Keeping the Magic: Fursona Identity and Performance in the Furry Fandom

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KEEPING THE MAGIC: FURSONA IDENTITY AND PERFORMANCE IN THE FURRY FANDOM

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Anthropology and Folk Studies
Western Kentucky University
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

By
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I dedicate this thesis to my parents, Hannon and Shawna Maase for believing in me, and most important of all to my informants.
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The furry subculture (also known as the anthropomorphic fandom) creates identity through anthropomorphism and therianthropy. Anthropomorphism is the giving of human traits to the non-human. Therianthropy is the giving of animal traits to the human. Through play and creating art, these individuals of the furry subculture take on an anthropomorphic identity (what furries call a fursona) while bridging local and global groups through communication technologies.

For this folklore project I conducted ethnographic field works interviews with the Bowling Green, Kentucky fur group. I also build off of the interviews project with an online furry role-play group as well as a Manhattan, Kansas fur group. This thesis explores furry folklore: how members of the furry fandom create, relate to, and express their fursonas. This was done by looking at people’s narrative of joining the fandom and stories of their fursona creation, furry art, fursuits, and fursuit performance. At the same time it covers the complexities of furries as a network and how they mitigate stigma and identity.
Introduction

“The animal people lived,” starts a Coyote Myth, “before the days of the first grandfather, long, long, ago, when the sun was new and no larger than a star, when the earth was young and tall firs of the forest no larger than an arrow, [humans] had not yet come out” (Nozaki 1961:1-3 and Judson 1997:1). Anthropomorphism has dominated human imagination throughout the ages and cross culturally. From the cave art at Lascaux to our sports teams and cereal boxes the animal person certainly still captures something in the imagination and takes on powerful elements of meaning. Anthropomorphism is at the basis of what is known as the furry subculture.

The furry subculture (also known as the anthropomorphic fandom) creates identity through anthropomorphism and therianthropy. Anthropomorphism is the giving of human traits to the non-human. Therianthropy is the giving of animal traits to the human. Through play and creating art, these individuals of the furry subculture take on an anthropomorphic and therianthropic identity (what furries call a fursona) while bridging local and global cultures through communication technologies. They often shorten the word furries to fur in reference to one another.

My goal in writing this thesis is to explore how members of the furry fandom create, relate to, and express their fursonas. This is done by analyzing people’s personal stories in the fandom, fursuit construction and performance, and roleplaying. Building from my past research I worked with the Bowling Green furry group observing what makes this population distinct from other groups. How does geographic region effect fursona creation and performance? How does context shape values of fursona

1 My change from “people” to avoid confusion.
2 Story text has been translated by the cited authors, is not given a tribal affiliation and is possibly edited.
performance? And last, how does an individual’s discovery of the overall fandom shape fursona and performance? Overall I hope to glimpse how folklore can grow out of cycles of popular culture media and how people express themselves in relationship to animals in our modern environment through the study of this group’s context, fursona making, values, and performance.

**Research Methods**

This is my third project involving the anthropomorphic fandom. I have previously done field research amongst the Manhattan, Kansas population (based on the Kansas State University campus) including the Midwest Furfest convention. I have also done various interviews with an online role-playing group based in Kansas City, but members of the group also live elsewhere in the United States. In the K-State project I reached several conclusions. The K-State furries used the meets as a place for socializing, relaxing, and working on art. Despite the fact that all of them were involved in the online community, that medium could not substitute for a physical community. The furries also defined “being furry” on an individual basis. By this I mean each furry defined what a furry is in their own terms. In the second project I looked into how belief plays into fursona construction. My hypothesis was to see as to why people selected their fursonas and how much spiritual and religious belief was involved with animals and fursona construction. I found that there was little religious or spiritual connection between furries and their fursonas. A majority of the furries online that I interviewed did not construct their fursona on a religious basis, but often on personal ideas of self-expression. Most furries simply stated they found no religious or spiritual connection to their fursonas. Their fursonas were an extension of the self. Through this extension the furries were able
to develop goals to help improve in areas of their lives (socializing, physical fitness, getting work done, etc.). This extension was mostly done through performance (fursuiting activities or roleplaying). These performances also allowed for these furries to connect with other people and to give to others (charity, entertain, inspiration, etc.). The first project did not concentrate on the folklore involved in the fandom (I did not look the creative process and was more concerned with social aspects). The second project did not involve field work, only online interviews with furries who were part of a friend’s role-play network.

This thesis looks at how furries develop their fursonas and the role that they play in belief and performance. For this project, I worked with the Bowling Green, Kentucky furry group, a group that meets in person. I also build off my previous projects for comparison. Through this new study involving participant observation these previous studies can be compared. How do furries physically express their fursona compared to online? How do groups differ from location to location (K-State college campus group compared to a city group not based on a campus)? The thesis expands on fursona choice in relationship to how the individual perceives the animal that they choose. I will also expand more on how furries value and reflect on each other’s performance.

In this thesis I conducted fieldwork and interviews with the Bowling Green furry group. This group met monthly doing activities (eating, talking, working on art, playing board games, laser tag, etc.). The group knew each other from the Kentucky Furry Forum which has a wide range in membership from across Kentucky, Ohio, and Tennessee. They use this forum to plan their monthly meets. I compare my previous group experiences and stories to this new research. Interviews have been done with Marantz
(for face-to-face interviews) or Logitech recorders (as necessary for interviewing distant informants). The online forum will be mentioned briefly due to its connection for these furries to the larger furry world. This is not a main point of the research, but it needs to be covered briefly due to connections it serves for the folk group. Material culture as an expression of the fursona and self will also be used to provide examples of furry creation and expression.

The first chapter overviews the history of the furry fandom. It also briefly reviews my past research. The final part of the first chapter introduces my current field research and informants for this project. The second half explains the forum and the local meets. This will provide context of place and people for the later chapters.

Chapter Two covers the narratives of my informants and how they joined the fandom. I will then further explore the narratives of their fursona’s creation and additional narratives that their fursonas have. These narratives include roleplaying stories, stories of self-expression, and stories of their connection to the larger fandom (adopting and conventions). These stories are part of the creative process and what ties the individual to the community. The stories of their “finding” and joining the fandom reveal their connections, values, and sphere within the fandom and how that influences the member’s genre creations.

In chapter Three I discuss fursuit construction and performance; especially as pertaining to a fursona. I explore the three suiting types: tails/ear wear, partial suiting, and full suiting. These are the emic categories used by all three furry groups I have studied. Also important is animal iconography (clothing, key chains, hats, cellphone backgrounds) worn to represent a fursona or reveal that someone is a part of the fandom.
I explore the value of self-constructed suits, commissioned, and brand-stores play in identity, prestige, and place in the fandom spoken or unspoken. The second part of this chapter involves the ethics of furry suiting and elaborates the “magic.” “Making” and “keeping” the “magic” is what the furries call their performance in suit. Suit performing also involves the handler, a trusted watcher, who keeps an eye on and aids the suit wearer. Handlers and the dangers to suit wearers are a part of this chapter.

The last chapter concentrates on art and how it speaks and aids in the identity of the furries. Art in this case includes character art both traditional and digital, 3D model art, fursuits, and performance. The evaluation of these arts orients the furry in the furry subculture while at the same time reflecting the value of anthropomorphism.

**Ethics**

This thesis is written under the guidelines of the American Folklore Society for ethical research\(^3\). Most of my informants spend a lot of time interacting with the larger furry network online. As they interact with both peers and strangers online I feel that it is best to keep my informants anonymous so aliases will be used in this thesis. Respect for our informants is essential to our collaboration as ethnographic researchers. There are several folklore scholars who have tackled the ethics and difficulty of online ethnography (Miller 2012, Buchanan 2012, Baym 1993, Carter 2005:152, Blank 2009:10). As my focus is on a physical group I do not discuss the forum in depth. I did not conduct interviews through the forum, nor do I use quotes from the forum. I agree with Samuel Wilson and Leighton Peterson that “electronic eavesdropping... violates the speaker's expectation of privacy” (2002:461). The observations of the forum pertain to how my

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\(^3\)[http://www.afsnet.org/?page=Ethics accessed December 24, 2014]
informants use it and to show how the local connects with the regional. The forum can be observed without membership. Interacting on the forums is only accessible to members, but any one is welcome to join as a member. My only interaction on the forums was to keep track of Bowling Green meets. I am a strong believer that, as there is no standing ethical conduct for online research as developed by the American Folklore Society, a website’s statements of privacy and permission stand.

**Literature Review**

The definition of folklore in the discipline has changed with time. Originally perceived as survivals of the peasants and the savage, the concept of what folklore consists of has come a long way. Changing perceptions of folklore also changed the concept of folklore. Folklorist Dan Ben-Amos defined folklore as “artistic communication in small groups” (1971). The folk is everyone; everyone takes part of the creating and transferring of lore (Toelken 1996:315, Sims and Stephens 2011:24-25). Folk groups also consist of individuals. These individuals and their small folk groups may be connected to a larger network. Individuals and networks also do not exist in a separate bubble. Networks are shaped by outside power relationships and cultural forces such as politics, belief systems, etc. (Noyes 2003:33-35, Abrahams 2003:212-15). Folklore of course is always affected by what Barre Toelken called the twin laws: dynamism and conservatism (Toelken 1996:40).

Roger Abrahams, in his essay on identity, in *Eight Words for the Study of Expressive Culture*, starts with defining identity. He finds that “identity has become the encompassing term for cultural, social, and spiritual wholeness. Identity also emerges in
discussions of territorial integrity, often as a rhetorical ploy in struggles for establishing and maintaining domain” (2003:198). In this definition identity is a layered aspect between self and culture. He further adds that “like authenticity, [identity] rests on ideas of the real and the enduring that do not bear up well under the investigation of everyday practices or extraordinary experiences” (2003:198). Abrahams also finds that identity is shaped by popular culture, media, and the economic environment (2003:199). Elliot Oring, in his article “The Arts, Artifacts, and Artifices of Identity,” breaks down identity into several types. Identities do change over time and shift with upon group dynamics. He defines individual identity as “sense of space-time connection with states, thoughts, and actions from the past” (1994:212).

He then defines personal identity:

Personal identity, while it depends upon a sense of individual continuity and contributes to it, refers to particular mental dispositions and contents, and not merely to the sense of continuity itself. It is composed from memories, identifications, and repudiations of individuals, ideas, and experiences which come to constitute a perhaps shifting, but nevertheless discernible, configuration.

What underlies these configurations can be said to constitute and distinguish a person. (1994:212)

He also notes “identity is not a kind of behavior, expression, or experience, nor is it any assemblage of behaviors, expressions, or experiences, although such is the stuff that may shape identity. Identity in some sense stands "behind" experience. As it is rooted in the psyche of individuals, it is not describable in behavioral or experiential terms” (1994:213). Oring also explains that folklorists must be careful in our study of identity as
we are not psychologists. Abrahams too argues we must be careful of representing individuals by painting them in a certain way or speaking for them without collaboration (2003:203). Still, the study of folk traditions is dependent on identity of individual and group. As humanity scholars we must do our best for collaboration with our informants so they can define their identity for themselves. The difficulty of identity between individual and group is at the core of furry complexity due to the hodgepodge of anthropomorphic materials, the large scope of the cultural network, and the ways the individuals find their niche within the fandom.

Individuals also act independently from networks and hegemonic forces. Leonard Primiano defines vernacular religion as the “inner experience and perception of the believer” and what is “personal and private” (1995:40, 43). From my perspective, other genres of folklore are important to an individual’s beliefs and encompass the personal and private. I argue that Primiano’s definition of vernacular religion fits also for personal belief with the everyday, apart from religious affiliation. The furries I have worked with inhabit a larger world of fandom, but come at it often as individuals, with individual needs and feelings. Their beliefs and private lives help shape their fursonas. Furries do interact in small groups as well as within the various online networks that are separate, but yet again are tied to each other via the context of the internet and overlap of interests.

Fandom studies have begun to gain the attention of folklorists. The internet as a medium has become a network of networks. Technology has become a hypertext allowing for “representation of the world” (Titon 2003:93). Online networks are such a hypertext, and they allow for the quick exchange of video, stories, photographs, and audio. Along with this, folklore can be passed along rapidly. New ideas can take root;
new networks can be formed online, and from them physical groups develop. The individual can express himself in his environment.

John D. Dorst, in *The Written Suburb*, discusses the cultural expression of the environment. This is what he calls auto-ethnography. Cultures automatically produce texts that can be interpreted (1989:2). This of course does not make a folklorist’s job worthless as we must collaborate with our informants and cannot depend on the text of the environment. Still, there is a lot to learn from environment. Online is an environment with lots of layered texts such as forums, avatars, rules, etc. Also not everything is shared online nor does the physical group always make itself known in the larger network. An individual can flit between them and express certain things they want to share with one or another such as personal information, certain art values, art they produce, etc. This demonstrates that there is a lot of complexity involved when it comes to analyzing furry text.

The book *Folklore and the Internet* and *Folk Culture in the Digital Age*, edited by Trevor Blank, is a collection of folklore essays involving internet studies. Blank makes use of several surveys that show internet use for 2012. “seventy-nine percent of adult men and women in the United States are regular internet users.” “The average person spent up to thirty-one hours per week on the internet; six out of every ten people received the news digitally every day, and at least one-third of internet users posted updates about their status or personal goings-on at least once a week through social networking sites like Facebook and Twitter” (Blank 2012:13). Blank finds that the study of folklore on the internet allows us to discuss both aesthetics and community. New forms create new
traditions; Blank argues that we need to be careful not to limit our discipline by becoming stuck on tradition and what is authentic (2009:7).

Lynne S. McNeill, in “Real Virtuality Enhancing Locality by Enacting the Small World Theory,” studies flash mobs and alternate reality games. McNeill concludes that folk phenomenon is no longer dependent on knowing each other or having a deep rapport with an online group. “The network becomes realized rather than assumed,” the performers in these events take part in the phenomenon often on short notice and what may be deemed “randomness” (2012:89). Furries meet physically after planning or planning at the last minute online. Their façade performance (a performance that invades outdoor space) may seem random to the onlookers as it could be created on a whim. Sometimes furries may come together not knowing who will show up because the post may not be responded to or read by all.

Henry Jenkins, in his book *Convergence Culture*, discusses the relationship of three concepts for online studies. These are convergence, participatory culture, and collective intelligence. Convergence is “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (2007:2). Participatory culture is how media producers and consumers interact with one another. A media producer now needs to consider what the audience will want and listen to their audience to make profit. There are certain levels of participation and some consumers have more power. This participatory culture shapes production and physical reality. Collective intelligence is the pooling of resources, often
unknowingly for use (2007:2-4). In describing how media grasp people’s attention and make consumers from a participatory audience a medium usually has these elements.

1. A work must be “completely furnished so that fans can quote characters and episodes as if they were aspects of the private sectarian world.”

2. “Second a work must be encyclopedic, containing a rich array of information that can be drilled, practiced, and mastered by devoted consumers.”

3. “The media must provide resources consumers can use in constructing their own fantasies.”

4. “No media is constructed with fresh eyes as it is always in comparison to other media” (2007:100).

Jenkins also finds that the internet serves as the new building ground for creation and sharing. Easy sharing and creation tools allow for everyone to be a creator. As popular culture now dominates the market and the imagination it often resituates the older folklore forms. For this reason popular culture often becomes the common culture. Commercial culture essentially becomes the everyday cultural expression (2007:140-41).

All of this review of internet folklore serves to show changes in group dynamics and the impact of internet on daily life. All of this pertains to furries as the internet serves as a hub for planning, communication, and sharing.

The concept of fandom too has changed. Fandom originally was perceived as a negative exoteric term denoting cult like fanaticism for a popular culture. It was later taken as a self-identification with a group sharing a common interest. Henry Jenkins’ argues that much like we are all folk, we are all fans. Fandom has become a resource for media producers. The internet allows for fans and popular culture producers to
communicate or to circumvent the main market by advertising goods and services on its own terms (2009:364). Jenkins’ calls this process “textual poaching,” where fans resist producer control and work with the stories they love and to fill in missing elements not contained or touched on by the producer (2009:364). Modern communication technology also has allowed for a breakdown of culture spheres (high, popular, and folk). These cultural spheres are not directly separate. They effect and influence one another. For example a famous painting can be used as an online meme critiquing a scene from a popular movie. Now everyone with internet access can interact at any time on almost any part of the globe. Transference of ideas whether physically or virtually becomes muddled as new ideas emerge and shape. The possibility of a global online community makes the transferring of ideas even more complex. The market is thus more open to ideas from everyday people as they become media engagers. Popular culture and elite arts are now more easily resituated as folklore (Howard 2008, Koven 2003, Howard 2005, and Dorst 1990). Linda Fleming, in her article “The American SF Subculture,” reviews the Science Fiction fandom from the 1930s to the 1970s. Here one can see the patterns of folk culture coming out of popular market fanzines. This group of writers and fans moved online instead of writer formats and aid in the furry subculture as well. This also shows the muddiness of elite, popular, and folk culture. The market had to change due to the development of space travel in the 60s. The reality of what people dreamed and fantasized about needed to change (1977:263-71).

Joon Koh and Young-Gul Kim, in Sense of Virtual Community: A Conceptual Framework and Empirical Validation, interview and analyze web communities. They define a web community having these aspects:
1. “Membership indicates that people experience feelings of belonging to their community.”

2. “Influence implies that people feel they can make a difference in their community.”

3. “Needs fulfillment suggests that members of a community believe that the resources available in their community will meet their needs.”

4. “Emotional connection is the belief that community members have and will share history, time, places, and experiences.” (2003:76)

They conclude that in life meetings are important for an online community to flourish and to aid in emotional wellbeing. They also find that not all members will engage with a community for all four things. Some members are more shy or do not want to risk their online face, or in turn put themselves into the larger online community (Koh and Kim 2003:76-87).

Fandom also operates with its own goods exchange independent of the market. Fans do not control the copyright to their fan works and do not wish to be sued for copyright infringement. This is why a majority of fan items are exchanged as gifts rather than sold. Gifts can include stories and art depicting characters from the canon that the fans enjoy. Gifts also can be of fan-created material that is not officially part of the canon (ex: fan-created characters). This reciprocity also allows for a strengthening of community, a building of networks, and construction of folk materials. The exchange of goods allows for fan work viewed for free to be appreciated (Hellekson 2009:113-15, Hetcher 2009:1878-79, and Stenger 2006:46). Fan work, though, can be commissioned
from artists, and this too skirts the main market. Money can thus be involved in the exchange, but it is on a personal basis and not developed for distribution.

