

Why so FURious? Rebuttal of Dr. Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's Response to Gerbasi et al.'s "Furries from A to Z (Anthropomorphism to Zoomorphism)"

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Abstract

This is a rebuttal to Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's criticisms of the original furry research conducted in 2006 and published in 2008. Her focus on gender identity disorder misses the main point of the study, which was that it was the first empirical study to collect data scientifically and report findings on the furry fandom, an often misrepresented subculture.

Keywords

anthropomorphism, furries, Furry, identity, zoomorphism

Dr. Probyn-Rapsey's critique (this issue, pp. 294-301) misses the main point of our study by narrowing its focus almost entirely to the issue of identifying and recommending treatment for the phenomenon of species identity disorder. When we reviewed the scientific literature in 2005, there had, to that point, been no attempt to study the furry fandom scientifically. Popular media provided the only available information (Stahl & Lewis, 2003; Gurley, 2001), which suggested that furries had interests in zoomorphism and anthropomorphism. These media portrayals were resoundingly unfavorable toward furries and empirically unfounded. For this reason, we sought information on this unstudied subculture through adherence to rigorous social scientific methodologies: the development of operational definitions, hypothesis formation and testing via proper data collection and analysis, and presentation of the results in a peer-reviewed journal. Our cautious suggestion of species identity disorder

in some members of the furry fandom was based on our finding that many furies agreed with statements that paralleled sentiments of people with gender identity disorder regarding their biological sex (e.g., “A feeling that you are your non-human species trapped in a human body”).

Dr. Probyn-Rapsey’s disagreement with the concept of gender identity disorder is irrelevant to our study’s stated intent, as is her assertion that we did not review the gender identity disorder literature, as we were not addressing the validity or political correctness of the gender identity disorder diagnosis (which is beyond the scope of *Society & Animals*). Given our word limit and the novelty of research on furies, it would have been counterproductive to review the gender identity disorder literature.

Dr. Probyn-Rapsey’s review contains numerous flaws:

- In discussing our findings, she ignores our discussion on p. 218, where we report that “additional analyses—in which the types of furies were compared on how likely they were to check neither, one, or both of the GID connections—reveal that participants in both distorted groups are more likely to check one or both of the GID connections. Undistorted types were likely to check neither GID item, $\chi^2(6, n = 188) = 53.121, p < .001$.”
- Her criticism regarding treatment for species identity disorder is misplaced, given that our article never mentioned treatment or speculated that furies should receive treatment.
- She criticizes our open-ended question about sexual orientation, even though open-ended questions are a perfectly valid social scientific convention. The fact that some furies provided responses that could not be validly categorized as heterosexual, bisexual, or homosexual has been addressed in subsequent research. Furthermore, it would have been invalid to include those low-frequency responses (e.g., “bi-curious,” “normal,” “pansexual”) in a quantitative analysis of variables related to sexual orientation.
- Her statement about control participants indicates a lack of familiarity with community college students. Few, if any, of the control participants were psychology majors; all were registered in Social Psychology or Lifespan Human Development, neither of which focuses on abnormal behavior.
- She states that furry participants might identify as less than 100% human for reasons that she felt included, “not the least having a hangover from furry drinks the night before.” While it may be an attempt at humor, we find this comment to be egregiously offensive, derogatory, and insulting to the furry fandom and our participants. Ironically, this remark illustrates her subscription to the very stereotypes we were empirically testing and confirms the necessity of our research.

- Finally, she states, “The *DSM* is updated and reviewed and republished every seven years.” This is incorrect. The first *DSM* was published in 1952; revisions were published in 1968, 1980, 1987, 1994, and 2000 (PsychiatryOnline, 2011). Revisions typically occur when it is necessitated by a wealth of knowledge from scientific research, and Dr. Probyn-Rapsey’s incorrect statement regarding basic facts about a work she is criticizing is astonishing.

In conclusion, we believe that Dr. Probyn-Rapsey’s criticism of our study is primarily a crusade against a subject only tangentially and superficially related to the main purpose of our study. We did not set out to study or judge gender identity disorder, nor do we make any prescriptions about species identity disorder, beyond a cautious suggestion that it may exist and therefore may be of interest to clinical psychologists. Our groundbreaking study on the furry culture filled an existing gap in the scientific literature and has been essential in generating further research on furies and their unique and creative culture.

References

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