people think I'm a freak.
24. Someone called me out on the street, told me to go fuck myself. Said person was fined.
25. Some of the comments on Furries I've overheard have been negative, never positive. However, I also usually hide that aspect of myself offline.
26. I've once had a friend find out that I was a furry, call me a 'Dog Fucker' and never talk to me again.
27. My parents tried to have me institutionalized over it if that counts?
28. Yes. I bought a tail at an amusement park, and my friends asked me if I was worried people would think I'm a furry.
29. In high school, but I think everybody's high school experience was similar in this fandom.
30. Yes. As many articles, even when they aim for good, start by saying "no, it is not a fetish" like reminding the reader, this is often thought as a fetish, even if they didn't know, but know they do and have knowledge about the stigma surrounding it. Telling a friend, any friend, will hit directly on the "this is weird, it should be about sex", "people disguising as animals for fun? Sounds like a fetish" even

though it is explained very often, not the majority of the fandom members actually own a fursuit. Closer friends and S.Os are easier to tell, they know you pretty well and they know, if you are saying you like this "weird thing" they will know you have a rational explanation and they won't jump directly to the sexual conclusion

31. I'm always concerned what someone's reaction will be when I tell them I'm furry because most people's understanding of the fandom comes from the Vanity Fair article or CSI episode. But I've never had a negative reaction offline when I tell people. My co-workers know and we're actually very curious about it.

32. Yes, a couple brief times

33. Yes, my friends hate furies and vocalize their distaste often. They do not know I'm a furry

34. Yes. I've been around people quite a few times insulting or making fun of the group who didn't know that I identify as a furry. It's sort of like it's the last thing it's still okay to make fun of.

35. Most people I talk to think furry is just having huge orgies.

36. Yes, several classmates of mine have consistently made fun of me / harassed me for my interest in the fandom.

37. A few family who know again, think it's a fetish, and it has resulted in issues.

38. Again to some extent, yes. I once had someone I knew say that furies should just be put down like animals, that they are a disgrace to humanity, because of one bad experience he had with a guy who was a furry and would leave dirty clothes and dishes all over said acquaintance's house. I have also had people in my D & D group talk about how obnoxious all furies are, oblivious to the fact that I am one and obviously not like that since they could not tell I was one.

39. Yes. Snide and derogatory comments.

40. Yes by family and friends

41. Yes. I'm not publicly a furry so sometimes my real life friends unknowingly comment about how "weird" and "sexualised" the fandom is around me. Acquaintances have also make derogatory comments about the fandom around me. I disagree with their views and opinions but do not speak out in defence of it for fear of being associated with it.

42. yes in circumstances where people have brought up the subject of furies in a negative connotation

43. In high school, yes.

44. Again, not directly, but when the topic comes up in conversation I rarely hear anything positive.

45. Yes, once or twice.

46. I have at home, but in public, no one really cares. When I've been with furies in public (particularly people in suit), other people are generally more intrigued than anything else. My group has only had one case of being harassed for being furies in all of the times we've done public meet ups.

47. Yeah. People who know about the furry fandom, but are on in it themselves, often only know about the "bad" sides.

48. Yes. I hear negative furry comments from random people daily at this point.

49. Yes, but never directly. I overhear jokes using annoying and incorrect "facts"

50. yes. although the people in question did not know I was a furry

51. Sort Of. It's hard keeping it a secret.

52. A little, mostly because they believe the CSI episode is all there is.

53. I've experienced people loudly complaining about the furry community or discussing how weird or gross the community is. But it almost seems like we have to keep our mouths closed or else we're considered too opinionated or too preachy.

54. I let it slip to my mother at one point, and while she said she was fine with it, she appeared to hold a sort of disdain under the surface.

55. Yes. It was only during high school, but at the time I was being stigmatized for much more than just that, even the few times I was open in it with randoms. I also wore a collar during the last couple years of high school, and of course many people asked why. I told the first few about me being a furry, but most of them had no idea what a furry was. I explained it to them each time, but after a while of this and just gave the answer "Because I just like to wear it".

