

Ezer Angeles

Jason Greco

English IV

23 February 2016

Bronies: People Against Today's Gender Norms

“Wait, you watch a show that’s for little girls?” That is the reaction of someone who is confused about a show that was intended for small children, but has become the center of attention to a large adult audience. *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* has turned into a home for a fanbase that is rapidly growing. However, because it has historically been a show for young girls, adult male fans of the show face much prejudice. Today, fans of My Little Pony, or *bronies*, are suffering through shame and shyness because they challenge today’s gender stereotypes and norms about masculinity. Due to these rebellions, bronies have become stronger people not only because of the positive messages of My Little Pony, but because of how the My Little Pony culture fosters growth and a sense of community and friendship by the efforts of bronies enduring the social conflict that goes with expressing themselves outside traditional gender norms.

Opponents of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic* claim that bronies are people who need to “get a life”. This chunk of society claims that bronies are just people who are looking to satisfy themselves, show their “gayness” by associating themselves with the show and choose this as their only option to socialize. Aja Romano, a staff writer for The Daily Dot, explains that:

“Throughout the [Bronies] documentary, male members of the brony fandom espouse a theme of fandom as being a major hardship that elevates them through

suffering. One adolescent fan, Lyle, tells us he worried his dad would think he was gay when he found out; a group of Appalachian fans talk about getting physically attacked after putting MLP decals on their cars. A military serviceman speaks of his inability to openly discuss his love for the show because other members of the military might assume he was gay” (Romano).

When society join together men with feminine-related themes, the first thought that pops out is “he’s gay”. This is not just because it’s judgemental, but because we’re not used to seeing men liking feminine things in everyday life.

In addition, modern-day society has claimed that bronies are people who have poor mental health, and are only going for the fandom to fix it. Phil Elmore, a freelance journalist and technical writer based in New York, states that

“...a brony is a wretched, immature male who engages purposefully in behavior and entertainment that should have been left behind when he transitioned from childhood to manhood. His devotion to a children’s television show calls into question his ability to function as an adult and to adopt and maintain adult responsibilities.” (Elmore).

According to Phil, being a brony is probably something that should’ve been long over after a certain age in a person’s life. Men are people who have left their pampers and milk bottles to move on and start acting like grown adults ready for masculine actions. Although Phil Elmore’s intentions were to show people that being a brony is a negative thing, his comments towards the brony community expresses the ignorance he has for anyone who watches a little girl’s show.

Incidentally, according to Gianna DeCarlo, author of the article “The problem with bronies: a look at the corruption of ‘My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic,’” bronies are people who are just like the LGBT community, only that the name “bronies” shouldn’t be associated with this topic, nor represent any LGBT members of the community. She says that:

“Bronies appropriate the oppression of real-life actual people to burden themselves with a victim complex that they believe makes them immune to criticism. An example is a panel at Bronycon this year called ‘Coming Out of the Stable.’ This is the idea of a ‘My Little Pony’ fan admitting to family and friends that he likes the show after hiding it in fear of judgment and scorn. This is an insulting trivialization of the struggles that queer people go through in the coming-out process and should not have even been considered as a panel in the first place. In short, the label ‘brony’ is ruined. It's garbage. Throw it out. Never use it again. The name is so closely linked to the awfulness of certain members that calling yourself one is aligning yourself with these jerks” (DeCarlo.)

According to Gianna, the word brony is just another word to say “I’m gay because I like ponies.” She claims that whoever claims to be a brony is also part of the LGBT community, in which the people who have “found out” they were gay or lesbian are susceptible to be criticized and condemned. Some people who oppose to the bronies, also oppose to the show itself, as they have claimed it to be a “satanic” work, attempting to attract people to become corrupt.

Opponents of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, have also stated that the show has led people to believe that certain lessons taught to little girls, or bronies for this matter, are wrong. Not only that, but these people have spawned so many controversial issues regarding the

characters and the story that seem a bit overcrossing the line. Kathleen Richter, author of the article “My Little Homophobic, Racist, Smart-Shaming Pony”, states that

...overall, these are the lessons My Little Pony teaches girls: 1. Magical white ponies are suited for leadership; black ponies are suited to be servants, 2. Stop learning! You will overcome any obstacle by resorting to strength in numbers (of friends), 3. Girls that wear rainbows are butch, 4. You need the government (ideally a monarch invested with supreme ultimate power and a phallic symbol strapped to her forehead) to tell you what to do with your life. (Richter)

