AN EXPLORATORY MIXED METHODS STUDY OF THE DEMOGRAPHIC, PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COMMUNITY-SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE FURRY FANDOM WITHIN THE SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

by

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Declaration

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I declare that **An exploratory mixed methods study of the demographic, psychological and community-specific features of the furry fandom within the South African context** is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

I further declare that I submitted the thesis/dissertation to originality checking software and that it falls within the accepted requirements for originality.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at Unisa for another qualification or at any other higher education institution.

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(D. R. Piasecki)

Abstract

This study sought to understand the South African furry fandom. Studies on this group, defined by an interest in anthropomorphic animals, have been conducted exclusively in the global West. The group was first understood at a theoretical level using social identity theory (SIT); after that, 98 respondents were asked to complete an online survey on demographics, psychological health, and experiences of group membership. Quantitative results were analysed via statistics, using SPSS, and qualitative results with content analysis and axial coding, using ATLAS.ti. Results revealed the prototypical South African furry to be a white male with an LGBTQIA+ identity, educated at a tertiary level, employed, and non-religious, who likely has depression or anxiety. Their identification with furry has generally been for less than 10 years. The study also revealed that the features of the South African fandom differ from both Western studies and from South African demographics in several significant ways. However, the reasons for these differences require further study.

Key terms:

Furry Fandom, Anthropomorphism, Zoomorphism, Anthrozoomorphism, South Africa, Social Identity Theory (SIT), LGBTQIA+, Mixed Methods, Exploratory Study.

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feel confident that if you could follow an earlier version of it without thinking it was complete rubbish, then others should be able to do so as well, but now more so than before because of your efforts to make it spotless.

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Fifth, naturally, I would like to thank my parents. The subject matter was weird, and I know my sitting around at home doing yet another degree seemed to some as "unproductive" when I could be employed instead (especially with my subject matter being... let's politely call it "eccentric", though I can think of some who have probably used worse adjectives for both it and myself), but at no point did either of you bat an eyelid at anything I was doing, you provided support of various kinds, and listened with interest to my in(s)ane ramblings about things you barely understood when I excitedly read or saw something new in the course of my work, which helped me feel a bit more comfortable about being part of this rather odd group, and opening up to people in general about it. Of course, in some ways this dissertation is coming back around full circle again to my childhood, and you were the ones that provided me with all the animation with talking animals (including, most importantly perhaps, that eventually-well-worn VHS tape of Martin Rosen's *Watership Down* that I could probably still quote verbatim). So

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You shouldn't be asking who [furries] are, you should ask who we were.

We... we were the fat kid. We were the brainy kid. We were the bookish kid. We were the kid with the big thick glasses. We were the kid concerned about his sexual identity. We were the kid who couldn't throw a baseball. We were the kid who, for whatever reason, all the other kids said, 'You don't belong with us'.

Now human beings, as social animals, crave companionship and denied companionship by our peers, we sought it out the next best place we could find it. Some of us looked to the stars, others, to the far past of human history. *We* looked to the happy, smiling, *accepting* faces that we saw on the Saturday morning cartoons.

Now, to answer your question, 'Who are we?': we are adults who never forgot our old friends.

–Dr. Samuel "Uncle Kage" Conway

(as quoted in Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016)

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Glossary of Terms

Accentuation effect	A result of categorisations, whereby similarities of the ingroup and differences from the outgroup are emphasised (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000).
Aeromorph	Fan group based on a shared interest in anthropomorphic flying machines, such as planes and space shuttles (Cole, 2018).Also used as an individual noun for an individual fan.
Anime	Generic term for Japanese animation.
Anthropomorphism	Assignment of human characteristics to animals, plants, and inanimate objects (American Psychological Association, 2015).
Anthrozoomorphism	Combinatory term to cover both anthropomorphism and zoomorphism (Roberts et al., 2015b).
Bestiality	The act of engaging in sexual activity with animals (American Psychological Association, 2015).
Brony	Fandom for *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic;* the name also refers to the disproportionately male population of the fandom (Gilbert, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2014). Also used as an individual noun for an individual fan. Plural: bronies.
Closed species	A regulated species where most individuals are prohibited from creating a character of their own (Koinu, 2017).
Dealer's Room (Dealer's Den)	A designated area at a furry convention where artists and crafters can display and sell their creations (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Soh & Cantor, 2015; Strike, 2017).
Erotic target identity inversion	Extension of erotic target location error theory. Manifestation of a sexual interest within oneself; a desire to become an imitation of the object of sexual interest, and sexual arousal at the act of becoming that object (Hsu & Bailey, 2019; Lawrence, 2009).
Erotic target location	A theoretical explanation for the development of paraphilias

error (ETLE)	involving the misplacement of sexual desire into a peripheral aspect of the object of sexual desire (Lawrence, 2009).
Faggot	A derogatory term for a homosexual male (Proffitt, 2018).
Fandom	Engaging socially with others, based on shared enjoyment of something (Chadborn et al., 2017; Plante et al., 2016).
Fanship	The enjoyment of something without necessarily engaging with others based on said enjoyment (Chadborn et al., 2017; Plante et al., 2016).
Furfag	A derogatory term for furries; a portmanteau of "furry faggot" (Strike, 2017).
Furry	Individual member of the furry community. Sometimes also shorthand for "furry fandom". Plural: furries.
Furry-created species	An entirely new species created by furries, with no biological relationship to other animals; may borrow aspects from multiple species for creation (Plante et al., 2016; Půtová, 2013).
Furry fandom	A social group engaging with each other based on shared fandom for anthropomorphic animals (Gerbasi et al., 2008).
FURSAverance	Virtual South African furry convention, begun in 2020 (FURSAverance, n.d., FURSAverance FAQs, n.d.).
Fursona	Anthropomorphic animal character created by a furry to serve as a representation of themselves (Kreis, 2019a; Plante et al., 2016).
Fursuit	Costume representation of the fursona (Gerbasi et al., 2008).
Fursuit lounge	A designated area at a furry convention where fursuiters can remove their fursuit heads to relax (Satinsky & Green, 2016).
Fursuiter	A person who wears a fursuit.
Handler	A person who aids fursuiter while in a fursuit by preventing harassment by others and ensuring they do not injure or cause harm to themselves (Kreis, 2019c; Satinsky & Green, 2016).
Hybrid species	A conception of what the biological combination of two or more species would look like (Plante et al., 2016; Půtová,

	2013).
Kigurumi	Japanese term. A garment, a loose-fitting adult jumpsuit designed to look like an animal (Alptraum, 2018). Sometimes shortened to *kigu*.
LGBTQIA+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other queer identities (Montz, 2019).
Midwest Furfest (MFF)	Major furry convention in Rosemont, IL (Evans et al., 2020a, 2020b; Patten, 2017b; Swann, 2016).
Murrsuit	Fursuit specifically used for sexual purposes (Abery, 2020; Strike, 2017).
Otherkin	Spirituality involving the belief that one is not entirely human in some form or other (Laycock, 2012; Robertson, 2013). Always capitalised. Also used as an individual noun. See also: Therian
Pegasister	Female-gendered equivalent of brony used to distinguish female fans of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* from their male counterparts (Gilbert, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2014).
Plushophilia	Sexual attraction to plush toys (Lawrence, 2009).
Postfurry	Micro-movement that attempts to apply post-structural and transhumanist thought onto furry (Makyo, 2015; Tracer, 2016a, 2016b, 2017). Also used as an individual noun. Plural: postfurries.
Prototype	Set of attributes used by people to indicate the similarities members of a group have to one another, and how they differ from individuals within other groups (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000). Also used as an individual noun.
Psychological factors	For this dissertation, this refers to any factor studied that relates to the participant's mental health or may have affected it.

Pup mask	A leather or synthetic mask designed to look like a dog, primarily used for the purposes of pup play (Wignall & McCormack, 2017).
Pup play	A subcategory of Bondage, Domination/Submission, Sadomasochistic (BDSM) involving wearing pup masks and role-playing as a dog (Wignall & McCormack, 2017).
Queerness	Traits and behaviours associated with non-normative identities (Satinsky & Green, 2016).
South-Afrifur	South African furry convention that began in 2017 (Patten, 2017a).
Species dysmorphia (species dysphoria) (trans-species)	Other, informal names for species identity disorder (Grivell et al., 2014; Robertson, 2013).
Species identity disorder	A proposed psychological disorder similar to gender identity disorder, albeit applied to the concept of species (Gerbasi et al., 2008).
Squeaking	A form of communication done by some fursuiters, consisting of squeaking noises to imitate speech (Burke, 2018; Ferreday, 2011; Satinsky & Green, 2016; Strike, 2017; Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016)
Therianthropy	Spirituality involving the belief that one has a spiritual connection with an animal, or one is that animal mentally or metaphysically (Robertson, 2013). Possibly animal-specific application of Otherkin (Laycock, 2012; Robertson, 2013). Always capitalised. Individual noun: Therian
Western (world), The	A geographical location that broadly consists of the United States, Canada, England, and Europe (McNeill, 1997).
Zoomorphism	Assignment of animal characteristics to humans (American Psychological Association, 2015).
Zoophilia	A sexual interest towards animals (American Psychological Association, 2015).

Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of the Dissertation

This mixed methods study aimed to explore the furry community within the South African context, using social identity theory to describe this community. This was achieved by investigating the demographics and trends in group-specific attributes within a sample of members of the furry community living in South Africa. While the group has been studied exclusively in the United States, Canada, and Europe, which, for this dissertation, will be termed the Western world (McNeill, 1997), no studies had been done on the group in South Africa. Thus, this study was pertinent for understanding how this group operates in a specific non-Western setting, which also added to the understanding of the group as an international phenomenon.

A furry is, simply put, a person who has an interest in anthropomorphic animals and belongs to a community with a shared interest (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Kreis, 2019a). This is usually done to socialise with others in a group that usually calls itself the furry fandom (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Kreis, 2019a). Anthropomorphism is the assignment of human characteristics to non-human animals (American Psychological Association, 2015). There is also some link between furry and zoomorphism (Gerbasi et al., 2008). Zoomorphism is the inverse of anthropomorphism; thus, it is the assignment of non-human animal characteristics to humans (American Psychological Association, 2015). For ease and accuracy, in this study the combinatory term *anthrozoomorphism* is used most accurately to express the breadth of furry interest, as explained by Roberts et al. (2015b). Also, "furry" (plural furries) is commonly used both to indicate individual members and as the name for the community (being short for furry fandom). This dissertation will be using the term in both senses, with clarification where it is not immediately clear to which it refers. For this study, the South African context refers to the

geographical locale of the country of South Africa and its internal cultural structure. Thus, the respondents' primary residence was somewhere in the country, and they were engaged with life in the country. Residence status was not taken into account in this study; simply present primary geographical location.

Furries were understood through the theoretical framework of social identity theory, which aims to understand the structure of groups and their effects on the thought processes and behaviours of people who are members thereof (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Of particular importance to this study was the sub-theory of self-categorisation, which deals with how personal identity is mediated and influenced by a person actively seeing themselves as a member of this group (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000). The theory also concerns itself with the ways in which different groups interact with each other (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000). An analysis of homosexuality through social identity will be used to aid this discussion, which will then be extrapolated to understand furries. This will be done because furries as a group had not been subjected to rigorous psychological analysis through this theoretical framework. Thus a group with ostensibly similar features would likely provide insight into furry inter- and intragroup dynamics.

Problem Statement

While anthropomorphism has been discussed in academia for a long time, the primary focus has been on the problems it caused for the study of animals, namely the confusion it causes as to whether certain interpretations of results were scientifically accurate, or whether researchers were anthropomorphising animals by reaching those conclusions (Waytz et al., 2010). However, the academic view of anthropomorphism has shifted, and there is now a desire to understand better the psychology behind why it

occurs (Waytz et al., 2010). Studies of the furry community, with its heavy focus on anthropomorphism, are also relatively new in the social sciences, and most of the research has explicitly focused on Western communities, either online or mostly confined to people who can attend conventions in North America. Studies that focused specifically on other international communities were not found. Therefore, there was a need to determine whether any claims from research involving Western furry populations potentially applied to other populations of furries in different geopolitical contexts, to aid further research into the community in more international settings. Research into the South African furry community has been suggested explicitly as a potential expansion of research into the whole community. As stated in the book *FurScience!:*

> We aim to broaden our perspective of the fandom by studying furries in samples outside of North American conventions – in regions such as Japan, *South Africa* [emphasis added], and Europe, to see both what they have in common and what regional and cultural differences exist. (Plante et al., 2016, p. 162)

This study, thus, aimed to address this specific suggestion concerning the South African community. South Africa has a local community that may have some connection to the international community but may also not necessarily be part of it. It was necessary to determine a baseline for the furry identity within this country's context specifically, to inform directions for further study into the community within this context later. Further, this study gave indications if certain ostensibly similar-sounding groups have any members within the country, due to theoretical concerns with distinctiveness threats that these groups create that will be discussed in-depth below.

From extensive searching, no sound academic research had yet been done in South Africa on furries, nor specifically on furries within South Africa. This was determined through extensive searches of academic databases (namely Google Scholar, EBSCO, and JSTOR), using various combinations of the keywords "furry fandom", "furry", "furries", "Africa", "South Africa", "anthropomorphism", and "zoomorphism". Further, searches via search engines with the same keywords only found one reference to academic interest in the subject in the country, which was the following quote from a news article on the *Mail & Guardian* news website:

Johannesburg sexologist JacoPhillip Crous opines that "fursonas can be understood as totem representations ... an animal that's believed by the person to have spiritual or some other, possibly sexual, subjective significance, so the person adopts it as a personal emblem to which [he or she] feels drawn psychologically." Interpreting this in a way akin to Jungian archetypes, Crous says the fursona is a form of "empowerment" and "self-transcendence" for the individual – and, for the sexually invested, the fursona is the "idealised totemic form that drives the erotic charge for the yiff enthusiast". (De Waal, 2012)

At that time, Crous had not written anything more on the subject of furries, and thus the interpretation expressed by Crous remains untested. Furries also criticised this article specifically, as no members of the local community had been consulted beforehand (Parry, 2012), thus suggesting a possible need to evaluate the accuracy of the information that exists. There was a dearth of research in South Africa on this subject, as academia

has never studied the furry phenomenon, nor has it looked at its occurrence in the South African context. This study aimed to address this shortfall in understanding.

Thus, the aim of this study was to provide a basic overview of the furry fandom within the South African context. This was done for the purpose of expanding on international literature by contextualising it to a new, unstudied geographical location. Thus, the study's objectives were to establish: (i) the statistical features of the group; (ii) what the "average" South African furry was; (iii) psychological aspects of membership to the group; and (iv) potential differences between the South African community and the broader international community.

The Research Questions

Based on the previously discussed issues, four research questions for this study were formulated as follows:

1. What constitutes a prototypical South African furry?

   "Prototypical" was not used in the common-use sense; instead, it was a term explicitly from social identity theory. A prototype refers to a linked set of attributes considered to indicate several characteristics of the group and its members, including how group members are similar, how the group differs from other groups, and broadly indicates ingroup behaviours and structure (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

   This question was answered with quantitative data, in which statistical trends in demographic features of members of the furry community and quantitative features of furry-specific attributes were determined. Differences between local and international furry communities were not understood before the study. Thus, selecting a local furry prototype gave some indication as to whether the results obtained in Western furry

populations were in any way similar to South African results.

Further, while comparison was not the primary aim of this study, and no statistical tests were performed to those ends, face-value comparisons were made between the data gathered in the sample and those gathered in prior studies with samples of Western furries. The primary reason for this was to show potential areas of further study by highlighting apparent differences between the data sets.

2. Which specific furry and non-furry features relate statistically to one another, and to what extent?

This question was answered by statistical analysis of the correlations between demographic and furry features. The aim was to determine whether any demographic features of any particular furry would be able to predict specific furry features accurately.

For this question, the statistical analyses had four null hypotheses depending on the tests conducted. For correlational tests, the null hypothesis was that there were no relationships between the variables being tested. For ANOVAs, the null hypothesis was variables that would not be statistically significantly different across categorical comparative dimensions. For Chi-square tests, the null hypothesis was that categorical classifications would not be dependent on each other. Finally, for T-tests, the null hypothesis was that the means of variables being compared were not statistically significantly different from one another. Thus, this research question's null hypothesis was that there would be no statistical relationship between furry and non-furry features.

3. What is the psychological impact of furry identity and fandom membership on its members in South Africa?

This question was answered quantitatively and qualitatively, first by determining

quantitatively what psychological problems members of the South African furry community report having. Second by qualitative reports on how, if at all, the community has affected those specific issues. Answers were gathered and coded into themes, firstly showing what issues are reported and then how respondents felt that some of these issues were helped by the membership to the community.

4. In what ways do South African furries believe that the furry fandom within the South African context differs from the furry fandom within the international context?

    This question was answered qualitatively. Furries within the South African context, especially if they have contact with furries in the international context, have the best ability to explain how they experience the difference between the two. Thus, directly asking will help inform further study into the South African community by indicating potential avenues to explore in comparative studies. The answers were coded into themes systematically for analysis and then presented narratively.

Significance of the Study

Primarily, this study's significance lies in addressing the dearth in the literature and providing the prototype of a furry in South Africa. This gives insight into the benefits and disadvantages of holding this identity, and association with the group within this context. This has a potentially broader impact on the application and study of psychology in South Africa, as furry fandom has several psychological features that could interest researchers. Existing literature and studies suggest that furry identity has potential psychological benefits. Academic research will help social sciences better understand it, allowing for more detailed studies of factors relating to furry identity and community that were beyond the scope of this study .

Further, the South African public seems to have an interest in this subject. A collection of media reports began in late July 2018, following the South Afrifur convention earlier in the month. The timeline of media interest began with an Afrikaans-language article in *Huisgenoot* magazine (van Dyk, 2018). This was then followed shortly after that by a radio interview on Jacaranda FM, a major Gauteng-based radio station, with prominent furries in the South African community (van Heerdan, 2018), accompanied by a live-streamed video of some parts of those interviews (The Scenic Drive with Rian, 2018b, 2018c), a blog post on the radio station's website (The Scenic Drive with Rian, 2018a) and tweets (Jacaranda FM, 2018; The Scenic Drive, 2018). In the following year, the Afrikaans television programme *Kwêla* (kykNET Argief, 2019) had a filmed segment about some South African furries, which was subsequently written about on an Afrikaans website *Praag* (Suidpunt, 2019). This indicated there was public interest within South Africa on this subject at the time of the study, suggesting some desire for the community to be understood. Because furry often has lower acceptance outside of a United States context (Kreis, 2019c), studies must adequately understand the community scientifically. Thus, the study is also significant in addressing a currently existing public interest within South Africa in the phenomenon of furry fandom.

Research Design and Methodology

The study was conducted through an online survey consisting of both qualitative and quantitative responses. Recruitment was done via an online forum and group chat for furries in South Africa on the messaging application Telegram, and through snowball sampling. After the data were collected, the quantitative data were subjected to descriptive and inferential statistical analysis, to determine general trends in the data towards answering the research questions. Multivariate analysis was then performed to

determine which demographic and furry-specific features related to one another. Qualitative data was analysed via coding and narrative presentations, as per the methodology suggested by Strauss (1987, cited in Neuman, 2014), or in graph format where applicable. Combined, these explained the furry fandom and its members in the South African community.

Dissertation Structure

Chapter Two of this dissertation consists of a literature review that discusses the furry community. This begins with a broad overview of the common features and structure of the community while also defining common terms used by the community. The chapter then details the demographic features of furry fandom within the Western world. The relationship of furry to other groups that are ostensibly similar is detailed, and the distinctions between them are drawn. Next, the impact that furry identity is reported to have on its members' mental health is discussed, both in terms of how psychological issues are distributed and how the fandom is claimed to help. Finally, a detailed exploration of the stigma that furries experience is given. This created a detailed understanding of furry as a group and the experience of the individual furry.

Chapter Three discusses social identity theory in-depth. The chapter examines the theoretical concepts of groups and the nature of categorisation. Thereafter, the focus shifts to how groups perceive members of groups, both their own and others, with a discussion on theoretical concepts of prototyping, stereotyping, and deviancy. This leads to a discussion on comparisons that people make with one another and, in turn, the ways in which people interact with one other within a group, and how groups interact with other groups. Next, an analysis of applying this theory to homosexual identity is presented. This is extrapolated to references to the furry community to explore ways in which the theory

could be applied to furries as a group. To conclude, the critiques of social identity theory are detailed, and how social identity theorists respond to them.

Chapter Four details the research methodology including the research design and data analysis used to answer the research questions. Details are given on the structure of the instrument and how the sample was collected. The mixed methods analysis is discussed, first by explaining how quantitative data was statistically tested and then by explaining the data coding and content analysis methods used on the qualitative data sets. This is followed by a detailed explanation of how all qualitative and quantitative data could be considered reliable, valid, and verifiable. Finally, a discussion on ethical considerations is given, detailing possible ethical issues that may have arisen during the study and how these were accounted for.

Chapter Five details the results gathered during the process of the research detailed in Chapter Four. These results were split into separate categories: First, features about the demographics of respondents are presented. Second, features about respondents' furry identity are examined. Both were statistically compared to determine relationships. Finally, the results of the qualitative data are presented narratively to complement the findings that preceded them.

Finally, Chapter Six consists of a conclusion to the dissertation. In this chapter, the research questions are directly answered using data and conclusions presented in Chapter Five and interpreted through the theoretical lens explained in Chapter Three, in the order that the questions were presented above. Limitations of the study's findings, and issues encountered during the study are detailed, and recommendations for further study have been made. To conclude, a reflection on the study is presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

As furry research is a new area of study within the social sciences, most research on the furry community has been done by a multidisciplinary group of social scientists forming a group called the International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP), or sometimes going by FurScience (FurScience, n.d.). The IARP works specifically at studying the furry community in-depth and have done so with multiple studies with thousands of respondents (Plante et al., 2016). Thus, most existing studies were done by the same members of IARP.

It should be noted that most research discussed in this review has been done either online or at conventions. Results in the latter case may only apply to furries with the inclination, or financial means, of attending a convention. This could skew the data towards older, better-educated, wealthier members with higher-paying jobs. However, online surveys that have supplemented this help offset these issues. Many findings have been tested and confirmed by a meta-analysis of multiple surveys across several years (e.g. Plante et al., 2016).

Also, while attempts were made to rely on academic sources as much as possible there was a need sometimes to rely on grey literature, in the form of media – books, articles, and films specifically – created mainly by furries themselves. While not always academically sound, this was sometimes the only source for specific information. Grey literature in the form of external media portrayals of furries are kept to a minimum for reasons explained below (see "Experienced Stigma, Violence, and Responses Thereto"). As a final note before proceeding, the term LGBTQIA+ that will be used from this point forward is an abbreviation for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other queer identities (Montz, 2019).

Demographics of Furries

According to existing literature, furries are generally between the ages of 24-27 years old on average, white (83%), of the male sex (79%) or male-gendered (67%) (Plante et al., 2016). Most have at least some post-secondary education (75%), and they are roughly evenly split between being employed and studying (Plante et al., 2016). They are also most often socially and politically left-leaning (Plante et al., 2016). While most of these terms should be self-evident, an accurate description of what "white" means in these studies is important. Specifically, it refers to people of European descent who have pale complexions (Bhopal & Donaldson, 1998).

Arguably, the group potentially interests the social sciences and psychology for gender and sexuality distributions that differ from the general population. Furries are statistically significantly more likely to be members of the LGBTQIA+ community – for example, a furry in the United States is seven times more likely than the general population to be wholly or predominantly homosexual (Plante et al., 2016). Furries are also far more likely to be transgender than other fandom groups (such as fans of anime – Japanese animation – and sports fans), with around 2% identifying as transgender (Plante et al., 2016). The use of furry identity is often a way of exploring gender identity and sexuality (Plante et al., 2016), as discussed in further detail below. Interestingly, the term "coming out", used to indicate an admission of LGBTQIA+ identity, is often also used to describe admitting to others that one is a furry (Plante et al., 2016; Strike, 2017). This suggests that furries see an LGBTQIA+ identity as analogous to the experience of being furry. Further, female furries sometimes report a certain amount of misogyny aimed towards them, especially by gay men (Kreis, 2019e), suggesting that gay male furries are prototypical, and female furries threaten that prototype. This makes the group potentially

significant for study around LGBTQIA+ issues, both in general and for possible help towards clinical intervention on matters raised by LGBTQIA+ identities.

This, in turn, interacts with other demographic features. Specifically, while they generally claim to be non- religious, only around 33% are explicitly atheist or agnostic, and furries usually are somewhat spiritual (Plante et al., 2016). Religiosity specifically is not very common among some furries, which could be because it is seen as in direct conflict with LGBTQIA+ issues (Kreis, 2019f), suggesting that religiosity is seen as incongruent with LGBTQIA+ identities common within furry.What specifically defines a furry as a furry, beginning with arguably the most defining characteristic of furry identity: the relationship furries have with animals, will be detailed below.

Relationship to Real Animals

Animals are central to the concept of furry, so it is critical to understand exactly how furries relate to them. Furries feel strongly connected to real animals, not simply anthropomorphic representations thereof. Often, however, these real animals are infused with anthropomorphic aspects due to the interest furries have in them. Positive associations between admiration for, or spiritually connecting to an animal, and the assignment of both uniquely human and human nature characteristics to said animals, have been recorded (Roberts et al., 2015b). Human nature traits differentiate humans and animals from machines and include things such as emotions (Roberts et al., 2015b). Uniquely human traits separate humans from other living entities and include rational thought, for example (Roberts et al., 2015b). Anthropomorphising of animals also correlates with increased interest in the well-being and rights of real animals, as the animal is incorporated into the self-concept of the furry, further increasing identification

with the animal (Plante et al., 2018). This affinity is manifest in various active fashions within the community, which need further discussion.

Furry Fandom at a Glance

Furries, at a most basic definition, are people with interest in anthrozoomorphism – the application of human characteristics to animals (American Psychological Association, 2015) – and who gather in a community focused on this shared interest (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Kreis, 2019a; Roberts et al., 2015b). The furry identity is salient in these group settings, as will be discussed in the next chapter. An interest in anthropomorphism generally predates a person's participation in the fandom, but because this interest is unusual, furries generally feel fairly isolated until they come across the fandom (Roberts et al., 2015a). Furries generally discover the existence of the fandom through the internet, by accident, while searching for something else (Kreis, 2019a; Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, Schroy, et al., 2017).

Furries participating in both fandom and fanship tend to be motivated by several factors. The difference between these ideas is that fanship is enjoying something, whereas fandom identifies with other people based on shared enjoyment of something (Chadborn et al., 2017; Plante et al., 2016). Fandom participation tends to be predicted by desires for belongingness, seeing furry as a way to connect with family members, entertainment value and sexual appeal (Schroy et al., 2016). The first three factors also strongly predict fandom participation for furries, along with aesthetic appeal, self-esteem boosting and the occurrence of eustress (Schroy et al., 2016). Further, increases in seeing the group as distinct from other groups, when paired with feelings of belonging to the group, correlated with an increase in identification with the group (Reysen et al., 2016).

Furry fandom in the United States began as an offshoot of science-fiction fandom in the 1980s, at least insofar as furry gatherings began at science-fiction conventions in that decade (Kreis et al., 2020; Strike, 2017). These began with informal furry room parties hosted by convention attendees, where attendees would gather in a hotel room to discuss a shared interest in art, comics, and animation featuring anthropomorphic animals, watch cartoons and pass art around for admiration (Kreis et al., 2020; Strike, 2017). Eventually, as it grew, it moved away from science-fiction conventions and gained its own separate identity and following as a subculture (Kreis et al., 2020; Strike, 2017).

The literature suggests that the furry subculture is also considered a distinct consumer group. Studies have been conducted showing the use of self-actualisation via zoomorphic identity (Healy & Beverland, 2013). Part of the reason for this consideration lies in the fact that furries are themselves producers of creative content relating to their interest and actively display their interest to others; both are reportedly more likely to be done by furries than other fan groups (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, Schroy, et al., 2017). For the former, creative outputs by furries include visual art, writing, crafts, music, and YouTube videos (Kreis, 2019d; Risher, 2016, 2018; Strike, 2017). The community could be argued to be creating the items for themselves that the broader market lacks; thus, this space could be capitalised on if the group is understood better as consumers. Second, displaying fandom has two critical functions: it creates a sense of belonging with others, and acts to communicate interests to others to attract people with similar interests and repelling those who do not share these interests (Chadborn et al., 2017). Increased displays are primarily used to attract others more, which, in turn, leads to greater fandom participation, increasing identification with the group (Chadborn et al., 2017).

However, applications of furry identity to particular situations, especially in terms of consumer culture, were beyond the scope of this study. On the note of self-

actualisation, however, this study focused on two specific creative outputs that are both ways to display the furry fan identity to others: *fursonas* and *fursuits*. To most furries, these are seen to broadcast certain shorthand social information about the person (Kreis et al., 2020). Research has also suggested this, showing that furries have better memory for faces in furry art and fursuits than non-furries indicating that these are characteristic of the group and that remembering these faces is socially important to the group (Reysen et al., 2018). These findings suggest both items are important rather than arbitrary; thus both will be analysed beginning with the fursona.

Fursonas

Arguably, aside from the shared interest in anthrozoomorphism, the other most universal and important defining characteristic of most members of the fandom is the creation and use of the fursona. A portmanteau of "furry persona", the fursona is essentially a personal anthropomorphic character created to represent the self in various situations (Kreis, 2019a; Plante et al., 2016; Risher, 2016). The fursona is often also the only aspect other people within the community know about a particular person, so it is a critically important part of furry identity (Roberts et al., 2015a).

Fursonas are most generally said to be actively created by the particular furries themselves, by their personal creative volition, rather than as an act of simply copying an existing character exactly (Plante et al., 2016). Most animal species are represented to some degree within fursona species choices, and other animal-esque entities, such as mythical species and even non-real species created by popular culture, such as Pokémon (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Plante et al., 2016). Many furries are hybrid species, which are often biologically impossible combinations of two or more existing animals, and several that have non-existent unique furry-created species that were explicitly created by furries

(Plante et al., 2016; Půtová, 2013). The difference between these two species concepts is simple: (i) a hybrid is a conception based on the thought experiment of what the offspring of two species would look like or some other genetic or biological hybrid of two or more species and (ii) a furry-created species simply sometimes borrows aspects of other animals (or indeed, other sentient non-animal entities, such as cybernetic organisms, aliens, or mythological entities) to create new species that have no biological (so to speak) relationship with the animals.

Several examples of furry-created species used as fursonas will be explained to make this concept clearer and aid further discussions. These species are the Dutch Angel Dragon, the protogen, and the primagen. First, the Dutch Angel Dragon is an angelic horse-like dragon inspired by and named after a horse owned by the creator of the species (Biesemeyer, n.d.; Burke, 2018). Second, protogens and primagens are both described by their creator as an interdimensional, part-machine, part-alien species with visually-distinctive facial visors, with protogens described as the smaller, prototype (in the more traditional use of the word) versions of the primagen species (Koinu, 2017).

The related concepts of regulated and closed species also need detailing. Essentially, a regulated species has specific guidelines in place as to how design thereof works, and the character needs to fulfil those criteria to be recognised as such, but otherwise, anyone may create a fursona of that species (Biesemeyer, n.d.; Koinu, 2017). A closed species is a species that only the creator thereof may create fursonas or characters of (Koinu, 2017). Dutch Angel Dragons and protogens are examples of a regulated species, having specific guidelines for the design of those characters (Biesemeyer, n.d.; Koinu, 2017). Primagens, on the other hand, are a closed species, having both specific requirements for what constitutes a true primagen and only being allowed to be created by the species creators (Koinu, 2017). It was unclear from the

literature how regulation of these aspects occurs, and it does not seem documented. However, this question was beyond the scope of this study.

The fursona, thus, is often a far more complicated creature than it appears at first. It is governed by specific, complex ideas to reflect best the personality they are to represent. Adding to this, the choice of species is also not as arbitrary as it may seem. Choice of species is most commonly a result of a perception of characteristics that the furry shares with animals of that species (Plante et al., 2016). Most furries also see themselves as psychologically and behaviourally similar to their fursona (Plante et al., 2016). This shows that the choice of fursona species, in particular, is done deliberately to show the personality that the person believes themselves to have and the person they would like others to see them as, by associating the self with the ideas that others have of what that animal is like, which could be derived from culturally-rooted anthropomorphic stereotypes of that animal (e.g., the "cunning fox", the "wise owl").

Further, to some extent, furries view other furries with the same fursona species as them more favourably than furries with other fursona species, due to the benefits, in terms of mental health that they report the fursona has provided them personally (Plante et al., 2016; Reysen et al., 2015b). Furries also react strongly negatively to scenarios in which fursonas are intentionally copied by others, as it is seen as a direct threat to the expression of one's unique personal identity, generally even more so than to copying of their public identity (Reysen et al., 2020), further suggesting this furry self is incredibly personally important.

However the personal and furry selves are not identical, despite furries often stating they are. Studies have shown that furries rate their fursona higher in the Big Five personality dimensions than themselves, with extraversion having the most considerable difference (Reysen et al., 2015a). The fursona is also important for identity formation,

serving as social identity and as a representation of possible and idealised versions of the self, which enables easier development of a stable sense of self further down the line, and reduces felt discrepancies between ideal and actual selves (Kreis, 2019a; Kreis et al., 2020; Risher, 2016; Roberts et al., 2015a). The fursona also allows for the exploration of potentially socially undesirable characteristics of the people behind them – for instance, some fursonas are a different gender, or even different sexuality, to the person they represent, allowing exploration of self-identity through creative output (Kreis, 2019e; Kreis et al., 2020; Plante et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2015a).

Practically speaking, the fursona is a purely mental/imaginative construct. For most, the only way to portray the fursona is by getting art of the fursona that "brings it to life" and acts as the primary method of showing it to others and to represent something that the character can do, but the person behind it cannot (Risher, 2016). This function of art makes that medium particularly critical to the exploration of furry identity. However, pretending to be the fursona is another way to bring the character to life, and a physical way to do so can be found in the fursuit.

Fursuits

Another concept significantly associated with furries are fursuits, which are fabric costume representations of fursonas that some furries own and wear (Gerbasi et al., 2008). As with fursonas, of which fursuits are usually representations, details on fursuits are not arbitrary, but often fundamental aspects to their owner that were thoroughly planned out before construction and are characterised as a significant part of one's personal identity because the character portrayed is important to that person (Kreis, 2019b; Soh & Cantor, 2015; Strike, 2017). Fursuiters are usually accompanied by a person called a handler, who ensures the fursuiter does not injure themselves and protects

them from harassment (Kreis, 2019c; Satinsky & Green, 2016). As one could extrapolate from the above discussion on the relationship furry fandom has to animals, and contrary to concerns raised by People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (Elizabeth, 2009), there is no use of real fur in fursuits – they are made entirely of synthetic faux fur, and real fur is not seen as acceptable (Strike, 2017).

At this point in the discussion it is important to mention how fursuits differ from other animal-themed wearable items with different purposes. Fursuits are very specific items that can ostensibly appear similar to other animal-themed items on a surface level descriptively. First, the temptation exists, primarily through the theoretical lens of group psychology, to compare fursuits to mascot costumes. This is compounded by the mascot costume appearing similar to, and is often made from the same materials as, the fursuit (Strike, 2017). Aesthetics and potential non-animal mascots aside, the primary difference is that mascots represent something impersonal, often a group identity. In contrast, fursuits are a personal expression of self-identity within the furry group setting. Second, the *kigurumi*, or *kigu,* when shortened, refers to a loose-fitting, adult-sized jumpsuit made to look like an animal. It originates in Japan from a company named SAZAC (Alptraum, 2018). These are generally generic animals rather than specific characters and do not cover the face, unlike the fursuit, because they are far more casual, and rarely meant to represent a character, but rather simply the idea of that species.

Finally, pup masks used in pup play that is a form of role-play categorised by Wignall and McCormack (2017) as being a form of the bondage, domination/submission, and sadomasochism (BDSM) kink. Other forms of (sexual) animal role-play within BDSM also exist, most notably pony play (Aggrawal, 2011). However, pup play is the only one subject to academic study as far as could be found, so that was included in this study. In pup play, people adopt the characteristics of dogs and wear various accessories

associated with dogs, such as collars (Wignall & McCormack, 2017). The related mask is

a facial mask, crafted from leather or rubber, made to look like a dog's head (Wignall &

McCormack, 2017). This differs from the fursuit in the materials used, uniqueness, and

the primary purpose – pup masks are generic items reported by Wignall & McCormack

(2017) in their sample at least to be primarily, ,used as part of a sexual fetish activity, but

also with leisure aspects such as relaxation and getting into a new headspace. Fursuits, on

the other hand, are unique and meant for the personal expression of identity. Other than

that, a more detailed understanding of these activities was mostly outside of the scope of

this study. Some furries and their furry identity do participate in pup play. However, non-

furry pups also strongly distinguish that activity as distinct from furry fandom (Wignall &

McCormack, 2017).

While fursuits differ in many ways from these other items, including aesthetically,

there is no one correct aesthetic style of fursuit – while most will have a cartoon aesthetic,

semi-realistic suits also exist (Strike, 2017). There is also no one correct way of behaving

and acting as the character while in fursuit. Some furries speak in suit; some do not and

rely solely on gestures and occasional interpretation by others, while others squeak –

using noises similar to those you would hear in items like dog chew toys as a form of

verbal communication (Burke, 2018; Ferreday, 2011; Satinsky & Green, 2016; Strike,

2017; Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016).

Ferreday (2011) argues that nonverbal communication through animal avatars is

feminine, and, as such, nonverbal fursuiting could be interpreted as feminine. Thus, the

act of fursuiting could allow for the exploration and expression of non-normative

identities, especially those around gender and sexuality, without fearing harassment for so

doing (Satinsky & Green, 2016). This is achieved by a self-reported feeling that the

fursuit helps the wearer get into the character's mindset and to express that character

through visual drama (Satinsky & Green, 2016). Some fursuiters also state their experience is that the character they portray in the suit seems to take on a "life of its own" (Kreis, 2019b). That the queerness – that is, the behaviours and traits associated with non-normative identities – can be ascribed to the suit rather than the person wearing the suit (especially if the suit or character is felt to have a life of its own) also creates a certain amount of distance between the person and their suit, allowing fursuiters to experiment more with their human identity than they would otherwise (Satinsky & Green, 2016). This is not just limited to fursuits, however. Furries also do so with their fursona, stating they are not gay, but their fursona is (Risher, 2016) – the fursuit serves as a manner to act out the behaviour, rather than simply imagining or visualising it.

Fursuiters are generally very popular as visual indicators of furry in the media, usually being the predominant focus of media depictions of furry (Strike, 2017). The majority of audio-visual media consulted for this study either focused primarily on or otherwise featured extensive footage of fursuiters in particular (see Abery, 2020; Burke, 2018; Kreis, 2019a-g; kykNET Argief, 2019; Risher, 2016; The Scenic Drive with Rian, 2018b, 2018c; Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016). This is disproportionate to their actual level of representation within the furry fandom itself, and likely creates the inaccurate public perception that most, if not all, furries are also fursuiters (Strike, 2017).

Fursuiters are a minority within the fandom – less than 15% of furries surveyed in various studies have a full fursuit, and around 25% had a partial fursuit, usually consisting of a head, feet and hand paw gloves, and a tail (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Plante et al., 2016; Satinsky & Green, 2016; Soh & Cantor, 2015). While fursuiting is described as a primary motivation for fandom participation for at least some furries, it is not for most (Kreis, 2019b). Part of the reason for this is possibly that the typical cost of a fursuit puts it out of most people's price range (Gerbasi et al., 2008). The high price is likely to be because

fursuits are labour-intensive and take a long time to create, meaning that many creators

have to pick a few commissions from a larger number of applications (Hay, 2017). The

average price in the United States generally ranges from US$1000 to US$3000 (Hay,

2017). At the time of writing, the most expensive fursuit ever made had a price tag of

US$17500 because of complicated technological additions (Hay, 2017). For comparison,

South African fursuit prices for a full fursuit are an estimated $2500, with lower prices

offered to South African residents because of specific features that are standard for

international customers being considered add-ons for South African customers (Nautical

Creations, n.d.). Yote Fox Suits quotes ZAR8500 as an estimated basic cost, subject to

change based on specifications of the suit (Yote Fox Suits, n.d.). Fursuits are also

partially to benefit the viewer. Thus the places where they can be viewed by others need

consideration.

Conventions and Furmeets

The two most common forms of an in-person gathering are furmeets and furry

conventions. Furmeets are small, informal, localised private events that do not attract

people from far away (Patten, 2017b). Conventions, on the other hand, are larger, more

formal events that run over a few days annually, have membership fees, themes, a charity

for which they raise funds, and take place in hotels or other large public venues. Furries

will sometimes travel long distances to attend these larger events (Patten, 2017b). The

event recognised as the first furry convention was a small event called ConFurence Zero,

hosted in California in 1989 (Kreis et al., 2020; Patten, 2017b; Strike, 2017). Today, furry

conventions can be found on every continent (Patten, 2017a; 2017b). South Afrifur, the

first-ever (South) African furry convention, took place in 2017 (Patten, 2017a). Further,

because of COVID-19, the South African community hosted its first virtual convention,

FURSAverance, by YouTube live stream, in June 2020 (FURSAverance, n.d., FURSAverance FAQs, n.d.).

The main attractions of furry conventions are the panels one can attend on a variety of topics, and social events such as fursuit dance competitions and raves (Satinsky & Green, 2016; Strike, 2017). There is also an area known as the fursuit lounge, where fursuiters can take a break from fursuiting by removing their heads and relaxing (Satinsky & Green, 2016). Conventions also frequently host a fursuit parade, where most fursuiters attending the convention walk a predetermined route at a predetermined time around the convention area (Soh & Cantor, 2015; Strike, 2017). Another major part of the furry convention is the Dealer's Room (sometimes Dealer's Den). This is an area in which various artists and creators display and sell furry-interest items and artworks, which are given a prominent place at conventions due to the prior-discussed importance of art to the furry community (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Soh & Cantor, 2015; Strike, 2017). In addition to these, fundraising is traditionally done for animal charities and organisations at furry conventions (Patten, 2017b; Plante et al., 2014b; Strike, 2017), reinforcing the arguments made above as to the connection furries have with animals.

Having described in detail what furry is, it is important to understand what furry is not. This will be discussed below.

Adjacent Groups

Furry has some overlap with related groups with different relations to anthropomorphism, the more common of which will be discussed here. The need to distinguish furry from other, similar groups is essential for both social identity theory reasons (as discussed in Chapter Three), and for researching this group. At a theoretical level, groups try hard to distinguish themselves from others. At a practical level, this

means that not understanding how ostensibly similar groups are fundamentally different from one other could cause furries to react negatively to being studied. By alienating them if they feel they are being misrepresented, could potentially impact the ability to involve them in further research. Thus, it is important to understand other labels to have an accurate understanding of the relationship furry has to similar groups.