56. Yes and that is why i have not told anyone other than a few very close friends offline. I am scared I might judged.

57. Because of the casual aspect, not really - but I don't talk about it around my more conservative side of the family.. or really, most of them. It's less stigmatized than just plain not wanting to have to explain it with the media portrayal floating around. Bits and piece of art around seem to be ignored or approved of, however.

58. Some people I know have negative opinions about the fandom and it's members.

59. Sometimes. I rarely go out into the public as a furry as there is very few around here. / Mostly its just muttering. When fursuiting in the public there is almost always that loud guy who announces rather loudly to make sure the furs can hear them 'oh, its the creepy furrries' or something to a similar effect.
60. Most of the people who know about it outside of my immediate friend group just get really uncomfortable whenever the topic even remotely comes up. And a few of my closet friends like to light heartedly make fun of me for being a furry.
61. Yes, but only really by my older brother's friends, who all frequent 4chan; specifically /b/.
62. I generally keep being a furry very close to the chest offline. The few public suit outings I have gone to I felt very judged but only when I was carrying around my suit head.
63. When people who I interact with mock furrries as weirdos. Every fandom has its weirdos
64. Yes, which is why I stopped telling people.
65. Yes, by family
66. Mildly, mostly because some minor bad media coverage occasionally pops the question on fursuiters and if that's "what we do?" insinuating more.
67. Yes but they understand it better now.
68. I feel I would if I bothered to tell anyone.
69. Yes, often in high school, sometimes in college or while out.
70. Nobody knows that I'm a furry because I want to avoid the stigma.
71. I have not told anyone offline that I am a furry (yet), so have not faced any personal stigma. However, the reactions I have seen to furrries in general (particularly when featured in the media or on TV shows) is discouraging.
72. Yes, after a couple of my friends found out, I had to give them "the talk" as to what being a furry actually means instead of the stereotypes they pinned on me.
73. Talking to people who aren't in the fandom about the fandom...there's always a layer of awkwardness in the conversation. The general public just doesn't know what the fandom is. There's no corporation or movie studio branding what being a 'Furry' means. There are entertaining parodies in today's media, but their viewers don't really know what's being exaggerated. How do you describe such a diverse fandom to someone outside the fandom when members of the fandom will debate what being a furry means?
74. Yes, friends of mine complain about how weird furrries are when none of them really know much about them.
75. No, but I would never dress up or fursuit without a group of other furrries around because I fear being stigmatized and made fun of.
76. Yes, some people at my school called me "furfag" and lots of other insults associated with the fandom.
77. Yes, only by a few people a couple of times, but nonetheless it has happened
78. Not me personally but I know that two of my friends were heavily harassed for being furrries before I joined the friend group. 80% of jokes told were anti-furry comments that stopped after my joining of the group. Another friend gets harassed by his older brother (Who himself is a furry but for lizards etc) for being a furry.
79. A little. / My friends are gits.
80. I have told a few of my relatives about it before, and they don't seem to mind, however the younger ones in my family (around 20) may have seen bad stereotypes of furrries before, so I'm quite fearful of telling them.
81. Yes. My parents beg for me to not call myself a furry since some are crazy, and my friends call me a "furfag."
82. Yes. Stereotypes are widespread
83. Yes. I happened to be near a group of people that were talking about furrries, saying how weird they are and how they "have sex in fursuits" and are into bestiality. I kept quiet, but it made me feel very uncomfortable because I know the fandom isn't like that.
84. Not any specific examples, or any directed at me. It's just another "out-there" group in most people's eyes, and will be used as an example of "out-there" groups in some conversations
85. Yes, same reason. Certain social circles would be irrelevant and only bring negative attention, so I don't bring it up ever. In some rare cases I will change phone backgrounds or other things to avoid bringing attention to it.
86. It's best if we aren't mentioned at all, because when we are then it's very hateful.
87. Not many people know that I am a furry offline. My guy friends that do know that I am a furry look down on it.

