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Risk and Protective Factors for SADness in the Furry Community: An Exploration of Suicide, Anxiety and Depression Within the Furry Community

A thesis

submitted in fulfilment

of the requirements for the degree

of

Master of Social Sciences

at

The University of Waikato

by

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THE UNIVERSITY OF
WAIKATO

Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

2018

Abstract

This research explored the risk and protective factors for mental well-being within the furry community. It provided an insight into the prevalence of suicidality, anxiety and depression within the furry community. Finally, this research also sought to explore how being a member of the furry community impacted daily life and life stressors. There is little research that has been performed investigating the mental well-being of the furry community. we therefore draw comparisons with sexual minority communities as there are parallels with the furry community. This research was based upon Meyer (2003)'s Minority Model of Stress which states that minority mental well-being is modified by a range of general stressors, minority stress processes (risk factors), minority identity status, and coping and social support (protective factors).

The participant sample consisted of 1249 self-identified furies, recruited from 57 countries. Participants were required to complete an online questionnaire comprising of items relating to suicidality, depression, anxiety, disclosure of furry identity, level of bullying faced, experiences of being bullied, effect of furry community on daily life, fanship, and perceived social support.

We found that suicide, anxiety and depression were significant issues within the furry community and the literature suggests that there are several risk and protective factors which influence the mental well-being for members of the furry community. We found limited evidence that these risk factors were associated with mental well-being. Both bullying for non-furry specific reasons was found to be significantly positively associated with all mental well-being

measures. Fanship was also found to be positively associated with anxiety and depression.

Participants reported that the furry community provided a wide range of support including emotional and social support. which was reported by many participants to have been an influential factor on improving their mental well-being and decreasing their suicidal ideation and self-harming. This study has highlighted that the furry community may provide protective factors including social support to its members. It appears to provide both practical support including providing income or housing, as well as emotional support such as providing a place to seek advice, or to vent and share their emotions.

Acknowledgements

To the 1249 furies who took part in this research, I want to say thank you for opening up and sharing your personal experiences with me. Without your trust, this thesis would have not happened.

To my supervisors, Jaimie Veale, Courtney “Nuka” Plante, and Armon Tamatea. Thank you all for putting up with constant emails and providing the support, advice and knowledge to achieve this work. Jaimie – Thank you for always being able to answer my questions and guiding me throughout this journey. Thank you also for helping me draw all the threads together to complete this task. Nuka – Thank you for being a constant source of knowledge about the furry community, and for helping me get started with this research project. Armon – Thank you for taking me on even though your workload was full, your experience and knowledge was valued immensely.

Finally, to my wife Anne-Marie, thank you for putting up with the constant late nights and the ridiculous amount of coffee consumed. Thank you for the endless support, encouragement and kindness.

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Glossary of Terms

Anthropomorphism: Giving human traits to animals (dogs walking upright on two legs, cats talking).

Anxiety (Disorder): Excessive feelings of nervousness and fear.

Bronies: The (often male) adult fans of the animated My Little Pony tv show.

Depression (Disorder): Feelings of sadness and low mood accompanied by loss of interest in activities previously enjoyed.

Fandom: Identification with a community that shares a common interest in an activity or media content (e.g. books, tv shows, sports).

Fanship: Identification with a person's interest in an activity or media content.

Furry: Person with an interest in anthropomorphised animals.

Fursona: Animal themed avatar or representation, usually anthropomorphic. Used as an identity within the furry fandom. Can be a simple visual avatar, all the way through to a fully-fledged identity, with likes, dislikes, and personality.

Furry Convention: Event which involves gathering of furries at hotels, or event centres. Can span multiple days and may involve from a few dozens to thousands of attendees.

Gender: cultural beliefs regarding behaviours and attitudes associated with a person's sex.

Intersex: people born with primary and secondary sex characteristics that do not fit binary notions of male or female bodies.

LGBTQ+: Initialism for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning and other non-heterosexual and on-binary identities.

Mental Well-being: Measure of a person's overall mental health, including mental disorders

Minority Model of Stress: Model which describes the chronically elevated stress that is faced by members of stigmatised minority identity groups.

Protective Factors: Factors or aspects which help mitigate the negative harm from stressors.

Risk Factors: Factors which increase the risk of negative harm from life stressors.

Sexual Orientation: The sexual identity of a person, based upon what gender they are attracted to.

Therian: A person who identifies as non-human, instead identifies as real-world animal species.

Transgender: A person who identifies as a different gender to that associated with their birth sex.

Zoophilia: Sexual attraction to animals.

Chapter 1

Man is least himself when he talks in his own person. Give him a mask, and he will tell you the truth.

– Oscar Wilde

Furries are a group of people who share a self-proclaimed interest in anthropomorphism: animals with human traits. (Roberts, Plante, Gerbasi, & Reysen, 2015). The furry community has been found in past research to be a stigmatized minority group. Research on members of other stigmatized minority groups suggests that they have reduced mental well-being and are at greater risk of depression, anxiety and suicide. Despite some evidence showing this in furries, this has been limited in its geographical range and it has largely neglected the issue of suicide and mental well-being. In the studies performed by the International Anthropomorphic Research Project, there has been little research looking specifically at suicidality, and at the risk and protective factors for furry mental well-being, specifically in online non-convention-based samples. This present research differs from the established research in both its aims and its methodology. The participants were recruited from an international sample and answered questions on a wide variety of topics, including suicidality and mental well-being, as these have not been investigated to a great depth in prior research.

The work presented in this manuscript seeks to perform an exploratory analysis of the suicidality, anxiety and depression and build upon the existing research surrounding the furry community. The present research will be analysing the risk and protective factors for mental well-being within the furry community. Some of the expected risk factors include bullying prevalence, age and length of time in fandom, as well as whether a furry is able to comfortably disclose their furry identity to others. The expected protective factors against mental health risks include the level of disclosure of furry identity, connection to the fandom, including length of time in the fandom, and the number of furry friends seen or contacted on a weekly basis. This present research will also be performing a thematic analysis of two of the potential risk factors - furries' experiences disclosing their furry identity and their experiences being bullied for being a furry. The present research will also be analysing participants perspectives on the benefits of the furry community.

This paper begins with a summary and review of the literature around psychological well-being. This discussion will include an examination of suicide, anxiety and depression as well as some of the risk and protective factors related to those factors.

Following this discussion will be a summary of the literature regarding furries, including the demographic and socioeconomic factors of the furry community, furry fan pursuits, and review of the stigmatization of the furry community. This will lead to a focused analysis of the previously-mentioned risk

factors for mental well-being in the furry community, as well as a discussion of the protective factors within the furry community.

As this research is investigating the mental well-being of the furry community, it is important first to define what we mean by mental well-being.

Mental Well-being

Psychological or mental well-being is a broad term which refers not only to a person's happiness, but also to person's overall mental health (Chen, Jing, Hayes, & Lee, 2013; Ryff, 1989). Psychological well-being is based on the idea of achieving eudemonic well-being as a result of pursuing positive goals (Chen, et al., 2013). Eudemonic well-being refers to achieving personal growth, self-acceptance and satisfaction as a result of pursuing positive goals such as serving others or climbing a mountain. Failure or inability to pursue these positive goals can lead to poor psychological well-being. Poor psychological well-being can be a predictor of significant mental impairment or distress. Similarly, high levels of psychological well-being can predict significant resilience against mental distress. Poor mental well-being is measurable by the presence of mental illnesses such as depression or anxiety.

Mental illnesses are one of the most prevalent causes of disability and deaths within the United States (Khubchandani, Brey, Kotecki, Kleinfelder, & Anderson, 2016). Anxiety and depression are some of the most common mental illnesses, especially in adolescents and young adults. Anxiety and Depression are

often comorbid, and this comorbidity can lead to functional impairment and suicidal ideation (Khubchandani, et al., 2016).

How is Mental Well-being Assessed

One of the ways of assessing mental well-being is to assess the level of a person's individual anxiety and depression scores. When assessing for the presence of poor mental well-being, an ultra-brief assessment which can be helpful to quickly and effectively assess the client. One such brief assessment tool like PHQ-4, or Patient Health Questionnaire 4 Item.

The PHQ-4 is a succinct 4-item questionnaire which is useful for gaining a fast, accurate and easy to interpret measure of anxiety and depression prevalence within participant or patient groups. The PHQ-4 has high sensitivity and specificity for both anxiety and depression and is suitable for use both with individual clients and mass screenings for large client groups (Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Löwe, 2009). The PHQ was designed to simplify and shorten the process of accessing if a client had the presence of a mental disorder and to enable non-clinicians to administer this assessment. The PHQ-4 was derived for the first two questions of the PHQ and GAD and is based on the DSM-IV criteria for depression and anxiety. Khubchandani and colleagues (2016) tested the PHQ-4 with 934 students and found that the reliability and validity were both high - they deemed that the PHQ-4 was a suitable as a mass screening tool for depression and anxiety in young adults.

What are the Risk and Protective Factors for Mental Well-being

The Minority Stress Model describes the stressors and stress processes faced by members of minorities groups such as LGBTQ+ or racial minorities groups whose needs and values are not reflected in mainstream society (Meyer, 2003). The Minority Stress Model states that members of minority groups may face stressors like expectations of rejection, the need to conceal one's identity, internalised stigma and feelings of anomie, and feeling like one is alienated from society. This model also predicts the risk factors associated with the psychological stress of having a minority identity.

Meyer (2003) states there are three processes of minority stress which are relevant to minority group members; objective and acute stressful events or conditions, expectations of such events and the resulting vigilance towards them, and the internalisation of stigma. An example of these processes would be a man getting assaulted by a white man for being black. Subsequently the man would be hesitant around other white people and begin to expect it to happen again because of this vigilance. This vigilance may lead to the internalisation of the stigma against him. Meyer (2003) also highlights that for members of stigmatized groups with concealable identities, concealment or selective disclosure of identity is yet another source of stress.

Repeated exposure to stigma or minority stressors can lead to the internalisation of those beliefs or stigmas, and internalised stigma has been found to be a risk factor for poor psychological well-being (Lorenzi, Miscioscia, Ronconi, Pasquali, & Simonelli, 2015). Internalised stigma occurs when a person

assigns a negative view of themselves based on the stigma that they witness against themselves, or other members of their community, by society, such as homophobia, transphobia or racism. High levels of internalised stigma are correlated with poor sexual identity formulation, low levels of self-disclosure, and poor self-esteem (Lorenzi, et al., 2015).

Witnessing or facing harassment for being part of a minority can lead to expectations that this harassment will be faced again, or the expectation that others will reject you because of your minority status or identity (Meyer, 2003). This fear or rejection and further harassment can lead to excessive vigilance against it by focusing one's attention on the outward presentation of their identity, to avoid outing themselves inadvertently, which forms part of the minority stressors laid out in the minority model of stress. (Meyer, 2003; Mock, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013). This vigilance and resultant monitoring can lead to the concealment of identity. This concealment of identity can result in significant mental fatigue and invasive thought patterns (Mock, et al., 2013). For this reason, concerns about disclosing one's identity have been identified as a risk factor for poor psychological well-being for minorities including LGBTQ+ people and furries (Mock, et al., 2013). This point is discussed at greater length in the subchapter regarding the risks faced specifically by furries. It should be noted that the opposite of identity concealment, disclosure of identity, is a potential protective factor for well-being.

Several factors have been identified as protecting against poor psychological or mental well-being. Perceived social support is a significant

protective factor against poor mental well-being for both sexual minorities and other minorities (Mustanski, Newcomb, & Garofalo, 2011; Lorenzi, et al., 2015; Browne et al., 2017). In this present research we will be assessing perceived social support as well as associated factors including: the reported level of connection to the furry community, fanship and reported level of friends contacted on a weekly basis.

Suicidality

Suicide is the deliberate act of attempting to take one's life. Members of sexual minorities such as LGBTQ+ people have been found to be significantly more at risk of suicide compared to heterosexual or majority populations (Hong, Espelage, & Kral, 2011; Mustanski & Liu, 2013; Plöderl et al., 2014). Suicide is a significant issue globally and is the third leading cause of death for adolescents in America (Mustanski & Liu, 2013).

How is Suicide Assessed

Suicidality can be measured in a range of ways depending on what the purpose of the data is. Number of lifetime attempts can be used if one is wanting to know the severity of lifetime suicidal ideation. Measuring whether a participant has seriously contemplated suicide in the past 12 months and measuring whether a participant has attempted suicide in their lifetime is useful if you want to gain a measure of recent suicidal ideation or lifetime suicidal ideation. These two also allow accurate comparisons of population groups suicide rates. Additional measures for measuring included asking participants to

report on which health professionals they had seen about their mental well-being and about their experiences with suicide.

The 2005 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) included several items which ask participants to report the number of life time suicide attempts as well as the presence of serious suicidal contemplation in the past twelve months, and additional items which ask about their access to mental health professionals. The CCHS suicide items are all standardised and have been validity and reliability tested making them suitable for use for gaining the measures described above

What are the Risk and Protective Factors for Suicide

One of the biggest risk factors for suicide is being a member of a sexual minority population, such as identifying as LGBTQ+. Sexual minority population suicide attempt rates have been reported to range between 14% and 31% (Hong, et al., 2001; Plöderl, et al., 2014). This rate is significantly higher than the heterosexual reported population suicide attempt rate of 5% (Plöderl, et al., 2014).

Research into suicide has identified three categories of risk factors for suicidal behaviours. The first socio-demographic factors which includes sex, age-cohort, education, employment and marital histories. The second category is suicidal behaviour factors which include age of onset of suicidal ideation, time since ideation started, whether a suicide plan is present, and time since onset of suicide plan. The last risk category is a prior DSM-IV disorder diagnosis (Nock et al., 2008).

Depression and depressive symptoms are significant indicators of lifetime suicide attempts and recent or future suicidality (Mustanski & Liu, 2013; Plöderl et al., 2014). However, depression is considered only one part of suicidal ideation, increased impulsivity is needed as a disinhibiting factor to move from suicidal ideation to suicide attempts (Plöderl et al., 2014).

One of the most significant factors which influences suicide risk, as well as overall mental well-being, is level of social support. Mustanski & Liu (2013) identified that perceived social support from friends and family can have a reductive affect upon LGBTQ+ minorities suicidality. Their research found that high levels of perceived social support from friends and family, especially that from friends has a reductive effect on suicide attempts for LGBTQ+ peoples, while low levels of social support can increase the likelihood of a suicide attempt.

A Summary of The Literature Around Furrries

Demographics of Furrries

The average adult furry is a male aged 18-25, with 75% of furrries aged 25 or under, and 55% who are aged between 18-25. It is estimated that 20% of furrries are under the age of 18 (Plante, Reysen, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2016)

The furry community has a high rate of males compared to females, with 67% of furrries reporting their gender as male and 23% reporting their gender female with 10% of furrries identifying as Genderqueer or Non-Binary (Plante, et al., 2016). Furrries are thought to have a significantly high rate of transgender

members with 2.0-2.5% of furries self-identifying as transgender (Plante, et al., 2016).

The furry community has a low rate of heterosexual members compared to other communities. Furries are more likely to be members of gender or sexual minorities when compared to other fan communities, with only 25% of furries identifying as heterosexual; 10% identifying as homosexual; 10% as bisexual, and 14% identify as 'other' sexualities (Plante, et al., 2016; Schroy, Plante, Reysen, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2016)).

Nearly half of furries report their living situation as living at home with parents, a third of furries report living with a friend or significant other, and nearly one fifth report living alone. This changes across age with less living at home with parents and more moving into accommodation with significant others, with friends or living alone as they get older (Plante, et al., 2016).

Furry as a Social Identity

Furries as Fans

The furry community is primarily an online fan community. There are two ways of viewing a person's engagement with their fan community; fandom and fanship. Fandom (identifying primarily with the fan community) and fanship (identifying primarily with the figure/item of fan interest) are distinct concepts, despite their superficial similarity and, as such, can lead them to differently predict important outcome variables (Schroy, et al., 2016). This distinction between fandom and fanship is important when considering the furry

community as the two measures allow us to understand how the fan community can impact their experiences as a furry. Furrries have been found to have a high score in fandom measures, suggesting that, for furrries, the sense of identity gained from being a part of the community is important, and may well be the most important motivator for a furry's participation in the furry fandom (Plante, et al., 2016). Fanship is also a useful measure for seeing the relationship between fan connection and mental well-being.

It is important to clarify that, in general, the term "furry" does not refer to people who genuinely believe they are animals, people who believe they are genuinely identify as a non-human animal are called therians. The two are often conflated, especially in the media, leading to confusion and stigma(Plante, et al., 2016).

Furry Community Pursuits

The furry community is commonly found through social networks, forums, roleplaying games, video games and through art and writing (Roberts et al., 2015). The community can also be found at furry conventions such as FurCoNZ, AnthroCon, Eurofurence, Midwest FurFest, and other non-furry conventions like Armageddon, Comic Con and PAX West.

Many furrries are involved in artistic pursuits including creating digital or physical art, making fursuits, writing, and creating music. Nearly 70% of furrries identify themselves as video gamers, roughly 35% identify as artists, 30% as writers, and 10% as musicians (Plante, et al., 2016). The furry community is a visual-art-heavy fandom, with most content being fan made, and there is a lot of

demand for furry content (see Figures 1.1 and 1.2 below for examples of furry art content). Many furries report furry art being a significant contributor to them joining the furry fandom (Plante, et al., 2016). Of the top ten popular furry websites, six are hosting sites for (primarily digital) furry art online (Plante, et al., 2016). Unlike other fandoms, which are centred around content from one or two major sources such as television or movie studios, the furry community is centred around a wide and ever-changing host of independent artists (Plante, et al., 2016).

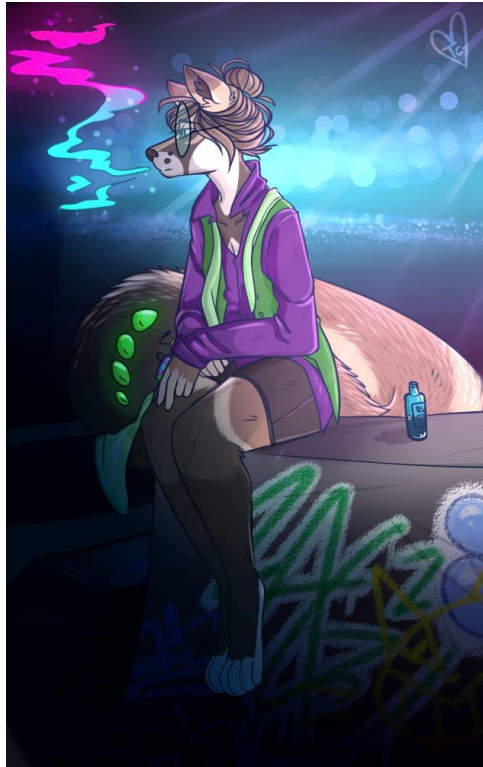


Figure 1.1. An Example of Furry Art Centred Around a Fursona ©2017

tinycheesecake24



Figure 1.2. Example of Furry Art Centred Around a Fursona ©2017 Taala

Fursonas

Most furies create and produce a fursona which is their *furry persona* for online and offline interactions. Fursonas are commonly the online avatars used by furies to represent themselves to other members of the community, used in the same way as a profile picture.

Furry Fan Motivations

People join groups and fandoms for many reasons, including to help reduce uncertainty of personal beliefs, improve self-esteem, give meaning and provide feelings of belonging and distinctness. Research suggests that people are more likely to join groups which meet these psychological needs, compared to groups that do not (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, 2016; Riketta, 2008). A person's motivation for joining a group helps inform both the person's and the group relevant behaviours that the group members engage in. It is therefore important to discuss the factors which motivate individual furies to join the fandom.

Schroy and colleagues (2016) investigated fan motivation with furies and anime fans. They also included measures for fandom, belongingness, self-esteem, attention and sexual attraction. Furies were found to be motivated to engage with the furry fandom community by the following factors; belongingness, self-esteem, eustress, aesthetics, escapism, attention, and sexual attraction. These findings support the findings of Mock, and colleagues (2013), who suggested that belonging and affiliation with others may be a significant motivator for members of the furry fandom. Reysen (2017) reported that

belongingness, distinctiveness and positive self-esteem were the most significant motivators for furry fan participation.

Furry Community Identities

Social Identity Theory and Self-Categorization Theory explain that people define who they are based on the groups with which they identify (Tajfel & Turner, 2010; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Through these categorisations, a person forms their concept of self as an extension of the groups to which they are a part of and contrasts it against the groups they are not.

Social Identity Theory argues that people strive to gain and maintain positive and distinct social identities. Brewer's (1991) Optimal Distinctiveness Theory, which is an extension of Social Identity Theory, states that people face opposing needs to feel included within a group and to feel unique and distinct as an individual. This is achieved by seeing their groups as distinct from groups to which they do not belong (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2016). Plante and colleagues (2016) found that many furies were motivated to join the furry community because of the sense of belonging and the sense of inclusiveness it provided. Optimal Distinctiveness Theory predicts that a person is more likely to strongly identify with the group if their own beliefs are present in the group's beliefs (Leonardelli, Pickett, & Brewer, 2010). Reysen and colleagues (2016)'s research supports this idea—they found that furry fans who feel included in the group and perceive the furry fandom as distinct from other fandoms had the highest level of identification with the fandom. Research by Plante and

colleagues (2016) also found that furies may not be comfortable with disclosing their furry identity to others out of fear of experiencing stigma. Plante and colleagues (2016) found that furies did feel most comfortable disclosing their identity to other furies. The accepting nature of the furry community could explain why so many members feel comfortable reporting being gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender compared to population norms.

Sexuality and Sexualisation of the Furry Community

The 2003 CSI episode titled “Fur and Loathing” featured a victim dead inside a fursuit and presented the furry community as one which is centred around sexual experiences while in fursuit. This episode was seen by 27 million people when it aired on CBS in 2003 (Aberguine, 2016; Mock, et al., 2013) and is significant because it was one of the earliest appearance of furies in mainstream media for many people. In this episode the furry fandom is presented as being sexually deviant, with a heavy emphasis on sex in fursuits. This is attributed as a possible cause of the common perception of furies as sexual deviants.

Furies receive significant stigmatisation, with 47% of furies believing they are perceived negatively by non-furies (Mock, et al., 2013). There is a misconception that furies all partake in a sexual activities around fursuits which stems from shows like CSI (Mock, et al., 2013; Schroy, et al., 2016). However, fewer than 15% of furies own a fursuit, and less than 10 % of all furies express any significant interest in plushophilia, which is the sexual attraction to either plush/soft toys or furry costumes ([Adjective][Species], 2011; Mock, et al., 2013).

Bullying and Stigmatisation of the Furry Community

Due to the high level of bullying and stigmatisation that furies receive we predict that this should be related to their well-being.

Relative to non-furies, furies experience more bullying throughout their lifetime: 61.7% of furies reporting being bullied between ages 11-18, compared to 39.2% for non-furies, (Plante, et al., 2016). Many furies report that their interest and engagement with the furry community and furry content lead to them feeling like an outsider and feeling vulnerable to greater harassment (Plante, et al., 2016).

Stigmatised individuals may feel greater isolation and greater salience of their stigma in situations where they are the only one stigmatised against (Pachankis, 2007). However, if multiple people who face the same stigma are in the given situation, they will feel less saliency of their stigma and have enhanced well-being (Mock, et al., 2013; Pachankis, 2007). Individuals who associate with other members of a stigmatised group through prosocial interactions or situations will find benefits for their sense of identity, self-esteem and mood, as well as a greater sense of acceptance (Mock et al., 2013; Pachankis, 2007; Schroy et al., 2016). Furies report greater levels of self-acceptance and well-being when they associate with other furies (Mock, et al., 2013). Mock and Colleagues (2013) found that who were more open about disclosing their furry identity had greater well-being.

Birkett, Newcomb and Mustanski (2015) performed an analysis of victimisation in lesbian, gay, transgender, and bisexual youth. They used a 10-

item measure which included items assessing exposure to verbal threats and insults, having been chased, having had personal property damaged or broken and whether participants had been physically and or sexually assaulted for being Lesbian, Gay, Transgender or Bisexual, or being thought to be one of these (Birkett et al., 2015). The present research is investigating participants experiences of being bullied or harassed for being a furry in an analogous fashion. Like the research of Birkett and colleagues (2015), this research is looking at the extent of the bullying and severity of the bullying and harassment faced. However, the present research is also performing an analysis and presentation of participants specific experiences of being harassed for being a furry.

Disclosure of Furry Identity

With many furries being in a situation where being open about their identity may cause conflict or harassment, furries may be motivated to hide or not share their identity at least in some situations (Plante, et al., 2016). The Minority Model of Stress suggests that concealing an identity, such as that of a sexual minority or that of being a furry, can lead to internalising negative mental well-being outcomes (Mock et al, 2013). When it comes to disclosure of their furry identity, 55% of furries report telling their friends at least somewhat about their identity, 35% of furries report disclosing some or most of their identity to family and 40-45% of furries report that no one in their day to day lives, nor any family or friends knew about their furry identity (Plante, et al., 2016). These results indicate that disclosing their furry identity is an issue which many furries

face. Research by Plante and Colleagues (2014) found that when compared to fantasy sports fans and anime fans, furries were the least likely to self-disclose their identity to others.