This also means that, because the groups overlap somewhat, it is also important to understand the extent to which they do so. Thus, this section aims also to understand some of the other unique labels that furries may attach to themselves, to clarify the adjacent labels respondents in this study used to describe themselves. However, the intergroup dynamics discussed below are entirely within the setting of the United States. The structure of the South African context cannot be determined without further work that was beyond this exploratory study.

Therians

There are two distinct but ostensibly similar spiritualistic groups with some overlap with furries: Therians and Otherkin. Each of these, and their differences from furries, will be discussed in turn.

Furries are often confused for Therians because of the stereotype that furries are people who think they are animals (Grivell et al., 2014; Plante et al., 2016). Thus, distinguishing between the two groups is important, especially because that description is more accurately closer to Therians than furries. Therianthropy is a relatively unstudied psychological and spiritual phenomenon involving the belief that one has a deep spiritual connection to a particular animal or has the spirit or mind of an animal (Robertson, 2013). This is an evolution of shape-shifting creatures common to many mythological stories across many cultures (Robertson, 2013), albeit with much more individual focus in the

modern setting. The terms shifter (from shape-shifter) or Were (like in werewolf) are also sometimes used by Therians as names for themselves (Robertson, 2013). Therianthropy is not a religious movement in the traditional sense but does contain elements that serve the same purposes as religious practices, such as a metaphysical framework upon which identity is developed (Robertson, 2013). Therians gather in person only on rare occasions. Most interactions between Therians are online (Robertson, 2013).

Though far from all, some members of the furry community are also Therian, and the two communities actively emphasise that they are different (Plante et al., 2016; Robertson, 2013). They also differ in many key ways at a psychological level. For example, unlike furries, Therians are less likely to attribute human nature or uniquely human traits to animals, possibly due to their potential dissatisfaction with being human (Roberts et al., 2015b). However, the exploration of Therians was beyond the scope of the study primarily because the combination of the identities is rare. For instance, only around 4% of sample populations in other studies have been both furry and Theiran (Plante et al., 2016). Therianthropy is, however, also potentially a sub-category of another spiritual movement: Otherkin, which will be discussed below.

Otherkin

Otherkin is the same basic idea as Therianthropy, involving ontological claims about being partially non-human, but applied more broadly and includes mythical creatures such as faeries and angels (Laycock, 2012; Robertson, 2013). The term Otherkin is used in two ways: to refer to individual members of the group, and as a group term for all people who identify as less than entirely human (Laycock, 2012). Therians, thus, are potentially readable as a subgroup of Otherkin and are more adjacent to furries than Otherkin because of the shared interest in and connection with animals (Laycock,

2012; Robertson, 2013). However, not all groups distinct from furries are spiritual movements, so other fandoms related to furry need explanation, such as the brony community.

Bronies

As anthrozoomorphism is a broad interest, furry has overlapped with several other fandoms that focus on specific media. Some furries have stated that being fans of specific media containing anthropomorphic animals aroused their interest. Examples include Western animation, such as Disney films, anime such as *Digimon,* novels such as the *Redwall* series by Brian Jacques, *Warriors* series by Erin Hunter, and videogames such as the *Star Fox* series and the *Sonic the Hedgehog* series (Enjy, 2019c; Kreis, 2019a; Plante et al., 2016; Spacetwinks, 2016). Therefore, fandoms for other anthrozoomorphic media need to be considered.

At the time of writing, the most prominent adjacent fandom was the brony subculture. The term *brony* is a portmanteau of "bro pony" and is the name of a fandom surrounding the anthropomorphic children's television series *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* (Gilbert, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2014). The *My Little Pony* franchise has had several iterations and television shows over the years; the *Friendship is Magic* brand constitutes the fourth iteration of the overarching *My Little Pony* brand and is generally the only iteration that bronies are interested in (Gilbert, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012).

The primary attention, interest, and name all come from the fact that many of those engaging in the fandom are considered highly unusual for the subject of their interest: bronies are disproportionately young adult men (Gilbert, 2015). These men are usually of the most interest to academia due to the non-normative masculinity embraced

by this section of the fan group (Gilbert, 2015). Further adding to the interest from academia in terms of gender performativity is that they borrow a form of the term "coming out" from LGBTQIA+ culture; in this case, the exact phrasing is "coming out of the stable" (Gregory, 2014; Jeong, 2014). The term *pegasister* (a portmanteau of "Pegasus sister") is also sometimes used specifically to refer to female fans of the show to distinguish them from the male fans (Gilbert, 2015; Peterson et al., 2012; Wells et al., 2014).

Distinguishing bronies from furries is necessary because of the prominent interest in bronies in recent years and structural similarity to furries that might lead to the confusion of one for the other. While there is some overlap between furries and bronies, they are not identical. Essentially, furries are fans of a broad genre, whereas bronies are fans of one piece of media that broadly falls under that genre (Plante et al., 2016). While brony could be construed as a subcategory of furry, one can be a brony without necessarily being a furry, and vice versa. There is also some debate in both communities about whether bronies classify as furries, as well as some intergroup stigma because the brony culture is a manner of entry for many furries into furry culture, giving some furries the impression of "invasion" by bronies (Plante et al., 2016).

Studies are being conducted into the brony group, specifically as its own subculture, without the furry angle (e.g., *Brony Research Project*, n.d.). The specifics of this subgroup were also mainly beyond the scope of this study, outside of the overlaps it has with furries (i.e. furries who are also bronies), because the primary focus of this study was on furries only. However, it is also worth noting that, while prominent around the time of writing, the brony culture was generally seen to be on the decline when the study was conducted (Forrest, 2019). This was possibly indicated by the fact that BronyCon, once one of the biggest brony conventions globally (Wells et al., 2014), ran for the last

time in 2019, reportedly due largely to significant decreases in attendance (Kaltenbach,

2018). This argument of decline was further aided by the fact that the television show's

ninth season, which aired in 2019, was its final season (Discovery Family Channel, 2019;

My Little Pony, 2019). However, they are far from the only adjacent group to furries

interested in anthropomorphism; thus other existing fan groups also need consideration.

Other Anthropomorphic Groups

As stated earlier, anthropomorphism is the assignment of human characteristics to

animals (American Psychological Association, 2015), which serves perfectly well to

discuss furries. However, it is not the full definition as it does not only apply to animals;

it can apply to plants and other inanimate objects as well (American Psychological

Association, 2015). Thus, neglecting the latter part of this definition could confuse what

happens when plants and inanimate objects are anthropomorphised, and what relationship

this has to furry. These will be clarified below.

While there are anthropomorphic plant characters in popular culture, no mention

could be found of a single community dedicated to the idea of anthropomorphic plants in

general – fans of single pieces of media with an anthropomorphic plant, even when

prominent, do not count for these purposes, as that is still a fandom dedicated to a piece

of media, rather than an idea. There have also been examples in popular culture of

anthropomorphic non-vehicle machines and even food items. However, communities

dedicated to fandom around the broad ideas do not seem to exist on their own, only

fandoms for the pieces of media that contain them.

Examples of media containing anthropomorphic characters that are not animals

include *The Brave Little Toaster* (which contains a cast of anthropomorphic kitchen

appliances), *Little Shop of Horrors* (a musical containing an anthropomorphic human-

eating plant as the antagonist), *Sausage Party* (an animated film featuring anthropomorphic food items) and *Undertale* (a videogame containing an anthropomorphic flower as its primary antagonist, along with various other characters that are anthropomorphic interpretations of other objects and animals). While unclear sometimes as to whether active fandoms exist around most of these, *Undertale,* in particular, has a documented fandom surrounding it (Spencer, 2017). However, in terms of communities interested in inanimate objects, one group is documented that is somewhat analogous to furry, albeit applied to anthropomorphic vehicles.

Unlike other anthropomorphised objects, there is an interest in anthropomorphic vehicles as a broad idea, focusing specifically on anthropomorphic aeroplanes, space shuttles, and other flying machines (Cole, 2018). This group refers both to themselves, and the subject of their interest, as *aeromorphs* (Cole, 2018). The survey in this study asked after this group as "aeromorph or anthropomorphic vehicle fans" for clarity and to cover the potential that some fans of the idea may be unaware of the term. The discussion below will call the fans "aeromorph enthusiasts" to distinguish them from the characters they admire.

The connection between this group and furries is somewhat complex. While they consider themselves separate groups, aeromorph artists are sometimes also prominent in the furry community, and aeromorph art can also be found on furry art websites (Cole, 2018). However, the two are strongly distinguished at a definitional level: furries are only interested in anthropomorphic animals, and aeromorph enthusiasts only in anthropomorphic vehicles, so while both are interested in anthropomorphism, they do not anthropomorphise the same things. One can be both a furry and an aeromorph enthusiast, but they are not equal. Further, the single article found in the literature that describes this group looks at it from a fetish angle (Cole, 2018). It follows that, if they are anything like

furries as suggested, and because there is overlap between the two communities further highlighting similarity, one would find that there is much more to it than just sexualising aeromorphs, and one would likely find that much about aeromorph enthusiast culture is directly comparable to that of furry culture, just aimed at a different interest.

The existence of another extremely niche group using anthropomorphic animals in a different, but somewhat related, manner to furries needs brief discussion: postfurries. *Postfurry* is an complicated micro-movement within the furry community usually defined by its ideological underpinnings, manifesting to deconstruct furry using postmodern thought and deconstructionism while also exploring post- and transhumanism, and post-genderism through the lens of anthropomorphism (Makyo, 2015; Tracer, 2016a, 2016b).

In simpler terms, it attempts to determine some "essence" of what furry is by flipping many fundamental ideas of furry on their head, while also using both furry and its deconstruction as a platform to examine what transcending the ideas around definitions of "human" and "gender identity" would mean (Makyo, 2015; Tracer, 2016a, 2016b). At an aesthetic level, it combines the anthropomorphic animal aspects of furry with cybernetics, rave, and fetish wear (Makyo, 2015; Tracer, 2017). The claim has also been made that the overwhelming majority of postfurries are gender-non-conforming in some way or other (Makyo, 2015), which could make postfurry of potential interest to further psychological research. However, understanding the philosophy of postfurry in -depth, or the structure of the community itself, was well beyond the scope of this study It can best be understood simply as some furries who push the entire idea of furry to its logical extremes to comment on it, while still at some level retaining an essence of what furry is to explore identity.

Following these explanations of what furry is, and is not, the discussion moves to psychology's understanding of furry. This will be done by focusing firstly on what

clinical issues are reportedly experienced by furries followed by an overview of how being furry was reported to help.

Correlation with Psychological Factors

A few psychological factors and issues that correlate with furry exist. To begin, though not confirmed, there is potentially a higher-than-average rate of autism spectrum disorders amongst furries. According to one study, around 4% of the furry population has an autism spectrum disorder. This translates to a roughly 2.25 times greater chance of a furry having this disorder than the general populace (Plante et al., 2016). However, other, more recent studies have found this number to be as high as 11% (FurScience, 2018). This also makes them a potentially important source for participation in studies around this disorder.

Also, regarding furries that are also Therians, some research has suggested there may be a new disorder, species identity disorder, present in some members, that parallels gender identity disorder (Gerbasi et al., 2008). While this is a controversial proposal to some, due to the contested nature of gender identity disorder (Probyn-Rapsey, 2011), the original research team suggesting it as a possibility only intended to suggest that it may exist, not that it does exist, and it could serve as a potential study later for clinical psychologists (Gerbasi et al., 2011). There is also a significant association between decreases in self-esteem and life satisfaction and reported identification as an animal, which follows the notion of species identity disorder (Roberts et al., 2015b). This is expressed by some respondents in the study by Grivell et al. (2014) as species dysmorphia or species dysphoria, echoing the perception of Therians that their experience is similar to that of gender dysphoria. Therians also sometimes use the term trans-species,

which has a similar meaning (Grivell et al., 2014; Robertson, 2013). These are a few areas of interest for further psychological research.

Finally, furries also speak of post-convention depression, a general feeling of unhappiness or loneliness that occurs for some time after returning home from having attended a convention (Roberts et al., 2015a). However, this is not necessarily a disordered reaction. It could simply be a counter-reaction to moving away from a situation where the psychological benefits that furry creates were present to a situation where they are not. The following section explores these benefits in an effort to contextualise the post-convention depression.

Psychological Benefits of Furry Identity

While the fandom can seem like a trivial part of life to outsiders, the furry fandom identity can be more important to members of the community than other social relationships or connections they have (Reysen et al., 2017). This means that furry identity also correlates with increased well-being feelings of connection and belonging that are created through associating with the group (Reysen et al., 2017). The fandom itself serves as leisure engagement, which provides psychological coping through increased social connection to other members of the group– the more engaged the furry is with other furries, the more it helps with mental well-being (Mock et al., 2013).

Further, furries, in general, have experienced more than average bullying beyond the fandom (Plante et al., 2016). In contrast, the furry fandom provides a safe, accepting space where almost anyone is accepted for who they are (Kreis, 2019a). Bullying within the group does occur, but there are also cases where, for instance, a young furry who was bullied by some furries was supported and shown compassion by others in the group (Kreis, 2019g). Some LGBTQIA+ furries have stated that the group provides a structure

of support for their queer identity, allowing them a group to fall back on if their parents do not accept them (Kreis, 2019e). Furries also sometimes provide material support to other members in need, though nonmaterial support is far more common (Roberts et al., 2015a). This also ties into the group's support for charity causes.

According to Plante et al. (2016) and Reysen et al. (2018), rates of anxiety disorders, mood disorders, and attention deficit hyperactive disorder are significantly lower or not much different than rates of those disorders in the general United States population. Though female furries are more likely than male furries to have anxiety or mood disorders, this was also in line with the general United States population (Reysen et al., 2018). Where people do have anxiety, particularly social anxiety, fursuiting is self-reported as a particularly effective way of overcoming those issues. However, some people report that fursuiting is a highly effective coping mechanism for other disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder and major depressive disorder (Burke, 2018; Kreis, 2019d; Kreis et al., 2020; Satinsky & Green, 2016). Interaction with the furry group often provides a testing and learning ground for social skills, and a way to learn about the appropriateness of certain social behaviours (Roberts et al., 2015a). This is a potentially vital aspect of the fandom for people who struggle with social issues, such as members with autism spectrum disorders. Fursuiting is also reported by many to be helpful with various problems that people with the disorder experience (Enjy, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c).

Some report that it allows them to temporarily disengage from their personal identity by inhabiting the identity of another character (Enjy, 2019b). Wearing the fursuit is also self-reported to decrease social anxiety and increase confidence, sometimes even by the merely existence of the fursuit and not even wearing it (Enjy, 2019b, 2019c). Interacting with someone else wearing a fursuit helps with an aversion to eye contact by tricking the brain into forgetting that they are engaging with a person rather than a

cartoon character (Enjy, 2019b). The suit affords a certain amount of anonymity, which is also self-reported to help feel less anxious about acting strangely (Enjy, 2019c).

Further, when in suit, behaviours engaged in are seen as part of the character's behaviour and do not appear to others as strange, but instead as endearing (Enjy, 2019b). Examples of this include what Enjy (2019a, 2019b, 2019c) calls "stimming", an informal terms used to refer to stereotyped behaviours (Kapp et al., 2019). Stereotyped behaviours are repetitive patterns of motor movements, use of objects, or speech that are part of the diagnostic criteria for autism spectrum disorders (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). To illustrate the integration of stereotyped behaviours into the practice of fursuiting, a fursuiter known as Pluma stated that they integrate their stereotypes into their suit by having wings, thus transforming their arm-flapping into their character wing-flapping (Enjy, 2019c). Wearing a fursuit head also reportedly dampens many sounds, bright lights, and even smells, all of which may over-stimulate autistic people (Enjy, 2019b; 2019c).

However, fursuiting can cause other problems for those with autism spectrum issues. First, fursuiting itself may also cause over-stimulation from the heat and humidity or the textures of certain fabrics (Enjy, 2019b; 2019c). Wearing a fursuit also attracts attention to the wearer, which may also increase unwanted physical contact. This could be highly stressful to the wearer even though conventions tend to deal with this by handing out ribbons that attendees can wear to state whether they welcome physical contact (Enjy, 2019b; 2019c). Unwanted physical contact can also be somewhat averted by the presence of a handler. This all suggests that while it may be beneficial and potentially therapeutic to some with the disorder, it needs to be considered individually. Partial fursuiting may be a way to avoid some of these stimulatory issues particularly while still gaining the benefits (Enjy, 2019b).

Moving from purely personal benefits of the furry identity and into broader social benefits, studies have shown that furry fandom identity and membership, particularly when salient, has a link to global citizenship identity and prosocial behaviours, such as being charitable (Plante et al., 2014b). Global citizenship refers to an identity through which a person aims to improve the world not just for themselves and the people around them (Plante et al., 2014b). Furries are generally more likely to identify as global citizens. They believe this is the group norm, that also correlates with increased pro-social attitudes (Plante et al., 2014b). This is likely aided by the group having an international subscription (Plante et al., 2014b) and wide acceptance of the furry fandom.

Furry, then, has psychological benefits. However, some believe that clinicians do not understand furry identity sufficiently and would assume that the source of their problems lies in their identity as furries (Roberts et al., 2015a). Greater research into furry could potentially help with clinical intervention for people with the furry identity, who may avoid therapy or not benefit from it because of a fear of stigmatisation and misinterpretation of the important coping factors it provides (Roberts et al., 2015a; Mock et al., 2013), and because of the prevalence of perceived stigma that exists against the group. A detailed discussion of the stigma and violence experienced is given in the next section.

Experienced Stigma, Violence, and Responses Thereto

The first question that arises when speaking of stigma against furries is whether the stigma actually exists, or whether it is just perceived, and if it does exist, whether it is to the extent believed. This question has been answered by research that shows stigma towards furries does exist (Roberts et al., 2016). Further, when asked to estimate

prejudice towards them by anime fans one study showed that furries, were reasonably accurate in their estimations (Reysen, Plante, Roberts & Gerbasi, 2017).

The continued experience and anticipation of stigma against furries by non-furries, also leads to concealment of the furry identity from others. This can be severely distressing and could decrease mental well-being because of the effort taken to continue concealing it, where the furry identity may also have significant importance to the person's sense of identity (Mock et al., 2013; Plante et al., 2014b; Roberts et al., 2015a). Bullying by outsiders for being a member of the furry community is common for most. For instance, some members of the community have also described harassment from colleagues after explaining their furry interests to co-workers (Kreis, 2019d; Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016). Also, furries have reported issues such as lost relationships, jobs, and even professional sanctions against them because of identifying as a member of the community (Kreis et al., 2020).

Even if stigma is overestimated, it can be experienced by furries as significant, comparable to the stigma experienced by ethnic and sexual minority groups (Plante et al., 2014a). This can socially isolate members of the community from society and lead to negative self-evaluation (Mock et al., 2013). Many furries have also stated that they will, or do, conceal their furry identity from clinicians due to concern about misunderstanding and stigmatisation of the identity (Roberts et al., 2015a). Negative responses by clinicians to furry identity could lead to losing trust, severely undermining the clinical treatment process (Roberts et al., 2015a). The negative effects of stigma are offset by the increased engagement with the group, and by the other ways discussed above in which the group promotes well-being (Mock et al., 2013; Reysen, Plante & Chadborn, 2017). It is important to understand both the content of the stigmatic beliefs against furries and their origins.

Stigma is usually driven by media depictions of furries, whether in fiction or some pieces of journalism. These have generally been negative and found by research to be generally incorrect (Gerbasi et al., 2008). For example, furry is partially stigmatised due to the perceived immaturity and irrationality of the interest, which also correlates with being seen as less desirable as a romantic partner to a non-furry (Mock et al., 2013; Reysen & Plante, 2017). More persistent, however, are the negative popular cultural and persistent online portrayals of furries that paint them all as sexual deviants and fetishists, often also associating them with things such as zoophilia and bestiality (Plante et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2015a; Roberts et al., 2016; Strike, 2017; Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016). The difference between the two is that zoophilia is a sexual interest in real animals, and bestiality is the actual performance of sex acts with animals (American Psychological Association, 2015). Furries do also engage in their affinity with animals in a sexual fashion to some extent. However, as Joe Strike (2017) puts it, when sexuality is concerned, furries are interested in the mental representation of the animal, not the animal itself. However, the created correlation between bestiality and furry, likely contributes to anti-furry hatred and discrimination, in much the same way as Hopwood and Connors (2002) explain that homosexuality became synonymous with HIV/AIDS, leading to homophobia. The general view of furries is that stigma towards them will be worse if the belief is that being furry is a choice – something that many of them do not believe to be the case (Plante et al., 2014a). The following sections, thus, will explore the accuracy of these claims.

Accusations of Sexual Deviancy

Furry is generally seen by its members as a highly sex-positive community (Kreis et al., 2020), which may create the perception to outsiders this indicates acceptance of

sexual deviancy. While there are sexual elements to furry, including pornographic art, the performance of sexual acts in fursuit, and specialised sex toys, these are only one part of the furry expression, rather than central to furry, as the stereotypes usually portray them to be (Abery, 2020; Kreis et al., 2020; Soh & Cantor, 2015; Strike, 2017; Vaughn & Rodriguez, 2016). To correct the misperceptions, sex and pornography within the community will each be explored below.

Engaging in sexual activities in a fursuit is usually called murrsuiting, and fursuits designed to accommodate sexual activities are sometimes called murrsuits. The appeal of murrsuiting has been described by some who practise in three ways: First, as aesthetically appealing to their partner when they are in suit; second, the erotic appeal of the fur against the skin when the partner is in suit; and third, as a mental aid specifically as a way to properly imagine themselves as their character when wearing the suit by getting into the headspace of that character (Abery, 2020; Strike, 2017).

Plante et al. (2016) showed that furry pornography was somewhat commonly viewed, though a larger portion of the overall furry art is viewed by men (51%) compared with women (31%). Men also, on average, viewed furry pornography four times as often as women monthly (Plante et al., 2016). The attitude towards furry pornography was generally fairly positive for men and generally mixed for women, but the overall attitude of furries towards non-furry pornography was negative-to-mixed (Plante et al., 2016). While no direct comparisons can be made to the general populace, as no comparable studies exist, studies with the general populace provide suggestions. A study by Evans-DeCicco and Cowan (2001) showed that, in the general population, women have an overall more negative attitude towards pornography than men, as was also seen with furries. Further, a meta-analysis by Price et al. (2015) showed that, in the general United States population between 2008 and 2012, two to three times as many men consumed

pornography compared with women. This could either suggest that furry men consume far more pornography than average or that furry women consume far less. However, which explanation is likely to be accurate is unclear.

Most furries also report either no preference or a preference of pornographic to non-pornographic furry art (Plante et al., 2016). Specifically, pornography serves as a visual way of projecting oneself into the place of the characters involved in it (Soh & Cantor, 2015). Fursonas are important to furry identity, thus pornography using the fursona is likely simply a way of projecting oneself into a fantasy situation, to increase personal significance, which likely enhances the eroticism of the art through direct identification or substitution of the fursona as the self. This is also generally described as the case for murrsuiting. The sex appeal seen in characters in commercial media is generally seen because they are inherently designed to be sexually appealing (Kreis et al., 2020).

However, sexuality in furry has been the subject of some controversy. Spacetwinks (2016) argues for the lack of acceptance of furry sexuality in the 1990s and 2000s. He essentially contends that the negative reaction from outside was ostensibly about homophobia (Spacetwinks, 2016). He notes that various female characters have broader appeal than simply to furries, with many non-furries appreciating their sex appeal (Spacetwinks, 2016). Characters noted by Spacetwinks (2016) were Lola Bunny (*Space Jam*), Krystal (*Star Fox Adventures*), Gadget Hackwrench (*Chip 'n Dale Rescue Rangers*) and Minerva Mink (*Animaniacs*). However, male anthropomorphic characters were not appraised in a similar fashion, which Spacetwinks (2016) argues indicates that the only acceptable form of furry sexuality to the mainstream were heterosexual male fantasies. Various older furries also believe that furry hatred has roots in the rise of homophobia in the 1980s in the United States because of the AIDS pandemic (Kreis et al., 2020), an

argument supported by Hopwood and Connors (2002) that homosexuality became synonymous with AIDS.

Adding to the argument that furry hate is disguised homophobia is that a common insult used towards furries is furfag (Strike, 2017) – a portmanteau of "furry faggot", with the term faggot being a common derogatory term in American English for a homosexual male (Proffitt, 2018). If this argument is taken to its logical conclusion, anti-furry violence may be conceived of as homophobic violence. Per the argument that the two are linked, the rhetoric disguises homophobia in two ways. First, through the perpetuation of external hatred for a group that has a significant LGBTQIA+ proportion, but is not specifically an LGBTQIA+ identity (Dreamseeker, 2020; Rex, 2017; Spacetwinks, 2016). Second, some in the group accuse others broadly of "perversion" and come out in opposition to this (Rex, 2017; Spacetwinks, 2016). However, insult aside, it is generally hard to gain much definitive proof that furries have been derided as a way to mask homophobia or that violence against furries is rooted explicitly in homophobia.

This accusation of perversion is also a mainstream stereotype about furries. However, more recently, this has ostensibly changed. A cursory internet search can find several articles on non-furry websites (Bassi & Serrano, 2018; Donaldson, 2018) that tout the sex appeal of male anthropomorphic characters, particularly those from Disney films, including Robin Hood (*Robin Hood*), Simba and Scar (both from *The Lion King*), Kovu (*The Lion King II: Simba's Pride*), Beast (*Beauty and the Beast*) and Max (*A Goofy Movie*).So the mainstream seems to have shifted on this position of only heterosexual male fantasy being acceptable. However, the extent of this shift and the impact it has on the acceptability of fantasies of alternate sexualities is up for debate. The next important consideration is what picture academia has of furry.

Outside of the IARP work, the conflation of furry identity with sexual interest has also been present in academic research, specifically surrounding the idea of an erotic target location error. Essentially, an erotic target location error is a way to explain the development of a paraphilia and involves the misplacement of a sexual desire into an item in the environment that is a peripheral or inessential aspect of their sexual interest (Lawrence, 2009). For example, a person who is sexually interested in women might, according to this theory, "incorrectly" place their sexual interest in women into women's clothing – that is, develop a sexual interest in women's clothing as a proxy for their underlying sexual interest in women, by focusing exclusively on that single aspect of women (Lawrence, 2009). However, this theory is criticised as being merely another way to pathologise unusual sexual interests, as it fails to distinguish pathological sexual interests from nonpathological sexual interests (Moser, 2009).

The theory also posits a more extreme manifestation of this process, called erotic target identity inversion, which occurs when the person manifests their sexual interest in themselves and, thus, attempts to become an impersonation of their sexual interest (Lawrence, 2009). The person has not only sexual attraction to the object of desire but also finds sexual arousal in the fantasy of becoming that object (Hsu & Bailey, 2019). Involving furries, the argument from this theoretical standpoint is that furries are sexually attracted to plush toys (a paraphilia called plushophilia), due at least in part to the fact that many represent anthropomorphic characters in, say, animated cartoons (Lawrence, 2009). The fursuit thus, is read as an attempt made to imitate a plush animal for sexual purposes (Lawrence, 2009). In Hsu and Bailey's (2019) study, tests were done to determine if furries exhibit both sexual attraction to anthropomorphic animals and sexual arousal by the idea of transforming into an anthropomorphic animal through fursuiting. The results determined that the majority rated their sexual interest in fursuiting from none to neutral.

However, there was a significant sexual interest both in anthropomorphic animals and in transformation to that, suggesting erotic target identity inversion (Hsu & Bailey, 2019).

However, Grey (2020) argued that perhaps a better and less stigmatising explanation for furry interest in sexual aspects of anthropomorphism lay in the much more straightforward explanation that it is a conditioned fetish. Adding to this argument many in the study indicated their interest in furry arose at least somewhat from exposure to furry pornography (Grey, 2020; Hsu & Bailey, 2019). Hsu and Bailey (2020) countered with the argument that conditioned responses were inadequate explanations of fetishes, that this explanation was incompatible with erotic target identity inversion, and that the theory is not inherently stigmatising. This was counter-responded to by Pfaus et al. (2020), who argued that conditioning has extensive evidence for its existence in the study of fetishes and that fetishes had been conditioned before studies took place. Further, even though research and understanding of sexuality is limited at best, partially due to practical and ethical issues that prevent accurate testing, making detailed understandings of fetishes is difficult (Pfaus et al., 2020). Thus, the theory ostensibly suggests that fursuiting is an expression of zoophilic urges, an explanation that furries reject (JM, 2015). The perception that exists that furries are zoophiles will be explored in more depth in the following section.

Accusations of Zoophilia

Contrary to the stereotypes, neither zoophilia nor bestiality is generally tolerated by furries (Strike, 2017) who further demonstrate their inherent love of animals by and above-average concern for animals seen in furry communities, exemplified by extensive raising of money for animal charities. Their intolerance of zoophilia or bestiality is especially true because it is seen as a form of abuse against animals, as it is usually

harmful to them, and consists of violence, exploitation and control being fetishised (Stern & Smith-Blackmore, 2016).

The terms "zoophilia" and "bestiality" are often used interchangeably, which can lead to confusion, so the term "animal sexual abuse" is preferred by professionals (Stern & Smith-Blackmore, 2016). Zoophilia is also generally considered pathological by most healthcare professionals and psychologists. In the *International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems*, eleventh revision (ICD-11), code 6D35 is titled "Other paraphilic disorder involving non-consenting individuals". It makes specific, explicit mention of animals as potential targets for this condition (World Health Organization, 2018). *The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, fifth edition (DSM-5), also explicitly lists zoophilia as a potential sub-disorder under "Other Specified Paraphilic Disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Thus, the consensus between both manuals is that it is abnormal, though both have the caveat that it also needs to cause distress and impairment to normal functioning to be considered disordered (American Psychiatric Association, 2013; World Health Organization, 2018).

Note, for the South African context, the legal status of bestiality within the country is that performed acts of bestiality are classified as crimes, as per the *Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act of 2007* (2015). Further, distribution of films that depict bestiality are given an XX or "Presumptively Harmful Content" classification (Film and Publications Board, 2019), rendering it a criminal offence to distribute, as per the *Films and Publications Act of 1996* (2016). It was unclear from these Acts whether simply possessing such material was also considered a criminal offence or only the distribution thereof.

Regardless, both furries and zoophiles are interested in animals, so there are overlaps between the two groups. Hsu and Bailey's (2019) research was ostensibly the

only academic study that quantified zoophilic interest in the furry fandom. The study's findings showed that within the sample, furries rated their sexual attraction to animals as generally very low, with just over half (53.29%) stating they had zero sexual attraction to real animals (Hsu & Bailey, 2019). Even of the remaining 46.71% that scored themselves higher than 0 on the 11-point scale, the majority of those still scored themselves at five or less (Hsu & Bailey, 2019). Further, while the FurScience/IARP team are the primary researchers into furry phenomenon, they have never covered this subject. The reasons are unclear, and the attitude of the IARP to studying this subject has not been clarified by the group Other than accusations and misconceptions, furries have also been subject to at least one act of physical violence. This will be discussed in the next section.

Experiences of Physical Violence

Stigmatisation against the community has not simply been limited to verbal statements and perpetuated misconceptions. Violent threats have been made against furry conventions, and a violent chlorine gas attack was performed against the 2014 iteration of Midwest Furfest (commonly known as MFF), a convention in Rosemont (Evans et al., 2020a, 2020b; Patten, 2017b; Swann, 2016). The reason for the attack, and the attacker's identity was still unknown to the public at the time of writing. However, it seemed reasonable to members of the community to assume that negative stereotypes and stigma towards furries, or aspects of furry culture seen as "socially unacceptable", were likely an exacerbating factor in that attack, or perhaps even other violent threats against other conventions (Evans et al., 2020a, 2020b; Swann, 2016). Thus, while uncommon, violence specifically aimed at furries is not entirely unheard of, even if the specific reasons for its occurrences are not fully understood or documented.

Conclusion

Furry is a complex and often misunderstood group and is potentially important to study for several reasons, including those of wellbeing and unusual population groups. The literature review has, to some extent, indicated what a prototypical member looks like in a Western context: a white male in his 20s, studying towards a degree, who is LGBTQIA+ and has a fursona but likely does not own a fursuit. Group norms have also been suggested: furries have great concern for real animals, strong acceptance of diversity, express kindness, and compassion to others, and are concerned by negative outgroup perception of their identity to the point where they generally hide it from others.

The next chapter will explore social identity theory and how this applies to and explains the workings of the furry identity and the group dynamics involved.

Chapter 3: Social Identity Theory

Introduction

To understand furries better as a group, social psychological theory will be briefly explored. After that, social identity will be outlined in detail, with specific focus first on the features of social groups and categorisations, then by examining how it defines members through concepts of prototypicality, stereotyping, deviancy and focusing on relations between groups and members thereof through social comparisons, and inter- and intragroup relations. Thereafter, the theoretical framework will be used to discuss furries first by showing the applicability of the theory, and the discussed aspects thereof, to LGBTQIA+ individuals, and using the LGBTQIA+ example to extrapolate how social identity theory may apply to furries themselves owing to the dearth of literature on the furry community.

In the broadest sense, social psychology is the study of the behaviour of people in social situations, with behaviour being observed and inferences made about the cognitive processes behind these observed behaviours (Baron & Branscombe, 2012; Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000). How the behaviour of individuals changes when in the presence of others is a significant part of the concern of social psychology (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). However, this is too narrow a definition, so the more accepted definition attempts to orient people not just in terms of other people, but also events and objects, and how influence works not just when other people are around, but when the presence of others is also implied or imagined (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Influence takes two separate but interrelated forms: First, informational influence is the use of the behaviours, beliefs, and attitudes of others as evidence about the way reality works (Baron & Branscombe, 2012; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Central to this form of influence is the desire to act so it is seen as "correct" (Baron & Branscombe, 2012), which directly relates to the second form

of influence, which is normative influence. Normative influence is the attempt to conform to the expectations of others to gain their acceptance (Turner & Oakes, 1986). People perceive others as having certain expectations, and will actively alter their behaviours to meet those expectations in order to gain approval (Baron & Branscombe, 2012).

The core debate in social psychology is whether individual behaviour in groups is in any way fundamentally different to their behaviour when alone (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Social psychology that focuses on the individual suggests that group behaviour is simply a result of interpersonal factors being stronger in groups due to said factors being more numerous (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). However, this is seen as a reductionist understanding of group behaviour (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Social identity, thus, developed as a response and aims to counteract this reductionism (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

Social identity is, simply put, a person's knowledge that they are a member of a group and that membership has significance for that person (Tajfel, 1972, cited in Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This identification has a psychological character, making membership of the group phenomenologically real to the person, above simply being a label applied to them by others or awareness of the attributes of the group (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Social identity is necessary to understand behaviour in groups, as the individual members of the groups have mentally internalised the group – that is, they have made their membership to the group part of the concept of their personal identity (Trepte, 2011) – and their behaviour in group settings is different as a result (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This raises the question of what exactly constitutes a "group", which shall be the starting point for this discussion on inter- and intragroup relations and how these create social shorthand through stereotyping and prototyping.

It is important to understand the distinctions between ingroups and outgroups. In simplest terms, the ingroup is seen as those most similar to the self, and the outgroup is the inverse (Stets & Burke, 2000). The functions of these categorisations will be explored in more depth below.

Social Groups and Categorisation

Social groups, at a most basic level, are collections of two or more people that have shared identification of themselves or at least perceive themselves to share a social categorisation (Stets & Burke, 2000; Turner, 1982, cited in Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). However, many social identity theorists believe that groups must have three or more members, as groups of two (a dyad) do not have the same group processes and are instead almost entirely focused on interpersonal processes (Hogg et al., 2004). Social categorisation is a way in which people are divided up. Multiple such categories comprise society, and the labels applied to others based on the perceived divisions (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, cited in Trepte, 2011). Individuals are members of multiple categories, though they can never be members of multiple categories that mutually exclude one another (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Categories can only ever be understood relative to each other and are constantly under pressure to distinguish themselves from other categories (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

The psychological processes involved are aimed at simplifying the social world to project order onto the world, reduce uncertainty about it, and provide a guideline and justification for behaviour towards other people (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Tajfel, 1978, 1979, cited in Trepte, 2011). Social groups, thus, are functional, and the processes that create them ensure that they are ultimately inevitable because of their functionality (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

Categorisation also refers to the self, as categorisation is usually done with reference specifically to the self, and suggests something about the self (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000). While the focus has been heavily on how people categorise others, people do not simply use themselves passively as a reference for categories for others but also actively categorise themselves (Trepte, 2011).

Self-categorization theory is an offshoot of social identity theory that focuses specifically on categorisation processes (Hogg & Williams, 2000). It involves depersonalisation – a change in perception of the self and others: from seeing each other as individuals to seeing each other as members of a group (Hogg & Williams, 2000; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Depersonalisation is seen as the most fundamental process underlying all other phenomena (Turner et al., 1987, cited in Stets & Burke, 2000). Self-concept comprises a combination of various self-descriptions and self-evaluations that the individual has of themselves (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This takes form in various self-identifications, distinct, complex, and sometimes contradictory ways of describing themselves in particular situations (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). These take two forms: social identifications are those depending on group membership, which forms part of the focus of social identity theory; while personal identifications (sometimes called personal attributes, to distinguish from social identifications) are concerned with specific personal attributes (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000). Personal attributes might also sometimes be formed within the context of a social group (Hogg et al., 2004). Self-categorisation also allows for the formation of groups, as through it, individual behaviour becomes group behaviour (Hogg & Turner, 1987).

The active self-identification in a particular context is the salient identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). This is usually the identity that fits in best with the information available to the individual through cognitive processing about the context to

determine the categorisation that would best fit the context, and categorisations accessible to the individual, to generate the simplest understanding (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Turner, 1987; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Oakes, 1987, cited in Trepte, 2011). Accessibility, in this context, is determined by several factors, including the emotional significance to the person and how much informational input is required for the identity to become active in the person's mind – the less information required, the easier the identity is to become salient – and is determined by whether they will aid completion of the person's goals at that moment (Trepte, 2011; Stets & Burke, 2000).

Fit, on the other hand, is the idea that the process of comparison has produced a result that suggests the ingroup differences of that identity in that context would be less than the outgroup differences caused by identifying as such in that situation (Turner et al., 1987, cited in Stets & Burke, 2000). In social identity theory, the argument is that social identification is more salient than personal identification in certain contexts and that behaviours in this context are group behaviours, and thus fundamentally different to individual behaviours as a result (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). Content of behaviours is mainly dependent on which particular social identity is salient; thus, different social identities can be qualitatively different from each other (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Social identity theory sees self-definition of personal identity as that which mediates between social categories, and, in psychology at least, concerns itself with how these categories become significant to the person through psychological processes (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). People tend to gain much of their self-concept from the social categories to which they belong (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Turner, 1987). Uniqueness is accounted for in this theory because, while groups are shared, all individuals are uniquely located within the social structure because of the differences in

which categories they place themselves (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Different group

identities are also different in the value and importance they have to the person (Hogg et

al., 2004). Individuals also seek a balance between being similar to others, while also

trying to differ from others (Brewer, 1988, cited in Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Social identity theory also assumes that categories have different levels of power

and status relative to one another (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). These power and status

differences give society its structure. However, this structure is never completely static, as

external factors, internal features, or dynamics with other categories can influence their

nature, or even whether they exist (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This needs to be explored in

more depth starting with stereotypes, prototypes, and deviancy, and then moving on to the

idea of comparison.

Prototypes, Stereotypes and Deviancy

People do not only categorise others, they also engage in self-categorisation,

which results in comparison of the self to others and a perception of the self relative to

others related to how individuals represent the group prototype (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

Prototypes are cognitive representations of groups of linked attributes that broadly define

the similarities between ingroup members, define group-related behaviours, differentiate

the group from others, and show the internal structure of the group (Hogg et al., 2004;

Hogg & Williams, 2000). In contrast, stereotyping is used to describe seeing an outgroup

member through a prototypical lens (Hogg et al., 2004). A stereotype is a shared

evaluation of a social group, specific to a situation and held both by groups and

individuals (Hogg & Turner, 1987; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Prototypes are generally shared due to the information and perspective they are

derived from being commonly accessible (Hogg & Williams, 2000). This helps internally

structure the group, based on which members are more or less prototypical than other members (Hogg & Williams, 2000). Prototypes, however, do not necessarily describe specific actual members of the group; instead, they are simply a description of the ideal member, as far away as possible from the features of outgroups (Hogg et al., 2004). Prototypes, much like social identities, are also context-specific (Hogg et al., 2004).

Depersonalisation, is also seeing oneself as taking on the features of the group's prototype, and the subsequent acting in line with the norms the prototype suggests (Stets & Burke, 2000). This is done through self-categorisation which influences the individual to behave according to the prototype (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Turner & Oakes, 1986). Members of the group assimilate their own beliefs and behaviours into that of the prototype of the group (Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Social influence works with depersonalisation by creating the assumption that if people are the same, they will agree with each other, expect there will be agreement and that this consensus is attributed externally (Turner & Oakes, 1986). However, this does not always seem to be the case. Polarisation refers to the average view of a group member on some specific issue becoming more extreme after discussions within the group about the issue (Turner & Oakes, 1986). There is evidence of this occurring which runs contrary to theories that groups should converge on such matters – that is, come to some middle-ground consensus between the divergent views (Turner & Oakes, 1986).

Social attraction to others is a product of the level of identification the perceiver has with the group and how much the person is perceived to be prototypical of the group (Hogg et al., 2004). The more prototypical a person is seen as, the more persuasive they will be to other members, as they will be considered more "correct" (Turner & Oakes, 1986). This also ties in with group leadership. Prototypical leaders are members who identify more strongly with the group, resulting in them acting in ways that serve the group. They are

thus seen as more prototypical of all, allowing them the freedom to act in less conforming manners while leading (Hogg et al., 2004). Non-prototypical leaders must act in more conformist manners to prove themselves and gain credibility (Hogg et al., 2004).

Prototypes can also lead to rejection and ostracism of members seen as less prototypical (Hogg & Williams, 2000). This is where the conception of deviancy comes in. Deviants do not fit in with social ideologies or roles (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Deviant members are less prototypical and are thus less well-liked (Hogg et al., 2004). The group tends to react to deviants negatively, as they are seen as a threat to the integrity of the norms of the group (Hogg et al., 2004). A more positive understanding of deviance is that they act as critics within the group and challenge the group norms in ways potentially ultimately constructive to the group (Hogg et al., 2004). However, there is some doubt about this happening because of the polarisation effect. As such, social identity involves several comparative aspects, which are discussed in further detail below.

