

NOT ALL FANTASIES ARE CREATED EQUAL:  
FANTASY SPORT FANS' PERCEPTIONS OF FURRY,  
BRONY, AND ANIME FANS

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## Abstract

Furries report in qualitative and quantitative studies that they feel discriminated against by the general public, but there are no published empirical data to support these claims. In this study we surveyed ( $N = 118$ ) fantasy sport fans online to quantify their assessments of three fan groups: furry, brony, and anime. Using 50 as a neutral point, fantasy sport fans were given a feeling thermometer test and asked to rate each fan group on a scale from 1 (extremely negative) to 100 (extremely positive). Participants who did not know what a furry, brony, or anime fan was were asked to write “NA” in the response field, and they were deleted from individual analyses. First we assessed how fantasy sport fans rated themselves, furries, bronies, and anime fans using a one-sample  $t$ -test with a test value of 50, which represented a neutral position. The results indicated that fantasy sport fans regard themselves significantly more favourably than neutral. However, fantasy sport fans assessed furries, bronies, and anime fans significantly less favorably than neutral. Within-subjects  $t$ -tests were conducted to determine how fantasy sport fans believed that a typical fantasy sport fan would assess other fan groups. Fantasy sport fans reported that they believed *a typical* fantasy sport fan would be more favorable of an anime fan than either a brony or furry fan. We also assessed how negatively fantasy sport fans *personally* felt about fantasy sport fans, furries, bronies and anime fans. Fantasy sport fans felt significantly more favorable toward fantasy sport fans than any other group. They also felt significantly more favorable about anime fans than either bronies or furries, which they viewed equally negatively. The results of this study provide evidence that furries and bronies face significantly greater negative affect than do anime fans when assessed by fantasy sport fans.

*Keywords:* anime, furry, brony, fantasy sport fans, perception, stigma, fandom, fan

## Not all Fantasies are Created Equal:

### Fantasy Sport Fans' Perceptions of Furry, Brony, and Anime Fans

Fan groups and individual fans often experience stigmatization and discrimination because of their fan interests, a point exemplified by the case of Grayson Bruce. Grayson, a nine-year-old boy in North Carolina, was made fun of by his classmates for wearing a backpack featuring characters from the television show *My Little Pony*. In response to the bullying, Grayson was told by the school that the solution was for him to not wear the backpack to school (Moran, 2014), a statement which simultaneously acknowledged that Grayson's identity as a male fan of a stereotypically female show was the source of the bullying and placed the onus upon Grayson to change, validating the bullies' behaviour. Far from an isolated incident, Grayson's story came just weeks after the tragic case of an 11-year-old boy, Michael Morones, who attempted to commit suicide because of similar bullying experienced because he was a male fan of *My Little Pony* (DeJohn, 2014; Moran, 2014). Stories such as these have made the issue of stigma and bullying in youth a particularly salient problem in our culture. But does bullying people based on their interests end when a person reaches adulthood? Do adult fans experience similar stigmatization?

While anecdotes such as the ones above suggest that members of non-mainstream fan groups experience greater discrimination and negative affect than more mainstream fan groups, there exists no systematic, quantitative test of this claim. As such, the purpose of this paper is to test this claim for three non-mainstream fan groups: bronies (adult, typically male, fans of *My Little Pony*), furies (fans of anthropomorphic animal art and writing), and anime fans (fans of Japanese animation style, cosplay, etc.)

### **Social Identity and Group Affiliation**

The groups we choose to affiliate with and the role of these groups in our identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) are well-studied topics in psychology (e.g., Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010). While this literature tends to focus on discrimination and social status for ascribed identities (i.e., race, sexual orientation, nationality), research is beginning to focus on achieved or chosen identities, including identifying as a member of a fan community (e.g., Billings & Ruihley, 2013; Reysen & Lloyd, 2012; Reysen,

Snider, & Branscombe, 2012). Fans are enthusiastic and loyal followers of a leisure activity (Reysen & Branscombe, 2010). Groups of fans who share a common interest often gather to share their enjoyment of that particular interest. Perhaps one of the best-known and most common such fan groups in American culture is sporting fans, who gather in thousands at stadiums or who congregate in smaller groups at bars or living rooms to support their favourite team (Wann, Melnick, Russell, & Pease, 2001). In fact, sport fans are often considered to be the most common and ubiquitous fan group and are, for many, the “default” or prototypical fan (Reysen et al., in press; Schimmel, Harrington, & Bielby, 2007). As a result, non-sport fan cultures and non-mainstream or fringe fandoms may be considered deviant or abnormal by more mainstream sport fans, with negative connotations.