When it comes to disclosing their identity to others Mock and colleagues (2013) found that, despite the risks of harassment and stigma, the more participants disclosed their furry identity, the greater their self-esteem. Mock and colleagues (2013) research found that disclosure of furry identity had significant effects on the mental health of furries both directly and indirectly, as greater disclosure of furry identity leads to greater engagement with the furry community which in turn leads to greater mental health.

Mental Health Prevalence within the Furry Community

There is, as has been discussed above, a common presumption that furries suffer a greater rate of mental health issues compared to population norms (Plante, et al., 2016). Previous research has identified that for many mental specific health issues such as ADHD, anxiety, bipolar disorder and depression furries are no more likely than the average population member to be diagnosed with a clinical diagnosis (Plante, Reysen, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2013b). The rate of furries reporting having any form of mood disorder, such as bipolar disorder or depression, is significantly higher than population prevalence rates at 16% compared to 9.5% (Kessler, Chiu, Demler, & Walters, 2005; Plante, et al. 2013).

When comparing the anxiety rates for furries against population rates, furries report anxiety disorders at a third of the population rate (6.1% compared

to 18.1%), however this number may be accounting for participants who misidentified feeling anxiety as an anxiety disorder. These results suggest that there is need for greater research around furies and anxiety. Mock and colleagues (2013b) reported that the Minority Model of Stress suggests that hiding and not disclosing your minority identity with others leads high levels of anxiety. This led to the expectation that furies would report higher rates of anxiety. However, findings by Plante and colleagues (2013) disprove this, and they found there was no relationship between strength of furry identification and anxiety rates. The research by Plante and colleagues (2013) may have lower rates of anxiety and other mental health issues reported by participants due it being administered at a conference, which participants struggling with these disorders may not feel able to attend due to their severity. This survey was also based on self-report not clinical evaluation. This means results cannot be easily compared to population rates collected through clinical studies. This survey was conducted via physical handouts in envelopes of surveys which were given to 820 attendees at the 2013 Anthrocon.

Suicide and suicidal ideation have yet to be researched within the furry community, however many furies report that they have attempted suicide previously and that they were concerned about the high rate of suicide within the furry community (Roberts, Plante, Gerbasi, & Reysen, 2015)The national rates for suicidal ideation and attempts within America, where many furies reside, were 9.2% of the population reported suicidal ideation, 3.1% reported

planning suicide attempts and 2.7% reported following through with those plans and attempting (Nock et al., 2008).

Suicide is a topic of significant concern because furries are members of a highly stigmatized group. The furry community also contains high levels of LGBTQ+ members, a group which is known for having a high rate of suicidality. Suicide within the furry community is an area we will be investigating, including prevalence, attempt rates, and whether furries have discussed these attempts with mental health professionals.

Protective Factors within the Furry Community

The overall findings from Mock and colleagues (2013) found that greater involvement with the furry community was associated with greater self-esteem, partially explained through disclosure of identity as described above. The association was also partially explained by a pathway suggesting that greater involvement with the community led to greater self-acceptance of one's furry identity and affiliation with the community, which then led more frequent disclosure of identity (Mock, et al., 2013). Crawford, Allison, Zamboni, and Soto (2002) found that disclosing a minority identity is associated with increased levels of social support and connection. This supports the findings of Mock and colleagues (2013) that self-disclosure of a furry identity leads to improved connection and engagement with the furry community, and thereby improving levels of social support.

Furries were found to report the same levels of life satisfaction and self-esteem when compared to non-furries, and were also found to report very

similar levels of physical and psychological health and quality of relationships (Plante, et al., 2012b). Furrries were also found to feel a more stable and complete sense of identity (Plante, et al., 2012b).

Seeking social support is one of the ways that people cope with stressors and can be either an instrumental or emotional coping behaviour (Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989). This affirms the findings that self-disclosure of a minority identity leads to increased level of social support (Crawford, et al., 2002). Many furrries report that they use the furry fandom as a source of social support when they need assistance both practical and emotional (Plante, et al., 2016). Primarily, furrries seek advice and guidance, as well as financial and practical support such as money to help pay for bills or help finding places to live (Carver, et al., 1989; Plante, et al., 2016). Furrries also seek social support for emotional reasons, such as looking for a place to vent and find sympathy or understanding (Plante, et al, 2016). In summary, there is evidence that furrries rely on the furry fandom as a source of social support and that this social support may prove to be an important protective factor for furrries.

Rationale for this research

There has been a significant body of research being done by The International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP). However, research involving furies has primarily been conducted by this same team of researchers, who have tended to sample furies in North America. There is a need to examine other non-North American samples to test the generalisability of existing research.

As discussed above, there has been only one significant study on the prevalence of mental health problems among furies, and this study only looked at furies attending a convention. These findings may not have been representative of the wider furry population because this research did not include participants who were not able to attend the conference. This could include those who were unable to attend due to geographical reasons or those who were unable to attend for mental health reasons such as being bed-ridden with depression or anxiety about the crowd sizes at this conference. As such, there is a need for research that looks at the wider furry community to gain further insight in to the prevalence of mental health problems faced by furies in a way that is accessible by all furies (e.g. online).

There has also been very little research that looks at the predictive factors and protective factors for furies in regards to these mental health problems. There is a need for research into what furies gain from being a part of the community and what parts of the community provides protective factors against mental health issues.

One area that has not been researched previously in the furry population is suicidality, and further research is needed into furies experiences of depression and anxiety. This research will investigate these areas using brief psychometric assessment tools to get a summary of furies rates of depression, suicidal ideation, and attempts.

Due to the stigma faced for their identity, many furies do not disclose their furry identity to mental health practitioners, both out fear of stigma or misunderstanding and out of fear of having their mental health issues treated differently (Roberts, et al., 2015). The problem of stigma and discrimination is exacerbated by the high proportion of LGBTQ+ members in the furry fandom. Many furies report that they feel stigma and harassment for their sexual orientation on top of being a furry (Roberts, et al., 2015).

The first area of interest is that of disclosure of furry identity. We will be investigating the locations and situation furies feel comfortable disclosing their identity. Alongside this we will be expanding on previous research investigating who furies feel comfortable disclosing to, and how much of their identity they disclose to these individuals. Finally, we will be investigating the degree to which participants believe others understood when they disclosed their furry identity/

There has been very little research into what types of bullying and to what extent furies are bullied for their identity as furies. Many furies have reported being bullied for being a furry despite this there is very little published data around this topic. We will seek to expand upon this by investigating what

are the most common experiences of furries who have been bullied and by finding out what the extent of these bullying experiences has been.

Due to the high proportion of furries identifying as LGBTQ+ (Plante, et al., 2016), research around suicidality within LGBTQ+ groups will be discussed, as these groups both face similar levels and types of stigma and harassment as well as facing similar or same struggles around identity and social support.

Previous research has found that suicide attempts and suicidal ideation may be a significant and prolific problem within the furry community (Roberts, Plante, Gerbasi, & Reysen, 2015). Additionally, as many furries identify as a sexual minority, this places them at greater risk of suicide and poor mental well-being, as discussed above (Plante, et al., 2016).

Mock and colleagues (2013) also suggested that being in a sexual minority can result in stigmatisation which can end up resulting in poor psychological well-being. Stereotyping, negative perceptions and preconceptions can become internalised and led to poor self-perceptions, poor mental health and a greater sense of isolation compared to those who are not sexual minorities (Mock, et al., 2013). This can lead people to attempt to manage their stigmatised identity by suppressing and hiding it which can lead to worse mental health and feelings of isolation both from others who are similarly stigmatised against (Mock, et al., 2013; Pachankis, 2007).

Due to the fact that furries are so highly stigmatized it's likely they conceal their identities as a result, like members of the LGBTQ+ community do.

This is the rationale for studying furies and making many predictions in line with LGBTQ research.

Mustanski and colleagues (2011) stated that for LGBTQ+ peoples, being subjected to harassment and victimisation has a significant impact on a person's level of psychological distress or mental well-being. This level of psychological stress could be modified by positive social support from peers and family (Mustanski et al., 2011). In the present research we are investigating this same relationship between perceived level of social support, from peers and from family members, on mental well-being as well. We will also be investigating the effect of these measures on participant mental well-being. There is indication within the literature that LGBTQ+ peoples may struggle with the development and maintenance of supporting relationships with peers due to the potential for rejection because of their sexual identity (D'Augelli & Hershberger, 1993 as cited in Mustanski, et al., 2011).

For LGBTQ+ peoples the online space has become a safe space for socialising and establishing romantic and platonic relationships, which can then be maintained in the real world (Hillier & Harrison, 2007 as cited in Mustanski, et al., 2011). Similarly, the furry community is primarily an online community, as discussed earlier (Roberts, et al., 2015). There are multiple furry community social networks and pages, such furry-specific Facebook groups, Reddit communities, forums and online messaging services. The present research is seeking to investigate whether furies report that they feel comfortable socialising in the

online space, and whether these findings will line up with those already found for LGBTQ+ peoples.

Research questions

This research is seeking to answer several key questions:

- 1) What are the current prevalence rates for suicidal ideation, anxiety, and depression within an international online survey of the furry community?
- 2) Risk and protective factors:
 - a. What are the risk factors and protective factors for mental well-being in the furry community?
 - b. What are the prevalence rates of these risk and protective factors?
 - c. What are the correlations of these factors with the mental well-being of members the furry community?
 - d. What are the personal experiences of members of the furry community with bullying for being a furry and disclosing their furry identity?
 - e. What are the personal experiences of members of the furry community with how being a furry affects daily life and life stressors?

It is important to clarify that the relationships that will be discussed here will be correlational.

To adjunct the finding of the research questions above we will also be performing a thematic analysis on participants experiences with two of the identified risk and potential protective factors for members of the furry community. Additionally, we will be performing thematic analysis on the day to day impact of being a furry along with an analysis of how being a furry helps participants cope with life stressors. The findings of this question will strengthen and supplement the findings made in the statistical analysis section.

Chapter 2

Methodology

Participants

The total sample included 1249 people who self-identified as a furry and met the requirement of being over 16 years old. The mean age of the sample was 23.03 years (SD = 7.18) with ages ranging from 16 years old to 76 years old. As shown on Table 2.1 the majority of the total sample identified as Male (59.8%) followed by Female (30%), and 7.7% who identified as Non-Binary. Of these 1249 participants, 16% reported identifying with a different gender to the sex they reported having been assigned at birth (Male, Female or Intersex).

The participants hailed from 57 countries with 713 (57.1%) participants listed the country they live in as The United States of America, 97 (7.8%) from the UK, 86 (6.9%) from Canada, and 65 (5.2%) from New Zealand, the full list of participant countries can be seen on Table D.1 in Appendix D.

| Variable | % | N |
|--|------|-----|
| Sex at Birth | | |
| Male | 61.2 | 765 |
| Female | 36.0 | 450 |
| Intersex | 0.3 | 4 |
| Gender Identity | | |
| Male | 59.8 | 747 |
| Female | 30.0 | 375 |
| Non-Binary | 7.7 | 96 |
| Sexual Orientation | | |
| Exclusively Heterosexual | 15.8 | 198 |
| At Least Incidentally Attracted to Same Gender | 39.2 | 490 |
| Equally Bisexual | 11.8 | 147 |
| Exclusively Homosexual | 10.1 | 126 |
| Pansexual / Other | 18.0 | 225 |
| No Socio-sexual contacts or relations | 5.0 | 63 |

Table 2.1. Description of Self-Identified Furry Sample (N = 1249)

Questionnaire

Participants were recruited to complete a 98-item online survey which was comprised of five existing questionnaires, as well as a range of demographic questions, and questions developed as a part of this research to measure concepts not covered by established measures. The research questionnaire had items measuring participants disclosure of furry identity, number of friends and furry friends, participants experiences of bullying, their fursona, connection with the furry community, participants experiences of depression, anxiety and suicide, social support, and how participants engagement with the furry community has helped or hindered participants lives.

In addition to the items from previous research several of the items in the survey were developed as a part of this present research, and those included items measuring the extent and severity of bullying faced by participants, items

measuring the extent of perceived social support, and items investigating the positive influence that being a furry has on peoples day to day lives.

A full list of questions is provided in Appendix A.

Identity disclosure and impact - IARP Furry Survey.

The majority of the questions for this survey were taken from Roberts, Plante, Gerbasi, and Reysen (2015)'s focus group questionnaire which was designed to be used in focus group discussions with furies recruited from a convention. The focus group was designed to discuss how participants felt about the furry fandom, their personal experiences within the furry fandom and how they felt their daily lives interacted with their 'furry' life. This survey measured who participants were willing to disclose to, how their fursona developed, how their engagement with being a furry helps or hinders their abilities to be members of adult society, childhood bullying, and convention norms and feelings. The items used from this questionnaire were modified for use in the present research's online survey as opposed to their original use in an group or individual interview. An example question for measuring this is:

Please rate the degree to which you have disclosed being a furry to Non-Furry Relationship Partners: (1=Not much, 2=Somewhat, 3=A great deal).

Suicide and health professional access - Canadian Community Health Survey.

The 2015 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) is a population based survey which gathers data on a wide range of health measures. The questionnaire was constructed by Statistics Canada after finding there was not a

appropriate physical and psychological health assessment in the health literature. In this research we measured mental health, suicidality, and which health professionals participants spoke to about their mental health. We measured the constructs of suicidality and health professional access using the measures from the CCHS. Examples of the items used in this research from the CCHS are:

Have you ever seriously contemplated suicide? (1=Yes, 2=No, 3=I don't want to say, 4=I don't know).

Depression and anxiety – PHQ4.

The Patient Health Questionnaire-4 (PHQ-4) (Kroenke, Spitzer, Williams, & Löwe, 2009) is a brief psychometric assessment designed to provide a rapid and accurate assessment of whether a client might be struggling with depression and requiring a clinical therapist visit. The assessment is comprised of a 2-item depression scale and a 2-item anxiety scale, which both have 4 response options scored from 0 to 3; "Not at all- 0, Several days-1, More than half the days-2, Nearly every day-3". The sum of scores for items 1 and 2, and items 3 and 4 are taken to generate a measure of anxiety and depression respectively, and a score of 3 or higher on either of the measures indicates the presence of anxiety or depression, or both. This measure has been found to have strong reliability ($\alpha=0.81$) and validity by prior research which found that participants who had previously, or currently been diagnosed with anxiety and or depression by healthcare professionals had statistically significantly higher scores on PHQ-2, GAD-2, and PHQ-4 screening items compared to those who did not ($p < 0.01$)

(Khubchandani, et al., 2016; Löwe et al., 2010). One of the items from this measure is:

Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems: Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge (0=Not at all, 1=Several Days, 2=More than half the days, 3=Nearly every day).

Fan motivations.

Wann (1995) proposed an eight factor Sports Fans Motivation Scale (SFMS) model to explain what motivates sports fans to engage with their sports team, these eight factors were Eustress, Self-esteem, Escapism, Economics, Aesthetic, Group Affiliation and Family. For brevity, we did not use the questions from Wann (1995)'s SFMS model but designed 8 questions which each asked about one of the motivation factors. An example of one of these questions is:

I feel tense and or excited when watching or engaging with furry content: (1=Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neither Agree or Disagree, 4=Disagree, 5=Strongly Disagree).

Fanship.

Reysen and Branscombe's (2010) Fanship scale was designed to simplify and provide an alternative and widely applicable measure for fanship which can be used for a variety of different fan interests. The Fanship Scale is an 11-item measure designed to be used with any fandom, as participants or researchers are asked to specify the fandom they are answering about – so in this case the fandom being asked about is the furry fandom. The fanship scale has a strong reliability at $\alpha=0.87$, and has been tested for sports fans, hobby fans, music fans,

and media fans (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). An example of one of the questions and response options from the scale is:

“I would devote all my time to my interest if I could.” (1= Strongly Disagree, 7= Strongly Agree).

In addition to the items from established research discussed above, several of the items in the survey were developed as a part of this present research. These included items measuring the extent and severity of bullying faced by participants, items measuring the extent of perceived social support. In addition, items measuring the role that the furry community played in participant’s lives as well as how being part of the furry community affected participant’s coping were included.

Bullying.

Bullying is being investigated from two angles. The first being a measure of the level and intensity of the bullying that participants faced for being a furry along with measures around what proportion of participants reported being bullied. The second being an open-ended question asking, “If you have been bullied for being a furry, were there any common characteristics of the bullying you faced?”. These two were chosen to be used in combination to establish an estimate of both the extent and severity of bullying faced by members of the furry community along with specific examples to back these estimates up.

Disclosure.

Similarly, participants were asked to answer the following question about disclosure in an open-ended fashion: "In which places/situations, if any, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others?"

Effect of being a furry on daily life.

Participants were also asked to answer the following questions in an open-ended fashion: "How has being a furry helped or hindered your ability to function in day-to-day life?" and "How has being a part of the furry fandom has made you better able to cope with the stressors you face in life?"

Participants were also asked if they felt that being a part of the furry fandom has made them better able to cope with the stressors you face in life. This was a simple yes or no question and was seeking to get a summary of the previous two open ended questions.

Perceived social support.

We measured the level of perceived social support participants felt from friends and from family. The question used to measure friends social support was:

How supportive are your friends about you being a furry?

(1= Not at all, 2= Very little, 3= Somewhat, 4= To a great extent).

Procedure

Participants were recruited to participate in the survey through a combination of posts on various online furry community boards and websites

advertising the research (78%), recommendations from other participants (9%), as well as posters being advertised around the Hamilton region and Waikato University (4%). The research was distributed through Facebook posts, Reddit posts, and several prominent furry news sites advertising the research. On all physical and online posters advertising the survey there was a link which took participants them directly to the survey opening page. See Appendix B for the Poster. Completion of the survey was voluntary, and participants could opt in to enter the draw for one of three \$25 Amazon vouchers after completing the survey.

Participants opened the link to the online survey and then read the information sheet (see Appendix C). Participants were required to answer “Do you identify as a furry or furry fan? Yes / No” prior to continuing with the research. If they answered yes they were then presented with the rest of the questions, if they answered no, they were presented with an exit screen (which can be seen at the end of Appendix A). Participants then completed the 98-item survey and the optional voucher draw. The average time to complete the survey was 28 minutes.

Data Analysis

We began by identifying the measures of mental well-being; We used the total anxiety and total depression scores from the PHQ-4, these were based on the how participants reported having felt over the past two weeks. We had a choice of two measures for suicidality; lifetime suicide attempts and suicidal ideation over the past twelve months. We chose to use suicidal ideation over the

past twelve months as it was likely to provide a more accurate and reliable measure compared to lifetime attempts, as lifetime attempts may not be representative of recent mental well-being. These measures were chosen as they provided an accurate and reliable measure which allows the research to assume with some confidence that these data gained from measures are characteristic of participant's recent mental health status. These are the primary mental health measures and data points we will be analysing as a part of this research.

After identifying our mental health measures, the next step was to find the factors which might predict or influence these mental health measures and outcomes for the members of the furry community. These potential factors were selected by reviewing the literature and identifying risk and protective factors which had been identified for other vulnerable minority communities such as the LGBTQ+ community. The first step was to identify all variables which had already been reported in the literature as potential impacting factors. These factors were perceived social support from friends and family, feelings of guilt over participation in furry community, disclosure of identity, exposure to bullying, feelings of connection with the furry community (Fanship), and number of friends seen each week who were also furries.

We reduced these variables and variable groups into averages and ranked scores where applicable, to reduce the number of variables. We reduced disclosure from six items to an average score, we generated an average score for being bullied in general and experiences of being bullied for being a furry. Additionally, number of friends was converted into a rank score for greater

analysis. Finally, fanship was reduced from 11 items to an average score. These composite variable measures provided simpler and clearer analysis for our research. After identifying and cleaning up potential risk and protective factors for furry mental well-being the next step was to investigate the reliability of the measures.

We next investigated the correlations between each of the variables as well as performing linear regression for the depression and anxiety measures and binary logistic regression for the suicide measure.

After identifying the correlational relationships, we performed multiple regression analysis to identify how all the variables predicted the anxiety and depression mental well-being measures. We were interested investigating the influence of disclosure, fanship, bullying, perceived social support, guilt over participation as well as the other risk and protective factors identified above. We performed both simultaneous and hierarchical multiple regression, the variables were entered in a simultaneous method.

We began by performing a simultaneous regression measuring the impact of all our variables on participants depression scores. The regression evaluation process was done according to Pallant (2007). All the variables scored within a Tolerance range of 0.708 to 0.909 and scored a VIF value between 1.1 and 1.412, both of these results indicated that there is very low possibility of multicollinearity. The Normal P-Plot and the Scatter plot both indicated these variables were linear, homoscedastic and did not violate the assumptions of normality. We also explored the presence of outliers by examining the

Mahalanobis distance values. Our regression model's maximum score of 33.603 was higher than the critical value of 27.88 indicating there were potential outliers which needed to be removed. After organising the data by Mahalanobis distance there was one case which had a distance outside of the critical value, after removing this case and repeating the regression analysis all cases were below the critical value of 27.88. We examined the Cook's distance to check if there were any other cases which might be problematic, the Cook's distance maximum score was 0.08, well below 1.0 which is one of the cut offs for problematic data cases.

Thematic Analysis

Alongside the statistical analysis of the relationship between risk factors, protect factors and poor mental well-being, an analysis of participant's personal experiences of two of these risk factors was also conducted. Participants were presented with the following questions: "If you have been bullied for being a furry. Were there any common characteristics of the bullying you faced?", "In which places/situations, if any, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others?", "How has being a furry helped or hindered your ability to function in day-to-day life?", and "How has being a part of the furry fandom has made you better able to cope with the stressors you face in life?". The responses to these questions were loaded into the ATLAS.ti software and then thematic analysis was performed upon these responses. The ATLAS.ti software was used to enable rapid manual coding along with the easy creation of themes and code groups.

Once the responses were loaded into ATLAS.ti, all blank and irrelevant responses were removed, this was primarily responses such as N/A, or skip. This was done for all datasets. Participants were anonymised with no personal data collected in the survey. Additionally, all identifying information was been removed from their responses, and participants are only referred to by number to additionally protect confidentiality.

After this process, the thematic analysis was performed following the method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which consisted of six steps: 1- Familiarising yourself with the data which is a process of reading and rereading the data sets and noting down initial code ideas. 2- Generating initial codes, which involved coding aspects of the data in a data driven manner, with the codes being derived from the dataset without any specific questions in mind to answer. 3- Searching for themes, collecting the codes into groups around central themes or ideas. 4- Reviewing themes, checking that the themes are applicable for both the coded responses and the overall data set. 5- Defining and naming themes, providing a clear definition of each theme and the story the analysis tells. 6- Producing the report, final analysis of themes and coded responses, producing clear and compelling extract examples.

There were on average 50 preliminary codes identified from each of the datasets and after consideration and reviewing these preliminary codes were reduced to the themes seen on Tables 3.10 – 3.13. A copy of the full list of quotes used throughout the present research can be seen in Appendix E.

Chapter 3

Results

Genders of Participants

Table 3.1 contains descriptive statistics for each variable separately for Male, Female and Non-Binary participants, as well as participants who elected not to identify their gender. The gender group Non-Binary was used as we had participants identify using a range of non-binary terms including Non-Binary, Agender and Gender Fluid. We had 16% of participants who identified as a different gender to their birth sex, all participants were counted as the gender they identified as currently (e.g., if they reported being Trans FTM, we counted them as Male).

| | % / Mean (SD) | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------------|-----------------|---------------|---------------|
| | Total Sample | Gender Identity | | |
| | | Male | Female | Non-Binary |
| Sample size | 1249 | 747 | 375 | 96 |
| Lifetime Suicide Attempt History | 38.4% | 32.4% | 46.0% | 52.3% |
| Suicidal Ideation in Past Year | 31.3% | 27.7% | 37.3% | 40.6% |
| Anxiety | 2.84 (2.09) | 2.48 (2.04) | 3.30 (2.09) | 3.76 (1.93) |
| Depression | 2.41 (1.96) | 2.13 (1.88) | 2.71 (2.01) | 3.26 (2.07) |
| Bullying General | 4.41 (1.96) | 4.34 (1.78) | 4.46 (1.81) | 4.63 (2.07) |
| Bullying Furry Specific | 2.94 (1.21) | 2.89 (1.19) | 2.98 (1.21) | 3.09 (1.38) |
| Disclosure | 11.42 (3.45) | 11.35 (3.44) | 11.51 (3.43) | 11.33 (3.49) |
| Friend Perceived Social Support | 2.14 (0.90) | 2.12 (0.93) | 2.17 (0.80) | 2.10 (0.96) |
| Family Perceived Social Support | 1.40 (1.085) | 1.38 (1.09) | 1.38 (1.07) | 1.41 (1.10) |
| Fan Motivation | 30.34 (3.98) | 30.04 (3.40) | 30.79 (3.86) | 31.01 (4.29) |
| Fanship | 50.51 (13.24) | 49.69 (13.26) | 51.83 (13.02) | 51.76 (13.14) |
| Number of Furry Friends | 3.58 (7.47) | 3.46 (7.13) | 3.65 (6.92) | 2.77 (3.28) |
| Guilt for Participation | 2.08 (1.46) | 2.05 (1.42) | 2.04 (1.47) | 2.30 (1.64) |

Table 3.1. Descriptive Statistics of Primary Study Variables

Descriptive Findings

It was found that 38.4% of participants had attempted suicide at least once in their lifetime, with 23.5% having attempted suicide at least two or more times. It was also found that 31.3% of participants had seriously contemplated suicide in the past year. It was also found that 46.7% of Participants scored in the clinical range for Anxiety and 41.3% of Participants scored in the clinical range for Depression with 27.5% and 18.4% scoring in the severe range respectively.