Social Comparisons

The concept of the subjective frame of reference is the set of points of comparison available in a situation, over which people have some control as to which they will be using (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). When these are used to compare the self to others, this is called social comparison (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Comparisons are central to social identity theory, as they are usually the first behaviour that occurs after categorisation (Trepte, 2011). This is necessary, as, in social situations, there are no objective standards to which one can compare themselves. Thus comparison to others is the only option available (Festinger, 1954, cited in Trepte, 2011). Comparisons also help determine which other people constitute the ingroup and the outgroup (Stets & Burke, 2000). When intergroup comparisons are made, people tend to attempt to maximise distinctiveness

between their ingroup and the outgroup, especially in ways that make the ingroup seem more favourable (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Social identity theory maintains that all knowledge is ultimately social and is derived from comparisons made (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This works because certain knowledge claims are made which are then compared to those of others, and either influence the belief in a new way or reinforce an existing belief with confidence in its accuracy (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). In group settings, people tend to wish to hold similar views to the consensus of their ingroup, evaluating them as the "true" perceptions. The individual draws on perceiving the stereotype of the group as the way to distinguish which group is making the "correct" knowledge claim (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). This leads to self-esteem, increased self-worth, and a sense of well-being, as the individual defines themselves in terms of the group, meaning that a positive evaluation of the group is a positive evaluation of the self (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). Self-esteem is also partially derived from group membership. People also actively attempt to feel positive about the groups with which they identify themselves as members (Baron & Branscombe, 2012), though likely also requires that the group accepts the membership of the individual (Ellison, 1993, cited in Stets & Burke, 2000).

Categorisation also results in the accentuation effect - an effect in the similarities between items within the category and differences from items outside of the category are emphasised through categorisation having occurred (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000). These differences are also exaggerated by contextual factors important to the person at that moment, leading to inaccurate perceptions of the differences being larger than they are, as a way of mentally distinguishing them (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). However, this effect only happens with aspects believed to be directly correlated with the categorisation (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). The accentuation effect is also stronger when the

categorisation is stronger, because of relevance to the situation, salience, or importance to the person (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

Categorisation and social comparisons work together to create group behaviour – categorisation creates stereotypical perceptions of the self and the ingroup, while social comparison dictates what is selected for the accentuation effect (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). For an applied example, someone living in a foreign country may perceive themselves as an outsider, and when they meet someone who comes from the same country as them, if they feel isolated from the country they are in, they may believe themselves to have more in common with their fellow countryman than they do, based solely on the lack of commonality with the local populace and their feelings of isolation. Groups are making comparisons constantly. It is important to understand how these comparisons impact relations between groups. This shall be the focus of the next section.

Inter- and Intragroup Relations

This section discusses two forms of group relations: relations between dominant and subordinate groups (intergroup relations) and relations between overarching and nested groups (intragroup relations).

In intergroup settings, power and status dynamics between groups mean that, in broader social contexts, one group comes to dominate over others (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). In this conception, dominant groups maintain the status quo of the society (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). In relation to these are subordinate groups, which are evaluated negatively (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Subordinate groups sometimes also avoid positive distinctiveness and go along with the status quo to reduce uncertainty (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

This is possible as dominant groups have the material means and promotion of subjective belief systems or social belief structures about the structure of relations between groups maintaining their relation to subordinate groups (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000). Two broad forms exist. Social mobility which is the idea that people can move between groups because boundaries between them are permeable, allowing an individual's social status to change (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). However, while the idea is useful for maintaining the status quo, the person gaining acceptance from the higher status group is rare. Allowing it on a mass scale would destroy the subordinate group, and the power relation would no longer exist (Hogg et al., 2004). Thus, more often, this ends with the person having a marginal identity – the dominant group does not accept them, and the subordinate group sees them as traitors (Hogg et al., 2004).

Social change in turn argues that boundaries are impermeable, and the entire group's social status needs to be changed (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Group status can be changed in two ways. First, through social creativity, where alternatives to the status quo cannot be imagined, meaning that the group tries to increase positive perception of the group by new comparisons, redefining negative characteristics, or choosing a different group with which to compare (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; van Knippenberg, as in Hogg & Turner, 1987). Second, through social competition, where alternatives to the status quo can be imagined, thus the subordinate groups directly compete with the dominant group over the legitimacy of the status quo (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

In intragroup settings, the internal structure of a group may include nested subgroups and cross-cutting categories, which are groups of people categorised by some similarity within larger overarching groups (Hogg et al., 2004). Generally, one of these nested groups has a dominant position within the group (Hogg et al., 2004). A schism

occurs when a nested subgroup feels there is intolerance of their views, or threats to their identity, from the overarching group, causing the nested group to fight against the overarching group for greater independence (Hogg et al., 2004). At this point, an example of the theory in application is required and will be detailed in the next section.

An Example of Social Identity Theory Applied to a Marginalized Group: Homosexual Social Identity

Because little work has been done on furries using social identity theory, this study could not explore in-depth how the theory has been used to understand the phenomenon. Social identity theory as used with another marginalised group will thus be detailed: LGBTQIA+ individuals, specifically homosexuals. This example has been chosen explicitly because furries are, on average, more likely to be a member of the LGBTQIA+ community than the general population (Plante et al., 2016), suggesting that many processes within the furry community may be shared with those of the LGBTQIA+ community. This will provide insight into how to apply social identity theory to furries, another subordinate group when explored in-depth hereafter.

Dominant groups determine what "normal" is; regarding sexuality, this would be heterosexuals (Cox & Gallois, 1996). As homosexuals are a subordinate group, studying them from the social identity perspective gives insight into their processes to maintain identity. Sexuality is a complex example to be using, as some people view their sexual identity as part of their social identity. In contrast, others may see it as part of their personal identity (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Homosexual identity is usually first seen by the person as a part of personal identity and may become social in form due to factors such as stigma (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Further, sexual orientation is a composite of multiple dimensions, including gender identity, social preferences and emotional attachments,

lifestyle, and, sexual behaviours and attractions, all of which may differently affect, and be affected by, developing the person's identity (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

Psychological theories of identity development have focused on the individual going through sequential stages, ignoring the impact of social factors on identity development and suggesting that other paths of development are problematic (Cox & Gallois, 1996). This is a problem for homosexual identity development, as homosexual men have an entirely different process of identity development to homosexual women (Gonsiorek & Rudolph, 1991, cited in Cox & Gallois, 1996). The social identity perspective, thus, overcomes these issues by focusing on not just individual-level processes but also the social aspects of identity development, and how social structure influences development (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Social identity is thus more capable of dealing with variations in identity development than linear stage theories (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

Social identity theory suggests that people will avoid siding with outgroups that are stereotyped negatively, regardless of whether they are believed to be arguing for the group's personal interest or not (Clark & Maass, 1988). In terms of negative stereotypes, heterosexual fear of HIV/AIDS often drives homophobia. Much media attention has been given to the links between homosexuality and AIDS, suggesting to most that they are synonymous (Hopwood & Connors, 2002). Further, various social identities have explicitly been linked with increases in negative attitudes towards homosexuality, such as political conservatism and Judeo-Christian religious beliefs (Hopwood & Connors, 2002).

A study by Clark & Maass (1988) into attitudes towards homosexuality and differences between ingroup and outgroup minorities showed that ingroup minorities are more influential when arguing the same position. This suggests that, while outgroups are generally seen to be acting in self-interested ways, self-interest was not a factor in

determining whether to support a position or not (Clark & Maass, 1988). A further study by Clark & Maass (1988) showed that heterosexual people with strong anti-homosexual sentiments would shift more pro-homosexual when presented with anti-homosexual arguments from a homosexual minority. While this seems a paradoxical move, social identity theory posits this as a concern by people with anti-homosexual views not to be construed as agreeing or being identified with the homosexual minority because of their negative view thereof (Clark & Maass, 1988).

However, another interesting finding in the same study is that heterosexuals with pro-homosexual views became more pro-homosexual when exposed to an ingroup minority with anti-homosexual viewpoints, suggesting that the ingroup minority was instead seen as an outgroup minority because of their viewpoint (Clark & Maass, 1988).

In terms of intragroup processes, Krane et al. (2002) argue that individuals with minority identities could benefit from involvement in group activities that support the social identity and are accepting of their personal identity. Using the example of the Gay Games V in 1998, Krane et al. (2002) explore the importance of an event in which an LGBTQIA+ identity is not only salient, but the majority identity, the identity being valued, and a sense of community that arises in such settings. The process during the event involved positive personal experiences within the setting of the Games, leading to personal feelings of empowerment, which increased personal, and then collective, identity and self-esteem as a result (Krane et al., 2002). Within the context of the Gay Games, participants noted that the shared identity was important, but so were individual differences (Krane et al., 2002). Exposure to others led to increased knowledge about the LGBTQIA+ community, resulting in strengthened identity (Krane et al., 2002).

Participation also encouraged individuals to perform acts of social creativity and increased participation in social change actions. This was also sustained by positive

memories of time spent at the Games (Krane et al., 2002). LGBTQIA+ individuals in this setting expressed that they are more likely to participate in social change activities when they see discrimination against them as individuals related to their social group membership, consistent with social identity theorising on the matter (Krane et al., 2002).

There are various ways homosexual individuals engage in social change. For social creativity specifically, four strategies exist: (i) comparative dimensions, (ii) refining existing negative evaluations, (iii) finding new comparison groups, and (iv) social competition. First, for new comparative dimensions, they make new comparisons that suggest they are better than heterosexuals, such as suggesting they are more artistically creative (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Another option is to be highly visible as overtly homosexual while participating in activities (such as sporting events) valued by heterosexuals (Krane et al., 2002). In terms of refining existing negative evaluations, an example exists with reproduction - heterosexuals will argue that they can reproduce, which they argue makes them better; homosexuals will invert this comparison by suggesting that heterosexuals are "merely breeders" (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

In terms of finding new comparison groups, homosexuals seek other, smaller groups with less status (such as drag queens, for instance) to show they are still above another group (Cox & Gallois, 1996). In terms of social competition, there are two strategies. Direct competition involves things like marches and protesting for gay rights (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Less direct forms involve lobbying for legal protections for homosexuals against discrimination (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

While these are sometimes effective, they also sometimes fail and leave the group in a worse position than they were in because the dominant group refuses to recognise the change in the relationship (Cox & Gallois, 1996). They also use various social mobility tactics. Capitulation is the complete avoidance of homosexual behaviours and enacting

heterosexual behaviours (such as having a heterosexual marriage). However, this is problematic as it may eventually lead to self-loathing (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Passing is a similar strategy, where the person attempts to appear heterosexual and simply does not disclose their homosexual identity, denying it if asked (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Covering involves disclosing the homosexual identity only if asked but attempting to appear not so through imitation of a heterosexual lifestyle (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Finally, blending involves avoiding talking about their sexual orientation, as it is seen as irrelevant to the rest of their life, and behaving in manners seen as appropriate for their gender (Cox & Gallois, 1996). The latter, however, may sometimes not be a social mobility strategy, but merely a result of their sexuality being seen as part of the personal, rather than social, identity, or have a social identity that is heterosexual; thus this person does not see themselves as part of the homosexual group (Cox & Gallois, 1996). However, these strategies are all problematic because one's sexual orientation will not simply change to align with the existing heterosexual social image (Cox & Gallois, 1996).

Group dependence impacts the choice of strategy for enhancement – the more a person depends on a group (due either to lack of other groups or relative status afforded by one group over others), the less likely they can change membership, and the stronger and more hostile the individual's reaction to perceived threats will be (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Dependence also interacts with solidarity, how much people believe they benefit more from this group than other groups, thanks to things such as social connections and psychological benefits, the relative values of which vary between individuals (Cox & Gallois, 1996). As threats increase, so does solidarity, resulting in decreased desire to change group membership (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Dependence and solidarity can predict the strategy chosen. Low solidarity generally also indicates low dependence, and thus social mobility strategies are more likely, and when both are high, social change

strategies are more likely to be adopted (Cox & Gallois, 1996). However, these also

depend on groups being voluntary (Cox & Gallois, 1996). With homosexuality not being

a voluntary identity, the relationship between solidarity and dependence is inverted –

dependence impacts solidarity (Cox & Gallois, 1996). Now that it is clearer how the

theory applies to a specific group, insights from this will be used to understand how the

theory applies to understanding furries.

Social Identity Applied to Furries

While little academic work has been done to explain furries through social identity

theory, certain aspects of furry identity and group processes could be understood in terms

of social identity. Extrapolating from the theoretical framework and seeing its application

to a somewhat similar marginalised group, some ways in which the theory helps explain

this unusual phenomenon will be considered.

To begin, consideration of how furries deal with other people who are entirely

outside of the furry community. Beginning explicitly with how furries deal with other

furries: I build on the argument of Krane et al. (2002) that group activities that support a

particular marginalised social identity will be psychologically beneficial. Thus, furry

conventions are psychologically beneficial for furries, adding value to the social and

personal identities in a setting designed specifically as a safe space for furry expression

and interaction. Logically furries would wish to preserve this safe space.

More important, however, is how furries deal with each other and how they deal

with those similar to themselves. In terms of intragroup relations, several nested

subgroups exist. Fursuiters, being a minority in the fandom (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Plante

et al., 2016; Satinsky & Green, 2016; Soh & Cantor, 2015) are simply a nested subgroup of

furries, rather than prototypical as generally suggested. Viewing other furries with the

same fursona species in more positive light than other furries in general (Plante et al., 2016; Reysen et al., 2015b), different fursona species could be interpreted as distinct, nested subgroups.

Groups also interact with other external groups. As a low-status group, furries face threats. To deal with entirely external threats, individual members often perform behaviours described by Cox and Gallois (1996) – the identity can be hidden mostly, and thus covering and blending both take place, where the furry identity is only shared with some or is treated as irrelevant to everything else in the person's life. Otherwise, as furry is seen as a safe, accepting space (Kreis, 2019a), furries may also perform acts of social creativity by suggesting that their broader acceptance than that offered by society makes them better.

When dealing with each other, however, furries often have a desire for belonging. The group can socially connect people, which may lead to group dependence, which can lead to increased solidarity with the group. Psychological benefits also increase solidarity with, and dependence on the group (Cox & Gallois, 1996). In practical terms, this means that the more furries engage with furry fandom, the more they find their mental health increasing (Mock et al., 2013), and the more solidarity and dependence increase, which leads to more engagement.

Some furries have a strong dependence on the group due to the social and psychological benefits of being part of the group, and thus also have high solidarity because furry identity benefits them more than others would. When threats are made to the group, the group reacts strongly and clamps down more on what society sees as "deviant" to move them away from the public view, which is the social mobility strategy of passing as normal to society. Complete banning of media coverage is a way of dealing with the same problem, albeit more extremely, as a blending technique, trying to protect

the private life of furries attending the safe space to separate it from the rest of their lives. However, with media coverage becoming more positive, it can be used as a form of direct social competition, where furries are seen commonly and become normalised. However, this is not the only way furries feel their group is threatened. As suggested by social identity theory, other, somewhat related groups also need to be considered in this way.

When furries with high identification with the group face a group distinctiveness threat, and with the stigmatisation of the group, a marked increase in members perceive the group in essentialist terms – a belief that members of the group have an intrinsic, unchanging quality that distinguishes them from other groups (Plante et al., 2015). Several groups pose potential distinctiveness threats to furries. The sharp distinction drawn by Otherkin and Therians between themselves and furries is made to the ends of legitimising the identities on their own grounds, as furry could be construed as "frivolous", compared to the seriousness of Therianthropy (Laycock, 2012; Robertson, 2013), emphasising that Otherkin and Therians see furries as a distinctiveness threat. People who engage in pup play also distinguish themselves strongly from furries (Wignall & McCormack, 2017). Also, the stigma towards bronies by furries shows that furries may see bronies as a threat to the distinctiveness of the furry identity and stereotype bronies negatively to enhance the distinction between the two groups. This can be explained with social creativity processes – comparing themselves to bronies potentially makes furries look better. These are all also true of the reaction of furries to zoophiles, as will be explained in-depth below.

The negative reaction to zoophilia suggests that zoophiles within the furry community are seen as a threat to the prototypical animal-loving attitude of furries; thus, zoophiles are a deviant group as they fall outside of the furry ideology. The reaction furries have to zoophiles can be explained by the process of polarisation, with group

discussions leading to increasingly negative views of zoophiles. I would argue this explains self-identification as zoophiles through symbols – as the group rejects them more, a schism is created, and the zoophile furries try harder to distinguish themselves from "regular" furries as a way to try to protect their interests from being pushed out. This likely leads to yet more polarisation by other furries, creating a continuous cycle. Furries also have concern they are sometimes too accepting of others, which allows undesirable people to maintain membership (Kreis, 2019g), which may explain this negative reaction, and may further fuel polarisation. Another way of understanding zoophilia may be as a new comparison group – furries distance themselves from zoophiles and negatively treat them as a social creativity strategy, a strategy threatened by people who consider themselves members of both groups.

Finally, both fursuits and fursonas can be interpreted through salience. The closeness of the felt connection to the fursona predicts the salience of the fursona, which predicts more significant differences between personal and fursona identities on the Big Five personality test scores (Reysen et al., 2015a). More actively the fursuit also puts the furry into their character's mindset, allowing the desired personality traits and identities to become salient (Satinsky & Green, 2016).

Now that there is some idea of how social identity theory applies to furries, it is time to consider what problems exist with the theory. These affect the research done in terms of applicability and understandings that can be gained from it. The section below discusses issues that have been raised with social identity theory, and how theorists have responded to these criticisms.

Criticisms of Social Identity Theory, and Social Identity Theorist Responses Thereto

Various issues have been cited with social identity theory and its methodology. The biggest of these is with the minimal group paradigm. The minimal group paradigm involves experiments done by dividing participants up into previously non-existent groups, with the term "minimal" referring to the groups being purely cognitive constructs because participants do not interact with one another (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, cited in Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Group membership is based entirely on an arbitrary criterion (e.g., preference of one painting over another). Then participants are isolated from others and asked to distribute points to other participants, where little information aside from group membership is given (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). These experiments have consistently shown that people will favour ingroup members even in these situations and are negatively biased against outgroup members (Hogg & Abrams, 1998).

The research in the theory has largely been conducted in controlled experimental settings (Hornsey, 2008). As such the theory likely overestimates the effects tested in laboratory settings when applied to external settings (Huddy, 2001). However, social identity theorists have counter-argued that results in minimal groups should be stronger in real-world interactions if the dispassionate experimental setting can capture them at all (Hornsey, 2008).

The minimal group research paradigm is also argued to fail to account for people choosing what group they wish to belong to (Huddy, 2001). The argument also states that the identities arising from the setting are far too weak and that stronger identities need to be the basis of research to gain the most accurate understanding of real-world effects (Huddy, 2001). Social identity is also argued to struggle to account for the meaning of the group identity to the individual (Huddy, 2001), an important factor because research has shown that subjective meanings impact group identity development (Huddy, 2004).

Confusing this matter is that meaning is not a static aspect but is influenced by the historical and cultural context of the group (Huddy, 2001).

However, social identity theorists counter-argue that groups only exhibit the behaviour they suggest in cases where the group identity has been internalised, thus creating meaning from categorisation and that assuming no meaning exists is a common misconception about the theory (Oakes, 2002). Further, they argue that considering identity strength, as a characteristic of the individual, separately from the context in which the identity occurs, would be reductionistic (Spears et al., as in Oakes, 2002). This is because social identities only develop in contexts in which categorisation of the self in these terms occurs in meaningful ways (Oakes, 2002). Some have also argued that minimal group situations used in social identity theory studies create certain expectations from the members, such as interdependence and outgroup discrimination (Hornsey, 2008). However, studies into this suggestion have given inconsistent evidence for this (Hornsey, 2008).

Others have argued that external assignment of people to a group also assigns a common fate to the group, and interdependence between members results from this shared fate (Cartwright, 1968, cited in Rabbie et al., 1989). Further, in minimal group paradigm settings, some argue that it is hard to tell behaviours that are intergroup from those that are simply interpersonal and that experiments have shown that interpersonal factors are more likely the explanation for behaviours in these settings (Rabbie et al., 1989). Some have suggested that minimal groups do not align with the theoretical aspects, as attempting to understand high-level intergroup conflict with small-scale minimal groups is reductionistic. It could be solved by simply determining the workings of minimal groups one by one (Hornsey, 2008).

Still others have suggested that social identity theory does little to distinguish the difference between a social category and a dynamic group (Hornsey, 2008; Rabbie et al., 1989). The difference works this way: a category is a classification according to some similarity shared between members, whereas a group suggests interrelations between members (Lewin, 1948, cited in Rabbie et al., 1989). A counter-theory, behavioural interaction, sought to deal with this issue. However, it is now seen as simply a more detailed version of processes discussed in existing social identity theory discourse (Hornsey, 2008).

The focus on self-esteem has also been a matter of contention, as this is measured on an individual level but assumed to have a collective outcome, specifically in the form of discrimination (Hornsey, 2008). Contrary to the suggestions posed by social identity theory, multiple studies found that people with high self-esteem are more likely to engage in outgroup bias (Huddy, 2001). Focus on self-esteem in studies has reduced, at least partially due to the understanding it cannot be measured overly simply – the difficulty in determining if low esteem leads to bias or if bias leads to higher esteem (Hornsey, 2008). This has largely been replaced with a focus on distinctiveness and self-definition (Hornsey, 2008). However, positive distinctiveness is also seen by some as insufficient to explain certain radical behaviours of groups (Sidanius et al., 1997, cited in Huddy, 2004).

Research has shown there is an inconsistent link between ingroup identification and ingroup bias (Hornsey, 2008). Huddy (2004) also maintains that social identity theory has largely ignored the impact of cultural and historical aspects on the formation and development of groups. Social identity theory is argued not to explain what, if any, differences exist in how the development of intergroup conflict happens in different societies (Huddy, 2004). Social identity theorists counter-argue that the theory does not

suggest a simple causal link but that biases are products of socio-historical context and the social position of the group itself (Hornsey, 2008).

Social identity theory has also been argued to ignore identities that would create intergroup conflict (Huddy, 2001). The argument is that social identity theory fails to adequately account for the origins of individual differences in how group behaviour is adopted and bias against outgroups develops (Huddy, 2004). This is especially pertinent because research has shown that individuals who dislike outgroup members are more likely to adopt ingroup identities in experimental settings. However, the theory cannot answer where this pre-existing dislike comes from (Huddy, 2001, 2004). For some, the theory also does not adequately detail the process by which group identities are adopted and developed by individuals (Huddy, 2004).

Furthermore, focusing on the group to reduce uncertainty has prevented proper understanding of how group members tolerate internally occurring differences to, and dissent from the group norms and prototypes (Hornsey, 2008). Social identity also generally focuses on groups where identity is known and fixed but mostly fails where group identity may be harder to determine, such as groupings by political ideology (Huddy, 2001). However, in this study, this was of lesser concern as furries have a known, fixed membership for the most part.

Now that furries have been explained and the theoretical basis has been considered, the methodology of the study is detailed in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology

Introduction

This study aimed to explore the furry community within the South African context by broadly describing the community through demographics, psychological features, and trends in group-specific attributes. Furries have been studied before to determine a general understanding of the group. However, they have not been studied academically within a South African context. As such, this chapter will deal with the decisions that were taken in the process of designing and implementing the first study in the South African furry community, as well as the justifications for the reasons such choices were taken. This chapter will begin with an overview of the choice of design, and the reasons for the specific choice of performing an exploratory study with mixed methods. This is followed by the process of construction of the questionnaire that was used. Thereafter, considerations around how the study was implemented will be accounted for, in terms of sampling, collection and data analysis. Next, the chapter will discuss how the data were ensured to be reliable and valid. Finally, a detailed discussion of ethical issues that were considered for the study will be given.

Research Design

An exploratory study with mixed methods was deemed the best way to get an initial understanding of the group within this context while building on other studies in other contexts. This study was exploratory in contrast to a descriptive study. Each will be discussed to differentiate them from each other, and to justify whey this study is classed as exploratory.

To begin, descriptive research provides specific, detailed, accurate accounts of the occurrence of phenomena (Neuman, 2014). Research aimed at explaining needs to be built upon research that explains the existence of this phenomenon (Neuman, 2014). Thus, descriptive research is a necessary and important foundational step for correctly understanding anything. The aim of descriptive research is thus to determine how things are, rather than trying to explain the reasons for things being that way (Neuman, 2014). The focus is on quantitative data, however, qualitative methods are also used, depending on the phenomenon studied (Neuman, 2014). Descriptive research methods involve observation of behaviours, analyses of case studies, or administration of surveys (Jackson, 2016).

Descriptive and exploratory research can seem alike. However, the primary difference between the two is that descriptive research starts with subject matter that is well-defined and aims to answer a specific question. In contrast, exploratory research is interested in something little-understood, and aims to determine what the phenomenon is in broad terms (Neuman, 2014).

According to Neuman (2014), exploratory studies, thus, are about ascertaining basic facts about a situation, with the end goal of not just generating an understanding but also gaining insight into further, more specific issues and potential hypotheses that can be explored in future. Exploratory studies are also done to ascertain the feasibility of future studies into this subject matter and determine ways of finding data for such future analyses (Neuman, 2014). Exploratory studies use qualitative data more than quantitative data, however, both data forms are acceptable, depending on the research question (Neuman, 2014). The stronger emphasis on qualitative data relates directly to the concern that exploratory research has on finding issues and the requirement for the methodology to be flexible in the face of discoveries (Neuman, 2014).

Thus, this study was explicitly exploratory research, rather than descriptive or experimental research, as it focused on the furry community in a context never studied before with the explicit aim of providing a framework for future study of this localised occurrence of this community., The reasons for the selection of mixed methods specifically, rather than the more typical focus on qualitative data, will be discussed below.

Exploratory research attempts primarily to broadly understand phenomena that are not well-understood, the research is necessarily complex, as research that is too simple would fail to provide useful information and guidelines for future studies (Neuman, 2014). This necessitated understanding the furry fandom as a group and what sorts of individuals were drawn to it. To address these questions and to explore the phenomenon in the depth required to understand it and provide a complete picture (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018), the decision was made that a mixed methods design was required.

A mixed methods study is one in which both quantitative and qualitative data are gathered (Christensen et al., 2015). Mixed methods research proposes the compatibility thesis, which states that qualitative and quantitative methods are complementary, and can thus be used together (Christensen et al., 2015). Such studies aim to address problems by combining the best aspects of each method in ways that offset their individual weaknesses, explicitly done by ensuring multiple forms of validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Christensen et al., 2015).

Further, mixed methods research also helps reduce the number of potential alternative explanations for results, helps explain divergent results better, and is more comprehensive as it includes both subjective, internal, and objective, external perspectives on the phenomenon (Christensen et al., 2015) – all factors that could help

clarify unstudied phenomena better. While quantitative data do not have paradigms for its analysis, qualitative data do.

The exact mixed methods design of this study was that of an embedded study. These studies involve one method being found within a broader framework of a study, primarily in the other method (Caracelli & Greene, 1997). The primary purpose of an embedded study is for the embedded method to answer different questions to the primary strategy (Gunasekare, 2015). Specifically, within this study, the qualitative data were embedded within a broader quantitative study of demographic features. Further, mixed methods expand the scope of a study by not limiting it to a single type of data (Greene et al., 1989).

In this study, the aim was primarily to determine group demographics through quantitative data. The qualitative data served as insights into aspects of the group identity and dynamics that demographics would not cover. Further, the methodology of analysis of the qualitative data was also at least partially content analysis (see the section "Content Analysis" below), which converted certain of the qualitative data into quantitative data, and axial coding (see the section "Axial Coding" below) of the qualitative data produced frequencies of axes. These qualitative data were analysed explicitly within a quantitative framework.

The survey method ensured the data were collected through a questionnaire (Jackson, 2016) as discussed below.

The Questionnaire

A questionnaire comprises a standard set of questions that the research respondents fill out themselves, self-reporting their answers (Christensen et al., 2015). The questionnaire in this study contained 33 questions – 7 of which were qualitative, and

26 of which were quantitative, in line with the mixed methods approach. Quantitative measures were in scales and self-inputted numerical data, while qualitative data were collected by self-inputted descriptive answers.

The reason for this choice in the instrument was because of the increased perception of anonymity for the respondents (this was paramount as some questions in the questionnaire were somewhat personal). Also, a survey ensured quick turnaround (necessary for larger samples), ease of statistical analysis of responses (Christensen et al., 2015), and because it is easier to administer to a population that is not localised. The disadvantage of the questionnaire is that answers, being self-reported, may be answered inaccurately to appear more socially desirable or due to lack of self-awareness or forgetting certain information (Christensen et al., 2015). The first issue of anonymity was attended to in that the numbers were assigned automatically to each completed response set in the order in which they were received - that is, the first response that was logged was given the case number of 1, the second was assigned case number 2, and so on, based on the date and time order in which they appeared in the raw results file.

The primary concerns of this study were demographic features, psychological features, and group norms. Demographics specifically refer to the "basic information" about a person (Jackson, 2016). In this study, these were age, race, sex, gender, sexual orientation, level of education, employment status, and religious beliefs. Questions 1 through 5 and 7 through 12 gathered data on these features. For this dissertation, psychological factors were any factors that specifically relate to the respondents' mental health and factors with an impact thereon. These consisted of self-reports of psychological disorders and rates of bullying experienced, and the impact that group membership had on the mental health of respondents. Questions 6, 30 and 31 gathered data on these features. Finally, group norms were about the identity of respondents as

members of the furry fandom specifically. They consisted of questions on attitudes towards external stereotype issues on perceived contextual differences and the duration of participation in the fandom, adjacent-group membership (Therian, Otherkin, Brony, Aeromorph), fursona species, and fursuit ownership (full vs partial vs intention to own). The remaining questions of the questionnaire, being 13 through 29 and 32 through 33 gathered data on these features.

The questionnaire was structured primarily on two factors: social identity theory and other questionnaires involving furries in international settings. In terms of the social identity, multiple question forms were necessary, in terms of defining group characteristics, dynamics with adjacent groups, and stereotyping by the reader. Demographic questions were asked to speak directly to the attempt to determine the group prototype. Overlaps with adjacent groups were studied out of concerns raised by social identity regarding distinctiveness threats (see the section titled "Social Comparisons"). Questions about fursonas and fursuits were asked because they are viewed as the defining characteristics of the group. Common negative stereotypes were tested for to counteract outgroup stereotyping that would influence interpretation of the group and its members.

Demographic questions were based partially on South African community survey data (Statistics South Africa, 2016), so as to be able to compare the sample data to that of the South African population. Other questions were based on data collected in the book *FurScience!* (Plante et al., 2016), allowing for direct comparisons between the data presented there and the data gathered in the process of this study. Finally, some questions (see Appendix A, specifically questions 1-7; 10; 14; 15-17; and 26) were adapted directly from the *International Anthropomorphic Research Project (IARP)/FurScience March 2019 Furry Survey* (FurScience, 2019a) and *International Anthropomorphic Research*

Project (IARP)/ FurScience Summer 2019 Furry Survey (FurScience, 2019b). These were

chosen because the questionnaires were current and also allowed for direct comparisons

between South African and Western data. Further, the group that produced them have

conducted the most extensive studies of furries in the United States, and thus have had

time to develop scales that are reliable and valid. Research by their members has also

been extensively cited in this dissertation.

The questionnaire was run online between April 4th and September 28th, 2020.

Except for age, respondents were not required to answer any question they elected not to.

Further, as the survey was somewhat limited in options provided, but collected qualitative

responses when "other" was selected, a few new data categories were discovered in the

results and the decision was taken to show them separate from a broad "other"

categorisation in the final results. Specific sampling methods used will be described

below, followed by a detailed description of the exact manner in which the data were

collected.

Sampling

A sample is a small group specifically selected from a wider group called the

population (Christensen et al., 2015). Population refers to the complete group of people

being studied (Christensen et al., 2015). The aim is that the results of the sample will

represent what the results of the population would be (Christensen et al., 2015).

Convenience sampling was determined to be the most viable sampling method.

Convenience sampling is a form of non-randomised sampling where people most easily

accessible are asked to participate in the research (Christensen et al., 2015). In this study,

the sample came from within furry social settings. Snowball sampling, which refers to a

form of sampling where respondents recruit further respondents for the study

(Christensen et al., 2015), was also used – where respondents were asked to tell others about the study through personal communication or social media. The link was also shared with other Telegram group chats, and posted on Twitter by the forum administrators.

The required sample size expected was hard to determine beforehand. This is because the exact number of furries within South Africa is difficult to state accurately, even if there were ways to estimate approximately how many there are. As at February 2019, the forum had around 770 members (ZA Furries, n.d.). However, this number likely includes several inactive accounts and people who are no longer members of the community for various reasons. Fred Patten (2017a) estimated the South African furry population to be between 200 and 600; estimates in South African media have suggested as many as one thousand (van Dyk, 2018). Of note is that Patten (2017a) considered the higher population figure to include casual observers – people who participate in fanship, rather than fandom (Chadborn et al., 2017; Plante et al., 2016). Only those engaging in fandom, however, were of interest to this study. They are more likely to self-select to participate in the survey than those engaged in fanship, especially as people involved with fandom are much more likely to participate in communal spaces such as forums.

However, the distinction between those in fandom and those in fanship did not provide a more specific idea of exact population size, as there was no way to determine what proportion of the population engaged at each level before data collection. The size of the population is critical, as it determines how big the sample should be (Christensen et al., 2015). Suggested sample sizes based on populations varied between sources. According to calculations by Christensen et al. (2015), if the population was approximately 200, then there would be a need for at least 132 respondents in a study, whereas Israel (1992) suggests 134 would be required. For a population of 1000, then the

sample would need to be at least 278 according to Christensen et al. (2015), and 286 according to Israel (1992).

However, because the size of the furry population in South Africa was not known, it was estimated to be roughly in the middle of the highest and lowest values given. Thus, the furry population was assumed to be 600. According to Christensen et al., (2015), the study would require 234 responses, or 240 responses according to Israel (1992). These sample sizes would, according to the sources, produce a 95% confidence level for statistical analysis of a population of 600 (Christensen et al., 2015).

The study ultimately had 98 respondents, which, according to the calculations by Christensen et al. (2015), would produce a 95% confidence level for statistical analysis for a population size of approximately 130, or 125 according to Israel (1992). The method of calculating these sample figures was not available for the values provided by Christensen et al. (2015). However, figures provided by Israel (1992) were calculated based on a formula by Yamane (1967, cited in Israel, 1992), which was as follows, with n being the sample size, N the population size, and e the confidence level:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

As an accurate determination of the actual population size was not possible before commencement, the study assumes that the sample size may indicate the population size, suggesting that the population is possibly 125-130 individuals. If accurate, this would be below any other estimate given. However, response rates to online surveys tend to be around 10-20% (Bourque & Fielder, 2003, cited in Jackson, 2016), which suggests that the population may be between 490 and 980 individuals. Thus, an accurate population size for the South African furry fandom remains unclear, and no other way to verify it could be determined.

Data Collection

Surveys were distributed online through various social media platforms, specifically the ZAFur forum (ZA Furries, n.d.) and through the "ZA Fuzzbutts SFW" Telegram group chat. Telegram is a messaging application available on cell phones and computers (Telegram, n.d.). These were selected because active members of the community themselves suggested these would be the places to find the most respondents. Permission from administrators was obtained beforehand, which added credibility and made participation more likely because the leaders in the community essentially signed off on the study. See Appendix B for the letter sent to forum administrators, and Appendix C for the letter sent to the Telegram group administrators. Respondents were also encouraged to share the survey with other potential respondents. As stated above, the number of respondents was 98.

Data Analysis

Three methodologies of data analysis were used: For quantitative data, statistics were used; for qualitative data, both content analysis and Anselm Strauss' axial coding were used, depending on the structure of the question (Neuman, 2014). Axial coding was used for answers involving the origins of furry interest, the differences that the South African furry community has to the broader international furry community, and the impact furry has had on the mental health of respondents. Each will be detailed below, beginning with a detailed discussion of the statistical analyses used.

For ease of reading, questions will be referred to by number, rather than the question content. See Appendix A for the complete questionnaire.

Statistical Analysis of Quantitative Data

Once the data were collected, analyses were run in two statistical phases, both in SPSS, and a third phase discussed below. SPSS is a statistical analysis software programme that can analyse the statistical features of data sets, and generate graphs thereof (IBM, n.d.).

First, descriptive statistical analyses were used on each quantitative question. This is a form of statistics that shows the numerical features of the data set, such as frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Christensen et al., 2015). Often, these are supplemented by presenting the data in graph format (Christensen et al., 2015). Thus, where appropriate in this study, these were reported, and graphs were used to further illustrate the data. Percentages of distributions were also indicated, using either actual percentages or, where multiple responses to a question were possible, percentages of cases. The difference is subtle, but percentage is calculated on the overall count of responses to the question (which, in cases where multiple responses were possible, could come out higher than the number of respondents), whereas percentage of cases is calculated as the portion of respondents who gave that answer, divided by the number of respondents who gave any answer to the question. Thus, this provides a more accurate distribution of the number, showing it as a percentage of the people who indicated it, rather than a percentage of the answers that said people gave.

Second, questions were divided into whether they are measuring furry or non-furry aspects. The distinction between the two is that the "non-furry" questions are those that ask for information about the person independent of their group membership (i.e., age, race, education level, rate of having been bullied, etc.) whereas the "furry" questions asked after factors specifically around furry identity (i.e., information about fursonas and engagement with furry-specific activities, e.g., pornography consumption). With this

division, statistical tests were run to determine which non-furry aspects have a statistically significant correlation with which furry aspects, using relevant inferential statistics. Inferential statistics refers to using sample data to generalise findings to the population from which the sample was drawn (Christensen et al., 2015). Where appropriate, these inferential statistical analyses were supplemented by descriptive analyses. Thus, depending on the level of measurement of the question, the tests used were cross-tabulations, Chi-squared tests, Spearman's rank correlations, T-tests, ANOVAs, and post-hoc Scheffe tests. Each test will be described briefly below.

Cross-tabulations are used to show the intersections between categories by showing numbers of respondents who fell into both categories, and Chi-square tests are used to determine whether relationships observed in cross-tabulations are statistically significant (Christensen et al., 2015). Correlation tests show both the degree and direction to which values relate to one another, by outputting a value between -1.00 and +1.00, with negative values indicating inverse relationships, and values closer to 1 in either direction indicating stronger relationships (Christensen et al., 2015). A Spearman's rank-order correlation is a correlation test done when one variable being tested for is ordinal (Jackson, 2016). A T-test determines the significance of differences between means of two quantitative variables, tested under the presumption that the null hypothesis is true (Christensen et al., 2015). An ANOVA (analysis of variance) is a test done to determine whether means across categories are significant, where the independent variable is categorical, and the dependent variable is quantitative (Christensen et al., 2015). Finally, a post-hoc test is done after an ANOVA in which three or more categories were used, to show which categories had statistically significantly different means (Christensen et al., 2015). See Table 1 for a full breakdown of what tests were used to compare survey questions. Justification for omissions will be provided in the results chapter. In the cases

of ANOVAs, post-hoc tests were also done, and reported as deemed necessary. With Chi-square tests, cross-tabulations were only reported as necessary.

Table 1

Tests done to compare demographic and psychological data to furry data

Furry Questions	Demographic/Psychological Question							
	1	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
13	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation
17	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation
21	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation
24	ANOVA & post-hoc	Chi square & cross-tabulation						
25	ANOVA & post-hoc	Chi square & cross-tabulation	ANOVA & post-hoc	ANOVA & post-hoc	ANOVA & post-hoc	Chi square & cross-tabulation	ANOVA & post-hoc	ANOVA & post-hoc
26	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation
27	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation
28	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation
29	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation	Correlation	ANOVA & post-hoc	Correlation	Correlation

The level of measurement refers to what type of data is being collected (Christensen et al., 2015). First, nominal scales use words, symbols, or numbers to categorise the participant as part of a specific group (Christensen et al., 2015). In this study, questions 2-5, 8, 9 15, 16, 23, and 24 all produced nominal data. Second, ordinal scales are used when variables are ranked, but without knowing the distance between ranks (Christensen et al., 2015). Questions 6, 22, and 25 produced ordinal data. Third, interval scales are variables in which the distance between them is known, and there is no absolute zero point, though there may be an arbitrary zero point (Christensen et al., 2015). Questions 7, 10, 11, 13, 17, 21, 25, 26 and 29 produced interval data. Finally, ratio scales are interval scales with a non-arbitrary, absolute zero point (Christensen et al., 2015). Questions 1, 14, 18, 27 and 28 produced ratio data.

SPSS codes data in specific ways that need to be discussed. SPSS has three available forms of measure – nominal, ordinal, and scale (McCormick et al., 2015). Nominal measures are used to indicate categories, ordinal measures indicate ordered values, and scale measure indicates a numerical magnitude (McCormick et al., 2015). Thus, in encoding the data for SPSS, nominal data was encoded as "nominal"; ordinal and interval data was encoded as "ordinal", and ratio data was encoded as "scale". See Table 2 for a full breakdown of how questions were coded in SPSS.

Table 2

Coding of variables in SPSS

Nominal	Ordinal	Scale
Province of Residence	Bullying Rates[b]	Age
Ethnicity	Socioeconomic Status	Years as a Furry
Personal Gender[a]	Education Level	Number of Fursonas
Personal Sexual Orientation	Religiosity	Pornography Percentage
Employment Status	Spirituality	Pornography View Times in
Furry as a Choice	Types of Identification with Fursona[b]	Last Month
Adjacent Group Membership[a]	Relation to Real Animals	
Fursona Gender Absolute[a]	Reasons for Fursona Choice[b]	
Fursona Sexual Orientation	Fursona Gender Relative to Own	
	Fursuit Ownership[b]	
	Sexual Interest Levels[b]	
	Attitude Towards Pornography	

[a] Categorical answers were separated into individual variables with binary yes/no indications for each. [b] Rating scales were separated into individual variables per statement rated, with the score for that statement in each.

Beyond the above tests, some tests were also conducted within the differentiated categories. Within the demographic features, the different measures of question 6 were correlated to one another, and questions 10 and 11 were subject to a paired samples T-test. Within furry features, several tests were done. First, question 13 was correlated with itself, and with question 17. Second, different answers for question 16 were cross-tabulated, and a T-test was run with one against a value in question 21. Third, the values of question 21 were correlated, and one was correlated against question 17. Finally, questions 26-29 were correlated with one another, and the different measures of question 26 were subject to both correlation and a paired samples T-test. Details about the exact comparisons made, and reasons for them, will be explained in the results chapter.

In all cases the alpha level was always 0.05. This indicates there is a 5% chance that the conclusions reached may be errors (Jackson, 2016). The alpha level is a comparison to the *p*-values (that is, probability values) that are calculated in statistics (Jackson, 2016). Essentially, the alpha value is determined as a threshold that will indicate whether a result may be significant or not, and significance is determined by comparing the *p*-value to the alpha value – if the *p*-value is less, the null hypothesis will

be rejected (Jackson, 2016). Setting of the alpha value is complicated by the fact that setting it too high will cause a Type I error, where the null hypothesis is rejected when it is actually true, and too low will cause a Type II error, where the null hypothesis is not rejected, despite being false (Jackson, 2016). An alpha value of 0.05 is typical for the social sciences (Jackson, 2016), thus is the reason it has been set as such in this study.

