Accuracy of Perceived Prejudice toward One's Fan Group

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Abstract

We examined the accuracy of perceptions of prejudice of members of two different fandoms: anime fans and furries. Anime and furry fans rated the perceived degree of prejudice of (a) ingroup members toward another group of fans, (b) their own prejudice toward another group of fans, and (c) the prejudice of another group of fans toward their ingroup. Anime fans expressed more prejudice toward furries than furries expressed toward anime fans. Both furries and anime fans were relatively accurate in their perception of ingroup members' prejudice toward an outgroup. Finally, although furries slightly underestimated the degree of prejudice outgroup members showed toward furries, they were relatively more accurate than anime fans, who greatly overestimated the degree of prejudice outgroup members showed toward their ingroup. Together, the results show that group members may be accurate in their perception of prejudice toward their group, though groups may differ in this accuracy, and further research is needed to examine why this may be.

Keywords: anime, furry, furries, fan, prejudice, accuracy

Introduction

Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) posits that individuals seek to join or maintain positive and distinct social identities. The extent of this tendency has been shown in *minimal groups* research paradigm, where categorizing people arbitrarily (e.g., those who overestimated the number of dots in an image versus those who underestimated) was sufficient to elicit ingroup bias – a tendency to hold positive attitudes and give preferential treatment toward members of one's own group (Tajfel, Billig, Bundy, & Flament, 1971). While individual differences and situational factors can enhance or mitigate this bias, people have a general tendency to favor their ingroup to distinguish between ingroup and outgroup members (Turner & Haslam, 2001). Ingroup bias is dualistic, in that it manifests both as ingroup favoritism and as discrimination and prejudice toward outgroups. Brewer (1999) suggests that ingroup favoritism and outgroup discrimination are separate processes, with ingroup favoritism more likely to be the product of categorization. However, ingroup bias may also be tied to the norms of the group.

Self-categorization theory later elaborated on social identity theory, positing that when individuals categorize themselves

as ingroup members, they depersonalize and self-stereotype in line with the ingroup's prototypical content (e.g., norms, behaviors, beliefs; Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987). Put another way, when a group identity is salient, group members perceive themselves and other group members as similar to one another—they also tend to see themselves and ingroup members as distinct from outgroup members (see Hogg & Smith, 2007). If a group has a norm of disliking or expressing prejudice toward an outgroup, when that identity is salient, ingroup members are likely to express prejudice toward the outgroup. Indeed, if a group norm of fairness is salient, then less intergroup bias is expected (Jetten, Spears, & Manstead, 1997). In other words, if I believe other group members will express prejudice toward an outgroup, then I will also likely express prejudice toward that outgroup (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2008). In the present study, we examined the accuracy of perceptions of prejudice for two fan groups.

Prejudice is defined as a negative evaluation of someone based on his or her group membership (Crandall, Eshleman, & O'Brien, 2002). In the present research, we examined perceptions of prejudice in two different fan groups. Prior research (Crandall et al., 2002) has shown that individuals suppress their expression of prejudice toward some groups (e.g., racial/ethnic groups, religious groups), but not others (e.g., rapists, gang members). This research included two fan groups (i.e., country music fans, rap music fans) who scored in the middle of a list of 105 groups (e.g., terrorists, drunk drivers, farmers, doctors) in terms of how acceptable it is to express prejudice toward the group. In other words, these fan groups fell in the middle

range of the acceptable-unacceptable extremes. Crandall, Ferguson, and Bahns (2013) suggested that groups occupying this middle position—between "definitely not OK to have negative feelings about this group" and "definitely OK to have negative feelings about this group"—fall into a "normative window" (groups that are shifting over time from acceptable to unacceptable in terms of suitability to stigmatize) are the best groups to research prejudice for social psychologists. Illustrating this idea, Reysen and Shaw (in press) recently found that people *are* willing to express prejudice toward certain fan groups (e.g., furries, bronies, or juggalos— fans of the Insane Clown Posse). For this reason, in the present study, we selected anime fans and furries in which to explore perceptions of prejudice.

Anime fans are enthusiastic admirers of Japanese animation and comic books (manga). Anime fans show their interest through artwork, costuming (i.e., cosplay), and creating fan-produced content (e.g., fan dubbing). Anime fans tend to be male, young (e.g., college students), video gamers, introverted, and tend to perceive themselves as nerds (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, & Shaw, in press). Furries are self-identified fans of anthropomorphism (ascribing human traits to animals) and zoomorphism (ascribing animal traits to humans; Reysen, Plante, Roberts, & Gerbasi, 2015). Similar to anime fans, furries show their interest through artwork, costuming (i.e., fursuits), and writing (Plante, Roberts, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2014). Also similar to anime fans, furries tend to be male, young (e.g., college students; Plante, Roberts, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2015), video gamers, and tend to perceive themselves as nerds (Reysen et al., in press).