Cosplaying too is a large part of fandom and something that folklorists such as Matthew Hale, have begun to study. Cosplay is usually reserved for conventions. The creation of costume based on characters can involve a great deal of time, gender-bending (known as “cross play”), and further creative elements on top of just costuming a character (Hale 20013:19-26). Fursuiters often do not have the same judgment of values on their performance and suit-creation as cosplayers do. This is because cosplaying is based around popular-culture icons, whereas fursuits are usually a furry’s fursona. In concern of performance and suit construction there may be other values to consider. The gender of the wearer is difficult to ascertain in most fursuits; this ambiguity may need to be looked at in consideration of sexual gaze. By sexual gaze I mean how an individual recognizes and responds to another’s gender (Mulvey 1975:62). In this gaze there is usually a relationship of both cultural and biological values expressed and perceived. The gender of a fursuit can be difficult to ascertain as sex and gender may not be apparent in the fursuit design. This is not always so as suit design if up to the maker. Hale also brings up: “syncretic acts take the form of what Julie Sanders has described as a transpositional practice wherein one casts a specific genre [or text] into another generic mode. What’s more, this process also has the potential to serve as an act of re-vision in itself involving the “trimming and pruning,” “amplification,” and/or “commentary” of a given source text. These acts of adaptation are, in turn, inscribed on cosplayers’ bodies and in their actions” (2006:18-21). I have not seen this in fursuiting, but I have seen it in
other furry art (art produced by or for furries based in anthropomorphism). I have not witnessed it in any furry population.

The furry fandom is different than other fandoms. The furry fandom is a fandom to an idea and not a distinct form of popular culture. Individuals place themselves within the fandom on their own accord based on their interests in the idea. Popular media does have an important say in the inception of an interest in anthropomorphism, but so also does folk narrative. Narrative is important as furries create fursonas for themselves, and are inspired by their own lives, experiences, and what they share with others. Personal experience about fursona creation places furries within the furry group, while humorous narratives and jokes help mitigate stigma. Although it is a seemingly growing phenomenon, the furry fandom is stigmatized by outsiders, as I will discuss. Furries are often associated with sexual deviancy, pornography, and bestiality. Though the cause is still unknown, there was a chlorine gas attack at the 2014 Chicago furry convention, Midwest Furfest.

Folklore though is resituated by popular culture. Frank De Caro and Rosan Jordan have defined “re-situating” folklore as “the detaching of folklore from its folk context by an author/creator and resituating it into the context of their work” (2004:8, see also Koven 2003). Furries are inspired from popular culture. Popular culture may make use of anthropomorphic characters from folklore and inspire furries to take these folklore elements into the designing of their fursona and art. It is important to keep this idea in mind in how furries construct their identities and how they share and express the anthropomorphic. For this reason furry art is often an individual creation. This makes the fandom also unique, as its market has a great deal of power to create revenue separate
from a popular media market. For example homemade fursuits are commissioned for hundreds of dollars.

The furry fandom also is very muddled as there are many groups that compromise the furry network. Local groups and groups online may have expressive forms or be interested in different parts of the fandom from one another. For example some furries may only be interested in an anthropomorphic character from popular comics or video game characters while others may enjoy mythological creatures or the philosophical arguments of *The Island of Dr. Moreau*. Popular artists interact with the fandom as a main audience and many furries may eventually through developing a following in the fandom, become popular artists themselves. In the case of furries tied to popular culture, and to the elite art world, such furries take on status in the furry community. These furries are referred to as *pop* or *pop* furries in the fandom. Furries may make their fursona into a commodity as they seek art, stories, or a fursuit of their fursona from commissioners in the network. These *pop* furries are often sought the most for commissions. Furries place a lot of value on these commissions from *pop* furries. Exchanging commissioned gifts by members of a network can be based on the values of coming from a *pop* furry. Gifts and commissioned art may also involve depicting one’s fursona with *pop* furries.

Walter Benjamin’s thoughts on mechanical reproduction also fit well with digital market economies ([1936]2001:58). The digital reproduction of an original may seem to lose the original’s aura in mass media but when the commodity is the self or an expression of self then this opens new doors important to furry studies. The market for art of fursonas and fursuits brings into question what is valued in terms of both aesthetics and process. Art creation of course does not have to involve commodification. According
to Michael Owen Jones, art creation includes preoccupation with the sensory, ideational, and instrumental; associations with place, people, and a particular period of time; identity formation, clarification, and reconstruction; and therapeutic benefits that sometimes attend the processes of individuals' grieving over a loss, coping with emotional trauma, or attempting to adjust to changes in their lives (1995:371). Jones’ approaches to art creation are excellent places to explore the creation of furry identity and art.

There has been little work done on furries, although the amount has slowly been growing since I started my first research project. The most well-known work, *Furries from A to Z Anthropomorphism to Zoomorphism*, is by social psychologist Cathleen Gerbsai and colleagues. It is survey work done at the furry convention, Anthrocon. The survey reveals that the majority of survey takers were male and heterosexual. The heterosexual part disproves a common misconception that most furries are homosexual. She also found the “commonly named species were: fox or fox combinations (20.6 percent), wolf or wolf combinations (17.6 percent), dragon or dragon combinations (10 percent), or tiger or tiger combinations (6 percent)” (Gerbasi 2007:11-2). Gerbasi does propose that some furries may have what she defines as species identity disorder. This comes from two questions, “do furries consider themselves one-hundred percent human,” and “would they be zero percent human if possible” (2007:2, 21-4). Cultural context and other possible variation in data is not considered by these surveys. Gerbasi has redone this survey several times. She realizes the convention limits her population, and that as it is a more public space where her presence could have resulted in not everyone answering honestly. From my experience Gerbasi’s gender survey did not match my Manhattan
fieldwork project as a majority of members were female, but does match my interaction amongst the Bowling Green population.

Sherry A. Jeansonne, a sociology graduate at San Marcos Texas State University, wrote a thesis on furries. She did fieldwork also pertaining to fursona creation at a local furry meet in her area. She primarily concentrated on space use and animals chosen as a fursona. She found that fursonas help furries “get out of their box” and allow many to be outgoing, much as I have begun to discover. At the meets she observed, the fursona types matched Gerbasi’s survey results. Jeansonne’s too found that women were most likely to choose cats and men, dogs. She also finds that many choose the animal based on the folklore elements ascribed to an animal, for example wolves being loyal to packs, foxes being tricksters, dogs being playful, etc. (2012:51-60). She touches on the stigma of furries found in the media and furries strategies for dealing with the issues of stigma. Furries took two approaches to dealing with stigma. One approach is wanting to set the stigma straight (explain what furries actually do) the other is ignoring stigma (2012:64). She also concludes that “Although furries argue that being a furry is not something they do, it is something they are; sociologically we can say that becoming a furry is a social construction” (2012:68). Some furries I have worked with would argue against this statement as some furries see the fandom as something they do, thus putting less emphasis on their fursonas than other furries. Basically they see the fandom as a hobby and really care about fursonas. A majority of Bowling Green furries do put emphasis on their fursona’s expression in the fandom.

I have only found one brief reference to furries by folklorists. Martha Sims and Martine Stephens, in their introductory text book Living Folklore, do mention furries in
the chapter on folk group as an example of the difficulty of folk group (how an individual connects with a group and these with a larger network of individuals that are not part of the group) which I have touched on earlier (2011:43-44).

Musicologist graduate Palmer Curtis, a furry, wrote his thesis on an orchestral piece called *The Forgotten Races*. The musical piece is about anthropomorphic races coming together. Curtis brings up “The thing that most furry fans do agree on is that some artistic medium with these anthropomorphic characters as a subject, such as a cartoon show or a comic book, touched them on an emotional level at some point. This inexplicable yet inexorable yearning made them seek out more material of like kind, and led eventually to acquaintances with other people with similar interests” (2005:5). This shows part of the network process. This also covers a yearning of collectiveness of difference species common in 1970s anthropomorphic science fiction novels as brought up by Sherryl Vint.

Heidi J. Nast, in her *Loving....Whatever: Alienation, Neoliberalism and Pet-Love in the Twenty-First Century*, reviews the fandom and uses preexisting media interviews and explanations of the fandom from web pages to discuss how people relate to animals. She concludes on the fandom:

Furry fandom activities make all animals into pets. Their activities also shed light into how the “realness” of pets is in some contexts incidental to the psychical investments that pets as objects or screens are made to hold. In the case of FF, humans can *become* pets, this transmogrification apparently being needed in order to facilitate human contact, sociality, and love.” (2006:320)
This ties into agency and the needs for furries to network and meet one another in a society of Karl Marx’s *Entfernung* (alienation). Marx argues that capitalist society entraps the individual as a social working unit. The work environment separates the worker physically and temporally from being themselves and from other people (Marx [1844]1964:13-16). It also separates people from a natural environment. By using internet technology furries can counter being isolated by work environments and enjoy a hobby that expresses self, “other,” and nature.

Research on the relationships between animals and humans are important for this study. Research on even fictional relationships is important as an agent of enculturation. John Berger, in *Why Look at Animals*, argues about changes in animal human relationships. “In the last two centuries, animals have gradually disappeared. Today we live without them. And in this new solitude, anthropomorphism makes us doubly uneasy” (Berger 2009:9). We have shared the world with animals and their loss does impress the mind. “The animals of the mind, instead of being dispersed, have been co-opted into other categories so that the category animal has lost its central importance. Mostly they have been co-opted into the family and into the spectacle” (Berger 2009:13). The animal is thus lost from our gaze. By animal Berger is mainly referring to how the wild animal is lost from our gaze in the urban environment therefore this does not apply to everyone. I also find that the domestic farm animals are lost, or at least hidden from our urban environment. The corporate farms, feeds lots, and habitat destruction have removed animals even from our rural environments.

The science fiction of the 70s often depicted animals (and anthropomorphic characters) and humans living together. Even today the science fiction imagination brings
work, play, and more to its representations of human/animal engagements (Vint 2008:185 and 321). “They [science fiction authors] also acknowledge, challenge, and ultimately reject the ideological systems that maintain and perpetuate nature/culture, animal/human-animal dichotomies and the biases thus created and observed” (Yampbell 2008:220). Many young adult science fiction works have themes on animal human relationships and this may enculturate readers (Yampbell 2008:220). Furries’ enjoyment of anthropomorphism stems from the media that they enjoy. The history of the fandom too is tied to the 1970s science fiction fandom.

Masahiro Mori, in his classic article “The Uncanny Valley,” provides a model of anthropomorphism in its relationship to humanity. The uncanny valley is the divide between humans and something non-human. If it is human like, but not enough it causes revulsion. If it is very human like it is respected (Mori 1970:3-5). Anthropomorphic animals take on this space of being sacred or profane depending on cultural values. To the individual furry they may be sacred as animals may tie to personal, religious, or spiritual beliefs. As there is no preexisting construct for the outsider many place the furry as a deviant. Animals to our minds often fill both of these categories. The Kitsuné for example is both a servant of the harvest god Inari and a trickster Yōkai (Nozaki 1961:7-15). The Uncanny Valley and concept of the sacred and profane is important in understanding stigma between furries and outside groups.

Uncanny things are often associated with others and thus stigmatized. Erving Goffman’s work on stigma of course must be mentioned as it is essential in establishing what is meant by stigma in this thesis. To Goffman there are three categories of stigma. The first is
“overt or external deformities” (disease and deformities), Deviations in personal traits (mental illness and criminal actions) and “Tribal Stigmas” which are traits that can be imagined or real that deviate from the dominate preserved norm of religion, nationality, and ethnicity (Goffman 1963:2). Goffman “saw stigma as an attribute that is “deeply discrediting” and that reduces the bearer “from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one” (Goldstein and Shuman 2012:115). Basically the stigmatized person is marked as undesirable. His concept of stigma is based in the concept of the discredited and discreditable. The discredited are those belong to a stigmatized group. The discreditable are those who may be victimized by stigmatization, but heir stigma is not immediately obvious but might be discerned with others (Goldstein and Shuman 2012:115).

Folklorists too have done work on the concept of stigma. Diane Goldstein and Amy Shuman, in “The Stigmatized Vernacular,” review folklore case studies of what they define as stigmatized vernacular. Goldstein and Shuman find “different, unfamiliar, and terrifying situations are multiply stigmatized as not only barbaric but also as not-credible, as beyond the pale of the possible, as hypervisible but not recognizable” (2012:119). The uncanniness of anthropomorphism certainly can create or feed into situations of stigma. For example fursuits can be terrifying, unfamiliar, and different.

The concept of tellability explored by Goldstein and Shuman also plays into how things are stigmatized. Tellability is someone’s ability and right to tell a story in a social situation. “Tellability addresses audience expectations, news worthiness, uniqueness, relevance, importance, and humor but also and perhaps just as centrally appropriateness, contextualization, negotiation, mediation, and entitlement” (Goldstein and Shuman 2012:115).
Furries feel they are often misrepresented by media. Tellability and one’s “competence” gives one authority. How this ties into the furry stigma and the furries own values is important. There have been several cases where media (Vanity Fair, Taboo, and Dr. Phil) have done interviews with furries, selecting individuals for shock value (Nast 2006:319-20). Furries argue for who should best represent the fandom and argue that the media finds extreme and eccentric individuals who do not represent the majority. This is an issue for furries as there is such diverse interest in anthropomorphism in the fandom.

Goldstein and Shuman paraphrase Harold Garfinkel, “stigma and its opposite—that which is considered ‘normal’—always invoke a relationship between the tellable and the untellable” (2012:120). It is also important to realize the invisibility and visibility of the subject stigmatized (Goldstein and Shuman 2012:121). Furries have an online presence usually unknown to the everyday populace, but through meets and suit performance they can enter visible spheres. Silence though is also something to be explored. Most fursuit wearers are silent as it is part of “making the magic” and this too can play in stigmatization as silent people dressed as animals is an uncanny image and cannot answer to people’s confusion and possible fear.

Cultural identity and stigma often feed to one another. Folklorist Daniel Wojcik, in his work on punks, Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art, addressed important issues of cultural identity (1995). Despite the fact that that they are separate cultural movements, the furry and punk moments have similar emphasis on self-identity tied to a self-created aesthetic. This self-created aesthetic, though, usually exists as part of a larger communal spirit or perceived image amongst individuals. Wojcik found that punks’ aesthetics annoy, get in your face, and horrify. They also demonstrate a do-it-yourself mentality.
The goal for punks is to express one’s own social identity against cultural norms (1995:5). The punk movement shares with furries an origin in counter cultural movements based in popular culture. In the case of punks it came out of the punk music movements instead of literature (1995:20). Much like punks, many furries also see themselves as artists (1995:15).

Another important similarity to punk culture became stigmatized with sexual deviance and amorality like furry culture (1995:30). Furries often take on their stigma by appropriating it with exaggerated jokes with each other. For example they may make jokes about sexually deviant characters or funny memes depicting what furries do not want to be associated with. Fursuits and furry activities are based in fun and not the direct social shock factor of punk culture. The furry movement also is quite the opposite of punk culture in issues of aesthetic representations and public view. Furries see their culture as being associated with togetherness, helping one another, and warm feelings instead of the anarchy and future-less expressions found in punk society. These positive traits are what furries express for public view and why many furry activities involve charity and donation events.

There are also two important elements Wojick brings up. One is his concept of Neo-tribalism. This concept is usually associated with nonwestern aesthetics becoming a part of a cultural movement, usually self-made, and taking on qualities of what is perceived as the primitive (35). Most furries do not engage in body modification, but animal costuming does contain a mythic quality that instantly fits a “primitive image” in the mind of the observer. Some furries do play into this concept, while others not as much. This is not to say there are not overlaps between furries and punk culture. Some
punks may be furries, although none of my informants are part of the punk movement to my knowledge. Furries may share values on shocking “others” and may use similar aesthetics to punk culture such as collars. Extreme Furries may also invoke body modifications to gain qualities of their fursona, but none of my informants do this to my knowledge. The second concept is Wojick’s observations of punk becoming a part of the mainstream as tapped in by companies and media. This is the resituating of folklore from media and cycling back again. The furry movement is growing and furry is becoming more complex allowing for more possible conflicts of what constitutes a furry and who has rights to furry tellability. Already there are products directed at furries despite the fact that many furries do create their materials themselves and these products and their companies are growing. I did not see any conflict between furries on who has the right to tell a story in my fieldwork, but took note of a few changes in the two years since the Manhattan research.

Stigma often stems from fursuits. Fursuiting usually involves wearing suits in a “invasion” of public space and doing a façade performance. Dorothy Noyes, in a “Façade Performances: Public Face, Private Mask,” defines façade performance as “performances in front of or penetrating the façade may validate or challenge that self-representation” and “Façade performances call attention to the enclosure in private space.” They also “call attention to the enclosure in private space of such things as wealth, female sexuality, institutional power, and autonomous selfhood” (1995:91). The fursuit performance takes on these aspects in their representation of self, species, sometimes gender, and use of space. “Masqueraders claim to speak for the community at large: broader community is often an external audience judging between the two performances. They can compete,
collaborate or ultimately merge” (Noyes 1995:92). Fursuit performances invade the public space and are façade performances that bring the private and the animal into the human world allowing for that border between animal and human, sacred and profane to blur in absurd antics.

Play is heavily involved in façade performance. It involves acting like an animal, messing around with objects and the onlookers in animal like wonder. Johan Huizinga, starts his book, *Homo Ludens*, with an argument that “play is older than culture” and follows his argument later with “animals play just like men.” He continues “in play there is something “at play” which transcends the immediate needs of life and imparts meaning to the action” (1971:1). In his chapter on play in contemporary civilization he argues that in his contemporary culture “the spirit of the professional is no longer the true play-spirit; it is lacking in spontaneity and carelessness” (Huizinga 1971:197). Western society forces play into alienation and market competition. The façade performance allows furries at meets to cut back and have fun exploring territory of the anthropomorphic and what it means to be human. In acting like animals, fursuit performers take on spontaneity and an appearance sometimes of carefreeness. Besides the need of a fursuit there is an appearance of everyone can play and be a performer as there is not much to it. The clowning around in a suit just needs silence and a fursuit. The suit also does not discriminate to age, religion, gender, skin color, etc. This will be explored further in the section on furry performance.

Façade performance also separates the everyday from the performance. These performances help create narrative. Katherine Young’s concept of the taleworld and the story realm is a model that shows narrative processes. The story realm is the contextual
situation in which a story is told. The tale world is the events, characters, and settings that transpire in the narrative (Shuman 2005:8). Façade performance is a tale world that invades the public space allowing for overlap of tale world and story realm. Roleplaying also is overlap of story realm and taleworld where the tale tellers create their stories collaboratively and perpetuate later narrative through their experiences. This perspective shows the complexity of narrative in furry stories and performance.

The furry fandom is again a complex network of individuals who share a love of anthropomorphic characters. Play and art both are important aspects of this fandom. In looking at the fandom from a folkloristic perspective we can learn a lot about the individual, art, and how we shape the new tradition. The research reviewed in this intro helps serve as a base for this thesis’s chapters. To look at furry culture next we must look at the context of people and place.
Chapter 1: Context: History, People, Place

This chapter reviews the history of the furry fandom, my previous Kansas Project, Manhattan project, and then the Bowling Green group. I then compare use of space and furry activities done between the groups I have studied.

