

Cringe culture is fundamentally ableist

After watching Contrapoints' video, "Cringe," yesterday, in which autism & autistic people were brought up time and time again, I had some thoughts.

Cringe culture on the internet is centered around the ostracizing and cyberbullying of people who are seen as having socially unacceptable habits, interests, and appearances. The vast majority of people who make up that category are autistic or otherwise neurodivergent, and that's not a coincidence.

Autistic people have long been pushed into the margins of society. Many of us have been bullied from a young age, at school and often at home, by neurotypicals who don't know how to cope with social and behavioral differences.

Many of us have found refuge in fandoms and other interest-specific social groups, because we connect with people best when we're bonding over our special interests. It's no surprise, then, that many autistic people enjoy Pokémon, Anime, My Little Pony, Furry culture, cosplaying, role-playing games, etc. And it's no surprise that by joining those subcultures, many autistic people meet other autistic people and then bond over their shared life experiences.

And I have a hypothesis that the reason the aforementioned interest groups are so stigmatized isn't really because of the interests themselves. *It's because autistic people are the ones who are interested.*

The worst thing about cringe culture is this pattern:

Neurotypicals in the dominant social group have repeatedly ostracized, abused, and excluded autistic people, forcing us out of the dominant social group.

Autistic people, left completely alone and with nowhere to turn, discover interest-based fandoms that are filled with other autistic people. These fandoms are a dream come true—there's no judgement there. Everyone's a weirdo and it's okay. Autistic people finally feel like they belong somewhere.

Neurotypicals, upon discovery of these fringe social groups mock and further ostracize the members for not conforming to dominant social norms/ for not being part of the NT in-group. *This is deeply ironic, because one of the main reasons people are in these fandoms in the first place is because they were shoved out of NT social circles from the very beginning of their lives.*

Autistic furies and My Little Pony fans aren't hurting anyone. They're having fun in their own social circles, engaging with their special interests in their own ways. And if

neurotypicals have such a problem with autistic people being happy members of neurodiverse social groups, then maybe they should stop pushing us out of NT social groups to begin with.

If they won't let us be friends with them, but they don't like it when we're happily engaging with our special interests in ways that don't involve NT people at all, then their problem isn't that they hate bronies or furrries or Anime-cosplayers. No. Their problem is that they hate autistic people.

~Eden 🐢