88. Frequently. Sometimes I think about casually dropping that I'm a furry to my roommates, but occasionally they'll say something kind of a little mean or incorrect about furies. I also usually hear furies get pretty harshly criticized for stuff I or almost all furies have never done.
89. Yes. A close friend gave me crap about it when he first found out.
90. An individual that used to be my friend told several people that I "fantasise about sex with cats"
91. Yes- friends see furs in a negative light.
92. around certain family members, yes
93. I go to anime/manga/comic conventions in my fursuit sometimes and have had off comments from other attendees like 'Wow, whatever floats your boat, but I don't get how people are into that' or 'gross, furies' without any cause. Lots of people think it's a fetish when for the majority of us it's no different from cosplay.
94. I don't really talk about it at all. But I have had to set a good friend straight once or twice because they thought furry was a "fetish" rather than a fandom. Thanks, media.
95. Yes very few times.
96. Again, not directed at me, but I don't advertise being a furry in public, especially as comments I've heard from others in public have been mainly negative and so keep being furry to myself
97. No, at most weird looks and I have only 1 occasion where some random passer-by made some fun the people in our fur walk. Most people I have talked to, which ranges from friends to co-workers to random people, either find it interesting or they don't really care that much. Most people just go with a "whatever floats your boat" attitude to furry stuff.
98. Yes, but never overtly, nor by non-friends for non-comedic purposes. It's just not something you bring up in the outside world today, as not every person has experienced anything past the surface of the internet. It reminds me somewhat of the plight of the homosexuals back in the days before our current wide-spread acceptance, where such a secret could lead to a life-shattering collapse of one's social network.
99. A bit but people know I couldn't care less what they think
100. Yes, although I keep it a secret.
101. A few times, ranging from just "banter" to flat-out bullying.
102. Yes. Indirectly by co-workers due to misinformation
103. Not quite stigmatized per se, but definitely some of my friends don't really understand much about it and can make some inaccurate/insensitive remarks.
104. Occasionally comments get thrown around, especially when suiting at conventions (anime cons specifically, which furies attend but the cons aren't fur cons) but aside from when I suit I don't really encounter a lot of hate, but it is certainly out there.
105. Only once or twice, usually just by telling people or the one time I wore my tail in public. That is a very, very, very rare occasion and sometimes I felt like people were just staring and judging. Pretty scary feeling.
106. Yes. I've been labelled as a zoophilic individual a couple times.
107. Yes, lots of my friends will mention how much they hate "furfags" or just make fun of furies on a regular basis. Only 2 people that I'm close with know that I'm a furry and are cool with it.
108. Yes; family, knowing I enjoy the fandom, had false views of the community (promiscuity & strangeness).
109. No, normally whenever the topic of furies comes up, people who are not familiar with me initially believe all furies to be sexual deviants, but I often explain otherwise. Others seem pretty accepting of furies.
110. No. People tend to be nicer in person, and it doesn't tend to come up in person unless I am close to the person.
111. Occasionally, I wouldn't bring it up around work.
112. Yes, but a changed the topic of conversation at the time to avoid it.
113. I'm not open about with anyone except for a select few, but it's not hard to see how someone could be stigmatized just for being a furry.
114. I've never revealed myself as a furry in the public eye. Doing so would only influence negative bias. causing flaky friendships and passed job opportunities, which really cannot be avoided as not everyone dwells on the internet and understands the furry fandom. Most simply see it as people that are into bestiality who are covering themselves up, or freaks who fuck in costumes, as they only look at any data for a second, which simply is the nature of reality.
115. yes, going as far as making me feel I have to hide liking anything even just animal related for fear of getting abuse or even attacked (the latter especially since the incident a year or so ago where a fur con was attacked with chlorine gas)