History

To understand the furry subculture we must first understand the furry fandom as a realm with its own unique elements. The furry fandom is complex for two reasons. The first is that it is distinct from other fandoms as it is a fandom based on a concept instead of a particular media such as *Star Wars* or *Lord of the Rings* fans. One can perceive this as more generally being attracted to the notion of anthropomorphism, but the enjoyment of anthropomorphism does not make someone a furry. This becomes a matter of personal choice and how someone identifies via subcultures as tied to the dominant culture. The second complexity is that there are many different ways and reasons people join and identify with the fandom. In this regard the fandom consists of a wide variety of groups and networks mainly connected through online means. The fursonas also make the fandom unique as it becomes a basis for one’s identity between these networks and often an expression of self. Furries through their fursona get to create their own traditions independent of popular culture. Even if furries are inspired by popular culture their creations are not based in it. Their fursonas, fursuit performance, fursuits, and fursona art is their creation. These are the traditions that are independent of popular culture. Other fandom creations depend upon the fandom itself. Due to its online nature and the seeming ubiquity of anthropomorphism in human cultures furries exist in many parts of the world with regional specifics attached to the overall ideal of furry culture.
Despite human-animal creatures having been part of our imagination for many years, the fandom developed out of the science fiction and fantasy fandoms of the 70s and 80s (Patton [1996] 2012 and Nast 2006:316). Stories have always been populated with a wide degree of non-human fantastic creatures. This fandom also developed during this era due to the underground comic movement making use of the funny animal genre and inverting it for shock value. In this case anthropomorphic characters would take on more serious and realistic stories like *Maus*. The modern fandom developed from these older fan movements dedicated to these characters. The word “furry” was first used at a science fiction convention to describe Steve Gallacci’s anthropomorphic anthology comic *Albedo*, which had very serious themes (Patton [1996] 2012). This and other similar discussion at conventions would eventually lead to the 1989 Confurence convention, the first convention based directly on anthropomorphic characters (Patton [1996] 2012).

The earlier science fiction literary fandom is important as the genre was not popular and was rarely seen as literature by the masses. Fans and authors were often connected through a network of written communication, published fanzines, and conventions. This network eventually would move online with the development of networking technologies (Flemming 1977:263-71). The custom-kit computers of the late 70s and 80s allowed for personal representation and faster sharing in fandom. This growth of computer technologies in relationship to fandom is also important as it overlaps with the advent of tabletop roleplaying games. Roleplaying could be now done online in massive MUCKs (Multi User Chat Clients usually webpage or custom servers used for roleplaying before instant messaging) (Howard 2012:43). One could role-play any setting or character one wanted to with any roleplaying system, whether produced

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4 Spelled correctly, many furry conventions are named with puns in mind.
media or homebrewed. This development would set as a predecessor for online avatars and character creation as tied to fandom and online presence.

The removal of what was known as the comic code authority in the 1980s allowed for serious anthropomorphic comics to enter into the main stream. The comic code authority was a code agreed to by the comics industry put in place in 1954. This code put restrictions on what could be in comics (Hajdu 2008: 92-103). The underground comic supported art forms and genres that contained material that had been acceptable before the development of this code. This included producing comics with more extreme content to push boundaries and ideas. New emergent anthropomorphic materials thus became part of the popular culture and spawned additional media (cartoons, movies, video games, etc.) for the enculturation of the later generation. At the same time this code’s removal allowed for Japanese manga (comic books) and anime (animation) with its folklore and Kemono (beast people) to enter the United States more easily.

There is a difference in generation of furries. Individuals of the earlier period may not consider themselves a part of the modern fandom and may not be concerned with things such as the fursona identity. If they are involved in the current furry scene, they may be seen as pop furries (furries with popular or celebrity status). Many furries also enter due to the popular culture media they are familiar with. They often do not know the fandom’s history or have familiarity with older media associated with the fandom. Furries of this earlier generation are usually in their forties or older. The Younger furries that I have ran into are usually fourteen to twenty years old. There certainty is inspiration from older members along with the media new and old that that perpetuates the fandoms growth along with artistic traditions.
Stigma

Before I had done any research and met my friend and role-play informant Sam I was well aware of the stigma associated with the fandom. I have always enjoyed anthropomorphic characters in fiction. I first found the fandom back in 2004. When looking for a mod (fan-made add-ons to videogames) for the videogame **Command and Conquer Renegade**, I found a mod that made all the human characters anthropomorphic animals. I thought this mod was very cool. This mod declared itself a furry mod. I had no idea what this meant and led to a google search resulting in pornographic materials and odd people dressed as animals (some actual furries and others satires or parodies). This was before a good furry Wikipedia page existed. I was also quite young just starting high school at the time. The search results and people’s accounts of what a furry was on the internet turned me off from getting to know the fandom. It was not until meeting Sam that I got to understand the stigma and depth of the fandom. For both my Manhattan and role-play project I had openings into the group through knowing my informant Mr.G. (I didn’t know he was furry until finding the group in Manhattan) and Sam beforehand. There still was uneasiness, but most seemed to be happy to have someone to do research, listening to their perspective and helping “set the record straight.” The Bowling Green group was less receptive. Most members did not mind me attending and taking notes or asking a random question, but were not willing to do interviews. One individual was also not open to the project.

Joan Lopes’s study, in **Culture and Stigma: Popular Culture and the Case of Comic Books**, discussed how fandom is stigmatized. This is useful as furries are
stigmatized. “A stigmatized person's social identity is discredited by the power of a single attribute, such as being visually impaired or a drug user. Individuals may be viewed as deserving of some kind of intervention” (2006:387). Stigmas thus become stereotypes attributed through social processes (390). Lopes develops eight points with reference to stigma:

1) Stigma can attach to various social objects, including both forms and practitioners.

2) Stigma can be global or more specific to genres, styles, or social roles.

3) Stigmatization is a processes of discrediting forms and practitioners and making them problematic.

4) Stigma usually implies potential harm or pathology.

5) Stigma can lead to various forms of intervention.

6) Stigma elicits defensive claims, stigma management, or alternative theories.

7) Both stigma and stigma management can affect the development of a cultural form.

8) Stigma theories can change over time. (391-92).

Lopes also argues the comic code authority made comic genres stigmatized. The comic market became stifled with way too few genres. Many genres were taken out of circulation. These lost genres (horror, science fiction, fantasy) found their niche in the underground market. After the end of the code, despite the return of these genres, comics became associated with a small culture whose stigmatization only was amplified by the return of darker and disturbing genres such as horror, romance, and science fiction which
were originally acceptable before the code (2006:402). Stigmatization also needs to be considered in the sense of fandom.

Furry stigma is based in the stereotype that furries are sexually deviant or have a mental disorder. Usually the idea is that furries are into bestiality and their activities are based on sexual behavior. In Goffman’s terms furries are thus in the deviant category. Fursuits serve as a marker of this deviance in the eyes of the person of the everyday norm. This has been the way furries have been portrayed in popular media and on the internet. This is important as furries are not stigmatized in relationship to nationality, religion, or ethnicity, but due to their hobbies. Individuals are seen to represent the whole. A lot of the stigma takes place online or is based on online activities that may not be tied to the fandom. Online it is difficult to determine someone’s nationality, ethnicity, and religion online it is interesting to see that online groups are basing stigmas on things associated with hobby and fandom. The ripping of images out of their context of both art and conversation for humorous purposes may aid in this process.

In my conversation with furries on the fandom and representation, they all mentioned this stigma. Furries also sometimes used catch phrases in their narratives to avoid this sexual stigma (I don’t look at Yiff, it wasn’t one of those websites, I’m a furry, but not like that). Also for example Mr. G. explained how he was unsettled by the furry porn on the internet in his “finding” the fandom story. Narrative is thus used to shape a furry as being situated correctly within the fandom and not a deviant even to other furries.

The uncanniness of fursuits also plays heavily into this stigma. This uncanniness is perceived both in and out of fandom. Most furries do not have fursuits and several of my interviews either expressed complete dislike or unsureness if they actually wanted
one. Fursuits are the most perceived aspect of the fandom as they invade space. To the outsider it marks the suit wearer as a furry, and they may not pay attention that there are other furries without suits nearby. On top of this stigma, furries place judgment on each other based on representation to the public. Humor about what “not to do” helps reinforce an image the furries want to be seen as. This humor serves to prevent the tarnishing of furry culture due to the pre-established stigma. This humor also includes the stigma of furry dysphoria (mental illness) within the fandom. To most furries being furry is akin to fandom and a hobby. Stigma includes that they are furry because they are unhappy with their lives seeking and believing they have an animal identity instead of a human one. Furries also take the stigma and make personal jokes about sexual deviance. And lastly furries also must deal with the more general overlap of fandom and the anthropomorphic, such as the overlap with the new My Little Pony Fandom (aptly named Bronies as the shows modern incarnated fandom apparently has an adult male following). Here are two fan groups that have sexual deviance as a stigma and are placing it on each other despite their similar characteristics (both being fan groups to anthropomorphic characters).

The meets and convention in Manhattan were closed and rarely invaded public space. The furries in Bowling Green at parks and restaurants did activities. They did not have anything easily visible that marked them as furries. The park had many activities not considered “normal” recreation such as the boffing group ((fighting with foam weapons)) which had people wearing tails and a Society for Creative Anachronism group. I accidently mistook these tail wearers as furries led to my own embarrassment.
Nonetheless these groups nearby bring less spectacle to the furry group in Bowling Green. In concern of the Roleplaying group project I can only speak from the interviews.

There was one national event however that transpired involving furry stigma. It also took place on the day the Bowling Green furries had a furry meet. At Central Midwest Furfest (not to be confused with the Central Midwest Furmeet convention), a furry convention in Chicago, the convention center had to be evacuated and nineteen furries were sent to the hospital. This was the result of chlorine gas which investigators traced to a glass container. Investigators said the chlorine was released intentionally (Chachkevitch and Ziezulewicz, 2014). This event was covered by many news stations and online. There has been no follow up story to this event that I have seen.

The issue here is the story did not rest on the attack, but on the furries themselves. Newscaster Mika Brzezinski and colleagues when presenting the story for MSNBC could barely get through the story, Brzezinski herself having to leave due to her fits of laughter5. This is an issue of tellability. Fursuits are an odd spectacle and the preexisting stigmas about furries stopped the media from getting at the issues at hand (the attack). A near terrorist attack has taken place on a fandom, almost an absurdity in its own right. The Kentucky forum had a single board discussing if everyone was ok as members had attended the Chicago meet. The message box was also used for prayers, thoughts, and feelings (accessed 12/7/14). At the Bowling Green meet this has come up a couple of times. The local furries did not know anyone attending the event; they reflected on the poor coverage of the media, wondered about the attacker, and discussed the absurdity of the fandom being attacked by someone.

5 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp76cHN2FDU accessed 2/25/15
This categorizing and application of stigma from Goffman’s terms is interesting in concern of online relationships versus the activities done by the group offline. Fandom is personal, it is not visible to the outsider unless they have knowledge and know what to look for. These groups are not openly visible to the outsider and thus outsiders may only have the online stigma to place their judgments on. Furries wearing suits make themselves visible, but the outsider usually doesn’t have context in-which to engage with the silent fursuit performer. As usual stereotypes can be real and imaginary. The dialogue of identity through online communication is an interesting phenomenon of fandom groups. To know a group, we must get to meet and know the people who make up them.

**First Project: Manhattan Kansas Group**

This is the third project I have worked on concerning the fandom. I had originally come across the fandom ten years ago by accident in the form of a video game modification. The premise was interesting, but confusing due to the mixed information I found online about furries. It was years later that I become friends with several members of the fandom that understanding and misconceptions came into focus. My first project with the fandom took place in 2012 with Manhattan, Kansas, group ASK (Anthropomorphic Society of Kansas State). This group at Kansas State was campus based and an official school group. The group was in its third year of existence when I worked with them. The group is now defunct and is no longer registered since the
students who comprised the original group left and no one stepped up to take the place of the second president.

The group usually met every Thursday night starting at 8:00 and ending about 10:00 pm. The meet actives cycled through a weekly schedule. The nights were broken down to an art night (working, sharing, and critiquing artistic projects, including fursuits), game night (playing computer and board games), movie night, and auxiliary night (picnicking, going out to parks, charity events, going to the pool, and other activities off campus). The group was close-knit and the club served as a place to get out and have fun. Furries also would use this time to help each other; for example, one of my informants spent a game night fixing another member’s computer. Members would often wear fursuits or ear and tails at these meetings. There were fourteen members of this group, though four were rarely present. Two members owned fursuits and were also suit makers. Interviews conducted in this research suggested that these furries did not suffer from a species dysphoria, and used their fursonas as a pretext for fun and play.

With ASK I also attended Central Furry Meet (a convention), a furry meet now defunct, as it had been run by the original founder of ASK. There were twenty-five members at the event. Twelve wore fursuits, though many more wore furry accessories. The meet was also a campout and not an indoor meet. The event cost forty-five dollars and was for two nights. Dinner and lunch were made by convention staff. The meet included a raffle, fursuit photo shoot, a game room, and many fursuit performances. The photo shoot was for furries wearing suit.

I also ran a tabletop role-playing game tutorial during the convention as I was asked by Mr. G., president, and organizer of the event. I later was asked to do this for
one of the game nights. Roleplaying was not part of my original research scope. Most furries actually had not played a tabletop roleplaying game before, either at this convention or at the meets. I did not inquire though into online roleplaying experience. Mr. G. and another man to my knowledge began hosting their own tabletop roleplaying games independent of meets after this tutorial.

In my interview with the convention, most attendees had only discovered the fandom within a year, much like the ASK group. Of note was a CMF attendee who was in his sixties. What was interesting was that he too had only recently found the fandom within the year, like many of the furries I had interviewed for the project. Most of the attendees too seemed to also use their fursonas in ways similar to the ASK group. This project was primarily looking at defining furries and what they do from an anthropological perspective.

Second Project: Online Role-play Group

The second project was done in spring of 2014. It involved online interviews with eight individuals. These individuals with one exception were all online role-players. There also was an extra interview with a furry, Bella, who was not a part of this group, but interested in having an interview, when I originally was looking for informants. Online roleplaying falls into two forms. One is group roleplaying mostly done through a client like Second Life or a MUCK and usually in a predetermined setting. In these cases furries would build characters for the online world. If they wanted to use their fursonas, their fursona’s expression was limited by the setting and client. The other role-play form, which is more common, is personal roleplaying. Personal role-plays are often done out
of boredom to pass time or for building a shared personal story. This is usually done one-
on-one online.

The project’s purpose was to look at how belief played into being a furry. My hypothesis was to examine the reasons why people selected their fursonas and how much spiritual and religious belief was involved with animals and fursona construction. With three exceptions, the furries did not find any religious or spiritual connection with their fursona. Sam felt that there was a social connection for his fursona that served as a reminder for his goals (going to the gym and getting out and meeting people) (Sam 2014). All furries I talked with in this interview actually used their fursona in this manner. Allen felt there was a spiritual connection to his fursona. To Allen, his fursona represented him in his dreams and found these dreams have special meaning in his life (Allen interview 2014). Along with being a furry, Kella was also a therian. As a therian she believed that a part of her soul was part fox. This animal part expresses itself when she is stressed or angry (Kella 2014). For the most part religion and spirituality have nothing to do with furries.

I also learned some things about furries as tied to the furry network. Only my informant Helena had a fursuit. It was during this project where I learned that many furries don’t want a fursuit and have different aesthetic values in concern with fursuits and their relationship with stigma. I will touch on this later. Only three out of the eight furries had attended a larger con, though most wanted to. I also did not get a sense of intense identification from these furries in relations to their fursona. It should be understood that Kella separated her therian identity from her furry one. There is overlap,
but to Kella being a therian is separate from the furry fandom which she sees as a fandom. Still, it can easily be seen why therian and furries could easily go together.

Again, the role-play group project concentrated on furry belief in regard to their fursona. For the most part most furries did not find any spiritual or religious connection to their fursona. Instead furries use fursonas as a means to express themselves through art, performance, and to have fun. They also use their fursonas to set goals for themselves (a reminder to go to the gym or get out more). Certainly the furries of this group found their fursona helped them form goals or were outlets to have fun. I feel that personal expression and belief is important in fursona making. Primiano defines vernacular religion as “inner experience and perception of the believer” and what is “personal and private” (1995:40 and 43). This of course is too broad an application for Primiano’s definition of religion, but I feel that fursonas are private and are made from personal beliefs of their creators. To the furries of this group fursonas are productions of their personal and private lives to whatever individual degree they are revealed to the public. As an expression of vernacular belief fursonas are fascinating as examples of human creativity and self-expression.

There is always suspension of belief in roleplaying. Much like acting on a stage the other players need to ignore reality to a certain degree to act their parts. Roleplaying belief in some ways always does tie into identity, religious and spiritual disposition, but the extent is based on the individual. I will explore this later in the roleplaying section.

Third Project: Bowling Green Furry Group
For this thesis project I have been working with a Bowling Green, Kentucky, furry group. The group plans its meetings on the private forum *Kentucky Furries*. Their meetings are once a month. According to my interviewees, they rarely use the forums except to look up meets and other events. These furries do not have administrative or moderator status on the forums. The forum is set up in different sections. The forum sections are as follows: News and Rules, Introductions (for introducing yourself to the forum community), Meetings, General Discussion , The Menagerie (*Kentucky Furries’* place for their official meet, this location is open to change), Art and Stuff, Role Playing (mostly used to find physical table-top roleplaying groups), For Sale (place for selling furry art), Ideas! And Help, Site Governance, and Photos. There are also two adults’-only sections (Adults only and Personals) which need identity verification. There is also a Shout Box. The shout box is mostly used to say hello and for birthday announcements.

Figure 1: Screenshot of Kentucky Furries Forum taken January 19, 2014 (boxes edited out for privacy).
I have not used the forum much except to be aware of Bowling Green meets. A majority of furries on the forum seem to be from Lexington or Nashville. Furries attending the Bowling Green meet usually are local or from Glasgow. The Bowling Green group is in its second year of activities. The group had an age range from eighteen to twenty-nine. The average age was twenty-one. The only furry older than twenty-one was the twenty-nine year old. Some members of the Bowling Green group have been members of the forum for many years and others joined recently. The activity of the meet determines the furries who show up. Meets for this reason can range in size and dynamics. Bowling Green meets are planned by my informant Dylan, a dragon who founded the Bowling Green Group. He posts plans for the next group meet the night after the previous meeting date. He usually takes a democratic approach, allowing members to vote on what they would like to do with an idea or premise involved. After this phase, usually taking a week, the date, time, and location is posted in the forum.

First impressions can play a lot on the imagination. I mention this, as when looking at the forum for the plans of the first meet, all I had to go by at first was the avatars of my informants. There were fourteen attendees at the meet. From the planning page I got my first glimpse of eight of these individuals. One individual has requested to be left out of this research so will not be mentioned. It is also to be noted that online avatars are open to change, but my observation is that an individual’s first avatar identity one sees tends to stick with them and it can be confusing when an avatar changes.