Below, we describe fantasy sport fans, a subset of mainstream sport fans, as well as three different non-mainstream fandoms: furies, bronies, and anime fans.

## **Fantasy Sport Fans**

Fantasy Sport Fans (FSF) are a relatively new subgroup of traditional sport fans. FSF create and manage fictitious sport leagues by drawing from current player rosters in their league of interest (e.g., National Basketball Association, National Football League). FSF pit their teams against one another using statistics from real sporting events, determining a winner at the end of the season. Popular fantasy sport leagues include football, basketball, baseball, NASCAR, and golf (Billings & Ruibley, 2013). Fantasy sports leagues have grown exponentially in the past decade and are now a multi-billion dollar industry with over 30 million fans worldwide (Carlson, 2013).

Research on FSF is relatively limited given that fantasy sports have only risen to prominence in the past decade or so. What little research exists has largely focused on the motivations and fan-related activities of FSF (e.g., Lee, Seo, Green, 2013) and have shown that FSF are drawn to the positive outcomes of participation, particularly entertainment and self-esteem (Billings and Ruibley, 2013).

Because they represent a ubiquitous and mainstream fan interest, FSF are considered, in the present research, to represent mainstream opinions. These fans are contrasted presently with three non-mainstream groups that may be considered deviant by comparison (Reysen et al., in

press) and, as a result, may be viewed in a stigmatized manner by FSF as obsessed and dysfunctional (Hills, 2005; Jenkins, 1988; Jones, 2012). These three groups are described in the following sections.

## **Furries**

Furries are people who self-identify with an interest in anthropomorphism—the ascription of human traits to animals—or zoomorphism—the ascription of animal traits to humans (Gerbasi et al., 2008; Roberts, Plante, Gerbasi, & Reysen, in press). Furries interact with one another in online communities and forums where they share artwork, stories, and music and discuss issues related to their interests. Furries often form social networks in local areas, which may have regular meet-ups. Furries also interact with one another at large, regional conventions.

Most furries represent themselves to others in the fandom through a fursona, an animal-themed avatar that includes a name, appearance, and, in many cases, a distinct personality. Furries usually create fursonas that include self-representative characteristics combined with idealized traits (Plante, Roberts, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013). Approximately 11% of furries represent their interest through the creation and wearing of elaborate, “mascot-like” fursuits that allow them to interact with others in-person as their fursona (see Plante, Roberts, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2014a; Plante, Roberts, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2014b; Plante et al., in press).

Media coverage of furries has been largely sensationalized and negative. The CSI episode, *Fur and Loathing* (Zuiker & Stahl, 2003), portrayed furries as sexual deviants, reducing the diversity of fan interests to that of a fetishistic desire to have sex while wearing fursuits. Such inaccurate and incendiary portrayals of furries have resulted in furries perceiving societal stigma, with many fearing “outing” themselves for fear of negative repercussions (Roberts et al., in press). Research suggests that many furries fear discrimination from their family and coworkers if their furry identities were revealed, and many furries conceal their furry identity to avoid association with media-propagated stereotypes (Mock, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013; Plante et al., 2014a; Roberts et al., in press). Despite the existence of negative stereotypes about furries, research has found that the furry fandom provides its members with a sense of positive social identity, social support, and unconditional friendship (Roberts et al., in press).

## **Bronies**

Bronies are self-identified, often adult male fans of the television show *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*. Among the most common reasons cited by bronies for their interest in the show are the quality of the show's animation, the positive morals of tolerance, acceptance, and friendship taught in the show's storylines (Edwards, Griffin, & Redden, n.d.), and feelings of nostalgia elicited by the show, which may remind them of the cartoons they watched in their youth. Bronies may express their interest in the show by collecting memorabilia, clothing, and artwork associated with the show, while others create novel art, music, and fan fiction based on characters from the show. Like furies, bronies interact with one another in local groups and at fan conventions across North America.