Correlations were regarded on a scale of <0.30 being weak, 0.30–0.69 moderate, and >0.70 strong (Jackson, 2016). Correlation indicates both the extent and direction of a linear relationship between two values – the further away from 0.00 a value is, the stronger the relationship (Christensen et al., 2015). Negative values indicate that the relationship is inverse – as one increases, the other decreases, and vice versa (Christensen et al., 2015). The problem with this form of analysis is that it may create the false impression of causality – that is, that one value changing is the cause of the other value changing – and that it cannot account adequately for the possibility that they may not be directly correlated, instead both influenced by a third variable (Jackson, 2016).

Finally, face-value comparisons were made between the results obtained in the variables, and the results of studies into Western furries. Face-value comparisons were also made between the data and available data on the South African population. These were not performed statistically but were rather aimed at highlighting potential differences and factors that may impact the applicability of findings on Western furries onto the South African population, and to suggest directions for future studies.

Finally, the third phase deals with questions 12, 19, 20 and 30-33. These all produced qualitative data, analysis of which is discussed below.

Analysis of Qualitative Data

While this study primarily dealt with quantitative data to determine demographic averages, there were also qualitative questions. Analyses of qualitative data, specifically for axial coding, were done with ATLAS.ti, software that allows qualitative analysis of various forms of data through coding and the ability to define and visualise relationships between codes (ATLAS.ti, n.d.).

Qualitative methodology produces different sorts of information to quantitative data, but as per the discussion above on mixed methods research, the information is complementary (Christensen et al., 2015), and adds richness to the understanding required of an exploratory study, such as this one. Qualitative data has several significant advantages over quantitative data. First, qualitative methodology is primarily concerned with understanding the respondents' subjective, internal experiences of the phenomena being studied (Christensen et al., 2015). Given this study was analysing a group not studied within the South African context, understanding the subjective experiences within their context was the reason for conducting an exploratory study(Neuman, 2014). Qualitative data describe local situations in ways that quantitative data cannot account for (Tracy, 2013). Qualitative research provides critical information, providing hints as to issues that could be flagged for future research (Tracy, 2013). When dealing with a group that has been under-studied (such as the one in this study), qualitative data can help add meaningful interpretations to why the qualitative data gives the results it does, providing the study with a richer, deeper, contextualised explanation for the phenomenon (Tracy, 2013).

Qualitative methodology's issues need acknowledgement, however, and how these issues are overcome. First, qualitative data analysis is not as standardised as quantitative data analysis is (Neuman, 2014). However, this issue is offset by the fact that more

recently, specific methods of qualitative data analysis are set out and widely used, despite the critique that they are still far less standardised than quantitative statistical analysis (Neuman, 2014). This is also confounded by the fact that qualitative data is often open to interpretation (Neuman, 2014). Second, before data collection, the analysis methods used may be hard to determine because processes aimed at organising or refining the data cannot be used to make analysis easier before beginning (Neuman, 2014). However, this is offset by the ability to begin analysis while data is still being collected, which is not possible with quantitative data (Neuman, 2014). Finally, quantitative data analysis also cannot be used to test hypotheses, but shows that a particular interpretation of the phenomenon is plausible (Neuman, 2014).

As mentioned, in this study two methods of qualitative data analysis were used and are discussed below.

Axial Coding. For questions 20 (origin of furry interest), 32 (how furry has helped mental health) and 33 (how the South African furry community differs from furry communities elsewhere), respondents were asked to explain their own experiences of furry in their own words, and this produced detailed responses. Thus, a particular process used for this study was that of thematic coding as suggested by Strauss (1987, cited in Neuman, 2014). This is a three-stage process. First, open coding is done, where critical terms and themes are within the text, aided by the theoretical framework of this study, and preliminary names are given to these determined themes while they are highlighted or demarcated in some unique way within the text (Neuman, 2014). This first stage of coding the data involved showing a broad idea of what appears in the data (Tracy, 2013). In this study, this involved reading through responses and highlighting specific key phrases, marking them off as unique codes.

The second stage is axial coding, which involves examining the coded themes to look for relationships between themes, and possibilities for clustering themes together into larger wholes (Neuman, 2014). This helps simplify the themes and creates a full understanding of the structure of the themes relative to one another, in terms of things like sequential ordering or the existence of sub-themes within larger themes (Neuman, 2014). In this study, the process involved reading over all the first-stage codes, and analysing their content to see which codes were identical, and then combining them as necessary; and by analysing the full content of themes to find sub-themes. For example, a theme that occurred in the data was that the local community is smaller than the international community, and thus the sub-themes of this were whether the smaller community was seen as positive or negative.

Finally, selective coding is done once the data collection is complete. This involves once again looking at the data and the themes to make concrete comparisons between themes, and to find specific cases that illustrate specific themes (Neuman, 2014). In this study, this involved finding links between themes, specifically in the ways they spoke to each other. To continue the example, the theme of "the community's smaller size is negative" was linked with the theme of "other members engage in clique behaviour".

For further analysis and report-writing once the coding was complete, the illustrative analytic method was used. This involves the theory dictating certain empty boxes, essentially thematic elements that the theory suggests should appear in the data, which guide the analysis of the data and show how the phenomenon can be explained by the theoretical framework (Neuman, 2014). Three empty boxes pertaining to furry as compared to other groups emerged aided by social identity theory, namely: its differences from the broader international furry community, the subordinate nature of the group within South African society, and the mental impact of the fursona when salient. Coding

also revealed several other conceptual categories not dictated by social identity theory, namely: the interest in anthropomorphism that predated the group membership, the discovery of the group's existence, the ways in which the group was said to help one's mental health, and the harm group membership caused to mental health. The remaining qualitative questions were determined to be best handled by content analysis, which will be discussed below.

Content Analysis. There were three qualitative data sets that needed handling differently to the aforementioned data sets, and thus were subject to content analysis. This is a process of examining the content of a data set, and systematically recording certain aspects of the data, such as frequency of certain responses, and presenting it using graphs (Neuman, 2014).

The first of these was 'fursona species' (question 19), because of the sheer number of possibilities for responses, many of which may be unique, and because more meaning can be gained by quantifying how popular species are than simply detailing the different responses. The system used was to group responses by broad species categories (e.g. canine, avian, marsupial, etc.) and tally numbers in each group, and then display these tallies in a table. With the largest groups, these individual groups were also sub-divided into specific subspecies (e.g. under "canine", subdivided into wolf, fox, dog, unspecified, etc.). As no research has shown specific fursona species having a significant psychological impact (i.e. people with different fursona species do not have different psychological aspects because of the species of their fursona), this was not subject to analysis beyond showing broad trends in popularity.

Second, for 'formal psychological diagnoses received' (question 30), the responses were coded as per their classification in the DSM-5 and presented numerically as prevalence rates. Third, the question on 'undiagnosed psychological issues' (question

31) were presented as prevalence rates, however, coding was not done as strictly by formal standards, due to the answers received usually being less specific. Fourth, answers on 'religious affiliation' (question 12) were also tallied for prevalence rates. Finally, self-reported "other" responses in quantitative questions were separated and presented insofar as specifying their content did not result in respondents being identifiable (through highly unique and unusual answers given, for instance). This was sometimes done by adding extra categories to the data, where answers came up more than once.

Data Verification

Discussion is needed on how the data in the study were verified. Qualitative and quantitative data each have their own forms of verification, which will be discussed followed by a discussion of validity in mixed methods research.

Reliability of Quantitative Data

Reliability refers to the consistency of scores within the measurement instrument being used (Christensen et al., 2015). Two forms of reliability were important to this study.

First, test-retest or stability reliability refers to the consistency of scores over time (Christensen et al., 2015; Neuman, 2014). In this study, most data collected were demographic, and while certain aspects may change over time (such as age), they are, in general, either not going to change, or will do so in predictable ways.

Second, there is internal consistency reliability, which is the consistency by which a single construct is measured by a multiple-item scale (Christensen et al., 2015). This was important for questions 6 and 13, which measured bullying rate and connection furry respectively. To determine internal consistency reliability, the Cronbach's or coefficient

alpha, was calculated. The coefficient alpha is a numerical measure that shows how consistently items are measuring the same construct (Christensen et al., 2015). This can be determined by testing on just one administration of the test, and should ideally be 0.7 or higher (Christensen et al., 2015). For the bullying measures, the coefficient alpha was determined to be 0.903. For connection to furry, the coefficient alpha was determined to be 0.837. Thus, both of these measures had internal consistency reliability.

Validity of Quantitative Data

Validity refers to the extent to which the measurement instrument is actually measuring what it intends to, and also to the accuracy of the inferences made based on the results (Christensen et al., 2015). Validity does relate directly to reliability – a study can be reliable without being valid, but it cannot be valid without being reliable (Neuman, 2014). Unlike reliability, however, validity is not something one can have absolute confidence in, as it is more difficult to achieve. This relies on the operationalisation of the constructs and the way in which they are defined and measured (Christensen et al., 2015). Various forms of validity apply in this study.

First, content-related validity involves judgment as to whether questions in the measure represent the construct adequately (Christensen et al., 2015). The first of these is face validity, where items are judged to appear to measure what they should be measuring (Christensen et al., 2015), as the survey used in this study seemed to do. Most questions in the survey are essentially demographic, and thus appear to measure what they should measure.

Second, there is internal structure validity, which relates to how a measure is constructed (Neuman, 2014). Because most questions each only deal with one dimension, this was not a concern except with question 13. This question overall measured the

concept of connection to furry, but each scale represents a different form of connection. Thus, that question was a multidimensional measure (Christensen et al., 2015). For this, validity was determined in two ways – with the aforementioned coefficient alpha, and with measuring the correlation of each item to each other item (Christensen et al., 2015).

Third, there is statistical conclusion validity, referring to the validity of inferences made based on the statistical relationship between variables (Christensen et al., 2015). These claims require for there to have been statistical significance in the relationship – the indication that the relationship between the two is unlikely simply a result of chance (Christensen et al., 2015). This was determined in the process of statistical analysis, and statistical justifications were provided with conclusions reached.

Fourth, construct validity, which refers to the extent to which constructs can be inferred from their operational representations, or the extent to which the questions being asked match the construct being measured (Christensen et al., 2015). There was a potential threat to this validity which needs discussion: the participant effect, the extent to which the participant's responses are influenced by the demand characteristics, the information available to them about the purpose of the study or the context in which it occurs (Christensen et al., 2015). Unfortunately, the only way to get data in this study was through self-reporting, so some of the data might have been subject to positive self-representation and social desirability bias, both of which refer to respondents giving answers they believe will make them look good to observers, rather than answering honestly (Christensen et al., 2015). This is especially true due to the stigmatisation of the community, and the tendency for it to be portrayed badly, as discussed in the literature review. However, studies have also shown a willingness to answer in ways that go against social desirability (Gerbasi et al., 2008), which suggests that responses should be valid in this way.

A second factor affecting this form of validity is experimenter effects, the characteristics of the researcher that may influence responses (Christensen et al., 2015). However, in this study my position as a member of the furry community may have increased this validity, as it raised my trustworthiness as a researcher to the respondents and increased the likelihood of honest responses.

Finally, there is external validity, the extent to which the results can be generalised to other populations (Christensen et al., 2015). Of particular concern to this study was population validity, the extent to which the results can be generalised to the entire target population, the population which the study aims to understand (Christensen et al., 2015). This study aimed to attempt to generalise findings to the furry population, but the sampling method was non-randomised, which may have undermined external validity somewhat (Christensen et al., 2015).

This section covered how quantitative data verification concerns were addressed, but because this study used mixed methods, qualitative data verification also needs examination. Those will be detailed below.

Verification of Qualitative Data

Methods of ensuring qualitative data is up to standard differ significantly from those used for quantitative data. There are different ways of verifying the data.

First, qualitative data should have rigour − that the data were collected appropriately (Tracy, 2013). This is achieved by the collection of sufficient amounts of data, and having detailed, systemic organisation and processing of the data during collection and analysis (Tracy, 2013). This also requires the research to pertain to the theory used, and the ability to be applied practically (Tracy, 2013). This study had rigour, as the questions asked directly related to social identity theory, had real-world

applications for understanding furries in non-Western contexts, and had systemic, detailed organisation methods as described above.

Second, self-reflexivity is required (Tracy, 2013). This refers to the researcher's knowledge regarding their identity and approach to the work and the subjects thereof (Tracy, 2013), to bracket them out of the analysis of the subject, with the aim to create an objective analysis thereof. Practically, this was achieved through discussion of my motivation for undertaking this study, and explaining my own strengths and weaknesses.

In this regard, I am a member of the furry community. This gives the work the strength of the researcher knowing more about the community than mos. This could be construed as a potential weakness, as the researcher may be considered potentially biased, or interested in promoting a specific viewpoint of the community. However, this connection has been discussed openly in multiple instances, the study and the dissertation have touched on a subject considered difficult or taboo to the community, and I was not heavily personally connected with the South African furry community in general. The research is motivated by an interest in knowing how the fandom differs in this context from others, not by trying to portray it in a light that suggests it is perfect; thus objectivity is the primary goal. It is also my belief that having insider knowledge has been advantageous, as it allows for seeing things that others who have studied the phenomenon cannot or otherwise have not – for example, I had a much better idea of specific places to look for grey literature created by furries themselves to gain deeper insights into aspects that the academic literature had not covered.

Third is transparency, which states that honesty and openness on how the research was conducted, and self-critical analysis thereof, is required (Tracy, 2013). In this study, this was applied as necessary when the processing of data was being done, looking for shortfalls and errors that became evident further down the line, and my openness

throughout this study about my status as a community member, and by my being open with respondents as to the exact nature of the study and how the data would be used.

Fourth, qualitative research requires credibility, which refers to the trustworthiness of the research, and the plausibility of the explanations it provides (Tracy, 2013). This was achieved in several ways in this study. First, through thick description, detailed explanations of what is being studied, and the contextual meanings (Tracy, 2013). In this study, the entire focus was on this subject, so, if sufficient data were provided, this should apply to this study. Second, this can be achieved through crystallisation, using multiple points of view towards achieving a cohesive understanding of the phenomenon (Tracy, 2013). In this study, this was primarily achieved through multivocality, including the viewpoints of multiple respondents (Tracy, 2013), where each participant was invited to explain their own personal experiences and opinions on what furry is like and how it differs in South Africa to elsewhere.

Finally, qualitative research should have transferability, the ability to apply the research to other contexts (Tracy, 2013). For this study, the work is specifically localised to one context, but it is also transferable to some extent, because most of the prior research work being done on furries has been done in the West. This study indicates how the South African furry community differs and is similar, meaning that the reader may infer certain things about other international furry communities, and how they may be similar or different. The only issue here is that it may be easier for furries to infer this than other readers would, as they could relate the South African comments to their own views of their own communities in their own context; something not possible for others who do not have intimate lay knowledge of furry in general.

Concerns around research quality has been answered in both qualitative and quantitative settings separately. Validity around combining the two into a mixed methods study is addressed below.

Validity from Mixed Methods Approach

Mixed methods research has other forms of validity specifically relevant to the study's methodology and conclusions that need consideration. First, there is inside-outside validity, which refers to the accuracy with which the subjective experiences of the insider and the observed external perspectives are presented (Christensen et al., 2015). In this study, the research presented internal perspectives with qualitative data, and external perspectives with quantitative data. This was aimed at supplementing the latter with the former, using internal perspectives as a way of understanding external observations in context, which validates the study in this way. Second, there is sequential validity, where the concern is that the order in which instruments are used will bias the results (Christensen et al., 2015). In this study, only one measure could be used that was identical for all respondents, and thus the results could not be biased because of the order of either questions or instruments.

Third, sample integration validity is concerned with conclusions being gained from qualitative and quantitative aspects, with the two not being treated equally (Christensen et al., 2015). In this study, the data types were handled separately and did not cover the same subject, validating the study in this way. Finally, multiple validities are concerned with both qualitative and quantitative methods being valid; meaning that if the qualitative and quantitative methods are sound, this has been achieved (Christensen et al., 2015). The arguments above suggest that the study was valid for both quantitative and qualitative methods separately, so should be valid in this way.

Ethical Considerations

Several ethical considerations to this study require detailing. Ethics in research, broadly speaking, refers to guidelines for conducting research, aimed at determining whether the research is legitimate, by ensuring that the researcher maintains their obligation of protecting respondents, by ensuring that the potential benefits will outweigh any potential costs that the respondents may be subject to because of the research (Neuman, 2014). Specific ethical considerations directly relating to this study will be discussed below.

Researcher Integrity

Before ethical issues around respondents in this study are discussed, the researcher's integrity needs to be addressed. This refers to the need for a researcher to be accurate and truthful in how they present their findings (Christensen et al., 2015). I reiterate that identifying as a furry was a potential conflict of interest; however, my interaction with other furries, and participation in the community, was mostly on an international scale, and I have associated little personally with the South African community specifically until beginning this study. I had no emotional investment in particular outcomes related to the South African community, and intended to report the results accurately and honestly regardless of what they were. The interest in performing this study was purely in contributing to the base of knowledge, and gaining a proper understanding of how the community functions.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are related, but subtly different concepts. Both relate to the concept of privacy, the ability for a person to control when and how information about themselves is shared with others, and the ability to decline to receive certain information about oneself (Christensen et al., 2015). Anonymity refers to attempts made to prevent the identity of the participant being known or disclosed (Christensen et al., 2015; Neuman, 2014). Confidentiality in research refers to the information gathered not being provided to anyone outside of the group of researchers performing the study, and only releasing the data in aggregate form so particular respondents cannot be linked to particular responses (Christensen et al., 2015; Neuman, 2014).

In this study, some potentially sensitive personal information was collected (e.g., sexual orientation). While the collection of most of the information should satisfy anonymity, some respondents may be identifiable through their fursona species descriptions, as these can be highly unique. To prevent this, qualitative and quantitative data was handled separately, with no way to link the two, and the qualitative data itself was stored in a way so it was improbable that one could determine which responses for each question correlate to responses to other questions. The only potential exception that may apply was if there were respondents who report highly unusual or perhaps unique psychological disorders, and then gave other responses referring to these conditions in responses to other questions, but this scenario did not occur. Confidentiality was protected by strictly controlling access to raw data. This was maintained through strong encryption of the raw data sets, and by only sharing relevant data with others when necessary for completing the study, such as sharing quantitative responses with others to perform statistical analysis.

As this study was conducted online, there was always a risk of data being compromised (Christensen et al., 2015); however, strong efforts were made to ensure it did not, such as not collecting IP addresses in the process of data collection, and destroying data in potentially insecure places once it had been securely copied into the encrypted storage space. No instances of data breach were known to have occurred. It must also be noted that while concerns about personal information being shared are common in psychological research (Christensen et al., 2015), perusing the forum shows that certain potentially sensitive information, specifically sexual orientation, is already listed on many forum accounts (ZA Furries, n.d.). The potential impacts of sharing of sensitive information in this study will be discussed below.

Protection from Harm

Central to research ethics are concerns about beneficence and malfeasance (Christensen et al., 2015). Beneficence refers to acting so it benefits others, and malfeasance refers to acting in ways that harm others (Christensen et al., 2015). Thus, research ethics is concerned with maximising the former, and minimising the latter, at least insofar as reasonably possible (Christensen et al., 2015). Harm can take various forms, including physical, mental, and legal harm (Neuman, 2014). In this study, respondents did not have to perform physical tasks, so concerns around physical harm were moot. Mental harm was of some concern for this study, insofar as questions were asked around psychological disorders. However, the level of stress was not unreasonably high and the respondents were not being directly or intentionally placed within a stressful situation (Neuman, 2014). In addition, there are potential benefits from learning how being a furry helps with these issues. Respondents could also withdraw from the study at

any point if they felt they were being harmed, and their data would not captured in such cases. However, legal harm needs discussion.

There is a requirement that researchers protect respondents from an increased chance they may be arrested (Neuman, 2014) should illegal activities be discovered in the course of the study. There is also the ethical problem around whether protecting the participant engaged in such activities cause harm to others (Neuman, 2014) and what the researcher is to do in such cases. As discussed in the literature review, furries are subjected to misconceptions of being involved in zoophilic activities which are illegal within South Africa, specifically pornography depicting acts of bestiality. This could potentially have put respondents at increased risk of arrest, if revealed during the study. Because these issues could cause significant distress to respondents, they were not part of the study, thus the potential for legal harm in this respect was avoided.

Informed Consent

Because of potential concerns that respondents may have around stigma regarding certain questions, a pre-survey briefing indicating the voluntary nature of the study and explaining exactly what the data will be used for took place as part of the informed consent letter (Christensen et al., 2015). Informed consent refers to telling the participant about the research, how it works, its aims, and the potential risks and benefits, so they are aware of aspects of it that may influence their willingness to participate. Thus, with informed consent, the participant is assumed able to make an informed, free decision on whether to participate (Christensen et al., 2015).

Informed consent was actively collected from all respondents, in which the purpose of the study was explained. Active consent is obtained where the participant directly agrees to participate in the research (Christensen et al., 2015). As this study asked

questions about sexuality and pornography, the study did not involve the participation of minors, and thus consideration of issues around minors was not required. The survey contained an open-ended question on age, and any participant that indicated their age to be younger than 18 had their data immediately deleted upon receipt. This study had no participation incentives, so these need not be declared (Christensen et al., 2015). Consent was attained by having the informed consent letter as the first page of the survey and having the participant indicate directly that they agree to it (Christensen et al., 2015), and not allowing progress unless they had consented See Appendix D for the letter used.

There was also an option at the end of the survey where the respondents could indicate that they would like their responses, which may have automatically been saved, to be deleted, thus allowing for freedom to decline or withdraw participation at any time (Christensen et al., 2015). This was part of the debriefing, which will be discussed below.

Debriefing

Debriefing refers to a discussion once the research is complete, to further explain the research the use of any deceptive tactics employed (Christensen et al., 2015). Deceptive tactics refer to actively misleading or passively withholding information from the respondents (Christensen et al., 2015). These are dealt with through dehoaxing – explaining the use of deception in the study (Christensen et al., 2015). The other major goal of debriefing is desensitising, which refers to mitigating undesirable influences the study may have had on respondents (Christensen et al., 2015).

The study did not contain deceptive tactics, nor was there an expected undesirable influence, so neither of these were necessary to mitigate, and the debriefing was simply used to explain the study in further depth and allow for questions to be asked. However, as this study was conducted online, debriefing occurred in the form of a letter that further

explained the purpose of the study conducted, and provided contact information for the researchers, to answer respondents' questions (Christensen et al., 2015), and contact information for the university and ethical clearance references, should respondents wish to raise ethical concerns. See Appendix E for the feedback letter provided to respondents, and Appendix F for the University of South Africa's ethical clearance letter pertaining to this study.

Conclusion

The structure of the study performed has now been explained, and the potential issues around it have been addressed. The study performed was an exploratory, mixed methods study using a questionnaire, aimed at determining demographic, psychological and furry-specific features of the furry community in South Africa. Data collected was both qualitative and quantitative, with the former being subject to statistical analyses and the latter to axial coding and content analysis. Issues that could impact reliability and validity of each of these were detailed, as were the ways in which these issues would be accounted for during the process of the study. Finally, potential ethical issues and their impact on the study were detailed. While harm from the study is minimal, explanations were given as to how the study aimed to deal with these issues to avoid the potential for unforeseen harm occurring to those who responded to the survey. The next chapter will detail the results of the study.

Chapter 5: Results

Introduction

This chapter will present the results of the study through the statistical and qualitative analyses of the survey. Features of the sample will be shown, subdivided into three categories – demographic, psychological, and furry-specific features – towards the aim of answering the first research question. Once this is done, relationships between these two categories will be shown, towards answering the second research question. Finally, the qualitative data will be presented, which will answer the third and fourth research questions.

Demographic Features

Age

First, the survey asked respondents for their age. This question was required of all respondents, as it was used to ensure that data were only collected from adults; responses submitted by minors were immediately removed from the data set. And because the study did not deal with underage respondents, the average age determined here may be skewed higher than that of the population in South Africa. Statistically, the features of this variable within the sample were:

Table 3

Descriptive statistics of age of sample

M	25.16
Mdn.	24.00
SD	5.989
Range	18–50

Note. n = 98.

Table 3 shows that, as per the mean, the prototypical furry in South Africa is approximately 25 years old. This was in line with Western furry samples, who, in online

surveys specifically, averaged in age from 23.3-25.9 years of age (Plante et al., 2016). In

the South African population, the modal age cohort of the general adult population (i.e.

the population 18 years or older) was age 20-24 years old (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

This implies that furries in South Africa are close in age to, but slightly older than,

average for the general South African adult populace. The reason for this slight

discrepancy, however, is unclear. See Figure 1 for a graph of the age distribution.

Figure 1

Distribution of age
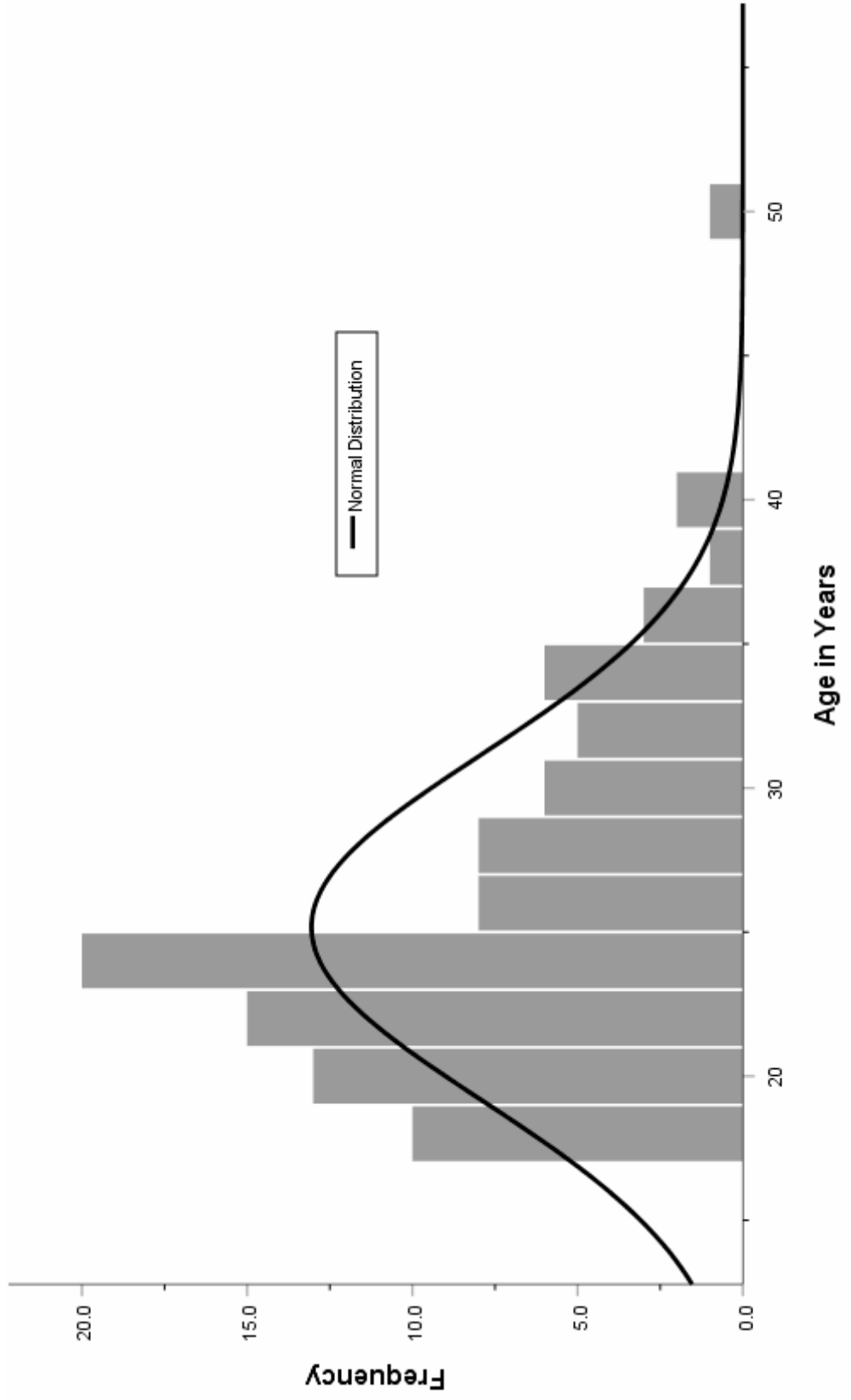
Province of Residence

Distribution of province of residence was:

Table 4

Distribution of province of residence

Province	n	%
Eastern Cape	0	0.00
Free State	2	2.08
Gauteng	52	54.16
Kwa-Zulu Natal	3	3.13
Limpopo	2	2.08
Mpumalanga	3	3.13
North West	2	2.08
Northern Cape	1	1.04
Western Cape	31	32.29

Note. n = 96.

As per Table 4, the majority of respondents were from Gauteng (54.2%) and the Western Cape (32.3%), with the former being selected at a rate almost double the latter, and the remaining provinces barely selected by respondents, with zero respondents indicating their residence to be the Eastern Cape. It can be inferred that the prototypical furry may live in one of these provinces, but not with absolute certainty. Relative to the most recent community survey on the South African populace (Statistics South Africa, 2016), Gauteng is the most populated province (24.1%), with the Western Cape only fourth (11.3%), behind Kwa-Zulu Natal (19.9%) and the Eastern Cape (12.6%). This implies that the furry sample was not distributed geographically in the same way as the South African populace. One possible explanation is that the furry sample is disproportionately white (see the section below titled "Ethnicity"), and these two provinces have the largest percentages of white populace in the country – whites constitute 16.0% of the Western Cape population and 13.6% of the Gauteng population, both of which are higher than the overall South African population distribution of 8.12% (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

Further, there is a general social perception that Gauteng and the Western Cape are more cosmopolitan than the rest of the country. This can be evidenced by, for instance, the history of pride events – that is, events that publicly celebrate LGBTQIA+ identities (Tucker, 2009) – in South Africa. The two oldest pride events in the country are the Johannesburg pride event, which began in 1990, and the Cape Town pride event, which began in 1993 (Tucker, 2009). The possibility exists, thus, that respondents were not born in these provinces, but moved to them. However, since the study only accounted for residence, and not province of birth, this potential explanation is untested. Also, because province of residence would have no meaningful impact on aspects of furry identity, no further analysis was done on this demographic variable.

Ethnicity

With an *n* of 97, the majority of respondents identified as white (96.91%). Of the other races, only 2.06% indicated their race to be black African, whereas 1.03% indicated "other" No respondents indicated their race to be coloured or Indian/Asian. The prototype thus seems of white ethnicity.

This was somewhat in line with Western furry samples, which found a white population predominating, albeit less so, with a proportion of 83.2% (Plante et al., 2016). The proportion of black respondents in Western furry surveys, however, was proportionately similar at 2.1% (Plante et al., 2016). However, the South African populace is majority black African, at 80.67%, with the white population being a minority, at 8.12% (Statistics South Africa, 2016). A possible partial explanation for this discrepancy may be due to the significant occurrence of LGBTQIA+ identities of the furry community (see the subsections below titled "Gender" and "Sexual Orientation") and the indication that Black African individuals are less likely than others to identify as

LGBTQIA+ (Nyeck et al., 2019). Due to the significant number of white respondents,

this demographic variable was not used for further analysis.

Gender

Gender distribution in the sample was:

Table 5

Gender distribution of sample

Gender	*n*	% of Cases
Cis-Male	76	78.35
Cis-Female	5	5.15
Transgender (MtF)	7	7.21
Transgender (FtM)	2	2.06
Non-Binary	4	4.12
Genderqueer	4	4.12
Genderfluid	1	1.03
In-question	2	2.06

Note. n = 97.

The terms "cis-male" and "cis-female" were used to distinguish these identities

from transgender identities. "Cis-" as a prefix is used to designate that the person's

gender identity aligns with the sex they were born with (Aultman, 2014) – so, a cis-

female was designated female sex at birth, and identifies their gender as female; the same

applies to cis-male individuals in terms of male sex and gender. This contrasts with trans-

identities, where sex and gender identity do not align (Aultman, 2014). In this study, this

question allowed for multiple responses, and the decision was taken to show the

percentage of cases and not of responses.

No respondents selected "Transgender (gender non-conforming)", "Agender", or

"Do not identify as male, female or transgender", and the smallest group selected by

respondents was genderfluid – only one participant (1.03%). Further, all respondents who

indicated their gender to be "other" in their responses specified it to be a variation of "in-

question" – that is to say, they were exploring their gender identity and had not settled on

a specific identity. For example, one participant wrote "questioning Transgender or non-binary" as their answer, whereas the other simply stated "in-question". As this was the only answer given when "other" was selected for respondents' own gender, these were grouped as *in-question*, rather than the broad "other" label. Only four respondents selected more than one option for this question.

As per Table 5, cis-male was the most common answer given (78.4%); therefore the prototype is implied to likely be cis-male. Surveys of furries in the West found that most respondents had masculine identity, but this was only 67.1% (Plante et al., 2016), meaning that South African furry sample was more male- identifying. However, reasons for the predominance of male identifying individuals in Western samples were not available in any literature consulted.

Further, for the South African population, gender distribution was 49% male, and 51% female (Statistics South Africa, 2016), thus the furry sample was also significantly more male-identifying than the population of the country. A potential explanation for this discrepancy relative to the South African populace lies in the sample size, and that a sample of 98 would be insufficient to study a population as large as the entire country. The discrepancy may lie in the Statistics South Africa data not accounting for non-normative gender identities, which is an issue with the instrument used, or possibly due to using passing strategies by non-normative individuals to hide their true identities. Due to cis-male being dominant, and being the only group large enough for testing, and the inability to combine other genders in meaningful ways while creating large enough groups to test, this variable was excluded from further analysis.

Sexual Orientation

Distribution of sexual orientations within the sample was as follows:

Table 6

Sexual orientation distribution of sample

Orientation	*n*	%
Bisexual	37	37.76
Homosexual	34	34.69
Heterosexual	15	15.31
Pansexual	5	5.10
Asexual	2	2.04
Demisexual	2	2.04
Don't Know	2	2.04
Other	1	1.02

Note. n = 98.

Neither "pansexual" nor "demisexual" were originally included in the options provided. However, because multiple people indicated these identities through specification when selecting "other", and they came up again later in fursona sexual orientation (see the section below titled "Fursona Sexual Orientation"), the decision was taken to include them for analysis. Pansexuality is a label used to indicate that a person is attracted to others despite their sex, gender, or sexual orientation (Rice, 2015). This differs from bisexuality in that bisexuality is an attraction to both male and female, whereas pansexuality incorporates that, and attraction to people whose identity falls outside of the gender binary, such as transgender and non-binary people (Rice, 2015). Demisexuality is a label used to indicate that a person does not experience sexual attraction to others without first forming an emotional bond with them – an emotional bond is a prerequisite for sexual attraction (Decker, 2014). The one remaining indication of "other" (1.02%) was unique, and did not fit into any other categorisation, and thus will not be elaborated on further to preserve the participant's anonymity.

In Western furry samples, the proportions of sexuality were around 11% for bisexuality, just over 10% for homosexuality, and less than 25% for heterosexuality (Plante et al., 2016). This means that, as per Table 6, the South African sample was more bisexual (37.75%) and homosexual (34.69%), and less heterosexual (15.31%), than the

Western samples. Further, estimates of the South African population suggest an estimated heterosexual population of approximately 97.7%, with the remainder being non-heterosexual (Nyeck et al., 2019), meaning that the South African furry sample was less heterosexual and more LGBTQIA+-identifying than the rest of the populace.

While reasons for the differences between South African and Western samples are unclear, there is a potential explanation for the difference between the furry sample and the South African populace. This may lie in the relationship between LGBTQIA+ identities and race in South Africa, where white individuals are more likely to identify as LGBTQIA+ than other ethnicities do (Nyeck et al., 2019), and the sample in this study being predominantly white. However, as this study was exploratory, further research into the reasons for differences from Western samples would be required.

The majority of respondents (84.69%) identified as non-heterosexual (i.e. bisexual, homosexual, pansexual, asexual, demisexual, or other). This suggests that the prototype is not heterosexual, but LGBTQIA+ in sexual orientation, most likely bisexual (37.76%), or homosexual (34.69%). Due to the sizes of the groupings, only the categories of bisexual, homosexual and heterosexual were used for analysis.

See Figure 2 for a graph of sexual orientation distributions for both people and fursonas.

Figure 2

Comparison of distribution of sexual orientations of people and fursonas
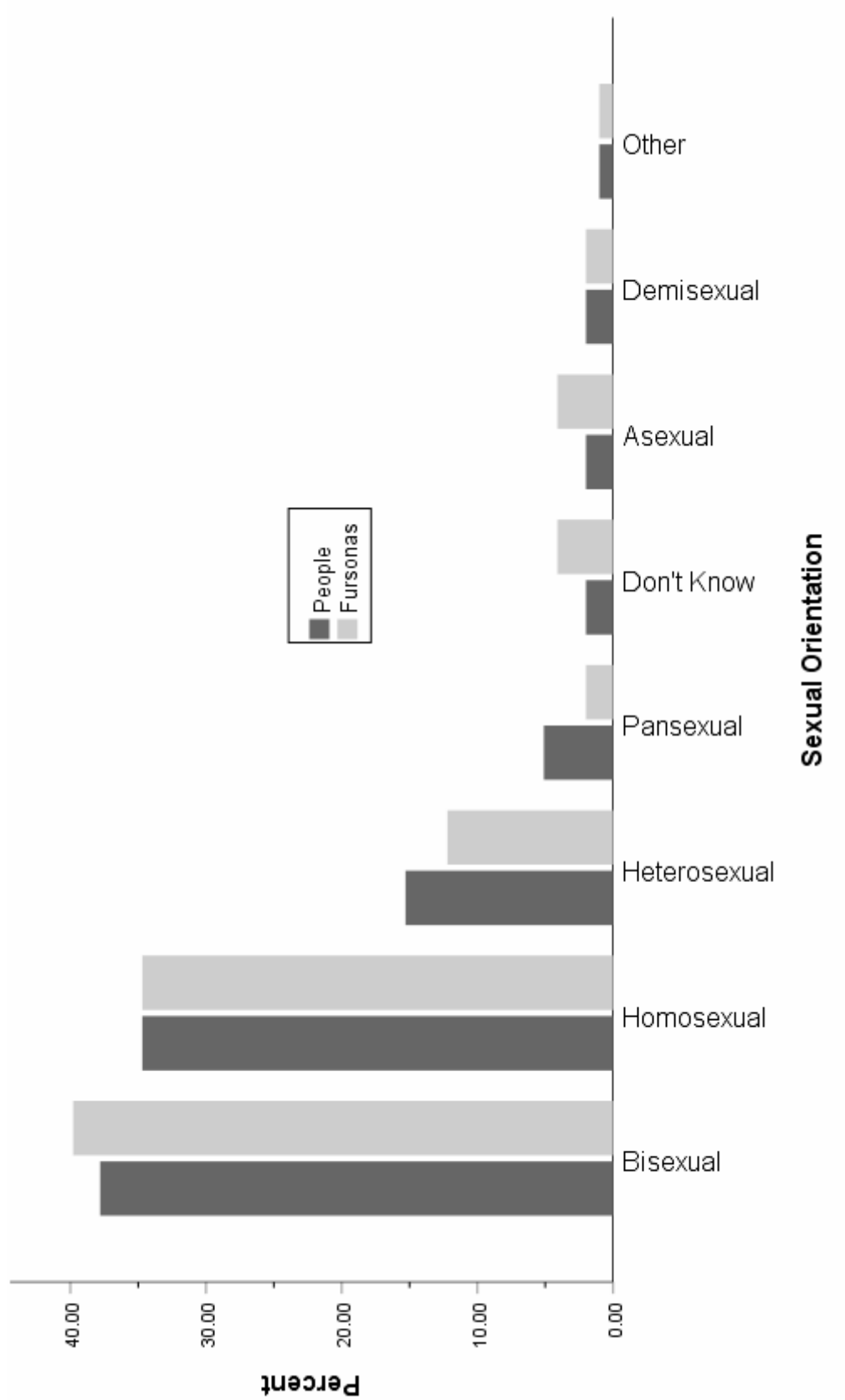
Perceived Socioeconomic Status

The distribution for perceived socioeconomic status in South African society was done on a 10-point scale, with a score of 1 indicating the lowest status and 10 indicating the highest status within South African society. Distribution of scores was as follows:

Table 7

Distribution of perceived socioeconomic status

	1 (Bottom)	2	3	4	5 (Middle)	6	7	8	9	10 (Top)
					Status					
n	2	3	4	11	18	20	24	10	5	1
%	2.0	3.1	4.1	11.2	18.4	20.4	24.5	10.2	5.1	1.0

Note. n = 98.

The descriptive statistics for this measure were as follows:

Table 8

Descriptive statistics of perceived socioeconomic status

M	5.89
Mode	7.00
SD	1.816

Note. n = 98.

On the 10-point scale, 1 was the lowest socioeconomic status within South Africa, and 10 the highest. As per Table 7, more people rated themselves as 6 or above (61.2%) than as 5 or below (38.8%). Most commonly selected was 7 (24.5%), and least commonly selected was 10 (1.0%). Further, as per Table 8, the mean was 5.89, and the mode 7.00. These suggest that the prototype sees themselves as doing better socioeconomically than the average person within the country, though still closer to the middle of society than towards the uppermost end. However, data for the Western sample in this regard was unavailable, thus it is unclear how South African furries perceive themselves socioeconomically relative to their Western counterparts.

See Figure 3 for the distribution in graph format.