Although some parts of My Little Pony aren't always what they seem in terms of appearance and deeper meaning, the bottom line is that the show was never intended to promote the opposite of what it teaches. According to Kathleen, Hasbro's experience with My Little Pony has made Hasbro to release the show with 100% faith that it was going to be a straight-forward show where girls can learn valuable lessons on friendship, believing to have this show flawless from misinterpretations. Although Lauren Faust, the original creator of My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic, has rebutted Richter's statement in another article of the same website, controversies about characters appearing in My Little Pony have begun receiving negative criticism about their personalities. For instance, one pony had an animation error in an episode of MLP (My Little Pony) regarding the direction of where her eyes are pointing, has been given a name by the bronies themselves, calling her “Derpy”. And although Hasbro gave a silent nod towards the bronies by using that name, they've reconsidered it and instead favored to remove the pony completely from the show. Bronies became furious, and began petitioning to “Save

Derpy”. The reason for Hasbro’s reconsideration is explained in an article done by Adrian Chen, a writer for Gawker.com. He states that

Derpy's new prominence also reignited a controversy simmering beneath the Brony Sphere over whether or not Derpy's appearance and behavior were offensive. Some fans have claimed Derpy is one "giant retard joke": Derpy's name comes from 'Derp,' internet slang that started on message boards in the early 2000s and means something is stupid. Whether "Derp" explicitly mocks people with mental disabilities has been endlessly debated. But it's definitely related to those "retard" sounds idiot kids make at each other in high school halls, and it's disproportionately used to refer to people with mental disabilities in general and people with Down Syndrome in particular. (Chen)

This pony, according to Adrian, has become fan-corrupted as the bronies themselves have given her the name regarding the animation error. However, this isn’t the only character with controversy; Rainbow Dash, one of the main six characters of My Little Pony, has been given negative feedback about how her personality. According to Lauren Faust’s rebuttal to Kathleen Richter, particular focus has been placed on Rainbow Dash, one of the main characters, whose macho behavior, rainbow-themed appearance, and rejection of feminine social norms has been widely suggested to be proof that she is a representation of butch lesbianism. Although most fans reject this, and the show's creator, Lauren Faust, has rejected wholesale the idea that Rainbow Dash is supposed to be a "stealth lesbian," the rumors and myths have persisted. Accusations that one or more of the characters are "secretly" lesbians and are trying to convince America's children to be gay are reminiscent of the conspiracy theories that conservative groups

have leveled against other children's shows like SpongeBob SquarePants or the 1960s Batman series. Rainbow Dash is one of those characters who's a typical tomboy, and who happens to have a rainbow mane. In reality, when people take a look at how bronies came to be, the majority of the stories aren't sexuality related.

Proponents of *My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic*, especially bronies themselves, have stated that they really love the show because of its magical nature of friendship. Mike Rugnetta, director of the PBS Idea Channel on YouTube, has explained in one of his videos that "Up until about the 1920s, pink was actually considered a more masculine color and better for little boys. Feminist philosopher Judith Butler argued that we develop ideas of masculinity and femininity based upon the performance of gender. She states that "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender... identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler). Bronies are men who perform what is supposed to be a strictly female pastime. That makes some people upset or at the very least confused this isn't anything new though. There was a time when it was unheard of for a woman to wear a pair pants or for a man to stay at home and raise a child. But as they started performing outside of their gender roles, these things became normal. Bronies are a group of men who say that it's okay to like a show about ponies and unicorns and magic and friendship, and that it has no effect on their gender self-identification. As the brony community continues to grow, through the magic of friendship and internet, they challenge our perceptions of what preferences are in men and what shows we should consider "girly."

Bronies, by challenging what we think is masculine, shines light to newer thinking and life to a whole new way of creativity. Brendan Craig, a brony, gives a description of how a brony becomes to be:

“As the man looks on he discovers all these pictures are from a show, a cartoon called My Little Pony: Friendship Is Magic. He is intrigued as he notices many of these pictures have been created by adults—male adults, for that matter. Most are very well made, as if a great deal of thought and care was put into making each and every piece of artwork. For that’s what they are, he realizes: art, formed from the imagination of so many individuals. The man frowns because he does not understand why so many adults are fascinated by a simple cartoon, but he intends to find out” (Craig).