Roughly half (50.4%) of participants reported being physically bullied in their lives, with 16.5% reporting being physically bullied a great deal. When it comes to being bullied specifically for being a furry, less than half (37.9%) reported being harassed or being made to feel ashamed for being a furry, with only 10.1% reporting being harassed a great deal for being a furry.

Participants are more likely to disclose their furry identity to people that they feel closer to with 71.8% of participants having reported feeling at least somewhat comfortable disclosing to non-furry friends. Additionally, 57.6% of participants reported feeling at least somewhat comfortable disclosing to their partners and 51.5% feeling comfortable disclosing to family.

Furries were noticeably less likely to disclose to people they knew less intimately such as professional peers and strangers with 64% of furries reporting discomfoting disclosing their furry identity to non-furry work peers, nearly 75% of participants reporting discomfort disclosing to their work non-furry bosses or

supervisors and 62.1% reporting discomforting disclosing with non-furry strangers.

When asked about the level of support they received from friends and family about being a furry: 81.9% of participants reported that their friends were at least somewhat supportive of them being a furry and 51.4% reported feeling at least somewhat supported by family.

Most of Wann's (1995) fan motivations were present within the participant population. All the motivation factors apart economics and family, were reported by the majority of participants to be factors which motivated their engagement with the furry community. Participants also reported feeling moderate to strong fanship with an average score of 50.5 out of a potential 77. (See Table D.2 in Appendix D for more details)

Less than 5% of Participants reported feeling daily feelings or near daily feelings of guilt (or a score of 1 and 2 respectively) over their participation in the furry community.

When asked how many of their friends they see or speak to on a weekly basis, the average number of friends was 7.5 (SD=8.3). On average, 3.5 of those friends were furries (SD=6.9).

Finally, 78.1% of participants felt that being part of the furry community helped them cope with life stressors.

Relationships between Risk Factors, Protective Factors, Fandom Participation

Factors and Mental Health Measures

To establish if there were any significant relationships between the risk and protective factors and our mental well-being factors, correlations were conducted. As can be seen on Table 3.2, there are several of the potential risk factors that have a significant relationship with suicidality: Bullied for being a furry has a weak positive relationship, bullied in general also has a weak positive relationship. Disclosure and Fanship were both also found to have a significant very weak positive relationship, as was guilt for participation. Bullied for being a furry and bullied in general both had a weak positive relationship with Depression. Perceived Social Support from Family had a very weak negative relationship with Depression. Bullied for being a furry and bullied in general both had a weak positive relationship with Anxiety, as did Fanship. Perceived Social Support from Family had a very weak negative relationship with Anxiety. Guilt from participation was also very weakly positively correlated with Anxiety.

| | | Serious Suicide Contemplation in the Past 12 Months | | GAD-2 (Anxiety) Score | PHQ-2 (Depression) Score |
|----------------------------------|------------|---|----------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| Bullying General | <i>rho</i> | .208 | <i>r</i> | .135 | .164 |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1065 | <i>N</i> | 1179 | 1179 |
| Bullying for Being a Furry | <i>rho</i> | .132 | <i>r</i> | .107 | .114 |
| | <i>p</i> | .000 | <i>p</i> | .000 | .000 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1053 | <i>N</i> | 1179 | 1186 |
| Disclosure | <i>rho</i> | .067 | <i>r</i> | .023 | .027 |
| | <i>p</i> | 0.026 | <i>p</i> | .421 | .345 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1087 | <i>N</i> | 1204 | 1204 |
| Perceived Social Support Friends | <i>rho</i> | .012 | <i>r</i> | -.063 | -.033 |
| | <i>p</i> | .695 | <i>p</i> | .032 | .262 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1029 | <i>N</i> | 1127 | 1127 |
| Perceived Social Support Family | <i>rho</i> | -.039 | <i>r</i> | -.074 | -.053 |
| | <i>p</i> | .220 | <i>p</i> | .013 | .077 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1006 | <i>N</i> | 1127 | 1104 |
| Fan Motivation | <i>rho</i> | .022 | <i>r</i> | -.007 | -.036 |
| | <i>p</i> | .486 | <i>p</i> | .829 | .240 |
| | <i>N</i> | 990 | <i>N</i> | 1096 | 1096 |
| Fanship | <i>rho</i> | .086 | <i>r</i> | .031 | .121 |
| | <i>p</i> | .007 | <i>p</i> | .309 | .000 |
| | <i>N</i> | 973 | <i>N</i> | 1096 | 1096 |
| Number of Furry Friends | <i>rho</i> | .018 | <i>r</i> | -.025 | -.041 |
| | <i>p</i> | .552 | <i>p</i> | .398 | .165 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1051 | <i>N</i> | 1165 | 1165 |
| Guilt for Participation | <i>rho</i> | .074 | <i>r</i> | .045 | .066 |
| | <i>p</i> | .016 | <i>p</i> | .126 | .026 |
| | <i>N</i> | 1042 | <i>N</i> | 1150 | 1150 |

Note: Bold correlations are statistically significant

Table 3.2. Correlation Matrix for Risk and Protective Factors and Mental Well-being Factors

A binary logistical regression was performed to ascertain the effects of bullying, disclosure, fanship and guilt for participation scores on the likelihood that participants have seriously contemplated suicide in the past twelve months. The logistic regression model was explained 7.4% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in suicide attempts and correctly classified 65.9% of cases. Increasing a participant's bullying in general score and increasing a participant's perceived

social support from family was associated with a decreased likelihood of a participant reporting a prior suicidal ideation in the past 12 months. This regression also highlighted that bullying for being a furry, disclosure, fanship fan motivation, and guilt for participation no longer had a significant impact on attempted suicide in the past 12 months.

| | B | S.E. | Sig. | Exp (B) |
|----------------------------------|--------|------|------|---------|
| Bullied for Being Furry | .176 | .136 | .196 | 1.192 |
| Bullied General | .590 | .152 | .000 | 1.804 |
| Disclosure | .244 | .154 | .112 | 1.276 |
| Perceived Social Support Friends | .163 | .105 | .118 | 1.177 |
| Perceived Social Support Family | -.231 | .085 | .006 | .793 |
| Fan Motivation | .025 | .155 | .873 | 1.025 |
| Fanship | .104 | .068 | .125 | 1.110 |
| Number of Furry Friends | .000 | .000 | .087 | 1.00 |
| Guilt for Participation | .041 | .058 | .480 | 1.041 |
| Constant | -3.331 | .803 | .000 | .036 |

Table 3.3. Suicide and Risk and Protective Factors Binary Logistic Regression

Variable List

We performed linear regressions to examine the effects that the previously identified variables had on participants anxiety scores. As can be seen on Table 3.4 increasing a participant’s bullying in general score was associated with an increase in their anxiety score. We can also see that an increase in a participant’s perceived social support from family score was associated with a decrease in a participant’s anxiety score. The model also showed that bullied for being a furry, disclosure, perceived social support from friends or family, fan motivation, fanship, number of furry friends or guilt for participation were not significantly associated with a participant’s anxiety score.

We also performed a linear regression to examine the effects that the previously identified variables had on participant’s depression scores. The model

identified that, as can be seen on Table 3.5 increasing a participant’s bullying in general score, or fanship score was associated with an increase in their depression score. An increase in a participant’s perceived social support from family score was associated with a decrease in a participant’s depression score. The model also showed that being bullied for being a furry, disclosure, perceived social support from friends or family, fan motivation, number of furry friends or guilt for participation were not significantly associated with a depression score.

| | Unstandardised Coefficients | | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| (Constant) | .936 | .342 | .006 | .264 | 1.608 |
| Bullied for Being Furry | .046 | .061 | .449 | -.073 | .165 |
| Bullied General | .235 | .065 | .000 | -.107 | .363 |
| Disclosure | .020 | .066 | .765 | -.110 | .149 |
| Perceived Social Support Friends | -.031 | .044 | .483 | -.118 | .056 |
| Perceived Social Support Family | -.076 | .037 | .037 | -.148 | -.004 |
| Fan Motivation | -.041 | .067 | .536 | -.173 | .090 |
| Fanship | .012 | .029 | .682 | -.045 | .070 |
| Number of Furry Friends | .000 | .000 | .727 | .000 | .000 |
| Guilt for Participation | .014 | .025 | .572 | -.035 | .064 |

Table 3.4. Anxiety Linear Regression Model Output

| Model | Unstandardised Coefficients | | Sig. | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B | |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|------|---------------------------------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| (Constant) | 1.125 | .342 | .002 | .414 | 1.835 |
| Bullied for Being Furry | .020 | .064 | .759 | -.106 | .146 |
| Bullied General | .306 | .069 | .000 | -.171 | .441 |
| Disclosure | -.031 | .070 | .660 | -.167 | .106 |
| Perceived Social Support Friends | .002 | .047 | .964 | -.090 | .094 |
| Perceived Social Support Family | -.073 | .039 | .059 | -.149 | .003 |
| Fan Motivation | -.123 | .071 | .082 | -.262 | .016 |
| Fanship | .075 | .031 | .015 | .015 | .136 |
| Number of Furry Friends | .000 | .000 | .212 | .000 | .000 |
| Guilt for Participation | 0.29 | .027 | .278 | -.023 | .081 |

Table 3.5. Depression Linear Regression Model Output

Thematic Analysis

Disclosing Furry Identity:

We asked participants “In which places/situations, if any, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others?” and performed thematic analysis on their responses. Participants responses fell into one or several of three groups: comfortable to disclose situations, not comfortable to disclose, and reasons for not disclosing. In this section we will provide a sample of the responses within each theme and a full list of all referenced quotes is available in Appendix E.

Participants were asked to describe the situations where they felt comfortable or uncomfortable disclosing their furry identity and from these responses nine key themes were identified which can be seen on Table 3.6 along with an exemplar response from each theme.

| In which places/situations, if any, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others?" | |
|---|---|
| Theme | Example |
| Comfortable Disclosing with Close Connections | My friends were intrigued (and [they] even came with us to a furry convention). My partner also likes furry, but is less involved than I am (he has a fursona though). My family is just happy I am doing my thing, they don't really care or have anything bad to say about Furies |
| Comfortable Disclosing with Similar Groups | I am most comfortable about it once I have caught on that they are into it or if they are anime fans. If I do not catch wind that they are into any of that sort of thing, I do not really talk about it. |
| Comfortable to Disclose Online | I have never discussed being a furry with others in person. I would not be comfortable discussing this in person, but I am happy to do so online with people I don't know in real life. |
| Comfortable Disclosing with People Who Show Positive Interest | I'd feel comfortable in any space in which the people around me are predominantly furry or are genuinely interested in learning about the fandom. |
| Not Comfortable Disclosing in Professional Settings | Mostly, I don't care to speak on it one way or another. If someone is curious, I will divulge information UNLESS they're in a position to make massive changes for the worse in my life (AKA, my supervisors). |
| Not Comfortable Disclosing to Close Connections | I especially don't mention it around family because I tried telling them once but they saw it as a community that supports bestiality and is full of mentally ill people. As far as they know since that day I have nothing to do with furies or the community. |
| I'm Comfortable Disclosing with Anyone | I feel comfortable discussing furry with others in basically all situations. I've made it my duty to help educate others about the subculture. |
| I'm Not Comfortable Disclosing Anywhere | I feel uncomfortable in almost all situations. I think it's cool that there's a group of people who are like me and share similar interests, but ultimately the representation of this community and the stereotype that follows means that I'm not particularly enticed to share. |
| Fear of Personal Consequences as a Result of Disclosing | If they're not a furry then I won't discuss it. I value my career and personal life too highly for that risk. |

Table 3.6. Commonly Identified Themes and Exemplar Responses to Item

Regarding Participants Comfort Disclosing Being a Furry

Comfortable disclosing with close connections.

The theme 'Comfortable to disclose where supported' included the codes: being comfortable disclosing to significant others, being comfortable disclosing furry identity close friends, and being comfortable disclosing to family. This theme was drawn from the looking at those who would be likely to/able to provide support to participants after disclosing their furry identity.

Comfortable disclosing to close friends.

Close Friends were the most commonly reported group out of all reported that participants felt comfortable disclosing their furry identity with. It was also the first group/code within the theme Comfortable with Close Connections. Participants 1, 2 and 3 all mentioned that they disclose their identity to their friends, with Participant 3 identifying that their friends went as far as attending a furry convention with Participant 3 and their partner. Participant 4 also highlighted how they only felt comfortable disclosing to furry friends and extremely close and understanding non-furry friends and like Participant 3, would not discuss outside of these friends and fellow furries.

I feel most comfortable discussing being a furry with my partner - he too is a furry. My best friend is also a furry. Other than that, I don't really talk about it anywhere else unless I learn the people I am around are furries as well.

Participant 1

Close friends, furry communities obviously. My family is really supportive of artistic stuff and find it cool so them too I guess.

Participant 2

My friends were intrigued (and [they] even came with us to a furry convention). My partner also likes furry, but is less involved than I am (he has a fursona though). My family is just happy I am

doing my thing, they don't really care or have anything bad to say about Furrries

Participant 3

Comfortable disclosing to family members.

Disclosing to Family members was the second code within the theme of 'Comfortable with Close Connections'. Participant 5 reported that their friends and family know that they are a furry and they feel that these friends and family members are understanding of them. Participant 4 and 5 both mentioned that their parents are supportive of them and encourage them to continue with their furry art. Participant 6 identified that they initially felt discomfort disclosing to their family but that passed after a short period. Participant 8 also reported feeling some discomfort when discussing it with family, but because Participant 8's family is accepting of their furry identity its better than it could otherwise be. Participant 7 identifies that their family understand at least a little of what the furry fandom is, which helps them feel comfortable disclosing to their family.

[I feel] Comfortable when around other furrries or extremely close and understanding non-furry friends. Uncomfortable any other time.

Participant 4

During high school, when I first figured out I was a furry, I was more open about it, and tried explaining it to everybody. That

was not a good idea, since the other kids gave me a hard time about it. Ever since then, I've been more careful. But my friends and family know, and they're very understanding

Participant 5

Slightly uncomfortable discussing it with family originally, but that passed fairly quickly. They've done cosplay in the past, so it wasn't a huge stretch for them.

Participant 6

Comfortable disclosing to significant others

The third code within this theme was feeling comfortable disclosing to significant others. Participant 1 reported that it was their partner with whom they felt most comfortable disclosing and discussing their furry identity, Participant 1 also reported that their partner was a furry. Participant 3 identified that they felt comfortable disclosing to their partner and that their partner was also a furry. Participant 9 reported that their husband is the only person that they feel comfortable referring to themselves as a furry with, due to other people having misconceptions of the word. This sentiment is echoed by Participant 10 and Participant 11 who reported only feeling comfortable disclosing their furry identity with their husband and other furries.

I find it very easy to talk about it while drawing/painting. People see what I do and they get curious. My passion for drawing is the main reason why most people know that I am a furry and are

able to understand me because they find my drawings interesting, even if they find them super unusual. I am, however, reluctant to actually use the term ""Furry"" because people take words and make ugly assumptions because of their own perception of the word. I only talk about myself as a furry when talking to my husband."

Participant 9

The general public has such a negative view on furies that I never bring it up, unless I'm with other furies or my partner.

Participant 10

Mainly only with other furies and my husband who I disclosed too and he was supportive and understanding.

Participant 11

Comfortable disclosing with similar groups.

The theme 'Comfortable disclosing to similar people' included the codes: being comfortable disclosing furry identity at furry conventions and meet ups, being comfortable disclosing only to other furies, feeling comfortable disclosing to suspected furies, feeling comfortable disclosing in creative spaces and with creative type people such as artists, as well as the code I can disclose to members of other 'geeky' fan groups. This theme also included the code 'I do not disclose to non-furies'.

I feel most comfortable talking about furry related subjects either at conventions or with other furry friends with only one or two people of whom aren't furries that I would feel comfortable speaking about it with. Anywhere else, I'd prefer to just keep it to myself for the most part.

Participant 12

At furry events/meets I'll tell anyone there including non furries. Otherwise, I only talk to furries or non furries who are close friends

Participant 13

I only feel comfortable being a furry in places that are made for furries, ie meetups and conventions. I don't feel that it is appropriate out in the work environment or other places that are supposed to be professional, unless there is some sort of event to share hobbies.

Participant 15

Comfortable disclosing at furry conventions and events.

The first code for this theme is being comfortable disclosing at furry conventions and events. Participant 12 reported that they felt most comfortable talking about furry subjects primarily at furry conventions and that beyond disclosing to a few friends they keep themselves and their furry identity to themselves. Participant 13 also reported disclosing their furry identity at a furry

convention but they specified disclosing to all attendees not just other furrries.

Participants 14 and 15 reported that they didn't feel it appropriate for someone to disclose or discuss their furry identity outside of furry-specific events.

Comfortable disclosing to other furrries.

The next code within this theme was feeling comfortable disclosing to other furrries. Most participants reported feeling comfortable disclosing to other furrries, some like Participant 17 will disclose exclusively to other furrries where as participants like Participants 4, 11, 13 and 16 will disclose to non-furrries, if they feel close enough to them. Participant 16 will also only discuss with other furrries and their close friends if the friend knows the furry fandom.

I only discuss being a furry in environments where all other participants are furry or otherwise already intimately familiar with the fandom.

Participant 16

I feel more comfortable discussing being a furry when I know they're a furry or if they make furry art / animal art. I don't feel comfortable if I don't know the person very well or if I've seen them make anti-furry jokes.

Participant 17

Comfortable disclosing to suspected furrries.

Alongside the many participants who reported preferring to disclose to known furrries, some participants also reported that they feel comfortable

disclosing their furry identity to participants they suspect to be furies.

Participant 18 reports feeling comfortable disclosing to people they suspect to be furies as they are afraid of being rejected or harassed for disclosing their furry identity to non-furies. Participant 19 reports that they are comfortable disclosing to suspected furies as well as close friends and family.

I am only comfortable discussing myself being a furry or anything related to the furry fandom when the person I'm talking to appears to possibly be a furry as well, in any other case, I'm too afraid of being shunned, rejected, or made fun of. I'm the only furry I know, if any of my friends are furies, I don't know about it.

Participant 18

[I'm comfortable disclosing to] close friends, family, people I suspect are also furies, showing off my fursuit in any situation

Participant 19

Comfortable disclosing to creative peoples.

The fourth code in this theme was disclosing to creative people and or creative groups. Participant 20 provides an explanation of why furies might feel comfortable disclosing their furry identity to creative groups and communities and explains that the furry community is a very visual art heavy community. Participant 9 stated that they find it easy to talk about the furry identity when

they are drawing or painting, as people see the art that participant 9 produces and become curious about its furry nature.

I's not a hugely important part of me. If it becomes relevant, I bring it up. Sometimes I might have a funny anecdote involving being on the fringes of a weird internet subculture, and I'm happy to share those stories when appropriate. It comes up quite a bit in art communities, because the furry fandom is so heavily intertwined with visual artist communities.

Participant 20

I find it very easy to talk about it while drawing/painting. People see what I do and they get curious. My passion for drawing is the main reason why most people know that I am a furry and are able to understand me because they find my drawings interesting...

Participant 9

Comfortable disclosing to other 'geeky' groups.

The fifth code in this theme is that of feeling comfortable disclosing to other 'geeky' fan groups such as anime fans. Participant 21 said that they feel comfortable disclosing their furry identity to other furries and anime fans. Participant 22 also reported feeling somewhat comfortable disclosing to someone who identifies as or discusses anime, as well as feeling somewhat comfortable disclosing if My Little Pony is discussed. Participant 23 reported not

only being comfortable disclosing their furry identity to people at anime conventions and Maker Faires but that the furry community was a part of the culture at both events.

I am most comfortable about it once I have caught on that they are into it or if they are anime fans. If I do not catch wind that they are into any of that sort of thing, I do not really talk about it.

Participant 21

[I feel comfortable disclosing] When anime or my little pony comes into the conversation maybe.

Participant 22

Uncomfortable disclosing to non-furries.

The final code of this theme is feeling uncomfortable disclosing to non-furries. Participant 20 and participant 24 both mentioned how they feel they cannot discuss or disclose their furry identity outside the furry community out of fear of the stigma and negative perceptions that non-furries might have for furries.

Comfortable to discuss around other furries, Not comfortable discussing with non furries as the conversation always takes a bad turn

Participant 24

I don't feel comfortable disclosing it outside of the furry community. I feel that there's too much negative stigma associated with it.

Participant 25

Comfortable disclosing online.

Our third theme is feeling 'Comfortable disclosing identity online' and it included the codes feeling comfortable disclosing because of the anonymity of the online space and being comfortable disclosing behind the mask of a fursona online. This was one of the more commonly-reported themes with more than 13% of participants reporting that they either felt comfortable disclosing online, or felt comfortable disclosing online because they could be anonymous or hide behind their fursona as a 'mask' online. This theme was expected to be present as the furry community is primarily an online community and that many furies socialise and engage online through furry-specific social media pages and websites.

Feeling comfortable disclosing online.

The first code for this theme is feeling comfortable disclosing online. Participant 7 reported feeling more confident online and willing to disclose online *"if I know the person well enough even if they don't have any connections to the furry fandom"*. Participant 28 also reported feeling more confident online disclosing to others as they feel disclosing in the real world is more complicated. Participant 26 reported that they have never disclosed their identity to anyone in the real world and that they do not feel confident disclosing in person, however

they did report feeling happy to disclose online to people they do not know in real life. Participant 29 also reported feeling online both on social media groups and through online apps as did Participant 30.

I have never discussed being a furry with others in person. I would not be comfortable discussing this in person, but I am happy to do so online with people I don't know in real life.

Participant 26

Right now, in person, I wouldn't tell anyone unless I'm certain they're a furry and would keep it a secret. Online? Free game. I tell everyone.

Participant 27

On this app called '-----' there are many Furry groups. And on a Facebook "Furry" group I feel open. Most everywhere else I'm scared of being laughed at or hurt.*

Participant 29

*APP NAMES REMOVED TO ANONYMISE PARTICIPANTS

Feeling comfortable disclosing online anonymously.

The second code within this theme is feeling comfortable disclosing online because you can be anonymous online. Participant 31 made a clear distinction between having an internet persona who is separate from their In

Real Life (IRL) self, they also identified that they only feel comfortable where they can be this internet persona exclusively without it being linked to their IRL self. Participant 32 also identified with the idea of having a second identity online, somewhere they can disclose being a furry without fear of rejection. Participant 33 reported that they prefer disclosing online anonymously where they can't be personally identified, similar to Participant 31.

I don't talk about furry stuff outside the internet, and on the internet in places that I don't have a clean break between my IRL and my internet persona.

Participant 31

I feel uncomfortable telling anyone anywhere telling them I am a furry since I'm afraid of what they will think, except on the internet. On the internet it's like having a second identity.

Participant 32

I feel uncomfortable discussing it in any scenario where I could be personally identified, mostly in real life. I feel comfortable talking about it more anonymously online or with the one friend I have who's cool with it.

Participant 33

Comfortable disclosing online behind a fursona.

The third code in this theme is feeling comfortable disclosing online behind a fursona as a mask. Participant 34 used the term 'mask' to refer to using their fursona online instead of their own real profile. Participant 35 also discussed primarily going by their furry identity online like participant 34. Participant 31 referred to an internet persona where they discuss being a furry, this is akin to participant 34 and 35's responses and sounds like a reference to using a fursona or online persona online exclusively.

Comfortable with: people who I know beforehand are part of the Furry Fandom, and behind a ""Mask"" online (a ""Fursona"")

Participant 34

Excluding online (as there I mostly go by my furry identity), I rarely feel comfortable enough to discuss being a furry with others. The only occasions when I do is when those people are furries themselves, and we are in a more private area where people can't overhear us.

Participant 35

Comfortable disclosing with people who show positive interest.

The fourth theme was feeling 'comfortable when people show a positive interest in the furry community'. This theme was comprised of three comfortable to disclose codes; feeling comfortable disclosing furry identity if people show an interest, comfortable disclosing if people ask and feeling comfortable disclosing if

I know they do not hate furrries. This theme also included the uncomfortable to disclose codes; I do not feel comfortable disclosing unless prompted, I do not feel comfortable disclosing where people aren't going to listen to me without judging, and I do not feel comfortable disclosing where furrries are disliked or hated.

Comfortable disclosing to people who show an interest.

The first code for this theme is disclosing if people show an interest in furrries or the furry community. This code measures primarily unprompted disclosure, and is focused on participants reporting that they need to feel or know if the person being disclosed to is interested in furrries. Participant 36 reported that they are comfortable in any spaces where there are other furrries or who are people genuinely interested in learning about the fandom are. Likewise, Participant 37 also reported that they feel comfortable disclosing to others if they are interested to hear what Participant 37 has to say about the furry community. Participant 38 states that they primarily judge to see if the other person is actually interested and open to hear what they have to see, akin to Participant 37. This sentiment is also reported by Participant 39 who said they are more comfortable discussing the furry community when someone is willing to listen to them and ask questions when they do not understand something, signifying that they are actually interested in what Participant 39 has to say.