Figure 3

Distribution of perceived socioeconomic status in South African society
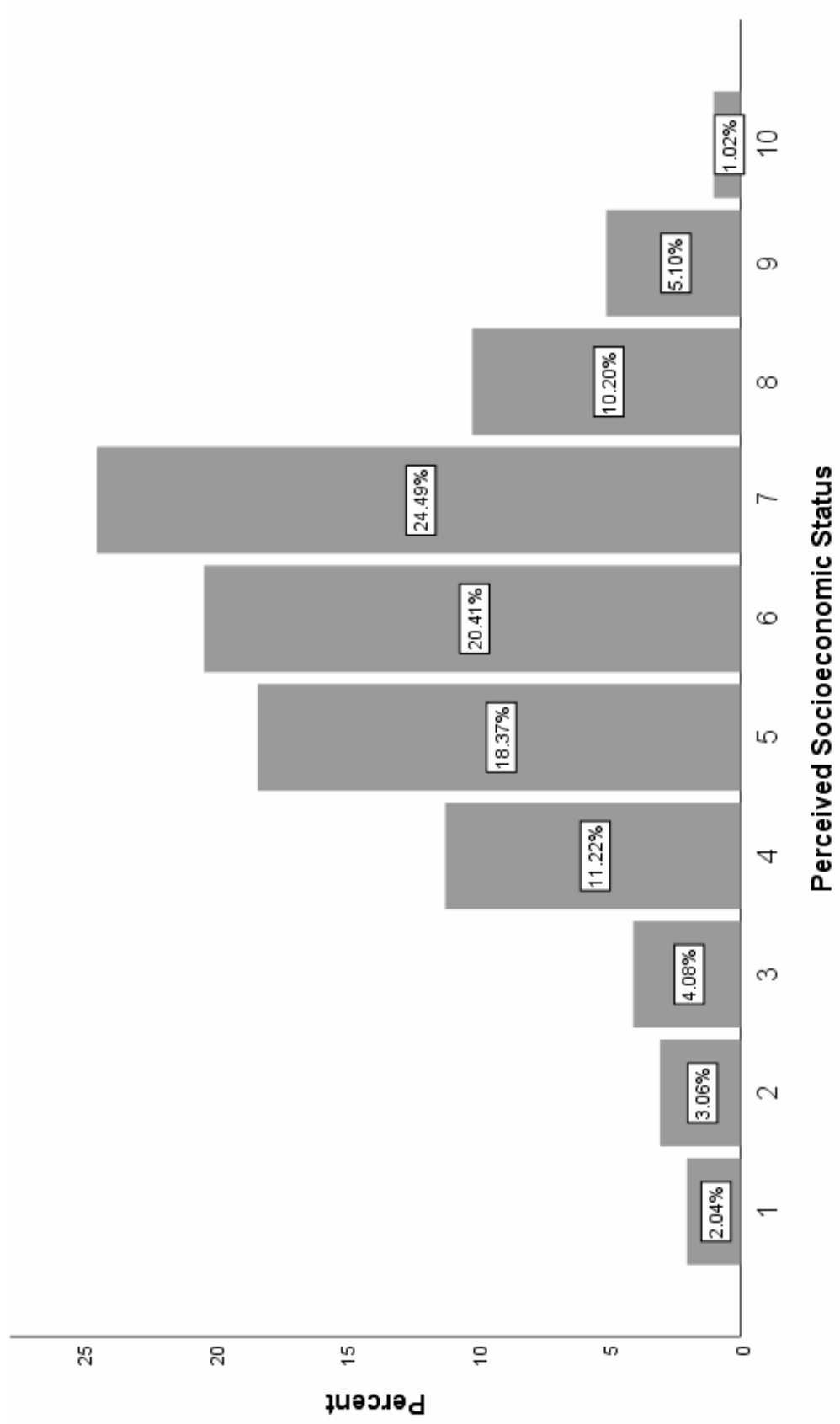
Level of Education

Education levels reported were as follows:

Table 9

Distribution of education level

Education Level	*n*	%
Some high school	6	6.12
High school ongoing	6	6.12
High school completed	16	16.33
Some tertiary education	16	16.33
Tertiary education ongoing	17	17.35
Higher certificate complete	2	2.04
Diploma complete	9	9.18
Bachelor's degree complete	8	8.16
Postgraduate ongoing	4	4.08
Postgraduate certificate complete	2	2.04
Postgraduate degree complete (Honours/Masters/Doctorate)	10	10.20
Other	2	2.04

Note. n = 98.

As per Table 9, half of the group (50.01%) had completed high school (16.33%), tertiary education (16.33%) or ongoing tertiary education (17.33%). Just over one in five respondents had completed some qualification after school, be it a certificate (2.04%), a post-graduate certificate (2.04%), a diploma (9.18%) or a Bachelor's degree (8.16%). A further 10.20% held a post-graduate qualification. The remainder of the sample represented smaller categories, such as some high school (6.12%), ongoing high school (6.12%), and ongoing post-graduate (4.08%). A further 2.04% chose "other".

To compare the data to Western samples, combinations of categories were necessary. First, a categorisation of "no completed tertiary qualifications" can be created by combining "some high school" (6.12%), "high school ongoing" (6.12%), "high school completed" (16.33%), "some tertiary education" (16.33%), and "tertiary education ongoing" (17.35%). Second, a categorisation of "one or more completed tertiary qualifications" was gained by combining "higher certificate complete" (2.04%), "diploma

complete" (9.18%), "bachelor's degree complete" (8.16%), "postgraduate ongoing" (4.08%), "postgraduate certificate complete" (2.04%), and "postgraduate degree complete" (10.20%). Thus, the proportion of respondents with no completed tertiary qualifications was 62.25%, and those with at least one completed tertiary qualification was 35.70%. In Western furry samples, 26.8% of respondents had completed a tertiary qualification (Plante et al., 2016), meaning that South African furries are more formally qualified at a tertiary level (35.70%) when compared to Western furry samples.

In the South African population, 26.52% had completed high school, and 2.48% had completed at least one tertiary qualification (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The furry sample is thus more qualified at a tertiary level than the South African populace, but also generally lower in likelihood to have merely completed high school. The reason for these discrepancies could lie in the age range of the sample vs the population, given that the youngest participant in the study was 18, where the statistics for the South African population included children. This could also be explained by the lower number indicating "high school complete" resulting from more respondents having gone into tertiary education. Another possible explanation may be because the furry sample was predominantly ethnically white, and the white South African populace is significantly more likely than other race groups to have a Bachelor's degree (Statistics South Africa, 2016). However, even accounting for South African furries being predominantly white, they also report even higher levels of education than the general white populace of South Africa, of whom 16.8% have at least a Bachelor's degree (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

Thus, from the respondents sampled, the prototype does not yet have a tertiary qualification, though the South African sample are also more likely to have one than either their Western cohorts, or other members of the South African population.

Employment Status

Distribution of employment status among the sample was as follows:

Table 10

Distribution of employment status

Employment Status	n	%
Full-Time Employment	44	44.89
Part-Time Employment	10	10.20
Full-Time Education	14	14.28
Part-Time Education	1	1.02
Unemployed, Looking	19	19.39
Unemployed, Not Looking	6	6.12
Self-Employed	2	2.04
Freelance	2	2.04

Note. n = 98.

Respondents could select only one option. Also, being on a disability grant and being retired were available as options; however, neither was selected by any participant. A possible contributory factor may be the age distribution of the sample, given that the youngest participant in the study was 18, and the oldest was 50. Further, all respondents that indicated "other" employment either indicated freelance or self-employed; thus these were included as categories.

As per Table 10, the most commonly selected employment status was "full-time employment" (44.89%), and the least commonly selected was "part-time education" (1.02%). The results were combined into broader categories for ease of analysis. First, "full-time employment" (44.89%) and "part-time employment" (10.20%) were combined into "employed". Second, "unemployed, looking" (19.39%) and "unemployed, not looking" (6.12%) were combined into "unemployed". Finally, "full-time education" (14.28%) and "part-time education" (1.02%) were combined into "education". With these categorisations, the majority of the sample (55.10%) is thus employed. The next largest cohort is unemployed (25.51%), with those in education coming in third (15.31%). The smaller categories "self-employed" and "freelancer" were excluded from further analyses.

Studies of Western furry samples allowed for multiple answers to be selected. Within these, approximately the same proportion of Western furries are employed (56.1%), where far more (46.0%) are engaged in education, and slightly more (29.7%) are unemployed (Plante et al., 2016), as compared to the South African sample. However this study only allowed one answer to be selected for this question, making comparisons across these samples less accurate. Further, in the South African populace, the unemployment level was 23.3% for roughly the same period (April – June 2020) over which the survey was run (Statistics South Africa, 2020). This means that furries were, in general, unemployed at a proportion slightly higher than the South African populace. A possible explanation for this may be because the unemployment rate over this period was higher in the age cohorts of 15-24 years old (56.4%) and 25-34 years old (35.6%) than all other age cohorts (Statistics South Africa, 2020). From the analysis of education, the prototype seems to be predominantly employed.

Religion and Spirituality

Level of religiosity and spirituality were distributed as follows, with 1 indicating "Not At All", 2 being "Slightly", 3 being "Average", 4 being "Moderately", and 5 being "Strongly":

Table 11

Distribution of levels of religiosity and spirituality

	Religiosity		Spirituality	
Rating	*n*	%	*n*	%
1 (Not At All)	55	56.12	25	25.51
2 (Slightly)	16	16.33	26	26.53
3 (Average)	14	14.28	14	14.28
4 (Moderately)	8	8.16	22	22.45
5 (Strongly)	5	5.10	11	11.22

Note. n = 98.

As per Table 11, the most commonly selected religiosity level was a rating of 1 (56.12%) and either 1 (25.51% or 2 for spirituality (26.53%). A mean score was calculated for each question above, and descriptive statistics for these were as follows:

Table 12

Descriptive statistics of religiosity and spirituality levels

|	M	Mdn	SD
Religiosity	1.90	1.00	1.223
Spirituality	2.67	2.00	1.368

Note. n = 98.

As per Table 12, respondents were slightly religious. For spirituality, the findings indicated a level between slightly and averagely spiritual. To establish whether there was a significant difference between the level of religiosity and spirituality in the sample, a paired-samples T-test between these two measures was conducted. Results were significant, t(97)= -5.063 $p < 0.001$. Because $p < 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected, indicating that the sample was significantly more spiritual than religious

See Figure 4 for a comparison of spiritual and religious levels indicated.

Figure 4

Comparison of distribution of level of religiosity and spirituality
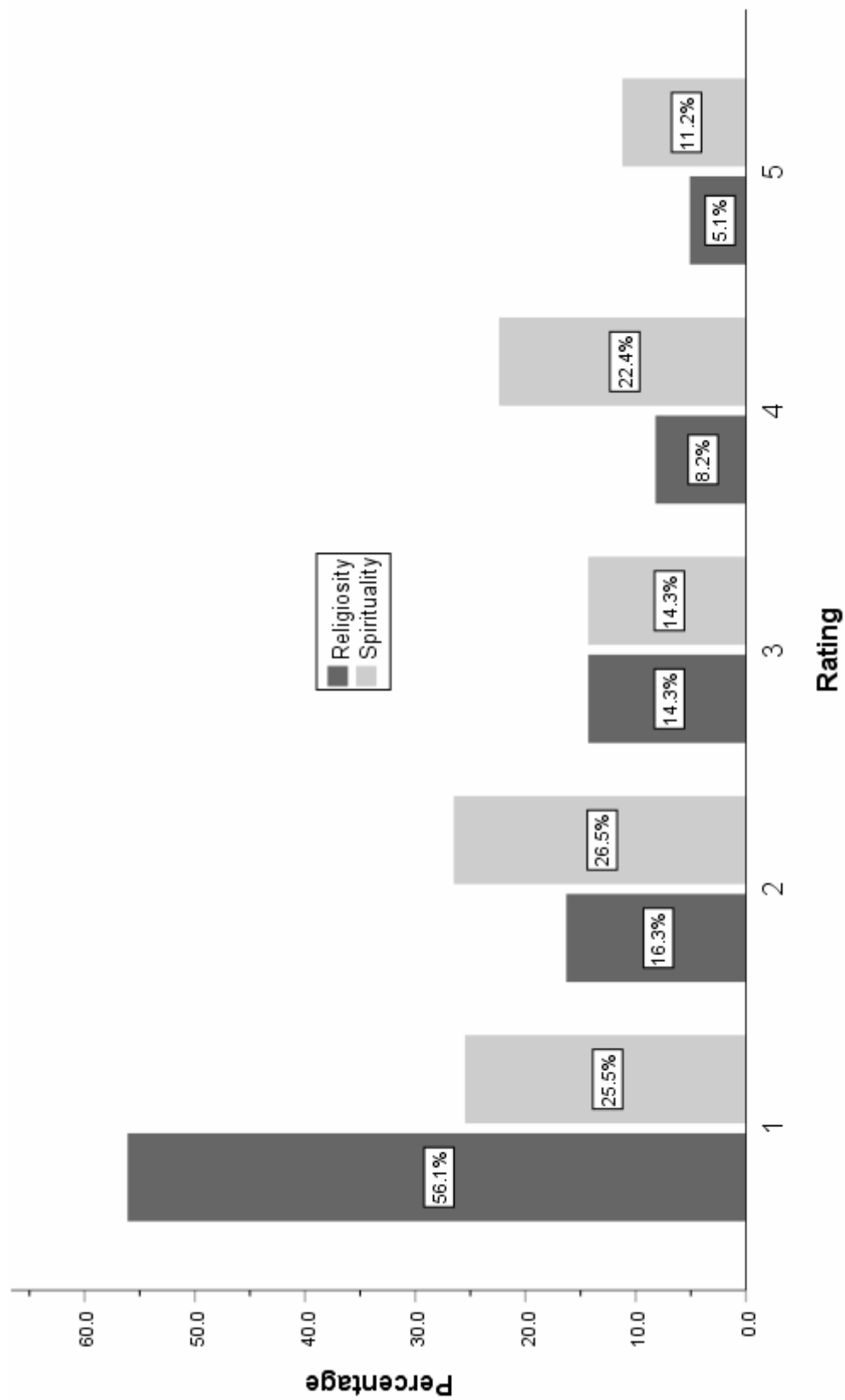
Further, religious affiliation was as follows:

Table 13

Distribution of religious affiliation

Religion	*n*	%
Atheist	17	22.08
No Religious Affiliation	16	20.78
Christian	15	19.48
Agnostic	10	12.99
Other Non-Religious	6	7.79
Paganism/Wicca	5	6.49
Don't Know	1	1.30
Other Religious Affiliation	7	9.09

Note. n = 77.

As per Table 13, the largest affiliation group were atheist (22.08%), no religion (20.78%), and Christian (19.48%), with "don't know" being stated least (1.02%). Various indications of non-religious ("atheist", "agnostic", "no religious affiliation", "other non-religious", and "don't know") were almost twice as common (63.64%) as indications of active religious affiliation (35.06%).

Western furry samples also scored these measures on the same 5-point scale. For comparison religiosity ratings of 1, the lowest score were given by approximately 55% of the Western sample (Plante et al., 2016) similar in proportion to South African furries. However, the most commonly selected spirituality level in Western samples was 3, with around 25% of the sample selecting that rating (Plante et al., 2016).

In terms of direct religious affiliations, Western samples had 16.8% atheist respondents and 23.5% Christian (Plante et al., 2016). In the broader South African population, 78.3% of people identified as Christian, 0.09% as atheist, 0.06% as agnostic, and 10.72% as having no religious affiliation (Statistics South Africa, 2016). The furry sample, thus, was less Christian and more non-religious in various forms than both the Western furry samples and the South African population. While reasons for the differences to Western samples are not immediately clear, a potential explanation for the

difference in affiliation to the South African population is the tensions mentioned above perceived by furries between religiosity and LGBTQIA+ issues, and the lack of tolerance the former is believed to have for the latter (Kreis, 2019f). The lack of active religious affiliation, combined with low scores on both religiosity and spirituality, suggests that the prototype has a negative view towards both religiosity ($M = 1.90$) and spirituality ($M = 2.67$), though more so towards religion, and rarely subscribes to any specific faith. Now that demographics have been explored for the group, psychological factors are dealt with in the next section.

Psychological Features

Levels of Bullying

In the survey, scores assigned corresponded to levels of frequency on a 5-point rating scale. 1 indicated "this did not happen to me", 2 indicated "once or twice", 3 indicated "every few weeks", 4 indicated "about once a week", and 5 indicated "several times a week or more". Means and standard deviations for the different forms of bullying were as follows:

Table 14

Descriptive statistics of forms of bullying experienced

Type of bullying	M	SD
Called names	2.99	1.311
Teased	2.90	1.342
Deliberately left out	2.52	1.370
Lies and rumours	2.32	1.295
Secrets told	2.11	1.069
Harm to possessions	2.07	1.175
Made to feel afraid	2.06	1.215
Hurt physically	1.84	1.028
Friendship broken	1.84	0.943
Forced to do things in order to be liked	1.82	1.127

Note. n = 97.

As per Table 14, mean scores on the different forms of bullying ranged from 1.82 to 2.99 and that some forms were far more common on average than others. Both name-calling and teasing averaged approximately every few weeks – both averaged close to 3.0 (the categorical value of "every few weeks"), with name-calling having an *M* of 2.99 and teasing having an *M* of 2.90, as shown above. The group mean for all respondents across all forms of bullying was 2.25, with a standard deviation of 0.87298, indicating that bullying in some form occurred to most respondents at least once or twice, as per the survey scoring system indicated. It can be extrapolated that the prototype was bullied at least somewhat in high school, most likely through name-calling, teasing, and deliberate exclusion by their peers. *M* scores stated in this table were the mean score for that form of bullying across all respondents in the group – the scores given by each participant for each measure listed above were added together, and divided by the *n* of 97, to gain that measure's *M* value. This was to approximate how frequently, on average, members of the group likely experienced that form of bullying by extrapolating the closeness of the mean scores for particular forms of bullying to the categorical values as described above.

The distribution of the frequency of types of bullying experienced in high school is tabulated in Table 15, and Table 16 shows correlations between types of bullying. See Figure 5 for a complete comparative graph of Table 15.

Table 15

Distribution of scores by bullying type

| Type of bullying	This did not happen to me (1)		Once or twice (2)		Frequency Every few weeks (3)		About once a week (4)		Several times a week or more (5)	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I was TEASED in nasty ways.	14	14.4	31	32.0	22	22.7	11	11.3	19	19.6
SECRETS were told about me to others to hurt me.	31	32.0	39	40.2	16	16.5	7	7.2	4	4.1
I was hurt by someone trying to BREAK UP A FRIENDSHIP.	43	44.3	35	36.1	12	12.4	6	6.2	1	1.0
I was MADE TO FEEL AFRAID by what someone said he/she would do to me.	42	43.3	27	27.8	14	14.4	8	8.2	6	6.2
I was deliberately HURT PHYSICALLY by someone and/or by a group GANGING UP on me.	45	46.4	35	36.1	8	8.2	6	6.2	3	3.1
I was CALLED NAMES in nasty ways.	14	14.4	24	24.7	25	25.8	17	17.5	17	17.5
Someone told me he/she WOULDN'T LIKE ME UNLESS I DID what he/she said.	53	54.6	23	23.7	9	9.3	9	9.3	3	3.1
My THINGS were deliberately DAMAGED, DESTROYED or STOLEN.	38	39.2	33	34.0	13	13.4	7	7.2	6	6.2
Others tried to hurt me by LEAVING ME OUT of a group or NOT TALKING TO ME.	29	29.9	25	25.8	20	20.6	10	10.3	13	13.4
LIES were told and/or FALSE RUMORS spread about me by someone, to make my friends or others NOT LIKE me.	33	34.0	29	29.9	14	14.4	13	13.4	8	8.2

Note. n = 97.

Table 16

Correlations between types of bullying experienced

	Teased	Secrets told	Friendship broken	Made to feel afraid	Hurt physically	Called names	Forced to do things in order to be liked	Harm to possessions	Deliberately left out
Secrets told	0.530**	–							
Friendship broken	0.292*	0.505**	–						
Made to feel afraid	0.613**	0.575**	0.409**	–					
Hurt physically	0.473**	0.256*	0.299*	0.501**	–				
Called names	0.810**	0.516**	0.334*	0.629**	0.570**	–			
Forced to do things in order to be liked	0.454**	0.555**	0.419**	0.505**	0.297*	0.471**	–		
Harm to possessions	0.492**	0.360**	0.256*	0.374**	0.436**	0.661**	0.491**	–	
Deliberately left out	0.512**	0.649**	0.406**	0.491**	0.265*	0.471**	0.611**	0.466**	–
Lies and rumours	0.494**	0.649**	0.458**	0.482**	0.337	0.482**	0.623**	0.477**	0.604**

Note. $n = 97$.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .001$.

Figure 5

Rates of bullying experiences by type
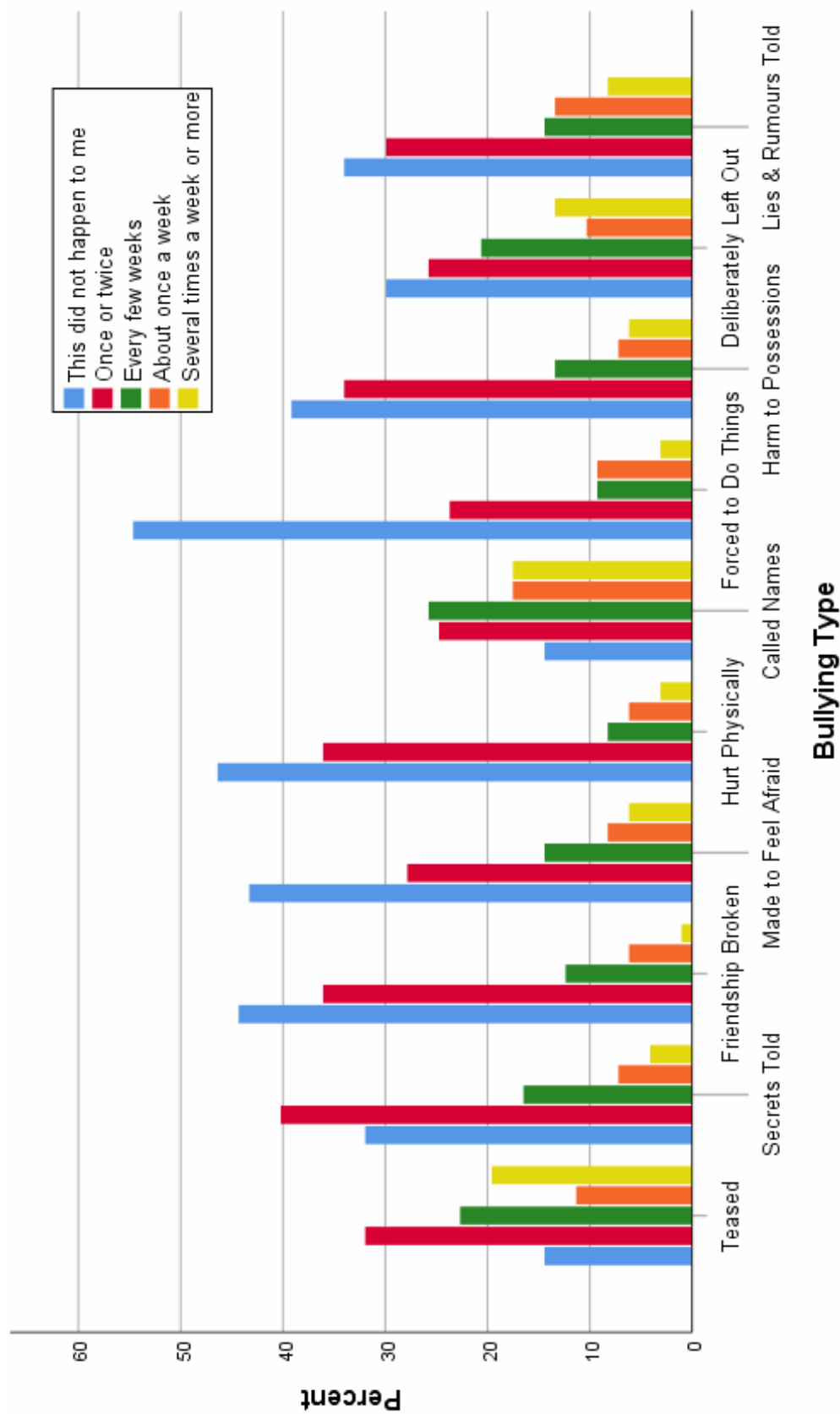
As Table 16 shows, all forms of bullying tested for positively correlate to each other in statistically significant ways – all correlated to one another with a significance of less than 0.05. In most cases the significance was less than 0.001. These correlations were generally weak to modest, except for the correlation between having been teased and having been called names, the highest correlation at 0.810. These values were all determined to measure the same construct, as the coefficient alpha across these different measures was 0.903. While the degrees of the relationships differ, it does suggest this can be simplified down to an average score per individual for further analysis. Therefore, each individual's overall mean bullying score was calculated, which was used in later analyses.

Further, 25.77% of respondents marked all forms of bullying as either "this did not happen to me" (rating of 1) or "once or twice" (rating of 2). In comparison, 35% of grade 9 pupils in South Africa are never or rarely bullied (Reddy et al., 2019). While the South African population data only applies to grade 9, and the sample here was asked about high school the suggestion does still seem to be that furries are bullied in high school more frequently than their peers. In Western furry samples, the rate of not being bullied in high school was 38.3%, which was also significantly lower than the United States national average rate of 60.8% (Plante et al., 2016).

Thus, furries are more likely than other South Africans to have been bullied in high school, though less likely than Western furries to have been bullied, even though they are more likely to have been bullied than their peers across both populations. While reasons for the lower rate of bullying than Western furries is unclear, 56% of LGBTQIA+ individuals in South Africa under the age of 25 indicate that they have experienced discrimination for their identity while in school (Nyeck et al., 2019), and as discussed

above (see the sections above titled "Gender" and "Sexual Orientation"), furries are more likely than the South African population to identify as LGBTQIA+.

Mental Disorders

Respondents were asked to explain formally diagnosed psychological issues and other issues for which they had received no form of professional assessment Most respondents were not qualified to make sophisticated formal assessments of their mental health, so some of the particularly complex issues with no formal diagnosis reported cannot necessarily be trusted as to whether they truly reflect in the respondents. However, other issues (such as depression and anxiety) may be easier to recognise, and their reporting should thus be more reliable than the less common ones. Neither reports of mental disorders, formal or informal, have been used for further analyses and will simply be reported here. Further, blank cases were counted separately within the tables as "Unspecified/None Indicated". The tables will indicate the true response rates for each question in their notes. Frequencies reported below thus reflect the frequencies of cases that indicated each disorder and not the percentage of total responses.

Upon collection, the formal diagnoses were first grouped by exact type, then categorised roughly into categories as dictated by the DSM-5. This also helped make data more anonymous, as some reported disorders were unique. Simply stating the category of the disorder rather than the disorder itself makes respondents harder to recognise from the data provided, thus preserving anonymity. Sometimes, diagnoses shared were impossible to class reliably. So a categorisation of "other specified non-disorder diagnoses" was created as a catch-all and includes things such as misanthropic tendencies, anger management problems, and SPD (the participant indicating this simply put this down, rendering it impossible to determine if they meant schizoid personality disorder, sensory

processing disorder or something else). Formal diagnoses, however, were distributed as

follows:

Table 17

Distribution of formal mental disorder diagnoses

Disorder Category	*n*	% of Cases
Unspecified/None Indicated[a]	47	47.96
Depressive Disorders	29	29.59
Anxiety Disorders	27	27.55
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorders	18	18.37
Other Specified Non-Disorder Diagnoses	5	5.10
Autism Spectrum Disorders	4	4.08
Bipolar and Related Disorders	4	4.08
Obsessive-Compulsive and Related Disorders	3	3.06
Trauma and Stressor-Related Disorders	2	2.04
Schizophrenia Spectrum Disorders	2	2.04
Specific Learning Disorder	1	1.02
Neurological Disorders	1	1.02
Personality Disorders	1	1.02
Sleep-Wake Disorders	1	1.02

Note. n = 98. Actual number of respondents to question was 51.
[a] Value is number of respondents who either left the question blank, or stated
"none".

Informal reports were also organised as far as possible in the same manner.

However, some issues had no apparent DSM equivalent, leading to categorisations such

as "social issues" (which included things such as introversion and shyness, which were

thought not to be covered by "anxiety"). Self-reported undiagnosed mental issues were as

follows:

Table 18

Distribution of self-reported mental health issues

Issue	*n*	% of Cases
Unspecified/None Indicated[a]	38	38.78
Anxiety	37	37.76
Depression	35	35.71
Social Issues	4	4.08
Loneliness and Isolation	3	3.06
Sleep Disorders	3	3.06
Anger and Aggression Issues	2	2.04
Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Issues	2	2.04
Bipolar Issues	2	2.04
Dissociation	2	2.04
Obsessive-Compulsive Issues	2	2.04
Specified Phobias	2	2.04
Autism Spectrum	1	1.02
Dyslexia	1	1.02
Paranoia	1	1.02
Species Dysphoria	1	1.02
Trauma	1	1.02

Note. n = 98. Actual number of respondents to question was 60.
[a] Value is number of respondents who either left the question blank, or stated "none".

As per Table 17, the most commonly indicated formally diagnosed disorders were depressive disorders (29.59%), anxiety disorders (27.55%) and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorders (18.37%), with specific learning disorders, neurological disorders, personality disorders, and sleep-wake disorders being indicated least (all 1.02%). With informal self-reports of issues, these are both even more commonly reported, as per Table 18, with anxiety (37.76%) just slightly more common than depression (35.71%), and autism, dyslexia, paranoia, species dysphoria, and trauma all being reported least commonly (1.02%).

Formal and informal reporting of depression and anxiety were the highest amongst respondents. Many respondents also indicated a co-occurrence in formal diagnoses (18.37%) and informal reports (20.41%). Usually for both formal and informal reports, the specific sub-disorders were usually unspecified. Of the specified anxiety

disorders (13.27%), social anxiety disorder (7.14%) was more common than generalised anxiety disorder (6.12%). In informal reporting, where specified (13.27%), social anxiety (9.09%) was most commonly reported.

Western furry samples report mood disorder rates of 16.1%, anxiety disorder rates of 6.1%, and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder rates of 9.2% (Plante et al., 2016). These are far more present in formal diagnoses of the South African furry sample. However, autism-spectrum disorders were about equal across both Western (approximately 4%) samples (Plante et al., 2016) and South African (4.08%) samples. Further, the prevalence of disorders within the South African population is approximately 15.8% for anxiety disorders and 9.8% for mood disorders (Stein et al., 2008), indicating that furries in the sample are suffering more from psychological disorders than the South African population. The reasons for the increased occurrences, however, are unclear. As this study is exploratory, a causal link between furry and increases in mental health issues should not automatically be assumed. Instead, further research is required to determine the exact reasons for these discrepancies.

This suggests that if suffering from mental problems, the prototype seems most likely to have depression or anxiety, if not both. However, because of the view that mental disorders would not impact aspects of furry identity measured quantitatively, no further analysis was done using mental health issues.

South African furries demographic and psychological features have now been covered. Now that the beginnings of an answer to the research question on what constitutes a prototypical South African furry are forming, it is time to analyse the furry-specific features of the group towards further answering this question. This will be the focus of the next section.

Furry-Specific Features

Number of Years as a Furry

The descriptive statistics for this variable were as follows:

Table 19

Descriptive statistics of number of years as a furry

M	8.81
Mdn.	7.00
Mode	4.00; 5.00
SD	6.6456
Range	0.00–38.00

Note. n = 95.

As per Table 19, the statistical values have a reasonably broad range (0.0–38.0), and the data was bimodal. So, while 4-5 years were the most commonly selected values, the mean is approximately double that, likely due to outliers in the data. It can be extrapolated that the prototype has likely spent less than 10 years identifying as a furry and most likely around 4-5 years. The inference is that the prototype generally identified as furry as a teenager when combining this information with earlier statistics around age.

Removing the two outlier values produces the following descriptive statistical results:

Table 20

Descriptive statistics of number of years as a furry, with outliers removed

M	8.251
SD	5.4498
Range	0.00–22.00

Note. n = 93.

See Figure 6 for a distribution graph of the number of years that respondents have considered themselves to be furry.

Figure 6

Distribution of length of time identifying as furry
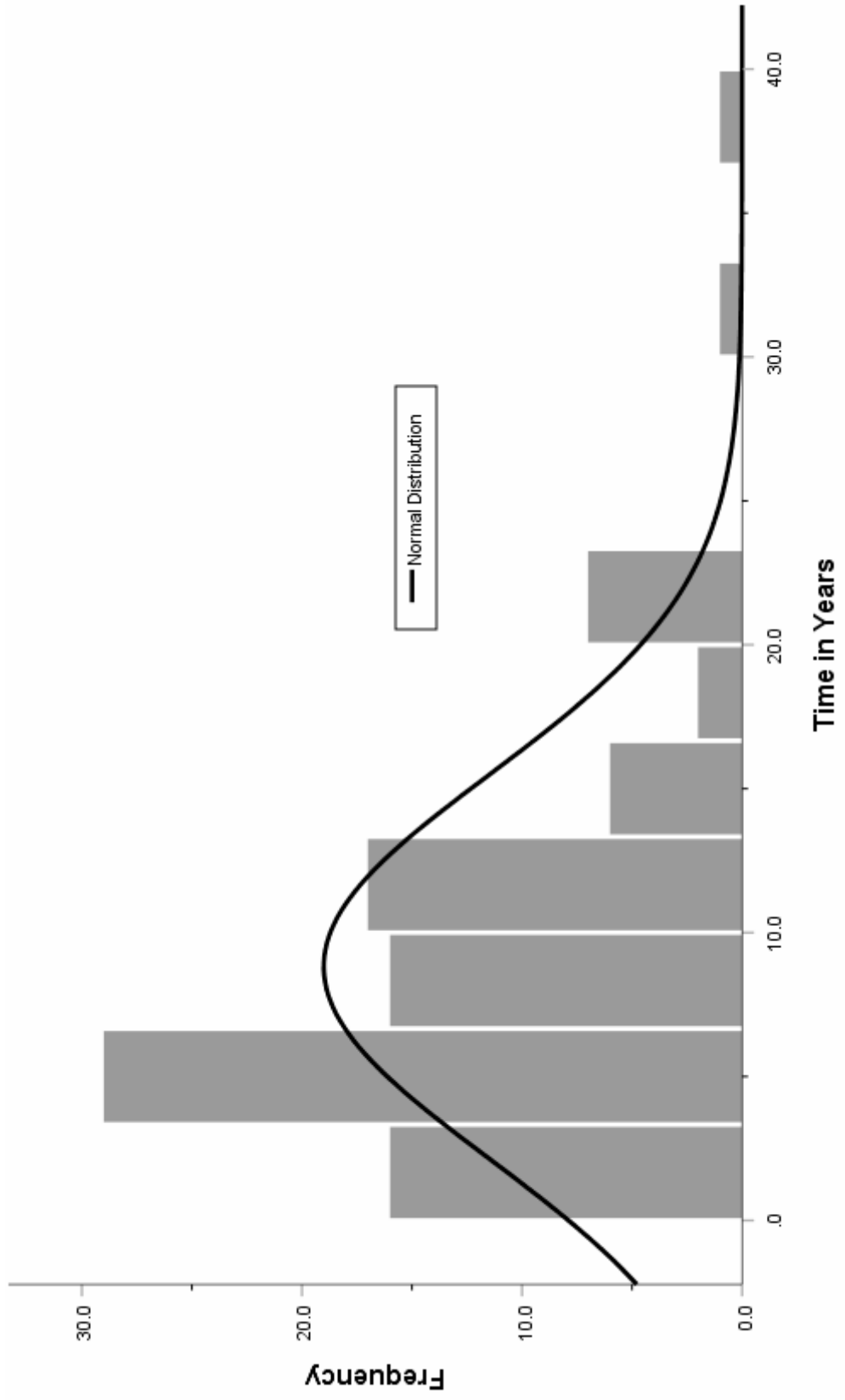
Western furry samples found the average time in the fandom to be 6.6–8.6 years and an age of identification with the fandom averaging 16.0–17.2 years old (Plante et al., 2016). This means that South African furries have generally been in the fandom for a slightly shorter period, which, when considering age, may indicate that beginning to identify as furry may have occurred later in South African samples than Western samples. However, the reasons for this are unclear.

However, due to the perception this variable will likely have no meaningful relationship to demographic features, outside of the apparent notion that older furries are more likely to have been in the fandom longer, this was not used for further analysis.

Connection to Furry

The survey presented respondents with several statements about how they are connected to both furry identity and the furry community. They were asked to rate each statement on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). The descriptive statistics per question are reported below.

Table 21

Descriptive statistics of forms of connection to furry

Statement	*M*	*SD*
I am emotionally connected to being a furry.	4.53	1.817
Being a furry is part of me.	4.68	1.690
I strongly identify with other furries in the furry community.	4.26	1.789
I am glad to be a member of the furry community.[a]	4.99	1.862
I see myself as a member of the furry community.	4.95	1.749
I am emotionally connected to my fursona species.	4.59	1.888
I strongly identify with my fursona species.	4.68	1.825
My fursona species is part of me.	4.22	1.935

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.

M scores were calculated by adding together individual scores per measure and dividing by the *n* as indicated in the table. To compare these different measures at a

glance, the mean score is the most useful statistical feature. Thus, as per Table 21, the highest average forms of connection to furry identity rest on identification with the group, rather than for personal reasons – specifically, being glad to be, and then seeing oneself as a member of the community has the highest means (4.99 and 4.95, respectively). The next highest means were that the person identifies with their fursona species; and that they see furry as part of themselves ($M = 4.68$ for both). On average, the lowest value was seeing the species of the fursona as part of oneself ($M = 4.22$). None of the averages is below the median value of 4, showing a skewing of the data towards the higher end of the scale.

This suggests that overall, members of the sample agree with the statements more than not, though ultimately membership to the group is perhaps of more importance than feelings about one's personal identity as a furry. This is perhaps an illustration of depersonalisation – furries, when considering their status as furries, are emphasising their relationship to the group, rather than their own personal engagement with the core interest of the group (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Turner & Oakes, 1986). This suggests that being furry is not simply identification with the interest but with the group itself. The individual furry sees their self-categorisation of their furry identity as their salient identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004) – an unsurprising explanation, given that the measures specifically speak to making the furry identity salient.

The distribution of responses to the statements is tabulated in Table 22, with Table 23 showing correlations between statements, which shows that results of all statements were statistically significantly correlated to one another. See Figure 7 for a complete comparative graph of the former table.

Table 22

Distribution of scores by nature of connection to furry

Statement	Rating												
	1 (Strongly Disagree)		2		3		4 (Neutral)		5		6		7 (Strongly Agree)
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
I am emotionally connected to being a furry.	3	3.1	13	13.3	17	17.3	16	16.3	13	13.3	17	17.3	19	19.4
Being a furry is part of me.	0	0.0	10	10.2	21	21.4	17	17.3	11	11.2	20	20.4	19	19.4
I strongly identify with other furries in the furry community.	6	6.1	13	13.3	17	17.3	16	16.3	20	20.4	12	12.2	14	14.3
I am glad to be a member of the furry community.[a]	1	1.0	12	12.4	12	12.4	16	16.5	10	10.3	13	13.4	33	34.0
I see myself as a member of the furry community.	1	1.0	8	8.2	16	16.3	15	15.3	18	18.4	10	10.2	30	30.6
I am emotionally connected to my fursona species.	4	4.1	13	13.3	15	15.3	17	17.3	8	8.2	20	20.4	21	21.4
I strongly identify with my fursona species.	4	4.1	9	9.2	17	17.3	15	15.3	14	14.3	17	17.3	22	22.4
My fursona species is part of me.	8	8.2	15	15.3	14	14.3	19	19.4	12	12.2	12	12.2	18	18.4

Note. n = 98 where unspecified.

[a] *n* = 97.

Table 23

*Correlations between types of connection to furry*

	I am emotionally connected to being a furry.	Being a furry is part of me.	I strongly identify with other furries in the furry community.	I am glad to be a member of the furry community.[a]	I see myself as a member of the furry community.	I am emotionally connected to my fursona species.	I strongly identify with my fursona species.
Being a furry is part of me	0.831	–					
I strongly identify with other furries in the furry community.	0.593	0.604	–				
I am glad to be a member of the furry community.[a]	0.571	0.556	0.753	–			
I see myself as a member of the furry community.	0.623	0.666	0.698	0.831	–		
I am emotionally connected to my fursona species.	0.740	0.686	0.515	0.566	0.545	–	
I strongly identify with my fursona species.	0.678	0.624	0.468	0.526	0.514	0.880	–
My fursona species is part of me.	0.665	0.602	0.501	0.484	0.442	0.879	0.807

Note. $p < .001$ in every case. $n = 98$ where unspecified.

[a] $n = 97$.

Figure 7

Comparison of different forms of connection to furry identity
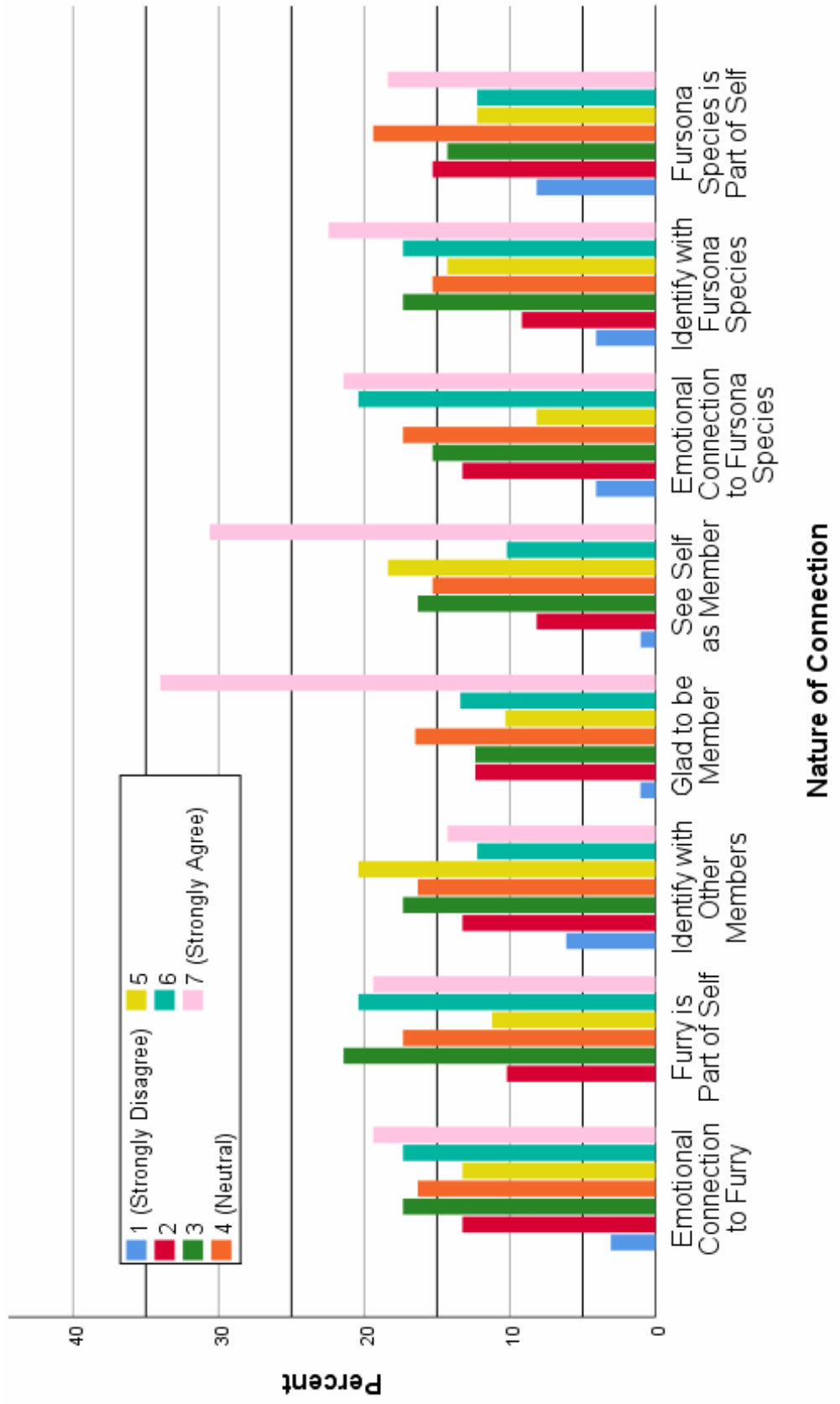
However, multiple forms of furry identity exist, and the results show that the social identification as a furry, rather than the personal identification (which would be the fursona, in this case), is the salient identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000). Of the furry identities, seeing oneself as a member of the overall group appears to be more important in the group context than one's personal relationship to attributes of their fursona, as the group identity is salient, rather than the personal identity of "self as fursona". This could also suggest that the fursona is more aimed at interpersonal interactions rather than intragroup dynamics.