I will now discuss these avatars. At the top of the meet planning page was a blue smiling cartoon dragon that seemed very welcoming with its cartoon wide eyes. This avatar belonged to Dylan. Next was the avatar belonging to Max, a lion. The
anthropomorphic lion squinted through protective eye glasses, in a standard modern US military dress, leaning into a rifle, boonie hat squared down on his head. This gave me an impression that Dylan was very serious and also a member of the military. He supports our military, but did not join and in the flesh he is a jovial large man with glasses. Samson’s avatar had a black cat with white ear tips, white messy hair, and his tongue sticking out disapprovingly. If anything, the avatar does capture Samson’s joking and carefree personality. I often got Samson confused with Alan whose fursona was a white cat done in similar style. Devin is a dragon. His avatar was done in a less cartoony style. Then there was Ed whose avatar was a shirtless maned wolf, smiling at the looker, dog tags around his neck. These dog tags he also wears in real life, they are blank and not a representation of military status. Sticking out too was Nana, whose choice was a unicorn cat, grey furred with long black hair. Her avatar sports black glasses and a multicolored horn in the center of her forehead. She also wore a gold cross around her neck. Her Christianity is an important aspect of her life, and is expressed in her fursona. Her fursona wears a cross even in the forum avatar. Out of the avatars of the furry group this one was the most unique. Last there was Kevin. Kevin’s avatar is a wolf. Black-and-orange furred he sits, mouth open in happy greeting. He was very open, inviting, and talkative on the forum, while at the meets he was usually very quiet.

What follows next is a short rundown of the meets that have taken place during this thesis based on my field notes. Afterwards I will then break down my observations. All meets ran from 3:00 to 8:00 PM unless extra travel was necessary.

1. The first meet was 7 September 2014 at 3:00pm-8:00pm. The meet started at Ichiban on 1423 US 31.W Bypass. Here members ate, but did not talk. The
meet then moved to Spero Kereiakes Park where the group introduced each other.
I was surprised by the lack of furry accessories. Only two group members Ed and
Kevin wore tails. The group sat around and talked and shared internet humor,
fursonas, and furry art through their handheld devices. I was also confused upon
arriving at the park due to a boffing group which had a member wearing a tail.
Dylan was also happy at this was the largest meet he had organized. The meet ended with a group photo.

2. Meet 3 October 2011 was held at Spiro Kereiakes Park. Ed and Gina bought pizza for the group. Ed and Gina also brought their dogs. Members talked, played Gameboy, shared furry art and humor through their electronics, and played disc golf. A Kentucky Furry administrator also visited from Alabama. Devin also brought his Chain Mail to share. Also taking place at the same time in the park was the boffing group and a Society for Creative Anachronism practice.

3. Meet 2 November 2014 meet I could not attend due to a conference. The original plan for this meet was to play laser tag in Tennessee. Instead the group went to the park.

4. Meet 7 October: The group ate and Wendy’s and went bowling.

5. 8 January 2014: I was ill and didn’t attend. The group went to laser tag in Hendersonville, Tennessee.

6. Meet 1 February 2015: The group met at a restaurant, Chedaers and then played board and card games at a local game store.
7. Meet 1 March 2014: The group met at Ed and Gina’s house. Here the group played video games, card games, ate pizza, and shared furry art and humor through digital devices.

The first thing that I observed was what seemed to be an apparent lack of anthropomorphic expression in the Bowling Green group. Three of the members wore what I call partial tails. These tails are inconspicuous compared to tails normally worn by furries. They usually aren’t worn at the center of one’s pants, but on the side giving it an illusion that it is an overly large tail like key chain. I also began to pick up that certain furries would wear clothes that had animals on it, depicted their fursona’s animal, or had furry related imagery on it (mostly convention shirts or furry pride shirts). During the Cheddar meet Kevin once opened his coat to reveal a furry badge he commissioned he wanted to share with everyone. Wearing this furry material mostly served so new attendees from the forum could find the furry group at a meet.

There also were no fursuits and because of this no façade performances. I didn’t even see smaller play as I did in Manhattan. The closet thing I saw to this was anthropomorphic jokes about Ed and Gina’s dogs typical of dog owners. There was nothing distinctly furry about the video games and digital games played at the meets. Dylan who loves dragons did have a Magic the Gathering, dragon deck. The dragon-based decks though are quite popular as it is a fantasy based game. The furries also followed fursona name use. Furries introduce themselves by, and call each other by, the names of their fursona. There were to exceptions to this. Dylan introduced himself by
actual name because he sees himself responsible as the group organizer. Devin’s fursona
does not have a name and thus goes by his real name.

As most of the furries in Bowling Green are not artists there is little care to do art
at meets. Besides Kevin’s badge, the only other physical art shared was the Devin, the
dragon’s, scale mail. All the other art that was shared was through phones, IPod, and
other digital devices. This along with furry humor was pretty much the only activity that
would designate this group as a furry group to an observant onlooker.

Use of space was also interesting in concern of the Bowling Green meets. The
park has unique cultural groups using its more public space. Not only were furries
meeting in the park, but boffers (recreational activity were people fight with foam
weapons not to be confused with larping) and a Society for Creative Anachronism
practice. Three of the boffers wore tails and did talk to Dylan briefly, before returning to
their activities. They did not show up at other meets. Although the park is a public place,
people still use the space for hobbies that are often not associated with parks. The use of
space is intriguing. Outside public space space like parks are not associated with these.
Public space is shared by everyone. It is interesting to see such a vast array of groups
sharing this space as they are often unknown in the average public gaze; especially when
there are plenty of none group members doing their own activities. It is a space like this
which façade performance could easily be conducted. As there are no fursuits there are
no performers. With activities in the park like foam weapon fights and armed medieval
combat duels, people dressed as animals would perhaps seem far less farfetched in the
public eye.
Over all, the Bowling Green meets appear to serve much the same function as that of the Manhattan. It is to simply have fun, meet people and socialize. Unlike the Manhattan group, there are fewer expressions of furry culture. It could be that my presence amongst the group may have affected some of this aspect, but I doubt it. The social geographic environment may effect furry presentation in Bowling Green. I perceive Kansas and Kentucky as having a conservative nature. Both Bowling Green and Manhattan are college towns. The difference for the Manhattan group was that it was campus based. The group could meet in their own space and if they were observed by an outsider may be perceived as just “crazy college folk.” Both groups were roughly the same age and when the Manhattan group made use of public space such as the park or swimming pool, play and façade performance was natural. Furry Façade performances were more common at Central Midwest Furry Meet instead of at the Manhattan meets. The Manhattan group also wore more furry apparel. There were also nights set aside for art and more furry oriented activities (suit making) in the Manhattan group. A majority of the Bowling Green group do not consider themselves artists. They mostly engage for the sake of enjoyment of furry art and the concept of anthropomorphism. From my observations there is little difference in regional furry behavior between these two groups. In the next chapter I will look at Fursona creativity and fandom “discovery” narratives of my role-play-group and the Bowling Green group to see if there are any differences in their use.
Chapter 2 Making the Magic: Joining the Fandom and Fursona Creation

In this chapter I will look at furry narratives about joining the fandom and their fursona’s creation. I will start with some examples from the Manhattan group, and then carry on with the role-play group, and then the Bowling Green group. I will then follow up with an analysis of how these narratives and fursonas are used.

The fandom is complex, as individuals associate with being furry for a wide diversity of reasons and interests that pertain to anthropomorphism in some form. From my first project with the Manhattan group I asked many of my informants for definitions of what being furry was and my informants’ answers were incredibly varied. Below are a list of definitions given by my informants during this first project.
“Furries are people who identify with animals in some way, some feel they are part animal or should be, or some just like their characteristics,” “A furry is a person who themselves as having an animal side. These people create an animal version of themselves, called fursonas (parody of the word "persona") to express this side of them,” and “a group of people who enjoy a concept of self-representations of anthropomorphic or human like animals. For example Bugs Bunny and Tony the Tiger” (Pan, Pink, and Mr. G. interview in Maase 2012:154)

These definitions and identities are based in a personal reflection of ones place in the fandom. I feel that the individual’s interest in the fandom and choosing of a personal animal fits into is an excellent example of a new tradition of vernacular belief. The next question to ask is how people get into the fandom and how they go about creating the elaborate characters that define them in the fandom. This section will discuss furry’s stories and how they got into the fandom along with the process of their fursona’s creation.

**Finding the Fandom Narratives:**

**Manhattan Field Work**

In my Manhattan field work, none of the local furries at that time had joined the fandom within five years of doing that project. None of the furries at the local meets were older than twenty-one at the time. The convention had people from the ages of fourteen to sixty. The average age was twenty. There were also three couples and one of the couples brought their young child with them. Most furries found the fandom through the internet.

My main informant of this project, Mr. G., found the fandom online through a website known as 4chan. On this website, Mr. G stumbled upon a board discussing the
typical furry stigmas. He had no idea what this was at the time and googled furries. He
had failed to turn on his google filter and was bombarded with pornography. He was
surprised by this and turned on his filter. Online pornography did not interest him as this
was the associations being made on 4chan. After turning on his filter Sam really liked the
art he found afterwards. This art demonstrated to him that pornography was not what
being furry was about. His fursona is a grey wolf as he always liked wolves (Maase
2012:160).

What is interesting about Mr. G.’s experience is that anime has its own
anthropomorphic characters. 4chan is an image board site originally meant for anime
fans, but has become a hub of internet humor, memes, and often dubious activities
(hacking, website attacks, online bullying, etc.). A site originally made to cater to the
anime fandom stigmatizes the furry fandom, despite this overlap.

Pan joined the fandom because her friends were into it in high school wearing
ears and tails. She also was also dating Mr. G. at the time. When she broke up with him
she did not do anything else with the Manhattan furry meets. Pan’s fursona is a red
panda. She reflected in one of our interviews that “I think red pandas are cute and pretend
I have those qualities and feelings” (Maase 2012:159).

My informant Pink got into the fandom because an old boyfriend who was not a
furry, but really liked the art, got him interested in it. Pink described his fursona
connection “I connect with it because I am very feminine in nature. I am playful, kind,
and all-around spirited. I found a lot of these characteristics within foxes, and so I chose
it to be my fursona. The pink is an expression of my feminine side. Central Midwest
Furmeet (CMF) also had some interesting fursonas. Fursonas included pokemorphs,
fursonas based off of the non-anthropomorphic creatures from the incredibly popular Japanese franchise Pokemon (Anime, Manga, Video Game, Card Game). Below is a list of Manhattan and CMF furries by fursona (Maase 2012:161).

Table 1: Manhattan Fursonas:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Panda</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Dragon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tiger</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fairy Cat</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: CMF Fursonas (not counting Manhattan Furries)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wolf</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Western Dragon</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1 An Otherkin (believes their soul is a mythical animal)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rat</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heyna</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawk</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giraffe</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bear</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pokemorph</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vaporeon and Lucario</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fursona-less</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Older Generation Furry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Furry</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Toddler and Guardian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In my second project with the roleplaying group I actually spent time listening to furries and how they came across the fandom and joined it.

Role-play Group

Sam found the furry fandom in high school through *Furcadia*, a furry MUCK\(^6\), or text based roleplaying game. In this game one constructs a digital avatar that one can move around in. The interaction and roleplaying though is done through a chat client. He and his friends used to meet online after school on *Furcadia* and hang out. The avatar he made was a fox. He has been a member of the fandom for seven to eight years. His fursona eventually became a Snow Leopard. “I started off with a base feline” because “In the mythological world when it came to storytelling and the lions and cats where always tricksters and stalkers, and always prowling around.” “I at the time was a person who always fluttered group to group never finding a niche that I belonged to.” “I liked the bigger cats more the bigger cats compared to the domestic cat” (Sam 2014). He chose a snow leopard due to a physical condition that he has. “I can’t sweat and because I can’t sweat\(^7\) I can survive in colder conditions longer than most people.” “Since snow leopards can survive in very cold temperatures it made sense that they probably would be the closest representation to me” Sam’s fursona also has a story separate from him. His fursona’s story is a love story where the Fursona was a slave and fell in love with the child of another slave. They go through a bonding ritual that bonds their age together so they age at the same time. It changed his furona’s furry coloring into a bluish tint from the typical grey (Sam 2014).

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\(^6\) A roleplaying game played online by typing through a chat box.

\(^7\) Anhidrosis
Helena’s interest with anthropomorphism began with werewolf folklore when she was about twelve. In the middle of high school this interest in anthropomorphism spread out due to the internet. “I liked the art that I saw, but didn’t understand it at the time, didn’t know that it was furry art” (Helena 2014). She didn’t find out about the actual fandom until she got into Second Life due to a friend. Second Life is an online roleplaying game/client. Second Life is very interactive. Players can make any 3D avatar they would like, limited only by their skill. There is also an extensive in-game market in which players create and exchange in-game currency and real money for goods they create. This friend took her to a specialty store in the game that created anthropomorphic avatars, her response was “I always wanted to do this” (Helena 2014). She went looking for similar avatars and ended up finding many more who were members of the furry fandom.

Helena’s fursona also reflects her growth and development as a human being. Helena felt ostracized when she moved when she was young and was picked on. “I felt like I connected with a dark side, for the longest time I felt like I was putting on a smile,
but always felt neglected and angry and just alone.” “It felt like it fit, the werewolf lore I knew at that time was a rage beast.” “It’s how I felt as a kid bottling in this rage” (Helena 2014). In finding furry art on the internet she realized “Where am I, this is wonderful” (Helena 2014). Her reaction was influenced by the art of anthropomorphic wolves and gods, but more peaceful. Her foray onto Second Life led her into the fandom when she was 18. She however, has considered herself a furry since the middle of high school.

The first fursona concept she had was just an avatar for Second Life. Through these avatars she changed through a fox, then a dragon, then another dragon, a wolf, a bat, then a husky. These avatars either have to be bought or made. “The husky stuck out to me and I really liked that avatar” (Helena 2014) She then emphasized the color. This avatar and her fursona are “grey scale,” while most furries are black and white, or rainbow colored. She too eventually sat down and created her fursona, a wolf husky. The fursona furry color “comes from actual folklore, that dark side. “She (the fursona) is wearing her heart and soul on her skin”. In the avatars appearance “Just throw a dress shirt, baggy pants, and a top hat and boom” (Helena 2014).

She also reflects on what she would like others to see in her fursona. “It is more or less a mirror image I’ve kind of felt or somebody I look up to.” ‘She’s always been the more outgoing character, more or less she’s me, but a little bit more stable and a little bit more comfortable and that I’m ok with it’s an extension of me.” “This is what most fursonas are, an extension of your reality that you’re able to jump into and be more

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8 Not rainbow, but a hyperbole she uses for a plethora of non-natural fur colors.
comfortable in your own skin.” “She doesn’t have a story she is just a thing” (Helena 2014).

Figure 3: Helena’s Main Fursona. (Digital Art, provided by owner)

It is important to note that Helena has a fursuit that is her fursona, as well as and another fursuit. This non-fursona fursuit she likes wearing more often. A fursuit does not have to be their fursona. It can be an independent character or just be a costume with no character attached. In the community furries can adopt furry characters. Usually this comes from buying art from artists at auctions. Sometimes these anthropomorphic characters have backstories and sometimes they don’t. This other fursuit is a character that she has adopted from an artist on furaffinity through auction. She adopted it online.

9 In this case the fursona doesn’t have a story in the sense of what Catharine Young may argue as the “Tale World.”
10 A furry social site where artists can share art.
in an auction as it reminded her of another character she was trying to adopt on auction. It is a red wolf and its creator gave her a name and background story in a world that he had created. “All creatures in that universe draw their energy from the land. Everyone in this world is born with a glass full of water. They can use this energy however they see fit and however they can manifest it. Every time they do this they spill water out of the glass. If it is ever empty they die” (Helena 2014).

Despite the fact that I haven’t found any furrys with two or more fursonas there is no reason that they could not. This depends on what purpose a fursona serves to the individual. Is their fursona them, a goal setter, a role-play character, a fursuit for suit performance. Furries do have multiple characters that they may use for things such as roleplaying or creating artwork and stories to share with the community. Furries in Helena’s case may have a fursuit made as well for these extra characters although it is not their fursona.

Figure 4: Helena’s Adopted Fursona. (Digital Art, provided by owner)

Kalvin also discovered and joined the fandom in high school. He’s been a furry since about the age of 16, but joined the online community about four years ago. He
though, always enjoyed anthropomorphic characters in video games such as *Star Fox* and Disney Movies.

He too found the fandom on *Second Life* when he found others who enjoyed portraying anthropomorphic animals. He too, was introduced to second life by a friend. Kalvin though was prominently interested in a *Bleach* role-play on *Second Life*. He based his character off of the fox-headed Sajin Komamura from bleach. Kalvin respected this character for his sense of loyalty and traits he held for others. His fursona developed out of this character, “I liked his morals, the pack mentality or loner personality of being loyal and protective” (Kalvin 2014).

Kalvin saw some of himself in his character. “I was shy, timid, and a bit defensive, not very open, but if you befriended him he was very loyal and protective” (Kalvin 2014). This fursona continued to grow as he did. “As my social life bloomed, I felt a wolf didn’t embody me. A husky is a large gentle giant and thus fitted better, playful, and sociable” (Kalvin 2014). Kalvin too was bullied in school, his family often verged on homelessness, and for a while he had an alcoholic father. Due to these “scars of my past,” he felt the wolf should still be part of his fursona (Kalvin 2014).

Kalvin enjoys roleplaying. His fursona thus has some elements that he enjoys from his media and he often employs these in roleplaying as his fursona. The card game *Magic the Gathering*™ (MTG) has some very personal elements which I will touch on later in the roleplaying section. Kalvin’s fursona though does have elements he enjoys from the lore of the game world and two of the magical colors blue and white. The

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11 An Anime
character is also associated with a Bant Mage from MTG. There are five colors in Magic. Kalvin’s Fursona, is blue, white, and Green, but mostly blue. “Blue is illusion, deception, and mental ability, white being order and protection, and green being nature, strength, and regeneration. These are a Bant mage’s color.” “Bant mages where loyal, found strength in numbers, and helped one another.” The fursona is also inspired by the plainswalker character Venser the Sojourner “who is blue and white, logic and order” (Kalvin 2014).

Figure 5: Kalvin’s Fursona. (digital art, provided by owner).

Allen became a furry in 2004; he didn’t became a member of the larger community until 2006. He was introduced to the fandom while roleplaying where a partner suggested he play a werewolf, when he did this his partner responded “Now

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12 A place. One of the five shards of Alura, one world of uncountless in the Magic the Gathering Universe. It is ruled by a caste system dominated by knights and a hierarchy of angels (Beyer 2008).
you’re a furry” (Allen 2014). He eventually stuck with the dragon everyone knows him by. “I began to put more of my personality into my characters.” The character became a vision that Allen “could not express in real life” (2014). What does his fursona express that Allen cannot? “He is sociable and open towards feeling towards others” (Allen 2014). As Allen lives in a rural area and must take care of an ailing mother who does not share his belief system he cannot express himself the way he wants to, “I can do this through fandom” (Allen i 2014). This fursona is the main reason for roleplaying. “His (fursona) aspect is blue lighting that comes from his blue scales and his yellow lightning tattoos. These are under his eyes or on his pectorals” (Allen 2014). These in his story indicate what elemental magic he is capable of. This fursona is also born into “a water bearing tribe” (Allen 2014).