I'd feel comfortable in any space in which the people around me are predominantly furry or are genuinely interested in learning about the fandom.

Participant 36

I feel comfortable discussing furry fandom when I feel the other person is interested in me talking about it. Also I don't feel comfortable to talk about it when there is a lot people around that are non-furry

Participant 37

[I]would feel more comfortable if people were to listen to me with an open mind and be willing to question things that they don't particularly understand in a kind manner. It makes it special when people see videos or photos of furies and they actually show interest in it.

Participant 39

Comfortable disclosing if the topic is brought up.

The second code in this theme is the that participants reported feeling comfortable if they were asked about being a furry or if the topic was brought up by another person. Participant 40 stated that they are comfortable discussing being a furry in most contexts, but they do not feel need to bring it up. Participant 40 also stated that they wear furry paraphernalia to prompt or encourage these conversations if the person is interested or curious. Participant 41 said that they are comfortable to answer the questions others pose to them, and makes mentions of these questions happening at conventions or with strangers on airplanes, with people who are curious. Participant 42 reported that

they tend to hide the furry context behind their stories from friends and family, but they mention that if someone gets a clue that Participant 42 is a furry and asks about it, they're happy to answer questions. Participant 43 highlighted the idea that being a furry is not something that people 'need' to know about them, similar to Participant 41, and that if asked and if someone show an interest Participant 43 will be honest and open about being a furry to those that ask.

I'm pretty comfortable discussing it, or at least telling people about it, in most contexts. If people ask, then I wouldn't hide anything, and if I'm friends with them my furry interests will naturally come out, but I don't just talk about furies to strangers generally and my furry badge on my bag is the entry way for conversations on that topic.

Participant 40

At this point in my life I enjoy answering questions in depth to strangers, such as non-furies I encounter at convention hotels or strangers on airplanes. Strangers are generally curious and I appear pretty normal and respectable, and so approachable. I don't discuss it with coworkers (barring a few close non-furry friends at work and other furies who are known to me at my large company when in private).

Participant 41

I honestly probably wouldn't mind discussing it with anyone in particular or anyplace in particular. I consider myself open about being a furry, but find that "coming out" as a furry is completely unnecessary. There's no reason someone must know about my gender, lifestyle, and hobbies. But if someone ever asks, I'll be entirely honest. I make no effort in hiding who I am and what I do, and those who care enough to take notice and ask about it are the only ones who specifically know about my gender, lifestyle, and hobbies.

Participant 43

Comfortable if the person does not hate furrries.

The third code in this theme is participants reporting that they feel comfortable disclosing if I know the person being disclosed to does not hate furrries. Participant 39 reported feeling comfortable with non-furrries who have an open mind, who are therefore unlikely to harbour negative stereotypes about what furrries are. Participant 44 stated they are happy to disclose their furry identity to people they know well and that they know do not hate furrries, Participant 44 also stated that they have one friend who is hateful towards furrries and that they will never disclose to this friend. Participant 46 said that they felt the same as Participant 44 in that they also want to know a person and know that they are not bias against furrries before disclosing to them. Participant 45 stated that if they are unsure of how the person being disclosed to will react

or how they will take it, Participant 45 will not disclose their furry identity to them.

Only if I know the person well and know that they do not hate the fandom. Sometimes there are people who just hate the fandom. There is one person I know and consider a friend who thinks furries should be shot. I would never disclose to them that I am a furry

Participant 44

I feel comfortable when they want to hear what furry is and I think they are open minded enough to understand it. I am usually uncomfortable when I don't know how they are going to react or if I think they will take it the wrong way.

Participant 45

I mainly discuss about this topic with people I fully trust after spending time to learn about their interest - as to make sure they don't hold any hatred fuelled by media coverage. That's when I feel comfortable to talk about it.

Participant 46

***Uncomfortable disclosing furry identity where people are not willing to
listen.***

The fourth code for this theme is not disclosing furry identity where people are not willing to listen. Participants 37, 38 and 39 all report that they feel more comfortable disclosing their furry identity and discussing the furry community with people who listen and then ask questions when they want to know more. The opposite side of this is seen in participant 47's response where they report not feeling comfortable disclosing to people who have rigid opinions and aren't interested in hearing what Participant 47 or others have to say about furies.

Uncomfortable: People who are quick to judge and don't listen to any other kind of opinions but their own.

Participant 47

Not comfortable disclosing in professional settings.

This theme is based on participants reporting feeling uncomfortable disclosing in professional settings, with the specific codes within this theme were; not feeling comfortable disclosing at school and not feeling comfortable disclosing at work, participants also referred to feeling uncomfortable disclosing in general professional settings.

Uncomfortable disclosing at work.

Most participants described that they did not feel comfortable disclosing at their place of work and with their co-workers or supervisors. Participants 49

and 51 reported that they normally are quite comfortable disclosing to other people, however they do not feel comfortable disclosing to people who hold a position of power over them who might have the ability to make their lives worse, such as their supervisor. Participant 48 reported feeling similar to Participant 49 in that they also prefer not to disclose to their supervisors due to fear of being looked down upon. Participant 50 said that they feel that the furry community is a topic which is not appropriate for professional settings, much like video games and anime. Participant 52 reported that they feel that their co-workers and managers do not need to know about the furry part of their lives.

In professional environments I will disclosed if asked but I tend to avoid it to avoid being looked down upon by supervisors.

Participant 48

Mostly, I don't care to speak on it one way or another. If someone is curious, I will divulge information UNLESS they're in a position to make massive changes for the worse in my life (AKA, my supervisors).

Participant 49

Nonprofessional situations and without family I'm cool with talking about it, but around family I hold back a bit, in a professional setting though I find it an inappropriate topic just like gaming, anime, etc.

Participant 50

I am least comfortable telling coworkers and managers as I feel this is not a part of my life they need to know.

Participant 52

Uncomfortable disclosing at school.

The second code within this theme was that participants did not feel comfortable disclosing at school. Participant 5 and Participant 53 both identified that they received harassment and bullying for disclosing at school, and participant 53 also reported that they are looking to avoid this happening again. Multiple other participants reported feeling uncomfortable at school as well as other places of education, however they largely echoed the sentiments of Participant 5 and Participant 53.

During high school, when I first figured out I was a furry, I was more open about it, and tried explaining it to everybody. That was not a good idea, since the other kids gave me a hard time about it. Ever since then, I've been more careful. But my friends and family know, and they're very understanding

Participant 5

Sometimes uncomfortable with discussing it with family, although they are accepting so it is not the worst. Sometimes uncomfortable with it at school due to risk that others in higher grades will overhear and target me for it. I have already been

picked on for being a furry by higher grades this year and do not want it to continue.

Participant 53

Not comfortable disclosing to close connections.

The theme of not feeling comfortable disclosing to close connections, consists of the codes; participants reporting not feeling comfortable disclosing to family, and participants reporting not feeling comfortable disclosing to close friends, although there were only a small number of participants who reported this.

Participant 54 reported that they fear disclosing to family members and friends out of fear of being rejected. Similarly, Participant 55 reported that their family views furies as a community full of people who are mentally ill and into bestiality so they do not feel comfortable disclosing their furry identity to them. Participant 56 said that their family members do not care to understand what furies are, and therefore participant 56 feels uncomfortable about disclosing their furry identity to family.

I don't talk about it with my friends and family for fear of being rejected.

Participant 54

Normally when I'm talking with other furies or with my friend who already know I a furry. When it comes to strangers or people that don't know, if they don't ask or inquire I don't say

anything about my life as a furry. I especially don't mention it around family because I tried telling them once but they saw it as a community that supports bestiality and is full of mentally ill people. As far as they know since that day I have nothing to do with furies or the community.

Participant 55

The only place that is uncomfortable discussing is around family (sister and her kids are only local family). They don't want to care to understand.

Participant 56

I'm comfortable disclosing with anyone.

A significant number of participants reporting that they felt comfortable disclosing their furry identity to almost anyone and were identified in a separate theme of their own.

Participant 57 and Participant 58 both reported feeling comfortable to disclose their furry identity with others as they feel like disclosing their identity provides them with an opportunity to educate non-furries and change their views on the furry fandom. Participant 59 reported that they feel there is nothing wrong with being a furry and that others have the decision on how they want to interpret Participant 59's disclosure. Participant 60 also reported a similar nonchalant attitude and regards their furry identity as a part of a hobby and a place to be yourself, they do not consider it a problematic aspect.

I feel comfortable discussing furry with others in basically all situations. I've made it my duty to help educate others about the subculture.

Participant 57

I never feel uncomfortable. I have discussed with a lot of people and they think its cool. I have even made people change their view on the furry fandom.

Participant 58

I'm primarily okay with sharing it. I do not see anything wrong with being a furry. If someone chooses to see me as something worse that's their problem. I do not share it completely with strangers but that's just me really.

Participant 59

I'm not comfortable disclosing anywhere.

A small group of participants reported that they did not feel comfortable disclosing their furry identity to anyone or rarely disclose or discuss the furry community.

Participant 61 reported that they are glad that the furry community exists, but they also state that the stigma and representation of the furry community led to them feel uncomfortable and discouraged from sharing their furry identity with others. Participant 62 echoed this idea of wanting to avoid

being associated with the stigma and stereotypes faced by members of the community.

I feel uncomfortable in almost all situations. I think it's cool that there's a group of people who are like me and share similar interests, but ultimately the representation of this community and the stereotype that follows means that I'm not particularly enticed to share.

Participant 61

It has an undesirable stigma because many do not understand it. Also, I am a mildly shy person and do not want to provide an opportunity to be teased.

Participant 62

Fear of personal consequences as a result of disclosing.

This theme encapsulates the reason that most participants reported not disclosing their furry identity, which was a fear of either rejection or bullying for disclosing their furry identity, or other consequences which impacted them directly.

Participants 63 and 64 both reported not feeling comfortable disclosing their identity because it could jeopardize their employment or personal life. Participant 65 reported wanting to avoid being associated with the stigma and negative associations someone has with the idea of furies.

If they're not a furry then I won't discuss it. I value my career and personal life too highly for that risk.

Participant 63

Anything that could affect employment, I'm not going to bring it up. Otherwise it depends if it's relevant to the conversation.

Participant 64

I feel uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others when in a generic group setting or one-on-one meeting with a new person where I am unsure of the others' opinions on things typically viewed as strange, due to the social stigma surrounding being a furry and the societal assumption that being one automatically connects you to zoophilia."

Participant 65

Bullying for Being a Furry

The five following themes are the themes found from participants responses to the question "If you have been bullied for being a furry. Were there any common characteristics of the bullying you faced?". It is important to explain here that some of the terms used by participants to describe their experiences of bullying may offend.

Participants were asked to describe their experiences of being bullied for being a furry and from these responses five key themes were identified which can be seen on Table 3.7, along with an exemplar response from each theme.

| If you have been bullied for being a furry. Were there any common characteristics of the bullying you faced | |
|---|--|
| Theme | Example |
| Bullied Because Furies are Considered Sexually Deviant | Typically people will call furies anything from "dog-fucker" to pedophile to a plain old creep. |
| Bullied and Treated as Lesser | Names like Furfag, or yiff in hell, or dog fucker, horse fucker. Mostly name calling, sometimes linked or tagged in images of animal gore or mutilation or cruelty. been told to kill myself or been told I was cancer |
| The Bullying Involved Intentional Violence or Harm | The usual verbal stuff like "go kill yourself furry trash" etc, physically is less so as in person I look like any other person. Physically bullying is more prominent when I am in suit. Trash thrown at me, grabbed and "made out with" by a drunken man. That kinda stuff |
| No Disclosure, No Bullying | I have not been bullied for being a furry, for I keep hidden and under wraps. There was one instance where it happened when I visited a furry con years ago and I was called a derogatory term |
| The Bullies Don't Understand | People mainly thought it was a sexual thing, and they would go around telling everyone that I like to have sex with animals, which isn't true. My more understanding friends and I would try to correct them, but they seemed to enjoy spreading this rumour more than they cared about knowing the reality of it. |

Table 3.7. Commonly Identified Themes and Exemplar Responses to Item Regarding Participants Experiences of Bullying Being a Furry

Bullied because furies are considered sexually deviant.

The first theme was that furies were being bullied because they were considered (by the bully or harasser) to be sexually deviant. This theme is based on the following four codes: participants reported being accused of being a paedophile, participants reported being accused of engaging in zoophilia and bestiality or being called zoophilic terminology such as “dog fucker” or “animal fucker”, participants also reported being called gay or being accused of being gay when being bullied for their furry identity. The final code is participants reporting being called a sexual deviant or referred to in sexually deviant terms such as pervert or yiffer. Yiff, or yiffing is a furry-specific term used by both furies and non-furies to refer to sexual activity or material within the furry fandom, when

used in the context of this code it can be interpreted as a derogatory term.

Nearly 25% of all participants identified this as a common aspect of the bullying or harassment they faced for being a furry.

Accused of being a paedophile.

The first code of this theme is being accused of being a paedophile, which is something that was seen in a fair few of the responses. Participant 66 said that they have witnessed people refer to furies as paedophiles and creeps. Similarly, Participant 69 has also been called a paedophile and a creep in an animal costume. Participant 68 reported that they have also been called a paedophile along with being accused of engaging in bestiality. Participant 67 stated that they have been harassed by people who insist that if you are a furry that means you are also a paedophile, participant 67 also reported that they have had this same harassment at non-furry conventions. Participant 70 highlighted one of the possible sources for this belief that people have and this particular harassment that furies face from media portrayals of furies. They identify that people believe that the cases of bestiality or paedophilia where the person has been a furry are representative of the furry community as a whole.

Typically people will call furies anything from "dog-fucker" to paedophile to a plain old creep.

Participant 66

Have been harassed by people who insist that being a furry means that you are a paedophile or into bestiality. This happens occasionally at non- furry conventions.

Participant 67

Being called an autistic, bestiality lover, and paedophile also [have been called] gay.

Participant 68

Many people assume that we are all only in it for sex, bestiality, and paedophilia, because when furies do those things, those are the only times the media covers us, and that is what most people bully us for.

Participant 70

Accused of engaging in bestiality.

The second code within this theme is being accused of engaging in bestiality or zoophilia or called derogatory zoophilic terminology. Participants 67 and 69 both report being called a 'dog-fucker' by others who discover they are a furry, as has participant 71. Participants 68 and 70 both reported that people assumed that they were into bestiality because they were a furry. Participant 73 also reported that people commonly assumed they were into bestiality because they were a furry. Participant 73 identified that for many the assumption of bestiality was the go to insult when it came to furies. Participant 72 presented the idea that being a furry isn't inherently wrong and draws comparisons

between how engaging with the furry community is deemed 'unnatural' by some, and how the idea of flying and drinking coffee could be considered 'unnatural' whilst also touching on the idea of escapism.

Idiots telling me to "Yiff in hell"; or "Go fuck an animal you sick bastard".

Participant 71

People would usually say that furies are degenerate animal rapists that sexualize animal-likeness, but it wasn't something that offended me personally, as while that is one aspect of the furry fandom (referring to the sexual aspect, of course), it's just their opinion, believing that it's inherently wrong, and I in turn sometimes try and counter argue that many people are sexual individuals with "unnatural" lifestyles (I mean, flying in a metal hunk in the sky known as a plane while drinking ground up beans in the form of coffee isn't exactly "natural") that participate in escapism, so in essence, it's not a contest to see who's the most unconventional, as we're all degenerates to some extent...

Participant 72

Assumptions that I have sexual relations with animals, or that I believe myself to be an animal are common, out of the gate go-to insults for most people who are hostile to furies.

Participant 73

Accused of being gay.

The third code in this theme is that many participants reporting being accused of being or being call gay. Participant 68 reported being called gay for being a furry, as does participant 75 who reported specifically being called 'faggot' or 'gay' and other bigoted insults for being a furry. Participant 76 said that they were subjected to people calling them gay as an insult. Participant 74 also reported receiving general insults around the topic of being gay because they are a furry. Participant 77 reported that they were assumed to be "male, gay and a sexual deviant" because of their furry identity.

[I've been] facing incorrect stereotypes: "animal fucker, furfag".

general "gay" insults. telling me to "kill myself". jokes about rape. threats on general well-being. physical violence.

Participant 74

It's always the same insults: "faggot" and "gay" and "deviant" and all that lame standard-issue bigot BS.

Participant 75

Calling us Zoophiles, accusing us of fucking animals. Using Gay as an insult.

Participant 76

A general disregard/dismissal of my opinions and arguments; assumptions that I was male, gay, and a sexual deviant; an

unwillingness and/or inability to consider that there can be non-sexual aspects to the furry fandom.

Participant 77

Called sexually deviant offensive terms.

The final code for this theme case being called sexually deviant or offensive terms such as pervert. Participant 71 reported being told to “yiff in hell”. Participants 75 and 77 both reported being called sexually deviant. Participant 78 reports having been cursed at and called a pervert because they were a furry. Participant 80 also stated that they had been called a prevent for being a furry and that they feel than many people see the furry community as one of sex fiends or paedophiles.

People Cussing you out and calling you a pervert or accuse you of practicing Bestiality.

Participant 78

Usually, they refer to being a furry as horrible without any reason to why that is– as if you're expected to just "know" furries are all cringy people. They also tend to call you an animal-fucker. It's basically brought down to bestiality, "you like being fucked in a fursuit", you're a sexual deviant, a cringy person, you shouldn't be allowed around animals, and "you must think you're an animal or something". Other than that, the term "furry" alone is used as an insult quite often.

Participant 79

[it's] mostly that many see the furry community as gay sex fiends or paedophiles which does hurt and I have been considered gay and at times a pervert for being a furry

Participant 80

Bullied and treated as lesser

The second theme for common bullying characteristics was that participants reported being treated as lesser when people found out they were a furry. This theme includes the following codes: participants reported being accused of being or being called childish and immature, being called a freak or weirdo, being called derogatory terminology such as FurFag, Faggot or being called a cancer, and being excluded or isolated because they are a furry. many participants reported that others used the term furry in a derogatory manner – similar to how 'gay' is used as a derogatory term. Participants also reported that people would treat them like animals by such things as barking at them like a dog. Another code, within this theme was that participants also reported being called retarded, autistic or mentally ill for being a furry. Finally, participants repeatedly reported being told to kill themselves, receiving death threats or hearing that furries should be killed off. This theme overlaps with the previous theme as many of these codes could be associated with being considered sexually deviant.

Accused of being immature.

The first code within this theme is being accused of being and or called childish and immature. Participant 81 identified that the people sometimes bully furies because they think that it is childish. Participants 82 and 83 reported that others have often characterised them as childish or immature for their furry identity.

People that think furies are people having sex with animals, or the ones that think it's childish, are the ones that bully

Participant 81

Repeatedly characterized as immature or not otherwise competent

Participant 82

Always considered as if I'm being childish.

Participant 83

Called a freak or weirdo.

The second code for this theme is being participants reporting having been called a freak or weirdo for being a furry. Participant 84 reported that they, and others who have been with them, have been called a freak for wearing furry gear. Participant 85 reported that freak is one of the terms that they are called often when people harass them about being a furry. Participant 87 also reported being called a freak / weirdo and that they had been told to kill themselves.

Participant 86 said that they often see people calling furries freaks, weirdos and losers online both on furry sites and non-furry sites.

Mostly just the generic stuff of people calling me and people I was with a "freak" for wearing furry gear

Participant 84

"Freak" and "animal fucker" come up a quite a bit but I tend to just remove myself from the situation as soon as it starts, I'm not going to sit around and get yelled at I don't have time for that. People who don't like it tend to question it in disgust.

Participant 85

Most bullying happens online, when posting content (whether videos, fursuit pictures or drawing) to non-furry websites like Tumblr or YouTube.....it's mostly being called names such as losers, freaks, weirdos.

Participant 86

Being called a freak, told to kill myself, that I'm gross and nasty and no one likes me

Participant 87

Called furfag, faggot or cancer.

The third code for this theme is participants reporting being called derogatory terminology such as FurFag, Faggot or being called a Cancer.

Participant 74 reported that they were subject to a wide range of derogatory terminology including animal fucker and FurFag. Participant 89 reported being called a FurFag, and being made to feel like they have not right to speech.

Participant 90 also reported being called a FurFag along with another wide range of derogatory terminology including being called a cancer. Participant 91 stated that they had been called a cancer, because of the misconceptions and stereotypes around furries.

Mostly online trolling, calling me "furfag", things of that nature.

Participant 88

Well there is always a classic "dog fucker" and generally I have no right of speech or opinion because I'm a "retarded and sick psychopath". Or the very common " Shut the fuck up furfag".

And of course not to exclude treats and death wishes...

Participant 89

Names like Furfag, or yiff in hell, or dog fucker, horse fucker.

Mostly name calling, sometimes linked or tagged in images of animal gore or mutilation or cruelty. been told to kill myself or been told I was cancer

Participant 90

Excluded because of being a furry.

The fourth code for this theme was participants reporting they were being excluded because they were a furry. Participant 92 reports being excluded from online chat rooms for either being a furry or having a furry avatar. Participant 94 reported being alienated as a part of the bullying they received for being a furry. Participant 93 reported a wide range of consequences for coming out as a furry and for coming out as gay. Participant 93 also reported that they have suffered physical and emotional abuse from parental figures as well as other students at his school. Participant 93 also reported having lost friends for disclosing their furry identity as well as having been discriminated against while working for being a furry. They have even been barred from premises on the basis of they and their partner's furry appearance.

I have not really been 'bullied', though I have been told to leave a few online chatrooms and online meeting places on account of being a furry and having a furry avatar

Participant 92

My father called me dog fucker all through high-school. The idea of bestiality was a common theme. I often was bullied for a combination of being gay and furry. People often assuming they went paw in paw. I suffered both physical and mental abuse from my stepfather. At school as a freshman I was attacked physically several times. I had a very close friend abandon me for being a furry. Later in life I have had several employers

discriminate against me for being gay/furry lower wage for the same job constant suspicion and having me and my partner also a furry banned from the premises for the sake of appearance.

Participant 93

Common insults, and being alienated are the usual things that come from being bullied.

Participant 94

Furry used in a derogatory way.

The fifth code in this theme is participants reporting having the term furry used in a derogatory way. Participant 79 reported that their bullies use the term 'furry' being used as an insult often. Participant 95 made reference to someone they knew who used furry to describe anything they thought was negative in their life, such as bad grades or someone he didn't like by calling them furry.

He made fun of almost anyone, for any reason he wanted. He often mocked disabilities. Not to downplay the furry hate though. He would often use the word furry to describe things he didn't like. Like if he got a bad grade, the test was 'Furry'. If he didn't want to go to a party, it was a 'Furry Convention'. If he didn't like someone, regardless of whether or not they actually were, he called the a 'Furry'...

Participant 95

Treated like an animal.

The sixth code in this theme is that of participants reporting being treated like animals by people who knew they were furies. Participant 96 reported that they have been threatened with violence and called an animal. Participant 97 and 98 both reported that they have been barked at by other people.

I was told by someone that they would hit me but they didnt
want to get in-trouble for "Animal abuse"

Participant 96

Lots of strangers in public during outings making sexual
comments, more at the local Renaissance fair, most commonly
harassed by drunks, in high school it was common for people to
bark at me, other such bullying

Participant 97

People trying to damage my furry-related drawings, people
barking at me in the hallway

Participant 98

Called retarded or autistic.

The seventh code in this theme is participants reporting being called retarded, autistic or mentally ill for being a furry. Participant 68 reported that some of their bullies called them autistic. Participant 99 also reported being accused of being autistic, with people commonly asking if they were on the

autism spectrum. Participant 89 stated that people considered him a “*retarded and sick psychopath*”. Participant 100 also reported that they had witnessed people referring to furies as retard and mentally deficient.

I was attacked with the common place insults of asking if I'm on the Autistic Spectrum, if I was abused as a child, and if I use murr suits.

Participant 99

People tend to refer to furies as retarded or mentally deficient.

Participant 100

Told to kill self.

The final code in this theme is that participants having been repeatedly told to kill themselves, receiving death threats or hearing that furies should be killed off. Participant 74 reported that they had people “*telling me to kill myself*”. Participant 97 also reported being told to “*go kill yourself furry trash*”. Participant 101 stated that they have had people tell them they should die off in a plague. Participant 102 had been told repeatedly to kill themselves, much akin to Participants 74 and 97.

Vulgar and aggressive, will attack you based off of stereotypes and state that you should die off like a plague or talks of genocide.

Participant 101

Every bully I've met online or IRL says the same thing, they tell me to kill myself or that I fuck animals

Participant 102

The bullying involved intentional violence or harm.

The third theme for bullying was bullying that involved violence or intended harm. This theme includes the codes participants reporting physical harassments or altercations, receiving threats of rape and rape jokes and threats of physical violence, as well as receiving death threats and being told to kill themselves. The code receiving death threats and being told to kill yourself fell within two categories and participant's responses will not be repeated as they can be seen in the above section.

Physical violence a part of bullying.

The first code within this theme was participant's reporting physical violence or altercations as a part of their being bullied for being a furry. Participant 93 reported suffering physical abuse from parental figures and school peers for being a furry. Participant 103 also reports having been subjected to physical violence as a result of their furry identity. Participant 104 reported having been physically assaulted on his town's waterfront for being a furry. Participant 105 also reported being assaulted when out in his fursuit, including being grabbed by drunkards and having trash thrown at them. Participant 105 also said that the physical harassment and violence is more common when they are in their fursuit.