The correlations reinforce this. As per Table 23, all correlations were statistically significant. Being glad to be a furry strongly positively correlated both with identifying with others in the community and seeing oneself as a member of the community, whereas personal connections to one's fursona, or the species thereof, were only moderately positively correlated with connections to the community and to other members thereof. These values were all shown to be measuring the same construct, as the coefficient alpha was 0.837.

To aid further analysis, the scores of individuals were combined into an overall mean "connection to furry" score, which was tested against other variables, by adding together every measure's M scores (as per Table 21) and dividing by 8, the number of statements, to create an overall M for this factor. Reporting the analysis of individual statement scores was deemed necessary only if anything significant was found in the overall identification M score. The group mean for all respondents across all forms of identification used for analyses was 4.6104, and the standard deviation for this was 1.50234.

Furry as a Choice

Respondents were asked whether they believed the group categorisation of furry to be a matter of choice of active association, as opposed to an innate feature of one's identity. The distribution of answers was as follows:

Table 24

Distribution of belief that being furry is a choice

	n	%
Yes	72	73.47
No	13	13.27
Unsure	13	13.27

Note. n = 98.

As per Table 24, people sampled overwhelmingly consider furry identity an active choice (73.47%). While the question was vaguely phrased to allow for personal interpretation as to what was meant by a "choice", the results broadly suggest that most furries in the sample typically see membership to the furry community as an act of self-identification – a label one applies to oneself – rather than a social categorisation – a label applied by others to indicate perceived divisions (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, cited in Trepte, 2011). Western furry samples, however, were significantly different – just over 30% indicated that furry was a choice, while just over 35% indicated that it was not. The remainder stated that they did not know (Plante et al., 2016). A potential explanation may lie in cultural differences and perceptions thereof – as will be discussed below (see the section titled "Distinction of South African Community from the International Community"). Furry is seen as being less well-known in South Africa than in other countries; thus it is possible that furries in South Africa expect only to be called furries if they themselves do so, whereas in Western contexts, where furries are better-known, others can tell

individuals they appear to be furries – in Western contexts, there is more possibility of the label of furry being used as a social categorisation.

This means that, even though some people may appear to have all the features of being a furry, the sample in this study generally believes that to be a furry in South Africa is to decide that one is actively a furry. Furry is perhaps not well-known enough within South Africa for other people to categorise one as a furry, thus to be a furry is necessarily a choice one makes for oneself, because one has to find out for themselves that furry exists first, It is not a significant enough category in South Africa for one to be classified as a furry by others. Thus, there was no reason to believe that demographic features should have a meaningful impact on one's view of furry as a choice, so this question was excluded from further analyses.

Adjacent Group and Nested Subgroup Membership

Because of the previously-discussed possibility of other groups being seen as threatening the distinctiveness of furries (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Plante et al., 2015), and to inform future studies of intergroup dynamics, this study tested membership to adjacent, similar groups, and potential subgroups. Respondents could select more than one option. Other labels and identifiers that furries in the sample used for themselves were as follows:

Table 25

Distribution of other labels used by members of sample

Label	*n*	% of Cases
Human	74	75.51
Human-Animal Hybrid	30	30.61
Artist	34	34.69
Musician	16	16.33
Writer	30	30.61
Brony	15	15.31
Aeromorph Fan	2	2.04
Postfurry	3	3.06
Otherkin	0	0.00
Therian	6	6.12
Other	4	4.08

Note. n = 98.

Most labels constitute adjacent groups or possible nested subgroups, but three

need explanation. The labels of "artist", "musician", and "writer" were provided because

of the importance of creative pursuits within the fandom to display their identity to others,

explicitly creating furry-directed outputs (Kreis, 2019d; Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi,

Schroy, et al., 2017; Risher, 2018; Strike, 2017). More than merely considering

themselves to be artists, musicians, or writers, the terms are more accurately hyphenated

in contexts where the furry identity is salient. So they are *furry*-artist, *furry*-writer, *furry*-

musician. This is because part of their engagement with the community lies directly in

their creative output relating to it. Thus, these three labels are subgroups of the

community as a whole and fill various group functions, such as artists bringing fursonas

"to life" through visual art (Risher, 2016).

Again, because it was possible to belong to more than one group, the percentage

of cases was reported. As per Table 25, many furries attributed one or more creative

labels to themselves, with artists being most common (34.69%) and musicians least

(16.33%). Of adjacent groups, bronies were most common by a wide margin (15.31%),

whereas other groups barely represent – aeromorph fans being the smallest of those

selected (2.04%). No respondents selected Otherkin. Two of the labels given in "other" were other forms of creative pursuit (which cannot be stated to preserve the anonymity of respondents); the third will be discussed below. The biggest category overall was, unsurprisingly, human (75.51%), however, the label of "human-animal hybrid" was also significant (30.61%). This needs further exploration at this point.

Some respondents selected the broad description of "human-animal hybrids" and three possible explanations for their choice of the label are as follows: Perhaps the respondents who consider themselves a "hybrid" do so because they are Therians, Otherkin, or they consider themselves to be an animal trapped in a human body. These possible explanations rest in the fact that, ostensibly, they are similar ideas – both Therians (Robertson, 2013) and Otherkin (Laycock, 2012; Robertson, 2013) view themselves as not entirely human in some capacity, and seeing oneself as an animal trapped in a human body could be read as another way of saying one is Therian. As such, all three of these explanations were tested.

First, as already stated, nobody selected Otherkin as a group, so that potential explanation can immediately be dismissed. Second, a paired samples T-test was run to compare the choice of the hybrid label to the rating given for that species being trapped in a human body (see the section below titled "Reasons for Fursona Species Choice"). The test produced a p-value of 0.054. If p were rounded off, it would mean that $p = 0.05$, which suggests marginal significance. What this suggests is that the averages may be significantly different, but only slightly so, which implies that feeling that one is a particular species trapped in a human body may explain the choice of human-animal hybrid label; however, this is not certain. Third, cross-tabulating choice of the hybrid label with choice of Therian label revealed that only one participant had selected both,

accounting for only 3.3% of those who selected human-animal hybrid as a label. This shows this too does not explain the choice of human-animal hybrid as a label.

As none of these provided statistically significant results, the best explanation that remains is theoretical: salient identity (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). In this interpretation, the identity of oneself as one's fursona is the salient identity. A possible explanation is that perhaps they will consider themselves a hybrid because they are simultaneously aware within furry contexts of themselves as both a person and as their fursona (in a sense). Or perhaps it is an indication of awareness of a certain liminality of anthrozoomorphism – the fursona is an animal, but it has human features, making it something of a "hybrid". Some cases in the data also reinforce this interpretation. At least one selected both "human" and "human-animal hybrid", and their primary fursona's species (which cannot be explicitly stated, to preserve anonymity, as it was unique to this study) is a mythological creature depicted as a human-animal hybrid.

Further, another participant wrote "feral" in their selection of "other" – in furry vernacular, this refers to characters only barely anthropomorphised, typically only sapient, and capable of speech, but otherwise appearing and behaving in much the same way as the real animal with no other anthropomorphic features (*Non-anthro*, n.d.). This participant also did not select "human" as a label. Still, this has little impact on the prototypical South African furry, who, according to the data, may call themselves other things, most likely relating to some creative pursuit, but ultimately has no issue with seeing themselves as human.

In addition, in Western furry samples, around 4% of respondents identified as both furry and Therian, and approximately 16-25% of furries also identified as bronies (Plante et al., 2016). Compared to the South African sample, Western furries were slightly less likely to call themselves Therians but slightly to significantly more likely to identify as

bronies. However, membership to other groups, and the features of those groups, is outside of the scope of this study and related data were not used for further testing.

Relationship to Animals

As furries use animals for identity, consideration was required about how much the animal forms part of the furry's ingroup. As stated previously, the ingroup is how similar they see others to themselves (Stets & Burke, 2000). Thus, knowing how similar furries consider animals to themselves was necessary for future studies. Respondents were given a set of seven numbered, increasingly-overlapping Venn diagrams and asked to select the one that best represented their answer. The distribution of the ratings was as follows:

Table 26

Distribution of level of connection to animals

	Rating						
	1 (0%)	2 (16%)	3 (32%)	4 (48%)	5 (64%)	6 (80%)	7 (96%)
n	6	12	17	18	13	16	16
%	6.12	12.24	17.35	18.37	13.27	16.33	16.33

Note. n = 98.

The scale above, as shown in the graphic used in the survey (see Appendix A, question 17), did not provide clear numbers of the scale of difference to respondents, just simple Venn diagrams, with circles for "self" and "other" steadily and consistently increasing in levels of overlap. However, the exact degree of increase was not available to respondents. For the analysis of the results, each diagram was estimated to be translatable as increments of approximately 16% more overlap than the prior diagram in the sequence. A rating of 1 indicated 0% overlap; 2 indicated 16% overlap, and so on up to a rating of 7 indicating 96% overlap between the two circles. The reasons for this exact increment being selected, where none was initially given, were based on three factors. First, that a

rating of 1 showed no overlap (i.e. 0%), whereas 7 showed an overlap less than 100%. Second, the highest possible whole-number increment that would fit a 6-point scale while remaining less than 100 was 16% (16x6 = 96). Third, this also puts a score of 4 (the mid-point of the graph) close to 50% (the exact increment at that stage would be 48%).

As per Table 26, the distribution is fairly even, with a score of 4 most commonly selected (18.37%) and 1 least commonly (6.12%). Slightly fewer people (45.9%) rated animals as over 50% within their ingroup (rating of 5 or higher) than the people (47.9%) who rated animals as less than 50% part of their outgroup (rating of 2-4), and very few (6.12%) considered animals to be outside of their ingroup (rating of 1). Given the focus of furries on animals and the relationships to animals discussed in the literature review, the average value also seems lower than one might expect. However, data do not exist as to how the distribution compares to Western samples. For this study, the statistics for this variable are as follows:

Table 27

Descriptive statistics of relationship to animals

M	4.35
Mode	4.00
SD	1.839

Note. n = 98.

Thus, as per Table 27, on average, South African furries see real animals as at least somewhat part of their ingroup, though not overwhelmingly so. Thus, comparisons were made between the relationship to animals and the statements measured in the section titled "Connection to Furry" to determine if either group or fursona specifically relate to the level reported. The following results were found:

Table 28

Correlation between connections to furry and relationship to nonhuman animals

Statement	r	p
I am emotionally connected to being a furry.	0.050	0.623
Being a furry is part of me.	0.138	0.177
I strongly identify with other furries in the furry community.	-0.065	0.526
I am glad to be a member of the furry community.[a]	0.027	0.795
I see myself as a member of the furry community.	-0.008	0.940
I am emotionally connected to my fursona species.	0.268	**0.008**
I strongly identify with my fursona species.	0.154	0.129
My fursona species is part of me.	0.305	**0.002**

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 28, the only statistically significant relationships were with the fursona species as part of oneself ($r = 0.305$, $p = 0.008$) and emotional connection to the fursona ($r = 0.268$, $p = 0.002$). Both relationships were positive and weak, but the null hypothesis was still rejected for these two statements. This implies that increased connection to the fursona does correlate to increased consideration of animals as ingroup members; however, only weakly so.

The results seem to indicate that some increases in emotional connection to fursona species and seeing that species as part of oneself are linked to increased regard for animals as a whole, though increases in identifying with that specific species do not. The correlation between seeing the fursona species as part of oneself and seeing animals as within one's ingroup is shown by prior studies, which suggest that incorporating the animal into the self-concept also leads to an increased concern with the actual animal's wellbeing (Plante et al., 2018). Seeing the species as part of oneself means that one likely sees oneself as "part of that species", so to speak (though not, as established, so it forgoes one's humanity), which would increase ingroup identification with that species. However, this question accounted for animals as a whole, so the result is perhaps explained by suggesting that the two balance each other out – more identification with one specific

species could correlate to less identification with others, which would cause a neutral

score – one cannot deny seeing animals as one's ingroup. However, it does not follow

that all animals are part of that ingroup.

In terms of emotional connection, prior studies have shown that the assignment of

anthropomorphic characteristics to animals correlates with increased admiration for

animals (Roberts et al., 2015b). This suggests that seeing animals as part of one's ingroup

may be a manifestation of admiration for animals. This would stretch beyond simply

one's own fursona species – by association with other furries, an individual furry

encounters anthropomorphisation of other species, and thus seeing these other species

with anthropomorphic features could, as suggested by prior studies, lead to an increased

positive regard for them. The wider the variety of species encountered, or perhaps the

more frequently, the higher the broad regard for animals may grow, given the increases in

the number of distinct species subject to positive regard.

Number of Fursonas

The descriptive statistics for the number of fursonas reported by respondents were

as follows:

Table 29

Descriptive statistics of number of fursonas

M	2.26
Mdn.	1.00
Mode	1.00
SD	3.848
Range	0–34

Note. n = 98.

Having one fursona was the most common answer given (63.3%), with two

fursonas coming in second (15.3%), three in third (9.2%), and four in fourth (4.1%). One

participant (1%) indicated a count of 0 fursonas, and seven respondents (7%) indicated

having five or more. As per Table 29, the mean was 2.26, and the median and mode were both 1.00, calculated by adding each individual's indicated number and dividing by the n of 98. The higher mean is possibly explained by outliers that ranged as high as 34. Thus the median and mode may be more accurate descriptors, thus suggesting that the most commonly indicated answer was one.

See Figure 8 for a distribution graph of the number of fursonas reported.

Figure 8

Distribution of number of fursonas
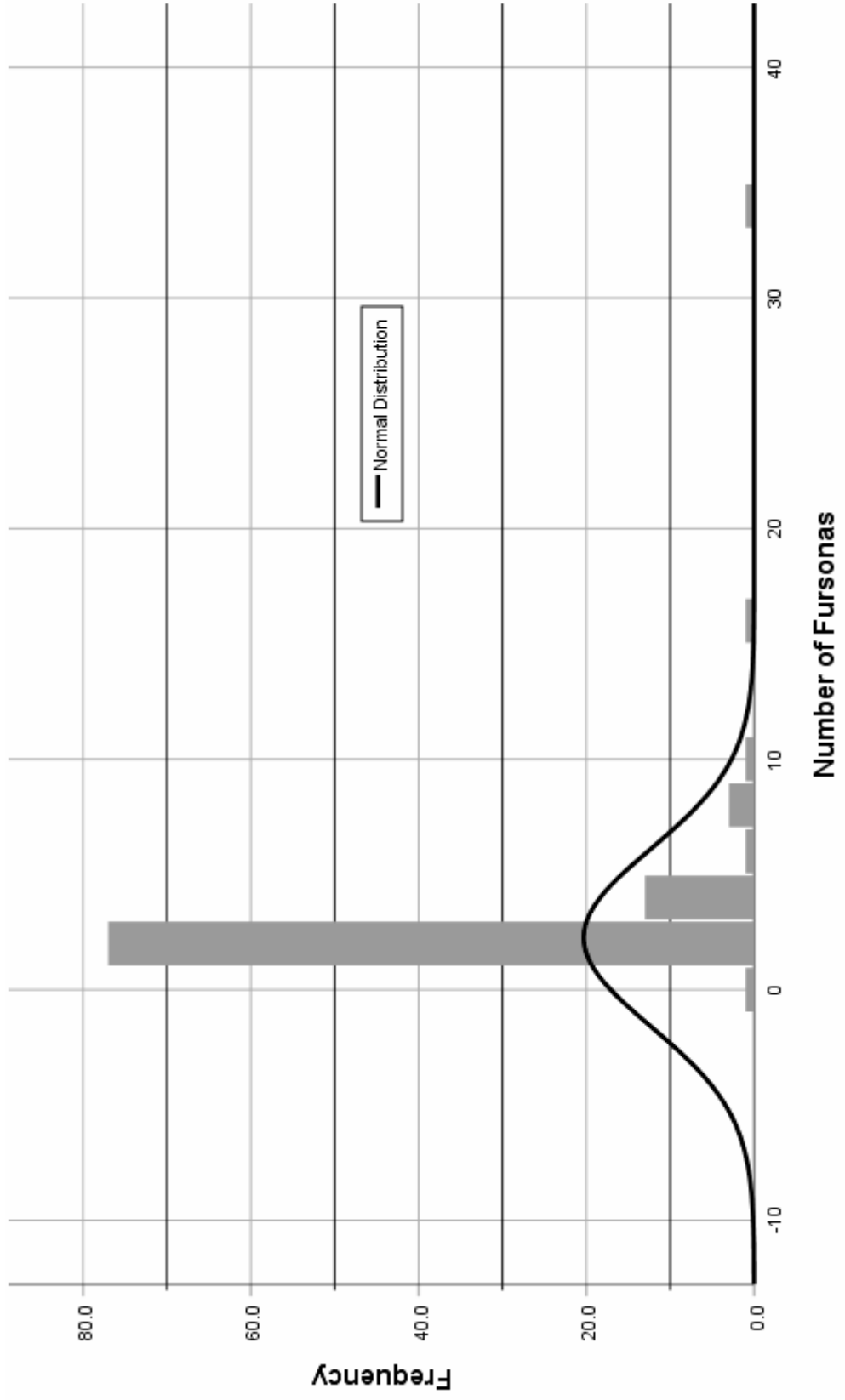
Compared to Western furry samples, more stated they had only one fursona presently (just over 70%), two fursonas was proportionate (just less than 20%), three was far less common (less than 5%), and having over four was almost non-existent (Plante et al., 2016). However, the latter three become more common over the lifetime – just over 20% had two fursonas, just over 10% had three, and approximately 10% had four or more (Plante et al., 2016). However, the question asked in this study did not account for whether respondents indicated lifetime or present fursona count. Thus, two possible explanations for the data exist.

First, that not all respondents understood the question in the same way; thus some indicated current fursonas, and others indicated lifetime fursonas. Second, a fursona count may result from the fursona acting as a salient identity, and the furry finding they need more or less different salient identities to fit different contextual situations in which they may find themselves (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg et al., 2004). Thus, one fursona may be used only for some situations, and another for different ones; or, perhaps, over one's lifetime, different salient identities may be in response to personal and contextual changes, and some identities no longer serve an explicit "purpose" and are perhaps retired in favour of newer identities with a better fit. This also suggests that the differences in mean and median scores may also be accounted for by the number of different situations and manners of engagement that individuals have with the furry fandom – median and mode suggest that most people engage with furry in a singular fashion. In contrast, those who have multiple fursonas may use them for different contexts. It can be extrapolated from this that the prototype most likely has just one fursona, though it may have more. Demographic features should not affect this, therefore, further testing with this variable was determined to be unnecessary.

Fursona Species

The distributions of fursona species, by broad groups, were as follows:

Table 30

Distribution of species of fursona

Species Group	*n*	%
Canines	36	38.3
Hybrids	16	17.02
Others (Unique)	13	13.83
Felines	12	12.76
Mythological	6	6.38
Equines	3	3.19
Llamas	2	2.12
Protogens	2	2.12
Rabbits	2	2.12
Sharks	2	2.12

Note. n = 94.

As per Table 30, canines were the most common choice of fursona species, followed by hybrids. The "Others (Unique)" category exists as a catch-all for any fursonas that did not fit into any other group. As such no more detail will be provided here, as all were unique and the answers given could identify respondents. Nevertheless, to break this down further, the most common canine subspecies were wolves (19.14%), foxes (9.57%), and dogs (8.51%). For felines, big cats dominated (9.57%). As regards mythological species, dragons were the most common (4.26%).

Explaining exact combinations of hybrids might identify respondents, thus eroding anonymity thus the decision was taken to indicate common components of hybrid species rather than their specific combinations. Most commonly, hybrids had canine (50%), feline (13.33%) or mythological (13.33%) components, with the remainder of components listed (23.33%) being unique answers. Under canine hybrid components, wolves were most common (23.33%), followed by foxes (16.67%). Feline components were all big cats.

In Western furry samples, the most common fursona species choice was hybrid, at just over 14%, followed by wolves, at around 14%, then foxes at around 11%, dogs at around 9%, and big cats slightly above 8%, and dragons slightly below 8% (Plante et al., 2016). Exact comparisons across categorisations used in this sample and prior Western samples was not possible because of a lack of complete data sets. However, roughly speaking, proportions of species distribution are reasonably similar in the South African sample, with wolves and hybrids being more common, dogs and foxes slightly less common, big cats being approximately the same, and dragons being significantly less common. The exact reasons for these discrepancies were not clear.

There was no singular majority in the representation of a particular species in the sample. However, canines are by far the most common choice, both as pure species and for components of hybrids. Taken together by combining the canine category with the canine hybrid category, the majority of fursonas within the sample are at least partially, if not wholly, canine (54.25%). The prototype thus likely has a fursona that is wholly or partially canine.

Reasons for Fursona Species Choice

The survey asked respondents to rate various possible explanations why or the choice for the choice of fursona. Respondents were asked to rate each statement on a 7-point scale, from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 7 ("Strongly Agree"). The average scores for the statements asked to be rated were as follows:

Table 31

Descriptive statistics of reasons for fursona choice

Statement	*M*	*SD*
I have an innate connection to the species	4.35	2.026
I am that species trapped in a human body	2.04	1.471
I have shared characteristics with that species	4.12	1.874
I was that species in past life	1.84	1.597
That species is my spirit guide[a]	2.63	2.200
I have physical resemblance to that species	2.20	1.566

Note. n = 98 where unspecified.
[a] *n* = 97.

The means were determined by adding up the individual responses and dividing by the appropriate *n*. As per Table 31, innate connection (*M* = 4.35) and shared characteristics (*M* = 4.12) are the most highly-rated reasons for the choice of fursona species. Also, the lowest-rated reasons involved spiritual explanations – because the species is trapped in a human body (*M* = 2.04); and having been that species in a past life (*M* = 1.83). This aligns with the explanation that furry is not a form of species dysmorphia. This also suggests that the decision of what species the fursona will be is determined more by feelings of innate connection to and shared characteristics with the species than other factors. Western samples have shown a link between the choice of fursona and the perception of shared characteristics (Plante et al., 2016). Thus, in both Western and South African samples, the choice of species is not arbitrary. The total distribution of the ratings given of responses to the statements is shown in Table 32. See Figure 9 for a complete comparative graph of the table.

Table 32

Distribution of scores by nature of connection to fursona

Connection	Rating													
	1 (Strongly Disagree)		2		3		4 (Neutral)		5		6		7 (Strongly Agree)	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
I have an innate connection to the species	11	11.2	10	10.2	14	14.3	18	18.4	11	11.2	12	12.2	22	22.4
I am that species trapped in a human body	56	57.1	11	11.2	15	15.3	7	7.1	6	6.1	2	2.0	1	1.0
I have shared characteristics with that species	11	11.2	9	9.2	19	19.4	17	17.3	15	15.3	14	14.3	13	13.3
I was that species in past life	69	70.4	8	8.2	7	7.1	6	6.1	2	2.0	2	2.0	4	4.1
That species is my spirit guide [a]	52	53.6	10	10.3	8	8.2	5	5.2	4	4.1	7	7.2	11	11.3
I have physical resemblance to that species	50	51.0	14	14.3	16	16.3	7	7.1	4	4.1	7	7.1	0	0.0

Note. n = 98 where unspecified.

[a] *n* = 97.

180

Figure 9

Distribution of reasons for fursona choice
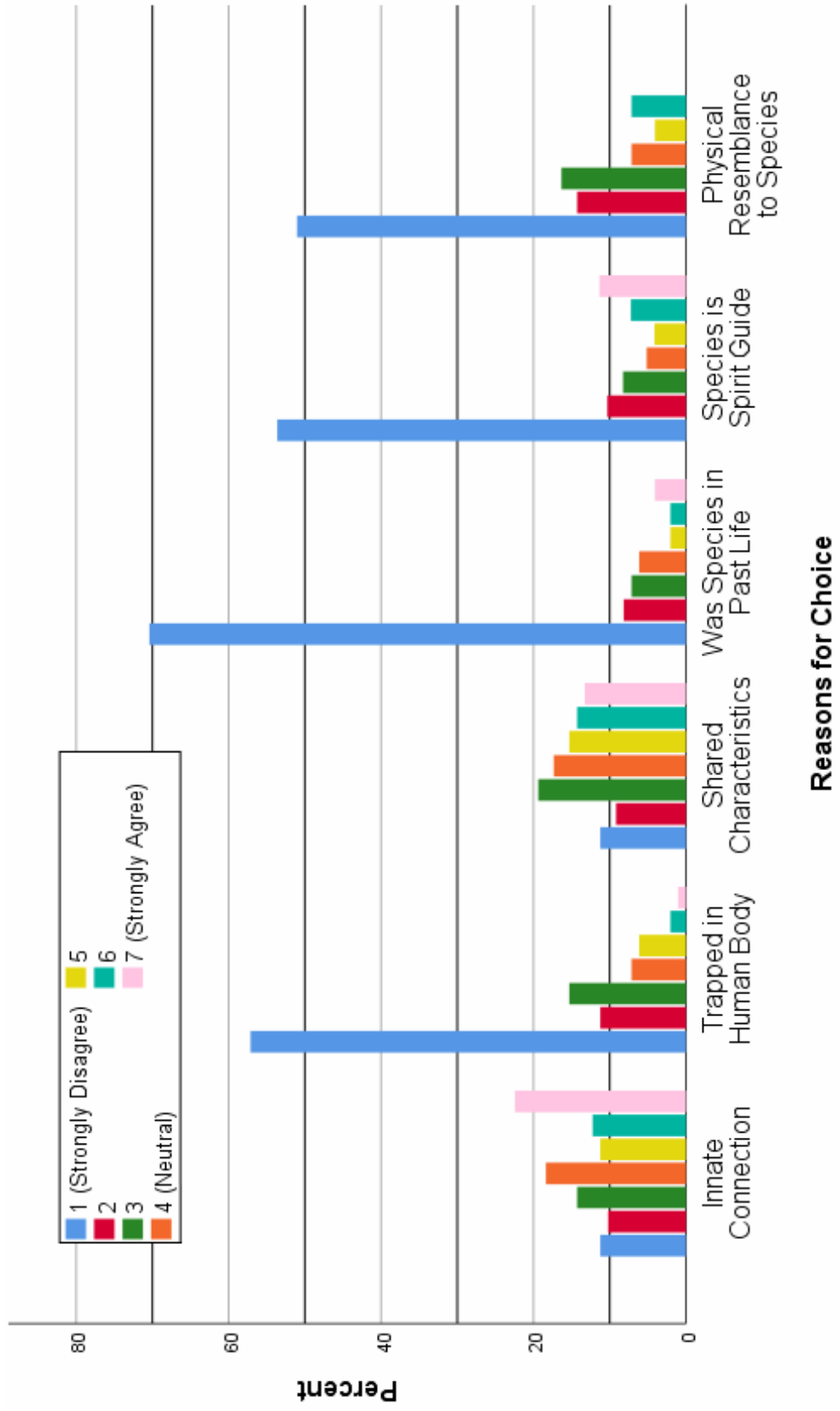
Further, correlations between these statements were as follows:

Table 33

Correlations between types of connection to fursona

	Innate	Trapped in human body	Shared characteristics	Past life	Spirit guide
Trapped in human body	0.521**	–			
Shared characteristics	0.612**	0.341*	–		
Past life	0.392**	0.606**	0.342*	–	
Spirit guide[a]	0.454**	0.580**	0.332*	0.702**	–
Physical resemblance	0.359**	0.375**	0.353**	0.489**	0.495**

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.
*$p < .05$, **$p < .001$.

As per Table 33, all statements rated in the question were positively correlated with different degrees of strength. Further, all relationships were statistically significant, rejecting the null hypotheses that there would be no correlations between these values. The strongest relationships are those that seem to relate to similar ideas. The species as spirit guide and the species as past life have the strongest correlation ($r = 0.702$, $p < 0.001$), and both are metaphysical/ontological claims. Being the species in a past life was also moderately associated with the species being trapped in a human body ($r = 0.606$, $p < 0.001$) – another metaphysical/ontological statement. An innate connection was moderately associated with feeling one has shared characteristics with that species ($r = 0.612$, $p < 0.001$). Physical resemblance generally had the weakest relationships with all other statements and does not seem to share any commonalities with other statements. These results indicate that connections that people have to their fursonas result from related concerns – for example, if a person has metaphysical reasons for fursona choice, they will likely agree with the metaphysical statements above more than other statements.

This segues into the next analysis on the correlation to the relationship with nonhuman animals (see the section above titled "Relationship to Animals"), which were as follows:

Table 34

Correlation between reasons for fursona choice and relationship to animals

Statement	*r*	*p*
I have an innate connection to the species	0.349	**<0.001**
I am that species trapped in a human body	0.436	**<0.001**
I have shared characteristics with that species	0.169	0.096
I was that species in past life	0.279	**0.005**
That species is my spirit guide[a]	0.265	**0.009**
I have physical resemblance to that species	0.063	0.537

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 34, believing one is their fursona's species trapped in a human body was correlated strongest to the connection one has to nonhuman animals ($r = 0.436$, $p < 0.001$), but only moderately so. Innate connection was the next strongest relationship ($r = 0.349$, $p < 0.001$), followed by being that species in a past life ($r = 0.279$ $p = 0.005$), with that species being one's spirit guide being the weakest ($r = 0.265$, $p = 0.009$). Nevertheless, all relationships are weak. In all these cases, these correlations were positive. Further, the relationship to physical resemblance and shared characteristics was statistically insignificant ($p > 0.05$). Thus the null hypothesis was rejected for all cases except physical resemblance and shared characteristics. There was a relationship between how one sees nonhuman animals and every statement, except a belief that one physically resembles that species and that one shares characteristics with that species.

An increased perception of the animal as within one's self-concept correlates to increased concern in the species' wellbeing (Plante et al., 2018). The data seems to support this interpretation. The statements that correlated significantly with the relationship respondents had with animals all pertain to a perception of an internalised relationship with the species, such that the species is, to some extent seen as part of oneself. However, the relative weakness of the relationship is perhaps again explained as discussed earlier – the primary concern that furries have for animals in general is limited

somewhat, and applies primarily the species they identify as rather than generally. In contrast, the measure is about concern for animals in general. The perception of being that species in a human body correlates the strongest of all values to concern for animals, in general, and may imply a belief in specific metaphysical claims – if the participant believes themselves to be that species in a human body, they necessarily need to consider that others who make the same claim but identify as different species, are also making truthful statements.

Thus other species also have ontologies that can be displaced into human bodies, and are perhaps considered to be of as much concern as their own species. This would, however, be offset somewhat by limited exposure to different species-within-human-bodies, which could lower the general concern – if they encounter no one claiming to be of a particular species, that species might fall outside of the general concern, as there would be no "evidence" of that species group having the same ontological claims.

In Western furry samples, results for the same statements rated on the same scale vary in numerous ways. The approximate distributions of scores were as follows:

Table 35

Distribution of reasons for fursona choice in Western samples

	Score Given	
	1 or 2	6 or 7
Statement	(Disagree)	(Agree)
I have an innate connection to the species	50%	20%
I am that species trapped in a human body	>60%	14%
I have shared characteristics with that species	15-20%	45%
I was that species in past life	70%	10%
That species is my spirit guide	>50%	<25%
I have physical resemblance to that species	50%	11%

Note. Data adapted from Plante et al. (2016). Values all approximate.

As per Table 35, compared to the South African sample, usually a larger portion rated the values lower, and a smaller portion higher, than their Western counterparts. However, there were exceptions. For having shared characteristics, the South African

sample was about the same proportion, rating it lower. However, it was still a proportion smaller than the Western sample which rated it highly. Also, an innate connection to the species had an inverse relationship to the Western data – a smaller portion of the South African furry sample rated this value low, and a larger portion rated it high, than in Western samples. The exact reasons for these discrepancies with the Western sample, however, were unclear.

Fursona Gender

The congruence of fursona gender to that of the respondents was as follows:

Table 36

Distribution of gender congruence between person and fursona

Congruence	*n*	%
Always Same Gender	64	65.3
Usually Same Gender	18	18.4
Equally Same and Different Genders	8	8.2
Usually Different Gender	5	5.1
Always Different Gender	3	3.1

Note. n = 98.

Except for "Always Different Gender" answers, all other answers from personal gender identity were compared with answers given for fursona gender identity. Sometimes, respondents only indicated the other gender/s that their fursona was represented as and excluded their own gender/s. Thus, where necessary, answers for personal gender were added to the answers for fursona gender. Further, where "Always Same Gender" was selected, respondents skipped over the question of fursona gender; thus answers given for personal gender in such cases were copied across to fursona gender. The distribution of fursona gender was as follows:

Table 37

Gender distribution of fursonas

Gender	n	% of Cases
Cis-Male	79	81.44
Cis-Female	21	21.64
Transgender (MtF)	9	9.27
Transgender (FtM)	2	2.06
Transgender (Gender Non-Conforming)	3	3.09
Non-Binary	12	12.37
Genderqueer	5	5.15
Genderfluid	7	7.22
Agender	3	3.09
Do not identify as male, female, or transgender	2	2.06
In-question	2	2.06
Hermaphrodite	2	2.06

Note. n = 97.

A few respondents cited that one of their fursona gender identities was hermaphrodite, which was included because of its unique position in furry, and the discussion that arises out of the furry use of this term. In furry terminology, a hermaphrodite (or *herm*) character is a particular form of intersex, where they have a female body (typically indicated by breasts) but both a penis and a vagina for their genitals (*Herm*, n.d.; *Hermaphrodite*, n.d.). Other forms of intersex characters are also known by specific terms in furry. Specifically, a gynomorph is a character with a female body and a penis for their genitals, and an andromorph is a character with a male body and a vagina for their genitals (*Herm*, n.d.). As such, "hermaphrodite" has a specific contextual meaning that goes above a broad "intersex" categorisation. However, I acknowledge there is a push to remove the term "hermaphrodite" from clinical literature around human intersexuality because of the technical inaccuracy of the term in medical settings and concerns around the fetishisation of intersexuality (Dreger et al., 2005). It also bears acknowledgement that furry hermaphroditic characters often (but not always) fall directly into explicitly fetishist portrayals, especially as hermaphroditism is sometimes paired with hypertrophilia (*Hermaphrodite*, n.d.). *Hypertrophilia* is a sexual

paraphilia that involves characters with sexual features of massively over-exaggerated size, such as penises or breasts (*Hypertrophilia*, n.d.). So while I acknowledge that "hermaphrodite" is a problematic term, the term was kept intact in the results because it has a precise meaning in furry linguistics that the term "intersex" would simply be too broad to cover. Also, the use of the term "hermaphrodite" in this case could be interpreted as directly indicative of the fetishisation discussed by Dreger et al. (2005), thus indicating a place for further study or discussion.

Three respondents also opted to provide details by selecting "other" to explain the reasoning for their fursona sometimes being of a different gender. One participant stated: "generally the only time my fursona is female is when it represents a cosplay from a game", another stated the fursona was female for "specific roleplay [*sic*] situations", and the third stated that their fursona "shapeshifts [*sic*] between male and female as desired".

As per Table 37, cis-male still dominates fursona gender (81.44%), likely because cis-males dominated the sample, and most people suggested that their fursona and gender identities were always or usually the same (83.7%), as shown by Table 36.

Compared to Western furry samples, the proportion who rate their fursona gender as always the same as their own were similar (62%), where more had a fursona that was always of different gender (5%) than the South African sample (Plante et al., 2016). However, data on specific gender distributions of fursonas in the Western sample were not available.

It can be assumed that the prototype has a male fursona, which generally aligns with their existing male gender identity. Aside from comparison to the person's gender identity, no other meaningful information can be gained comparing this data to demographic features; thus no further analysis was done.

Fursona Sexual Orientation

The distribution of fursona sexual orientation was as follows:

Table 38

Sexual orientation distribution of fursonas

Orientation	*n*	%
Bisexual	39	39.79
Homosexual	34	34.69
Heterosexual	12	12.24
Asexual	4	4.08
Don't Know	4	4.08
Pansexual	2	2.04
Demisexual	2	2.04
Other	1	1.02

Note. n = 98.

See Figure 2 for a graph of the distribution of fursona sexual orientations relative to the distribution of personal sexual orientations. As per Table 38, fursonas were most likely bisexual (39.79%), followed by homosexual (34.69%) and heterosexual (12.24%). The congruence of one's sexual orientation to one's fursona will be discussed below in the subsection titled "Sexual Orientation", as located under the section titled "Relationships of Demographic and Psychological Features with Furry Features". For now, the prototypical South African furry has a fursona that is also LGBTQIA+, which is partially or fully attracted to others of the same gender.

In Western furry samples, fursona sexual orientation was roughly 20% exclusively homosexual, roughly 18% exclusively heterosexual, and the remainder (62%) bisexual (Plante et al., 2016). However, in these samples, the testing was done based on the Kinsey scale (Plante et al., 2016), so the "bisexual" categorisations (i.e. the remainder of the sample) may include other similar orientations such as pansexual. Considering homosexual and heterosexual, however, the South African sample differs – it is nearly a third less heterosexual (12.24%) and nearly twice as homosexual (34.69%), as Western samples were. If taking the "bisexual" from Plante et al. (2016) as roughly equivalent to

the remaining sexual orientations in the South African sample, the South African sample is also significantly less inclined to other sexualities (46.9%) than the Western sample was. The reasons for these discrepancies, however, were unclear.

The decision was taken that bullying, perceived socioeconomic place in society, education, employment, religiosity, and spirituality would not relate to the sexual orientation of the fursona in ways that would be meaningful, so this variable was only tested against the demographic features of age and personal sexual orientation. The reason for this was that the congruence of fursona sexual orientation to personal sexual orientation suggested this was the direct correlation and that other correlations that could be found would be indistinguishable from those of personal sexual orientation.

Fursuit Ownership

Actual ownership of, and attitudes towards owning a fursuit, were as follows:

Table 39

Distribution of ownership, and attitude towards ownership, of fursuits by type

	Full Fursuit[a]		Partial Fursuit[b]	
Status	*n*	%	*n*	%
Owned	5	5.1	15	15.5
Not Owned Yet, Wanted	61	62.2	61	62.9
Not Owned	17	17.3	11	11.3
Not Owned, Probably Never	8	8.2	3	3.1
Not Owned, Don't Want	7	7.1	7	7.2

[a] *n* = 98. [b] *n* = 97.

As per Table 39, owning a partial fursuit (15.5%) is approximately three times more common than owning a full fursuit (5.1%). However, most furries in the sample do not own a fursuit of either variety, though the majority of those who do not own one wish to (62.2% for a full fursuit, 62.9% for a partial fursuit). The smallest group for partial fursuits stated that they would "probably never" own one (3.1%), whereas, for full fursuits, the smallest group were those who owned one (5.1%).

In Western furry samples, around 13% own a full fursuit, where around 25% own a partial fursuit (Plante et al., 2016). The South African sample is significantly less likely to own a fursuit than their Western counterpart. The reasons for this discrepancy are unclear, but it further suggests there are perhaps specific local conditions relating to the lack of ownership of a fursuit, some of which will be explored below. However, the important conclusion is that the prototype does not presently own a fursuit, but they desire to.

See Figure 10 for a graph comparing ownership, and attitude towards ownership, of fursuits.

Figure 10

Comparison of ownership, and attitude towards ownership, of fursuits
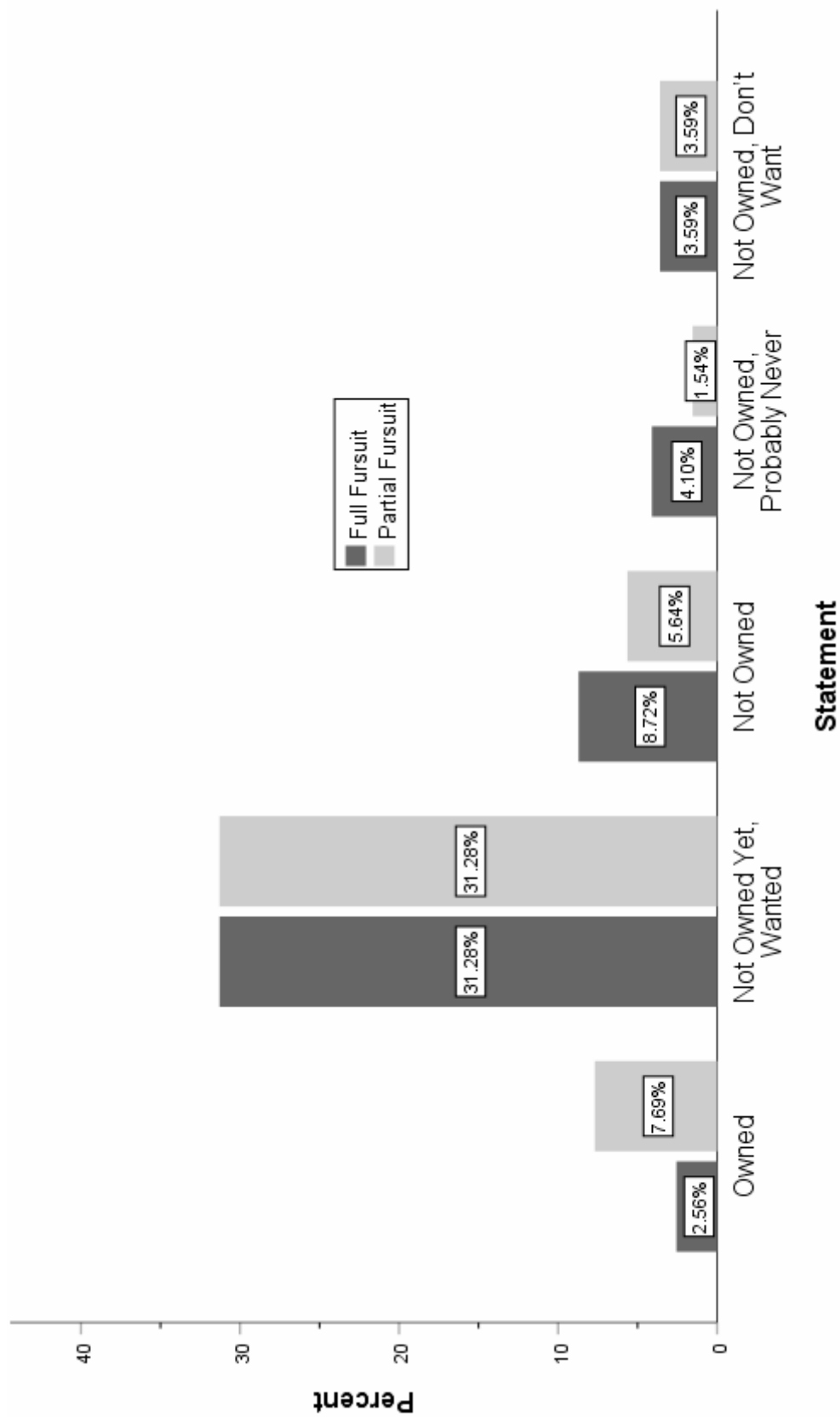
Furry Sexuality

The interest of sexuality in furry was rated by respondents on a 7-point scale, with 1 indicating "Not a Fetish at All", and 7 indicating "Completely a Fetish". The distribution was as follows:

Table 40

Distribution of ratings for interest in sexual aspects of furry

Rating	Personal		Community Estimate	
	n	%	*n*	%
1 (Not a Fetish at All)	7	7.3	3	3.1
2	15	15.6	9	9.4
3	14	14.6	12	12.5
4 (Neutral)	21	21.9	34	35.4
5	17	17.7	29	30.2
6	16	16.7	7	7.3
7 (Completely a Fetish)	6	6.3	2	2.1

Note. n = 96.