Kella too was introduced to the fandom through a M.U.C.K. She was a furry before this: “I was furry long before I knew that furry existed, so in a way, I’ve always been furry” (Kella 2014). She’s been a member of the fandom since 2000. Her fursona development too also extends into her youth.

   When I was little, I identified most with the wolf. But, it never really felt right. I then looked at the fox, the “catlike-canine” and it felt better but still not right. It wasn’t until I discovered the grey fox that things fell into place. Specifically, it covers my climbing, digging, and crafty-ness, and doesn’t leave me feeling like there is a hole in my self-representation In high school, I was obsessed with the wolf, and would get hyper with the inflow to coming storms. The exchange student started calling me "Kaze no Ookami" or "Wolf of Wind". Since then, my fursona’s changed to be the fox, or the Kitsune. (Kella 2014)
Bella was introduced to the fandom by a close friend. “I realized that this was something I was interested in for myself. So, I made a Furaffinity account” (Bella 2014). She’s been a furry since 2008. She has always loved the name she chose for her Fursona. She had always liked wolves,

When I started to think of my own fursona, I knew she was going to be an arctic wolf. From there, I built her like I would build a character for a short story. Except instead of making up traits and quirks, I used my own. I imagined her to be kind and respectful, interested in learning and loved to read. Introverted but enjoyed the company of those close to her. But if I’m being honest, also gave her qualities I didn’t possess. I made her brave in the face of uncertainty. Confident when she knew she was right. She was still all the things that I was, but she wasn’t afraid. She was a wolf, a predator species. (Bella 2014)

When she was little she was also inspired by books and movies. “…It was through these stories that I first fell in love with the idea of animals that walked and talked like me” “If there was ever an anthropomorphic character in a story, they had a purpose. They had knowledge beyond what the hero/heroine or even the reader could comprehend” (Bella 2014).
Telm found the fandom when he was looking online by coming across furry art. He’s been a part of the fandom for six years. “I have, however, always liked anthropomorphic animals in cartoons and games now that I think about it” (Telm 2014). His fursona was originally a story character, but now “The more involved with the furry community I became, the more he became my identity in the fandom” (Telm 2014). This character is a geomancer and this is important for his name. The taleworld fursona lives happily with his wife until they are captured. His wife is killed and his children are sold. He now wanders the land to find them.

Valin created his character first as an online roleplaying character. He was introduced to the fandom by fellow role-players. When he was younger he lived with “a
bunch of dogs,” and enjoyed Clifford the Big Red Dog and Werewolf movies (Valin 2014). The character he made was a large werewolf. “I was pretty big and tall for my age as well. So I decided to make him a very friendly gigantic werewolf or a "Macro" Werewolf as this fandom would call it. I was pretty big and tall for my age as well.” “He has red markings, pawprints rather, on his pectorals, on his Biceps in a tribal band, and one large pawprint on his back. Each of those pawprints represent a dog that I had and loved over my years and may increase with every dog I care for” (Valin 2014). The character also has tribal bands on his arms depicting the dogs Valin has owned throughout his life. Valin does not have a religious or spiritual connection to his fursona. His fursona though is important in his life, “besides an imaginary friend since I was little, he’s technically a goal in my life. Not to actually be him really, but to have more strength, more willpower, and even have a certain style like him” (Valin 2014). He also didn’t fit in, “Well, I never really had a place to where I fit in until the fandom found him (Valin 2014). “It also made me realize who I am and how I can evolve more as a person of character” (Valin 2014).
Figure 7: Valin’s Fursona Middle. (digital art, provided by owner)
Bowling Green Group

Now, I will discuss the Bowling Green interviews. Only four people wanted to provide an interview from the Bowling Green group. Dylan is the organizer of the Bowling Green meets. A Bowling Green, Kentucky, citizen his entire life, he found the fandom when he was fourteen. He is a an artist though he claims to “not be very good.” He found the fandom a day he was looking up pictures of the video game character Bowser to draw. He stumbled across the website of a furry artist named Kaa. Kaa’s page linked to other websites including furaffinity which Dylan joined. His fursona he originally created before he had found the fandom and used it for roleplaying. His love of dragons comes from his love of the book, Eragon, by Christopher Paolini and PlayStation game Spyro the Dragon. “I became “dragon crazy” and began drawing all the dragons I could.”

The fursona has changed over time, being full scaled with blue body and yellow chest. Dylan also has made the dragon have furry instead of being scaled and has a white chest. The dragon’s personality is his now instead of a separate entity. He thus acts like himself when roleplaying and acting amongst the online furry community. The dragon is a western dragon (European in aesthetic). He finds his dragon “unique” in the fandom though he has seen a fursona dragon that is similar to his. He mentioned “Furry dragons are rare.” By this he means dragons that are furry instead of scaled. Also his dragon has prominent ears which he did not discuss. He also prefers western dragons over eastern dragons. “They have a little more versatility and are not as tied to religion as the eastern dragon, they can just be whatever.” Dylan likes the color blue and the decision in making this fursona come from “Whatever makes my eye happy.” He also defines his fursona
with cuteness and approachableness. “It is the most huggable thing you can find without being super cute. As super cute thing is too close to being too much of a good sweet.” He uses the fursona as an online face and for personal one on one roleplaying (Dylan 2014).

Figure 8: Dylan’s Fursona. (digital art, provided by owner)

Kevin found the fandom when he was in high school. He has lived in Bowling Green his entire life. He found the fandom through YouTube. He was watching some videos from Mid-West Furfest, a Chicago based furry convention. He originally did not think the fandom was “cool.” He found the art fun however, and started a Furaffinity account and became part of the larger fandom. It took Kevin a long time to make his fursona. Some people can make it instantly on the spot, but he wanted to put some thought into it. By
thought he means deciding on species and the fursonas colors. He decided upon a wolf. The wolf has grey hair on the chest and orange highlights and a little bit of red. He liked the color scheme and thought the orange and red complimented each other. He thinks that these are “Warm Colors.” They also define to him a “warm person, not a cold person.” to him they are inviting colors. He considers his fursona “as me in a hypothetical reality.” He couldn’t elaborate on this further, just that it was fun to pretend and daydream about the “what if,” not an actual dream or imaginative experience (Kevin 2014).

Devin is a furry from Evansville who likes to come to the Bowling Green meets because there are very few furries where he lives. He found the furry fandom by browsing the website DeviantArt for Dragon’s artwork. This happened in high school. Devin’s story starts far earlier though where in middle school he became very fond of dragons. A friend of his was reading the book *Eragon* and he really liked the dragon on the cover. This inspired him to look for dragon art online. He originally found a Czech art site that led him to DA and the furry dragon artists there. The art he noticed was “drawn by similar people and called themselves furries.” He only likes quadruped dragons not anthropomorphic bipedal dragons. He also only likes western dragons not eastern dragons (Devin 2014).

Devin originally decided to create a fursona as “everyone in the fandom seemed to have one.” He thinks that they are needed to function within the furry community. Fursonas serve as a face for people to interact with online. He naturally picked a dragon because he liked them. He too took a while to think on the process to “what looked good to me.” Things he had to consider were the aspects dragons usually have, head types, scale styles, spikes, horns, straight, curled, and colors. The dragon is a black and blue
western dragon. He picked these colors because he liked them. The dragon is quadruped, with wings, scaled, not furred with blue stripes on the back, blue eyes, and white horns. It has prominent ears and is between six and seven feet shoulder height. The prominent ears are important as they make his fursona unique. Not that Devin strives to make his fursona unique, but it is a feature not normally considered with reptiles. “A dragon should have prominent ears as a predator it should have good hearing and eyesight like a bird.” The dragon’s tail is also tapered. A dragon is not a real physical animal, but a mythic one and thus could have liberties in its design (Devin 2014).

Figure 9: Devin’s Fursona. (digital art, provided by owner)
Table 3: Bowling Green Fursonas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Fox</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>Western Dragon</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dog</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hybrid</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Unicorn Cat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Furry</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Wife of Furry</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Patterns of Narrative

Both Manhattan and Bowling Green meets had a place for furry narratives. When new furries introduced each other they were often curious as to how others found the fandom and how they developed their fursona. Furries use the narrative of how they found the fandom with each other for several reasons. 1. It is as an icebreaker, as many furries asked this during the first and second meet. 2. It builds connections of other artists and people they may know online, making the met online “other” less intimidating. 3. It allows for people to see familiarity in each other’s interests and find new anthropomorphic materials that they may like. The sharing of these stories reveals connections. I feel there is also an artists’ legacy in connecting furries within the larger
context of the fandom. These artists inspire art and expression of self that may be seen as a traceable ancestor connecting to those early fandom days. Animals though do have a powerful influence on the imagination and surely new furry creators can arise. The importance of popular culture on the furry individual cannot be ignored.

“Joining the fandom” stories also have similar traits. They either involve a discovery or an introduction. Furries either discover the fandom like Dylan, Kevin, or Devin or are introduced like Allen and Kalvin. Furries who find the fandom online usually engage with an anthropomorphomorphic character they already like such as dragon art, although Kevin’s story is a bit of an outlier as it involved a video of a physical furry meet. Furry ridicule can even lead to the creation of the discovery of the fandom such as in Mr. G.’s case. Websites such as Google and YouTube allow for people to find the greater fandom. Through these venues furries eventually can engage with the online furry or artist communities like the Kentucky Forum, Furaffinity, DeviantArt, Second Life, and VCl. All the furries I interviewed for my last two projects had found the fandom in high school or middle school. This is not always the case, with all furries, as some like Greymuzzle, from Central Midwest Furry meet, at the age of sixty had found the fandom within a year. There are also furries who feel they were furry before finding and joining the fandom, such as Helena, and either place their furriness with the love of anthropomorphism (been furry forever) or the discovery of themselves in high school. This is interesting as usually we associate fandom with a popular culture product. The furry fandom is dedicated to the idea of anthropomorphism in general. Anthropomorphism is common in the cultural environment, thus one’s love of anthropomorphism can be independent from the furry movement. What I am saying is,
most furries enjoy anthropomorphism before finding the fandom. When they find the fandom they then gain a language and larger group to discuss anthropomorphism with.

When a furry is introduced to the fandom by a friend, a door is opened to things the furries already like. This aids in avoiding stigma. For example if a furry would stumble upon a part of the fandom online (pornography or pictures of fursuits), not knowing what it is, they may associate what they find with stigma instead of joining. When a friend helps introduce the fandom it shows that everything is okay. The journey into the online world is done with more thorough understanding. Five of my stories involve people being introduced into the fandom.

In Pan’s story she simply was interested as it was something her friends were doing at the time. Her interest in the fandom was not about the anthropomorphism and more on the social aspect. In these cases on the social level certainly the fandom is not dysphoric. The interest of the individuals in the fandom is something to do for fun that does not have to put emphasis on fursona creation. If an outsider were to observe the Bowling Green meets, it would seem like a bunch of people simply hanging out. Another layer to this is simply sharing popular culture that the group enjoys. Most furries, like many people, had favorite animals existing before they joined the fandom. Someone’s favorite (animal, food, t-shirt) becomes an icon that is recognized by a group. It makes them stick out and ties them to community. A favorite is a part of a personal belief system or expression not tied to religious or spiritual realms. This is tied to young play and learning the self. Another part of it is the world that we live in and sharing it with non-humans.

Fursona Names
Fursona construction expresses furry aesthetic at the personal level. Fursonas are created from and express an individual’s personal beliefs. These self-made goals such as reminders to go to the gym and to be more sociable are seen in my roleplaying group interviews. It is not seen as much in my Bowling Green group which concentrates more on the social aspect of the fandom.

Still, fursonas are complex. They can be just an online avatar, a role-play character, an online screen name, and expression of the self. Furries know each other and recognize each other by their fursonas even when they get to know each other in real life. This is true for all the groups I have studied. Devin mentioned, “It’s easier to remember someone’s screen name then it is their real name.” In a certain way there is a neo-tribal element to using screen names. Choosing a screen name involves a process of creating a new identity. A furry’s screen name may involve a favorite animal and personal elements, or by the popular perception of American Indian spirituality they may seem very Native American. It becomes part of an accepted identity to the online and local group. A screen name and often fursona name is a new name that allows for an individual to meet people online without jeopardizing their identify and to an extent safety. This becomes a rite of passage where the individual can eventually meet with this online group in real life. A furry name can be anything they want to be called. Usually it rests on something the furry is familiar with and likes and is often an animal. Kevin and Max for example have their species as part of their fursona name. These are shortened and the species dropped when referring to them in real life. The furries except for Sam and Devin (who I met outside of the fandom) preferred to be called by their fursona name. Devin answered to both as he places less emphasis on his fursona.
Fursona Choice

In John Berger’s *Why Look at Animals*, he discusses our perceived distance from animals. In this distance there seems to be an aspect missing from our world (2009:13). The fandom has a lot of cat and dog fursonas, two animals that have come to share our closest domestic space (Berger 2009:13). Even if the fursona is a wild variant, fursonas are still usually canine or feline in nature. Twenty-seven of forty-seven of the furries I have worked with have fursonas in these categories. Fursonas also do not have to be biologically correct everyday animals. Six fursonas are dragons, a creature whom in the west is usually associated with evil (Blust 2000:520). There is a change in this perspective as dragons are now seen as good rather than evil. In talking with Dylan and Devin neither could pinpoint a change in this perspective, but felt that the dragon’s portrayal in popular media helped that change, especially the book series *Eragon* (2003), “Puff the Magic Dragon” (1959), and Anne McCaffrey’s *The Dragon Rider of Pern Series* (1967) (Dylan, Devin 2014). The two cat hybrids also carry folklore elements: fairy and unicorn. Two furries also admitted being inspired by werewolf media for their fursona. Valin also has an extra imaginative element in the size of his fursona.

Popular media also freely uses folklore, and furries have been influenced by this as well. The two pokemorph fursonas show that fursonas can be made out of popular media. Even if the animal is an everyday animal it can have an unnatural alteration. Sam for example is a blue Snow leopard and many furries have colorings that would not be held elsewhere in nature. A few furries in my groups also zeroed in on exact taxonomic species as an identifier. Kella was one who did so, but perhaps this is due to her identity as a Therian. Bella also emphasized species. Fursonas change with time. Some fursonas
grew and changed with their maker over time like Kalvin and Helena. Other furries have a fill in fursona when they join the fandom until they design their own personal fursona (Allen and Sam).

In comparison to Kathleen Gerbasi and Sherry Jeansonne’s studies my data too follows similar patterns. Jeansonne’s work reveals a majority preference for canine and feline fursonas (2012:15). Gerbasi’s convention work also found canines (50%), felines (26%), and dragons (17%) to be her most popular fursona types (2007:14). Still, if anything a fursona’s animal is only limited by one’s imagination and there are furries that break the mold. There are limiters such as few furries (and none that I have interviewed) would want to be an ugly or culturally marked taboo animal to my knowledge. This will be discussed later in the chapter on stigma.

There is definitely time and thought involved in the creation process. Some furries take a long time to decide their fursona, even having place holders. These place holding fursonas are fursonas (often just an animal without traits) to use online to interact with other furries. It may not even be an animal a furry ends up picking to be their fursona. Devin’s Fursona took several months to develop. As already described Fursonas change over time with their creator. This depends on the time and imagination one wishes to invest in the fursona. Some furries put emphasis on the fursona being themselves (Sam, Kevin, Dylan), to an elaborate creation of genre beyond themselves such as constructing story universes and multiple art form epics (Kalvin and Sam), to just an online animal with no deep characteristics besides the creative process (Devin). Furries also emphasize what they want others to see in their fursona (Helena, Dylan, and Kalvin). Others place their favorite media (Comic, show, videogame, etc.) into their character (Kalvin and the
pokemorphs). Furries also put unique spins on their animals. This helps give them a distinct face to be recognized online amongst the other animal folk and make them more recognizable in fursuit.

Many furries also use characteristics that they see in themselves or wish to see in themselves as a goal. In the characteristics they see in themselves, there are layers to this identity. The first layer is how they see themselves and how society defines them. The second layer is portraying aspects of themselves as an unknown figure on the internet amongst strangers. It can allow for people to feel more at ease from a quick glance at an avatar, written description, or fursona art and perhaps aid in roleplaying (discussed in roleplaying section). There is usually a reflective aspect in the defining of self. Abrahams’ concept of identity is again a struggle for cultural, social, and spiritual wholeness. Identity in this way is shaped and contested by different group powers (peers, teachers, fellow workers, etc.) (2003:198). Fursonas are identities that are made to interact with others, but express the personnel self. Fursonas also can change and be replaced by a new one. Oring argues that identity is always changing as it is affected by new experiences (1994:212). Fursonas as creations of self-expression are interesting dialogues of the individual and the folk group. A member who puts more of themselves into their fursona can build a more interesting story to share with the larger group.

Also in identifying with an animal it puts the animal in a symbolic category that is part culturally and part personally determined. Sam for example describes snow leopards: “In the mythological world when it came to storytelling and the lions and cats were always tricksters and stalkers, and always prowling around.” This is not true of all.
cultural myths and symbols for the variety of cats. Sam also relates the snow leopard cold
tolerance to his Anhidrosis. This design element makes the fursona more uniquely him.

Another element that makes a character design more unique and an expression of
personality is clothing. Sam’s fursona puts a lot of descriptive emphasis on his magical
cloths that put the character in a fantastical representation. While Helena joked “Just
throw a dress shirt, baggy pants, and a top hat and boom.” The top hat is the only thing
that would make the character stand outside the normal clothing description. These were
the only to furries that emphasized clothing as part of their creative process. As fursonas
are made from the imagination they too can wear anything. As animals they can also
wear nothing at all. Though a fursona does not have to be anthropomorphic, but can also
be a plain animal (known as feral). This would be like Helena’s second fursona. Dylan
and Devin’s Fursonas are also feral as they are what would be defined as more dragon
like and not more human like such as being bipedal. Clothing is an interesting design
choice whether emphasized or not as it borders the fursona tale world with the creator’s.
To what degree do imaginary self-representations express culture? How much of this
culture is self-created, ignored, or borrowed? These questions on cultural creation are a
beautiful and part of fursona creation.

Furries do put a lot of emphasis on the colors of their fursona. Every furry of the
last two projects emphasized their fursona’s colors. They come in a wide spectrum. Only
Bella and Kalvin matched their fursona’s colorings to their natural animal colorings.
Some like the dragon fursonas could be any color, as a dragon, as a creation, is
determined only by the imagination. Dylan, Kevin, and Devin picked colors pleasing to
their eye. Helena picked colors symbolic meaning to her growth as a person. The darker
colors represented her troubled past with coping with bullying and her lighter colors are her new outlook on life (2014). Allen and Sam’s odd coloring come from their fictional background stories that tie into their roleplaying. Helena’s adopted character’s glowing colors also come from a background character.