Media coverage of bronies, like furies, is often sensationalistic and inaccurate. Portrayals of bronies in the media often depict the fandom as immature, socially awkward, sexually deviant, and obsessive. For example, a segment on *The Howard Stern Show* defined bronies as "sickos sexually attracted to cartoon ponies" (Hambrick, 2013). Despite these negative portrayals of the fandom, bronies are simply young people who like a particular show and have found others who share a similar interest. Research suggests that they are comparable to other fandoms, and the motivations for engaging in the fandom include interacting with like-minded others, artistic expression and social identity development, a sense of meaning in one's life, and an appreciation for the themes in the show, including openness and acceptance of others (Edwards, Griffin, & Redden, n.d.; Langley, Griffin, Edwards, Chadborn, & Redden, 2014). The latter point was perhaps best illustrated when, at the world's largest brony convention, Bronycon 2014, there was a special meet and greet held for the previously-mentioned Grayson Bruce, where hundreds of bronies gathered to give the young man a standing ovation and show their support for him.

## **Anime**

Anime is a Japanese style of animation (see Chen, 2007). Fans of anime enthusiastically embrace their interest through the watching of anime television shows and movies, reading of manga (graphical novels) and comics, cosplaying — dressing up as a character from a show or story — and by interacting with other anime fans online or in-person. Many anime fans also create their own fan-related content, including written fan-fiction, music, and artwork. As a genre, anime has permeated American markets and is gradually becoming a more accepted, mainstream

interest, as exemplified by the popularity of Japanese television shows, movies, manga, and videogames including *Pokémon*, *Dragonball Z*, *Evangelion*, and *Sailor Moon*. Its popularity is so pervasive that Netflix offers an entire anime genre alongside traditional genres such as horror and comedy. Like furies and bronies, anime fans also interact with one another, both online, through forums and Internet groups, as well as in local anime clubs and regional anime conventions.

A recent study (Reysen et al., in press) examined stereotypes of anime fans that existed in online forums and in previous publications (e.g., Dinnie, 2012; Dunbar, 2011; Manion, 2005; Mycella, 2012; Napier, 2001). The authors concluded that there exist numerous pervasive and negative stereotypes about anime fans (e.g., socially awkward, lacking social skills), and suggested that an ambivalent prejudice exists toward anime fans. It is worth noting, however, that the anime fandom, of the three non-mainstream fandoms discussed, is by far the largest. For example, North America's largest anime convention, Anime Expo, was estimated to have 61,000 attendees in 2013 (Animecons.com, 2014), more than ten times the size of the largest furry convention, Anthrocon ("Anthrocon", 2014), and more than six times the size of the largest brony convention, Bronycon ("Bronycon", 2014). As such, while anime may not be as mainstream an interest as sports, compared to furies and bronies, it may be considered less deviant and, by extension, anime fans may be less stigmatized by fantasy sport fans than either furies or bronies.

## **Perceived Discrimination**

Anecdotally, members of the brony, anime, and furry communities routinely experience feelings of separation from mainstream society and a fear of ostracism for their involvement in unusual or non-conforming fan interests. The present study tests the extent to which FSF hold negative stereotypes about members of these non-traditional fan groups.

## **Present Study**

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether a mainstream, popular fan group — fantasy sport fans — report having negative opinions of non-mainstream fan groups:

furries, bronies, and anime fans. We used Mechanical Turk to obtain a sample of 118 fantasy sport fans and assess their attitudes toward the three groups. We predicted, based on social psychological research on social identity theory (e.g., Tajfel & Turner, 1979) that FSF would have a positive view of their own (ingroup) fan group and a negative view of (outgroup) members of the other, less-mainstream fan groups: furries, bronies, and anime fans. Moreover, because anime is a more mainstream fan interest than either *My Little Pony* or anthropomorphic animals, we predicted that anime fans would be less stigmatized than furries and bronies.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

We recruited 150 self-identified fantasy sport fans through Amazon's Mechanical Turk. Participants' age ranged from 19-69 ( $M_{age} = 33.41$ ,  $SD = 10.95$ ). In total 32 participants were removed from the analyses because they identified as either a furry, brony, and/or anime fan, resulting in a final sample of 118 participants. Participants indicated their racial/ethnic category as European American (80%), African American (8%), Hispanic (9%), Asian (6%), and/or First Nations (1%) (participants were able to indicate more than one racial/ethnic category). The sample was highly educated, with fewer than 7% of participants indicating that they had only a high school education or less. The vast majority of the participants (80%) indicated that they had some college, an associate's degree, a bachelor degree, post-graduate college courses, and so forth, with 13% of participants indicating that they had an advanced degree. In total, 70% of the sample was male and 30% female (one participant did not report his or her biological sex).