A brony doesn’t just look at one of the episodes of My Little Pony and becomes a brony. Bronies are the people who make the fanart and praise the show for what it is and what it teaches. Not everything that people say about bronies and the show are bad. Emanuel L., author of “Meet the Bronies: The Men (and Women) who Love My Little Pony”, states that

“Via My Little Pony, boys are exposed to many lessons they would not ordinarily receive from boy-oriented shows. Some non-stereotypical male gender lessons include learning sympathy and empathy, reasoning and solving problems outside of using violence, and embracing emotions as opposed to hiding them. By societal standards, boys are not supposed to like pink cartoon ponies, but the show manages to engage male viewers through other methods like humor and action that does not typically appear in shows aimed at little girls” (Emanuel).

While the show is intended for girls, the success of it engaging male viewers has permitted it to transmit lessons that are taught more in girl-oriented shows, which is good for parents who are very sensitive about what today's cartoons are teaching boys. Proponents of the show also defend bronies by stating how the show's never intended to cause harm, but instead, provide the tools for better living. Shoshana Kessock, a proponent of the show, states that

“In the spirit of battling for gender equality in our appreciations, I'll say that it might be nice to live in a world where I can fight for my appreciation of action films and comic books, video games and tough role models, while a guy can like a rom-com or two along with his MLP without having his masculinity questioned. If it's good for the goose it might be good for the Brony, and in the end, who is any fanboy or girl to judge? Meanwhile, Bronies continue to grow as a positive, supportive fandom across the internet with every season of the show with little sign of slowing down” (Kessock).

According to Shoshana, bronies were never meant to be people to do any harm of any shape or form to anybody, but yet, they are people who include anyone who loves the show for what it is.

Finally, another positive aspect about bronies is that they hold conventions where all bronies are allowed to socialize and share their thoughts and appreciations about the show. Jason, a dual-PhD student at Indiana University in the Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology and the Department of Communication and Culture, talks about his experience of being at a bronie convention:

“One of the central narratives of many panels was that being a brony itself was often marginalizing and made one the object of ridicule in society at large, and thus the fandom was a support structure for bronies. Nothing in my research contradicts that idea, and I personally believe that it is true, but I also believe that the fandom has an opportunity, and perhaps a responsibility born out of the fandom itself being stigmatized, to pay attention to its margins and the ways in which marginalized groups might be neglected or even wrongly treated”
(Nguyen).

According to Jason, being a brony is a responsibility: to make sure that groups related and not related to the fandom aren't neglected or wrongly treated. Bronies are people who are very supportive of the fact that if anybody isn't certain about liking the show or not, they understand completely with no intentions to force anything of it on them.

Although many people may look down upon bronies and criticize the show for its misunderstandings, we have to remember that it doesn't matter if you like the show or not; we have to understand that there isn't a 100% man or woman in the world. Everyone should at least create a sense of close community and empathy towards one another, just as the show teaches. The fandom of My Little Pony may or may not last for a long time, but for now, just enjoy everything they bring to the world, including everything pony and non-pony related.

Works Cited

- "Are Bronies Changing the Definition of Masculinity? Transcript." *PBS Idea Channel Wiki*. Web. 24 Feb. 2016.
- Craig, Brendon. "Brony Handbook: One Path of Many." Print.
- Valiente, Christian, and Xeno Rasmusson. "Bucking the Stereotypes: My Little Pony and Challenges to Traditional Gender Roles." *Journal of Psychological Issues in Organizational Culture* 5.4 (2015): 88-97. Print.
- "In Defense of Bronies - The Quest For Gender Equality in Fandom." *Torcom In Defense of Bronies The Quest For Gender Equality in Fandom Comments*. 20 June 2012. Web. 04 Feb. 2016.
- "My Little Homophobic, Racist, Smart-Shaming Pony." *Ms Magazine Blog*. Web. 03 Feb. 2016.
- "My Little Pony: Sexism Is Magic." *The Daily Dot*. 19 Feb. 2013. Web. 25 Jan. 2016.
- "Bronies Furious After Minor My Little Pony Character Is Changed to Seem Less Mentally Disabled." *Gawker.com*. Web. 08 Feb. 2016.
- "Research is Magic." *Research Is Magic*. Web. 04 Feb. 2016.
- "The Problem with Bronies: A Look at the Corruption of 'My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic'." *Citypaper.com*. Web. 03 Feb. 2016.
- "The Rise Of The Brony And The Death Of The American Man." *Return Of Kings*. Web. 03 Feb. 2016.