Except for Helena’s adopted character all the fursona’s with fictional stories are used in roleplaying. As these furries know each other and role-play with each other, their fursonas are formed according to the genre of role-play that they play, in this case fantasy. Elements of a fursona can be inspired and developed from a role-play experience. Through from role-play fursonas can change. Fursonas used for roleplaying also take part in a larger shared narrative of fursonas between furries. For example some of my informants who had fursonas used for roleplaying can use magic and thus is something emphasized about their fursonas outside of the roleplaying game. Sam for example got a lot of his fursona’s magic and item ideas from his Dungeon and Dragon’s experiences; especially if they enjoyed an element of the popular culture game world (2014). This allows other furries who enjoy Dungeon and Dragons to recognize these elements and interact with them.

Kalvin also used his roleplaying and gaming experience to shape his fursona. As a fan of the card game Magic the Gathering he has applied the characteristics of a Bant Mage to his character. He also likes the use of blue and white magic for his character role-plays. As personal role-plays can take on many different worlds, times, and settings, an easy explanation for his fursona is to be a Magic the Gathering planes walker (someone with the ability to travel to worlds). Kalvin emphasized that this version of his fursona used for roleplaying does not use the MTG black magic as it goes against his
real-life ethics (interview, 2014). This allows for unique imaginative displays in the fursona itself especially online.

Over all fursona creation is limited only by the imagination following the dominant cultural schema of the larger network the furries inhibit. Furries need unique fursonas to recognize a face online. A lot needs to be decided: species, clothing, coloring, personality, is there a story or not, how much is a creator their fursona. The degrees a furry puts into their fursona in the end is left for them to decide. This is a unique folk tradition or art that reflects itself in greater art and performance such as suit making, roleplaying, and the façade which we will get into in our next chapter.
Chapter 3 Performing the Magic: Fursuit Making, Performance, and Roleplaying

This chapter will look at fursuit making, fursuit handlers, fursuit performance, and roleplaying.

**Fursuits**

If any single thing sums up the representation of furry culture it is the fursuit. This image sticks in the mind just as fursuits stick out like a sore thumb in the everyday world. These costumes are an easily recognized image and are a big part of attachment of stigma outside and even inside the fandom. The fursuit as necessary to being furry is a false assumption which many make. Most furries do not have a fursuit: they are very expensive, and many furries do not want one (I will discuss this in the stigma section). There are two types of fursuits, partial and full. Partial fursuits are just a head and arms. Sometimes feet are also included. Basically it is just a mask and gloves. These suits are easier to take off, less cumbersome, and less hot. Partial fursuits are also cheaper. Partial fursuits are more common in my research groups. Full suits are a full bodysuit. On top of this there are also furry accessories that are commonly worn such as ear bands and tails. Partial tails as described earlier are smaller tails. This may be a newer trend as I was not familiar with them during my first research project.

Partial tails were made by a store that specialized in furry apparel called *Anthrowear*. They currently at this time cost $8-16 or four bit coins (accessed 10/18/14). David saw these tails and got inspired to order his own from their website. Anthrowear started as a business in 2012. Partial tails are interesting as the furries in Manhattan made their own tails. Much like other hobbies there was a personal gain and pride in making
your furry apparel yourself. There are probably other businesses to that cater to the furry population. Still, holding a sway to peoples imagination and customizing something for them is a change in the personal construction of accessories in the fandom. Furries also wear plenty of other accessories like collars, badges (usually convention based), and furry or animal themed clothing.

In the first fieldwork is where I observed the most fursuits. Fursuits were predominantly worn at the furry convention. Seven individuals out of twenty-two did not wear fursuits at this convention. At the Manhattan meets only two people wore their fursuit. Tails and ears were more popular. Two girls wore ears every meet, and one of these, women wore her coon cat-tail as well. The ears became more common as one meet served a workshop for ear making. There also was a workshop for suit making, though it wasn’t hands on, instead the group’s two fursuit makers presented their projects and explained them. Suits at meets just seemed to be to show off, while at the convention they became a larger attraction. At the convention they became a source of profit for the suit makers, part show for the fursuit photo-shoot, and a part of façade play antics.

In the roleplaying group most furries did not have fursuits. Two of my informants, Sam and Telm, had their suits in production at the time of the interview. Sam ordered his partial suit from a maker online for a discount price for $500. He also wanted to wear his fursuits at conventions and meets. He wanted a fursuit as he always saw his his fellow furries playing around, doing parades, and just having fun and he wants to be a part of it (Sam 2014). Telm’s girlfriend was making his (Telm 2014). Valin said if he got a suit he would love to use it for inspiring people and donation drives (Valin 2014).
Bella mentioned she liked to wear her ears and tail at conventions. Ears and tails are like fursuits. Both are expensive and they need taking care of. Her tail was a gift from a friend and she bought her ears at a convention (Bella 2014). Kalvin is on fence considering buying a suit and explained how they cost about $500 for a partial suit and up to two thousand for a full suit. He is on the fence due to the stigma associated with suits and their uncanniness. He did get to try a fursuit of a fursona similar to his own and this was his response.

“I actually got to try on a suit similar to his fursona. I looked into the mirror and it was such a bizarre and wonderful feeling of being something more than human. Being human is something wonderful all its own, but that was near breath taking and it was a surreal experience.” (Kalvin 2014)

Only Helena has a suit. In fact Helena has two. One is for her fursona and another is for her adopted character. She likes wearing this second suit more for several reasons. “She’s a lot easier to wear around, plus the furry suit was $3,000 instead of $500,” less hot, and she is “more approachable” (Helena 2014). She wears them at Walmart façade with other furries, cons, Halloween party, “typical stuff you won’t be judged too hard for”. She does wear it out with the Kansas City (KC) fursuit on days like Saint Patrick’s day (Helena 2014).
Figure 10: Helena’s Fursuit (partial fursuit). (Photo, provided by owner)

Figure 11: Helena’s Adopted Fursuit (full and with digigrade legs that bend in the knees like a quadruped animal). (Photo, provided by owner)
In Bowling Green no furries whom I talked to have fursuits. Kevin said he would like to buy a suit, but right now it is too expensive and he’d like a nicer fursuit (2014). Devin feels like he should make a fursuit to see if he would like suiting. He is still in the planning stages. Part of this is making a scale mail for his dragon suit. It has been a tedious project that has taken three years and he is not very far into it. He explains why he would want a suit. “I would want to fursuit for others to see me, to create a personality through my fursona different from his own” (Devin 2014). This personality Devin talks about for people to see is the “magic” that furries talk about. This “magic” to a furry is the embodiment of a fursuit performance. It is the fursona coming to life. This “magic” is seen in the suit antics (acting like an animal, messing with objects, clowning, making bizarre use of space, etc.) and façade performance whether in doing volunteer work or just having fun. Devin though does not know what to “personally think on it, until he tries it.” Devin is also from Evansville and furries wear suits at the meets there (2014). Dylan does not have a fursuit and is uncertain if he wants one. “They make me feel I should be embarrassed for them (suit wearer), then I shouldn’t be because they’re fine and doing their thing” (Dylan 2014). This is why Dylan wants to go to a convention so he can be around them and get used to furries in suits (Dylan 2014). Fursuits too carry a stigma with them even amongst furries as they have an uncanny valley effect (this is discussed in chapter 4). Not all furries wear suits, and although suit wearing is mostly is associated with the fandom by outsiders it is not prevalent. Some people may perceive that to be furry you have to have a fursuit, but this too is not true (Dylan 2014).

**Fursuit making**
From what my informants have touched upon, fursuits are very expensive. A partial suit typically goes for $500 (Sam, Kalvin, Mr. G., Helena 2014). Apparently a fursuit can go way above $3,000 while expensive suits such as Cryo’s suit (furry popstar) as pointed out by an informant Dragonkun, cost $15,000 (Maase 2012:176). They also seem to take a long time to make. “This is taking longer, it is taking a year, they usually take six months” (Sam 2014). Part of this expense is due to the materials used (fake furry materials), the intense labor, and that it is done by individual makers like Dark and Mister G who led the ear and fursuit making workshop. Both Mr. G and Dark are both furries and where local to Manhattan, Kansas. Furry suitmakers, if they advertise online, can get commission from all over the world if they wanted. Mr.G made suit orders from all across the United States.

The suit-making workshop was about making a fursuit head. This tiger head was for a very excited member of the Manhattan meets. Shannon and Mr. G. bent green foam over the customer’s head. This foam would serve as the skeleton for the suit’s head. Enough room was to be measured as a space between Raz’s face and the foam for breathing room. It was then cut according to measurements and strips made for a mouth, ears, and parts removed for eyes. The eyes are inserted later. Mr.G. makes mesh eyes. Dark uses glass ones. She paints their back with acrylic paints before gluing them inside the suit sockets. The backs of these painted glass eyes allow light to shine through them allowing for all sorts of custom eyes depending on the animal and the imagination. Glass eyes limit the eye sight of the viewer considerably as they must look through the slits between the eye and nose. Mesh eyes can be looked through with less limited visibility. The production of style ranges from cartoon like, to anime, to realistic. The suits also
include things such as motorized ears and mouth parts, squeakers in the nose and paws, electric lights in the eyes, squeaky noses and paws usually associated with clowns. At Central Midwest Furmeet several suits had these squeaky parts. This carnival like clowning device certainly aids in fun and façade. According to Helena fans are also included to reduce heat (2014). Furry feet can be made the same way. Fursuits and gloves are measured like one would do for a costume. Helena also expressed that feet can be made bipedal or digitigrade (Bended hind legs found on most quadruped mammal). Her suit has digitigrade legs. This makes the legs harder to walk on (2014).

The ear making workshop involved everyone. We were given a typical plastic head band and green foam. The simpler ear forms involved rounded ears (bears, Mustelidae, mice, etc.), small triangles (cats), and larger triangles (canines). One foam ear is measured and cut and cleaned up with scissors. The ear is then measured and cut against the foam for the second. If one wants thickness they can combine ears into a full ear. The foam ears are then wrapped with layer after layer with masking tape at the space of the maker’s choosing. This too adds thickness. Less tape makes the ears more bendable. One can also cut into the tape for ear depth. One then can glue fake furry over this and the ear band is done. This was not all done at one night, the furring took part of another night and some furries continued to work on their ears for many more meets. A band later can be inserted into a fursuit foam head.

Sam explained that furry suits “are like mascot costumes sewn together piece by piece they are made with hardened foam that can be crushed and reformed. This requires a lot of sculpting. The head is takes the longest time to make. If it’s done wrong you have to throw away the entire head and start over. One of the reasons making
these takes forever is it is not the suit maker’s day time job. If they had eight hours a
day they could probably get the entire thing done in a month. As most of us have full
time jobs it doesn’t give us enough time to work on our art.” (2014)

Fursuits can be made by the individual like any costume. It is easier to have someone
make something for you though, especially if they involve skill. Ear bands for example
are cheap and easy to make. Some furries have begun to get reputations in the fandom as
good suit makers and make online shops such as Anthrowear. Fursuits though take a lot
of time and effort. Skill in making a fursuit, especially the head, is sought in a maker
because of a fursuit’s resonance within the uncanny valley and the stigma of suits and
being a furry.

Façade Performance

Fursuits are an expense and seen as a luxury of ownership and status
within the community for some. For others being a furry is about an idea. From my
experience at CMF and the Manhattan furry group the façade performance usually
happens with furries in suit. This is due to the spectacle of the suit. Wearing the suit
enables the ability to act as it gains the attentions of of the outsider turning them into
unwilling spectator. Dorothy Noyes, in her article, “Aesthetic Is the Opposite of
Anaesthetic” explores categories of art based on attention. Noyes categorizes the
surround as “built environment, lore of and for children, pedagogic doxa, lullabies, verbal
and gestural play, craft and domestic arts, and everyday adornment” (2014:142) Fursuit
performance messes around with the built environment. The animal character is often the
subject of children lore and lullabies. The performers are also silent and use gestural play
to interact with the civilian audience and the world around them. Fursuits also are not
everyday adornment. The façade performance breaks the everyday surround turning it into something fun, memorable, and out of the ordinary. These performances can take place in an open space such as a park or a store (like Walmart) allow for façade as they draw attention as they stand out in the surround (2014:141). Furries doing a public performance decide on the performance as a social thing to do as part of their hobby. This is much like the punks studied by Dan Wojcik. The furries disrupt the norm, turning normal space into a space for fun and perhaps for art (1995:5).

The convention though is not a normal day; it is an enclosed space with pilgrims enjoying their time together and their love of anthropomorphism. The performance is similar to the façade performance in public space, but most of the onlookers though are furries. The world of the convention is very much turned upside down due to the amount of people in suit and their shenanigans. At the convention space becomes a ritual world where the magic can come alive unhindered by the outside world. Suits at conventions are a way to show off your fursuit and fursona. There are also fursuit activities at the conventions (contests, photo-shoots, games, etc.) In summary fursuits worn at conventions are for furries only, while public performance is about breaking the everyday for everyone.

Fursuiting involves what is called “making the magic”. When the suit is on the furries become someone else. When the suit comes on maybe they become their fursona, maybe an animal, maybe an inspiring presence (a goal to be achieved, putting a smile on someone’s face, etc.), or maybe just a jokester. This depends on the furry and what they want out of their fursona and fursuiting. Some furries do not make fursuits of their fursona and may wear a fursuit of a different character. Other furries also may make
cosplay suits of a character from popular media. These suits too can be worn for façade performance, but mostly serve as a convention show piece.

Furries come from a wide array of backgrounds, class, race, and gender and in the circumstance of the meet to a limited degree it doesn’t matter. I use the term “limited degree” as it would be naïve to say these things do not take place in the background. This too is part of the magic making everyone equal (at least those in suit). Furries without suits do not get to engage in the performance and may become targets for the fursuiters to play with. Furries though in suit are masked and it is hard to know who they are unless you recognize their iconography from online. The suit wearers and furries can thus share narratives later of the event while the non-furries are left only with the image of someone with a animal suit after the event.

Another part of this magic is “keeping it.” Furries do not take the suit off in public and usually do not speak. This lets them play to the audience. The silence also aids in an uncanniness depending on onlookers, suit, and action. At Central Midwest Furmeet furries did all sorts of play behavior in suit. Some of this involved trying to do the norm including playing video games and air hockey while wearing suit or at least their gloves. This shows skill and also allows for laughs in the hilarity that ensues. Though, I was surprised in losing air hockey to a furry orange dragon wearing his orange furry gloves ending in long red claws. “I beat you even with the gloves” he said holding up his mallet. The video games too were interesting due to the limited eye sight and a particular game being played, *Guitar Hero*. This game involves playing an electric guitar in rhythm on screen. This is a game that requires much skill without interference.
Other performances involved clowning about and roleplaying as animals. Furries in suit would often cock their head at each other and non-suit wearers, and circle each individual in animal like confusion. Furries often too would paw individuals and perhaps study their belongings (pens, paper, phones, etc.) with joking interest. At the convention suit wearers were very open to hugs. The environment can also be part of the performance – for example, dancing on chairs and tables. In one funny incident the animal performance became incredibly emphasized as some geese walked by. Two furries adorned in wolf and fox suit hunkered low, stalking two of the annoyed geese who eyed their annoyance behind them, walking at a quick pace. The two stalkers bolted after their prey, which in a flutter of flurry of feathers, jump to the safety of the nearby lake. This playing increased during the fursuit photo shooting as it gave opportunity for antics as there was an increase of people in suits. It is not that furries without suits cannot act in this play, but it is rare. At meets sometimes furries would engage in some animal play behavior such as two cats hissing and play scratching at one another (though both were wearing ears). Ears and tails may allow for some performance although they aid more in look and expression of being furry and a person’s fursona.

Some in my roleplaying group discussed their façade performance. To Helena, “wearing the furry suits are a blast, but you have to do it with a lot of people around” (2014). Non-furries going about their everyday business are needed for the facade performance to work. “It’s a funny reaction where you wear them to a drive through window” (Helena 2014). She mentioned furries wear suits at Walmart and Sam mentioned stores. This is an invasion of the everyday in a public space, but as long as the performance does not break laws then there is no harm. Part of the invasion of public
space does lead to an uncanny nature of the fursuit and the furry. This is why fursuit design is important.

Helena likes her fursuit because it is “more approachable” especially for kids. “She is a cartoon to any kid that sees her” (Helena 2014). Inspiring or entertaining kids are mentioned by Helena, Sam, Valin, and Kalvin. A person wearing an animal suit like a mascot or carni performer at a fair does play a lot on a kid’s imagination. This is why suit construction is important. I myself remember being very young and scared of a guy in a bear suit handing out balloons at an Illinois corn fair. Plus there are associations with the oddness of the stranger in the suit and their intentions when involved with children. This is an example of stigma of the uncanny, anthropomorphic, and fursuits. Helena mentions that kids react either “positively or negatively” to their encounter with suit wearers. Suit wearers also tend to wear them at charity events like volunteering at children hospitals or humane shelters (Helena, Kalvin, Telm, Devin 2014).
Figure 12: Helena Doing Suit Performance With An Old Newspaper (Photo, provided by owner)
Part of keeping the magic is for kids. Breaking the magic to the furries destroys the awe and wonder in the eyes of a child. There is an animal person walking around or at least an older person in a suit having fun. It is why conventions are often family places where people take their children along. This makes conventions all the more a powerful
place out of the everyday for the child surrounded by silly animal folk seemingly out of a cartoon or children’s story. Kalvin described the kids’ response “The children there [Anthrocon] had the first glint in their eyes as they would have at their first time at Disney world” (2014). People also want pictures taken with fursuit wearers due to the odd spectacle or inspiring presence.

Fursuiting also requires what Helena called a “handler”. This person aids the fursuit wearer due to the many dangers of fursuiting. Dangers of a fursuit include getting hit by a car, having limited eye sight, hurting someone by accidentally colliding with them, or getting heat stroke. The suits also inhibit movement. Helena compared wearing a suit to wearing a heavy snow skiing suit during the summer. The legs often don’t bend, thus making it easy to fall. If one were to fall on their face the muzzle of the suit could smash into the wearer’s face. There is also the worry of pins possibly left behind from the maker. Fursuits are also not always touch-friendly. Rubbing a suit can pull out the furry or a child tackling a furry suiter can knock them down easily (Helena 2014). Kalvin and my an informant from my first project, Dragonkun, also mentioned that hugging a fursuit involves hugging above the arms due to the arms pits being sweaty and gross (Kalvin 2014. Maase 2012:172). There thus is also a trust involved in a handler and fursuiter due to these dangers. This is also a good reason why not every furry would want to wear a suit.