### **Materials**

Participants were recruited as a control group for a larger fandom research project. As such, participants answered a battery of questions related to self-esteem, identity, and personality. Embedded in the 200 questions were the items relevant to the present study: feeling thermometers asking participants how they felt about fantasy sport fans, furries, bronies, and anime fans and asking participants how they thought the average fantasy sport fan felt about each



of these same groups. Participants were asked both about their own attitudes and about the average fantasy sport fan's beliefs to address the possibility that participants would respond in socially desirable ways (i.e., responding positively about other groups) if asked only about their own attitudes. The feeling thermometer is a common, well-validated measure of felt prejudice toward other groups (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002).

To assess attitudes toward different fan groups, FSF were given the following instructions: *"For the following items you will rate how you think various groups view one another. Write a number from 0 to 100 in the box provided, with 0 being "Extremely Negatively" and 100 being "Extremely Positively."* They were then given a series of questions to answer from the perspective of a "typical" fantasy sport fan and then as themselves. With regard to anime fans, we asked, *"From a typical Fantasy Sport Fan perspective, how positively or negatively do you think they would rate a typical Anime Fan (If you do not know what an Anime Fan is, type "N/A")"* and *"How positively or negatively would YOU rate a typical Anime Fan."* "NA" answers were coded as missing. Analogous questions were asked about furies (*"From a typical Fantasy Sport Fan perspective, how positively or negatively do you think they would rate a typical Furry Fan (If you do not know what a Furry is, type "N/A")"*) and *"How positively or negatively would YOU rate a typical Furry Fan."*), bronies (*"From a typical Fantasy Sport Fan perspective, how positively or negatively do you think they would rate a typical Brony (If you do not know what a Brony is, type "N/A")"*) and *"How positively or negatively would YOU rate a typical Brony."*), and fantasy sport fans (*"How positively or negatively would YOU rate a typical Fantasy Sport Fan."*).

## Results

### **"Other" Fantasy Sport Fans' assessments of Furies, Bronies, and Anime Fans**

We first looked at participants' estimates of how other FSF would rate the different fan groups. Scores with an average below 50 indicate negative attitudes, while scores above 50 indicate positive attitudes. Participants, who were themselves fantasy sport fans, believed that other fantasy sport fans would have negative views of furies ( $M_{\text{furry}} = 19.74$ ,  $SD = 25.32$ ), bronies ( $M_{\text{brony}} = 21.94$ ,  $SD = 26.70$ ), and anime fans ( $M_{\text{anime}} = 33.91$ ,  $SD = 25.61$ ). A series of a

one-sample  $t$ -tests with a test value of 50, revealed that ratings of all three groups were significantly negative:  $t_{FUR}(46) = -8.19, p < .001, d = -2.42, t_{BRO}(34) = -6.22, p < .001, d = -2.13, t_{ANI}(77) = -5.55, p < .001, d = -1.26$ .

We then conducted within-subjects  $t$ -tests to determine if there were significant differences in participants' predictions about fantasy sport fans' attitudes toward anime fans, bronies, and furies. The results indicate that there was no significant difference in participants' estimates of FSF evaluations for furies and bronies  $t(31) = -0.83, p = .411, d = .30$ . Both furies  $t(45) = -4.73, p < .001, d = -1.41$ , and bronies  $t(34) = -2.84, p = .008, d = -.97$ , were estimated to be perceived more negatively than anime fans.