116. Yes, I will get very disgusted or confused looks from people, especially women. (Say I'm acting like a wolf in a mild way by growling at friends or something.)
117. I don't generally talk about it openly; people either wouldn't get it, or would give me shit for it, from past experience
118. Yes, at a Christmas party at work (note: nobody there knows I'm a furry) I overheard a colleague saying that all Furies would dress up in costumes and have sex. / /
119. Only by stereotypes, but nothing personally against me.
120. A little bit. My mom really seemed to hate it, and thought it was some perverted thing on the internet that she didn't want me getting involved in.
121. I don't know. I can say maybe part of the reason I feel ostracized and lonely is that I'm a furry but I think of all the factors this one is very low if it even exists. Once again I'm not a furry offline. A couple people know and I don't think they treat me any differently.
122. Well yeah, expressing your inner nerd often tends to get quite a few looks from people. Some of them are in disgust, but I'd like to think that most people smile on the inside when they see someone expressing their true self.
123. Greatly again. Most people do not know I like furry related things, but those who do know, who do not know what I actually am, quite often search for me to either beat me up or steal my property.
124. I haven't told anyone offline due to the stigma
125. Hell yes. Some people I encounter daily in school think I am disgusting, but they never justify their over reactions. I am victimized by arrogance.
126. Yes I've been harassed for writing furry media
127. Same deal as on the internet. There was a time when people I knew offline nearly connected one of my online furry accounts back to me, and it was very clear their intention was negative while searching.
128. No as it isn't something I ever talk about in real life, due to the stigma surrounding it
129. By "friends"
130. Yes. I've been hiding it, as there's a large amount of anti-furry bullies who harass and insult and assault furies at my school.
131. Only in England, I wouldn't go around wearing my tail/ears in public in England, Wales is a lot more open.
132. Yes, because I am afraid of losing friends, but I'm pretty open about it.
133. Yes. (Friends stigmatizing furry porn.)
134. Yes. People assume that it's all about sex.
135. Only once. A friend once talked about furies in a manner consistent with the worse stereotypes while unaware that I was a furry.
136. Yes. I conceal my furry identity and only reveal to my very close non-furry friends and a few furry friends. That being said, I know I have to learn defending my super normal (at least I think!) and awesome furry identity.
137. yes, but not me personally being stigmatized just the furry community as a whole
138. I don't talk about it outside of the internet often. However, I have shared it with people I've dated. In most cases, it became a thing that was ignored and not shared, which would feel isolating.
139. Yes, my parents are really weirded out by it
140. Just a little bit. Some people talk about furies in a negative manner.
141. I have. My dad and sister speak of furies very poorly and if they knew I was in the fandom, who knows how they treat me/act around me.
142. A few times, but mostly because they do not understand that we're not (all) into bestiality.
143. Once, slightly. During a period of poor health (I had just withdrawn from university, and been diagnosed with narcolepsy) my mother felt concerned enough about the possibility of suicide that she checked through my browsing history extensively. I was a little mortified- I'm not terribly concerned with people knowing I'm a furry, but having a loved one explore every lurid detail of how my interest in anthropomorphism plays out (especially my fascination with Transformation fetish subculture) was not something I was thrilled to experience. "That furry stuff is really weird," she said to me with a scowl. God, makes my stomach shrivel up just thinking about it.
144. yeah people think we're pervers
145. If I was actually open with it, probably would be.
146. Yes, by friends and acquaintances that don't know that I'm a furry
147. Yes, by my family. They had heard the worst of the fandom. My mom even called me disgusting, though she has apologized.

