

Peddling the Veil Between Worlds: Proselytizing within Otherkin, Fictionkin, and Therian Communities

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There's an old saying, "ask ten otherkin, get twelve answers": the otherkin, therian, and fictionkin communities are all hotbeds of different points of views around ideas of identity, each filled with thousands of different personal experiences and explanations that culminate into a melting pot of nonhumanity. Everyone comes to their own conclusions about the "why"s and the "how"s of their identity, with explanations ranging from psychological, to spiritual, to genetic, to eclectic, to uncategorizable mishmashes.

This beautiful cacophony of experience and explanation results in vibrant discussions, explosive groups, and a series of communities that are stronger for the way the individuals within them push and pull in dynamic discourse with one another. The lack of a defined "default" experience makes these communities' greatest strength their diversity. But, as with any community filled with so many different perspectives, some people may find it impossible to wrap their heads around explanations and outlooks that differ from their own.

One of the most aggravating experiences within the overarching otherkin communities is when individuals or small groups attempt to re-define terms, re-write history, and enforce their own belief systems onto others. These can appear in both large, easily recognized forms and in smaller, much more subtle ways.

Perhaps the easiest large-scale example to pull from is ideas surrounding the "right way" to be otherkin. Such individuals who proudly proclaim that someone can only be otherkin if they fit into a very specific checklist of criteria that involves holding specific beliefs have existed both historically—in ways such as exclusive, aggressive shifter-oriented therianthropoc attitudes that can be viewed in older therian-oriented forums, and infamous arguments that can be found spread across the Internet of the "veil between worlds" falling or thinning—and more modernly—in the form of rhetoric such as "Otherborn" terminology, which was created in 2020 out of the concept that otherkin who do not attribute to their nonhumanity to pre-birth reincarnation narratives are "bastardiz[ing]"¹ what it means to be otherkin.

These expansive efforts almost always rely on ahistorical narratives that blatantly ignore the existence of nonhuman-identifying individuals within the communities who don't fit within

¹ Otherborn FAQ, Azaphaer <https://azaphaer.tumblr.com/post/190572764931/otherborn-faq>

the confines of their beliefs, especially otherkin who attribute their nonhumanity to psychological explanations. These types of rhetoric and persons usually aggressively push not only straight-up misinformation onto others, but literal ideological beliefs as well: in the case of aforementioned “Otherborn” terminology, you can see both at play due to the insistence by the term’s coiner that the modern-day otherkin community is a corruption of prior iterations (subtextually implied to be in comparison to “Otherborn,” which is therefore suggested to be closer to the ‘true’ meaning of otherkinity) and the simultaneously stringent requirements of the term, including specific beliefs in cross-species reincarnation.

But this exists in less dramatic forms as well: the ways in which some individuals may micromanage the validity of nonhuman identities based specifically on the kintype in question, rather than for any valid criticism is likely a common and familiar occurrence, such as the criticisms heavily aimed at fictionkin, machinekin, conceptkin, and phytanthrope identities; how often you may see people lionize certain types of identity-related experiences, such as specific shifts; subtle implications that if someone has specific nonhuman-related emotions or instincts, then they cannot possibly be legitimate; individuals who strongly imply that all otherkin are spiritual without saying it outright; and the ever-classic hierarchy of experiences that some people may put out there in the ways they phrase their own identity in comparison to others, such as a “draconic” looking down upon “dragonkin” for not attributing their draconity to the same extravagant spiritual explanations as the “draconic”.

You can even see it occasionally on interpersonal levels, with the appearance of an otherkin, therian, or fictionkin who either outright demands or subtly implies that they should be treated different due to the complexities of belief related to their identity, or who refuses to engage with others in discussion outside of the playing field of their own belief system. From supposed royal elves who flee back to their “true bodies” when they sleep to reign over the half-dozen elven-human-dragon-gryphon kingdoms of El’l’f’c’ci’it’yy and should be treated as sensitive royalty 24/7, to wolves who dance with their furry ancestors and can dispense the Uber Secret Knowledge of Physical Shifting at the flick of a paw (and will howl bloody murder should you inform them that you don’t, and never will, believe in p-shifting), to demonic hyper-masculine overlords who demand offerings of Ko-Fis and subjects to worship at the feet of their throne made with a thousand blood-encrusted emu bones. While these examples are all slightly exaggerated, they likely all ring with an unfortunate familiarity, especially to older members of the community.

