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LONG LIVE THE PONY

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Men all over the world have fallen in love with My Little Pony, but some face backlash from others for their support of the animated characters.



ZACHRY WEISE/ADVANCE-TITAN

UW Oshkosh Women's Center staff members donned pony costumes Wednesday and told Oshkosh students "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" is a TV series that can be enjoyed by all ages and genders.

The Women's Center presented the 2012 documentary "Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of My Little Pony" in Sage Hall. The film follows teenage and adult men from the U.S., Europe and the Middle East known as "bronies" as they prepare for "BronyCon 2012," a convention for My Little Pony fans.

The men in the documentary said they enjoy the characters, plotlines and lessons that are applicable to everyday situations.

The animated My Little Pony series debuted in 2010 and has since developed a strong male following.

Members of the Internet community now produce artwork, music remixes and fan fiction as well as unusual works like laser shows and parodies of Dos Equis commercials.

Women's Center director Geneva Murray led the event dressed as the character Pinkie Pie.

She said the My Little Pony fandom among males is helping men realize they are no less masculine for enjoying a stereotypically female show.

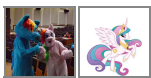
"If you don't fit into this man box of how you're supposed to behave, what are the repercussions for that?" Murray said. "And how can we as a campus create an environment that encourages a safe place for men to be themselves?"

Women's Center programming Assistant Bryan Hulbert, who dressed for the film screening in a Rainbow Dash pony costume made by Murray, said he did not realize how many students have heard of bronies.

"A lot of students on campus are really familiar with bronies, which is really shocking to me," Hulbert said. "It's kind of like one of those urban legends, where everybody you tell seems to have a friend who knows somebody or 'my sister's boyfriend is really into this.'"

Long live the pony

Women's Center employees dress up as My Little Pony characters at the screening of "Bronies: The Extremely Unexpected Adult Fans of My Little Pony."



The men in the film also discuss the problems they encounter along the way, such as overcoming their introverted personalities to socialize at BronyCon and dealing with families who are unaccepting of the men's fandom.

A man in the documentary explains how another man bashed his car's rear window with a baseball bat

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because it was decorated with My Little Pony decals.

The angry man pointed a rifle at the man, demanding he stop his My Little Pony fandom.

Besides these dark moments, the film focuses on more positive moments in the brony fan base, such as bronies in the U.S. military coming together at a luncheon and fans purchasing \$500 pony hats to raise money for a child with brain cancer.

Oshkosh student John Schultz said he never heard of My Little Pony until a half hour before seeing the "Bronies" film.

He said he was surprised by the number of adults who like the show.

"I thought it'd be more of a kids' thing," Schultz said.

Oshkosh student Katie Jankowski said she believes the documentary only follows the most obsessed fans, such as those who regularly attend conventions and dress in costumes.

"Not everybody is that extreme about it," Jankowski said. "Some people just think it's a cute show."

Guest speaker Autumn Bradley said although the film focuses on the strong unity within the brony culture, the culture does not exist without its own set of flaws.

She said people immersed in the My Little Pony culture are so impressed that men enjoy the show that female fans of My Little Pony are often pushed aside.

"Some of the problems in society they talked about actually still exist in the fandom too," Jankowski said.

The ponies themselves are also slimmer now than they were in the 1980s version of the series, according to Murray.

However, she said she prefers to focus on the positivity the show has brought to viewers.

"I think you can always look at popular culture with a critical lens and you can always pick out things that aren't as great as you would like for them to be," Murray said. "However, I think that the overall messaging is still good. There are always some things that I think I just kind of want to enjoy for the sake of enjoying, to be honest."

Hulbert said the screening of "Bronies" was used to tell male students the Women's Center is available to help them with problems they may face as well.

"I think it's important too that we do some of our programming geared specifically towards men and what they can do to either assist women in their own advancement or what they need to do to be aware of the challenges that women face or even the challenges that men that don't fit into this box of masculinity face," Hulbert said.

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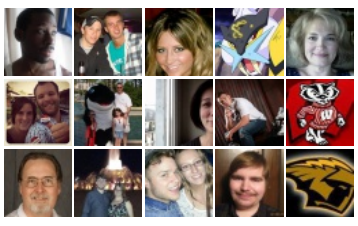
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