148. Only one person in real life knows that I am a furry, and even then we only see each other in public so we can't discuss it. When the topic comes up, my other friends will often make a joke about it (i.e. "The only people who want to see Zootopia are furrries").
149. Oftentimes it seems that they're neutral about furrries, but on other occasions it seems like they despise them. / TL;DR: Not really, since nobody knows
150. Not directly as nobody I know in real life knows I am a furry, however a few of my friends openly hate furrries.
151. Some of my friends push away from it so I keep it a secret except to my best friend, though I have a feeling some of my other very close friends already know.
152. YES people think you shit in litter boxes
153. once again, don't feel comfortable being open about liking "furry" things, for fear of stigmatization or ostracization
154. I'm not openly furry, but there are many people I know in real life who are the people listed above, being edgy and making jokes about furrries and other online groups just for fun. I've been slowly de-attaching myself from these people; however, if they were to find out I was a furry before I'd get in a comfortable spot away from them, I know their ridicule would never end. That's when I would feel like crap.
155. Extremely often. Most of the time as a pervert, zoophile, paedophile, faggot, you name it I've been called it.
156. Yes, my friends who don't know of my interests have made derogatory comments about furrries.
157. I don't talk about being a furry often but to the few people I have told either they are furrries or they are very supportive of me being a furry.
158. Yes. Even though no one knows I am one when I hear people talking about it in real life it's very negative.
159. A few of my IRL friends seem to harbour the misconception that all furrries are in it for the sex
160. Only once. The vast majority of all interactions have been positive-- most people one could meet don't really know what a furry is; they find the drawings, tails, etc. interesting and/or creative.
161. Definitely, even my close friends will harass me about it.
162. I feel that people are less willing to be around me, which is unfortunate.
163. Passively, though I've said very little to cause anyone to specifically target me for anything.
164. Very few people I know offline know that I'm a furry, so I don't have much experience with this. The only people that know I only told because they had already reacted positively to the subject of furrries. While it is just a hobby, I don't really feel it's the kind that you should walk down the street exclaiming.
165. A couple of times, when doing a typical furry outing in the city close by where we dress up to have fun outside with random people walking by. There is always some people who think of us as the scum of earth. I don't care much for the comments though, the families and their kids usually love us, the kids have great fun with our random encounters.
166. No one I know offline knows about me being a furry right now, so I couldn't say. Maybe some day, though. There would probably be a bit of the same acknowledgment of the stereotype either way - online or off. Just with less likelihood of the more confrontational Idiots without there being an internet connection between them and you.
167. Sometimes by my family
168. When in fursuit at a non-furry con, I got a few 'gross a furry', not nothing too outrageous.
169. Yes, and I feel I shouldn't be. It's a hobby, not a lifestyle. You don't get that sort of treatment for liking basketball or crocheting, so why this? Friends, family, I've gotten unnecessary crap from lots of people over this, ha-ha.
170. Yes, frequently. Online you are able to easily avoid anybody who might stigmatize you by simply blocking them or staying around exclusively-furry communities. In real life, however, no matter how many furrries you surround yourself with there will always be "normal" people present as well. As most people lack any awareness of the furry fandom in the first place, their opinions seem to vary wildly. Most display indifference or only mild interest in "the funny people in the animal costumes," but not infrequently you may also hear utterances of "freak," "weirdo," "pervert," and the like. I have not revealed this interest to my own family, as their reactions to even simple anime-styled accessories have been strongly negative. However, I come from a very progressively minded household, so I do not believe their reactions come from a place of intolerance. They just don't like nerdy stuff.
171. Yes, my experience has been that the fandom is usually treated with mockery or disdain when it comes up as a topic of conversation.

172. I've never felt directly stigmatized, but if I was open about being a furry I would think there would be a 100% chance stigma would be directed at me. During a game of cards against humanity, one of my friends asked what a furry was and another responded with something along the lines of 'bunch of internet zoophile perverts' -yeah. I had to bite my tongue to stop myself from saying anything.

173. Respondent: [00:10:42] Are you aware of ... I mean, the people who don't like us, who have taken their [unintelligible 00:10:48] from the media, it's got to a point where we have been physically attacked for this. I mean, I don't know if you've found out about ... there was a convention, it was about a year ago.

Interviewer: [00:11:01] Oh, the chemical attack?

Respondent: [00:11:03] Yes.

Interviewer: [00:11:03] Yes, the chlorine gas attack. Yes, I was very surprised that there was this attack, and it was barely broadcast. There doesn't seem to be much media about it, apart from, sort of, articles downplaying the seriousness of it.

Respondent: [00:11:22] Well, the use of chlorine gas is a war crime.