The ratings had the following statistical features:

Table 41

Descriptive statistics of interest in sexual aspects of furry

Level	*M*	Mode	*SD*
Personal	4.02	4.00	1.692
Community Estimate	4.10	4.00	1.252

Note. n = 96.

As per Table 40, the most commonly selected answer for both personal sexual interest in furry (21.9%) and perceived community sexual interest in furry (35.4%) was a score of 4 (neutral). As per Table 41, the mean score for each (4.02 and 4.10, respectively) was also close to the neutral score. A paired-sample T-test indicated that the null hypothesis was upheld when comparing personal to estimated communal interest, $p =$ 0.624, and because $p > 0.05$. This suggests that people were slightly more likely to rate the community's interest higher if their personal interest was higher, but that the average estimation of the communal interest, while slightly higher, was not statistically

significantly different to actual interest levels reported by individuals,. Further, these two

values were also positively correlated weakly, $r = 0.342$, $p = 0.001$. What this means is

that, to a weak degree, as personal interest increases in sexual aspects of furry, so too

does the assumption that others are also sexually interested.

The descriptive statistics for the number of times furry pornography was viewed

in the last month were:

Table 42

Descriptive statistics of number of times pornography viewed in last month

M	30.03
Mdn.	20.00
SD	47.638
Range	0–300

Note. n = 92.

This indicates that furry pornography, on average, is viewed about 30.03 times per

month or about once per day. It must be noted stage that within the sample, two people

indicated their pornography viewership to be 1000 times per month, and one as high as

9000. These were extreme outliers, and to obtain more accurate statistics on the group,

the decision was taken to exclude them from the analysis. The median was considerably

smaller than the mean, suggesting a positively skewed distribution.

The descriptive statistics for the percentage of artwork viewed as being

pornographic were as follows:

Table 43

Descriptive statistics of percentage of furry art viewed being pornography

M	51.45
Mdn.	50.00
SD	27.535
Range	2.00–96.00

Note. n = 94.

As per Table 43, on average, about half of the artwork viewed by furries was pornographic. Attitude towards furry pornography was rated on a 7-point scale, from 1 ("Strongly Negative") to 7 ("Strongly Positive"). Scores were distributed as follows:

Table 44

Distribution of attitude towards furry pornography

Rating	*n*	%
1 (Strongly Negative)	0	0.00
2 (Negative)	1	1.04
3 (Slightly Negative)	1	1.04
4 (Neutral)	23	23.95
5 (Slightly Positive)	19	19.79
6 (Positive)	17	17.71
7 (Strongly Positive)	35	36.46

Note. n = 96.

The statistics for this were as follows:

Table 45

Descriptive statistics of attitude towards furry pornography

M	5.61
Mdn.	6.00
SD	1.284

Note. n = 96.

As per Table 44, a rating of 4 (i.e. neutral) was indicated most commonly (23.95%), with ratings less than that being the least commonly selected (2 and 3 both being 1.04%, and 1 being 0.00%). As per Table 45, the mean score was 5.61. Both of these indicate that the general view of furry pornography is neutral-to-positive. Further, relationships between level of interest, attitude, and use of pornography were tested. The results were as follows:

Table 46

Correlations between measures pertaining to pornography

	Personal interest[a]	Pornography percentage[b]	Pornography times[c]
Pornography percentage[b]	0.582[*]	–	
Pornography times[c]	0.382[*]	0.505[*]	–
Attitude[a]	0.612[*]	0.587[*]	0.539[*]

[a] $n = 96$. [b] $n = 94$. [c] $n = 92$.
[*] $p < .001$

In all cases, the relationship was positive, and $p < 0.05$, indicating that they were also statistically significant, rejecting all null hypotheses. However, all relationships were moderate. The above suggests that the more one likes sexual aspects of furry, the better one sees it, however, interest in it relates more strongly to the percentage of pornography viewed more so than the actual number of viewings.

In Western furry samples, around 50.9% of art viewed by men, and 30.7% of art viewed by women, was pornographic (Plante et al., 2016). Further, men viewed pornography 43.5 times per month, and women 10.5 times (Plante et al., 2016). Finally, male furries ($M = 5.37$) and female furries ($M = 4.26$) differed in their assessment of pornography, with men viewing it more positively (Plante et al., 2016). Weighing these values against each other using prior values of masculine-identifying furries at 67.1% of the Western sample and feminine as 23.3% (Plante et al., 2016), was necessary because this study was unable to compare values along gender lines. Thus, these values were determined (see Appendix G for the complete calculations):

Table 47

Measures of sexual interest in Western samples

Measure	Weighted value
Pornography percentage	45.69
Pornography times	34.99
Attitude	5.08

Note. n values not available. Adapted from data in Plante et al. (2016)
Full calculations for these values in Appendix G.

Compared to the South African sample the Western sample views more pornography monthly (34.99 times), but it constitutes a lower portion of the total artwork they view (45.69%). Further, their attitude is slightly less positive ($M = 5.08$) than the South African sample. This suggests that Western furries perhaps view more artwork, but are slightly less actively interested in pornography than their South African counterparts. However, the statistical significance of the relationships between these variables was not calculable due to a lack of access to complete sets of Western furry data.

South African furries thus, on average, generally view furry pornography at least once per day, and the artwork constitutes around half of the total amount of furry artwork viewed. This is also reflected by the prototype's having a better-than-neutral opinion of the pornography.

It was assumed that the factors of bullying, place in society, education, and employment would not have a meaningful relationship with one's personal sexual interest in furry or belief in the sexual interest of others. Thus, tests comparing these variables were not done.

 See Figure 11 for a comparison of ratings of personal sexual interest in furry to the perceived sexual interest of others within the community, and Figure 12 for a graph of the distribution of the percentage of furry artwork viewed that was pornographic.

Figure 11

Comparison of distribution of personal and perceived community interest in sexual aspects of furry
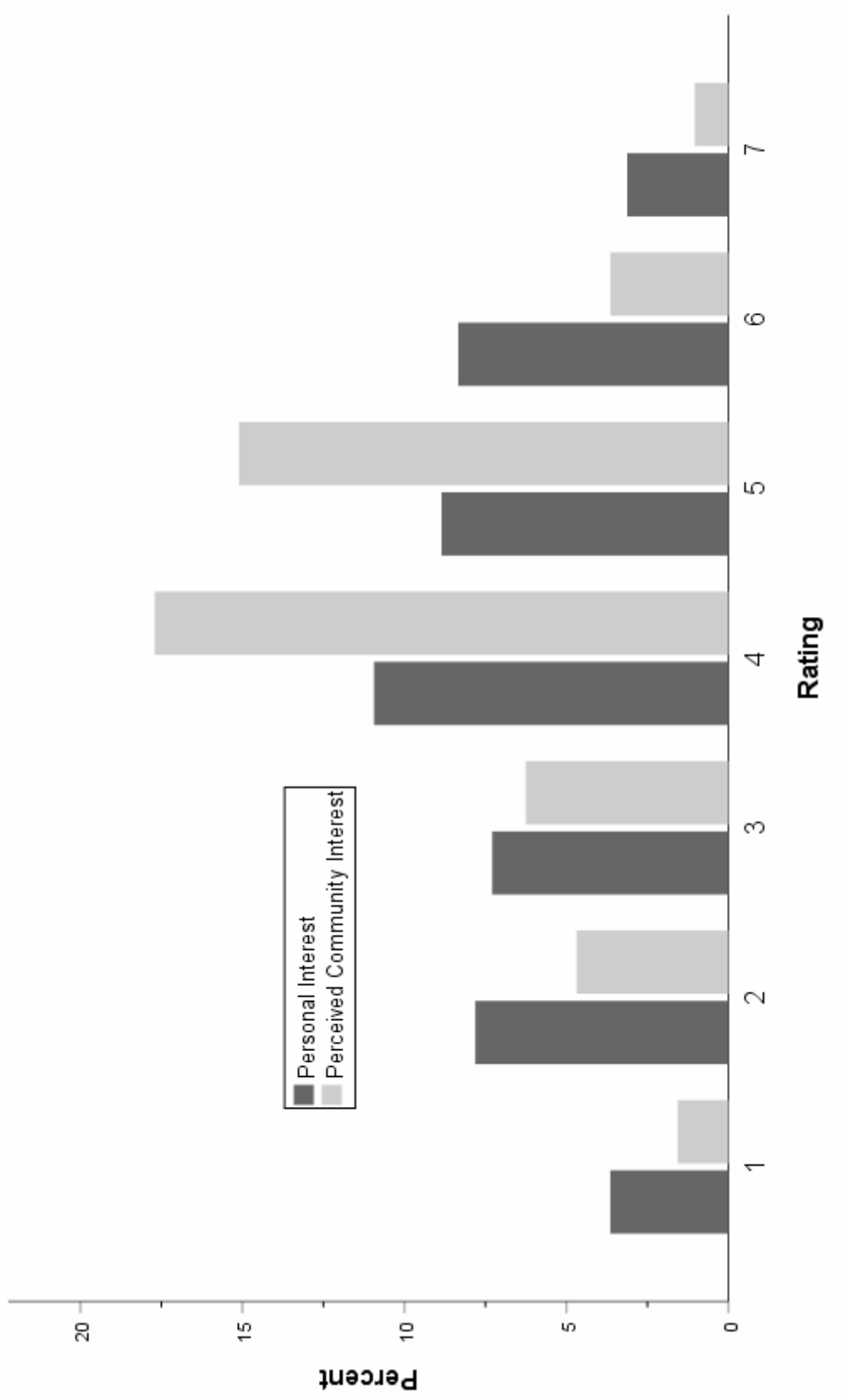
Figure 12

Distribution of percentage of furry artwork viewed that is pornographic
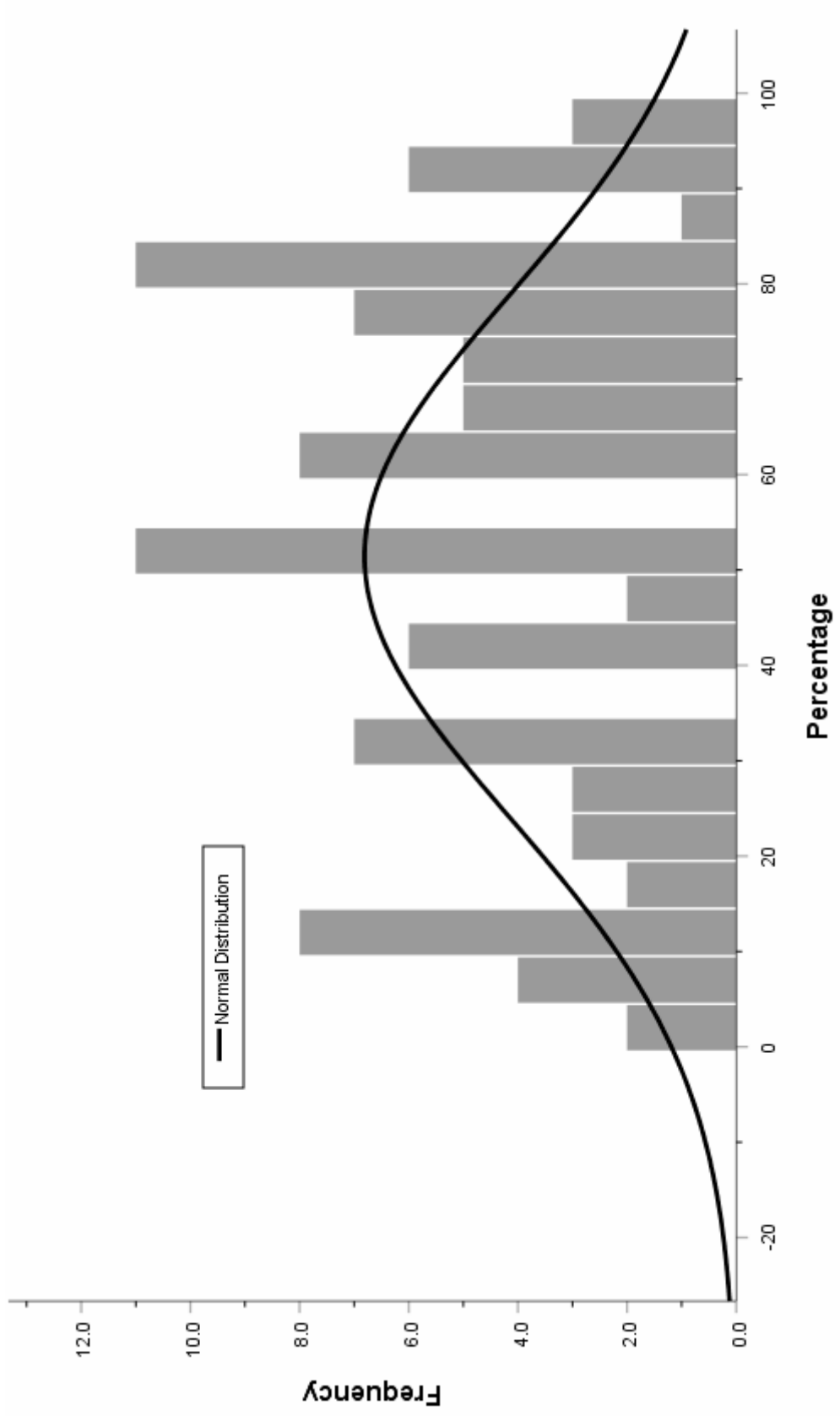
Relationships of Demographic and Psychological Features with Furry Features

This section has been subdivided by demographic and psychological features, and within each will be a discussion of what relationships, if any, that particular demographic feature has with furry features. Sometimes, relationships were not tested, the reasons for which were discussed above.

Age

Correlations of age to furry features were as follows:

Table 48

Correlations between age and furry-specific features

Furry-specific feature	r	p
Connection to Furry (overall)[a]	0.075	0.464
Relationship to Animals[a]	0.105	0.304
Belief Furry is Sexual for Others[b]	0.328	**0.001**
Furry as Sexual for Self[b]	0.200	0.051
Percent of Art Viewed as Pornographic[c]	0.231	**0.025**
Pornography Views in Last Month[d]	0.136	0.187
Attitude to Pornography**[b]**	0.202	**0.048**

Note. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 96$. [c] $n = 94$. [d] $n = 92$.

Further, correlations of age to reasons for fursona choice were as follows:

Table 49

Correlations between age and reasons for fursona choice

Statement	r	p
I have an innate connection to the species	0.068	0.504
I am that species trapped in a human body	0.074	0.471
I have shared characteristics with that species	0.040	0.696
I was that species in past life	-0.069	0.497
That species is my spirit guide[a]	-0.065	0.526
I have physical resemblance to that species	-0.028	0.782

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 48 and Table 49, age only has statistically significant correlations ($p < 0.05$), with the level of sexual interest that others are believed to have ($r = 0.328$, $p =$

0.001); the percentage of pornography viewed ($r = 0.231$, $p = 0.025$); and the overall attitude to pornography ($r = 0.202$, $p = 0.048$). However, these relationships are all weak, with the latter being the weakest. Thus the null hypothesis was that there were no correlations between age and these variables; and this was rejected only for the variables mentioned above. However, reasons for these connections were unclear.

An ANOVA determined there was no significant relationship between age and fursuit ownership [$F(2, 84) = 1.853$, $p = 0.163$], $p > 0.05$. This means that age has no relationship to whether respondents own a partial fursuit, and thus the null hypothesis was not rejected. Being older or younger does not make one more or less likely to own a partial fursuit.

Sexual Orientation

ANOVAs determined the following:

Table 50

ANOVA results for furry features relative to sexual orientation

Variable	Sum of Squares	df (within)	Mean square	F	p
Connection to furry (overall)[a]	0.523	83	0.262	0.115	0.891
Relationship to animals[a]	9.198	83	4.599	1.398	0.253
Belief furry is sexual for others[b]	3.020	82	1.510	1.034	0.360
Furry as sexual for self[b]	22.455	84	11.227	4.140	**0.019**
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[c]	7414.887	80	3707.443	5.434	**0.006**
Pornography views in last month[d]	2188148.175	81	1094074.088	1.123	0.330
Attitude to pornography[b]	7.963	82	3.982	2.517	0.087

Note. df (between) value in all cases was 2. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 96$. [c] $n = 94$. [d] $n = 92$.

Table 51

ANOVA results for sexual orientation compared to reasons for fursona choice

Variable	Sum of Squares	Mean square	F	p
I have an innate connection to the species	1.543	0.772	0.174	0.841
I am that species trapped in a human body	12.304	6.152	2.756	0.069
I have shared characteristics with that species	1.002	0.501	0.135	0.874
I was that species in past life	9.918	4.959	1.801	0.171
That species is my spirit guide[a]	12.019	6.009	1.196[b]	0.308
I have physical resemblance to that species	17.775	8.887	3.617	**0.031**

Note. df (between) value in all cases was 2. Statistically significant results are shown in bold. df (within) value was 83 where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$. [b] df (within) value was 82.

As per Table 50 and Table 51, sexual orientation is significantly related to furry as a sexual interest for oneself ($p = 0.019$), the percentage of pornography viewed ($p = 0.006$), and the view that one physically resembles their fursona species ($p = 0.031$). This suggests that different sexual orientations have different scores for these variables. The descriptive statistics for these, and the results from a Post-hoc Scheffe test, split by sexual orientation, were as follows:

Table 52

Descriptive statistics for significant relationships with sexual orientation

Variable	Bisexual[a] M	Bisexual[a] SD	Heterosexual[b] M	Heterosexual[b] SD	Homosexual[c] M	Homosexual[c] SD
Furry as sexual for self[d]	4.14	1.316	3.73	1.387	4.27	0.977
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[e]	55.00	26.352	33.87	23.597	60.58	26.949
"I have physical resemblance to that species"[f]	2.81	1.713	1.80	1.207	1.94	1.536

[a] $n = 37$. [b] $n = 15$. [c] $n = 34$. [d] $n = 96$. [e] $n = 94$. [f] $n = 98$.

Table 53

Post-hoc Scheffe results for significant relationships with sexual orientation

	Homosexual[a]			Heterosexual[b]		
	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p
Furry as sexual for self[c]						
Heterosexual[b]	-1.473	0.513	**0.020**	–	–	–
Bisexual[d]	-0.525	0.394	0.416	0.948	0.504	0.177
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[e]						
Heterosexual[b]	-26.714	8.216	**0.007**	–	–	–
Bisexual[d]	-5.581	6.360	0.682	21.133	7.995	**0.035**
I have physical resemblance to that species[f]						
Heterosexual[b]	-0.141	0.486	0.959	–	–	–
Bisexual[d]	0.870	0.372	0.071	1.011	0.480	0.115

Note. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 34$. [b] $n = 15$. [c] $n = 96$. [d] $n = 37$. [e] $n = 94$. [f] $n = 98$.

As per Table 52 and Table 53, there was a statistically significant ($p = 0.020$) difference between mean homosexual and heterosexual ratings for furry as a sexual interest for oneself, with homosexuals ($M = 4.27$) rating themselves, on average, higher than heterosexuals ($M = 3.73$). Thus the null hypothesis that mean homosexual and heterosexual sexual interest in furry is identical was rejected. Further, the heterosexual mean (33.87) differed significantly from both homosexual (60.58) and bisexual (55.00) means for the percentage of pornographic artwork viewed, with heterosexuals viewing far less than the other groups. Thus the null hypothesis, stating that the mean percentage of pornography heterosexual respondents consumed is identical to those of homosexuals and bisexuals, was rejected. Finally, while the test indicated a statistically significant difference in ratings for physical resemblance, shown in Table 52, post-hoc tests could not find any statistically significant differences between the mean ratings given by any

particular sexual orientation group, shown in Table 53. The null hypothesis could not be rejected for specific sexual orientations, and no further statements could be made.

This suggests that, for LGBTQIA+ individuals, furry is more important to them than it is for heterosexual individuals to explore and engage with their sexual identity. The literature suggests sexual engagement with furry interest is partially explained to get into the mindset of the character, as with murrsuiting, or to project oneself into the acts of the character, as with art (Abery, 2020; Soh & Cantor, 2015; Strike, 2017). Also, to have the ability to attribute the queerness as part of the character rather than the self (Satinsky & Green, 2016), or explore aspects of identity considered "socially undesirable" (Kreis, 2019e; Kreis et al., 2020; Plante et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2015a). In other words, literature suggests that furry identity in various forms is a way of exploring LGBTQIA+ identity. The data suggest that one significant way this identity is explored by individuals is through sexual engagement with the furry interest.

Finally, two Chi-square tests were done. Results relative to partial fursuit ownership indicated that sexual orientation was not significantly associated ($p > 0.05$) with partial fursuit ownership, $X^2(4, n = 75) = 1.800$, $p = 0.772$. This suggests that, within the South African sample, ownership of a partial fursuit is not primarily used for exploration of one's sexual orientation, despite the discussion above about furry identity used to explore sexuality, as LGBTQIA+ individuals were no more likely to own a fursuit than their heterosexual peers.

In addition, for association with fursona sexual orientation, the result was statistically significant: $X^2(4, n = 80) = 123.356$, $p < 0.001$. The cross-tabulation for this relationship was as follows:

Table 54

Cross-tabulation of personal vs fursona sexual orientation

| | Fursona sexual orientation | | | | | |
| | Bisexual | | Heterosexual | | Homosexual | |
Personal sexual orientation	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
Bisexual	33	91.7	0	0.0	4	12.5
Heterosexual	2	5.6	12	100	0	0.0
Homosexual	1	2.8	0	0.0	28	87.5

Note. n = 80.

The Chi-square result, along with Table 54, shows that fursona sexual orientation was significantly associated with personal sexual orientation ($p < 0.05$), thus rejecting the null hypothesis that these categorical classifications are not dependent on one another. Generally, but not always, the fursona reflected one's personhood in terms of sexuality. When the two did not align, both personal and fursona identities were queer – one homosexual individual (2.8%) had a bisexual fursona, and four bisexual individuals (12.5%) had homosexual fursonas. No non-heterosexual individuals had heterosexual fursonas, however, two heterosexual respondents (5.6%) had bisexual fursonas. This suggests that when the identities do not align the fursona is perhaps used as a way to explore other aspects of one's sexuality – for instance, bisexual individuals with a homosexual fursona may use the fursona to explore their more homosexual side, where their usual orientation leans more heterosexual, for instance. This is supported by the literature regarding the fursona being used to indirectly explore LGBTQIA+ identity (Kreis, 2019e; Kreis et al., 2020; Plante et al., 2016; Roberts et al., 2015a); however, the data collected for this study do not account for degrees of difference in sexual attraction to others to support this speculation.

Finally, given the emphasis on exploring identity, this potential reason may only apply in the direction indicated above and not the inverse. The results also suggest that sexual orientation is inherently part of the salient furry identity created. This is especially

true for LGBTQIA+ individuals, given LGBTQIA+ individuals' use of furry identity to explore sexual identity.

Levels of Bullying

Correlations between bullying and furry features were as follows:

Table 55

Correlations between bullying and furry-specific features

Furry-specific feature	r	p
Connection to furry (overall)[a]	0.091	0.377
Relationship to animals[a]	-0.083	0.417
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[b]	-0.028	0.791
Pornography views in last month[c]	0.006	0.953
Attitude to pornography[d]	-0.043	0.680

[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 94$. [c] $n = 92$. [d] $n = 96$.

Further, correlations of bullying to reasons for fursona choice were as follows:

Table 56

Correlations between bullying and reasons for fursona choice

Statement	r	p
I have an innate connection to the species	0.180	0.078
I am that species trapped in a human body	0.084	0.412
I have shared characteristics with that species	0.094	0.359
I was that species in past life	0.045	0.660
That species is my spirit guide[a]	0.144	0.162
I have physical resemblance to that species	-0.019	0.854

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 55 and Table 56, no statistically significant correlations were found on the mean bullying score; thus the null hypotheses were not rejected. Due to the non-significance of all correlations found, no analysis of individual bullying types was done, as the view was that nothing meaningful would be gained from such analysis.

An ANOVA determined there was no significant relationship between level of bullying experienced and fursuit ownership [$F(2, 83) = 0.085$, $p = 0.919$], $p > 0.05$. Thus, bullying experienced did not affect whether respondents owned a partial fursuit, and thus the null hypothesis was not rejected. This suggests that people who were bullied more than others are no more likely to engage in fursuiting, suggesting that potential ways fursuiting may help psychologically do not necessarily relate to mental issues caused by having been bullied.

Perceived Socioeconomic Status

Correlations of perceived socioeconomic status to furry features were as follows:

Table 57

Correlations between place in society and furry-specific features

Furry-specific feature	r	p
Connection to furry (overall)[a]	0.036	0.724
Relationship to animals[a]	-0.063	0.536
Belief furry is sexual for others[b]	0.194	0.058
Furry as sexual for self[b]	0.191	0.062
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[c]	0.171	0.100
Pornography views in last month[d]	0.109	0.294
Attitude to pornography[b]	0.241	**0.018**

Note. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 96$. [c] $n = 94$. [d] $n = 92$.

Further, correlations of this to reasons for fursona choice were as follows:

Table 58

Correlations between place in society and reasons for fursona choice

Statement	r	p
I have an innate connection to the species	0.015	0.887
I am that species trapped in a human body	-0.132	0.195
I have shared characteristics with that species	-0.011	0.914
I was that species in past life	0.022	0.833
That species is my spirit guide[a]	-0.058	0.570
I have physical resemblance to that species	0.002	0.983

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 57 and Table 58, the only statistically significant correlation ($p <$ 0.05) was a positive correlation with personal attitude towards furry pornography, but this relationship was weak ($r = 0.241$, $p = 0.018$). The null hypothesis was rejected only for this relationship. This suggests a trend, however, the reasons for this trend were not clear.

An ANOVA determined there was no significant relationship between perceived socioeconomic status and fursuit ownership [$F(2, 84) = 0.776$, $p = 0.463$], $p > 0.05$. Thus, one's socioeconomic status does not affect whether one owns a partial fursuit, and thus the null hypothesis was not rejected. What this means, is that simply being of a higher socioeconomic status does not mean one is more likely to own a fursuit. Thus, while the literature suggests that the high cost is likely to be a major reason people do not own fursuits (Gerbasi et al., 2008), the data suggest this is not necessarily the primary reason. However, what actual reasons may exist for the lack of fursuit ownership are unclear. Further, socioeconomic status is not a part of the salient identity of the furry within a furry context.

Level of Education

Correlations of education level to furry-specific features were as follows:

Table 59

Correlations between education level and furry-specific features

Furry-specific feature	r	p
Connection to furry (overall)[a]	-0.023	0.820
Relationship to animals[a]	-0.090	0.379
Belief furry is sexual for others[b]	0.204	**0.047**
Furry as sexual for self[b]	0.201	**0.049**
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[c]	0.125	0.232
Pornography views in last month[d]	0.150	0.147
Attitude to pornography[b]	0.303	**0.003**

Note. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 96$. [c] $n = 94$. [d] $n = 92$.

Further, correlations of education level to reasons for fursona choice were as follows:

Table 60

Correlations between education level and reasons for fursona choice

Statement	r	p
I have an innate connection to the species	0.001	0.989
I am that species trapped in a human body	-0.125	0.223
I have shared characteristics with that species	-0.011	0.917
I was that species in past life	-0.160	0.119
That species is my spirit guide[a]	-0.145	0.161
I have physical resemblance to that species	0.070	0.495

Note. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 59 and Table 60, education level was statistically significantly ($p < 0.05$) positively correlated with attitude towards pornography ($r = 0.303$, $p = 0.003$); belief that furry is a sexual interest for others ($r = 0.204$, $p = 0.047$), and personal sexual interest in furry ($r = 0.201$, $p = 0.049$). The first of these was the strongest relationship, but still only moderate. Thus with these three variables was the null hypothesis rejected, as these values correlate to one another. With all other variables – an increased level of education related to furry being more sexual for the self, increased belief furry is sexual for others, and a better attitude towards furry pornography – the null hypothesis was not rejected.

An ANOVA determined there was no significant relationship between education level and fursuit ownership [$F(2, 82) = 0.178$, $p = 0.837$], $p > 0.05$. Thus, one's level of education does not affect whether one owns a partial fursuit, and thus the null hypothesis was not rejected. In simpler terms, being more educated or less educated does not increase or decrease the likelihood of owning a partial fursuit.

Further, the results suggest that level of education is not a part of the salient furry identity.

Employment Status

ANOVAs determined the following:

Table 61

ANOVA results for furry features relative to employment status

Variable	Sum of Squares	Mean square	F	p
Connection to furry (overall)[a]	5.864	2.932	1.295[b]	0.279
Relationship to animals[a]	2.063	1.031	0.297[b]	0.744
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[c]	4554.086	2277.043	3.070[d]	0.051
Pornography views in last month[e]	656406.090	328203.045	0.358[d]	0.700
Attitude to pornography[f]	2.384	1.192	0.690[g]	0.504

Note. df (between) value in all cases was 2.
[a] $n = 98$. [b] df (within) value was 91. [c] $n = 94$. [d] df (within) value was 88. [e] $n = 92$.
[f] $n = 96$. [g] df (within) value was 89.

Table 62

ANOVA results for employment status compared to reasons for fursona choice

Statement	Sum of Squares	Mean square	F	p
I have an innate connection to the species	7.820	3.910	0.969	0.383
I am that species trapped in a human body	6.027	3.014	1.393	0.254
I have shared characteristics with that species	9.646	4.823	1.418	0.248
I was that species in past life	10.713	5.357	2.085	0.130
That species is my spirit guide[a]	54.376	27.188	6.093[b]	**0.003**
I have physical resemblance to that species	3.624	1.812	0.713	0.493

Note. df (between) value in all cases was 2. Statistically significant results are shown in bold. $n = 98$ where unspecified. df (within) value was 91 where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$. [b] df (within) value was 90.

As per Table 61 and Table 62, only viewing one's fursona species as a spirit guide is statistically significantly related to one's employment status ($p = 0.003$). The descriptive statistics for this variable were as follows:

Table 63

Descriptive statistics for significant relationships with employment status

Employment Status	n	M	SD
Employed	54	2.11	1.462
Education	15	2.67	1.877
Unemployed	24	2.24	1.690

Note. n = 93.

Post-hoc Scheffe test results for this variable were as follows:

Table 64

Post-hoc Scheffe results for significant relationships with employment status

	Employed[a]			Education[b]		
	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p	Mean Difference	Standard Error	p
Education[b]	2.119	0.617	**0.004**	–	–	–
Unemployed[c]	0.769	0.518	0.337	-1.350	0.695	0.158

Note. Statistically significant results are shown in bold.
[a] $n = 54$. [b] $n = 15$. [c] $n = 24$.

As per Table 63 and Table 64, those who are currently studying have a statistically significantly ($p = 0.004$) higher mean score ($M = 2.67$) for their fursona species being informed by that species being the person's spirit guide than those who are employed ($M = 2.11$). Thus the null hypothesis was rejected only in this case. Nothing else in the data suggests why this may be the case, as this statement did not statistically significantly relate to any other demographic feature other than the level of spirituality (see the next section). Thus, the reasons for this relationship remain unclear can only be speculated on and may require further research.

Finally, a Chi-square test was done to relate employment to fursuit ownership. The results indicated that employment status was not significantly associated with partial

fursuit ownership, $X^2(4, n = 83) = 2.348$, $p = 0.672$, $p > 0.05$. Thus, a South African furry is no more likely to own a fursuit if employed than if they are not or are studying. Again, this implies that economic factors (such as being employed and earning an income) are not the only thing associated with fursuit ownership. However, perhaps it is more a case of those who can afford a fursuit do not necessarily desire to do so, or perhaps those who own one are not necessarily purchasing them from someone else but making the fursuit themselves. The exact reasons were unclear. However, the results suggest that, generally, employment status is not a part of the salient furry identity.

Religion and Spirituality

Correlations were as follows:

Table 65

Correlations between religious and spiritual levels, and furry-specific features

Furry-specific feature	Religiosity[a]		Spirituality[a]	
	r	*p*	*r*	*p*
Connection to Furry (overall)[a]	0.118	0.246	0.163	0.108
Relationship to animals[a]	0.050	0.627	0.178	0.079
Belief furry is sexual for others[b]	-0.157	0.128	0.081	0.431
Furry as sexual for self[b]	-0.114	0.269	-0.175	0.088
Percent of art viewed as pornographic[c]	-0.064	0.539	-0.135	0.193
Pornography views in last month[d]	-0.179	0.082	-0.192	0.062
Attitude to pornography[b]	-0.161	0.118	-0.149	0.148

[a] $n = 98$. [b] $n = 96$. [c] $n = 94$. [d] $n = 92$.

Further, correlations to reasons for fursona choice were as follows:

Table 66

Correlations between religious and spiritual levels, and reasons for fursona choice

	Religiosity		Spirituality	
Statement	*r*	*p*	*r*	*p*
I have an innate connection to the species	0.149	0.143	0.259	**0.010**
I am that species trapped in a human body	0.255	**0.011**	0.277	**0.006**
I have shared characteristics with that species	0.252	**0.012**	0.359	**<0.001**
I was that species in past life	0.092	0.368	0.380	**<0.001**
That species is my spirit guide[a]	-0.005	0.964	0.255	**0.012**
I have physical resemblance to that species	-0.075	0.460	0.165	0.104

Note. Statistically significant results are shown in bold. $n = 98$ where unspecified.
[a] $n = 97$.

As per Table 65 and Table 66, correlations with religious and spiritual levels were only found with reasons for fursona choice. Religiosity was statistically significantly ($p > 0.05$) positively associated with having shared characteristics with the fursona species ($r = 0.252$, $p = 0.012$), and with feeling that one is that species trapped in a human body ($r = 0.255$, $p = 0.011$). Spirituality was statistically significantly ($p > 0.05$) positively correlated with everything except physical resemblance, but all connections were merely moderate. The null hypotheses thus were not rejected, except for the ones detailed here. These results suggest that, when religiosity is higher, the belief that one is that species trapped in a human body and has shared characteristics with that species increases. With increased spirituality, there are increases with every belief except that of physical resemblance.

ANOVAs determined there was no significant relationship between partial fursuit ownership and either religious level [$F(2, 84) = 0.685$, $p = 0.507$] or spiritual level [$F(2, 84) = 0.391$, $p = 0.677$], $p > 0.05$. Thus, one's level of religiosity or spirituality does not affect whether one owns a partial fursuit, and thus the null hypothesis was not rejected. This suggests that the religious affiliation of respondents rarely prevents them from owning a fursuit. Further, when either religiosity or spirituality increases, so do spiritualistic explanations for the choice of fursona, though more so for spirituality than

religion. Thus, the fursona could be a form of spiritualistic or religious expression in some form or other, though a fursuit does not seem to fulfil a spiritual purpose. These results suggest that spirituality is somewhat part of the salient furry identity, whereas religiosity generally is not.

Qualitative Responses

Finally, respondents were asked to write responses to three questions during the survey. First, they were asked about the origin of their interest in furry. Second, how being furry impacts their mental health. Finally, they were asked to detail how they, as insiders to the South African furry community, believed it to differ from the broader international furry community. The responses gained will be detailed in this section. Percentages given are percentages of all the respondents that gave answers with that theme (based on $n = 98$), however, never were all questions answered by all respondents. Quotations provided are verbatim how the respondents answered them, including spelling and grammar errors.

Pre-Furry Interest in Anthropomorphism

Interest in anthropomorphism before discovering the furry community varied in terms of specific items that respondents were interested in beforehand, with no overall consensus about any specific originating media that all experienced. This section will not detail every possible explanation given but will focus on the most common ones stated by respondents, and the broader themes these fall under. This is also to protect respondents' anonymity as specific responses were highly unique and may render the participant identifiable if this aspect of themselves is well-known to others.

Those respondents who discussed this aspect indicated that the origin of their interest in anthropomorphism was from childhood (16.32%), or an innate connection to the concept of anthropomorphism (4.08%). Where not innate, interest generally seemed to originate either from real animals (13.27%) or popular cultural depictions thereof. As one participant stated, "it depends if the question means the ultimate source, which was probably children's cartoons with anthropomorphic characters and a love of animals" Both of these ideas will be explored.

When real animals were involved, the connection to them was not always specified. However, for some, it did originate from personal encounters or experiences with animals, be they pets or wild animals (2.04%). Some also indicated that they desired to be an animal or pretended that they were one when they were a child (2.04%). The general love of animals also featured (13.27%). This connection seemed to relate to a love of cultural depictions, as one participant stated: "I just liked animals,so movies like 'the lion king' and 'balto' definitely interested me in furries so l became one myself,best choice ever" [quotation verbatim from data].

While connected, the far more common indications were connections to anthropomorphic depictions, and the most common of these were animation (33.67%), particularly various animated films (11.22%) and television series (7.14%). When respondents provided personal examples, the most common of these were Disney films (11.22%). Particular mention was made of *The Lion King* (3.06%) and *Robin Hood* (3.06%). Some respondents also indicated that films (9.18%) or television series (3.06%) interested them. However, no further details about their exact nature or identity were specified, so whether these were animated or not was unclear. Other forms of anthropomorphic cultural output were also noted; for instance, comics (2.04%), literature (7.14%), and videogames (8.16%) were also specified as causing initial interest in the

concept of furry, however, whether these were specifically furry-created, or simply anthropomorphic and not directly associated with furry itself, is generally unclear.

Ultimately, no single overwhelming consensus can be reached on where the origin of individual furries lies exactly. They all originate with animals or popular cultural depictions thereof, but their exact nature varies widely. The answers seem to suggest that for the prototypical South African furry the origin is broadly in childhood, likely due to an existing love for animals or a love attained for animated depictions thereof. This does not, however, account for specifically participating in furry as a community. Thus, the next section analyses the origins of the choice to associate with the fandom.

Discovery of Furry as a Social Categorisation

When determining how furry was discovered, the most common way it was found was on the internet (16.32%). While usually the exact manner of discovery was unspecified, a common thread was that the furry community was stumbled upon indirectly, either through searching for something tangentially related to furry and discovering furry, or through hearing about it in some other way. Of the websites cited, YouTube was most commonly where furry was first heard of (5.10%), however, the context of these exposures is generally varied in original intention. In terms of positive coverage, one participant detailed their exposure as: "I found a YouTuber called Zillion Ross and then I just found more and more furry content and I discovered the love in this community."; where another stated their exposure as: "I believe I watched some furry convention content which then extended to watching [fur]suiting channels and gaming channels.". However, not all coverage that introduced furry was positive, as this participant noted was via "YouTube videos meant particularly for cringeworthy content" [quotation verbatim from data].

Of the more broad, less specific-website-bound ways in which the internet brought people to furry, art was cited as a common origin of fandom discovery. Respondents cited that they had come to the community by discovering furry art (20.41%), as noted by a participant who stated: "I discovered the fandom when I started to get into art". This was in part due to an overlapping pre-existing interest in the artwork. For example, one participant stated that they discovered the fandom by "trawling on google for cool dragon art, leading into dragon transformation art" [quotation verbatim from data]. Only in a small portion of cases (5.10%) was the art that piqued the interest, specifically pornographic. For some, the origin was that furry gave them their own artistic outlet (6.12%), or happened to align with the art they were already producing, as mentioned by one participant who said "I only figured out what a furry is after I started drawing animals". This also ties in to stumbling across the community accidentally.

Influence by others was also commonly cited. Some were introduced to the concept by a friend who was already a member of the community or through making a new friend who was a member of the community (7.14%). As one participant stated, "I got into it thanks to a friend who introduced me to the furry fandom and communities", and another that their introduction was from "friendship made during an art stream". Otherwise, encounters with the community also had an impact (6.12%). The ways cited were that "interests of members on online community sites (twitter/forums) aligned with mine such as hobbies and interest in anthropomorphic art" [quotation verbatim from data] and "otherwise mainly just how nice the community is." Only 2.04% of respondents cited a furry-adjacent community as bringing them to furry.

These testimonies all reinforce the interpretation that furry is an act of self-categorisation, a choice made to associate with the group, rather than a social categorisation put on furries by others based on their interest in anthrozoomorphism

(Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Hogg & Williams, 2000; Tajfel & Turner, 1979, cited in Trepte, 2011). All this describes the reasons behind this self-selected categorisation, but this still considers furry as a broad, international grouping. The purpose of this study was to understand furry within the South African context. Thus the following sections will deal with more specific information as to its relationship to this context.

Distinction of South African Community from the International Community

The sample overwhelmingly agreed that the South African furry community had important differences to the overall international community in several ways, each of which will be detailed below. The respondents generally saw the differences as positive, though some negative perspectives of the effects of these differences will also be detailed.

The most significant difference noted by respondents was the size of the community relative to the size of the international community. Respondents stated that it is notably smaller than others in multiple ways. The number of people within the community was seen as far fewer than other communities (40.82%). The view of the size of the community was generally positive, with many (21.42%) citing increased closeness with others as a result. One participant stated this connection outright: "I think the community here is smaller and the furries are a lot closer to each other."

However, some also viewed the community's size as a significant problem for multiple reasons. The view was expressed by several that the community clusters around major cities in the country, and the community subdivides itself into smaller subgroups, often clustered around those areas of the country (2.04%). As one participant stated, "furries here seem to find their local group and in general don't look further into the community". These subgroups are seen as cliquey and not accepting of outsiders (2.04%), which leads to increased division and interpersonal conflicts between members of the

country's broader community. The process described by one participant was that "the community is very small compared to other countries" and that "this puts strain on the community as every slight issue within it gets noticed fairly easily".

Respondents also lamented the lack of opportunities to meet in person, be they casual meetings (8.16%) or conventions (10.20%), and that attendance at these events was in any event always low. As one participant described, "[…] in much of the EU/US, there are an abundance of conventions in close travelling distance. In South Africa we have one convention at present, with hopefully more to come as the fandom grows here". In contrast, another compared furry in South Africa directly to others, stating, "I've been a furry in 3 different countries now. The South African community is the smallest of those and probably the least 'active' when it comes to in person events" [quotation verbatim from data]. Some respondents even stated that they had never met another furry in person (2.04%). However, at least one participant saw some good in this, stating that "when you do see someone, it's a big occasion."