It was very based on furry, and primarily physical and verbal.

Many punches have been thrown.

Participant 103

I was physically assaulted on the ---- waterfront*

Participant 104

The usual verbal stuff like "go kill yourself furry trash" etc,

physically is less so as in person I look like any other person.

Physically bullying is more prominent when I am in suit. Trash

thrown at me, grabbed and "made out with" by a drunken man.

That kinda stuff

Participant 105

*LOCATION NAMES REMOVED TO ANONYMISE PARTICIPANTS

Rape jokes a part of bullying.

The second code for this theme is participants reporting being subjected to rape threats for being a furry. Participant 74 reported having people make jokes about rape towards them. Participant 106 reported receiving sexual threats for being a furry.

Physical and sexual threats, Mockery, Negative glares of hatred

Participant 106

Threats of violence.

The third code for this theme is participants being threatened with physical violence for being a furry. Participant 96 reported that people have threatened to hurt them for being a furry. Participant 107 reported that they have had a stranger threatened to set them on fire if they wore their fursuit. Participant 106 also reported receiving physical threats for being a furry.

... Sometimes the bullying can be as severe as being told to kill ones self or death threats (worst I've gotten is being told if someone as much as saw me in suit they would set me on fire) I've also had threats from strangers saying they will report me for animal abuse because they think I sexually abuse my cat because I am a furry.

Participant 107

No disclosure, no bullying.

Many participants have reported that they feel that they not received any bullying for being a furry, because they haven't told people.

Participant 108 reported using an alternative account from their personal accounts online to avoid being bullied or harassed for being a furry. Participant 108 also said that they haven't told anyone in real life about them being a furry. Participant 110 stated that they keep their furry identity hidden but they have been harassed when attending a furry convention. Participant 109 reported that

they feel discouraged from disclosing their furry identity because of the bullying and harassment they have witnessed furies face.

I've never told anyone in real life, and I use an alternate account online, so I have never been bullied for this.

Participant 108

I wouldn't say bullied directly, but hearing others speak about it around you, putting down furies etc. does make me feel kinda bad about myself and I do fear of being found out.

Participant 109

I have not been bullied for being a furry, for I keep hidden and under wraps. There was one instance where it happened when I visited a furry con years ago and I was called a derogatory term

Participant 110

The bullies do not understand.

This theme is based on participants reporting that bullies believed that anything furry related was inherently linked with sex, and specifically zoophilia. Participants reported that the bullies were ignorant of what the furry community was and or unwilling to learn and change their minds.

Participant 111 and 114 both identified that their bullies were not interested in hearing the reality of what the furry community is as well as ignoring these participant's attempts to explain it. Participant 113 reported

similar issues with attempting to correct or educate their bully. Participant 112 highlighted that their bully was more interested in spreading rumour than fact.

Usually the people attempting to bully me obviously has no idea what the furry group even was, aside from the stereotypical "animal lover" arguments.

Participant 111

People mainly thought it was a sexual thing, and they would go around telling everyone that I like to have sex with animals, which isn't true. My more understanding friends and I would try to correct them, but they seemed to enjoy spreading this rumour more than they cared about knowing the reality of it.

Participant 112

The bully has an incorrect idea of how the fandom works, is usually close-minded and refuses to listen to any logic, often resorts to demeaning various aspects of the fandom. Thinks furies are immature.

Participant 113

The Impact of Being a Furry on Day to Day Life

The following themes are the themes found from participants responses to the question "How has being a furry helped or hindered your ability to function in day-to-day life. We will briefly discuss each of the themes from Table

3.8 along with the codes and quotes that the themes comprise of. There were 68 codes within the responses to this item, which then were reduced to 10 themes which can be seen on Table 3.8 below.

| How has being a furry helped or hindered your ability to function in day-to-day life? | |
|--|--|
| Theme | Example |
| Being Part of the Furry Community Provides me with Support | Greatly helped. I have so many friends it's amazing to have people there to help you when you need it. |
| Being Part of the Furry Community Can be a Positive Thing | Honestly, it helped me figure out my passions in life, and is leading me towards a college degree in graphical design |
| Being Part of the Furry Community Can be a Negative Thing | Helped me cope with pressures of life and school, but sometimes takes time away from studying |
| Being Part of the Furry Community Provides me with an Escape | It gives me something to look forward to after work. I'm in a bad spot financially, having a way to hop online and just forget about it all is great. The problems are still there, and being handle, but it's nice to just let it go instead of dying in front of the television. |
| Being Part of the Furry Community Provides me with Practical Support | Its become a source of income when I create fursuits, so it gives me a purpose since my mental disability prevents me from getting another job. Its a bit difficult to explain it to non-furry friends and family but most have been supportive of me. |
| Being Part of the Furry Community Makes me Feel Accepted | Helped, I am bad at making friends but the furry community is welcoming to me, I feel important and cared about |
| Being Part of the Furry Community has affected my Mental Well-being | Being a furry let's me express myself more and get rid of my social anxiety. I do not have an urge to commit suicide whatsoever and am generally happy with how I am for right now. |
| My Fursona Enables Me to Cope | Having a clear understanding of what "ideal-me" looks like and acts like makes everything seem so much easier/better. I can ask myself, "what would my fursona do?" and then -- just do it, instead of freezing up or running to hide in the bathroom. It's really great. |
| Being Part of the Furry Community has Prevented me From Attempting Suicide or Self-Harming | Like I said, I often get support to do things from furries when otherwise I'd be stuck in bed all day. I ended up homeless at one point and probably would've taken my own life if not for some furs who took me in. |

Table 3.8. Commonly Identified Themes and Exemplar Responses to Item

Regarding Participants Experiences with Day to Day Life as a Furry

Being part of the furry community provides me with support.

The first theme was that being a furry provided our participants with support on a day to day basis. This theme consisted of five codes which discussed the ways in which participants felt support from the community.

The community provides social support.

The first code is that the community provided participants with social support and friends. Participants 115, 118 and 119 described how being part of the furry community has given them a wide range of friends as well as helping them establish relationships. The friendships that participants form with other furies in the community can be really important in providing somewhere participants can get support when stressed as described by participant 117, somewhere to relate to others as described by participant 115 or even somewhere which will help when loss occurs as described by participant 116.

It has made me find lots of friends, and people I can talk to, and relate to. It has given me love relationships. It keeps me optimistic. It fulfills me. It's entertaining, it's social, it's great.

Participant 115

When someone very close to me passed away almost 2 years ago, it was the community who helped me through - they gave me strength and friendship. They gave me a reason to get out and about and it really prevented me from dropping into a depressive cycle.

Participant 116

It's actually really helped. My closest friends are members of the fandom who have similar experiences to mine. It's a place where

I can relax and de-stress for a while and it's a place where I know
I can always go for support and fellowship.

Participant 117

The community provides emotional support.

The second code is that the furry community provided participants with emotional support. Participant 116 described how members of the furry community rallied around them and supported them during their loss, and how this support enabled them to get out and avoid a depressive cycle. Participant 121 described that their furry friends know when and how to best support them during times of depression and anxiety, by sticking near and caring for them, as participant 116's friends did for them. Participant 122 reported that they turn to their friends to support them during times of low mood and anxiety. Participant 120 identified that they can access support and advice from them when needed, which was also reported by Participant 123.

A few times it has helped when I had furry friends to talk to for support and advice when I needed it, I really can't say it has been a hinderance in any noticeable way.

Participant 120

Being a furry helps me. With anxiety, my friends whom I met within the fandom help me tremendously by helping me ground myself, and figure out how to push through. With depression,

they stay close, and make sure I know that I do matter, and that I am certainly cared for.

Participant 121

The community provides somewhere to belong.

The third code within this theme was participants gaining a community to which they can belong. Participant 124 reported that this feeling of belonging makes them feel less lonely and more confident. Participant 125 touched on the overall idea of this theme in stating that the community of like-minded others has given them a social support network.

I feel I'm more confident and energetic, I feel like I've found a group where I truly belong, so I feel less lonely.

Participant 124

It's provided me with a group of like-minded others to belong to - a community and social support network.

Participant 125

The community provided a place for relationships.

The fourth code within this theme was how being a part of the furry community had helped participants gain romantic relationships. Participant 118 identified that being a part of the furry community is something which their partners and themselves have in common. Participants 115 and participant 126 both

reported that being part of the furry community is what helped them form happy romantic relationships with other furries.

[Being a furry] has little bearing on my life outside of home; however, it has helped me meet the people that I live with, and those friendships at home are a very positive element of my life. It has also led me to several very happy relationships.

Participant 126

The community provides a safe space.

The fifth code was that the furry community provided participants with a safe space. Participant 127 and 128 reported that they have a safe space online to engage with furry content.

It provides a safe space online, which helps a bit with anxiety.

Participant 127

[Being a furry] hasn't really [impacted day to day life] other than always being a nice safe haven to watch fluff things online to take your mind off of life

Participant 128

Being part of the furry community can be a positive thing.

This theme comprises a wide range of positive consequences of engaging with the furry community but for brevity and ease we will discuss five of them.

The first code within this theme is that being part of the furry community makes participants happy or feel positive.

The community helps me feel happy and positive.

Participants 129 and 132 described how working on their art and engaging with furry art makes them happy and gives them confidence boost. Participants 120 and 132 however reported that they draw their happiness and positivity from the fact that other furies exist and are out there for them to engage with and socialise with. Participant 131 also made reference to the social support system that was discussed in the previous theme.

Oh, absolutely helped! Because of it, I'm MUCH more confident and happy. (Not to say I wasn't before, but through the fandom I developed artistic skills and such, so knowing that I'm REALLY good at something instead of just being "generally good" in most things is really nice.)

Participant 129

It definitely makes me happier, knowing there are people like me. I get a lot of fun and enjoyment out of it [the furry community]

Participant 130

Participating in the fandom brings me unconditional happiness. I get to be with my friends, and a support system I don't fully understand, and these facts bring a joy unexplainable. The

reminder that this exists helps on a regular basis until I see them again.

Participant 131

The community helped me become confident.

The second code in this theme is being part of the furry community has helped participants become more confident. Participant 124, 129 and 133 all described that being a part of the furry community has made them more confident as a result. Participant 133 stated that they no longer feel ashamed about being a furry.

It has helped me in getting out and meeting people with common interests, and gaining confidence in social situations. Essentially pulling me out of my shell and not feeling ashamed of who i was.

Participant 133

The community helped me discover my passion.

The third code in this theme is that being a part of the furry community helped participants discover their passion or discover some inspiration. Participant 134 and 135 both discuss how being part of the furry community has inspired them both to follow their passions to create visual art / medium. Participant 136 also describes how they, like participant 135 want to get better at their art.

Honestly, it helped me figure out my passions in life, and is leading me towards a college degree in graphical design.

Participant 134

It hasn't hindered it at all. It's given me a passion that I can explore. This passion has made me want to be better at a lot of things, like art and writing.

Participant 135

The community has helped me grow as a person.

The fourth code within this theme is that participants reported feeling like they had grown as people for being a part of the furry community.

Participant 137 and 138 discussed that they have had less issues with depression and anxiety as a result of being part of the furry community.

It has helped me to be more confident in myself, and to think of myself as a better person, to help focus and control my chronic depression and chronic anxiety better.

Participant 137

It has honestly been the best decision I have made. My mental health is 100 times better. I am more outgoing, my social anxiety has nearly disappeared, and I look forward to meeting new people. It has been a night and day difference and has made a massively positive impact on my life.

Participant 138

The community helped me understand my gender or sexual identity.

The final code from this theme is that furies have gained a greater understanding of their sexuality and gender identity as a result of engaging with the furry community. Participants 139 and 140 identified that being a part of the furry community enabled them to explore and work through their gender and sexuality issues.

it's helped me cope with my some gender and sexuality issues as well as offer support for some of my mental issues and past trauma.

Participant 139

Being a furry allows me to express myself in a creative way. It encourages me to write and draw more often than I usually do. It also helps me get in touch with my spirituality and sexuality more.

Participant 140

Being part of the furry community can be a negative thing.

This theme comprises a wide range of negative consequences of engaging with the furry community but for brevity and ease we will discuss five of them.

The community distracts me from the real world.

The first code within this theme is that being part of the furry community leads to participants being distracted from the non-furry world. Participant 141

identified that they engaged with the furry community as a way of coping with their life stressors, however this resulted in them being distracted from studying, the very thing they are avoiding the stress of. Participant 142 reported that they sometimes spent too much time in the furry community but that overall it did not impact them significantly.

[The furry community] Helped me cope with pressures of life and school, but sometimes takes time away from studying

Participant 141

Well, it certainly is a time-waster, and sometimes if you spend too much time with it, you'll find yourself ignoring your other duties, but ultimately I'd say it hasn't affected much.

Participant 142

I do not feel comfortable disclosing my identity.

The second code in this theme was participants reporting that one of the consequences of being a part of the furry community is not feeling comfortable disclosing their furry identity. We have already discussed the reasons why participants do not feel comfortable disclosing their identity above.

Other furies cause stress and frustration.

The third code within this theme was that participants found that other furies could cause them stress and frustration. The most commonly reported cause of stress or frustration was interpersonal drama, this is what participants 143 and 144 referred to. This drama seems focused around people engaging in

behaviours which manipulate others for personal gain as described by participant 145.

It gives me something to look forward to every morning. Seeing peoples messages and comments, their artwork etc. It has also been a hindrance because of drama.

Participant 144

...There's a lot of understanding and support to be found in the community, but sadly also several people in my personal experience who try to manipulate and use their own poor mental health in getting what they want. Ranging from wanting free art, to manipulating people towards breaking up relationships, forcing friendship and such.

Participant 145

I fear being harassed for being a furry.

The fourth code in this theme is that participants report that they either fear being harassed or having been harassed for being a furry. Like disclosure, this is also discussed above.

Being a part of the furry community gives me an escape.

This theme covers the idea that for members of the furry community engaging with the community gives them an escape or break from their lives.

Participant 146 described how being part of the furry community was their way of escaping the “tough shit” thrown at them. Participants 147, 148 and

149 all explained how they use the furry community as an escape from the pressures of their lives. Participant 148 described that their escape into the furry community as providing them an alternate reality where they do not have their daily stressors, which is also seen in participant 149's response. Participant 149 highlighted how the problems are still there even after the 'escape'.

Well, when I was 16 and first got involved, it helped me quite a lot. By removing myself from my life I was able to get through some of the tough shit that was thrown at me.

Participant 146

Gives me a bit of a playful outlet that allows me to be myself in a controlled environment, an alternate reality where I'm still myself but without the pressure of everyday life.

Participant 148

It gives me something to look forward to after work. I'm in a bad spot financially, having a way to hop online and just forget about it all is great. The problems are still there, and being handle, but it's nice to just let it go instead of dying in front of the television.

Participant 149

Being a part of the furry community provides me with practical support.

This theme encapsulated the practical and direct ways in which being a part of the furry community has helped participants.

The community helps me support myself financially.

The first code was that participants reported that they were able to support themselves financially as a result of being a part of the furry community. Participant 150 described how they produce art commissions for other furies as a way to earn income. They also describe how this provides stability in their life without creating too much pressure, suggesting other jobs might create too much pressure for Participant 150. Participant 151 reported that they have a disability which prevents them finding other jobs and that the fursuit commissions allow them to earn money where they might have struggled elsewhere.

I do a lot of commission work for people in the fandom, which gives me both a pretty decent lump of money each month as well as something to occupy myself with. It gives me a job that helps create stability in my life but don't put too much pressure on me.

Participant 150

Its become a source of income when I create fursuits, so it gives me a purpose since my mental disability prevents me from getting another job. Its a bit difficult to explain it to non-furry friends and family but most have been supportive of me.

Participant 151

The community helped me find accommodation.

The second code in this theme was that participants reported that they were able to find accommodation thanks to other furrries. Participant 152 describes a wide range other supports and benefits they have gained from other furrries, including accommodation and relationship support. Participant 153 describes how other furrries were able to support them during their homelessness and participant 153 credits these other furrries as likely having saved their life.

It has gotten me two apartments to share with others, deals, friends, and all around a general improvement in how I live my life. Talking to furrries helped me realize my previous relationship wasn't working out, helped me walk through the breakup process, and I've found new people to spend my time with.

Participant 152

Like I said, I often get support to do things from furrries when otherwise I'd be stuck in bed all day. I ended up homeless at one point and probably would've taken my own life if not for some furs who took me in.

Participant 153

Being a part of the furry community makes me feel accepted.

This theme covered the ways in which participants reported as feeling accepted by the furry community. The first code in this theme is that the furry

community makes participants feel accepted, and has been discussed already as one of positive benefits of engaging with the furry community.

The furry community gives me a safe space.

The second code in this theme is that participants felt that they gained a safe space out as a result of engaging with the furry community, and that this safe space was something they benefited from on a day to day basis. Participant 154 and 155 identified that the community provides them with a safe space, and participant 155 reports that this safe space is primarily online.

It has given me a support network of friends, coming from diverse backgrounds and with diverse (non-furry) interests. It has given me a safe space.

Participant 154

It provides a safe space online, which helps a bit with anxiety.

Participant 155

The community helps me express myself.

The third code is that participants felt that the furry community enabled them to express themselves better. Participant 156 reported that the furry community also helped them form their identity. For some participants, like Participants 156 and 158, when they reported feeling more comfortable expressing their identity it was linked with becoming more confident (which has already been discussed above). For others, like Participant 157, the community gave them a place to express their personality without judgement.

It's helped a little by boosting confidence and solidifying identity.

Partner 156

Its helped me by giving me an outlet to better express my personality and artistic abilities. It has hindered me only because of the public's view of furries, making it tricky for me to talk about with non furs.

Participant 157

I mean, being a furry and my work being in the furry fandom has made me more confident in myself and expressing myself, so it helps

Participant 158

Being a part of the furry community has helped with my mental well-being.

This theme and code measure the ways that participants reported that being in the furry community helped their mental well-being.

Participant 159 discussed how being a part of the furry community improved their mental well-being by improving their confidence and their self-perception. Participant 160 identified that being a part of the furry community has helped with their anxiety and depression alongside their panic disorder.

It has helped me to be more confident in myself, and to think of myself as a better person, to help focus and control my chronic depression and chronic anxiety better.

Participant 159

It has helped me explore activities and sides of my personality that I wouldn't necessarily have ever explored. It has helped me work towards my goal of overcoming anxiety and panic, and it played a role in my success in overcoming depression.

Participant 160

My fursona enables me to cope with day-to-day life.

Participants identified that they felt that they were able to better cope with day to day life thanks to the support from their fursona. This theme encapsulated the idea that participants use their fursona to motivate themselves, to relax or calm down, or to escape from life stressors.

Participants 161 and 162 made reference to how their fursona is the 'better' or 'ideal' version of themselves. They both describe how understanding or imagining their fursona has allowed them to tackle tasks and avoid freezing up or running away. Participant 163 described how they are able escape into their fursona's world through art to feel better or escape real world stresses.

Occasionally I imagine my fursona to power through episodes of lack of motivation or make difficult decisions. He is wiser,

psychologically stronger, and more rigorously principled than I am.

Participant 161

Having a clear understanding of what "ideal-me" looks like and acts like makes everything seem so much easier/better. I can ask myself, "what would my fursona do?" and then -- just do it, instead of freezing up or running to hide in the bathroom. It's really great.

Participant 162

It helps in the sense that I can escape my real world issues by zoning into and drawing [My Fursona]'s world. She, and drawing in general, helps me feel better when I'm down

Participant 163

Being a part of the furry community has reduced my suicidal ideation and self-harm.

This theme is based on the participants who reported that the furry community allowed them to get support or had their well-being improved sufficiently that they were not interested in attempting suicide or self-harm.

Participant 153 described how if it were not for other furies helping during their period of homelessness, they would likely have attempted to take

their life. Participant 164 also reported that if it were not for their furry friends being a support option, they would likely have also attempted to end their life.

Like I said, I often get support to do things from furries when otherwise I'd be stuck in bed all day. I ended up homeless at one point and probably would've taken my own life if not for some furs who took me in.

Participant 153

My friends I have made in the fandom are probably the only people who have kept me from attempting to end my life when my health issues left me feeling like I had absolutely no other options. They kept me sane when even my doctors and family didn't take me seriously.

Participant 164

How the Furry Community Has Helped Furrries to Cope with Life Stressors

The following themes are the themes found from participants responses to the question "How has being a part of the furry community made you better able to cope with stressors you face in life? We will briefly discuss each of the themes from Table 3.9 along with the codes and quotes that the themes comprise of. Where these themes share similarities with the themes discussed above we will briefly comment on any relevant responses. There were 68 codes within the responses to this item, which then were reduced to seven themes which can be seen on Table 3.9 below.

| How has being a part of the furry fandom | has made you better able to cope with the stressors you face in life? |
|--|---|
| Theme | Example |
| Social Network of Support | They're not blindly positive. They're realistically optimistic. They help me see the logic in actually doing things. They're there for me when I need to vent, I've even received monetary charity from furs when down on my luck. Many of the times I've contemplated suicide over the last year, there's always been a fur there for me, watching out for me. They're a damn good reason to keep going. |
| Escapism | As a kid, I was bullied a lot for various reasons (mental health, behavioral problems, and being in serious poverty). It was great to be able to go home and "log on" into a world full of color and life. Suddenly I wasn't a kid who couldn't afford lunch, I was a dragon or cat person or whatever. I'd say it was also some of my first experiences experimenting with being other genders than my assigned one. |
| Outlet for Emotions | It offers both an outlet of personal expression, sexual expression, and social connection. It's a sense of personal security and reinforcing my ego that I don't otherwise have. |
| Engaging with Furry Content | Again, the art makes me happy. I work with the government, and I am directly responsible for the deaths of an ever rising number of people, so being able to come home and see happy innocent art makes the world feel less like fire and destruction and a little more like sparkles and rainbows. |
| My Fursona Enables Me to Cope | Occasionally I imagine my fursona to power through episodes of lack of motivation or make difficult decisions. He is wiser, psychologically stronger, and more rigorously principled than I am. |
| The Other Furies Undersand and Support | I can be able to communicate with others who have similar experiences and understanding as myself. I have a stronger support system than I have ever had in any of the previous years in my life. I have people who accept me for who I am. |
| It's Made Me Grow as a Person | Non-directly. It's helped me be more confident in myself and grow into the person I want to be, so I have the frame of mind to deal with stressors. |

Table 3.9. Commonly Identified Themes and Exemplar Responses to Item Regarding How Participants are Able to Cope with Life Stressors as a Result of Being a Furry.

Social network of support.

This theme is based on participants reporting that they gained a social network as a result of being a part of the furry community. Participants also made reference to how this social network provides them with support.

The community provides a social network.

The first code in this theme is that participants reported gaining a social network within the community. Participant 165 highlighted the globally

connected nature of the furry community and that they can get support or socialise with other furries from anywhere in the world. Participant 166 and 167 both identified that there is a support network always present for them if they need it. Participant 166 also identified that they can talk and seek advice about topics they would struggle with in the real world.

It has given me access to more friends with a wider range of experiences, since internet friends come from all over the world. It has helped me find time to decompress from stressors and have fun relaxing with those friends, whether that's talking online or hanging out with people I've met near me. It augments the way I naturally make friends outside of furry circles.

Participant 165

It's provided me with a support network, as well as an online resource to seek help about subject matters like sex & relationships that I would otherwise be difficult to find in RL. It's also provided a space for me to express myself artistically and creatively with a like-minded audience who support my work. It's cathartic being able to have these conversations with friends and role models.

Participant 166

I feel like I always have a support team to back me up if I need help

Participant 167

The community helped me make friends.

The second code within this theme is that participants were able to make friends within the furry community, who then provided support for them.

Participant 165 described how their furry friends help them decompress and relax. Participants 166 and 169 described how their furry friends are there for them when they need to talk and work through problems. Participant 168 shows how furry friends can provide support even if a person is stuck in a hospital bed.

The community is very open about personal struggles and mental health. In the specific community I participate in (Reddit), there are weekly threads for people to address their concerns, and others will respond with advice or encouragement.

Participant 170

The community provides emotional support.

The third code for this theme was that participants were able to get emotional support from members of the community. Participant 170 described how the specific community provides a thread for furries to seek and provide emotional support with the issues that they are facing.

The community is willing to listen to me.

The fourth code is participants have a community which listens to them. Participant 171 described how the furry community provides an accessible alternative to conventional therapy and that the furry community provides them

with the ability to seek support at their times of need. Participant 170 describes that their community also provides this service through their weekly threads.

Professional help has two issues for me, affordability (it is too expensive) and sparseness (it doesn't happen often enough/when needed, often resulting in several days between an event and the first appointment available). The furry fandom has provided people willing to listen and helpful in defusing or reducing issues and, more at large, has accepted me for what I am

Participant 171

Escapism.

This theme has been primarily covered above and therefore will not be covered in depth here. It is worth presenting and discussing two responses from participants which are of interest.

Participant 172 highlighted that they used the furry community as an escape since childhood and that it allowed them to connect with a positive world which had the things their real world may have been lacking. The other aspect of participant 172's response that is worth highlighting is that this escape allowed participant 172 to begin exploring their gender identity. Participant 173 discussed how the furry community allows them to take a breather and take care of themselves despite all of the stressors in the world.