# Appendix C – Species Choice Analysis

## Reasons for Fursona change

### *Change in personality*

1. As I change, my sona changes with me. I don't see my sona as a different entity, we are the same and my sona is just an online representation of myself.
2. Changed with me
3. I originally started as a Dragon but that didn't feel right. I just made my hyena and she's been going through updates since. She gets small updates every once in a while.
4. SO convinced me previous fursona did not match my personality
5. I felt that a shark was more fitting for me
6. Perception of self
7. My fursona is, for the most part, an idealized version of myself. Since the definition of my "ideal self" shifts during significant changes in my life, my fursona must shift as well.
8. had an identity crisis
9. Because I've changed over the year
10. To fashion more like me
11. Trying to refine it to best match what I like about myself
12. I have had about 4 fursonas, I change them if I feel I've outgrown them. They are supposed to represent me, so I try to keep them as true to myself as possible.
13. Attitude shifted. Kind of growing up. Also physical aspects I thought by myself.
14. To fit with my changing personality
15. Because I changed as a person, and probably will again one day.
16. As people grow up, they see the world and themselves differently. In the 15 years that I've been in the fandom, I've gone through a lot of changes in my life.
17. He's evolved as I've grown and matured
18. I felt it fit more with my personality.
19. better representation of myself
20. Personal Growth/Change
21. I started to feel the opossum character I created was a better fit for my general personality
22. Started out as a wolf with fancy markings, but after some introspection, I felt like a sheep was more fitting for me and my personality. Hasn't changed since!
23. Twice, growing up I changed to match personal transitions as I learned more about who I am as a person and my Fursona is the version of me as I am and would like to be.
24. Yes, as my personality matured I switched once.
25. In the past, my fursona was my "ideal" self. Now, they are different aspects of me as I am, though exaggerated and fleshed out to be their own characters.
26. I felt that my original panther fursona did not really fit my personality, and I have no interest in a feline fursona
27. My personality and values have shifted dramatically since interacting with the furry community.
28. My interests changed, so my fursona changed to better reflect them.
29. I decided that what came to mind when thinking about dragons fit my personality better than what came to mind for a wolf.
30. Mainly personality wise.
31. I made the switch because it fit my personality more than my previous fursona.
32. Changing criteria for fursona selection, increased self-understanding.
33. I develop different interests and such over the years, and change details of my fursona accordingly
34. Over time your personality changes and you see yourself in different ways. If your character reflects these personality changes then it makes sense for the character to change.
35. I've changed as a person, I like to reflect that in my art
36. Has changed to fit me a little better.
37. Interest in other things affecting the fursona, personal changes being reflected in the character, desire for a more thorough backstory and "identity" for the fursona.
38. What he used to represent didn't feel like it represented me, any longer; I changed him as I, myself, changed.

## *Posthuman*

1. Used to be more of a fox and more feminine, then mostly changed to a wolf and more masculine. Not sure why. Still secretly enjoy femininity.
2. It used to be a fox, but that was experimental, so I changed it later since I decided that a wolf suits me more
3. HE was initially a phoenix, but changed to his own species as traits and abilities developed.
4. A character in a furry story was meaningful to me, so I changed my species as a tribute to him
5. To better represent who I am
6. I'm a furry because I'm species dysphoric. I'm a fox (kitsune, more specifically) stuck as a human. The fandom is awesome, and accepting of me.
7. A non-specific sense that it wasn't "right" anymore, followed by vague riffing until it did feel right again
8. Being a polar bear didn't really fit me.
9. I have had different alter-egos, sometimes one at a time, sometimes just different facets of the same person. Didn't really use the label of "furry" until recently when I thought "why not cat?"
10. My fursona is a personal reflection of me, so as I change so does he.
11. Changes in interest and sexual fluidity
12. Dissatisfied with having male fursona
13. As I grew up, my fursona grew up with me, gaining more womanly features and becoming more colorful as I stepped out of depression.
14. Changing interests and outlook, plus experimentation.
15. I realized I had a more social side, which matched more with a canine than feline, seeing as my previous fursona was a tiger.
16. Self realization
17. The biggest change is that he went from being quadrupedal (walking on all fours like a normal animal) to being bipedal. When I first came up with the idea for him I felt like making him walk upright made him too similar to being human to be sufficiently cool or interesting. I've changed my mind on that since then, but I still like to emphasize in his backstory and personality the things that make an intelligent wolf creature different from how a human would act and see the world.
18. Became more of a reflection of myself
19. As i grew as a human being, my fursona evolved as well
20. I felt a stronger connection to that specific species
21. I realized a shark represented me more
22. Changed to better fit who I am
23. Different color preferences, and I'm trans.
24. Certain media influence you and change the kinda person you are. My example would be after playing "UnderTale" I resonated with a certain character who happened to be a goat and thus somewhat changed my fursona
25. Some people have multiple fursonas and use them as their original characters. Some have only one and they identify as their fursona, often feeling trapped in a human body. I, on the other hand, identify strongly with my fursona and see it as an extension of myself, but I'm not delusional about it. I am, for better or worse, a human being after all. Although, if I had the possibility and chance to become my fursona, I'd take it in a heartbeat. I love the community because of its general acceptance, social "warmth" and the feeling of belonging somewhere. It is also, personally, a form of escapism.
26. Switched from being a regular fox to a domesticated fox (i.e. one based on the foxes artificially selected for tameness since the late 1950s by the Institute of Cytology & Genetics in Russia). To others I just describe it as a cosmetic change to fur pattern, but I also feel it's a better match for me, as a city dweller.
27. I got better at creating more complex characters, and the dynamics between the other characters changed
28. I've designed the character to look a bit more like the actual animal rather than me as I've continued to draw her
29. It has become less "some character I made" and more a representation of my personality.
30. When I was younger mine was based on a pokemon, as I grew up I wanted something more realistic and more aligned with who I am as a person.
31. My personality changed as i grew up. i wasnt do laughy jokey like a hyena anymore, I had matured and learned the importance of loyaty. I feel that I now share more qualities associated with a well trained grman shepard.