### **Fantasy Sport Fans' Own Views of FSF, Furies, Bronies, and Anime Fans**

We also assessed how negatively fantasy sport fan participants *personally* felt about fantasy sport fans, furies, bronies and anime fans. Participants positively rated other FSF ( $M_{FSF} = 66.94, SD = 26.88$ ), but they rated furies ( $M_{furry} = 22.76, SD = 25.15$ ), bronies ( $M_{brony} = 21.83, SD = 25.15$ ), and anime fans ( $M_{anime} = 37.16, SD = 26.78$ ) negatively. Follow-up one-sample  $t$ -tests with a test value of 50 indicated that fantasy sport fans regard themselves significantly positively  $t(104) = 6.43, p < .001, d = 1.26$  and rated the three other fan groups negatively:  $t_{FUR}(71) = -9.19, p < .001, d = -2.18, t_{BRO}(59) = -9.35, p < .001, d = -2.43, t_{ANI}(89) = -4.44, p < .001, d = -.94$ .

We then completed a series of within-subjects  $t$ -tests to determine if there were significant differences in participants' assessments of FSF, anime fans, bronies, and furies. Participants felt significantly more favorable toward FSF than they did furies,  $t(70) = 11.05, p < .001, d = 2.64$ , bronies  $t(58) = 10.41, p < .001, d = 2.73$ , and anime fans,  $t(88) = 10.07, p < .001, d = 2.15$ . Participants rated furies and bronies equally negatively,  $t(57) = 0.08, p = .940, d = .02$ , and rated anime fans less negatively than either furies,  $t(70) = -4.88, p < .001, d = -1.17$ , or bronies,  $t(59) = -4.74, p < .001, d = -1.23$ . All results are summarized in Table 1.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether there exists prejudice toward three non-mainstream fan groups (i.e., anime fans, bronies, and furies). To do this, we selected a comparable, but mainstream, leisure group — fantasy sport fans — to report their feelings toward their ingroup and each of the aforementioned outgroups. Consistent results were found whether asking participants about their own attitudes toward the other fan groups or when asking participant how they thought other FSF felt toward the other fan groups. Participants view other members of their own fan group favourably, but they rated anime fans negatively, and they rated furies and bronies even more negatively. Together, the results provide the first empirical evidence that there exists stigma toward anime fans, and particularly more extreme stigma toward bronies and furies.

The present results show that fantasy sport fans' perception of how other FSF feel about the assessed groups was largely similar to how they personally felt about the non-mainstream fan groups. One possible explanation for this result is that ingroup members have an accurate perception of the attitudes of other ingroup members. Indeed, individuals can be relatively accurate in their assessment of other ingroup members (Reysen, Hall, & Puryear, in press). A second explanation, following a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), is that ingroup members become depersonalized, adopting their group's attitudes toward the outgroups. A third explanation is that FSF projected their personal attitudes onto their fellow ingroup members (Robbins & Krueger, 2005) in a case of false consensus (Jones, 2004). Future research should attempt to not only replicate these findings, but to disentangle these possible explanations. In another vein, it would be worthwhile for future research to examine whether members of anime, furry, and brony fandoms accurately perceive the degree of prejudice from members of the other groups.

The results also showed that participants rated their own ingroup more positively than the outgroup fandoms. This result is in accordance with the social identity literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) on ingroup bias. In general, individuals seek to gain or maintain positive and distinct social identities. One way to maintain a positively distinct identity is to derogate outgroups. Thus, participants in the present study may have reported greater prejudice toward outgroup fans as a way to increase self-esteem and maintain a positive social identity.

Prior research (Reysen et al., in press) examining non-anime-fan prejudice toward anime fans found that non-fans reported a slightly positive view of anime fans ( $M = 56.14$ ), while the present results show a largely negative view of anime fans. It is worth noting, however, that in Reysen et al. participants were not solicited solely from a single fan group, but, instead, had a variety of different interests (e.g., music, television). Moreover, participants in Reysen et al. did not have their fan identity made salient during the study. In the present study, the salience of the ingroup (i.e., FSF) may have intensified the prejudice expressed toward anime fans (and the other fan groups), which has been shown to heighten outgroup bias (e.g., Levine, Prosser, Evans, & Reicher, 2005).

