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Can use as a sample

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Rough and Tumblr: The Furry Subculture

Every person feels awkward sometimes. Everyone has had a conversation in which they do not quite know what to say or whether to laugh. In that moment, many people wish the floor would open up and swallow them whole so they would have an excuse to escape. But what if you could avoid those awkward moments by simply not being you; by being an extension of yourself? What if you could feel more secure in socialization by stripping away some of society's social constructs? This is the aim of the subculture known as "furries."

Furries are people who are interested in zoomorphism, when a person assumes animal traits (Winterman). Many furries do this by wearing tails or ears, or even going so far as to dress up as an animal. This costume is known as a fursuit, and the animal (including the personality attached to the animal) chosen is known as a fursona ("The New Furry's Dictionary"). A fursuit completely covers the body so that the person appears as the animal. For example, Tumblr user totally-nachocat dresses in a full-body cat fursuit, complete with different outfits and a pair of glasses. The person dressed in the fursuit is entirely obscured so that he or she looks like a cat. The fursona attached to this fursuit is Nacho Cat, who "loves skateboarding, nachos, and spaaaaace!" ("Nacho Cat's blog!").



(“Nacho Cat’s blog!”)

The fursona acts as an avatar, becoming an idealized representation of a person, or one that a person wishes to show the rest of the world. According to David Stafford, avatars “allow us to explore an aspect of our personae through them” (44). He continues,

Our idea of disembodiment separates the self from the flesh. When we are separated from our physical forms, what is it that gives us our identity? The idea may be on the surface terrifying but there are many who seek this detachment, to escape the solidity of their own identity (44).

He goes on to say that, using avatars, people “can feel free to interact as they wish without any fear of consequence” (44). While this might seem like an invitation to act recklessly, furries see the use of an avatar, or fursona, as a way to build friendships with others without the awkwardness of actual human interaction.

According to BBC’s Denise Winterman, “‘Fursuiters,’ as they are called, bemoan society’s inhibitions and look admiring at the animal kingdom where creatures have more freedom to be expressive.” This is commonly seen at the most basic level in what is known in the subculture as scritchng—the scratching and grooming of others in fursuits (“Who are the furries?”).

Scratching, among other social interactions (particularly attending conventions, or “cons”), aids in giving shy furies confidence in all areas of life. “You have to understand something. I was a very shy person. And a couple years ago, something broke, and I’m not shy anymore. Then I became a manager at work and so it improved my whole life!” said one furry, whose fursona was a badger, in an article for *Vanity Fair* (Gurley).

“I can walk into any situation and go, ‘I am the dude!’ It’s like having a switch, a psychological switch you can tap into and turn something on,” said another furry in the same article (Gurley).

One post from Tumblr user furryfuntime reads, “With this fandom you can walk in...and they’ll act as if they’ve known you all your life.” Another says, “Anyone’s just welcome. Love, family, friendship is what it’s about” (“FurryFunTime”). These posts hone in on the idea that furies are comfortable in their subculture because they know that no matter how they act or who they really are underneath their fursona, they will be accepted. Another post from furryfuntime says that furies “want to be different. We want to be ourselves no matter what stands in the way” (“FurryFunTime”). This expresses the idea that the fursona really is a representation of the person behind it, that the fursona is one’s true self.

We could also see a fursona as a sort of selfobject, as suggested by Sue-Ellen Brown. The idea of self psychology was proposed by Heinz Kohut, but Brown applies his theory to the bond between humans and animals (137). In a 2007 study, Brown designed a survey that asked participants to answer questions that would identify whether or not their pet was a selfobject. A selfobject was defined as “a provider of self-cohesion, self-esteem, calmness, soothing, and acceptance” (137). The study found that “animals rivaled and even surpassed humans in their ability to provide important selfobject needs for the participants” (138). Thusly, we can

conclude that if we think of a fursona as a different entity from the person who created it, then the fursona itself could act as a selfobject, providing its creator with higher self-esteem, which would give the creator the confidence to socialize and “be him/herself.”

Photographic data from Tumblr suggests that many, if not most, fursonas are dogs or related animals, such as foxes and wolves. In her book *Pack of Two: The Intricate Bond Between People and Dogs*, author Caroline Knapp writes that dogs “lead us into a world that is sometimes kind and gentle but that can be frightening, frustrating, and confusing, too. Dogs can be aggressive and stubborn and willful. They can be difficult to read and understand” (4). In this way, dogs are very much like humans, which might be why so many furies gravitate toward dog fursonas: because they can understand and identify with dogs. Knapp goes on to say the bond between humans and dogs “does, in fact, qualify as a relationship, a genuine union between two beings who communicate with, respect, and give to one another” (5). Therefore, if a person’s fursona is a dog, that person can still form meaningful, real relationships with others.



(“Don’t Hug Cacti”)

Furries, like many other subcultures, also face hatred from people outside the subculture who do not understand it. Many furries, like tumblr user aceofheartsfox, are dedicated to giving other furries advice and support. A few tumblr users confided to aceofheartsfox that they were having trouble convincing their parents to let them go to furry conventions, mainly because of the popular belief outside the subculture that being a furry is a sexual kink. User aceofheartsfox kindly gave the other users advice, and suggested helping convince parents by showing them “all the fun activities and panels” (“Ace of Hearts Fox’s Fursuited Blog”). He told another user that “the event is quite tame...It’s a very laid back and fun gathering!” (“Ace of Hearts Fox’s Fursuited Blog”). This shows that furries are accepting and want others who are unsure of themselves to feel welcome and to have fun. When asked his opinion on babyfurs (furries who like to role play younger characters), aceofheartsfox replied that he was not in a position to judge anyone (“Ace of Hearts Fox’s Fursuited Blog”). This is further proof that the furry subculture is a welcoming community that reserves judgment, therefore building confidence in its members.

In conclusion, people join the furry subculture in order to ease social interaction and build confidence. Members do this by adopting one or more fursonas, which act as calming, self-esteem-boosting presences and allow people to interact without fear of judgment. The furry subculture is a welcoming community that encourages people not to be afraid to be themselves.



(“Don’t Hug Cacti”)

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