I did not see any handlers at CMF. I did know of them at the time. As there are such a large number of people at conventions there may not be a need for them or it may be an unspoken rule to watch out for suit-wearers. As there are no fursuits in the Bowling Green groups I have not seen any furries perform façade performance. Nor have I seen
the tiny amount of play like the “cat fight” at meets. The Bowling Green meets are tame and the furries engage with socializing, eating, and playing sports or board/card games. One can be a furry without the magic as in the end it is about socializing and having fun, the anthropomorphism is just an extension of self that does not always have to be represented by a fursuit. A fursona’s creation is personal in nature. It can be inspired though from past role-play experiences, popular culture, and private elements the creator wishes to endow into it. There are limitations however. The social stigma of deviancy and mental illness become areas which furries mitigate as not wanting associated with the fandom and at the same time cope and make into part of their expression through humor as seen in the next chapter.
Chapter 4 Magic’s Awe: Art and Furry Stigma

This chapter will analyze the furry art of my informants and the stigma associated with fursuits and performance.

Art

Furry art exists in many forms: performance, fursuit, 3D model, music (Palmer 2005) or the digital/traditional 2D art medium. Furry art is an expression of anthropomorphism and therianthrophism that relates to the social, personal, natural, cultural, sometimes mechanical, and the imaginary of our world. The complexity of furry art and aesthetic value depends on both the individuals and their audience including the perception of the outsider.

In the digital world things can become even more rapidly reproduced than in cultural theorist Walter Benjamin’s mechanical age of reproduction ([1936]2001:58). Everyday pictures can become memes. Cameras on handheld devices instantly can create new identity for utter strangers and quite possibly ruin a life. Mass digital reproduction and the sharing of events instantly through text and email can capture something and change it from its original context into something else. The rapid influence of strangers in a shared environment can be observed by others. An online environment can also be invaded by others (hackers and other internet ne'er-do-wells). Images can be replicated with little say from their creator. Photographs can be used willy-nilly without consent of the owner. This is part of the dilemma for furries depicting art online. The social media
layers can also complicate things as stories too become increasingly decontextualized and warped out of proportion. Furries can also skirt the professional art world, commissioning arts in the network, engaging in a different market environment. These difficulties are important to understand as we approach the art created by and for my informants. The first section of this chapter will overview my informant’s art whether commissioned or self-created, and then explore aesthetic values in relationship to furry image and stigma.

As discussed before, all the furries I have interviewed have taken part in a creative process in the creation of their fursona. The original furries of course do not have fursonas and seem more fans of anthropomorphism. Despite the creative process not every furry considers themselves an artist (Kevin 2014). Some furries just create things to share with the fandom, while others create art to sell in the network, and others are professional artists. The fandom also allows people to dabble and start new skills and arts (Devin and his scale mail). The art in this section was offered for use in this thesis by my informants during the interview process. There may be many other pieces the furries have not shared that express far more than what is analyzed here. Furry writers also offered several written pieces. I will not post these in the text as it becomes a possible issue of copyright.

A majority of furry art concentrates on fursonas. Furries seek furry artists to commission artwork of their fursona. Furry art does not just have to be of a fursona. There are sometimes other anthropomorphic characters in their art (for example: an adopt, a friends fursona, or maybe a fursona of a popular furry). Furries can use these additional characters to express themselves or inspire others. Fan works are also possible.
depicting anthropomorphic characters from popular media and folklore. Furry art represents the complexities of furry expression as fursona and character depiction can range from the everyday into fantastic worlds of an individual’s imagination or popular media. It can also take on a plethora of styles, and for this reason aesthetics depend very much on an individual’s choice, often reflected in their fursona.

I was not interested in aesthetic value in my Manhattan fieldwork. All I can offer is a few observations. Art was important at meets, as one of the four weekly meeting nights was dedicated as art night. Here they could critique each other and learn skills such as the suit and ear making workshops. The artists would also bring in pieces and do art on non-art nights. Movie nights also revealed aesthetic value on correctness of animal behavior and anatomy. Mr. G. for example was annoyed at wolves’ presentation in the CGI film *Alpha and Omega*. Not all films shown were anthropomorphic as it simply was a movie night. Nonetheless art and animal correctness and incorrectness are an important factor in art creation and straddling the Mori’s uncanny valley. Bad art can turn off an onlooker. Poorly done art of a person with disproportioned limbs or face can be unsettling. Adding animal features on top of this can be an even more frightening image as it may be critiqued not be seen as art.

Art played a major part of the Central Midwest Furmeet convention. I remember a young man being enthralled when Mr. G. showed him his incomplete partial furry head. He was so excited he wore it for the photo shoot and furry shoot, playing around for the rest of night. His character had some semblance of physical life to at last engage in the performance. Not only is the convention the place where suit performance becomes rampant and fun, but actual arts were celebrated. There was an art room where artists
could work on pieces or accept commissions by attendees. This space also served for artists to share ideas, styles, and critique one another. The convention even involved an artist guest of honor.

This artist guest of honor and several other artist furries put art pieces and commission space up for the auction raffle. A tail maker also put a commission space up for raffle. This money did not go to the artists, but to the Manhattan Humane society. These commission slots and art pieces were the most raffled objects at the event. This demonstrates the importance of art in the furry world. A lot of value was placed on the artists and their work by the attendees. This built prestige and added to a furries’ own iconography by having furry created by a guest of honor or by being a guest of honor.

Badges also served as expressive art. A badge is an image worn to quickly identify attendees and aid with safety, keeping nonmembers out. Like most conventions and events there is a standard badge given to everyone. This standard badge was a digitalized mass produced image made by the guest of honor. Many furries though sought to make their own to wear along with this. The creating of one’s own badge aided communicative aids. It allowed for people to recognize who is who. Badges too are helpful in aiding furries in suit. This way an onlooker or a helper could recognize suiting furries by their badge. Famous furries can also be recognized in person (off the internet) by their badge. Some furries only used one badge with an image for furries to recognize each other or get to know each other by a quick glance. Other furries collected badges and displayed them on lanyards and conventions showing the many conventions they had attended.
A furry’s art and depiction on a badge becomes a mark of prestige for artists they have commissioned and for conventions they have attended. This is independent of the aesthetic of the art itself in a certain way. Nevertheless, a good well known artist doing someone’s badge usually has artistic value already attached. A furry at a convention could also seek out an artist in the art room and choose an artist to do their badge for them. This shows a selective process in personal choosing of aesthetics and who can do what in aiding in the designing with their fursona. Furries could also make their own badge, but getting one made by a more prominent artist also has its value as a possible once-in-a-life time opportunity.

My interviews with my role-play group also showed emphasis on art. Online avatars were helpful in depicting characters for roleplaying. Beyond that, furry use usually involved placing their furry art either created or commissioned in online art galleries.

Next I will discuss the art my informants produce and the art they shared. Bella draws and writes. She likes to do free art for people. She finds that she is not skillful enough to do open commissions. Still, she finds a purpose in doing free art. It’s good practice, drawing freebies. And believe me; I could use all the practice I can get. Drawing anthropomorphic characters, as it turns out, is not easy. Figuring out how to draw extended muzzles and correct paws is an everyday learning experience. (Bella 2014)

Bella’s art that she shared involves anthropomorphic characters in the everyday real world going on about life and business. One article of clothing that does stick out are collars that are worn that would not be a part of normal human wear. Due to their
cartoonist nature there is some exaggerated situations and emotion. She did not discuss her writing.

Figure 14: Bella and Friend. (Sketch, provided by owner: Signature edited to preserve anonymity).
Figure 15: Bella Sketch (Sketch, provided by owner).

Figure 16: Bella and Friend Cartoon (Digital Art, provided by owner Signature edited out to preserve anonymity).
Helena makes a lot of things in the game *Second Life* and makes money from it. This mainly involves the rave gear and DJ tables for in game use. Helena also has tried making music and “can doodle a bit, but can’t draw that well” (2014). Her music is techno based. She usually commissions artists to make art of her characters or takes part in online artist commission auctions. The art she shared was all commissioned and digital. The seven pieces were all of her fursona or her adopted character. Four were reference pages meant to help artists draw her characters. Two are of her fursona cartoon-like on neutral background. One depicts her adopted fursona in a daily life scene walking by a café.

Figure 17: Helena Reference of Her Fursona (Digital Art, provided by owner Signature edited out to preserve anonymity).
Figure 18: Helena Reference of Her Adopted Character (Digital Art, provided by owner
Signature edited out to preserve anonymity).
Figure 19: Helena Art of her Adopted Character (Digital Art, provided by owner
Signature edited out to preserve anonymity).
Figure 20: Helena Fursona Art (Digital Art, provided by owner Signature edited out to preserve anonymity).
Figure 21: Helena Reference of her Adopted character and a Friend whose Character Was Adopted by the Same Original Creator (Digital Art, provided by owner Signature edited out to preserve anonymity).

Kalvin says “I do not do art. I have done doodles, but most art that I have that is furry related are gift art, prizes, and commissions” (2014). He used to write based off the role-plays he did, but has stopped. He shared eleven art pieces with me. Four are sketches by him. These were done out of boredom. One depicts a fantastic wolf monster with fire and water in its hands. Another sketch depicts a Hedron stone from Magic the Gathering. One is his bleach Second Life character. The last is a wolf in snow that he uses for a book mark. The other seven pictures all are of his fursona. Three involve the Magic the Gathering aspect of his character. One is an award given by an artist for catching a
screenshot of their 2,000th webpage view. One is a raffle prize. Two are gifts from a friend, one given on his birthday. The last two are small fursona avatars that can be used for websites. One is Halloween themed, depicting his fursona trick-or-treating.

Figure 22: Kalvin on the MTG World of Zendikar (Digital Art and online artist award, provided by owner).
Figure 23: Kalvin Birthday Gift (Digital Art and online artist award, provided by owner: Birthday and name removed to preserve anonymity).
Allen writes stories, but is not a published author. These stories do include anthropomorphic characters as they are based in fantasy settings. He has written a story about his fursona, but does not include this with the rest of his stories. These stories are creations as independent stories. His fursona’s story is to aid in roleplaying (Allen 2014). Despite writing, Allen argues “I lack all artistic skills.” His fursona picture was commissioned by Sam as a gift (2014).

Sam’s stories depict anthropomorphic characters, but his fursona’s roleplaying is not the center of the stories he writes and plans to publish someday. When his fursona
does appear in the stories Sam plans to publish his fursona serves as a joke, an author’s signature appearing in the story (Sam 2014). This is something writers do much like classic painters, comic artists, and film makers putting themselves in their work. The art that Sam shared all depicted his fursona. Two were badges he got at conventions and the last is a reference sheet. This art piece is given to artists to better make his character.

Figure 26: Sam Reference Page (Traditional Art, provided by owner: Name removed to preserve anonymity).
Telm explained “As I could not draw my way out of a paper bag, or draw a paper bag to draw my way out of, I write stories…” (2014). It is hard for him to finish stories, though, due to his ADHD. Sometimes the stories are of his fursona and sometimes not, but he does use his fursona’s story for roleplaying (2014). He did not share any art work. Valin has started to practice doing digital art (2014). The two works that he shared were of his fursona. They are made by two separate artists. The one by him is a humorous emoticon (anime style depicting odd highlighted expressions for humor and often reflecting internal ideas and emotions of characters in reflection to its environments). This picture depicts his fursona amongst strangers, as a larger werewolf amongst normal
sized anthropomorphic characters and humans. Children also climb on his back, while he looks totally confused at his predicament. The other picture involves his fursona beating some friends at video games. Kella did not share any art, but she says she draws. She also writes using her fursona in police detective stories. She finds that her “writing is an escape from my reality” (2014).

Figure 28: Valin Emoticon Art (Digital Art, provided by owner)

The Bowling Green group confused me at first due to the lack of artistic activities at meets as I thought it would be the same as the Manhattan meets. Art did play a part in the Bowling Green meet, though often in different ways. The groups would often sit and talk. In doing so they would show their favorite art and character art to each other through handheld devices. This also included memes. These memes were not created by my informants, but they often would lead to furry jokes and recalling of convention experiences. Furry memes that poke fun at furries and furry stigma were among these.
One meme that garnered a lot of stories is the Tumbles the Dragon meme discussed in the stigma section. Fursona art was often shown by furries to one another for judgment. All of the artwork shown were accepted by the onlookers as I didn’t witness a case were a fursona art was critiqued. Furries often would be interested in these conversations, crowding around to look at the picture. This increased if it was a humorous picture. Devin also brought his scale-mail to show at the second meet. It was greeted by admiration to the other furries. In the Bowling Green meet, art is shared digitally. This may be due to a lack of artists in the group or to the meets having a different purpose. I was asked with Dylan what the furries did in Manhattan for meets. The Bowling Green meet did not seem to interested in the concept of an art night.

Dylan does digital art. He originally started drawing when he was very young. “I began drawing when I was little to put my imagination on paper.” “I am not the best artist, but I keep on drawing” (2014). He now usually draws dragons and tries to do draw other creatures. He started drawing dragons when he started playing the video game, Spyro the Dragon. Dylan also used to draw a lot of fan art of various characters he enjoyed. He uses how-to-draw books and online tutorials. He draws for fun, but his drawing has declined with the years. He says that he does not copy nor is inspired from other artists. “I just doodle and it’s whatever appeals to me, whatever makes my eye happy” (2014). Dylan shared two pictures, both of his fursona. Both of these he made himself. One just depicts his fursona at a sunset and the other is a reference sheet.
Devin also stated that he doesn’t do art though he is trying to make scale mail and his fursuit. He shared three pictures. These are all of his fursona that he commissioned from different artists. One is a badge. The bust was $15, the Full body and background for the same price and the badge for $10. Despite these prices Devin mentioned “I’d be willing to pay more, a lot more” (Devin 2014).
Figure 30: Devin Bust (Digital Art, provided by owner: Name edited out to preserve anonymity)
Kevin simply did not do art. He has tried to in the past, but doesn’t have the skill. His thoughts on furry stories is that he respects authors who write about their fursonas, but does not really want to read about someone’s furry character (Kevin 2014).

Furry art is a product of the imagination. Furry art can be of the fursona fursona. Furries can also create art to sell, like Helena’s rave equipment. This makes the furry fandom unique as it becomes a market based on the selling and buying of people’s personal creation of the self. Furries seek artists to commission that can provide proper
style and aesthetic for their fursonas. This market builds furries’ prestige in ways that they can show virtually and physically at meets or conventions. The tie between artist and furry buyer is fascinating as they both tie into what is expressed online and the value placed on the art. Skill and technique are tied to artist. The higher value though is placed on the fursona art itself as products to be shown at conventions, often independent from the artist.

Again, I can only interpret from what has been said and given to me. Both Kalvin and Helena allowed me to use their entire online art gallery. I know that many other furries have online art galleries, but it would be an invasion of privacy to use galleries not provided by my informants. Only Bella and Dylan do their own fursona art. The others may, but did not share. Not a single one of my informants thought of themselves as a good artist. This may be due to modesty during the interview. I find Bella and Dylan to be fine artists in their own rights. The others all commissioned art of their fursonas. A few were gifted by friends. A few were rewards given by artists like in Kalvin’s 2K hit reward. This is an interesting relationship where the artists give time and effort to produce a piece like Kalvin’s for a simple screenshot of their online virtual success. It does keep artists and buyer on their toes, not knowing when someone will do something similar. The same goes for online auctions like Helena’s adopt. A furry could also wait for an adopt or auction that looked like their fursona.

One thing to note is that all the furry art I have observed among these groups with the exceptions of Dylan, Devin, and Helena’s reference sheet are all far more human than animal in facial portions. What I mean here is the anthropomorphic heads usually involve shorter muzzles, the placement of eyes, etc. This human design element is observed in a
fox breeding survey where foxes bred to be domestic pets eventually led to foxes with shorter muzzles (Elia 2013:164-7). This along with the clothes and bipedalism become cultural markers of creator onto creation.

Some furry art shows the everyday. For example depicts her fursona doing everyday things. This furry art is an overlapping of the fantastic, the anthropomorphic character in everyday world. This is a creating of a “what if”. Perhaps this is what Kevin was trying to get at in his hard to explain “something to admire and day dream about. “Wouldn’t that be cool?” “Nothing major, just a wandering thought” (Kevin 2014). In this way anthropomorphic is not uncanny as it is a whimsical thought of the maker. Furry art like this depicts a human-animal hybrid in everyday life with no further questions needed for the audience. The animal person is taken for granted as a normal person. This is a certain conjured magic of its own. If furry art depicts questions it is usually used for humor as in Velm’s emoticon picture where the everyday is broken by the absurd. When animal people in a more fantastic setting like in Sam’s art also does not depict the uncanny as the anthropomorphic has always been a part of the fantasy genre. The use though is always up to the author in his response to audience. Furry art is interesting and needs further research; it is understood though within the contexts of use and reflects elements of the creator artist placing them within a furry art world. Its use is mainly amongst furries giving the fandom a unique place as fandom. The issue of stigma mostly comes elsewhere, in the areas of media and fursuits.

**Art and Stigma**

The point of this section is not to engage in a psychological analysis or sexual study of the fandom, only how stigma plays within the folk repertoire of the fandom
itself. What can be said is that there are always deviant individuals within any group. The larger the group or network the more deviants one is likely to find. I also explained that the internet is like the wild west where one can find all sorts of things online. Pornography can be found of all sorts of things whether made by a supporting fandom or not. One who creates pornographic images does not have to consider themselves as part of the fandom and may not be recognized by the fandom. What I can speak on is that no sexually deviant or pornographic activities took place in any of my fieldwork as it simply was not the nature, pursuit, or purpose of the events and the fandom as a whole. The main concentration was on having fun and the notion of anthropomorphism itself. There are five main elements that are associated with furry stigma: sex, being seen as mentally disturbed, uncanniness of fursuits and suit performance, the media, and the overlap with other fandoms.

Sex is the most commonly associated negative attribute of the fandom. Mr. G.’s joining the fandom story had a defensive element. He mentioned the pornography that came up when he searched the term furry and had to turn his filters on. The porn he came across was not what made him interested in joining the fandom. Porn is an element that furries may defend against and do not want associated with the fandom.

Others explained the media’s concentration on the fursuit as the center of sexual deviance “The media just wants a story for people to gasp and look at these crazy people in fursuits and going around making animal noises” (Sam 2014). “They [outsiders] think that we're all a bunch of people who just, pardon my language, have freaky sex in fursuits and that we all want to engage in bestiality, when really the furries who are like that are few and far between” (Telm 2014). Helena told a story about how non-furries reacted
when they found out she was a furry on a game called *Rust*. They become disgusted as they associated it with bestiality and fursuit sex (2014).

This stigma also goes as far as stopping furries from being open as furries. “To be honest, fear of judgment and ridicule has made me wary of mentioning the furry fandom at all to my family and all but the closest of my friends. So, I don’t get to involve him [fursona] in my life much at all” (Telm 2014). Kevin is afraid of stigma from telling people he is a furry “I don’t want to explain and be put into that weird position”. He’s does not see himself as a person who “can talk himself out of things” (Kevin 2014). Devin argues most internet users associate furries with internet pornography due to bizarre websites and Rule 34 art\(^{13}\) (2014). For clarification Rule 34 is internet humor. There is a numbered list of rules of the internet. Rule 34 is if something exists there is porn of it online. Dylan elaborated “It’s too close to bestiality, or other things, why would you throw away your humanity, of course these are all valid reasons but incorrect as they simply don’t understand and don’t get the scope of what I personally believe the furry fandom is” (2014).