As a kid, I was bullied a lot for various reasons (mental health, behavioral problems, and being in serious poverty). It was great to be able to go home and "log on" into a world full of color and life. Suddenly I wasn't a kid who couldn't afford lunch, I was a dragon or cat person or whatever. I'd say it was also some of my first experiences experimenting with being other genders than my assigned one.

Participant 172

Sometimes, the world is really stressful. Politics, crime, war, etc. And I tend to take each little thing on, a lot of times. This often results in panic attacks and stress. In the furry fandom, I can at the very least take a breath. Draw something. Relax for a moment. Be able to just stop thinking about the world's problems and focus on actually taking care of myself for once.

Participant 173

Outlet for emotions.

This theme discusses how participants identify that the furry community provides them a way to relax and or get an emotional release or outlet.

Participants 173 and 175 identified that they used the furry community as a way of disconnecting from their real-world stressors and unwind and recover.

Participant 174 discussed how they use the furry community as an outlet for talking or creating art about the problems they face in the real world. The

majority of participants who reported using it as an outlet made mention of how venting or using it as an emotional outlet helped them de-stress.

The community (especially on tumblr) gives me an outlet to talk and make art about problems that are too hard to say out loud and deal with in the 'real' world, and gives me something nice to daydream about when things get too rough.

Participant 174

It provides an emotional 'out' after a tough day; a way to disconnect and mentally recover, you might say. When I'm interacting with furries or am simply in a furry-friendly atmosphere, I feel separated from my 'real-life' emotions and problems, and can just forget about them for a while and be someone else (e.g. my fursona). It's a great way to unwind and relax after a stressful day.

Participant 175

Engaging with furry content.

This theme covered the ways that participants reported engaging with furry content as a way of improving their ability to cope with life stressors. The responses fell into two categories; creating furry content and engaging furry content. Participant 176 painted a very clear picture about how their engagement with and enjoyment of furry art provides a positive perspective on an otherwise difficult situation. Participant 177 reported that they both engage

with furry content and create furry content as a way of handling life stressors.

Similarly, participant 174 also reported creating furry art as a means of working through stressors.

Again, the art makes me happy. I work with the government, and I am directly responsible for the deaths of an ever rising number of people, so being able to come home and see happy innocent art makes the world feel less like fire and destruction and a little more like sparkles and rainbows.

Participant 176

When I am stressed or upset, I usually go to Youtube to watch videos from other furs, or I will draw my sona on my graphics tablet. I will also talk to other fur friends about how I feel, or we'll talk about things that make me happy, like food or art.

Participant 177

My fursona enables me to cope.

This theme has been primarily covered above and therefore, in the interest of brevity, it will not be covered at length here. This theme contained the codes: I can envision, roleplay or think like my fursona to find comfort, I can envision, roleplay or think like my fursona to escape, I can envision, roleplay or think like my fursona to work through a task, and I can envision, roleplay or think like my fursona to work through my emotions.

Other furies understand and provide support.

This theme captures the way that participants feel that other members of the furry community provide support and understanding to participants as other furies know what the harassment and other struggles are like.

I can talk to other furies.

The first code in this theme is that participants felt comfortable talking to other furies who understood the participants. Participants 178 and 179 both identified that the similar experiences that furies have enable the participants to feel understood. Participant 178 reported that this understanding has given them a strong support system where they are accepted for who they are. Participant 179 reported that they feel other furies understand them better than non-furies would and that this enables them to cope better.

I can be able to communicate with others who have similar experiences and understanding as myself. I have a stronger support system than I have ever had in any of the previous years in my life. I have people who accept me for who I am.

Participant 178

My furry friends enable me to have people who understand me and the different aspects of my life even the sides that non-furry friends don't know about and make it easier to cope as I have someone to talk to about it

Participant 179

I know I'm not alone.

The second code in this theme is that participants felt able to cope with life stressors because they know they're not alone. Participant 181 reported that knowing that they're not the only one that faces challenges and they're not alone helps them cope with life stressors. Participant 180 reported that they know they always have people they can talk to such as friends who are always there for them.

When I go home, I have people to talk to, and to me, even just talking to someone, helps me. I know I am never alone, people out there legitimately care about me not just see me as another number on a list; as a counsellor, or psychiatrist does.

Participant 180

It's welcoming to know I'm not alone there are others that face challenges just as well, and they are not alone as well.

Participant 181

It's made me grow as a person.

This theme is also covered in the above results, and it included participant's reported feelings of confidence, improved mental well-being and having a place where participants feel safe to explore their sexual and gender identity.

Chapter 4

Discussion

The current research was the first, to our knowledge, to report the prevalence and potential predictive factors for suicide, anxiety and depression within the furry community. We sought to examine the relationships of the potential risk and protective factors on these mental health factors using regression and correlational analysis. It therefore will contribute to the literature on this population as well as for the topics of suicide for minority groups. It is important that the findings of this present research are interpreted in the context of other minority groups as there is limited research performed with this participant group and there has been no research investigating the mental well-being of this participant group.

Mental Well-being in the Furry Community

Furries are one and a half times more likely than members of other stigmatised groups to attempt suicide. This indicates that furries are at significantly higher risk of attempting suicide than other minority groups. They are significantly more at risk than the general population for attempting and contemplating suicide (Nock et al., 2008). It was expected that we would see a similar suicide attempt rate as other minority groups due to the similar harassment and difficulties faced by furries and other minority groups. The higher rate of suicide attempts in the furry could be a result of the furry community having both a high rate of other minority group members, who are already subject to stigmatisation which is compounded upon by furry

stigmatisation. These findings could be expanded upon by assessing if minority identity (e.g. LGBTQ+) furries had a different suicide rate to non-minority identity furries. This would first examine if there is a furry-specific effect on suicide attempts, then allow for assessment of the significance of this furry-specific effect.

We investigated a range of predictor variables which were expected have an effect on participants' suicidal ideation and found that bullying both general and furry-specific, disclosure, fanship and guilt all had weak positive relationships with suicidal ideation. Fanship and disclosure were expected to be protective factors and therefore were expected to be positively associated with suicidal ideation, though we did not find this. A logistical regression indicated that bullying for being a furry, disclosure, fanship and guilt for participation are not associated whether or not a participant is likely to have contemplated suicide in the past 12 months. However, it is likely that other variables are also associated with participant suicidal ideation which have been suppressed by general bullying in the model.

An increase in bullying in general was found to be a small but significant influence on increasing a participant's likelihood of attempting suicide. Although we were more interested in furry-specific bullying, the finding that the general bullying is linked with increased risk of attempting suicide is important because furries have been found to experience a greater level of general bullying during their lifetime (Plante et al., 2016). We expected that bullying in general and furry-specific bullying would both be associated with suicide based on the

findings of Mustanski and Liu (2013). We found that general bullying associated with all mental well-being factors, but furry-specific bullying was not associated with any of them. This could be because the measures for general bullying and furry-specific bullying were not distinct enough and participants may have responded to the items without knowing that they were assessing different measures.

The personal experiences of furries was assessed to compliment the findings of the quantitative analysis. However, where there is no evidence in the statistical analysis we can also examine the participants personal experiences to see if the variable was present but not caught in our assessment. We only saw limited evidence that supported social support from friends as a protective factor. So we examined personal experiences and we found participants reporting that social support and practical support from members of the furry community was a protective factor against self-harming and suicide. Participants discussed how the friends and connections they had made were there during these times of great emotional stress. Participants also reported that they gained an improved mental well-being as a result of engaging with the community. Participants reported that the social support they gained helped reduced social anxiety and provided a place for them to get advice or understanding when they were feeling depressed or stressed.

The social support these furries have experienced has clearly been important and this supports the research that social support is a protective factor for mental well-being in minority groups. Despite the lack of statistical

evidence, these experiences show social support may still be an important protective factor for mental well-being. This means that for at least some furries, social support is a protective factor which reduces their risk of suicide and self-harm.

We found that anxiety was more prevalent in furries than depression was with just under half of the participants meeting the clinical criteria for anxiety and just over two in five participants meeting the clinical diagnostic criteria for depression. This suggests that the rate of furries with anxiety or depression is higher than the 6.1% of participants reported to have anxiety and the 16.1% reported to have depression as reported in previous research (Plante et al., 2016).

These rates indicate that there is a likely to be a higher rate of depression or anxiety than previously thought. It is likely that a portion of the participants who scored in the clinical range have not been diagnosed and therefore if asked if they have any prior mental disorders or issues they would not be represented. The measures for assessing anxiety and depression prevalence were likely different as participants were asked to report if they had been diagnosed with anxiety or mood disorder. the online recruitment of participants would more likely recruit participants who would have not attended conferences as result of their mental illness symptoms. Future research should examine the rate of furries diagnosed with a mental illness such as anxiety or depression through online recruitment to assess the participants who otherwise would not be able to attend convention based surveys.

The present research investigated a range of predictor variables which were expected to be associated on participants depression and anxiety scores and found that bullying both general and furry-specific, perceived social support had weak relationships with depression and bullying both general and furry-specific, perceived social support, fanship and guilt for participant all had weak relationships with anxiety. After performing a linear regression, we found that an increase in participants bullying in general bullying score was associated with an increase in participants depression score. We also saw general bullying having the same association on anxiety as depression and expect that for anxiety and depression the high rates of participant scoring above minimal is may be a result of the higher rate of bullying that furries face over all. The high level of bullying and harassment faced by participants may drive the higher rates of poor mental well-being as harassment and bullying are some of the stressors that are linked with poor minority mental well-being (Meyer, 2003).

The present research also found that an increase in participants perceived social support from families score was related with a decreased anxiety score. This is what we were expecting, as Mustanski and colleagues (2011) found that perceived social support, including perceived social support from families was one of the key variables associated with improved mental well-being in lesbian and gay people. This finding indicates that social support from family members is a protective factor for anxiety within the furry community. It is important to be clear that this relationship is weak and thus further

investigation should be performed into how social support is utilised by furries, including using a comprehensive social support measure.

Each of the regression models for suicide, anxiety and depression accounted for less than 10% of the variance for each well-being measure. Our predictor variables only accounted for a small fraction of the mental health outcomes experienced by furries. This could be partly explained by measurement error with the measurements of the constructs. The models nevertheless provide an insight into the factors that contribute to mental well-being within the furry community. However, the low variance accounted for suggests that further research is needed.

Bullying

We investigated the prevalence of bullying in the furry community and found that over a third of our participants reported having been bullied or discriminated against for being a furry with just over a third of participants also reporting being harassed or being made to feel shame for being a furry. Over half of furries reported that had not felt any furry-specific bullying or harassment.

Repeated harassment or exposure to harassment and prejudice can lead to internalised stigma (Lorenzi, et al., 2015) and it is also considered a contributing factor towards minority mental well-being. To investigate if this harassment had an effect on mental well-being in participants we tested if there was a relationship between participants' reported levels of furry-specific bullying and suicide, anxiety and depression and it was found that both a participant's general level of non-furry specific and furry-specific bullying were associated

with a higher likelihood of a participant having contemplated suicide in the past twelve months. It was also found that both categories of bullying were also associated with higher depression and anxiety scores. Upon performing the regression analysis, it was found that furry-specific bullying did not contribute to the participants suicidal contemplation or anxiety and depression scores. General bullying was found to be statically significantly associated to these scores.

It was expected that the level of furry-specific bullying would be associated with and contributing to participants mental well-being as minority specific harassment is a contributing factor towards negative mental well-being outcomes in Meyer's (2003) minority model of stress. However, it is possible that this minority specific harassment is being moderated by other factors from the minority stress model including identity concealment or disclosure, the coping methods, and social support participants reported gaining as a part of the furry community.

Alongside the items asking about the extent of which participants felt they were bullied, we also asked participants to describe the common characteristics of their experiences of being bullied for being a furry.

The most commonly reported aspect of the bullying participants faced was derogatory zoophilia comments or terms such as "animal fucker" or accusing participants of bestiality, with over 15% of participants who reported having faced these terms without being asked about them directly. This indicates that there is a misconception amongst some of the general population regarding

what the furry community is about. This is likely because of the sensationalist nature of media, with furies having been presented as sexual deviants. These comments indicate that the misconception that members of the general public have is that the furry community is a sexual community or that the sexual aspect of the community is representative of the community as a whole.

Another idea that was present in the responses was participants being accused of being gay, or the word gay as a derogatory term, or other gay derogatory terms. The common assumption that furies are all gay is one that can be attributed to two factors, the first being that the majority of furies are men, with this present research finding that just shy of 60% of participants identified as male, and previous research finding 72.4% of participants identifying as male (Plante, et al., 2016). The second factor is based on the fact that previous research found that that furies were 7 times more likely to identify as gay compared to non-furies (Plante, et al., 2016) and this present research finding that 50% of participants identifying as at least incidentally, if not more than incidentally attracted to the same gender. Of our participants 35% of men identified as predominately heterosexual and 16 % identified as exclusively heterosexual.

Disclosure of Furry Identity

The overall trend in participants disclosure of identity was that participants felt more comfortable disclosing to better known groups such as friends, partners and family, than distantly know or unknown groups such as work peers, work supervisors and strangers.

This level of closeness was seen in the thematic results where the most commonly reported groups that participants were comfortable disclosing to was furry and non-furry close friends, partners, and family. As was found in the themes and codes on in sections 3.9 and 3.10, participants reported that these friends and other close connections provided them with social support to help mitigate their bad days or the harassment they faced for being a furry.

As was found by Plante and colleagues (2016), nearly half of furries live at home with family or parents. This could explain why so many participants made comment about whether they could disclose to their parents. This may also explain some of why perceived social support was seen as more important by participants, as well as being found to be associated with mental well-being. It may be the case that these responses were made by people who lived with their parents as this present research as the average age of our participants is 23 and 27.8% of participants were aged 18 or younger.

Participants repeatedly identified that they need closeness and understanding with the person being disclosed to, and we can see a drop off in participants reported comfort disclosing to groups as the level of closeness to the participant decreases. This distance leads to a drop off for most participants but for some participants complete separation from the person being disclosed to, namely if they are a stranger, enables them to feel comfortable to disclose. We see in the participants responses regarding where they feel comfortable that if a person is understanding they are likely to be more comfortable disclosing even if they are a stranger. Participants reported that they were comfortable

with strangers so long as they are understanding or interested in the furry community.

Concealment of identity is a minority stress process which contributes to poor mental well-being. We found that disclosure of identity was associated with a participant's likelihood of contemplating suicide but not with depression or anxiety scores. The regression analysis found that disclosure did not contribute to any of the mental well-being measures. It was expected that low disclosure of identity would be associated with poor mental health outcomes as seen in the Minority Model of Stress. This disparity could be because the community provides a place where furries can express themselves openly without fear of judgement, outside of their day-to-day lives, as was reported by participants. It is also possible that the measure for assessing disclosure of identity was not appropriate for assessing the relationship between disclosure and mental well-being.

Support for Furry Identity

We investigated the level of perceived social support for being a furry from friends and from family members and then analysed the influence this perceived social support had upon participants mental well-being. Participants reported significantly greater perceived social support from friends compared to family, with 81.9% of participants reporting feeling at least somewhat supported for being a furry compared to 51.5% of participants reporting perceived support from family. Upon analysing the effect these two social support measures had upon participant's mental well-being it was found that perceived social support

from friends had no impact on a participant's depression or anxiety scores whereas perceived family support was found to have a weak negative relationship with a participant's depression or anxiety scores. There have been no studies investigating how social support influences mental well-being for the furry community so we drew comparisons with LGBTQ+ population studies. Since these communities are both minority identity communities and therefore are expected to have similar outcomes. The present research findings differed from what was expected based on the work by Mustanski and colleagues (2011) which found that perceived social support from family and especially friends had a significant impact on well-being for lesbian and gay minorities. The difference between findings may have been due to the use of non-standardised measures. The present research used single item measures which were not drawn from other existing social support measures. The findings likely could be improved by using a scale measure of perceived social support like the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) which was used by Mustanski and colleagues (2011). The use of a scale measure would enable greater reliability and coverage of the entire construct of social support

Guilt Over Fandom Participation

We found that less than 10% of the population reported feeling any guilt on a daily or near daily level regarding their participation in the furry community, with over 50% of the population reporting feeling no guilt at all for participating the furry community.

We analysed if feelings of guilt for participation had any impact on a participant's mental well-being and found that there was a very weak positive relationship between guilt for participation and depression. This correlation is likely very weak as the majority of the community reported feeling little to no guilt over participating in the furry community.

Fanship

On average, participants reported a moderate to strong level of fanship across all 11 items in the fanship scale. We found that there was a very weak positive relationship between fanship and suicide contemplation in the past 12 months and also between fanship and anxiety scores. This was the opposite of what was expected, it is unclear as to why this is the case. Fanship may be unrelated to mental well-being due to the very low relationship between the two.

As this present research is an exploratory piece of research all significant relationships will be considered as areas for further research including this one.

Number of Furry Friends

We asked participants to report how many friends they saw or spoke with on a weekly basis and how many of those friends were furies. We found that on average participants has 3.5 furry friends and 7.5 friends in total that they see or speak with on a weekly basis. We then ranked participants reported number of furry friends and tested if the number of reported friends had any impact on participants mental well-being. It was found to not be significantly related to suicide, anxiety or depression, and no further analysis was performed. It was

expected that number of furry friends would be associated with an improvement in participants mental well-being as more friends who identify the same as you would reduce feelings of isolation as seen in the minority model of stress by making them feel less of a need to conceal their identity. Additionally, it was expected that the increased number of furry friends would improve mental well-being through providing greater social support for fellow furies, as Mustanski and colleagues (2011) had found that social support from friends was associated with improve mental well-being for other minority groups. Neither number of furry friends or social support from friends was associated with improved mental well-being despite evidence from previous research suggesting they would be. It is possible that restriction of range contributed to this lack of associations. As almost all or all of the participants were already well connected to the furry community and had furry friends and that furies who were socially isolated may not have been picked up in this study. Whereas previous research may have found a number of LGBT members who were isolated from their communities.

This indicates that further research is needed to unpack this area and test these findings from previous research.

Participants identified that being a furry has both benefits and negatives. The negatives have mostly been discussed in terms of bullying and harassment, and struggling with disclosing a furry identity due to stigma and prejudice. The potential protective factors such as disclosure, social support and fanship were found to have limited correlation with mental well-being. However, participants have identified their personal experiences of being a part of the furry community

and how that has influenced the life and their ability to cope with life stressors.

The final sections outline a discussion of these experiences.

Influence of Furry Community on Daily Life

Based on the responses participants have given to the items described above we can comfortably say that the furry community provides a place for furries to express themselves without fear of the minority stress processes that lead to poor mental well-being.

A significant majority of participants reported feeling that the furry community helped them deal with life stressors. Specifically, participants identified that they had access to a wide range of support systems as part of the furry community including social support and friends, emotional support, acceptance, as well as the already discussed support around suicide and self-harm, and mental well-being. We can see that Mock and Colleagues (2013) findings were supported, and that the engagement with the furry community leads to greater levels of social support.

Participants report that through the furry community they were able to seek advice, emotional support, and practical support through contacting other furries. The emotional support that participants reported seeking or receiving involved many areas including participant's wanting to vent during stressful times, or seeking advice without being judged for being a furry.

Some participants reported that the furry community gave them access to practical support. This was seen where participants were able to get accommodation or financial support when their options ran out. Participants

reported that the furry fandom gave them a source of income, a source of self-sufficiency and for some without this job they would not be able to support themselves.

Many participants identified that it was exclusively the furry community that helped with daily life, but it was engaging with the art produced from the community or engaging with their fursona which helped them cope. The creation or consumption of furry art was reported by many participants as something which made them happy or made them feel better. Many participants described how they used these behaviours along with others to gain a temporary escape from life stressors. It's likely that for some furies the community provides a way for them to emotionally regulate during times of distress, similar to how video gamers will play to avoid tension.

The furry community accepts and welcomes furies and provides a place where they do not need to conceal their furry identity. This is because they are in a situation, either online or at conventions, where they are no longer the minority identity. The nature of fursonas also challenges the need to conceal identity because a furry can express themselves openly and freely with their fursona online and at social gatherings without having to reveal their real identity, if they do not wish to.

Chapter 5

Limitations

When this research project was initiated the main focus was investigating the risk and protective factors within the furry community however we were unsure exactly what these factors would be, so this present research pursued an exploratory breadth over depth approach. This allowed for the present research to test a wide range of risk factors, but it may have prevented the present research from testing using more in-depth hypotheses and measures.

One limitation was that certain items were not made clear as to what they were measuring. Items around bullying were intended as all measuring bullying specifically for being a furry however after reviewing the responses it became clear that by accident the questions had been asked as two separate measures. We therefore categorised these responses as independent and separated them in the presentation, analysis and interpretation of these results allowing us to see the evidence of the increased level of bullying that furries faced This could have been resolved by using specific measures for each area of interest and make sure that each item is explicit in what it is measuring to both participants and researchers.

Due to the weak relationships between factors and mental health measures and the lack of expected relationships we must be careful with the interpretation of the results to avoid presenting the relationship as more

significant and influential than it may be. Thankfully the present research is able to make more confident comments about the prevalence of bullying that furies face along with who they feel comfortable disclosing to because of supporting statements and evidence found in participants responses about these specific risk factors.

It is possible that the low level of associated and correlated measures is due to restriction of range. This was seen in several variables: Bullying for being a furry where 88% of participants scored median or below, disclosure where 79.9% of participants scored median or below, and perceived social support from friends where 73.7% of participants scored above median. This meant we were unlikely to see accurate correlations or associations between these variables and our mental well-being measures which were close to normal distribution. Finally, as this study is cross-sectional it is impossible to imply causal direction from the results of the study.

Future Research

The findings of this research have identified that there is greater research needed into what factors influence the mental well-being of members of the furry community. The present research has indicated some of the factors and their influence or lack thereof on furry mental well-being. With these findings being exploratory having additional research in this field would be a good way of validating this research's findings. Social Support has been found to be a significant protective factor for mental well-being, as the findings by Mustanski

and Liu (2013) show the participant's personal experiences as well show it.

Despite our social support measures having no association with mental well-being, this could be explored better through the use of a standardised measure such as the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

Additionally, Future research could examine the rate of furries diagnosed with a mental illness such as anxiety or depression through online recruitment to assess the participants who otherwise would not be able to attend convention based surveys. This would likely provide a more accurate prevalence rates for furries with a mental illness compared to the findings of this research and the findings of Plante and colleagues (2013)

Conclusion

Overall the present research found that there was a high prevalence of suicide anxiety and depression within the furry community. We found that the furry suicide rate was higher than for other minority groups. We also found that over 40% of participants scored in the clinical range for either depression or anxiety which is double and seven times the previously recorded rates respectively for this community.

Our findings suggest that there are several risk and protective factors which influence the mental well-being for members of the furry community. We found limited statistical evidence that these risk factors were associated with mental well-being, contrary to what was seen in previous research into other minority groups. There is likely a dimension of the furry community which is not

being accounted for in these measures. The furry community is likely be providing social support as discussed by many participants, however the measures used in this research are not appropriate for measuring the influence of social support in this community. Bullying for non-furry specific reasons was found to be significantly associated with all mental well-being measures, and fanship was found to be associated with anxiety and depression.

We saw high levels of bullying for furies, which supported reasons participants gave for not feeling comfortable disclosing their furry identity to certain groups. We saw high levels of disclosure to close social groups and lower disclosure to more distant groups, with the exception of strangers.

We saw participants identify a range of ways in which being a part of the furry community helped their daily lives. The first being the high level of social support and wide social network that furies form, which can provide them with both practical and emotional support. We also found participants reporting engaging with furry content and their fursonas as a means of avoiding or coping with life stressors. Participants reported using furry content to feel positive or calm. Participants also reported role playing or 'becoming' their fursona, which was believed to be the better capable version of the participants. The impact of this upon mental health has not been assessed.

Future research would be wise to investigate the prevalence of mental illness in the furry community through online recruitment. This would expand upon both this present research and previous research. Future research should

also consider re-assessing the impact of social support upon furry mental well-being through the use of the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support.

Despite the risks of high harassment and stigmatisation, for many members of the furry community the community represents access to a wide array of support and benefits for its members.