The real question is, how do we engage with individuals who are either engaging in outright proselytizing and trying to push their beliefs as the only “true” way to be otherkin or

experience otherkinity, or who are microproselytizing and breaching netiquette? And how do we help to reinforce larger, multi-perspective community spaces against such rhetoric, especially in its more aggressive or harmful forms?

The latter is perhaps the easier of the two questions to answer: we can help to avoid proselytizing becoming acceptable in large community spaces simply by being aware of it. Being able to recognize when someone is trying to enforce their own belief systems onto others is the first step of being able to intervene in, and ideally deescalate, the situation. Really, it could be said that the therian and otherkin communities in particular have an especially robust immunity to proselytizing in its worst forms, due to both groups' history with "physical shifter packs" in recent history. The expulsion of these packs—which have been known to prey especially on desperate and young alterhumans, working either as quick scams or enabling dangerous mindsets and behaviors—from larger therian and otherkin spaces has built some the foundation for how these two communities treat similar attitudes that cross the line between what is and isn't possible.

The former is a much trickier question to example. It's a hard line to walk, trying to inform someone that they're letting their own biases and beliefs cloud how they treat or view another individual or group without being unnecessarily inflammatory and, for lack of a better word, being a drama-starting, demanding asshole yourself: sometimes it's best to let sleeping dogs lie, especially in regards to individuals or groups who have made it clear that their perspectives and how they interact with others based on those perspectives, isn't going to change. You can run the risk of throwing your own beliefs on to someone or another group, especially if you go at the interaction with a "my way or the highway" attitude and lay out your own moral judgements as a basis for your argument.

If someone absolutely cannot otherwise stop themselves from engaging, then it's just important for them to remember to be polite and informative rather than inflammatory. It's always better to assume ignorance over stubborn malice, and who knows? Maybe that 6000-year-old cyborg-dragon-demigod *doesn't* actually know that psychological otherkin can exist. Maybe that werewolf wearing an uncomfortable number of feathers and beads in their fur has never been exposed to fictionkin beyond the sort of anecdotes anti-otherkin make up about them. Maybe that vegan, elven princess who's disavowed hunting instincts and those who have them as "evil" and "satanic" and "impossible" has just never been approached by someone who's been willing to have a civil conversation on the topic.

It's hard to look at people, especially people who may very well be claiming or pushing untrue things about your own identity or the identities of people you care about, and remember

that they are still individuals themselves. But if someone is going to engage with others, it's important to remember to be self-aware in the things one says, and to be willing to at least start the conversation off politely. If it veers off the tracks into a screaming dumpster fire then that's one thing, but going into a conversation looking for a fight isn't productive if you're aiming to change the other person's mind. It's only potentially useful if you're going in intent on changing the *audience's* minds, and even then, it might be significantly more worth it to just disengage and go create informational posts, essays, or whatnot.

The fact is that in sections of otherkin, therian, and fictionkin communities where these smaller beliefs have sunk their teeth in so far as to be considered irrefutable, minds and attitudes simply aren't going to be shifted. If a forum believes wholeheartedly that phytanthropes cannot exist because it's impossible for plants to have souls and that therefore anyone claiming to be [inset-plant-here]kin is a fluffy dandelion wishkin, then it's likely not worth going in to try and change minds. Those attitudes have probably already been challenged and subsequently the new information went ignored. It's disheartening to hear, but it's true: a single person isn't likely to change the zeitgeist of a forum or large group, especially ones that base their own legitimacy on their exclusion of others. They're just going to get banned or otherwise removed from the group, kicking and screaming.

Our best hope to help steering away from the type of proselytizing we see people peddling is to keep doing exactly what we've been doing: by cultivating open-minded and accepting spaces where critical, democratic discussion is encouraged without any personal attacks of fallacies. By creating communities that are both interfaith *and* which solidly stand with science. By talking and creating based off of our own perspectives and beliefs, by getting criticized and arguing over those with others, and by learning and growing from there. Rinse and repeat.

In so many ways, our communities are resilient *because* we're oftentimes classifiable as a bunch of stubborn, argumentative creatures. From civil debates to feral screaming matches, the otherkin, therian, and fictionkin communities are never afraid to fight over what they think. And sometimes you get the bad of that, like in the case of some individuals implying that others cannot be otherkin if they don't believe in reincarnation and aren't religion; but more often I think you get the good of that, with two or more people going at it, throwing out their logical perspectives, their sources, and their opinions for the audience (and indeed, the greater community) to nod or shake its head at, and draw conclusions on for itself. These communities are a constantly evolving animal—what decides what direction they evolve in is those in them.