An important similarity between furries and anime fans is the fact that non-fans stigmatize them both (Roberts, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, in press), expressing prejudice and perceiving these fan groups as non-prototypical (Reysen & Shaw, in press). In both studies, furries were found to face greater prejudice from non-fans than anime fans.

Current Study

The purpose of the present research was threefold: (1) to replicate prior research regarding the degree of prejudice felt toward furries and anime fans, (2) to assess the similarity between one's own prejudice toward other groups and their perception of prejudice in other ingroup members, and (3) to test the accuracy of fans' perception of prejudice toward their ingroup. To this end, furries and anime fans predicted the degree of prejudice felt by other ingroup members toward members of the other fan outgroup, and predicted the degree of prejudice felt by outgroup members toward their own fan ingroup. Participants also indicated their own degree of prejudice toward the other fan outgroup. Based on prior research showing that furries received greater prejudice than anime fans (Reysen & Shaw, in press; Roberts et al., in press), we predicted that anime fans would express greater prejudice toward furries than furries would express toward anime fans. Following a social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), ingroup members were predicted to perceive other ingroup members as similar to themselves, and, as such, their own degree of prejudice would be similar to their prediction of the prejudice felt by other ingroup members

toward the outgroup. Finally, based on research showing accuracy in perception across a variety of domains (see Jussim, 2012), we predicted that both groups would accurately perceive the degree of prejudice received from members the other fan outgroup.

Methods

Participants and Procedure

Participants (N = 2980, 71.8% male, 1.8% other; M_{age} = 24.03, SD = 6.72) included self-identified anime fans (n = 2256) solicited either online or at the anime convention A-Kon, 2014 (Dallas, TX) and furries (n = 724) solicited at the furry convention Anthrocon, 2014 (Pittsburgh, PA). The majority of participants indicated their racial/ethnic group as White (76.2%). As part of a larger study regarding fandoms, participants completed self-report measures regarding their perception of the ingroup's prejudice toward the outgroup, perception of the outgroup's prejudice toward the ingroup, participants' own prejudice toward the outgroup, and demographic items.

Materials

Participants' perception of the ingroup's prejudice toward the outgroup was assessed with one item (e.g., "From a typical anime fan perspective, how positively or negatively do you think they would rate a typical furry fan"). Participants also completed one item assessing the perception of the outgroup's prejudice toward the ingroup (e.g., "From a typical furry fan perspective, how positively or negatively do you think they would rate a typical anime fan"). Lastly, participants

completed one item to assess the degree of prejudice toward the outgroup (e.g., "How positively or negatively would you rate a typical furry fan"). The samples differed with regard to which group constituted the ingroup and outgroup (e.g., furry was the ingroup for furries and anime fans was the outgroup for furries). Participants rated the items on a 101-point scale, from 0 = *extremely negative* to 100 = *extremely positive*. For ease of interpretation, we reversed the scale, such that higher scores indicate greater negative prejudice.

Results

We first conducted a MANOVA with sample (furry vs. anime fan) as the independent variable and the prejudice variables as the dependent variables. The omnibus test was significant, Wilks' Λ = .693, $F(3, 2973) = 439.97$, $p < .001$, η_p^2 = .31. As shown in Table 1, anime fans perceived other anime fans as having more prejudice toward furries than furries perceived other furries having toward anime fans. A similar patterned emerged with anime fans personally expressing greater prejudice toward furries than furries expressed toward anime fans. Lastly, furries perceived greater prejudice from anime fans than anime fans perceived from furries.

To examine the extent to which participants' own prejudice was similar to their perception of ingroup members' prejudice, we next conducted a series of paired samples *t*-tests. Both furries ($t(723) = 3.39$, $p = .001$, $d = .13$) and anime fans ($t(2254) = 6.31$, $p < .001$, $d = .14$) expressed lower prejudice toward the outgroup than what they perceived other ingroup members expressing. Estimates of ingroup prejudice

and individual reports of prejudice were significantly correlated for both furry fans (r = .49, $p < .001$) and anime fans ($r = .64$, $p < .001$). Thus, ingroup members accurately perceived the degree of prejudice of other ingroup members.