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APPENDIX A

1 Do you identify as a furry and or a furry fan?

- Yes
- No

2 What is your age in years?

3 What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

4 What was your sex assigned at birth?

- Male
- Female
- Intersex

5 What is your sexual orientation?

- 0 Exclusively attracted to men
- 1 Predominantly attracted to men, only incidentally attracted to women
- 2 Predominately attracted to men, but more than incidentally attracted to women
- 3 Equally attracted to men & attracted to women
- 4 Predominantly attracted to women but more than incidentally attracted to men
- 5 Predominantly attracted to women, only incidentally attracted to men
- 6 Exclusively attracted to women
- O Other
- X No Socio-sexual Contacts or Relations
- P Pansexual

6 What country do you live in?

7 How did you hear about / find this survey?

- I saw a poster about it
- I saw it shared on Facebook
- I saw an advertisement for it on Facebook
- I saw it on an online site that is not Facebook

- I saw an advertisement for it online
- I was told about it by a friend
- Other

8 Do you belong to any other fan communities besides the furry community?

Choose all that apply

- Anime Fans
- Bronies
- Cosplayers
- Video Gamers
- TV Show Fans
- Sports Fans
- Book Fans
- Other

9 How long have you been a part of the furry community? *

- Not a member
- Less than 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year
- 1 - 2 years
- 2 - 4 years
- 4 -8 years
- 8 years plus

10 Do you have a fursona? *

- Yes No

11 Please rate the degree to which you have disclosed your furry identity to:

a. Non-Furry Friends

- Not much Somewhat A great deal

b. Non-Furry Family

- Not much Somewhat A great deal

c. Non-Furry Relationship Partners

- Not much Somewhat A great deal

d. Non-Furry Work Peers

- Not much Somewhat A great deal

e. Non-Furry Work Supervisors

- Not much Somewhat A great deal

f. Non-Furry Strangers or New Acquaintances

- Not much Somewhat A great deal

12 Please rate the degree to the following people understood when you disclosed your furry identity to them:

a. Non-furry Friends

- They did not understand
 They understood a little
 They understood most of it
 They understood it very well
 They did not understand
 I have not disclosed being a furry to these people

b. Non-furry Family

- They did not understand
 They understood a little
 They understood most of it
 They understood it very well
 They did not understand
 I have not disclosed being a furry to these people

c. Non-furry Relationship Partners

- They did not understand
- They understood a little
- They understood most of it
- They understood it very well
- They did not understand
- I have not disclosed being a furry to these people

d. Non-furry Work Peers

- They did not understand
- They understood a little
- They understood most of it
- They understood it very well
- They did not understand
- I have not disclosed being a furry to these people

e. Non-furry Work Supervisors

- They did not understand
- They understood a little
- They understood most of it
- They understood it very well
- They did not understand
- I have not disclosed being a furry to these people

f. Non-furry Strangers or New Acquaintances

- They did not understand
- They understood a little
- They understood most of it
- They understood it very well
- They did not understand
- I have not disclosed being a furry to these people

13 In which places/situations, if any, do you feel comfortable or uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others?

Type your answer here...

14 How many friends do you see and or speak to at least once a week?

Type your answer here...

15 How many of those friends are furies?

Type your answer here...

16 Do you believe that you are 100% human?

- Yes
- No

17 Can you describe what being less than 100% human or transcending humanity means to you?

Type your answer here...

18 Bullying is prevalent in modern society. Many people including furies are bullied, these next questions will ask you to describe your experiences being bullied, if you have been.

a. To what extent have you ever been Physically Bullied?

- Not Much
- Somewhat
- A Great Deal

b. To what extent have you ever been Verbally Bullied?

- Not Much
- Somewhat
- A Great Deal

c. To what extent have you ever been Bullied Online?

- Not Much
- Somewhat
- A Great Deal

d. To what extent you ever been harassed or made to feel ashamed for being a furry?

- Not Much
- Somewhat
- A Great Deal

e. To what extent have you ever been bullied or discriminated against for being a furry?

- Not Much
- Somewhat
- A Great Deal

f. If you have been bullied for being a furry. Were there any common characteristics of the bullying you faced?

Feel free to say as much or as little as you like.

If there are any key words that define the bullying, feel free to put them.

Type your answer here...

19 How did your fursona develop?

If you do not have a fursona please enter N/a

Type your answer here...

20 What does your fursona mean to you?

If you don't have a fursona, please enter N/a

Type your answer here...

These questions will ask about your relationship to your fursona.

a. My fursona represents an idealized version of myself

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree

- Agree
- Strongly Agree

b. My fursona represents an accurate picture of myself

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

c. My fursona is the total opposite of who I am

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

d. My fursona represents who others want me to be

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

e. My fursona's personality differs from my non-fursona's personality

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

f. My fursona's appetite differs from my non-fursona

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

g. I experience more attention from other people when 'in' my fursona

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree

- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

h. My Fursona is more than just an online avatar to me

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

i. My Fursona helps me feel able to cope with life

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

j. I 'become' my fursona to be more confident in social situations

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

22 Why do you have a fursona?

If you don't have a fursona, please enter N/a

Type your answer here...

23 |

would change my non-fursona personality to be more like fursona if I could

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

24 Please rate the degree to which you agree with these statements:

a. I discovered the furry community through online websites or online furry websites

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

b. I discovered the furry community through furry friends

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

c. I discovered the furry community through furry or non-furry conventions

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

d. I discovered the furry community through television

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

e. I discovered the furry community through other means not listed here

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

f. I went looking for the furry community

- Strongly Disagree

- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

g. The furry community found me

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither Agree or Disagree
- Agree
- Strongly Agree

25 If you could change something about the fandom, what would it be? Why is that?

Type your answer here...

26 What do you like about the fandom? Why is that?

Type your answer here...

27 Over the last 2 weeks, how often have you been bothered by the following problems?

a. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge

- Not at all
- Several Days
- More than Half the Days
- Nearly Everyday

b. Not being able to stop worrying

- Not at all
- Several Days
- More than Half the Days
- Nearly Everyday

c. Little interest or pleasure in doing things

- Not at all
- Several Days
- More than Half the Days
- Nearly Everyday

d. Feeling down, depressed or hopeless

- Not at all
- Several Days
- More than Half the Days
- Nearly Everyday

28 The following questions will ask about suicide, this is an area which can be sensitive for some people.

If this is an area you wish not to talk about you can choose to not answer these questions

a. Have you ever seriously contemplated suicide?

- Yes
- No
- I don't want to say
- I don't know

b. Has this happened in the past 12 months?

- Yes
- No
- I don't want to say
- I don't know

c. How many times did you seriously attempt suicide in your lifetime?

| |
|--------------------------|
| Type your answer here... |
|--------------------------|

29 Now I would like to ask you some questions about mental and emotional well-being.

a. In the past 12 months, have you seen or talked to a health professional about your emotional or mental health?

- Yes
- No
- I don't want to say
- I don't know

b. How many times (in the past 12 months)?

c. Whom did you see or talk to?

- Family Doctor or General Practitioner
- Psychiatric Nurse
- Psychologist
- Social Worker or Counsellor
- I don't want to say
- I don't know

30 How has being a furry helped or hindered your ability to function in day-to-day life?

31 Do you feel that being a part of the furry fandom has made you better able to cope with the stressors you face in life?

- Yes
- No

32 How has being a part of the furry fandom has made you better able to cope with the stressors you face in life?

33 What does your fursona mean to you?

Please describe whether your fursona is just a online avatar for you or is something more?

34 How supportive are your friends about you being a furry?

- Not at All
- Very Little
- Somewhat
- To a Great Extent

35 How supportive are your family about you being a furry?

- Not at All
- Very Little
- Somewhat
- To a Great Extent

36 Have you made any permanent changes to your body to reflect your fursona or your engagement with the community?

Type your answer here...

37 Have you ever felt guilt over your fursuit/participation in furry community?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Not at all

Everyday

38 Please rate the degree to which you agree with each of these statements

a. I feel tense and or excited when watching or engaging with furry content.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

b. I feel a sense of positive identity/ positive feelings when watching and or engaging with furry content.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

c. I turn to watching or engaging with furry content as a way of distracting from or avoiding real life events

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

d. I enjoy watching or engaging with furry content.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

e. I enjoy earning money from/ profit from engaging with furry content.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

f. I enjoy the beauty and art of furry content.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

g. I gain enjoyment from being able to connect with other furrries within the larger furry fandom.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

h. Watching or engaging with furry content helps bring my family closer together.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree or Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

39 These next questions will ask you about your level of engagement with the fan community:

1. I have rescheduled my work to accommodate being a furry or interacting with the furry community.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

2. I am emotionally connected to the furry community.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

3. I spend a considerable amount of money on furry paraphernalia, (fursuits, art, toys etc).

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

4. I do not devote much energy to the furry community.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

5. I want everyone to know I am connected to the furry community or being a furry.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

6. I would devote all my time to the furry community or being a furry if I could.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

7. I would be devastated if I were told I could not pursue engaging with the furry community or being a furry.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

8. I strongly identify with being a furry or the furry community.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

9. When being a furry or the furry community is popular I feel great.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

10. Being a furry or the furry community is part of me.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

11. I want to be friends with people who like the furry community or are furies.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

Thank you for completing the survey. If you wish to enter the draw for the Amazon voucher please open this survey and enter your email address

there: <https://furryresearch.typeform.com/to/VnoZlb>

Your responses to this survey and your email address in the other survey will be stored separately and your responses will not be linked with your email.

Submit

APPENDIX B

Participants Needed

for research investigating mental health and protective factors in the furry community

We want to investigate how being a member of the furry community can protect against mental health issues



Do you identify as a furry or with the furry community?
Do you own a fursuit? Do you have a fursona?

If so please get in touch - we'd love to have you as a part of this research project

You will be entered in the draw for a \$25 Amazon voucher for completing the survey.

Go to <https://goo.gl/mMLKxb> to complete the survey

Researcher:

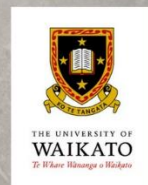
Moses Simpson - ms365@students.waikato.ac.nz

Supervisors:

Dr Jaimie Veale - jaimie.veale@waikato.ac.nz

Dr Armon Tamatea - armon.tamatea@waikato.ac.nz

This research is approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee



APPENDIX C

Project Title

An investigation into the furry community and the mental health risks and protective factors within the furry community

Purpose

This research project is looking to investigate how being a member of the furry community can be a protective factor against mental health issues. The purpose of this research is also looking to investigate the mental health risks and issues faced by members of the furry population. This research also seeks to improve the knowledge surrounding the furry community as well as provide insight into the specific mental health needs of members of the furry community. This research is conducted as a requirement for the Masters of Social Science Research.

What is this research project about?

This research will provide greater insight to the driving factors and motivations for members to engage with the furry community .

This research can provide greater knowledge for clinicians, other health and support workers regarding the risks faced by a client who identifies with this community as well as the protective factors which the furry community provides to its members.

This research would provide greater normalisation of the furry community within a clinical setting. We hope that this will allow members of this community to be able to seek support and help more easily, as many furries experience barriers to reporting their identity to health professionals

What will you have to do and how long will it take?

This research is an online survey which will take less than an hour to complete. It includes questions regarding mental health (including suicide) within the furry community, how people cope with stressors, as well as your perspective regarding the furry community more generally.

What do I get for taking part?

Participants who participate in the online survey can enter the draw for one of three \$25 Amazon vouchers. Participants also have an option of being sent a summary of the findings.

Confidentiality

This survey is anonymous – we will not be asking any information which might personally identify any participants. By taking part in the survey you are giving your consent to participate.

Participants will enter the draw for the vouchers in a separate survey from the research survey to make sure no personal information is linked to their responses.

What will happen to the information collected?

The information collected will be to produce a thesis on the topic described above. It is intended that this research will be published in a peer-reviewed journal. Only the researcher and supervisors have access to the responses. The data will be stored for a maximum duration of 5 years in a password protected folder.

Declaration to participants

If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any question
- Be given access to a summary of findings from the study when it is concluded.

What to do if you're feeling upset/distressed after participating in this research

If you live within New Zealand we recommend visiting a counsellor or using this website and making use of the services available on here:

<https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/get-help/in-crisis/helplines/>

If you live outside of New Zealand we recommend either visiting your local counsellor/therapist or using the relevant services listed below:

<https://www.getselfhelp.co.uk//helplines.htm> – United Kingdom

<https://psychcentral.com/lib/telephone-hotlines-and-help-lines/> - USA + UK

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/national-help-lines-and-websites> -
Australia

Who's responsible?

If you have any questions or concerns about the project, either now or in the future, please feel free to contact either:

Researcher: Moses Simpson, ms365@students.waikato.ac.nz

Supervisor: Dr Jaimie Veale, jveale@waikato.ac.nz

This research is approved by the School of Psychology Research and Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns or questions about this research or the

research approval process please contact the head of the School of Psychology
Research and Ethics Committee: Dr. Rebecca Sargisson:
rebecca.sargisson@waikato.ac.nz

APPENDIX D

| | n | % | | n | % |
|------------------------|----|-----|--------------------------|------|-------|
| Argentina | 3 | .2 | New Zealand | 65 | 5.2 |
| Australia | 44 | 3.5 | Norway | 2 | .2 |
| Belgium | 1 | .1 | Not Specified | 38 | 3.0 |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | 1 | .1 | Philippines | 4 | .3 |
| Brazil | 18 | 1.4 | Poland | 11 | .9 |
| Canada | 86 | 6.9 | Portugal | 6 | .5 |
| Chile | 1 | .1 | Puerto Rico | 2 | .2 |
| China | 3 | .2 | Queensland | 1 | .1 |
| Colombia | 1 | .1 | Romania | 3 | .2 |
| Costa Rica | 3 | .2 | Russia | 4 | .3 |
| Croatia | 1 | .1 | Serbia | 1 | .1 |
| Czech Republic | 1 | .1 | Singapore | 3 | .2 |
| Denmark | 7 | .6 | Slovakia | 1 | .1 |
| El Salvador | 1 | .1 | Slovenia | 1 | .1 |
| Estonia | 1 | .1 | South Africa | 5 | .4 |
| Finland | 5 | .4 | South Korea | 1 | .1 |
| France | 9 | .7 | Spain | 3 | .2 |
| Germany | 31 | 2.5 | St. Helena | 1 | .1 |
| Guatemala | 3 | .2 | Sweden | 5 | .4 |
| Hungary | 3 | .2 | Switzerland | 5 | .4 |
| Indonesia | 2 | .2 | The Faroe Islands | 1 | .1 |
| Israel | 6 | .5 | The Netherlands | 10 | .8 |
| Italy | 6 | .5 | United Arab Emirates | 1 | .1 |
| Japan | 2 | .2 | United Kingdom | 97 | 7.8 |
| Lithuania | 2 | .2 | United States of America | 713 | 57.1 |
| Malaysia | 3 | .2 | Venezuela | 1 | .1 |
| México | 11 | .9 | Vietnam | 2 | .2 |
| Netherlands | 5 | .4 | Zimbabwe | 1 | .1 |
| New Caledonia | 1 | .1 | Total | 1249 | 100.0 |

Table D.1. Participant Countries of Origin

| Fan Motivation | Strongly Agree | Agree | Neither Agree or Disagree | Disagree | Disagree Strongly |
|------------------------|----------------|-------|---------------------------|----------|-------------------|
| Eustress | 19.2 | 49.1 | 23.5 | 5.2 | 3 |
| Positive Self Identity | 37.9 | 50.6 | 9.4 | 0.9 | 1.1 |
| Escapism | 16.4 | 34.3 | 23.7 | 18.4 | 7.1 |
| Entertainment | 46.1 | 46.9 | 5.6 | 0.7 | 0.7 |
| Economics | 19 | 21.7 | 44.1 | 7.6 | 7.6 |
| Aesthetics | 69 | 28.7 | 1.5 | 0.1 | 0.7 |
| Group Affiliation | 49.3 | 38.5 | 9.8 | 1.1 | 1.1 |
| Family | 2.8 | 6 | 37.4 | 25.2 | 28.6 |

Table D.2. Percentage of Participants Who Reported Each of Wann’s Eight Fan Motivations

| | Chi-square | df | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----|------|
| Step | 42.89 | 9 | .000 |
| Block | 42.89 | 9 | .000 |
| Model | 42.89 | 9 | .000 |

Table D.3. Suicide and Correlated Risk Factors Model Chi Square Values

| Step | -2 Log Likelihood | Cox & Snell R Square | Nagelkerke R Square |
|------|-------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| 1 | 964.74 | .054 | .074 |

Table D.4. Suicide and Correlated Risk Factors Binary Logistic Regression Model Summary

| Observed | | Predicted | | |
|--|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| | | No Ideation in Past 12 Months | Serious Ideation in Past 12 Months | Percentage Correct |
| Step 1 Suicidal Ideation in Past 12 Months | No Ideation in Past 12 Months | 445 | 43 | 91.2 |
| | Serious Ideation in Past 12 Months | 219 | 61 | 21.8 |
| Overall Percentage | | | | 65.9 |

Table D.5 Suicide and Correlated Risk Factors Binary Logistic Regression Expected Counts

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2 tailed) |
|---------|---|--------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|-----------------|
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std Error Mean | 95% C. I. of the Difference | | | | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | Disclosure Non Furry Friends - Disclosure Non Furry Family | .241 | .774 | .022 | .198 | .285 | 10.92 | 1226 | .000 |
| Pair 2 | Disclosure Non Furry Friends - Disclosure Non Furry Partners | .007 | .784 | .022 | -.037 | .050 | 0.29 | 1227 | .771 |
| Pair 3 | Disclosure Non Furry Friends - Disclosure Non Furry Work Peers | .531 | .728 | .021 | .490 | .571 | 25.53 | 1228 | .000 |
| Pair 4 | Disclosure Non Furry Friends - Disclosure Non Furry Work Supervisors | .656 | .776 | .022 | .613 | .700 | 29.60 | 1229 | .000 |
| Pair 5 | Disclosure Non Furry Friends - Disclosure Non Furry Strangers | .534 | .770 | .022 | .491 | .577 | 24.28 | 1230 | .000 |
| Pair 6 | Disclosure Non Furry Family - Disclosure Non Furry Partners | -.235 | .920 | .026 | -.286 | -.183 | -8.93 | 1231 | .000 |
| Pair 7 | Disclosure Non Furry Family - Disclosure Non Furry Work Peers | .289 | .733 | .021 | .248 | .330 | 13.83 | 1232 | .000 |
| Pair 8 | Disclosure Non Furry Family - Disclosure Non Furry Work Supervisors | .415 | .731 | .021 | .374 | .456 | 19.87 | 1233 | .000 |
| Pair 9 | Disclosure Non Furry Family - Disclosure Non Furry Strangers | .293 | .789 | .023 | .248 | .337 | 12.98 | 1234 | .000 |
| Pair 10 | Disclosure Non Furry Partners - Disclosure Non Furry Work Peers | .524 | .916 | .026 | .473 | .575 | 20.05 | 1235 | .000 |
| Pair 11 | Disclosure Non Furry Partners - Disclosure Non Furry Work Supervisors | .650 | .950 | .027 | .596 | .703 | 23.94 | 1236 | .000 |
| Pair 12 | Disclosure Non Furry Partners - Disclosure Non Furry Strangers | .527 | .941 | .027 | .475 | .580 | 19.63 | 1237 | .000 |
| Pair 13 | Disclosure Non Furry Work Peers - Disclosure Non Furry Work Supervisors | .126 | .411 | .012 | .103 | .149 | 10.71 | 1238 | .000 |
| Pair 14 | Disclosure Non Furry Work Peers - Disclosure Non Furry Strangers | .003 | .642 | .018 | -.033 | .039 | 0.18 | 1239 | .859 |
| Pair 15 | Disclosure Non Furry Work Supervisors - Disclosure Non Furry Strangers | -.122 | .607 | .017 | -.156 | -.088 | -7.06 | 1240 | .000 |

Table D.6. Within-between Subjects T-test Scores for Participant’s Reported Comfort Disclosing to Different Non-Furry Groups

| | | Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2 tailed) |
|--------|---|--------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------------------|-------|-------|------|-----------------|
| | | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std Error Mean | 95% C. I. of the Difference | | | | |
| | | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | Well Known Groups - Not Well Known Groups | .491 | .581 | .017 | .458 | .5230 | 29.60 | 1226 | .000 |

Table D.7. Within-Between Subjects T-Test Scores for Averages of Participant’s Reported Comfort Disclosing to the Well Known Non-Furry Groups (Friends, Partners and Family Members) and Not Well Known Non-Furry Groups (Work Peers, Work Supervisors and Strangers)

APPENDIX E

"I feel most comfortable discussing being a furry with my partner - he too is a furry. My best friend is also a furry. Other than that, I don't really talk about it anywhere else unless I learn the people I am around are furries as well."

Participant 1

"Close friends, furry communities obviously. My family is really supportive of artistic stuff and find it cool so them too I guess."

Participant 2

"My friends were intrigued (and [they] even came with us to a furry convention). My partner also likes furry, but is less involved than I am (he has a fursona though). My family is just happy I am doing my thing, they don't really care or have anything bad to say about Furries"

Participant 3

"Comfortable when around other furries or extremely close and understanding non-furry friends. Uncomfortable any other time."

Participant 4

"During high school, when I first figured out I was a furry, I was more open about it, and tried explaining it to everybody. That was not a good idea, since the other kids gave me a hard time about it. Ever since then, I've been more careful. But my friends and family know, and they're very understanding"

Participant 5

"Slightly uncomfortable discussing it with family originally, but that passed fairly quickly. They've done cosplay in the past, so it wasn't a huge stretch for them."

Participant 6

"Comfortable: Around Other furs; with people I know to be in other fandoms, or have other furry friends; one-on-one with another person; online; if I know the person well enough even if they don't have any connections to the furry fandom; with family who know what the fandom is and have a little understanding of what it is"

Participant 7

Sometimes uncomfortable with discussing it with family, although they are accepting so it is not the worst. Sometimes uncomfortable with it at school due to

risk that others in higher grades will overhear and target me for it. I have already been picked on for being a furry by

Participant 8

"I find it very easy to talk about it while drawing/painting. People see what I do and they get curious. My passion for drawing is the main reason why most people know that I am a furry and are able to understand me because they find my drawings interesting, even if they find them super unusual. I am, however, reluctant to actually use the term ""Furry"" because people take words and make ugly assumptions because of their own perception of the word. I only talk about myself as a furry when talking to my husband."

Participant 9

The general public has such a negative view on furies that I never bring it up, unless I'm with other furies or my partner.

Participant 10

Mainly only with other furies and my husband who I disclosed too and he was supportive and understanding.

Participant 11

I feel most comfortable talking about furry related subjects either at conventions or with other furry friends with only one or two people of whom aren't furies that I would feel comfortable speaking about it with. Anywhere else, I'd prefer to just keep it to myself for the most part.

Participant 12

At furry events/meets I'll tell anyone there including non furies. Otherwise, I only talk to furies or non furies who are close friends

Participant 13

I don't discuss being a furry with others outside of furry conventions, meetups, etc.

Participant 14

I only feel comfortable being a furry in places that are made for furies, ie meetups and conventions. I don't feel that it is appropriate out in the work environment or other places that are supposed to be professional, unless there is some sort of event to share hobbies.

Participant 15

I only discuss being a furry in environments where all other participants are furry or otherwise already intimately familiar with the fandom.

Participant 16

I feel more comfortable discussing being a furry when I know they're a furry or if they make furry art / animal art. I don't feel comfortable if I don't know the person very well or if I've seen them make anti-furry jokes.

Participant 17

I am only comfortable discussing myself being a furry or anything related to the furry fandom when the person I'm talking to appears to possibly be a furry as well, in any other case, I'm too afraid of being shunned, rejected, or made fun of. I'm the only furry I know, if any of my friends are furies, I don't know about it.

Participant 18

[I'm comfortable disclosing to] close friends, family, people I suspect are also furies, showing off my fursuit in any situation

Participant 19

It's not a hugely important part of me. If it becomes relevant, I bring it up. Sometimes I might have a funny anecdote involving being on the fringes of a weird internet subculture, and I'm happy to share those stories when appropriate. It comes up quite a bit in art communities, because the furry fandom is so heavily intertwined with visual artist communities.

Participant 20

I am most comfortable about it once I have caught on that they are into it or if they are anime fans. If I do not catch wind that they are into any of that sort of thing, I do not really talk about it.

Participant 21

[I feel comfortable disclosing] When anime or my little pony comes into the conversation maybe.

Participant 22

Anime conventions and maker faires. In fact it's part of the culture at anime events and maker faires love the fact the suit is hand made.

Participant 23

Comfortable to discuss around other furies, Not comfortable discussing with non furies as the conversation always takes a bad turn

Participant 24

I don't feel comfortable disclosing it outside of the furry community. I feel that there's too much negative stigma associated with it.

Participant 25

I have never discussed being a furry with others in person. I would not be comfortable discussing this in person, but I am happy to do so online with people I don't know in real life.

Participant 26

Right now, in person, I wouldn't tell anyone unless I'm certain they're a furry and would keep it a secret. Online? Free game. I tell everyone.

Participant 27

I feel comfortable when I'm on the internet, in the real world it's more complicated, but I don't feel uncomfortable in any way

Participant 28

*On this app called '-----' there are many Furry groups. And on a Facebook "Furry" group I feel open. Most everywhere else I'm scared of being laughed at or hurt.**

Participant 29

I am part of ----, a social media app for furies, where I am comfortable discussing Furry related topics. Otherwise, I am not really ready to come out to my family and peers about being a Furry just yet.

Participant 30

**App names removed to anonymise participants*

I don't talk about furry stuff outside the internet, and on the internet in places that I don't have a clean break between my IRL and my internet persona.

Participant 31

I feel uncomfortable telling anyone anywhere telling them I am a furry since I'm afraid of what they will think, except on the internet. On the internet it's like having a second identity.

Participant 32

I feel uncomfortable discussing it in any scenario where I could be personally identified, mostly in real life. I feel comfortable talking about it more anonymously online or with the one friend I have who's cool with it.