The results raise several questions about the nature of the dislike for anime fans and why, although disliked, they were disliked less than both bronies and furies. It may be the case that what little exposure people have had to either bronies or furies has been extremely negative. For example, the television show *Hannibal* (Fuller, 2014), depicted a therian (a subculture associated with furies; see Gerbasi et al., 2010; Robertson, 2013) as a violent serial murderer. As discussed in the introduction, the public's main source of understanding of furies primarily involves misleading and negative media portrayals of furies, such as the *CSI* episode (Zuiker & Stahl, 2003), *Vanity Fair*'s unkind coverage of the fandom (Gurley, 2001), a furry death camp in *Second Life* (Brookey & Cannon, 2009), or an incendiary representation in *1000 Ways to Die* (McMahon, 2009). As the most accessible information, this extremely skewed perspective of furies may explain why such negative attitudes exist toward furies. With time and effort, anti-stigma efforts like the International Anthropomorphic Research Project's (IARP) *Just Like You*\* furry anti-stigma campaign (discussed in Roberts, 2014a), which depicts a number of scenes of furies in everyday life doing everyday things, may help to undo some of the media bruising.

It will prove interesting to see the impacts of the anti-stigma activities that are underway for the furry fandom. Furry convention organizers are trying their best to clean up the public image of the furry fandom (Roberts, 2014b). Press are largely distrusted at furry conventions and it remains a challenge to expose the positive aspects of the fandom when the participants are so media bruised that they do not want to have any connection with media. Further, often there are negative ramifications for those who do speak to the media—particularly if they misrepresent the fandom (Roberts, 2014c; Roberts et al., in press). Thus, furies are placed in the perilous position

of needing a media that they largely cannot trust to tell the (rather boring) story of what the fandom is really all about: friendship (Roberts, 2014a).

Analogously, the brony fandom has endured a significant amount of negative media coverage, resulting in the propagation of negative stereotypes about bronies. Howard Stern's audience registers in the tens of millions across various media. And, analogous to furies, if the majority of the media's information about bronies is biased and meant to shock and disgust — as is clearly the case with Stern — it may not be surprising that the bronies share the brunt of mainstream culture's negative affect. As with furies, there have been attempts to shift the public perception of bronies, the most notable of which may be a documentary entitled *Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of My Little Pony*, which accurately profiles bronies from all walks of life and portrays the events of a typical brony convention in a non-sensationalistic manner.

In contrast to the furry and brony fandoms, which have largely evaded mainstream media, the anime fandom has undergone drastic changes in recent decades. The 1980s and 1990s brought anime to mainstream America, replacing traditional studios such as Hanna-Barbera (e.g., *Tom and Jerry*, *The Flintstones*, *The Jetsons*) and Warner Brothers (e.g., *Loony Toons*) with distinctly Japanese-infused styles through shows like *Silver Hawks*, *Spiderman*, *Jem*, *ThunderCats*, or the *Transformers*. In contemporary American culture, Anime influence can be seen even in popular Disney movies such as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, and *Aladdin*, and has become a commercial success through completely Japanese television shows such as *Pokémon* and *Dragonball Z*. As such, while Howard Stern sends his cronies to attend Comicon and ridicule anime fans in much the same fashion as Bronycon, there are far more sources of positive media to counteract this negative media attention.

In many ways, the American notion of the geek or nerd is being reclaimed and changed into something more positive. Major transitions are happening, likely due to several converging events. First, the technological era of gadgetry has given people like Bill Gates an unmistakable platform to show the financial profits of being bright and tech-savvy. Second, the public has access and exposure to much more science than in the past. For example, *The Nerdist* ([www.nerdist.com](http://www.nerdist.com)) is a popular podcast that reaches many audiences. In a way, many of the predictions made by Carl Sagan in the 1980s have proven valuable and accurate. We now live in a world where being scientifically literate is beneficial to survival (Sagan, 1995). Third, the

aforementioned kinds of sentiments are being expressed in popular culture with high-grossing movies like *Ironman*, where the premise is that those who are skilled with technology benefit in every way — including getting the “girl.” And, popular TV shows like *Big Bang Theory* have made a lasting impression (and cosplay opportunity) for the members of the public. Finally, Japanese anime in the USA has undergone a rather large Americanization of content, and the biggest “anime” conventions in North America — like Comicon — have undergone a broadening of boundaries where true manga and anime are welcomed with many other popular culture icons. This has likely contributed to people’s basic understanding of conventions and groups and perception of them being perhaps weird, but harmless.