Finally, we assessed the accuracy of participants' perception of outgroup prejudice using one-sample *t*-tests comparing participants' perception of outgroup prejudice toward the ingroup and the actual degree of prejudice expressed by the outgroup (i.e., mean response as the criterion). Furries perceived less prejudice from anime fans than the actual prejudice expressed by anime fans, $t(723) = -8.50$, $p < .001$, $d = -.36$. In contrast, anime fans perceived more prejudice expressed by furries than was actually expressed by furries, $t(2255) = 16.19$, $p < .001$, $d = .69$. Using effect size (i.e., d) cut-offs suggested in prior accuracy research (see Jussim, 2012), furries, although underestimating anime fans' prejudice toward them, were relatively accurate, whereas anime fans were largely inaccurate and overestimated the degree of prejudice from furries toward anime fans.

Discussion

The purpose of the present research was to examine (1) relative levels of prejudice expressed toward anime and furry fans, (2) the similarity between own prejudice and perceived prejudice of other ingroup members, and (3) the accuracy of perceived prejudice toward one's ingroup. We found evidence supporting the first two predictions: anime fans expressed more prejudice toward furries than furries expressed toward anime fans and one's own

prejudice was similar to the perception of ingroup members' prejudice toward the outgroup. However, our hypothesis that fans would be accurate in their perception of prejudice directed toward their ingroup was only partially supported: while furries were relatively accurate, anime fans were inaccurate.

The present findings are largely in accordance with prior research. Prior research has shown, for example, that although anime fans and furries experience prejudice from other groups, furries are the target of greater prejudice than anime fans (Reysen & Shaw, in press; Roberts et al., in press). The present results replicate these findings, showing that anime fans dislike furries more than furries dislike anime fans. In another line of research utilizing a social identity approach (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987), the research suggests that ingroup members depersonalize by taking on attitudes and beliefs in line with the ingroup's prototypical content and express a degree of prejudice similar to that which they perceive other ingroup members expressing (Shapiro & Neuberg, 2008). The results show exactly that, as both anime fans and furries were relatively accurate in their perception of other ingroup members' expressed prejudice toward the outgroup. Another line of research has shown that furries are frequently the target of prejudice (Mock, Plante, Reysen, & Gerbasi, 2013), while anime fans may be less frequently the target of prejudice, or may face ambivalent prejudice (Reysen, Plante, Roberts, Gerbasi, Mohebpour, & Gamboa, in press) rather than direct prejudice. Put another way, furries may know they face prejudice while anime fans may be more uncertain about how they are viewed by others. The present

study is in accordance with this prior research, as furries, but not anime fans, were accurate in their perception of prejudice. Furry fans accurately predicted (though slightly underestimated) the degree of prejudice from anime fans, while anime fans inaccurately overestimated the degree of prejudice from furries.

While the present research is novel in that it examined the accuracy of perceived prejudice toward one's group, it is not without its limitations. First, only two groups were examined, which limits the ability to generalize the findings to other groups. Future research may assess a variety of groups, including those that differ with regard to how acceptable it is to express prejudice toward them. Second, we did not assess how much knowledge or how frequently each group has had contact with the other. Prior research suggested that more frequent contact may increase accuracy (Reysen, Hall, & Puryear, 2014); as such, these variables should be assessed in future studies. Finally, there may exist other individual difference variables, moderators, and contextual and cultural influences that we did not measure, but may predict greater accuracy in stereotype perception (Epley, 2008, Fiske, 1993; Smith & Collins, 2009). Such moderators should be assessed and tested in future research.

To conclude, we examined perceptions and accuracy of prejudice among anime fans and furries. Anime fans expressed greater prejudice toward furries than furries expressed toward anime fans. Both furries and anime fans were relatively accurate in their perception of other ingroup members' prejudice toward the outgroup. Although furries slightly underestimated the degree of prejudice anime fans felt toward them, they

were relatively accurate in their perception. Anime fans, however, overestimated the degree of prejudice furries felt toward them, and were inaccurate in their perception. The results show that some groups may be more accurate in perceiving prejudice than others, and some groups may perceive more prejudice targeted toward them than is actually the case. Further research may help to increase our understanding of these estimates of prejudice and may help to and reduce experienced stigma from members of minority groups.

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Author Note

Table 1

Means (Standard Deviation) and Difference on Ratings between Anime and Furry Fans

Variable	Anime Fans	Furry Fans	$F(1, 2975)$	p	η_p^2
Ingroup Rating Outgroup	57.35 (24.98)	29.62 (20.91)	728.30	< .001	.197
Participant Rating Outgroup	54.26 (29.22)	26.87 (22.33)	535.79	< .001	.153
Perception of Outgroup Ratings	35.08 (24.13)	46.20 (25.52)	113.04	< .001	.037

Note. 0-100 scale, with higher scores indicating greater negative prejudice.