Fursuits were also brought up a lot as a subject of stigma. The uncanniness of the fursuits holds a lot of weight inside and outside the fandom. Robotist Masahaori Mori’s concept of the Uncanny Valley involves two processes that lead to human refusal. The farther something is from being human the less it is anthropomorphized, but the less it is of the human world thus an “other”. The closer something is to being and acting human, the more it unsettles the onlooker (Mori 1970: 3-5). The uncanny valley does not have to apply only to human beings, but it can apply to animals as well. A fake animal that does not look as it should can also be unsettling to people. This is why fursuits are difficult as

\(^{13}\) Internet Humor: If it exists you will find porn of it on the internet.
they must fit within the spectrum of anthropomorphism in respect to both the human and animal aspect. Too far from the target leads to the perception of uncanniness and revulsion within the onlooker. Both the animal and human need to be balanced in art and performance by the creator.

The suits are what outsiders see and recognize with the fandom. Suits are for the most part homemade. Fursuit makers can try to improvise a suit themselves or use online tutorials. For this reason there is a massive range of fursuits. A good costume can lessen the impact of uncanniness. A bad suit creates questions and expresses oddness. Suit performers also may not want to break the magic to explain things. Fursuits and sexuality also play in social media representation and are portrayed as odd spectacle. Popular culture representation, such as in episodes of the *Simpsons* and *CSI*, have depicted furries in a deviant light. Other shows such as *Dr. Phil* and *Taboo* play into showing individuals as members of the whole. Magazines such as *Vanity Fair* also have also contributed to furry stigma by interviewing individuals (Helena, Sam 2014).

Fursonas themselves also can carry uncanny weight. As discussed before canines, felines, and dragons are the most common fursona. None of the fursonas in this thesis are ugly animals. The giraffe fursona is the odd fursona out of place, being the only ungulate. Both dragons and werewolves have charged symbolic status both negative and positive. A lot of this positivity stems from recent media.

Helena’s werewolf is important to her as a person, but she does present this aspect in suiting. Both Dylan and Devin’s fursonas are dragons and have much fewer anthropomorphic traits than other fursonas. In suiting Helena discussed that people would come up and ask for the suitors pictures to be taken. The spectacle is accepted in
this case. According to her, children either react positively or negatively. Her suit’s uncanniness is also a reason she wears her adopted fursuit, “She is more approachable as she doesn’t look realistic; she looks more like a mascot and more inviting” (Helena 2014). Kalvin and Devin both mentioned they were unsure of wanting a fursuit. “I am unsure because they are different and many people do not know how to accept what is different. I believe people are becoming more knowledgeable about what people really are” (Kalvin 2014). He doesn’t like the aesthetic appearance of wearing suits. “He felt they were odd, out of place, not furry.” (Kalvin 2014). Dylan is not sure if he will ever want one. This is also why he is not sure he wants to go to a convention. They make him feel that he should be embarrassed for the suit wearer (Dylan 2014).

The last stigma concept is the overlap of fandom. Therians like Kella easily have a place within the fandom, but not all furries know what to think about therians. Dylan in discussing about beliefs and fursona mentioned “There are furries like dragon otherkin who “believe when they die they become that or something like that” (2014). He joked later “some furries would find this insulting (being human), Woah, but I’m not human” (2014). Dylan also talked about the dysphoria stereotype that confuses people. They ask “why would you throw away your humanity” when this was not the point for him and many others being furry (2014). This does not make Kella and her beliefs bad; simply it demonstrates the otherness in the network and its associations to social media and fandom representation. This shows the difference in belief and associations in definitions of being furry as an online umbrella. Not all therians probably like being associated with furries.
Devin also talked about being a brony (a fan of the tv show *My Little Pony Friendship is Magic*). Many furries are of course fans of the show as it features anthropomorphic characters. Not all bronies are furry and many don’t want to be associated with the fandom due to stigma. The brony fandom also has its own word for *My Little Pony* pornography called clop. This is part of the stigma against bronies themselves (Devin 2014). What is interesting about this is both fandoms that overlap are stigmatized by online pornographic images. While the Furry fandom is an umbrella fandom, bronies are a classic fandom dedicated to a single media source. Individuals in both though can reject each other due to this common shared stigma produced partly from online judgments independent from what a majority within these fandoms actually do. The size of the network and the open end of animal enjoyment bring many people to the fandom. This network makes making psychological claims through survey research far more problematic.

One of the many ways to deal with stigma is to adopt it and to treat it with humor. Furries interact a lot online and thus need to communicate in online dialogues. Memes become a center for dialogues about identity. Part of this is due to being subjects of internet humor (sites like 4chan). Furryies at Bowling Green would love and share internet memes and jokes while sitting around and chatting. Part of this humor lies in ownership of words. *Yiff* is a term used to refer to furry porn and as the sexual act itself. *Yiff* supposedly is the sounds foxes make in sexual intercourse. The furries during the Bowling Green meets never use the term *Yiff* to discuss intercourse. If they brought up the word it was used as a joke reference of hyper sexual deviant character playing out absurd scenarios involving discomfort. A joke for example could be “Why did you not
like the furry convention, because some furry tried to *yiff* you.” There are two other plays on this word. *Yaff* might seem a nonsense word put alongside *yiff* in memes, however, it is a barking sound dogs use on a hunt (http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/yaff accessed 2/25/15). I have not heard *yaff* used in oral jokes, but have seen it in furry memes. The last is Yerf, a furry website dedicated to clean furry art and excellence.

These hyperbolic characters used in furry humor may not always be sexual in nature but also may demonstrate extreme social shortcomings and behavior that may poorly represent furries. The Tumbles the Dragon meme was discussed also. This may have been a real furry at a convention or just hypothetical, but the jokes and memes involve an intoxicated furry stumbling down the stairs at a convention. These Tumble memes and jokes reiterate not being a Tumbles. Basically their point is to behave well, don’t disgrace the fandom, or you will be a laughing stock. If the dragon is in suit, it also conveys the dangers of wearing a suit. Furries through appropriation of humor made by others and making their own memes of furry deviance can form standards of aesthetics for a group. This humor becomes tellable amongst furries as self-critique and fun. Ownership of iconography is similar to what the punks in Wocjiks study did (Wocjik 5 and 30). The furries treat the sexuality as a way to laugh at their subculture sexual deviance is not the main point of the fandom.
Acting online, there are worries of the stranger, the deviant “other,” that lurks around the corner; a concept that plays heavily in many urban legends. There are an untold amount of users on the internet and many in the fandom still go out and meet others daily despite these fears and stigmas. Kalvin discussed his Anthrocon (a furry convention) experience “At Anthrocon ninety-nine percent of people there that he met where very sociable, friendly, accepting, and warm. It was a good experience, he would recommend going to anyone. There was the One percent who were beyond the normal level of strange” (Kalvin 2014). Despite a generalized statistic, it shows that furries are not always comfortable with individuals and their actions in the fandom, that there is deviance due to the depth of the network, and that it helps spawn rumors and ideas due to an individual out of many perpetuating stigma (2014). “Strangeness” is up to an individual in relationship to a collective determined social whole. With such a large
network this becomes difficult to maintain. Furries get together and laugh over some games, critique art and media, or eat out with friends. This seems rather normal for America.

I asked my interviewees where they thought the fandom was going and its place in American culture. Some were positive and others negative. Some think the fandom will stay as is others think it will grow. Most hope the stigma will end.

I sincerely hope that furries will one day be rid of the stigma that currently surrounds them. I know that with the internet becoming more prevalent, the fandom will continue to grow and reach all over the world. With any luck, when it gains a large enough following, the stigma will dissolve and it will cease to be a source of shame or apprehension in members of the fandom. (Telm 2014)

Bella explains:

On the whole, I feel like the community is capable of so much good and I see that every day. Every convention supports a charity or a cause. And even on a smaller scale, if someone in the community is having financial trouble or doesn’t have a place to sleep, people reach out. Like every fandom out there, there are problems. But caring for one another isn’t one of ours. I can’t tell you how many times I’ve seen one furry simply be kind to another and expect nothing in return. And that’s something so remarkable to me. To the majority and this is just my experience, we’re kind of like a plague. People think we’re all perverts and sexual deviants. And right now, that’s all they really see. They don’t see the kindness, or the potential. All they see is a sickness. (Bella 2014)

Helena hopes
In America we will stop having this horrible representation of there all just in it for the fetishes and the weird stuff. Most people do not understand how many donations go into the fandom. A furry convention 90% of the time take the proceeds earned from entrance fees after they have paid for the convention, the staffing, and everything else, and the prepared budget for next year to the ASPCA, local charities, and animal shelters. Many furries go to charity events and hospitals and give their charity and time and energy. It is a pain in the butt to be in a fursuit. They do this to make people smile. (2014)

Sam feels and brings up interesting points:

I do not think the fandom is going to die down. It’s going to evolve beyond just being a part of internet culture. There are already stores in Australia that sell furry related objects like plushies, furry suits. It’s already becoming something beyond just being a trekkie or anime and going to the convention dressing up. He feels that it’s going to be a new outlet for people, a new way for us to discover who we are really by exploring these different fursonas (2014)

Valin States:

I feel right now that the fandom is way out of place as what it used to be ten years ago. Furries within the fandom mess up publically and American culture nowadays blows everything out of proportion and disables us to express ourselves how some of us want to. At this rate it will fall if the fandom plays more into this generation instead of their actual selves. We can do it; we definitely can make the fandom appear much better than how America (or even the world) looks at us now. (2014)
Dylan thinks the fandom will continue to grow as it appears in game and grows on the internet.

   Young people will be drawn to it as it is different from standard real life. I hopes it turns into a force of good where furries will help with out with charities and donations for animal research groups or charity they want to give too. (2014)

This range of opinion reflects the nature of the fandom. Only time and data will tell what will happen. With hopes and fears the fandom is certainly a large network with lessons to teach, rich in art, and expressions of the human condition.

Furry art is a difficult negotiation of fandom identity. Most furries create or commission work about their fursona. This work is shared and expanded on by those interacting in the community. Despite what most furries do with their art, it becomes associated with online pornography. This stigma thus limits what people think furries do with art. The overlap of other fandoms due to anthropomorphism is an interesting phenomenon as identity becomes a place of conflict with stigma. Some bronies for example who have their own stigma associated with online pornography do not wish to be associated with the furry stigma and vice versa. This new “otherism” based in fandom is an interesting trend in social change in the internet age where judgment is not done on physical bodies and creeds, but on likes, dislikes, and actions expressed online. Furry art thus serves as both a subject of stigma and as an object of an individual’s expressive aesthetic that often requires negotiation of ownership of identity through humor.
Conclusion

The furry fandom is complicated due to its size, layers, and online and offline interaction. It is hard to think of any social phenomenon to which to compare it. Furry aesthetics are complex. They are based in the personal, the anthropomorphic, and expressed most fully in the fursona. The issues of furry aesthetics lie not only in furry expression, but how others perceive that expression and the overlap of different groups in the fandom.

Dorothy Noyes’ concepts of folk network are important in looking at the folk groups in the internet era. The individual’s online and offline interaction in a folk group adds new layers of complexity to folklore studies. The internet’s allows for the breaking of boundaries of for class, creed, age, and culture allowing them equally to interact and speak. Furry, as a fandom, serves as a new model of folk dynamics in such a setting. Fan cultures as forces of change and expression are becoming large parts of our culture. As producers of new traditions, furries serve as one of many examples of fan groups needing to be explored by folklorists.

Art online and offline allows for new means of communication and expression. Art in relationship to stigma becomes an interesting place of mitigation and identity. Furry stigma is not based in nationality, ethnicity, or religion in Goffman’s “tribal stigma” categorization. Still, they are marked with deviance based on stereotypes from people’s online experience. This is an interesting trend in concern of people’s offline and online activities and how they associated group. The deviant stigmas are associated with furries even when a majority of furries consider themselves hobbyists. This goes as far as other groups that overlap with the fandom stigmatizing the larger furry fandom and vice
versa. Even without nationality, religion, or ethnicity to become something to stigmatize fandom becomes the target instead. The relationships, symbols, art, and communication between groups and online stigmatization are new places for folklorists to analyze. This is an area folklorists can look into. Internet rumor, humor, and reactions are a dialogue that folklorists are equipped to work with. The conflicts that arise out of such dialogue are scenarios that can help us think about dialogue and identity shaping.

Furries and their interaction with representations of animals also serve as a model to our changing relationships to animals in the world. Fursona making is an art itself that allows people to interact on a new social layer involving play and love of animals. As the fandom consists of so many different groups that interact with representations of animals in different ways, there are new traditions and ideas that involve animals.

Fursona suit performing is another layer that becomes the source of spectacle, media misconceptions, and fun as it invades space for laughs. The fandom’s resituating of popular culture and folklore shows how the two merge. Folklorists need to be aware of this as fandom serves as a new location for folklore and in the casting of older genre forms in new guises. The complexity of the furry fandom means that many more studies need to be made to explore the richness of subculture networks. The furry fandom thus is rich a source of new tradition with old elements. The furry fandom helps show how humans express their humanity through the animal, how traditions now are spread globally, and how we are interacting in an ever dynamic world for human and animal alike.

If further research is to be done on the furry subculture future scholars should look more at fursuit performance as my observations were limited. Furry roleplaying
groups both online and off could also be a future project worth investigating as it involves another area of the interaction between popular culture and folklore.

Roleplaying involves a lot of creation both for the individual and the group. The convention scene also can be an area for folklore investigation. Many conventions have their own traditions and group dynamics. Furry conventions are one example out of many subculture conventions. As I look back at the last three years of research and experience all I can say is that, much as in the past, the animal still is with us in this age of sprawling industrial cities and lives bent over glowing screens. I leave this with the thoughts of my informant Bella

…it was only natural that the guides in fiction were often animals. In human history, we’ve always looked towards them to survive. When we needed to hunt, we followed their tracks. Some cultures viewed them as spirit guides and messengers of gods. The fact that they are so ingrained into stories is proof of their importance to our own survival thus far. And so, a little girl fell in love with the idea of being a white rabbit in a waistcoat. It wouldn’t be until many years later that she even knew what a furry was, but the thought was still there in a sense (Bella 2014).

And for many it is still here.
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GLOSSARY

Esoteric Furry Terms

Adopt: A character made by another furry adopted with permission by another furry.

Albedo: Anthropomorphic underground science fiction comic seen as the birthplace of the furry fandom.

Anthrocon: The largest furry convention in the United States, held annually in Philadelphia.

Central Midwest Fur Meet: A furry convention held in Topeka, Kansas

Confurence: First furry convention held in 1989.

Digitigrade: Bent legs found on most quadruped mammals.

Feral: An anthropomorphic animal that talks and thinks like a human, but otherwise its species.

Full Fursuit: A full costume like a sports mascot.

Fur: Furry term short for a person who is a furry.

Furaffinity: Online art hosting sites for furries

Furcadia: Online furry roleplaying client.

Fursona: Anthropomorphic expression of self or character made by a majority of the contemporary members of the furry fandom.

Fursuit: Costumes constructed by some furries. Usually of their fursona and usually needed for façade performance.

Kentucky Furs: Online forum for Kentucky Furries to meet and plan events.

Mid-West Furfest: A Furry convention held in Chicago. As of 2014 there was a chlorine attack putting nineteen attendees in the hospital.

Minitail or partial tail: A miniature tail worn by some furs.

Otherkin: Someone who believes their soul is or is part of a perceived mythological creature (dragon, unicorn, etc.). A majority of furries are not Otherkins.

Partial Fursuit: Term for suit that consists of costume head, gloves, tail, and sometimes shoes.
Pokemorph: A pokemon fursona

Rainbow: Unnatural color in a fursonas fur pattern.

Second Life: 3D Online roleplaying game/client. It is very complex.

Therian: Someone who believes their soul is not human, but an animal, or that their there soul is part animal. A majority of furries are not therians.

VCL: Online art hosting sites for furries

**Other Group Terms**

4Chan: Online Anime board

Bant: A place in the Magic the Gathering Universe. One of the five shards of Alura, one world of countless in the Magic the Gathering Universe. It is ruled by a caste system dominated by knights and a hierarchy of angels (Rose Water and Beyer 2008)

*Bleach: An Anime*

Boffing: Recreational activity involving combat with foam weapons often confused with L.A.R.P, but lacks the roleplaying aspect.

Client: A computer program that requests data (often online programs used for roleplaying like M.U.C.Ks)

DeviantART: A website for sharing art.

*Eragon: A Fantasy Novel by Christopher Paolini about a boy and his dragon.*

Game Master(GM): The creator, runner, story teller, and referee of a Roleplaying game.

L.A.R.P (Live Action Role-play): A form of role-play that differs from tabletop as mechanics if present are behind the scene and the role-play is acted out as if in real-life.

M.U.C.K (Multi User Chat Client): An online communication network.

*Magic the Gathering™ (MTG): A Trading Card Game produced by Wizards of the Coast.*

Meta: In tabletop role playing games elements needed to have a successful game independent of the rules (example team composition, in game equipment, strategies for handling an obstacle, breaking or not breaking the 4th wall).

Tabletop role-play: A form of role-play which usually involves visible game mechanics.
**Researcher Terms**

Dysphoria: Species Identity disorder where furs are unhappy with their lives and wish to be animals instead. This is one of the two furry stigmas.

Façade performance: Performance, as discussed in Dorothy Noyes article, “Façade Performances: Public Face, Private Mask,” which makes use of private space by revealing these aspects of representation of self, species, sometimes gender, and use of space. In the case of furries façade performance is taking the private into public space (1995:91).

Neo-Tribal: A concept of nonwestern aesthetics becoming a part of a cultural movement, usually self-made, and taking on qualities of what is perceived as the primitive as discussed by Daniel Wojcik’s book *Punk and Neo-Tribal Body Art* (1995:35).

Story Realm: Katherine Young’s concept of the connected elements of a story that create that story in the minds of the audience (Shuman 2005:8).

Tellability: Labov, William & Joshua Waletzky’s concept of who has the right to tell a story in a social setting (Goldstein and Shuman 2012:121).

Tale World: Katherine Young’s concept of the events and environment that take place outside of storytelling that are needed to conjure and create the story.

Stigma: Erving Goffman’s concept in which an individual is attributed in a manner that diminishes them from a whole person to a tainted, discounted one based on cultural social markers. For furries there are two main types of Stigma 1. Species identity disorder 2. Sexual Deviance (Goldstein and Shuman 2012:115) and Goffman 1963:2).

Uncanny Valley: Masahiro Mori’s concept of human aesthetic in relationship to the nonhuman other. The closer something is to being human and is flawed (missing a body part, still being not human like a robot or animal, the wrong size, having something in the wrong place, etc.) the more it revolts humans which he discusses in his article “The Uncanny Valley” (Mori 1970: 3-5).