Beyond furry-specific concerns, the view was also expressed that the country's broad issues impact the community indirectly. The biggest issue noted relative to the community was poor internet and that the community relies heavily on access to the internet as being of particular importance to the South African community as the only reliable means of connecting with others (8.16%). As one participant stated, "we seem to be a much more online community that relies on social media mostly for interaction". This was viewed as a potential explanation for the demographic distribution of the community. One participant indicated that "[South African] furries are skewed towards those with regular internet access", and another speculated that "I suppose that the ethnicity of the ZA fur fandom has some correlation to the portion of the population that have a permanent and reliable internet connection" [quotation verbatim from data]. One

participant also gave their perspective on the economic differences from the international community, speaking as a producer of content for the fandom:

> A general lack of disposable income among our prospective clients means that South African artists/crafters are unable to charge rates that international furry artists charge. We also struggle to find services (eg sticker & magnet printing) & materials (eg faux fur for fursuits) to adequately service a slumbering market at reasonable prices. We are limited to one convention per year due to this lack of capital as well. General absence of consumer choice due to our limited numbers & age of our group (most students and/or unemployed). [Quotation verbatim from data.]

Interestingly, 20.41% of respondents stated that the furry community is less known in South Africa than it is in other countries. This therefore, raises the next point of analysis: how the respondents believe furry within South Africa relates to the country's general society.

Furry as a Subordinate Group in South African Society

Respondents touched on furry fandom's place as a subordinate group within South African society. Primarily, the view was that South African society generally knows less about the furry community than other societies (20.41%), but that in some ways, this is perhaps for the better – as one participant expressed, "Locals are more ignorant with regards to the meaning of being a furry, often espousing sexual beliefs as the core of the community whereas in the States it's more widely understood (even if still slightly taboo)" [quotation verbatim from data].

Further, those that have encountered non-furries in South Africa that know anything about the community felt that such people saw furry in a negative light (9.18%). Social behaviour of South Africans was also believed by a handful of respondents to differ significantly from those living in other countries (11.22%). For instance, one stated that "our culture isn't the same as thy say in the UK and that makes us our own people with our own way of thinking and seeing" [quotation verbatim from data], which another expressed as "South Africans, like those around me and somewhat myself, are conservative. Regardless what we think conservative means to us - we all push things away that seem against our own morals" [quotation verbatim from data]. Another participant stated the following:

Cultural differences from other parts of the world could have an impact on the way people view the relationship with animals, and the manners in which animals are viewed, so there are possibly ways in which South Africans look at these differently to others, and different ways of approaching furry through this unique cultural lens.

Some also saw the country's community as being isolated (2.04%) and believed to be significantly newer than the communities of other countries (3.06%). However, the view was also that the local community is a safer social space for them than the rest of South African society, or perhaps even more than the international community. Some felt there was more acceptance and tolerance of unusual others within the South African community versus either South African society or even against the international furry community (4.08%). For instance, one stated that "South Africans are generally more accepting than other nationalities in most fields", and another explicitly called the

community a "safe space for queer people". However, one participant saw this negatively, stating, "I consider the local group's tolerance and acceptance is sadly reaching beyond what should be classified as tolerable and could be considered a net result of being inside a smaller entangled group of individuals struggling with acceptance and popularity" [quotation verbatim from data].

Furry, as experienced by its adherents, thus, as suggested by social identity theory, fits the criteria of a subordinate group in South African society, being negatively evaluated by South African society (Hogg & Abrams, 1998). Further, one participant also behaved as members of subordinate groups are sometimes shown to, by going with the status quo of South African society and viewing furry in a somewhat negative light, thus avoiding positive distinctiveness (Hogg et al., 2004; Hogg & Williams, 2000).

An understanding of furry's place in South African society, and relative to international furry fandom is now understood. The following sections of this dissertation will discuss the group's impact on the mental health of respondents.

Furry Fandom as Mentally Helpful to Respondents

Overall, responses from respondents indicated the highly positive effects the group had on their mental health, with several common themes emerging. These can be broadly expressed in two major themes: the group itself providing help and the fursona being used for mental health purposes. The former will be explored in this section, the latter in the next section.

How the community itself helps with mental health varied, but, the most significant themes involved the fact that it provides a support network for their own issues (13.27%). The support network's functionality varied for different people. However, in general the feeling was that others in the group provided them with acceptance (15.31%),

understanding (6.12%), tolerance (10.20%), a way in which they could share their problems with others, gain help finding new ways to deal with the issues experienced (10.20%), and, for some people, a chance to help others (4.08%).

As one participant described it, "I found people who understand. Who share my pains and arent subjects to social stigmas around tolerance. It was the first experience I ever had with truly understanding people" [quotation verbatim from data]. Another detailed their experience as follows:

> The furry community has pretty much helped me discover so many different aspects of myself, from sexuality to finding a place where I can make life long connections with people that I believe will be close to my heart forever. I've had a place to vent about all the issues in my life, I had a place where I could help others and it was a place where I learnt to be a better person, espcially through my own mistakes that I have made. I wouldn't be happy right now if it weren't for the furry community. [quotation verbatim from data]

In terms of particular issues, reductions in depression (5.10%), and subsequent increases in happiness (5.10%), and decreases in suicide ideation (4.08%), and anxiety, particularly social anxiety (7.14%) were noted. For the latter, respondents expressed that, through the community, they found like-minded people with whom they share common ground and interests (6.12%), and that allowed for opportunities to gain new friends (11.22%) and potential romantic partners (4.08%), increase the amount they were socialising with others (6.12%), and gain new social skills in a safe environment (4.08%). These lead to a feeling of increased self-confidence (4.08%), that ,sometimes lead to a

feeling they were becoming a better person (3.06%). One described the process for them in the following manner: "I spend most of my time at home alone and I am unable to see my real life friends very often so being able to interact with the furry community and my friends within it helps a lot or I feel I would be a lot more lonely and depressed" [quotation verbatim from data].

Furry as an interest was also noted by many as a form of escapism (11.22%), either as a distraction from their own real-world issues, as an outlet for creativity and personal expression, or as a way in which to fantasise about a different, more ideal life or self. As one described their experience:

> Being able to disconnect from reality and inhabit a more idealised version of myself alongside others doing the same helps me relax and gives me a space to vent about things that lets me treat RL as the "other". The knowledge that when things get difficult, I have an avenue to visit where I won't have to deal with it for a while, offers comfort. [quotation verbatim from data]

These factors show that many furries are expressing solidarity to the group – that is, they believe they benefit more from being furry than they do from any other group identity of theirs (Cox & Gallois, 1996). This implies that they possibly also depend on the group (Cox & Gallois, 1996). These are predicated upon the belief that membership to the group is voluntary (Cox & Gallois, 1996) – which, as indicated, is the case with the sample. However, group membership is not the only way furries claim to have benefited psychologically, and thus consideration of the mental impact of fursona is also required separately.

The Fursona as Mentally Helpful to Respondents

Respondents also spoke of using the fursona for mental health purposes (15.30%). The fursona was a way to explore one's own identity in a somewhat detached fashion, allowing one to explore aspects of the self, and express emotions that they struggle with in other ways act out an idealised version of the self and be more social with others by "hiding behind" the fursona. As one expressed: "[my] fursona gives an easy way to run thoughts & ideas past 'someone' who acts as a voice of reason and stability whenever I'm experiencing issues whenever there is no-one else to confide in.".

Both community and fursona, thus, allow for people to explore themselves in a safe environment and is a salient identity within the furry community itself. We can see that overall, furry fandom is seen as beneficial mentally to many members of the community. Furries in South Africa consider one another to be caring, supportive, and similar to them in ways they seemingly cannot generally find elsewhere. Beyond that, the fursona also provides ways to explore parts of the self they evidently cannot explore in other circumstances. This all suggests that far from the frivolous interest it may seem at first glance, being furry and the fursona itself are both of significant psychological importance to the community members. However, while consensus was that being furry was good for one's mental health, some expressed neutral or negative opinions of the impact of furry on themselves. These will be discussed below.

Furry as Mentally Harmful to Respondents

For some, the effects of furry on mental health were not significant or otherwise harmful. Generally, a neutral feeling towards the impact of furry (4.08%) was expressed

more than a negative impact (3.06%). One participant expressed their neutrality by stating,

> Depression had become less of a problem, I am anxious, but because of similar people in the fandom - I learned to control it with their help. Things have gotten better, maybe because of the community, maybe because of age - but the fandom has definately pulled me out of the deep end but also tossed me back into it. It's a community, all types of people good and bad [sic], but it's a community that you all share a common interest in, so there will always be some good if not always good. [quotation verbatim from data]

One responder who experienced the fandom as harmful to their mental health, stated that "it is often the cause of anxiety". No other respondents who expressed negative views gave significant detail about how the fandom had harmed their mental health. Around twelve respondents (12,24%) either did not answer the question or simply stated it had had no positive impact on their mental health – however, this does not necessarily imply harm, it could simply imply that help was not needed, or was found elsewhere.

Conclusion

The results have now been detailed. While the sample was relatively small, the data was rich. Several apparent differences between South African and Western furries were discovered. Some of the effects that these demographic differences have on how furry ontology is expressed by South African furries have been highlighted. Some possible reasons for these differences have been speculated upon.

Altogether, these have shown that the furry fandom in South Africa is a coherent group, and behaves the theory indicates a coherent group would. The group has prototypes, such as a notion that a furry should be more tolerant than other South Africans are towards them, which is also a stereotyping of other South Africans through the lens of furry as a subordinate group, reinforcing the perceived social categorisations of both South African furries and "normal" South African people. Members self-categorise as furries, and as other subgroups within the fandom. There are indications of some intragroup conflicts between geographical subgroups. However, it is also not exactly identical to other furry fandoms in other countries. As such, the group seems to operate in a liminal space between identification with other furries in other countries, and a certain amount of distinctiveness of the South African fandom to other geographically-distinguished furry fandoms. Broader furry is not seen as a distinctiveness threat, but more as an overarching group that the nested group of South African furries does not always align exactly with, due to different local conditions.

A detailed overview of South African furries now exists for the first time. Thus, the study is able to begin providing some explicit answers to the research questions posed at the beginning, while also raising further, more specific questions, as any good exploratory study should do. This, as well as a reflection on the study, and suggestions for how to build upon the groundwork laid here, will be summarised and discussed in the concluding chapter.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Introduction

The final stage of this dissertation is to discuss how the study has answered the research questions and what considerations are needed when looking at the results. Answers will be provided to the questions, then issues and limitations will be detailed, and finally potential future avenues that research into this community can take will be suggested and highlighted.

Answers to Research Questions

The study proposed four research questions. These will be dealt with in the order they were presented at the outset.

The Prototypical South African Furry

The prototypical South African furry can be defined along both demographic and furry-specific features, which are elaborated upon below.

Demographically, the prototypical South African furry is a 24- to 25-year-old white cis-male. He perceives his socioeconomic position within South African society to be slightly above average. He has completed high school, where he was bullied regularly, but not constantly, usually through being teased, called names, and being left out. He is employed and is more likely than others in South Africa to have completed at least one tertiary qualification. He is also at least somewhat, if not exclusively, attracted to other men. He has some spirituality but is more likely non-religious than of any faith. He also likely has issues with depression and anxiety.

He has been a member of the furry community for less than ten years, having joined as a teenager, and is emotionally invested in the identity, though more because he

identifies with other furries than for any particular personal reason. He also believes identifying as furry to be his choice after discovering the community accidentally through the internet. However, his interest in anthropomorphism was innate or gained through childhood experiences. He also fairly likely engages in at least one creative pursuit.

In terms of his relationship with animals, he sees them as around 50% overlapping with his ingroup, and contrary to stereotypes, he has no issue seeing himself as human. He also generally has one fursona. This fursona is almost always male, though it may sometimes be portrayed as female for some non-gender-exploratory reason. His fursona is wholly or partially canine because he feels he is innately connected to or shares features with canines. He desires to own a fursuit but does not presently own one.

As far as sexuality in furry is concerned, his fursona is generally also wholly or partially attracted to other males, and he himself is slightly more than neutral in his sexual interest in furry. He views furry pornography approximately once per day, which he sees fairly positively, and this constitutes about half of the furry art he views.

Relationships Between Furry and Non-Furry Features

This research question had a null hypothesis that there would be no relationships between furry and non-furry features within the sample. However, some relationships between demographic data and furry-specific data were found; thus the null hypothesis is rejected. These will be detailed below.

In terms of age, data suggest that the older a furry gets, the more they believe others are sexually interested in furry, and the more the portion of the art they view becomes pornographic, and the more positive their view of furry pornography becomes.

In terms of sexual orientation, being bisexual or homosexual is related to an increased level of sexual interest in furry and a significant increase in the portion of art

viewed that is pornographic. Further, the fursona's sexual orientation is almost always identical to that of the person.

Socioeconomic status also rendered various relationships. The higher one's perceived status, the more favourably they were to see furry pornography, however, only slightly so. Increased education related to increased personal sexual interest in furry, increased belief that others in the community are sexually interested in furry, and have a more positive attitude towards furry pornography.

Further, those studying were more likely to see their fursona species as a spirit guide. Other relationships to metaphysical issues were also noted. Specifically, in terms of spirituality, the more spiritual the person was, the stronger their connection to their fursona species in most ways tested for (innate connection, belief one is that species trapped in a human body, perceived shared characteristics, belief one was that species in a past life, the belief that said species is one's spirit guide), however, not with belief in physical resemblance to it. Religiosity, however, only related in this way to belief in shared characteristics and being that species trapped in a human body.

Finally, the rate of bullying experienced had no significant impact on any furry features. Further, where significant relationships existed between furry and either demographic or psychological features, they were never exceptionally strong, but demographic features almost always positively correlated with furry features. This seems to imply that the furry identity attracts particular kinds of people, rather than representing the South African population. This also implies that there are particular aspects of furry that attract specific groups of people, though they were not clear in this study.

Psychological Impact of Furry Identity and Fandom Membership in South Africa

Respondents found that furry was indeed psychologically beneficial for them. A significant number of furries in the community indicated that they suffer from a psychological disorder, most commonly depression or anxiety, the latter often being social anxiety. With these respondents stated that furry had actively helped them. The community provided members with support networks and opportunities to socialise, both of which they may have lacked elsewhere in their lives.

Further, furry as an interest provides a form of distraction. Some cited the fursona as an active part of their mental health process, allowing them to passively see themselves as, or actively pretend to be, someone better. However, for some, the community actively harmed their mental health; however, these were in the minority It is important for psychology not to misunderstand this phenomenon or assume that furry is frivolous and should not underestimate the importance of it to furries and their mental health, which needs to be understood by professionals whose help is sought.

South African Furry's Differences from International Furry

As expected, by a wide margin, the most significant difference noted by the greatest number of respondents is that furry in South Africa is a much smaller community than in other parts of the world. Consensus was somewhat split as to whether this is beneficial or not. Those who saw the size as good, noted that it leads to stronger feelings of connection with others, and it helps the community avoid too much attention from broader cultures that, if they know anything about it, are seen as hostile towards furry. But those who saw the size as a problem, noted that socialisation with other furries is difficult – groups of furries are scattered and rarely gather with each other, and some feel this leads to exclusionary cliques within the community.

Beyond these issues, the country's context was also seen as having an impact – South Africa has different cultures and cultural norms from the rest of the world, which impact its local structure. Further, features of the country are seen as negatively affecting the populace, and thus furry indirectly – for instance, poor internet impacts the ability for furries in the country to connect. Both economic issues and a lack of large market for items furries may want impact the ability for local furries to engage financially with their interest.

Limitations and Suggestions

Now that the questions that the study set out to answer have been given, the study itself requires critical analysis. In this section, thus, some limitations with the study that became evident during the research process are discussed, and suggest how these can be corrected in future studies. Also, other potential avenues of exploration that have appeared will all be discussed.

Demographic Issues

The sample size in this study was small, and this presented unexpected challenges. Most problematically, several key demographic features had sizes either overwhelmed by a particular label (such as ethnicity), or were scattered into groups too small to produce meaningful results (such as gender). Thus it made it impossible to gain meaningful insight from any tests that could have been done, and may have rendered important data.

Furthermore, the study lacked some potential insight into the community, such as differences between ethnic groupings. This could be addressed in future studies with different categorisation of respondents to account for these issues, or perhaps through other methods of study – for instance, qualitative or case studies of particular categories

about which the quantitative data could not render meaningful information. However, there is one particular categorisation requiring more depth: ethnicity.

Ethnicity, Language and Furry Experience

While furry in South Africa proved overwhelmingly white, there were at least some non-white respondents. If more could be found, a potential study could explore the way non-white cultures impact personal experiences of furry, and vice-versa. This could be especially valuable, as many South African cultures are highly localised and unique, and the majority of the population of the country is not white. There is already interest in the experiences of non-white furries in places like the United States, as seen, for example, by the existence of *HERE.*, a collaborative publication (known as a *zine*) where furries with non-white racial identities explore their experiences of furry through creative outputs (*HERE. FAQ*, n.d.).

There is also a possibility of better distinguishing differences between different cultural groups of white furries in South Africa. Because the demographics were determined with the census categorisations, this study neglected to determine the exact cultural origins of the respondents. Thus, it remains unclear as to approximately how many white furries in the country are Afrikaans-speaking vs English-speaking, for example. There could be important cultural distinctions between these two groups. The need for this was only clarified when the overwhelming dominance of white as a race group presented itself in the data. Further study is required as to the home languages of furries and the differences of experience across cultures. There is interest in understanding how subcultures interact with Afrikaner culture (Suidpunt, 2019), so future research could entail an analysis of how Afrikaner cultural identity intersects with that of furry – some respondents also indicated there were possible tensions between Afrikaner

culture and furry fandom, and exploring these qualitatively in more depth, or through case studies, could provide important information.

Issues with Survey Questions

There were two survey questions that, in hindsight, had problematic elements: asking about other labels that respondents use and the question of the origin of furry interest. Each of these will be discussed below.

First, the question on employment status was based on respondents selecting one response only. However, later analysis of Western furry sample data indicated that such studies had allowed multiple choices for this, affecting the ability to use these data for comparison. Second, the question on the number of fursonas a participant had did not account for current vs lifetime rates, as done in studies of furries in the West, which also affected its usefulness for comparison in this study. Third, the question that asked whether furry was considered a choice was vaguely phrased and open to interpretation. Some respondents may have seen it as asking whether having furry interest was an active choice, whereas others may have seen it as asking whether associating with the group was a choice. Being fundamentally different questions, they would produce different results, but which interpretation predominated is unclear.

Fourth, the label question. Generally, the available labels were clear, and the terminology was assumed to be commonly-known to furries. However, one major exception exists the label of "postfurry". While three respondents indicated that they were postfurry, the movement itself is not widely known even within the furry community, so there is a possibility this label was misunderstood by respondents, as it was also not defined in the survey. Further exploration into how furries understand this label may be required, and future studies can either explore the exact structure of postfurry, to come to

an academic understanding of it (because none could be found), or perhaps the inclusion of that label was simply a mistake that confused more than helped, and should be excluded in future research.

Finally, the question on the origin of furry interest was too broad and was too open to differing interpretations. For some, the question was understood to indicate the origin of their interest in anthropomorphism, whereas others took it as the origin of their association with the group. While results could be interpreted easily as to which answers related to which interpretation of the question, unfortunately, each answer lead to the exclusion of the other by the participant – for example, if the participant stated they watched Disney films as a child, they indicated where their interest came from, but not how they found the community itself, because they did not understand the precise focus of the question. Inversely, the participant indicated that they found the community accidentally on the internet – this does not indicate what their interest in anthropomorphism was before that, again because that was outside of what they understood the question to be asking.

Further studies would be required to understand the exact process furries undergo to become furries – where their interest stems from, how they discovered furries as a community, and why exactly they associated themselves with the group. This could also be done qualitatively, or with case studies.

Unclear Relationships

The analysis of the data found several relationships that were inexplicable. First, and of most importance, the reasons for ownership of a fursuit are still unclear, as no relationships were found with the data. This is partially because the sizes of groups only allowed for testing ownership of partial fursuits, meaning that potential clues from full

fursuit ownership were lost. So ultimately, no explicit determining factor could be found in the data to explain why some own fursuits and some do not despite a desire to.

Second, on more minor notes, the reason for those in education to more likely see their fursona species as their spirit guide was unclear. Plus, the relationship between seeing themselves as an animal trapped in a human body to the choice of human-animal hybrid as a label also produced a marginally statistically significant result, which needs further study to gain a clearer image of whether these concepts are, in fact, related. This could be explored with qualitative case studies to understand the terms and statements for those who rate the former highly while also selecting the latter.

Third, there was no reason found in the data for the tenuous relationship between bisexuality, and homosexuality with the belief in the physical resemblance to fursona species. Here, a potential explanation could be an alignment between fursona species and gay subcultural terms that use animals as labels (Maki, 2017). However, comparing the terms used to fursona species, there were very few species that were on both lists. Wolves were by far the most common individual species listed, but wolves and wolf-hybrids were still only 25.51% of the respondents. While a "wolf" can be found in gay subcultural terminology, and is specifically characterised by being muscular and hairy (Maki, 2017), there are no data and no existing study to suggest that the cultural stereotypes align with fursonas. Further study into these relationships would have to determine if there is anything noteworthy about the result in this study and to determine the relationship, if any, with gay subcultural terms.

Statistical Differences to International Furries and South African Population

While this study provided some distinctive face-value differences between South African and international furry communities, and between South African furries and the

South African population, the exact level of these differences were outside the scope of this study and reasons for these differences were generally not clear from the data themselves. They required speculation based on literature, other studies, or extrapolations of the effects of third variables on the data. Further study, thus, could be aimed at determining the exact significance, or lack thereof, of the differences, through quantitative, statistical analyses.

Conclusion

This study aimed to describe the furry fandom within the South African context in terms of demographic features, distributing furry-specific features, and descriptive explanations. To accomplish this, an online survey was conducted with members of the furry community in South Africa, asking both quantitative and qualitative questions, asking about the person, their furry identity, and experience of the community. The sample was gathered by approaching administrators of online social spaces for local furries to gain permission to post the link to the survey on their platforms, and by encouraging respondents to share the links with others.

The results determined multiple facts. First, a detailed image of the average South African furry was found, which showed them to be a white LGBTQIA+ male in his mid-twenties, who has at the very least completed high school if not studied further, and who is employed and doing better than an average citizen of the country. Further, he has a long-term interest in anthropomorphism, and while he is still fairly new to the community generally views it positively, and aligns himself strongly to it.

Second, despite limitations due to the relatively small size of the group, and the dominance of some features of the group (most notable ethnicity), multiple moderate relationships were shown between furry and demographic features, suggesting that furry

identity seems to attract certain specific kinds of people to it, though their reasons may vary.

Third, in terms of their community experience, the results showed that furry is overall an important part of the mental health of the community members, giving them mental support they seem to struggle to find elsewhere. They also find the community to be smaller and more insular, and spread out than the broader international furry community, which sometimes leads to feelings of closeness. In other cases it seems to lead to division into smaller, more geographically connected groupings. Further, South African society is seen to have less knowledge. thus less tolerance, of the furry identity and the impacts of broader socio-political and economic issues are felt within the furry community.

While the study does not provide a comprehensive understanding of the South African furry community, or its relationship to the international furry community, it does provide vital information on many aspects of its manifestation locally and shows that, far from being the trivial interest it appears to be, members of the community see it as important to their lives, and that the make-up of the community is drastically different from that of South African society. A need for further study into this unique community is required to understand it fully. Many potential avenues of further exploration have now revealed themselves, in terms of overcoming the limitations of this initial study, in exploring relationships found in the data more thoroughly to understand what they are suggesting more precisely, and in exploring findings this study could not adequately explain.

In conclusion, there are still many questions about this unique community, especially within a South African context. This study was the first ever conducted with members of this community within this context. Important details about this community's

workings within this context were gathered, giving further insight into the group's mechanisms as an international phenomenon. Many important, interesting avenues of future exploration have become apparent through the course of the study. This study fulfilled its primary purpose, and its findings can be built on in significant ways.

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Appendix A

Print Version of Survey Used

1. Please give your age in years: _____

2. Select your province of residence from the following list (select only one option):

☐ Eastern Cape   ☐ Mpumalanga

☐ Free State   ☐ Northern Cape

☐ Gauteng   ☐ North West

☐ KwaZulu-Natal   ☐ Western Cape

☐ Limpopo

3. Which of the following best represents your ethnicity? (Select only one option):

☐ Black African   ☐ Indian/Asian

☐ Coloured   ☐ White

☐ Other (please specify): _____

4. Which of the following best represents your gender identity? (Select all that apply):

☐ Cis-Male (assigned the sex of male at   ☐ Non-binary

birth and you identify as male)   ☐ Genderqueer

☐ Cis-Female (assigned the sex of female at   ☐ Genderfluid

birth and you identify as female)   ☐ Agender

☐ Transgender (male to female)   ☐ Do not identify as male, female, or

☐ Transgender (female to male)   transgender

☐ Transgender (gender non-conforming)

☐ Other (please specify): _____

5. What is your sexual orientation? Select the option which best describes you from the

choices below.

☐ Lesbian, gay, or homosexual   ☐ Asexual

☐ Straight or heterosexual   ☐ I don't know

☐ Bisexual

☐ Something else (please specify): _____

6. When you were in high school, how often were you bullied (including cyberbullying)

by one or more people in the following ways?

	This did not happen to me	Once or twice	Every few weeks	About once a week	Several times a week or more
I was TEASED in nasty ways.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
SECRETS were told about me to others to hurt me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was hurt by someone trying to BREAK UP A FRIENDSHIP.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was MADE TO FEEL AFRAID by what someone said he/she would do to me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was deliberately HURT PHYSICALLY by someone and/or by a group GANGING UP on me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was CALLED NAMES in nasty ways.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Someone told me he/she WOULDN'T LIKE ME UNLESS I DID what he/she said.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My THINGS were deliberately DAMAGED, DESTROYED or STOLEN.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Others tried to hurt me by LEAVING ME OUT of a group or NOT TALKING TO ME.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
LIES were told and/or FALSE RUMORS spread about me by someone, to make my friends or others NOT LIKE me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

7. Think of this ladder as representing where people stand in South Africa.
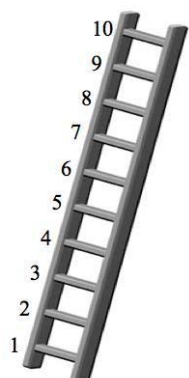
 At the top of the ladder are the people who are the best off – those who have the most money, the most education, and the most respected jobs. At the bottom are the people who are the worst off – who have the least money, least education, and the least respected jobs or no job. The higher up you are on the ladder, the closer you are to the people at the very top; the lower you are, the closer you are to the people at the very bottom.

Where would you place yourself on this ladder? Select a number based on the rung where you think you stand at this time in your life, relative to other people in South Africa.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8. Please indicate your education level (select only one option):

☐ Some high school   ☐ Diploma complete

☐ High school ongoing   ☐ Bachelor's degree complete

☐ High school completed   ☐ Postgraduate ongoing

☐ Some tertiary education   ☐ Postgraduate certificate complete

☐ Tertiary education ongoing   ☐ Postgraduate degree complete

☐ Higher certificate complete   (Honours/Master's/Doctorate)

☐ Other (please specify): _____

9. Please indicate your current employment status:

☐ Full-Time   ☐ Unemployed, Looking

☐ Part-Time   ☐ Unemployed, Not Looking

☐ Full-time Education   ☐ Disability

☐ Part-time Education   ☐ Retired

☐ Other (please specify): _____

10. Please indicate on the scale how religious you consider yourself to be

Not at all				Strongly
1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

11. Please indicate on the scale how spiritual you consider yourself to be

Not at all				Strongly
1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

12. Please indicate your religious affiliation: _____

13. Please rate the below items.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I am emotionally connected to being a furry.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Being a furry is part of me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I strongly identify with other furries in the furry community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am glad to be a member of the furry community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I see myself as a member of the furry community.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am emotionally connected to my fursona species.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I strongly identify with my fursona species.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
My fursona species is part of me.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

14. Please indicate how long you have been a furry, in years: _____

15. Do you consider being a furry to be a choice?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

☐ Unsure

16. Are you a... (Select all that apply)

☐ Human   ☐ Aeromorph / Anthropomorphic

☐ Human-Animal Hybrid   vehicle fan

☐ Artist   ☐ Postfurry

☐ Musician   ☐ Otherkin

☐ Writer   ☐ Therian

☐ Brony

☐ Other (please specify): _____

17. Please select the figure below which best describes the relationship YOU (Self) feel that you have with NON-HUMAN ANIMALS AS A GROUP (Other). In other words, please indicate how close you see yourself with real, non-anthropomorphic animals.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

18. Please indicate the number of fursonas you have: _____

19. Please indicate the species of your primary fursona:

_____

_____

20. Please indicate broadly where you believe your interest in furry originated from:

_____

_____

_____

21. Please indicate your reason/s for your fursona species choice:

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
I have an innate connection to the species	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I am that species trapped in a human body	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have shared characteristics with that species	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I was that species in past life	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
That species is my spirit guide	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I have physical resemblance to that species	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

22. What is your FURSONA'S gender relative to your own?

Always Same Gender	Usually Same Gender	Equally Same and Different Genders	Usually Different Gender	Always Different Gender
1	2	3	4	5
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

23. If you answered anything other than 1 for question 22, please indicate which of the
following best represents your FURSONA'S gender identities? (Select all that apply):

☐ Cis-Male (assigned the sex of male at   ☐ Non-binary

    birth and you identify as male)   ☐ Genderqueer

☐ Cis-Female (assigned the sex of female at   ☐ Genderfluid

    birth and you identify as female)   ☐ Agender

☐ Transgender (male to female)   ☐ Do not identify as male, female, or

☐ Transgender (female to male)   transgender

☐ Transgender (gender non-conforming)

☐ Other (please specify): _____

24. What is your FURSONA'S sexual orientation? Select the option which best describes
them from the choices below.

☐ Lesbian, gay, or homosexual   ☐ Asexual

☐ Straight or heterosexual   ☐ I don't know

☐ Bisexual

☐ Something else (please specify): _____

25. Please indicate which option best expresses your attitude towards, or current actual,
ownership of a fursuit:

	Owned	Not Owned Yet, Wanted	Not Owned	Not Owned, Probably Never	Not Owned, Don't Want
Full fursuit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Partial fursuit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

26. Please rate the below items.

	Not a Fetish at All						Completely a Fetish
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
To what extent would you say the interest in furry is sexual for most other furries in South Africa?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
To what extent would you say your personal interest in furry is sexual?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

27. Please estimate what percentage of furry artwork you view is pornographic:

_____

28. Please estimate how many times in the last month you viewed pornographic furry

artwork: _____

29. Please indicate your personal attitude towards furry pornography

Strongly Negative						Strongly Positive
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

30. Please indicate any psychological disorders you have been formally diagnosed with.

_____

_____

_____

31. Please indicate any other significant psychological issues (e.g. depression, anxiety)

you experience, but have not been formally diagnosed with.

_____

_____

_____

32. Please explain how furry has helped you with your mental health.

_____

_____

_____

33. Please explain any ways you can think of as to how being a furry in South Africa

differs significantly from being a furry in any other country.

_____

_____

_____

Appendix B

Letter to Forum Administrators Seeking Permission for Study

Good day.

My name is Duncan Piasecki, and I'm sending this letter to you to seek permission from you, as an administrator on the ZA Furries Forum, to use the forum to recruit participants for an academic study.

The study in question is towards a Masters in Psychology, which is being done through the University of South Africa (Unisa), with the title of "A descriptive mixed-method study of the furry community within the South African context". Broadly, the purpose of the study is to examine (1) what constitutes an "average" South African furry, demographically; (2) what demographic features and furry features relate to one another, and to what extent; (3) the ways in which the South African furry community help its members psychologically; and (4) in what ways South African furries believe that the furry fandom within the country differs from the furry fandom internationally. This research is based heavily on the research of the FurScience team in the USA: https://furscience.com/. The study will be conducted via an online survey.

I know that furries are not always keen to be studied, so I would like to allay some of your potential concerns about this study. For a start, I am a furry and have been since 2008. You can see that on my ZA Furries Forum account, which has a registration date of September 7, 2008, a link to which I can provide on request.

I am also able to provide other links to other furry websites that I have been more active on more recently if you wish for further confirmation as to my identity as a furry. I know the community, and I have been around it for a very long time, even though I have not been very active on the local forum or involved with the local community. As such, I want you to know that I do know what I am talking about, and I'm not rushing into this

blind and without any good idea of how furries work, nor will I be making wild, sensationalistic claims about what we do. I am purely interested in knowing how it works in this country, adding that knowledge to the overall scientific understanding of how furry works in general.

So, as I said, I am seeking permission from you to recruit participants for my study on the forum. This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa's Department of Psychology's ethics committee, with a reference number of 2020-PsyREC-56936493. Please feel free to contact me at 56939493@mylife.unisa.ac.za, my supervisor, Dr J.K Moodley, at moodljk@unisa.ac.za, or the chair of the ethics committee, Prof. Piet Kruger, at krugep@unisa.ac.za if you have any questions or concerns before granting this permission.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Regards,

_____

Duncan Piasecki

(Psychology Masters student, University of South Africa)

Appendix C

Letter to Telegram Group Administrators Seeking Permission for Study

Good day.

My name is Duncan Piasecki, and I'm sending this letter to you to seek permission from you, as a moderator on the "ZA Fuzzbutts SFW" Telegram group, to use the group to recruit participants for an academic study.

The study in question is towards a Masters degree in Psychology, which is being done through the University of South Africa (Unisa), with the title of "A descriptive mixed-method study of the furry community within the South African context". Broadly, the purpose of the study is to examine (1) what constitutes an "average" South African furry, demographically; (2) what demographic features and furry features relate to one another, and to what extent; (3) the ways in which the South African furry community help its members psychologically; and (4) in what ways South African furries believe that the furry fandom within the country differs from the furry fandom internationally. This research is based heavily on the research of the FurScience team in the USA: https://furscience.com/. The study will be conducted via online survey.

I know that furries are not always keen to be studied, so I would like to allay some of your potential concerns about this study. For a start, I am a furry, and have been since 2008. You can see that on my ZA Furries Forum account, which has a registration date of September 7, 2008, a link to which I can provide on request.

I am also able to provide other links to other furry websites that I have been more active on more recently if you wish for further confirmation as to my identity as a furry. I know the community, and I have been around it for a very long time, even though I have not been very active on the local forum or involved with the local community. As such, I want you to know that I do know what I am talking about, and I'm not rushing into this

blind and without any good idea of how furries work, nor will I be making wild, sensationalistic claims about what we do. I am purely interested in knowing how it works in this country, adding that knowledge to the overall scientific understanding of how furry works in general.

So, as I said, I am seeking permission from you to recruit participants for my study on the forum. This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa's Department of Psychology's ethics committee, with a reference number of 2020-PsyREC-56936493. Please feel free to contact me at 56939493@mylife.unisa.ac.za, my supervisor, Dr J.K Moodley, at moodljk@unisa.ac.za, or the chair of the ethics committee, Prof. Piet Kruger, at krugep@unisa.ac.za if you have any questions or concerns before granting this permission.

Thank you in advance for your assistance.

Regards,

_____

Duncan Piasecki

(Psychology Master's student, University of South Africa)

Appendix D

Informed Consent Letter

Dear prospective participant,

You are invited to participate in a study about furries and the furry fandom within the South African context. Participants are required to be 18 years or older. This study is towards a Master of Arts degree in Psychology, overseen by the University of South Africa (UNISA). The aim of the research is to gain insight into the general features of South African furries in order to gain an understanding of the furry community within this country specifically and inform further research into the community within this context. To this end, questions about numerous topics will be asked. Specifically, the study will explore relationships between demographic features (such as age, race, gender, etc.) and furry-specific features (such as personal connection to the fandom, psychological functions performed by fursonas, etc.).

The survey is anonymous in that it will not ask you for personal information such as your name or contact details. Collected data will be stored in an encrypted digital archive requiring password access, which will be stored on an external device and/or compact disc for a minimum of 5 years after the dissertation is complete for auditing purposes. This data will be exchanged with other research professionals, with the aim of analysis and completion of the study. This shared data will be anonymous. Results will only be published in processed format, and will thus also be anonymous. After the five-year period is complete, the data will be permanently deleted.

As this survey is conducted over the internet, there is always a risk of third-party interception, such as by hackers or government agencies. The University of South Africa researchers will not collect or use information such as internet protocol (IP) addresses or

other information that would link your participation to the electronic device used without informing you of the intention beforehand.

This study has no known risks. However, the possibility exists that some questions (e.g. gender, sexual orientation) may cause some discomfort. Also, in this study, there are questions about pornography use. Please remember that you are free to skip any and all questions in this study.

You will not benefit directly from participation in this research. However, participating will benefit contributions towards understandings of the furry fandom and anthropomorphic interests at an international level broadly and a local level specifically. We believe this knowledge will benefit both the field of psychology and the community itself. Findings from this research will be made available in dissertation format, which will be available once submitted at the UNISA Institutional Repository, at: http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/506.

If you have any other questions about the study, contact Duncan Piasecki, 56939493@mylife.unisa.ac.za, or Dr. JK Moodley, moodljk@unisa.ac.za.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa's Department of Psychology's ethics committee (reference number 2020-PsyREC-56936493). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the committee chair, Prof. Piet Kruger, at krugep@unisa.ac.za. Alternatively, you can report any serious unethical behaviour at the University's Toll-Free Hotline 0800 86 96 93.

Participation is voluntary, you can withdraw at any time, and there is no penalty or loss of benefit for not participating in this study or withdrawing your participation. If you are willing to participate in this research, please answer the questions that follow. There are 33 questions, and the survey should take approximately 20 to 30 minutes to complete. By completing the survey, you acknowledge informed consent, including using your

words as anonymous quotations. As this survey is conducted online, written consent is not feasible, and the survey itself does not require collecting your name for consent purposes. By providing consent, you do not waive your legal rights or release the investigator(s) and involved institution(s) from their legal and professional responsibilities.

Thank you in advance for your participation and assistance. Please print a copy of this letter for your records.

Please indicate your acceptance of the above conditions to proceed with the survey. If you wish to withdraw after partially completing the survey, the option to indicate that you wish any potentially partially-saved responses to be deleted will be provided at the end of the survey.

Appendix E

Debriefing Letter

Dear participant

Thank you for your participation in this online survey! The purpose of this research was to examine (1) what constitutes an "average" South African furry, demographically; (2) what demographic features and furry features relate to one another, and to what extent; (3) the ways in which the South African furry community help its members psychologically; and (4) in what ways South African furries believe that the furry fandom within the country differs from the furry fandom internationally.

Please keep your letter of information and this debriefing letter for future reference.

Researchers involved in this project:

- Duncan Piasecki, Psychology Masters student, University of South Africa, 56939493@mylife.unisa.ac.za

- J.K. Moodley, PhD, Senior Lecturer, University of South Africa, moodljk@unisa.ac.za

Your responses will allow for the exploration of the relationships between many variables, and contribute significantly to an understanding of the furry fandom within the South African context. If you have any questions or comments, please contact the researchers listed above. After analysis is completed, they will be posted in a dissertation available through the UNISA Institutional Repository, at:

http://uir.unisa.ac.za/handle/10500/506.

As stated in the informed consent, this data, which does not contain identifying information, will be exchanged with other research professionals. This data will be stored in an encrypted digital archive requiring password access.

As this survey is conducted over the internet, there is always a risk of third-party interception, such as hackers or government agencies. The University of South Africa researchers will not collect or use information such as internet protocol (IP) addresses or other information that would link your participation to the electronic device used without informing you of the intention beforehand.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us via email.

This research has been reviewed and approved by the University of South Africa's Department of Psychology's ethics committee (reference number 2020-PsyREC-56936493).. If you have any questions or concerns, please contact the committee chair, Prof. Piet Kruger, at krugep@unisa.ac.za.

If you wish to withdraw after partially completing the survey, please indicate below that you wish any potentially partially-saved responses to be deleted.

Appendix F

UNISA Ethical Clearance Letter

UNISA | university of south africa

COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

10 March 2020

Dear Duncan Robert Piasecki

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # : 2020-PsycREC-56939493

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 10 March 2020 to 30 June 2023

Researcher(s): Duncan Robert Piasecki

Supervisor(s): Dr J. K. Moodley

A descriptive mixed method study of the furry community within the South African context

Qualification Applied: Master's Degree in Psychology

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa Department of Psychology College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The *low risk application was reviewed and expedited* by Department of Psychology College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, on the **(10 March 2020)** in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:
1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the Department of Psychology Ethics Review Committee.

3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.

4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

5. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.

6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.

7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date **(30 June 2023).** Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number **2020-PsyREC-56936493** *should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.*

Yours sincerely,

Signature :

Prof I. Ferns
Ethics Chair: Psychology
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Appendix G

Calculations for Weighted Sexual Interest Markers in Western Samples

Values from Plante et al. (2016, pp. 93-94).

Formula:

$$\left(\frac{\text{variable}_{(male)}}{\text{percentage}_{(total)}} \text{ x percentage}_{(male)} \right) + \left(\frac{\text{variable}_{(female)}}{\text{percentage}_{(total)}} \text{ x percentage}_{(female)} \right)$$

percentage$_{(total)}$

= percentage$_{(male)}$ + percentage$_{(female)}$

= 67.1 + 23.3

= 90.4

Formula updated:

$$\left(\frac{\text{variable}_{(male)}}{90.4} \text{ x } 67.1 \right) + \left(\frac{\text{variable}_{(female)}}{90.4} \text{ x } 23.3 \right)$$

Therefore:

Percentage of artwork being pornographic:

$$= \left(\frac{50.9}{90.4} \text{ x } 67.1 \right) + \left(\frac{30.7}{90.4} \text{ x } 23.3 \right)$$

$$= (0.56 \text{ x } 67.1) + (0.34 \text{ x } 23.3)$$

$$= 37.78 + 7.91$$

$$= 45.69$$

Times pornography viewed in the last month:

$$= \left(\frac{43.5}{90.4} \text{ x } 67.1 \right) + \left(\frac{10.5}{90.4} \text{ x } 23.3 \right)$$

$$= (0.481 \text{ x } 67.1) + (0.116 \text{ x } 23.3)$$

$$= \quad 32.288 \quad + \quad 2.706$$

$$= \quad 34.994$$

$$\approx \quad 34.99$$

Attitude towards furry pornography:

$$= \quad (\frac{5.37}{90.4} \text{ x } 67.1) + (\frac{4.26}{90.4} \text{ x } 23.3)$$

$$= \quad (0.059 \text{ x } 67.1) \quad + \quad (0.047 \text{ x } 23.3)$$

$$= \quad 3.986 \quad + \quad 1.098$$

$$= \quad 5.084$$

$$\approx \quad 5.08$$