Taken together, these factors may account for the dislike of anime fans and the even greater distain felt toward furies and bronies by members of a more mainstream fan group. While researchers have begun to systematically study these distinct fan groups, this research is, at present, still in its infancy.

## **Limitations**

It is important to recognize several limitations in the present study. First, this work represents preliminary findings, which should be replicated by future researchers to test the resiliency of the effects. Second, the sample was relatively small, American, and was self-selected. This raises questions about the generalizability of these findings to other populations: other cultures (e.g., Japan), other demographics (e.g., teenagers versus adults), and other fan groups (e.g., car enthusiasts). Third, the present data do not speak to changes in these fan groups over time — something that would require longitudinal data — which makes it difficult to test several of the mechanisms suggested to underlie the observed effects. As a final limitation, it is worth noting that we only assessed negative attitudes toward members of non-mainstream fandoms, not behavioural intentions or actual behaviour. As such, while we can infer that negative attitudes felt toward furies, bronies, and anime fans could predict real-world bullying and discrimination, there is no way to know for sure without testing, in future research, whether the observed negative evaluations predict harassment, discrimination, and bullying toward members of these fan groups.

## Conclusion

At present, there was no research systematically testing whether there existed a stigma toward members of non-mainstream, fringe fan groups. Fantasy sport fans, as a subgroup of the most ubiquitous group of fans in America, were studied as a representation of mainstream attitudes. The present study explored how these fantasy sport fans felt about three other groups of fandoms: bronies, furies, and anime fans. Results indicate that there is a stigma toward anime fans, and there exists an even greater stigma toward bronies and furies. The present research therefore provides evidence, in conjunction with prior research showing that members of non-mainstream fan groups perceive stigma, that there exist very real negative stereotypes and attitudes toward these fan groups. This work also illustrates the importance of education and anti-stigma efforts for all three of these fan groups, particularly for furies and bronies.

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Table 1

*Results of Means, Standard Deviations, and Within-Subjects T-tests of How a Typical Fantasy Sport Fan Would Assess Other Fan Groups and How Fantasy Sport Fans, Themselves, Assess Other Fan Groups*

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i> -test of significant difference from neutral attitude (50%)	Within <i>t</i> -test of mean difference		
					Comparison with Row		
From a typical Fantasy Sport Fan perspective, how positively or negatively do you think they would rate a typical							
Furry Fan	47	19.74	25.32	<i>t</i> (46) = -8.193, <i>p</i> < .001		Brony <i>t</i> (31) = -.834, <i>p</i> = .411 <i>d</i> = -0.185	Anime Fan <i>t</i> (45) = -4.731, <i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = -0.480
Brony	35	21.94	26.70	<i>t</i> (34) = -6.219, <i>p</i> < .001		--	<i>t</i> (34) = -2.839, <i>p</i> = .008 <i>d</i> = -0.574
Anime Fan	78	33.91	25.61	<i>t</i> (77) = -5.549, <i>p</i> < .001		--	--
How positively or negatively would YOU rate a typical					Furry Fan	Brony	Anime Fan
Fantasy Sport Fan	104	66.94	26.88	<i>t</i> (104) = 6.427, <i>p</i> < .001	<i>t</i> (70) = 11.049, <i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = 1.500	<i>t</i> (58) = 10.412, <i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = 1.613	<i>t</i> (88) = 10.068, <i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = 1.147
Furry Fan	72	22.76	25.15	<i>t</i> (71) = -9.188, <i>p</i> < .001	--	<i>t</i> (57) = .075, <i>p</i> = .940 <i>d</i> = 0.058	<i>t</i> (70) = -4.876, <i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = -0.553
Brony	60	21.83	23.34	<i>t</i> (59) = -9.347, <i>p</i> < .001	--	--	<i>t</i> (59) = -4.735, <i>p</i> < .001 <i>d</i> = -0.664
Anime Fan	90	37.16	26.78	<i>t</i> (89) = -4.440, <i>p</i> < .001	--	--	--

*Note.* Ratings on a 100-point scale from 0 = *extremely negatively* to 100 = *extremely positively*.