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Animalistic Euphoria: The Liberatory Power of Gender Euphoric Animal Role Play (GEARP)

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores a never before studied practice and phenomenon: the sexual and social animal role play engaged in by transgender people, and their shared experience of a unique form of gender euphoria reached through this play, which I am calling “animalistic euphoria.” While the practice of animal role play by both homo- and heterosexual cisgender people has been documented since the early 1800s, and appeared in the academic literature since at least the late 1990s, the experiences of transgender people engaging in this play have never been studied. Eight interviews, across three species role-played, corroborated that animal roleplay enables a heightened connection to the transpeople’s gender identities. Uniform justification was that GEARP gives them the opportunity to eschew not only their assigned human form (a common cause of dysphoria), but also all gendered expectations associated with that form. Modeled on the Live Action Role Player subculture, this paper seeks to shed light on a shared practice and reduce shame felt by Transgender Animal Role Players (TARPs) in the validation of their experiences. Through a combination of ethnographic inquiry and archival research, this paper identifies GEARP as creating a liberated space in the sexual and social practices of TARPs in North America. Centered in the cultural studies literature, this paper makes the case that these seemingly disparate individuals can form a community of their own, through this shared experience.

Keywords: BDSM; sexuality studies; LGBT studies; subcultural studies; transgender studies