### *Improvement in aesthetic design*

1. Has been designed more precisely over time, patterns added, exact colourations decided etc.
2. Changed the gender from male to female because her design fit a female body more than a male one.
3. Started liking different colors and designs
4. small details like exact designs of brands and tattoos
5. Yes, when I was a kid he was a badass, and this deer-person was very guns-y, over the years I just made him into a cute little deer boy cause I like cute things.
6. Didn't like the color style
7. I couldn't draw dragons as well as i could draw bears
8. Respondent: [00:25:26] The ears and the tail are both robotic, and they're basically controlled hand gestures. I had things on my hands [00:25:36].  
Interviewer: [00:25:38] What turn the ears and stuff?  
Interviewer: [00:25:47] Yes.  
Respondent: [00:25:53] And, this is completely custom made, I printed this on my 3D printer, and the electronics are my own design, [unintelligible 00:26:00].
9. Hair style and choice of clothing
10. Different colors and clothing
11. Tastes changed. Fox -> Lion -> Waxwing -> Owl.
12. I originally had a Wolf, but changed it when I learned about Fennec Foxes, and wanted to be \*slightly\* more original
13. Was a bat first, couldn't figure out how to make the wings work in art
14. Decided a plain red fox was boring sometime around 14 years old
15. minor aesthetic changes, moving toward a more realistic pattern
16. Identified with characteristics of certain animals more than others as I grew up. Also decided a German Shepherd/fox/hawk mix with green highlights was rather silly. I could still express myself but without being way out there.
17. Art style changed, decided foxes are too common
18. Changed from fox to avoid being generic
19. Changes in colour. For me it's hard to get it JUST right.
20. I didnt want it to look like a rainbow anymore
21. Design tastes change/improve
22. Very Little, simple color pallet changes.
23. I have changed the colours of his fur to make him more aesthetically interesting as a character
24. Changed various patterns and such.
25. As I was new in the fandom, my sona changed species a lot as I kept seeing new animals that I thought would be adorable.
26. He now has a more refined apparence.
27. Improvements to designs.
28. Simple design changes, because I thought they looked neat.
29. Colors
30. Matured, design changes and the like.
31. For aesthetic reasons.
32. 152. Second fursona had a redesign of color and species to suit current self better
33. Small cosmetic changes, just genral design changes becuase I wanted to improve the design
34. Just aesthetic/color changes
35. Just to fit my tastes and design choices
36. Minor alterations in color shade and other small details
37. wasn't happy with design
38. My main fursona has updated their clothing style within the past two years
39. Color/markings changes
40. Mainly just for colors.
41. Decided to formalize how my fursona looked.
42. Small design changes.
43. Artistic choice
44. Colors
45. Changes to fur colour and pattern
46. Color variations
47. I wanted to add new things to him (i.e. piercings, markings, etc.)
48. Design refinements

- 49. Stylistic changes, mainly to do with his appearance.
- 50. Designs

difference

## Appendix D: Pornography Analysis

[redacted in this version]

## Appendix E: Correspondence with IARP

[redacted in this version]