Participant 33

Comfortable with: people who I know beforehand are part of the Furry Fandom, and behind a ""Mask"" online (a ""Fursona"")

Participant 34

Excluding online (as there I mostly go by my furry identity), I rarely feel comfortable enough to discuss being a furry with others. The only occasions when I do is when those people are furies themselves, and we are in a more private area where people can't overhear us.

Participant 35

I'd feel comfortable in any space in which the people around me are predominantly furry or are genuinely interested in learning about the fandom.

Participant 36

I feel comfortable discussing furry fandom when I feel the other person is interested in me talking about it. Also I don't feel comfortable to talk about it when there is a lot people around that are non furry

Participant 37

More or less judged by myself in how open and interested someone would be in discussing it. I take being a 'proud furry' quite serious, meaning that I advertise being one openly. But, it just isn't always a subject to talk about. Like sports, for example. I would say I treat it as something bigger than a very dedicated hobby.

Participant 38

[I]would feel more comfortable if people were to listen to me with an open mind and be willing to question things that they don't particularly understand in a kind manner. It makes it special when people see videos or photos of furies and they actually show interest in it.

Participant 39

I'm pretty comfortable discussing it, or at least telling people about it, in most contexts. If people ask, then I wouldn't hide anything, and if I'm friends with them my furry interests will naturally come out, but I don't just talk about furies to strangers generally and my furry badge on my bag is the entry way for conversations on that topic.

Participant 40

At this point in my life I enjoy answering questions in depth to strangers, such as non-furies I encounter at convention hotels or strangers on airplanes. Strangers are generally curious and I appear pretty normal and respectable, and so approachable. I don't discuss it with coworkers (barring a few close non-furry friends at work and other furies who are known to me at my large company when in private).

Participant 41

Honestly, I don't announce it. I tend to hide it from my non-furry friends in family but I do tell them stories but they don't know that they are furies unless I tell

them. Just if someone has a clue and asks I will tell them that I am one. but for the most part it's not really a big deal to me since I'm also still human. You wouldn't tell everyone that you are into medieval larping when you first meet them right? but anyways once I know them and they learn about it. nothing really changes instead of coming out to someone I think.

Participant 42

I honestly probably wouldn't mind discussing it with anyone in particular or anyplace in particular. I consider myself open about being a furry, but find that "coming out" as a furry is completely unnecessary. There's no reason someone must know about my gender, lifestyle, and hobbies. But if someone ever asks, I'll be entirely honest. I make no effort in hiding who I am and what I do, and those who care enough to take notice and ask about it are the only ones who specifically know about my gender, lifestyle, and hobbies.

Participant 43

Only if I know the person well and know that they do not hate the fandom. Sometimes there are people who just hate the fandom. There is one person I know and consider a friend who thinks furries should be shot. I would never disclose to them that I am a furry

Participant 44

I feel comfortable when they want to hear what furry is and I think they are open minded enough to understand it. I am usually uncomfortable when I don't know how they are going to react or if I think they will take it the wrong way.

Participant 45

I mainly discuss about this topic with people I fully trust after spending time to learn about their interest - as to make sure they don't hold any hatred fuelled by media coverage. That's when I feel comfortable to talk about it.

Participant 46

Uncomfortable: People who are quick to judge and don't listen to any other kind of opinions but their own.

Participant 47

In professional environments I will disclosed if asked but I tend to avoid it to avoid being looked down upon by supervisors.

Participant 48

Mostly, I don't care to speak on it one way or another. If someone is curious, I will divulge information UNLESS they're in a position to make massive changes for the worse in my life (AKA, my supervisors).

Participant 49

Nonprofessional situations and without family I'm cool with talking about it, but around family I hold back a bit, in a professional setting though I find it an inappropriate topic just like gaming, anime, etc.

Participant 50

Basically, I feel good if it is a situation that is not professional or a person who does not hold power over me

Participant 51

I am least comfortable telling coworkers and managers as I feel this is not a part of my life they need to know.

Participant 52

Sometimes uncomfortable with discussing it with family, although they are accepting so it is not the worst. Sometimes uncomfortable with it at school due to risk that others in higher grades will overhear and target me for it. I have already been picked on for being a furry by higher grades this year and do not want it to continue.

Participant 53

I don't talk about it with my friends and family for fear of being rejected.

Participant 54

Normally when I'm talking with other furies or with my friend who already know I a furry. When it comes to strangers or people that don't know, if they don't ask or inquire I don't say anything about my life as a furry. I especially don't mention it around family because I tried telling them once but they saw it as a community that supports bestiality and is full of mentally ill people. As far as they know since that day I have nothing to do with furies or the community.

Participant 55

The only place that is uncomfortable discussing is around family (sister and her kids are only local family). They don't want to care to understand.

Participant 56

I feel comfortable discussing furry with others in basically all situations. I've made it my duty to help educate others about the subculture.

Participant 57

I never feel uncomfortable. I have discussed with a lot of people and they think its cool. I have even made people change their view on the furry fandom.

Participant 58

I'm primarily okay with sharing it. I do not see anything wrong with being a furry. If someone chooses to see me as something worse that's their problem. I do not share it completely with strangers but that's just me really.

Participant 59

I generally don't feel uncomfortable talking about being a furry with most people. Very non-chalant. Most people are very closed about discussing it with other people, but it's just a hobby and a fun group and a place to just be yourself. It's not some detrimental personality aspect, it's not a sexuality (even if porn is made of it).

Participant 60

I feel uncomfortable in almost all situations. I think it's cool that there's a group of people who are like me and share similar interests, but ultimately the representation of this community and the stereotype that follows means that I'm not particularly enticed to share.

Participant 61

It has an undesirable stigma because many do not understand it. Also, I am a mildly shy person and do not want to provide an opportunity to be teased.

Participant 62

If they're not a furry then I won't discuss it. I value my career and personal life too highly for that risk.

Participant 63

Anything that could affect employment, I'm not going to bring it up. Otherwise it depends if it's relevant to the conversation.

Participant 64

I feel uncomfortable discussing being a furry with others when in a generic group setting or one-on-one meeting with a new person where I am unsure of the others' opinions on things typically viewed as strange, due to the social stigma surrounding being a furry and the societal assumption that being one automatically connects you to zoophilia."

Participant 65

Typically people will call furries anything from "dog-fucker" to pedophile to a plain old creep.

Participant 66

Have been harassed by people who insist that being a furry means that you are a paedophile or into bestiality. This happens occasionally at non-furry conventions.

Participant 67

Being called an autistic, bestiality lover, and paedophile also [have been called] gay.

Participant 68

people will usually call me a dog fucker, paedophile, creep in an animal costume, and say "you're human. act like it".

Participant 69

Many people assume that we are all only in it for sex, bestiality, and paedophilia, because when furies do those things, those are the only times the media covers us, and that is what most people bully us for.

Participant 70

Idiots telling me to "Yiff in hell"; or "Go fuck an animal you sick bastard".

Participant 71

People would usually say that furies are degenerate animal rapists that sexualize animal-likeness, but it wasn't something that offended me personally, as while that is one aspect of the furry fandom (referring to the sexual aspect, of course), it's just their opinion, believing that it's inherently wrong, and I in turn sometimes try and counter argue that many people are sexual individuals with "unnatural" lifestyles (I mean, flying in a metal hunk in the sky known as a plane while drinking ground up beans in the form of coffee isn't exactly "natural") that participate in escapism, so in essence, it's not a contest to see who's the most unconventional, as we're all degenerates to some extent..., and as indulging in sexual, furry content does not impose on others, it cannot be inherently wrong.

Participant 72

Assumptions that I have sexual relations with animals, or that I believe myself to be an animal are common, out of the gate go-to insults for most people who are hostile to furies.

Participant 73

[I've been] facing incorrect stereotypes: "animal fucker, furfag". general "gay" insults. telling me to "kill myself". jokes about rape. threats on general well-being. physical violence.

Participant 74

It's always the same insults: "faggot" and "gay" and "deviant" and all that lame standard-issue bigot BS.

Participant 75

Calling us Zoophiles, accusing us of fucking animals. Using Gay as an insult.

Participant 76

A general disregard/dismissal of my opinions and arguments; assumptions that I was male, gay, and a sexual deviant; an unwillingness and/or inability to consider that there can be non-sexual aspects to the furry fandom.

Participant 77

People Cussing you out and calling you a pervert or accuse you of practicing Bestiality.

Participant 78

Usually, they refer to being a furry as horrible without any reason to why that is— as if you're expected to just "know" furies are all cringy people. They also tend to call you an animal-fucker. It's basically brought down to bestiality, "you like being fucked in a fursuit", you're a sexual deviant, a cringy person, you shouldn't be allowed around animals, and "you must think you're an animal or something". Other than that, the term "furry" alone is used as an insult quite often.

Participant 79

[it's] mostly that many see the furry community as gay sex fiends or paedophiles which does hurt and I have been considered gay and at times a pervert for being a furry

Participant 80

People that think furies are people having sex with animals, or the ones that think it's childish, are the ones that bully

Participant 81

Repeatedly characterized as immature or not otherwise competent

Participant 82

Always considered as if I'm being childish.

Participant 83

Mostly just the generic stuff of people calling me and people I was with a "freak" for wearing furry gear

Participant 84

"Freak" and "animal fucker" come up a quite a bit but I tend to just remove myself from the situation as soon as it starts, I'm not going to sit around and get yelled at I don't have time for that. People who don't like it tend to question it in disgust.

Participant 85

Most bullying happens online, when posting content (whether videos, fursuit pictures or drawing) to non-furry websites like Tumblr or YouTube... Most often it

seems people doing the bullying don't understand what a furry actually means, and use certain false stereotypes (that the non-furries think are true) as insults. Other than that..., it's mostly being called names such as losers, freaks, weirdos.

Participant 86

Being called a freak, told to kill myself, that I'm gross and nasty and no one likes me

Participant 87

Mostly online trolling, calling me "furfag", things of that nature.

Participant 88

Well there is always a classic "dog fucker" and generally I have no right of speech or opinion because I'm a "retarded and sick psychopath". Or the very common " Shut the fuck up furfag". And of course not to exclude treats and death wishes...

Participant 89

Names like Furfag, or yiff in hell, or dog fucker, horse fucker. Mostly name calling, sometimes linked or tagged in images of animal gore or mutilation or cruelty. been told to kill myself or been told I was cancer

Participant 90

Most of the haters were those that never do their research about furries, and believe in the misconceptions and stereotypes associated with furries. Because they don't understand, and think we are bad people, they treat us like we're "cancer", as they would call us.

Participant 91 I have not really been 'bullied', though I have been told to leave a few online chatrooms and online meeting places on account of being a furry and having a furry avatar

Participant 92

My father called me dog fucker all through high-school. The idea of bestiality was a common theme. I often was bullied for a combination of being gay and furry. People often assuming they went paw in paw. I suffered both physical and mental abuse from my stepfather. At school as a freshman I was attacked physically several times. I had a very close friend abandon me for being a furry. Later in life I have had several employers discriminate against me for being gay/furry lower wage for the same job constant suspicion and having me and my partner also a furry banned from the premises for the sake of appearance.

Participant 93

Common insults, and being alienated are the usual things that come from being bullied.

Participant 94

He made fun of almost anyone, for any reason he wanted. He often mocked disabilities. Not to downplay the furry hate though. He would often use the word furry to describe things he didn't like. Like if he got a bad grade, the test was 'Furry'. If he didn't want to go to a party, it was a 'Furry Convention'. If he didn't like someone, regardless of whether or not they actually were, he called the a 'Furry'...

Participant 95

I was told by someone that they would hit me but they didnt want to get in-trouble for "Animal abuse"

Participant 96

Lots of strangers in public during outings making sexual comments, more at the local Renaissance fair, most commonly harassed by drunks, in high school it was common for people to bark at me, other such bullying

Participant 97

People trying to damage my furry-related drawings, people barking at me in the hallway

Participant 98

I was attacked with the common place insults of asking if I'm on the Autistic Spectrum, if I was abused as a child, and if I use murr suits.

Participant 99

People tend to refer to furrries as retarded or mentally deficient.

Participant 100

Vulgar and aggressive, will attack you based off of stereotypes and state that you should die off like a plague or talks of genocide.

Participant 101

Every bully I've met online or IRL says the same thing, they tell me to kill myself or that I fuck animals

Participant 102

was very based on furry, and primarily physical and verbal. Many punches have been thrown.

Participant 103

*I was physically assaulted on the ---- waterfront**

Participant 104

The usual verbal stuff like "go kill yourself furry trash" etc, physically is less so as in person I look like any other person. Physically bullying is more prominent when I am in suit. Trash thrown at me, grabbed and "made out with" by a drunken man. That kinda stuff

Participant 105

**Location names removed to anonymise participants*

Physical and sexual threats, Mockery, Negative glares of hatred

Participant 106

Most bullying comes from people who only know what rumors they've been told about furies. For example that we all have sexual relations with animals or others in suit, that we are all special needs, that we are all fat ugly slobs that only suit to hide how ugly we are. Sometimes the bullying can be as severe as being told to kill ones self or death threats (worst I've gotten is being told if someone as much as saw me in suit they would set me on fire) I've also had threats from strangers saying they will report me for animal abuse because they think I sexually abuse my cat because I am a furry.

Participant 107

I've never told anyone in real life, and I use an alternate account online, so I have never been bullied for this.

Participant 108

I wouldn't say bullied directly, but hearing others speak about it around you, putting down furies etc. does make me feel kinda bad about myself and I do fear of being found out.

Participant 109

I have not been bullied for being a furry, for I keep hidden and under wraps. There was one instance where it happened when I visited a furry con years ago and I was called a derogatory term

Participant 110

Usually the people attempting to bully me obviously has no idea what the furry group even was, aside from the stereotypical "animal lover" arguments.

Participant 111

People mainly thought it was a sexual thing, and they would go around telling everyone that I like to have sex with animals, which isn't true. My more understanding friends and I would try to correct them, but they seemed to enjoy spreading this rumour more than they cared about knowing the reality of it.

Participant 112

The bully has an incorrect idea of how the fandom works, is usually close-minded and refuses to listen to any logic, often resorts to demeaning various aspects of the fandom. Thinks furies are immature.

Participant 113

They people who felt the need to harass the community and the people in it, were simply determined to hate what they didn't understand or agree with. there was no logic behind it. The furry fandom, although weird to some, does no harm to those outside of it, so there really is no reason to discriminate against or hate them, but that logic was lost on them.

Participant 114

It has made me find lots of friends, and people I can talk to, and relate to. It has given me love relationships. It keeps me optimistic. It fulfills me. It's entertaining, it's social, it's great.

Participant 115

When someone very close to me passed away almost 2 years ago, it was the community who helped me through - they gave me strength and friendship. They gave me a reason to get out and about and it really prevented me from dropping into a depressive cycle.

Participant 116

It's actually really helped. My closest friends are members of the fandom who have similar experiences to mine. It's a place where I can relax and de-stress for a while and it's a place where I know I can always go for support and fellowship.

Participant 117

Greatly helped. I have so many friends it's amazing to have people there to help you when you need it.

Participant 118

It has helped me because it has given me a community to be part of, and helped me connect with my main group of IRL friends. It helped me connect with my current best friend and is something that my boyfriend and I have in common.

Participant 119

A few times it has helped when I had furry friends to talk to for support and advice when i needed it, I really can't say it has been a hinderance in any noticeable way.

Participant 120

Being a furry helps me. With anxiety, my friends whom I met within the fandom help me tremendously by helping me ground myself, and figure out how to push

through. With depression, they stay close, and make sure I know that I do matter, and that I am certainly cared for.

Participant 121

Being able to talk to the friends I've made from being a furry has helped me have people to lean on and talk to when I'm feeling low and anxious

Participant 122

It has helped in the way that it has given me an outlet to ask people for help and advice.

Participant 123

I feel I'm more confident and energetic, I feel like I've found a group where I truly belong, so I feel less lonely.

Participant 124

It's provided me with a group of like-minded others to belong to - a community and social support network.

Participant 125

[Being a furry] has little bearing on my life outside of home; however, it has helped me meet the people that I live with, and those friendships at home are a very positive element of my life. It has also led me to several very happy relationships.

Participant 126

It provides a safe space online, which helps a bit with anxiety.

Participant 127

It has given me a support network of friends, coming from diverse backgrounds and with diverse (non-furry) interests. It has given me a safe space

Participant 128

Oh, absolutely helped! Because of it, I'm MUCH more confident and happy. (Not to say I wasn't before, but through the fandom I developed artistic skills and such, so knowing that I'm REALLY good at something instead of just being "generally good" in most things is really nice.)

Participant 129

It definitely makes me happier, knowing there are people like me. I get a lot of fun and enjoyment out of it [the furry community]

Participant 130

Participating in the fandom brings me unconditional happiness. I get to be with my friends, and a support system I don't fully understand, and these facts bring a joy unexplainable. The reminder that this exists helps on a regular basis until I see them again.

Participant 131

Submerging myself in the furry things makes me happy. That means training and living my creativity by drawing, crafting or just chilling looking at other people's art. I need this to live and to breathe. It is not restricted to the furry fandom but the fandom is a perfect place for it all.

Participant 132

It has helped me in getting out and meeting people with common interests, and gaining confidence in social situations. Essentially pulling me out of my shell and not feeling ashamed of who i was.

Participant 133

Honestly, it helped me figure out my passions in life, and is leading me towards a college degree in graphical design.

Participant 134

It hasn't hindered it at all. It's given me a passion that I can explore. This passion has made me want to be better at a lot of things, like art and writing.

Participant 135

All the amazing art inspires me to improve my abilities in making art of my own.

Participant 136

It has helped me to be more confident in myself, and to think of myself as a better person, to help focus and control my chronic depression and chronic anxiety better.

Participant 137

It has honestly been the best decision I have made. My mental health is 100 times better. I am more outgoing, my social anxiety has nearly disappeared, and I look forward to meeting new people. It has been a night and day difference and has made a massively positive impact on my life.

Participant 138

it's helped me cope with my some gender and sexuality issues as well as offer support for some of my mental issues and past trauma.

Participant 139

Being a furry allows me to express myself in a creative way. It encourages me to write and draw more often than I usually do. It also helps me get in touch with my spirituality and sexuality more.

Participant 140

[The Furry Community] Helped me cope with pressures of life and school, but sometimes takes time away from studying

Participant 141

Well, it certainly is a time-waster, and sometimes if you spend too much time with it, you'll find yourself ignoring your other duties, but ultimately I'd say it hasn't affected much.

Participant 142

It's been both a focus and an outlet of frustration. Although it's sometimes been a hinderance. Furry drama can and will get you down...

Participant 143

It gives me something to look forward to every morning. Seeing peoples messages and comments, their artwork etc. It has also been a hindrance because of drama.

Participant 144

...There's a lot of understanding and support to be found in the community, but sadly also several people in my personal experience who try to manipulate and use their own poor mental health in getting what they want. Ranging from wanting free art, to manipulating people towards breaking up relationships, forcing friendship and such.

Participant 145

Well, when I was 16 and first got involved, it helped me quite a lot. By removing myself from my life I was able to get through some of the tough shit that was thrown at me.

Participant 146

Online, and in person, it is a means to escape the stresses of day to day life. You stop feeling it and just focus on the moment, as almost another person.

Participant 147

Gives me a bit of a playful outlet that allows me to be myself in a controlled environment, an alternate reality where I'm still myself but without the pressure of everyday life.

Participant 148

It gives me something to look forward to after work. I'm in a bad spot financially, having a way to hop online and just forget about it all is great. The problems are still there, and being handle, but it's nice to just let it go instead of dying in front of the television.

Participant 149

I do a lot of commission work for people in the fandom, which gives me both a pretty decent lump of money each month as well as something to occupy myself with. It gives me a job that helps create stability in my life but don't put too much pressure on me.

Participant 150

Its become a source of income when I create fursuits, so it gives me a purpose since my mental disability prevents me from getting another job. Its a bit difficult to explain it to non-furry friends and family but most have been supportive of me.

Participant 151

It has gotten me two apartments to share with others, deals, friends, and all around a general improvement in how I live my life. Talking to furies helped me realize my previous relationship wasn't working out, helped me walk through the breakup process, and I've found new people to spend my time with.

Participant 152

Like I said, I often get support to do things from furies when otherwise I'd be stuck in bed all day. I ended up homeless at one point and probably would've taken my own life if not for some furs who took me in.

Participant 153

It has given me a support network of friends, coming from diverse backgrounds and with diverse (non-furry) interests. It has given me a safe space.

Participant 154

It provides a safe space online, which helps a bit with anxiety.

Participant 155

It's helped a little by boosting confidence and solidifying identity.

Partner 156

Its helped me by giving me an outlet to better express my personality and artistic abilities. It has hindered me only because of the public's view of furies, making it tricky for me to talk about with non furs.

Participant 157

I mean, being a furry and my work being in the furry fandom has made me more confident in myself and expressing myself, so it helps

Participant 158

It has helped me to be more confident in myself, and to think of myself as a better person, to help focus and control my chronic depression and chronic anxiety better.

Participant 159

It has helped me explore activities and sides of my personality that I wouldn't necessarily have ever explored. It has helped me work towards my goal of overcoming anxiety and panic, and it played a role in my success in overcoming depression.

Participant 160

Occasionally I imagine my fursona to power through episodes of lack of motivation or make difficult decisions. He is wiser, psychologically stronger, and more rigorously principled than I am.

Participant 161

Having a clear understanding of what "ideal-me" looks like and acts like makes everything seem so much easier/better. I can ask myself, "what would my fursona do?" and then -- just do it, instead of freezing up or running to hide in the bathroom. It's really great.

Participant 162

It helps in the sense that I can escape my real world issues by zoning into and drawing [My Fursona]'s world. She, and drawing in general, helps me feel better when I'm down

Participant 163

My friends I have made in the fandom are probably the only people who have kept me from attempting to end my life when my health issues left me feeling like I had absolutely no other options. They kept me sane when even my doctors and family didn't take me seriously.

Participant 164

It has given me access to more friends with a wider range of experiences, since internet friends come from all over the world. It has helped me find time to decompress from stressors and have fun relaxing with those friends, whether that's talking online or hanging out with people I've met near me. It augments the way I naturally make friends outside of furry circles.

Participant 165

It's provided me with a support network, as well as an online resource to seek help about subject matters like sex & relationships that I would otherwise be difficult to find in RL. It's also provided a space for me to express myself artistically and creatively with a like-minded audience who support my work. It's cathartic being able to have these conversations with friends and role models.

Participant 166

I feel like I always have a support team to back me up if I need help

Participant 167

I am paralyzed in a convalescent hospital. Being able to correspond with other furry fans online, and editing books for furry specialty publishers online, keeps me from being bored.

Participant 168

Because of the furry fandom I have made close friendships with people who I can talk to about my problems.

Participant 169

The community is very open about personal struggles and mental health. In the specific community I participate in (Reddit), there are weekly threads for people to address their concerns, and others will respond with advice or encouragement.

Participant 170

Professional help has two issues for me, affordability (it is too expensive) and sparseness (it doesn't happen often enough/when needed, often resulting in several days between an event and the first appointment available). The furry fandom has provided people willing to listen and helpful in defusing or reducing issues and, more at large, has accepted me for what I am

Participant 171

As a kid, I was bullied a lot for various reasons (mental health, behavioral problems, and being in serious poverty). It was great to be able to go home and "log on" into a world full of color and life. Suddenly I wasn't a kid who couldn't afford lunch, I was a dragon or cat person or whatever. I'd say it was also some of my first experiences experimenting with being other genders than my assigned one.

Participant 172

Sometimes, the world is really stressful. Politics, crime, war, etc. And I tend to take each little thing on, a lot of times. This often results in panic attacks and stress. In the furry fandom, I can at the very least take a breath. Draw something. Relax for a moment. Be able to just stop thinking about the world's problems and focus on actually taking care of myself for once.

Participant 173

The community (especially on tumblr) gives me an outlet to talk and make art about problems that are too hard to say out loud and deal with in the 'real' world, and gives me something nice to daydream about when things get too rough.

Participant 174

It provides an emotional 'out' after a tough day; a way to disconnect and mentally recover, you might say. When I'm interacting with furies or am simply in a furry-friendly atmosphere, I feel separated from my 'real-life' emotions and problems, and can just forget about them for a while and be someone else (e.g. my fursona). It's a great way to unwind and relax after a stressful day.

Participant 175

Again, the art makes me happy. I work with the government, and I am directly responsible for the deaths of an ever rising number of people, so being able to come home and see happy innocent art makes the world feel less like fire and destruction and a little more like sparkles and rainbows.

Participant 176

When I am stressed or upset, I usually go to Youtube to watch videos from other furs, or I will draw my sona on my graphics tablet. I will also talk to other fur friends about how I feel, or we'll talk about things that make me happy, like food or art.

Participant 177

I can be able to communicate with others who have similar experiences and understanding as myself. I have a stronger support system than I have ever had in any of the previous years in my life. I have people who accept me for who I am.

Participant 178

My furry friends enable me to have people who understand me and the different aspects of my life even the sides that non-furry friends don't know about and make it easier to cope as I have someone to talk to about it

Participant 179

When I go home, I have people to talk to, and to me, even just talking to someone, helps me. I know I am never alone, people out there legitimately care about me not just see me as another number on a list; as a counsellor, or psychiatrist does.

Participant 180

It's welcoming to know I'm not alone there are others that face challenges just as well, and they are not alone as well.

Participant 181